

**VIRTUE AND HONOUR: THE GENDER DIVISION
AESCHYLUS' ORESTEIA**

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Abstract

Clytemnestra is first associated with Agamemnon's murder in Homer's *Odyssey*, though her participation in the deed is ambiguous, until Agamemnon reveals that she was an active agent. He compares his faithless wife to Odysseus' Penelope, who represents the 'perfect' wife in her behaviour. A brief examination of Penelope and of her fidelity to her absent husband reveals a series of duties that comprise wifely virtues in a woman.

It has long been recognized that Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is written through and against paradigms derived from the *Odyssey*. I argue that Clytemnestra can only be properly understood with reference to the virtues attributed to Penelope. An important but often neglected motivation for her revenge against Agamemnon lies in *his* failure to acknowledge his wife's virtue, by killing Iphigeneia and bringing Cassandra into the *oikos* as a concubine.

Aeschylus uses society's expectations of the virtues of a wife and creates the terrifying character of a woman who throws away virtue to possess honour. I examine the *Agamemnon* to highlight Clytemnestra's attempts to redefine herself as worthy of masculine honour, through her 'manly' behaviour, both in word and action, in reaction to Agamemnon's disregard for Clytemnestra's wifely virtue. The consequences of Clytemnestra's rejection of virtue is at the heart of the *Choephoroi*; her children suffer from her disavowal of the duties of wife and mother. Orestes returns to avenge his father; to punish the mother who was no mother to him, and her lover; to set his disordered *oikos* to rights. The

Eumenides completes the marginalization of Clytemnestra, as she is replaced by the Erinyes and Athena, and her desire for honour and vengeance is replaced by the larger issue of the place of vengeance in society, and returning the *oikos* to its original order.

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Virtue and Honour: The Gender Division

Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

For people who talk in generalities, saying that virtue is a good condition of the soul, or correct action, or something of that sort, are deceiving themselves. It is far better to enumerate the virtues, as Gorgias does, than to define them in this general way.

Aristotle, *Politics* 1260a 25-28

The virtue of a woman is mistakenly understood to be inherently (and almost exclusively) linked with her body; so much so that physical chastity alone becomes interchangeable with feminine virtue.¹ This is true of many societies in which the priority of marriage was procreation for the purpose of providing legitimate heirs for inheritance; Ancient Greece (and Athens most prominently) was one of these societies. When reading the literature of this society, several other elements become apparent and must also be considered, alongside physical chastity, as a part of the definition of feminine virtue.² Plato enumerates the virtues of woman: "If you want to know excellence in a woman, it isn't difficult to describe it; she must manage the house well, looking after its contents and being subject to her husband."³

According to Hesiod's account of Pandora, the first woman was all appearance and no substance, created by the pantheon of gods to impede and

¹ Cairns, (1993), 120: "Society sets different standards for women from those it sets for men, the main virtue required of women being faithfulness; men's honour is vulnerable through women, and men have an interest in ensuring that the women under their control remain faithful and sexually pure."

² Aristotle, *Pol.* 1259b 29-31, trans. Reeve (1998): "Roughly the same problem arises about women and children. Do they too have virtues? Should women be temperate, courageous, and just, or a child be temperate or intemperate? Or not?"

³ *Meno* 71e 6-9, trans. Sharples (1985).

demoralize⁴ mortal men. An equally detached view of women is proffered by Semonides, in which he states that no woman is good and decent, with the bee woman as his only exception. McClure writes: “even the bee woman provokes ambivalence, since, as the narrator reminds us, the woman who appears most virtuous is, in reality, the most worthy of blame (fr.7.108-9).”⁵ His concluding diatribe on the horrors of women and the evil intent they harbour towards their husbands nearly negates his one concession that the existence of a good woman - and thus a good wife - is even a remote possibility.⁶

Rarely in Greek literature is simple physical chastity touted as the only virtue, but the consequences of being unchaste are the greater topic.⁷ For had Helen been chaste, the Trojan War would not have happened; on the other hand, Penelope was chaste, and 108 of the ‘best men’ of Ithaca died. At first glance, most readers of Greek literature would consider only Penelope to be a virtuous woman, but why is one woman considered virtuous, and another not? There is more to a definition of ‘virtue’ than meets the eye, but whence does this prominence of physical chastity arise? Possibly too much emphasis in modern examinations of feminine virtue has been placed upon the purity of a bride as the bearer of legitimate heirs.⁸ Defining feminine virtues has been trivialized by the sweeping summary that a ‘good’ woman must spin and weave, and be (mostly) silent and (almost) invisible in the home. The image of Penelope weaving (and unweaving) for three years, waiting patiently for the return of her husband, has

⁴ (*Works and Days*, 61-102.) Either to remove man’s levity and happiness on earth, or to deprive him of the morals needed to maintain a virtuous soul and existence. Both interpretations apply.

⁵ McClure (1999), 56. Cf. Semonides, fr. 7.115-118.

⁶ Semonides, fr. 7.83-93. Cf. Xenophon, *Oec.* 7.17-35, for his comparison of a good wife to a queen bee, used as Ischomachos’ example to teach his wife in the management of their *oikos*.

⁷ Cf. Gould (1980), 52ff., for his examination of women in myth and their impact on society as “half-conscious paradigms”(42).

dominated the perception of feminine virtue among modern scholarship for years. This is only a partial view of Penelope's capabilities in maintaining her virtue, but it is the archetypal example of the virtuous wife.

This image is further fixed in place with Pericles' funeral oration,⁹ and even endures as a modern, but superficial, definition of feminine virtue despite the changes that have occurred within studies of Greek society. North remarks on the virtue of *sôphrosynê*: "Feminine *sôphrosynê* (chastity, modesty, obedience, inconspicuous behavior) remains the same throughout Greek history. The word is not used to describe the *aretê* of women in the Homeric poems; but when it is so used (from the time of Semonides of Amorgos), the behavior designated corresponds precisely to the *aretê* of Penelope and Andromache, who with Alcestis, become the classical exemplars of this excellence. The *exempla horribilia* of the opposed vice, wantonness or, more generally, being a bad wife, are Helen and Clytemnestra."¹⁰ This is the prevailing generalized definition-by-example of 'good' and 'bad' women found in Greek literature; but it does not account for the aberrations in behaviour in both types of women.¹¹ The definition of feminine virtue as merely capabilities in a domestic context is too narrow and exclusionary of those who do not fit this tightly structured picture;

⁸ Cf. Cairns (1993), 120-125, for his definition of feminine virtue as a "coyness about dealings with the opposite sex." Pomeroy (1995) does not offer any clear definition of feminine virtue throughout her book.

⁹ Thuc. 2.45.2. Though I raise the question whether this admonition was meant to apply to all women in general, or specifically to widows, as the text states; cf. McClure (1999), 20-23. This passage hints at the possibility that, in accordance with three stages of a woman's life (maiden, wife/mother, widow), there were different duties of virtue for women: for how could an unmarried maiden 'keep faith with her husband's bed'? The widow, having lost her husband, has reverted - partially - to her original maiden status, but still retains all the learning of a wife. This may explain more clearly Pericles' admonition to "fall not below the standard which nature has set for your sex". Xenophon, *Oec.* 7-10, offers some hope that women can be taught to be *sôphrôn*, and can learn to control themselves, raising themselves up through conscious effort and with the support of their husbands. With their husbands gone, this does not necessarily mean that widows can throw away all they have learned.

¹⁰ (1966), 1 n. 2.

nor does it sufficiently prepare any audience - ancient or modern - for the women of tragedy and their 'larger-than-life' actions. The Penelopean vision of virtue does not explain the actions and anger of Clytemnestra, Antigone and Medea. Nor does it offer any further insight into other women of tragedy who are considered to be 'virtuous' and good wives. With a comprehensive definition of feminine virtue, going beyond an appreciation for weaving and other domestic duties, we can understand the variations of representations of women, both in epic and tragedy. By understanding the women of tragedy, their violations and transgressive behaviour can aid in creating a more comprehensive definition of virtue, as well as the means to acquire and maintain it.¹²

Aidôs, Areîê, and Penelope, the Good Wife:

Modern scholars say very little on the subject of feminine virtue, but it is generally observed that feminine virtue in Ancient Greek texts is tied to some form of 'shame-culture'; the feelings of shame (*aidôs*) are important in the interpretations. Cairns simplifies the concept of feminine *aidôs* into the misleading statement of a certain 'coyness' with regard to the opposite sex and/or

¹¹ For both Helen and Clytemnestra have their 'good' moments; even Penelope's sporadic promises of marriage to the suitors could be interpreted as wanton behaviour.

¹² Keeping in mind the following *caveat* from Dover (1994), 14-15: "The chief obstacle to the identification of elements of popular morality in drama of any kind is the simple fact that drama consists of the utterances of fictitious persons in fictitious situations. The ancients themselves have set us a very bad example by treating tragic passages and individual verses, isolated from their dramatic contexts, as if they were recommendations given by the poet to his audience." He cites line 612 from Euripides' *Hippolytos* as an example of a notorious phrase taken out of context and misused regularly, and notes as well that if *Oedipus Tyrannos* 979 survived as the sole fragment of the tragedy by Sophocles, "anyone who made use of it for reconstructing Sophocles' 'philosophy of life' would be wide of the mark." With this admonition for moderation and consideration in place, Dover continues, 17: "Tragedy can afford to give an airing to ideas which may be novel to many members of the audience and perhaps may not always be easily grasped; this the audience will accept in a genre in which so much is solemn and impressive, not least the poetic language, which is allowed by tradition to be (in the strict sense of the word) enigmatic. This consideration must be borne in mind also whenever we encounter uncommon moral nuances in tragedy."

sex in general.¹³ Adkins summarizes the *arete* of women, with reference to the 'co-operative' values:

The *aretê* of women, not surprisingly, differs from that of men. The qualities demanded are beauty, skill in weaving and housekeeping, chastity, and faithfulness.... [It] is men who determine the nature of *aretê* both for men and for women; and clearly it would be easier to live with a Penelope than with a woman manifesting the *aretai* of a Homeric hero. Secondly, a woman within a Homeric household, not being called upon to defend it herself, has not the same need of the competitive excellences; and thus *aretê* may be used to commend the co-operative virtues. As a result, Homeric women may be effectively censured for actions which Homeric heroes have a strong claim to be allowed to perform.¹⁴

While Adkins is generally correct in this assessment, he has neglected to note that Penelope was under compulsion to protect her husband's home from invaders. Her methods were different from her husband's, for she did not pick up a sword and fight them off with brute strength; this she was not trained - as her husband was - to do. Instead, she re-oriented those skills she did have to accomplish a different purpose from that which she originally learned. Weaving was a finite task with a visible result and, by Adkins' definition of feminine *aretê*, a necessary skill for women to possess. Penelope altered its purpose, making weaving an infinite task without a visible product, giving it a new purpose as a stratagem to delay the enemy until the champion of the *oikos* could return and punish the intruders. The cunning for which Odysseus is constantly praised is also apparent in his wife. He is a Homeric hero; but Penelope also

¹³ Cairns (1993), 122 ff. Cf. Visser (1984), 194-95, for although she writes of *aidôs* in the context of ritual pollution and purification, her assessment of the dual nature of *aidôs*, and the manner in which it is earned or possessed by individuals, is accurate.

¹⁴ Adkins (1960), 36-37.

possesses this unique and defining quality, and yet she is preferable as a wife to a 'woman manifesting the *aretai* of a Homeric hero.' Penelope combines her domestic virtue with her cunning intelligence, her *mêtis*, to protect her husband's home and honour. She stalls the suitors with an intelligence that rivals Odysseus' renowned cunning; she is, as Winkler demonstrates, the perfect mate for Odysseus, matching him in intelligence and wily tricks.¹⁵

Penelope's intelligence begins to create a public reputation for Penelope, as Antinoös reports the suitors' reasons for pursuing such a reluctant bride to Telemachos and the *laoi* at 2.115-126. Her cleverness, wisdom and abilities are what keeps the suitors in persistent pursuit of Odysseus' wife. She has surpassed the reports of 'ancient queens' with her own 'great name,' and these men desire a share in that greatness of mind and character. By her brains and 'wily tricks', she is able to manipulate her wifely duties in such a manner as to create an obstacle to the suitors, with the outcome that her home is kept safe and replenished in stores and wealth, and she can 'keep faith with her husband's bed' a little while longer.

A woman can be crucial to the provision of *xenia*, and a (mortal) woman can manage an *oikos* on her own in her husband's absence, but she does not - or cannot - take over all the duties involved. For example, on the rare occasions Penelope attempts to enact one of the duties of the masculine role in *xenia*, she is stopped and corrected by Telemachos, who is the (budding) man of the *oikos*. When Penelope attempts to change the entertainment because Phemios' song is upsetting to her (1.336-44), Telemachos berates her for blaming the singer and

¹⁵ (1990), 129-161. Foley (1995), 95-96, also shows the 'like-mindedness' between the two, in terms of the praise for their suffering, the same terms employed to describe their internal moral struggles, and in the way that Penelope adheres to the "value system" that she has learned from Odysseus.

sends her back to her room, 1.356-59.¹⁶ It is not in the woman's power to change the entertainment, and Telemachos reminds her of that. Alkinoos is able to alter the entertainment several times, fearing lest he upset his guest further; even Helen attempts to lighten her guests spirits - though not by conventional means. Penelope's motivation in stopping the song was to avoid upsetting herself - a selfish move, whereas Alkinoos was solicitous of his guest's happiness, which is the correct reason for enacting this duty.¹⁷ Throughout the *Odyssey* there is no entirely conventional scene of hospitality depicted, where each head of the *oikos* follows his or her own duties of *xenia*. The concept of a completely woman-run *oikos* is plausible, but the woman in question is usually an immortal goddess, and no men are present, except as guests. Indeed, there appears to be a margin of flexibility in these gender-specific duties, to reflect to the individual's personal circumstances, as shown by Nausicaa's story. Penelope capitalizes on this margin, for her circumstances are unique and extreme.

The obligation of maintaining the *kleos* of the *oikos* through *xenia* leaves Penelope vulnerable to abuse of this tradition for, without the presence of Odysseus to aid and sanction her, she is powerless to prevent the suitors from taking advantage of her situation. By her deliberate blurring of the reasons and explanations for their presence - "for she holds out hope to all, and makes promises to each man" (2.91) about marriage but she never gives a clear answer,

¹⁶ As Kirk notes, this is echoes Hektor's advice to Andromache at *Iliad* VI.490-93.

¹⁷ There is another example when Telemachos uses these same words to put his mother in her place (21.350-53), Penelope has strayed most definitely into the role of the man, by offering gifts and conveyance to the stranger, should he succeed in stringing the bow (21.331-42). But neither the woman nor her son are in a position - within the duties of *xenia* - to make any offer usually made by the man of the *oikos*, such as offering gifts and transport. Though Helen offered a gift to Telemachos, she clearly states that it is for his future wife (15.123-29), and this is an allowable action for a woman (cf. Helen's gifts from the wife of Aigyptos). Arete also attempts to take on this masculine duty for herself when, at 11.335-41, she claims Odysseus to be "her own guest" and urges the other chiefs of Scheria to contribute more gifts to him. Though Echeneos vocalizes

and keeps them in the house through her restricted action under the etiquette of *xenia* - she holds them within her home for Odysseus' return and, through his punishment of their behaviour, she exacts her own disguised revenge for their slight upon her honour as a faithful wife.¹⁸ Penelope voices her wish that Odysseus would appear and perform the action that she cannot (17.528-540), and punish these intruders. The 'cunning intelligence' for which she is praised is dedicated to the benefit of the *oikos*, and to its protection; had she applied this quality to something other than the *oikos*, her behaviour would not have complied with society's (nor her husband's) guidelines for a wife.

This is the general distinction between what makes a wife good or bad; if her actions are fulfilled with the *oikos* as the focus of her attention and support, then she is virtuous. If, on the other hand, a woman acts with her own self-interests as her motivation, then her actions are detrimental to the *oikos* and to her family. More generally, an action taken by a woman without thought to the *oikos* and any (or all) of its members, or an action made with selfish intent, is an action that carries a bad result. Adkins has overlooked this very pertinent evidence of Penelope's behaviour in her own unique situation; a more comprehensive definition of feminine virtue is necessary, to accommodate the varying representations of women found in Greek literature.¹⁹

his agreement with her suggestion, still he defers to Alkinoös for the final decision and order (11.344-46).

¹⁸ For a summary of earlier views of whether Penelope recognized her husband, see Katz (1991), 93-113, Murnaghan (1987), and Felson-Rubin (1994). Foley (1995), 100 n. 21, rejects most views that she recognizes Odysseus, or even intuits his presence. She agrees with Katz's idea that the knowledge of the audience will add to the scene, and allow each individual to draw his or her own conclusion.

¹⁹ Cf. Williams (1993), 122-123, who comments on a division of roles based solely on sexual identities. This thesis accepts the view that such a division of social roles based upon sexual identity did exist as the mean of opinion of the Greek populace, and that there were ideas and

Gender Differences in *Aretê*:

Aristotle notes that *aretê* can exist in women, though he distinguishes the divergent nature of feminine *aretê* from masculine, comparing the difference of the quality of excellence in this binary relationship to that of a ruler and of one who is ruled.²⁰ The necessary difference in roles within the *oikos* leads to, and is linked with, the necessary difference in the *aretê* held by both men and women.²¹ Should either exhibit the *aretê* associated with the opposing sex, they are still judged in accordance to their gender-group as having inconsistent *aretê*: “It is evident, then, that all those mentioned have virtue of character, and that temperance (ἡ σωφροσύνη), courage (ἀνδρεία), and justice (δικαιοσύνη) of a man are not the same as those of a woman, as Socrates considered: the one courage is that of a ruler, the other that of an assistant (ἡ μὲν ἀρχικὴ ἀνδρεία ἢ δ’ ὑπηρετικὴ), and similarly in the case of the other virtues too.”²² He also hypothesizes the resultant perception if the different types of *aretê* should cross over into the opposing vessels: δόξα γὰρ ἂν εἶναι δειλὸς ἀνὴρ, εἰ οὕτως ἀνδρείος εἴη ὥσπερ γυνὴ ἀνδρεία, καὶ γυνὴ λάλος, εἰ οὕτω κοσμία εἴη ὥσπερ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἀγαθός.²³ Whether a situation of this sort ever arose in Aristotle’s experience is unknown; the mere statement itself is important, for it demonstrates that the idea of ‘cross-gendered’

theories to the contrary, such as Plato’s suggestion in the *Republic*, but that this did not necessarily represent a general opinion.

²⁰ *Pol.* 1254b 13-15, trans. Reeve (1998): “Moreover, the relation of male to female is that of natural superior to natural inferior, and that of ruler to ruled.” Also, *Pol.* 1277b 17-20: “For if a good person is ruled, but is a free citizen, his virtue (justice, for example) will clearly not be of one kind, but includes one kind for ruling and another for being ruled, just as a man’s and a woman’s courage and temperance differ.”

²¹ Also Aristotle, *NE* 1162a20ff, trans. Irwin (1999): “Human beings, however, share a household not only for childbearing, but also for the benefits in their life. For the difference between them implies that their functions are divided, with different ones for the man and the woman, hence each supplies the other’s needs by contributing a special function to the common good.”

²² *Pol.* 1260a 19-23, trans. Reeve (1998). See also *Pol.* 1254b 13-15, and 1277b 21-25.

²³ *Pol.* 1277b 21-25, trans. Reeve (1998): “For a man would seem a coward if he had the courage of a woman, and a woman would seem garrulous if she had the temperance of a good man...”

aretê was considered to be possible, or at least the consequences of such a transgression were.

Adkins defines *aretê* for (Homeric) men: “*Aretê* in Homer is courage-and-physical-prowess-and-social-position-and-fame. It denotes and commends all these qualities together because the general needs of Homeric society demand that all should be united in certain individuals. The man of *aretê* is the *agathos*, who necessarily possesses a great many goods and qualities; and he has *timê*, which in some way denotes and commends his position in life.”²⁴ Though *aretê* is predominantly used in a masculine context, it is also used in reference to feminine virtue. Through the writings of Aristotle and Plato, we know that an understanding and an appreciation of the various characteristics, duties and qualities that accompanied a woman did exist, and that this general understanding can provide the definition of a virtuous woman. These philosophers point out the role of the woman in the *oikos*, and acknowledge that a woman’s *aretê* exists; this is a clear expression of the differences between feminine *aretê* and masculine *aretê*.

Affecting Honour:

Women may possess *aretê*, a term that covers their duties within the *oikos* and also any quality or behaviour that is considered worthy of praise by their male guardian or members of the household. But women can only enact the “co-operative” values that Adkins notes; women are discouraged from the “competitive” values, with the implication that it is unseemly for a woman to

²⁴ Adkins (1997), 706. I will return to this equation of *aretê* – for Adkins has overlooked some pertinent details about some women in literature.

compete, especially in public.²⁵ Foley notes that “both sexes can publicly demonstrate *aretê* ... and achieve *kleos* ... for their actions, although they exercise their capacities for virtue in different contexts and achieve fame by different routes.”²⁶ While men earn their honour, and the regard of their peers helps to consolidate reputations for honour,²⁷ a woman can only be considered *aidoiê* or ‘worthy of honour’, at the discretion of her husband, or guardian. Women do not actually possess this title for themselves, but must earn this regard from their husbands through their adherence to virtue. And yet, there is a problem with the audience for a woman’s virtue; while the proposed ideal is an audience restricted to the *oikos* alone, a woman’s audience is as large as her husband’s or guardian’s audience.²⁸ For a woman is an integral part of a man’s reputation, and those who would accord him honour must take all aspects into account, including his *oikos* and those who reside within.

Cairns notes that “Society sets different standards for women from those it sets for men, the main virtue required of women being faithfulness; men’s honour is vulnerable through women, and men have an interest in ensuring that the women under their control remain faithful and sexually pure.”²⁹

²⁵ Cf. *Agamemnon* 940: “Surely this lust for conflict is not womanlike?” (trans. Lattimore, 1953) Agamemnon questions Clytemnestra about her desire to compete with him on his return.

²⁶ Foley (1995), 95.

²⁷ At *Ag.* 531, Agamemnon is considered “most worthy to be honoured among men now living,” (*τίεσθαι δ’ ἀξιότατος βροτῶν ἰ πῶν νῦν.*); though this refers to the concept which underlies *aidôs*, and superficially resembles the necessity of reference which honour requires (i.e. an audience who deems someone to be ‘honourable’ or in possession of ‘honour’), in the word *τίεσθαι* there is less a sense of reliance upon an audience to bestow this regard, and instead they merely recognize the honour which the individual possesses. (Also recalls and charges the meaning of *τιεῖν* at 259 offered to Clytemnestra by the Chorus.)

²⁸ As Cairns (2001), 21, notes: “... for the notion that individual characters are subject to the evaluation of their peers is central to the concept of honour which is the driving force of Homeric values.”

²⁹ (1993), 120-1. Cairns continues: “It is in adhering to these standards and in being above any slight on her honour that a woman deserves the title *aidoiê*; thus in maintaining her own honour and that of her male protector a woman merits honour, which is recognized by *aidôs*, in return.”

He has, however, blurred the distinction between virtue and honour, using “honour” to denote “chastity”; virtue and honour become indistinguishable in his account. This is inaccurate, for the definitions of virtue and honour prevent such interchangeability: the former describes one’s personal behaviour, the latter describes one’s behaviour in relation to others.

Where Adkins delineates the difference between “competitive values” and “co-operative values”, a correlation between honour and virtue can be observed. Men are defined by their ability to excel in competition, thus garnering honour, as well as by their ability to co-operate, thus behaving virtuously. Women ought not to compete, and must be co-operative and maintain “quiet” values. While both are connected, most obviously in men, a woman has no opportunity to perform public actions that merit recognition of honour,³⁰ and to do so is contrary to the whole concept of feminine virtue.³¹ The ‘actions’ of women are inherently different from the actions of men, in that a woman’s actions are domestically focused, centering on matters within the *oikos*. However, a woman can affect the honour of her men; should she behave in a manner that damages her virtue or indicates a disregard for the elements of virtue, her husband will feel the effects of her actions, and his reputation for honour will be damaged.³²

³⁰ While lamentation is a public act, it is a demonstration of grief and importance of the deceased to the *oikos*, and is also a finalization of the honour of the deceased.

³¹ There are several women throughout tragedy whose actions exemplify the definition of honour by their sacrifices. For example, Euripides’ Alcestis makes the ultimate sacrifice for her husband’s benefit, by dying in her husband’s stead, or Megara in *Heracles* states at 294 that she must not “shrink from following my lord’s example” and volunteers that it is better to die bravely rather than become a “source of mockery” for the enemies of her husband. These women on stage possessed unique qualities, which set them apart from the average Greek woman. Unfortunately, space limitations do not allow for a detailed examination of all women in tragedy that exhibit this quality of honour.

³² Cf. Cairns (1993), for his complete examination of masculine honour, and how it functions through reference to the opinions of peers. This is best illustrated by the Odyssean Agamemnon’s report of his own *nostos* (11.405-434), for his successful return home is destroyed by his own wife, as she betrayed and killed him with her paramour. Nestor’s report at 3.193-200 lays the

Homeric Honour and the Function of *Aidôs*:

The importance of honour to men in ancient Greece is well-documented by recent scholars;³³ the manner in which Homeric honour is achieved, sustained and rewarded is made clear from the epic poems. Masculine honour begins with a man's actions, but it is his audience of peers who decide whether these acts are indeed honourable and worthy of inclusion in an individual's *aidôs*. *Aidôs* functions to provide a restraint on behaviour and speech that acts within and outside each individual. A personal sense of *aidôs* will prevent one from doing or saying something that could reflect back badly; as well, the audience of an individual's life will provide a further check on an action to which one is personally ambivalent in terms of its rightness or wrongness. That is, to consider the reactions of an audience of peers will aid in the decision whether to attempt any action of such a sort or not. And yet, how much influence that audience will have upon any individual man is determined by his own perception of the honour and *aidôs* that audience possesses, and the regard he accords it.

To be *agathos*, one must exhibit certain personality traits, as well as perform certain actions. Adkins distinguishes between two types of values: " 'competitive' values or excellences and 'co-operative' or 'quiet' values or

blame firmly upon 'treacherous Aigisthos,' and at 3.262-73, he relates the story of the turning of Clytemnestra's fidelity by Aigisthos. At 4.91-2, Menelaos sums up the business briefly, but he is no less condemning of her betrayal, though he does not elucidate with respect to her involvement in the actual killing.

³³ Adkins (1960), 30-60 (for Homeric virtues), and 153ff., in which the evolution of *aretê* is examined, and attempts to 'up-date' the basic elements comprising *aretê* to include certain virtues that were attractive to the Greeks of the Classical period, e.g. to "render [*dikaiosunê*] an essential element of the most attractive group of values; or alternatively, as a second best, to demonstrate or assert that to be *dikaios* is a necessary, if troublesome, means to becoming or remaining *agathos*..." Cf. Cairns (1993); Dover (1994), 58-73, regarding virtues of men, and the various sources in which definitions and lists can be found; and 95-102, regarding character traits of women; Dover (1994), 67-69, treats epitaphs, which contain some virtue terms that are shared by men and women, noting that the composer of *GYT* 890 "must be saying ... that it is unusual for a woman to display both the modesty expected of a chaste woman and the talents required for the management of a household." – a rare example that follows the Penelopean model of virtue.

excellences.³⁴ The reward for success in competitive excellences was acclaim from one's peers; an individual performed these 'duties' in expectation of honour and reputation, with recognition encouraging further acts of honour. Arthur notes that "[it] is a circular argument in which the rewards of the heroic life are identified as its rationale."³⁵ The reward for honour is the same as its reason: *aidôs* (shame and awareness of what is honourable and good) is rewarded with *aidôs* (regard from one's peers, as recognition of honour).

There is more to Homeric honour than this competitive/co-operative distinction however. While there are elements of this present in the *Iliad*, there is also a "communal ethic of reciprocity"³⁶ in which all members do consider the honour and reputation of the others.³⁷ But honour cannot be given to oneself; "honour depends not exclusively on oneself, but also on popular opinion, on the audience, and the audience may side with either party, with neither, or may reserve judgement..."³⁸ The audience is the key to honour, and regard; one must convince the audience that the deeds are worthy for their pronouncement of regard.

Although the society is shaped by a desire for peaceful co-existence with minimal discord, the people of the society are still human, and still concerned

³⁴ Adkins (1960), 6-7. He continues throughout his work to demonstrate how the 'competitive' values were of greater importance to men of the Homeric world. He also notes while society progressed, a necessity for the 'co-operative' values to be as highly regarded arose, and the difficulties encountered by the ancient writers to syncretize the importance of both complexes without losing the interest of society in adhering to them (cf. Ch. 8). However, Cairns (2001), 21, notes some of the failings of Adkins' generalizations about Homeric values.

³⁵ Arthur (1984), 10.

³⁶ Cairns (2001), 21-22: "... the very issue of the poem is Agamemnon's breach of the communal ethic of reciprocity in initiating the quarrel with Achilles, and the issue of reparation for this offence underlies the poem's ethical structure.... The pursuit of self-interest regardless of others does not figure among the *Iliad's* ideals."

³⁷ Cairns (2001), notes the problem with this ideal, 22: "Honour in the *Iliad* thus sustains the values of a society which lays great stress on equilibrium and the avoidance of unprovoked aggression, but which is peopled by heroes who are acutely sensitive to the slightest suggestion of an affront and naturally more concerned with the maintenance and enhancement of their own status than with the status of their rivals."

about themselves primarily. Keeping in mind this idea/ideal of a community of reciprocity among men, in terms of honour and regard, there is a further application of this reciprocity in relations between men and women. It is time to ask: what was the reward for a woman's adherence to virtue, and was the reward also the reason for continuing to enact virtue?

Virtue and Its Audience:

From epic to tragedy, key elements in the definition of virtue appear to have remained constant, as well as the representations of women's duties. In tragedy, greater emphasis is placed on the way in which a woman's behaviour reflects on her husband's *timê*,³⁹ one aspect that has not been recognized as a contributing factor to feminine virtue is the effect a man's behaviour can have on a woman's. A woman is cautioned to be aware that her actions can affect her husband's (or father's or brother's) honour, as exemplified in the Funeral Oration of Pericles.

Taking Aristotle's advice,⁴⁰ I will not accept that virtue is merely "a good condition of the soul," and instead attempt to enumerate the composite parts of virtue, thereby creating a clearer definition of feminine virtue. To construct a clear and explicit definition of traditional 'feminine virtue' that draws together several aspects of varying natures - from skill in weaving to a woman's physical beauty - is a more complicated undertaking than it seems at first. Plato offers a short list of activities at which women were proficient (or expected to be): *ἢ μακρολογώμεν τήν τε ὕφαντικὴν λέγοντες καὶ τὴν τῶν ποπάνων τε καὶ ἐψημάτων*

³⁸ Cairns (2001), 212-213.

³⁹ Clytemnestra's behaviour not only taints and diminishes Agamemnon's death, but also her lover, Aegisthos, is mocked for hiding behind a woman, and being less of a man for allowing a woman to do his dirty work. See Chapter 1 for a greater discussion of this example.

θεραπείαν, ἐν οἷς δὴ τι δοκεῖ τὸ γυναικεῖον γένος εἶναι, οὐ καὶ καταγελαστότατόν ἐστι πάντων ἡττώμενον;⁴¹ The simplest definition of ‘feminine virtue’ that encompasses the majority of female figures in epic, which can carry over to women of tragedy, yet still maintaining a flexibility between different levels of skill or innate beauty, could be: ‘those elements for which women are praised by men’. The various aspects of feminine character, behaviour and skill are brought together by this common thread of praise.

Virtue is further defined by traditional roles in the *oikos*, summarized by Aristotle in his *Politics*, 1277b 24-5: “since even household management differs for the two of them (for his task is to acquire property and hers to preserve it).”⁴² Aristotle sees virtue as a necessary part of the *polis*, and that the virtue of the whole is determined by the virtue of its parts; thus women (and children) must be taught to be virtuous (*Pol.* 1260a7-19). In contrast, Plato argues against the idea of allowing the woman to stay at home. He argues that women ought to be given “the responsibility of acting as stewards, setting them to rule over the shuttles and everything having to do with spinning,” for half the city goes to waste while they allow “the female to live in luxury, spend money, and follow disorderly pursuits, while supervising the male.”⁴³ Plato proposes that women should help in the realization of the complete potential of the city; allowing them to stay in the *oikos* is more wasteful than virtuous, and that women could contribute directly to the virtue of the whole *polis*. Although his views were not necessarily popular (nor accepted) by his peers, the fact that Plato was proposing an idea that

⁴⁰ Cf. *Pol.* 1260a 25-27, and above, p. 1.

⁴¹ *Rep* 455d-e, trans. Griffith (2000): “Or do we have to give a long account of weaving, cookery and baking cakes - things the female sex is thought to be pretty good at, and where it is particularly absurd for them to be second-best?” These abilities are what Gagarin (1976), 90, called “a woman’s main functions”.

⁴² Trans. Reeve (1998).

⁴³ *Laws* 805e, 806c, trans. Pangle (1988).

embraced the concept of competent and capable women opens up the discussion of whether this society could accept a woman in charge of her own life, destiny, virtue and honour.

Adkins notes that the *oikos* is the central concern for a man to protect and defend; for it is here that his *timē* is kept, including all his possessions, wealth and wife.⁴⁴ With the woman of the *oikos* at the heart of the home, whose primary duty is to keep and store those things which the man acquires, she too becomes linked with his *timē*, for she can affect it through her behaviour. The man maintains his role as defender: of his *oikos*, his *timē*,⁴⁵ his *aretē* and his wife. With this concept of defender in mind, it is possible to include women, using Penelope and Andromache as the examples: they possessed 'courage' to face hardships *on behalf of their husbands*, and 'social position' could be expanded to include an awareness that their own position was limited to a domestic context, as a wife and help-meet to their men, but not necessarily an equal, and without the ambition to raise their position in society.⁴⁶

With virtue defined as praiseworthy qualities and behaviour, further clarification is necessary for why some aspects are sometimes praised and sometimes not. For example, Penelope's cunning is praised throughout the *Odyssey*, for she employed it to preserve the *oikos* until Odysseus returned. Whereas Euripides' *Medea* focuses upon the attempted suppression of Medea's cunning by Jason and Kreon, for they fear she might turn it against them in revenge over their plan to exile her, Aegeus praises this very same characteristic

⁴⁴ (1997), 705.

⁴⁵ See Foley (1995), 93-115.

⁴⁶ I have not included 'physical prowess' in this application of Homeric *aretē*, for a simple correlation of 'physical prowess' between men and women – indicating physical strength – is not applicable in the setting of an ancient society (women body-builders are a relatively modern phenomenon). On the other hand, the definition of 'physical prowess' could be expanded to

when he sees an opportunity to benefit personally (with his *polis* in mind) from her help. Each occurrence of praise or blame depends upon the woman and her intentions behind utilizing the attribute in question.⁴⁷ In epic, all praise and reward of the virtuous behaviour of women comes from men. The punishment for a lack of virtuous behaviour is represented unevenly in epic: Menelaos gently reminds his wife of her treacherous actions during the war; Hektor brusquely prompts Andromache to return to her place in the *oikos*, after her attempt to suggest military strategy; Agamemnon cannot punish his wife, but instead his son acts as his agent of revenge, and is praised. The most notable punishment of infidelity to the *oikos* is that meted out to his own handmaidens by Odysseus, for their relations with the suitors, and their betrayal of himself and his wife.

The List of Virtues:

Though a catalogue of the composite parts of virtue would be, at the very least, a modern construct (and, at worst, a misleading checklist that cannot be consistently applied to women throughout literature), a clearer definition of the elements of feminine virtue offered in epic will aid in observing a noticeable shift from virtue to a few notable attempts to create feminine honour in tragedy.⁴⁸ Accepting this list as a guideline of the (expected) duties in the virtue of a wife, we must also accept that - as a guideline - there may not be a strict adherence to every duty on this list by every female character in literature. Yet as a guideline, we can use this list to understand the nature of a wife's virtue, and how each of these duties affects the others.

include a woman's care of her physical self, which can then account for the several examples of praise for feminine beauty.

⁴⁷ Despite Aristotle's assertion, *Pol.* 1254b 13-15.

⁴⁸ Also represented in tragedy (though less frequently) is the enduring nature of traditional virtue.

There is literary evidence that not only demonstrates the importance of chastity as a part of virtue but also offers further defining elements of feminine behaviour that contributes to and is a part of feminine virtue. Homer offers the first vocalizations of feminine virtue - or at least a male perspective on what a woman's virtue should include - when Hektor tells Andromache where to go (VI.490-493):

ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰούσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε,
 ἰστόν τ' ἡλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε
 ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι· πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει
 πᾶσιν, ἐμοὶ δὲ μάλιστα, τοὶ Ἰλίῳ ἐγγεγάασιν.⁴⁹

Hektor sets out the duties for each of them, and admonishes his wife to adhere to her role, as he intends to fulfil his own, without overlapping the duties of the other. Another description of a woman's duties to the family and *oikos* is found in the *Odyssey*. Penelope refers to the duties to her husband, *oikos* and her virtue, when she speaks of her predicament to the stranger, at 19.524-29:

ὡς μαι ἐμοὶ δῖχα θυμὸς ὀρώρεται ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα,
 ἠὲ μένο παρὰ παιδὶ καὶ ἔμπεδα πάντα φυλάσσω,
 κτήσιν ἐμήν, δμωάς τε καὶ ὑψερεφές μέγα δῶμα,
 εὐνήν τ' αἰδομένη πόσιος δήμοιό τε φῆμιν,
 ἧ ἦθ' ἄμ' ἔπαμαι, Αἰχαιῶν ὅς τις ἄριστος
 μῶνται ἐνὶ μεγάροισι, πορῶν ἀπερείσια ἔδνα.⁵⁰

Here are listed four main elements to which a woman must pay heed: children, household, husband's bed, and public report. The element of physical chastity is present in this larger definition, as an inherent part of marriage, but the inclusion

⁴⁹ These lines are paraphrased several times in the *Odyssey* (1.356-59=21.331-42) as Telemachos uses them to assert his ascending role in the *oikos*, redefining his mother's role at the same time; no longer his nurturer, their roles become reversed as Telemachos grows older, and Penelope becomes *his* responsibility.

⁵⁰ =16.73-77 (Telemachos).

of domestic duties and childcare demonstrate other important elements necessary in the estimation of a woman's virtue. All other activities can be catalogued as specific descriptions under each of these general considerations for virtue in wives: spinning and weaving falls under 'looking after the household,' chastity is a part of 'keeping faith with the husband's bed,'⁵¹ and to be aware of public report was to avoid bad report, and to do only those duties in such manner as to garner good repute, keeping concern for her husband's honour as her first priority. The maintenance (or neglect) of each duty of virtue affects the others; for example, children were the result of 'keeping faith with the husband's bed,' and children were the reason for marriage, as well as security for the future of the *oikos*, and they would carry on the public opinion first acquired by their parents.

Penelope commits herself to accomplishing all these things that comprise the first option of her divided heart with endurance beyond compare throughout the tradition of Classical literature to come and its portrayal of women. She has waited years for her husband's return, raising their young son by herself and looking after a large and prosperous household. During this time, her home is invaded by the suitors, and she must discover ways in which she can follow these duties of a virtuous wife without bringing ruin upon the *oikos* through exhaustion of stores, without harming her child or exposing him to potential harm, without bringing dishonour to her husband's bed by marrying another before learning definite news of her first husband's whereabouts, and without offending guests and the etiquette of *xenia*,⁵² which would produce a bad report about her home and sully her husband's reputation.

⁵¹ The marriage bed (or husband's bed) is a common metaphor for marriage, and often throughout literature is used to represent marital bliss, and fidelity.

⁵² Disregarding that the suitors are in flagrant violation of *xenia* and all its accepted proprieties. They are still guests, and are still under the protection of Zeus, until such time as the master of

First in this list reads 'to remain here with the child'; children were the top priority of a woman in her marital household⁵³ - understanding that the production, rearing, and the protection of their health and safety is all part of that duty. The second duty is the *oikos*, the larger part of a woman's realm; everything she does focuses on benefiting the *oikos*, by prudently maintaining storage and distribution of supplies, management of servants, spinning and weaving of garments for all members of the *oikos*, and also the rearing of children. Women became symbolic of the *oikos*, as both a location, and as an ideal concept: to violate the women was to violate the *oikos*, and thus do harm to the reputation of the men who were head of the *oikos* and guardian of the women. The children were the future inheritors of the *oikos* and its wealth, status and responsibility; by killing a child of the *oikos*, the future of the *oikos* is threatened.

An awareness of public report is also a part of this list of a woman's concern for her virtue. She must take thought for the assessment of her actions by the public, what their opinion of her behaviour will be, and ultimately how this report will reflect upon her husband, and how his honour will be affected.⁵⁴ It must be understood that feminine virtue involves a series of duties that are to

the *oikos* returns and - with the blessing of the father of the gods - punishes those who have transgressed beyond accepted behaviour.

⁵³ Children could also be considered important to men in a political context, as illustrated in Pericles' funeral oration (Thuc. 2.44), when he says that those who have no children "cannot possibly offer fair and impartial counsel who, having no children to hazard, do not have an equal part in the risk." Even in the *Agamemnon* at 1524ff., as Winnington-Ingram notes, 111 n. 52: "if Thomson [1966] is right to translate 'whom he consented to rear for me' (referring to the husband's option of acknowledging or exposing the child), the phrase is even more expressive of the marriage-relationship..."

⁵⁴ Foley (1995), 105, remarks that "in Book 24 Penelope is awarded *kleos* in part for remembering her husband (*hos eu memnēt' Odusēos*, 195); she elsewhere insists that even if she remarries she will, unlike other women who tend to forget the previous marriage and children (15.20-23), remember Odysseus' house in her dreams (19.581)." This is in direct opposition to the words of Pericles, that no woman should be spoken of in any context in public, Thucydides 2.45. See Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.13 1260a 27-30, trans. Reeve (1998): "Consequently, we must take

be fulfilled. The success (or failure) to accomplish these duties contributes to the estimation of a woman's virtue. The ancient attitude generally accepts that a woman's behaviour can affect a man's honour. This thesis will examine the possibility that the reverse also exists within ancient literature: how a man's attitude towards the duties of a woman in her pursuit of virtue can affect her virtue (and her perception of the worth of striving for virtue). If a man gives no regard to duties well done, then a woman may not work so hard at fulfilling those duties. If the man himself violates the description of that duty - for example, not respecting his own marriage-bed - the possible reactions of the woman are varied and difficult to predict.

Making Honour Out of Virtue:

In tragedy, the 'traditional' virtues are still in evidence, but some anomalies of perception begin to appear. There are female characters who operate under the ideal of masculine praise for feminine virtue, and their tragic situation arises from the demands placed upon their desire to achieve that praise. There are other characters for whom the praise of men has become meaningless, as a consequence of their treatment by men. They have shifted their perception of what virtue and reward are, and what these concepts could now become. For some, reward lies within themselves, as implicit and internal praise of a sense of personal integrity. For others, a new understanding of 'action breeds honour' is created, and they attempt an action for a larger audience (beyond merely their *oikos*) to gain honour(able report).

what the poet says about a woman as our guide in every case: 'To a woman silence is a crowning glory' - whereas this does not apply to a man."

The nature of *aretê* demands that a woman's husband/*kyrios* recognize her virtue, and he must also acknowledge that his actions may affect her virtue as well.⁵⁵ Should he deny the existence of her virtue by means of his actions, a woman may decide to seek his approval no longer, through her own virtuous behaviour. Some women of tragedy react to their men's actions in a manner that recalls Achilles and his quarrel with Agamemnon, regarding the acknowledgement of honour and fame. Though they acted under the socially accepted definition of virtue (winning praise initially), as events unfolded all they had achieved was taken from them, despite the fact that their behaviour did not alter, nor was a flaw deserving punishment later uncovered. Their reward is removed, leaving them to wonder whether it is worthwhile to behave in a virtuous manner when neither recognition nor reward will follow.

This shift in perception creates a new facet to the definition of feminine virtue - a definition which is replaced by a sense of personal pride *within* the women themselves. This sense of personal involvement in the acquisition of honour and private reward mirrors their perception of masculine honour. As represented by some women of the tragic stage, their actions - the pursuit of honour, the lengths to which they will go to protect their own personal sense of honour - resemble actions traditionally associated with heroes. The image of women is begun in epic, and the boundaries of women's work, behaviour and virtue are set. Also found within epic are the seeds of variation of behaviour within established boundaries, and some of the latitudes allowed to women beyond those boundaries. Tragedy brings to the foreground the full expression of allowable transgressions within the criteria of feminine behaviour, illustrating

⁵⁵ 'The nature of *aretê*' being defined as necessarily being recognized by an audience, and accorded certain regard and respect.

the flexibility of the boundaries (within reason), as well as those transgressions that shatter the established boundaries completely.

In this thesis examining Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, I will demonstrate that Clytemnestra has abandoned her pursuit of feminine virtue in reaction to Agamemnon's denial of her virtue. I will examine how a hidden agenda of Clytemnestra's devising lies behind her revenge; for not only was the life of her child destroyed, but Clytemnestra's virtue was damaged by her husband's actions. The *Agamemnon* introduces Clytemnestra's attempts to gain honour, through her attempted persuasion of the Chorus to accept her as a woman capable of masculine action, and therefore capable of achieving masculine honour. Clytemnestra utilizes a masculine vocabulary in an effort to be perceived as an equal to other men, and also to compel others to offer her honour on a masculine-defined scale: honour (not virtue) to be bestowed by an audience of peers (directly, not through her husband) for actions taken (not virtue maintained) with a masculine means (revenge), though bearing a feminine motive (on behalf of a (female) child). Clytemnestra's interaction with the Chorus indicates that she believes honour ought to function in the same way for her, regardless of the (gender of the) individuals involved. The chorus of Elders resists her persuasion that she be treated as an equal (male), and her quest for honour fails. The *Choephoroi* looks at the further consequences of Clytemnestra's abandonment of virtue – how it has affected her family, and leads to her punishment at the hands of her son. The *Eumenides* brings an end to the strife and inversion of order that Clytemnestra instigated, as the *oikos* is returned to the guardianship of the male, and revenge is removed from personal power and placed under the power of the *polis* and the law-court. I will examine how

the female deities of this play represent two sides of Clytemnestra, and how the playwright uses each to highlight the humiliation of Clytemnestra in her failure to achieve honour.

Agamemnon

Many theories about the *Oresteia* have been written and rebutted; scholars have discussed the various pairings of imagery (light and darkness, real and supernatural) throughout the plays;⁵⁶ others have discussed the political impact of the trilogy,⁵⁷ or the evolution of the figure of Zeus⁵⁸ or the succession of the Olympian gods over the chthonic gods.⁵⁹ Few have written exclusively about Clytemnestra's part in the trilogy. Commentators have noted different reactions of Clytemnestra within the same text: she suddenly realizes the nature of her action and regrets it; by calling upon the *alastor* she is attempting to escape responsibility; she attempts to escape retribution by 'buying off' the *daimon* of the curse through an offering of her wealth. Those who do not agree with these theories assert that Clytemnestra willingly takes responsibility for the murder, but they make no attempt to explain her motivation. Vellacott comments on the issues that link the trilogy: "The moral values Aeschylus establishes are: in *Agamemnon*, humanity and pity; in *Choephoroi*, reverence for kindred blood; in *Eumenides*, judicial integrity. In each case he shows human action, willingly or unwillingly, destroying the principle involved. The concept common to all three principles is that of *αἰδώς*, which the poet names at the crucial point of the whole action, when Orestes confronts his mother (*Cho.* 896-

⁵⁶ Cf. Headlam (1910); Brown (1983), 13-34; Gantz (1977), 28-38; Peradotto (1964), 378-393.

⁵⁷ Cf. Cole (1977), 99-111; Hester (1981), 265-274; Bertman (1980), 134-38; Macleod (1982), 124-44; Dover (1957), 230-37; Sailor and Stroup (1999), 169-82; Samons II (1999), 221-33.

⁵⁸ Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1983), 75, for the theme of justice.

⁵⁹ Cf. Whallon (1980); Winnington-Ingram (1983), 152; Sailor and Stroup (1999). Bowie (1993), 10-31, discusses the parallels of rituals with events throughout the trilogy.

903).⁶⁰ This trilogy revolves around this one value – *aidōs*, honour and shame; it informs the action of all the characters, including Clytemnestra.

Few have attempted to explain why Clytemnestra would cast aside her other children, why she would seek revenge upon ‘the city’s darling’ and sacker of Troy, all for the sake of a child.⁶¹ Aeschylus has taken this relatively minor figure of the *Odyssey* and placed her centre stage⁶² for the first of his trilogy of revenge and punishment. The playwright has altered this epic character, emphasizing the conundrum of both her situation and her own behaviour. “The agent of punishment is an adulterous wife, but one whose daughter had been cruelly sacrificed. Perhaps to our surprise, however, we find that the woman who confronts us from the outset is neither, primarily, the adulteress nor the mother, but an anomalous creature - a woman with the will and mind of a man, resentful of male domination.”⁶³ Though the various stories of Clytemnestra throughout the *Odyssey* hint that she initially resisted taking Aigisthos as her lover, was this choice made through seduction and persuasion (on Aigisthos’ part) or did she choose him in reaction to her husband’s action (the denial of her status as mother)? Pindar’s *Pythian 11* suggests two possible motivations for Clytemnestra’s revenge, 22-28:

... πότερόν νιν ἄρ’ Ἰφηγένει’ ἐπ’ Εὐρύτιφω

⁶⁰ (1977), 115.

⁶¹ Vickers (1973), 361: “And although Aegisthus does not appear until the very end of the play we realize now that Clytemnestra’s motives for wanting to kill Agamemnon are not simply those of the avenging mother.” While I do not agree with Vickers that the queen’s love for Aigisthos was another motive for murder (for there is no evidence in the text of Clytemnestra’s feelings towards Aigisthos beyond that of a fellow-conspirator and protector when her plans go awry), I do agree that she had other motives.

⁶² Grene and Lattimore (1953), 7: “The story of the murder of Agamemnon had been told by Homer in the *Odyssey* and by the cyclic successors of Homer in the *Nostoi* (“Returns”), while the early part of the story appears in the *Cypria*. Stesichorus ... had made the fortunes of Orestes the subject of a long narrative in lyric form; and Pindar in his *Eleventh Pythian* had summarized the tale and reflected on the motives of Clytemnestra; and others, too, had touched on the story. On all these Aeschylus doubtless drew, and he had numerous variations from which to pick and choose.” (Cf. also n. 5 on same page.)

⁶³ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 76.

σφαγθεῖσα τῆλε πάτρας ἔκτισεν βαρυπάλαμον ὄρασι χόλον;
 ἢ ἑτέρῳ λέχει δαμαζομέναν
 ἔννηχι πάραγον κοῖται; τὸ δὲ νέαις ἀλόχοις
 ἔχθιστον ἀμπλάκιον καλύψαι τ' ἀμάχανον
 ἀλλοτρίαισι γλώσσαις·
 κακολόγοι δὲ πολῖται.

Was it revenge, or was it adultery that led Clytemnestra to murder? The commentators repeatedly remark that Clytemnestra was seeking revenge for her daughter's death.⁶⁴ The sacrifice of Iphigeneia is the provocation – there is little point in denying that. Children are the definition of motherhood – without a child, a woman is not a mother. As examined earlier, the honour of a man was tangled up with the physical chastity of his wife (and daughters); to protect his own honour, a man's wife must demonstrate fidelity to her marriage. Clytemnestra's adultery was symbolic of her feelings of betrayal by her husband.

Using the Homeric model of ideal virtue as a comparative foil,⁶⁵ this examination of Aeschylus' portrayal of Clytemnestra and her involvement in the murder will reveal an acute awareness of feminine virtue, including the methods of adhering to it and protecting it from harm. A woman has specific duties to

⁶⁴ For example, Roisman (1986), states baldly, 281: "Clytemnestra's anger is continually being nourished by the remembrance of her daughter's murder, over which she has been brooding for ten long years." Denniston-Page (1960) notes, 152ff. *ad loc.*: "The sacrifice of Iphigeneia has been called an 'innate maker of strife', and its character and the nature of the 'strife' are now further indicated by οὐ δεισήμερα, 'it has no fear of any man (Agamemnon)'; this is further clarified by what follows, lit. 'for there waits a terrible treacherous housekeeper (οἰκονόμος is substantive, not adj.) rising up again, unforgetting child-avenging Wrath', i.e. Clytemnestra will nurse her anger at home until her husband's return, and will then exact a terrible and treacherous revenge for her daughter's death." Lloyd-Jones and Fraenkel do not find clear references to Clytemnestra in these lines, while Thomson (1966) acknowledges that the line does suggest her, but he proposes that the ancient curse and the Furies are also associated with the ambiguous epithets of the line. Cf. Vickers (1973), 351: "...this quotation shows how Aeschylus has extended the technique of myth-parallelism: by placing a myth in a particular context he can make it not so much ambivalent as polyvalent. It gives more than one interpretation, holds them all simultaneously. The first two lines of that quotation refer to Agamemnon and Iphigeneia while the last two refer not only to them but forward to Clytemnestra against Agamemnon, and back to the original outrage by Atreus on Thyestes." Cf. also 358.

⁶⁵ Cf. O'Neill (1998), for an examination of the intertextuality between Homer and Aeschylus; also Winnington-Ingram (1973), 78, for the ways in which the story of the Trojan War informs this play.

fulfil,⁶⁶ in an effort to realize these ideals; in exchange for the accomplishment of these duties, she receives her regard from her husband, and also from his audience in some degree.⁶⁷ This chapter will examine the play for evidence that Clytemnestra was reacting to her husband's actions, which - before and after the war - had eliminated the reason to maintain her duties as wife and mother, keeping her husband and *oikos* as the focus of her virtue.

Introducing the Queen:

The Watchman demonstrates both fear and respect for his queen; though he despises being banished to the roof to watch for the beacon fires (1-10), he dares not defy her orders. He does not think that the house is run as well as it once was, when Agamemnon was at home (18-9).

Even amidst his complaints, the Watchman summarizes the dual nature developed by the playwright of Clytemnestra at 11: *ὄδε γὰρ κρατεῖ | γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ.*⁶⁸ There are several translations of this verse, though I prefer Lloyd-Jones': "such is the rule / of a woman's man-counseling, ever-hopeful, heart."⁶⁹ And yet, regardless of how modern scholars translate this, the idea that Clytemnestra is something other than feminine emerges from this mixed

⁶⁶ Cf. Gagarin (1976), 90-2, for his general overview of a 'woman's duties' within the *oikos*; these agree with my original definition of a woman's virtue.

⁶⁷ Cf. pp. 10-12. Cairns (2001), 212-213: "In any affront, the patient may feel himself dishonoured, but honour depends not exclusively on oneself, but also on popular opinion, on the audience, and the audience may side with either party, with neither, or may reserve judgement, depending on the circumstances."

⁶⁸ Zeitlin (1966), 646: "One recent critic has observed, "It should be a basic principle in interpreting Aeschylus that when language and syntax are most difficult, the poet is attempting to condense the largest volume of meaning into the smallest possible space." [Lobeck, unpublished diss., Columbia 1963.] The passage in question is an excellent example both of the difficulty of Aeschylus' thought and language and of the need to accept the ambiguity and density of texture in order to reach a modicum of genuine comprehension."

⁶⁹ I prefer Lloyd-Jones' translation for its succinctness and clarity of statement. In contrast is this translation from Verrall (1889), which seems overly poetic: "This it is to be commanded by a woman, who brings her quick hopes into the business of men!" Cf. Goldhill (1984), 9, for his notes about the grammatical intricacies in this line.

image.⁷⁰ Gagarin cautions that “we must bear in mind, however, that these and other references to Clytemnestra’s masculinity are made by the male characters in the play, who consider it abnormal for any woman to display qualities that they ... feel belong more properly to men.”⁷¹ And yet, Ischomachos is complimented by Socrates for having a wife who possesses just such a masculine quality, in Xenophon, *Oec.* 10.32-3: Νῆ τῆν Ἥραν, ἔφη, ὦ Ἰσχόμαχε, ἀνδρικήν γε ἐπιδεικνύεις τὴν διάνοιαν τῆς γυναικός. As with Penelope, Ischomachos’ wife focuses her abilities to the benefit of the *oikos* and the happiness of her husband; Clytemnestra uses her attribute to her husband’s detriment.

Goldhill and several commentators⁷² note the grammatical ambiguity of this line; he goes so far as to apply Barthes’ formula for hermeneutic sentences, and concludes that the “answer is ‘jammed’” by the vagueness of ἐπιζῶ,⁷³ but offers little else in discussion of the implications of this observation by the Watchman. The playwright has planted an early warning of the sort of woman he plans to introduce to his audience, one who diverges from the epic in every fundamental aspect. Whereas the Clytemnestra of Homer was in ‘her own nature...honest’ (3.266), and her part in the murder is conflictingly reported, Aeschylus’ representation makes her (appear) the sole agent in the murder, and the history of her virtue is ambiguous.⁷⁴ From the mouth of the Watchman comes this warning, for he is aware that something is very different and against

⁷⁰ Fraenkel (1950), *ad loc.*: “The oxymoron γυναικός ἀνδρόβουλον κέαρ, forceful both in sound and sense, impresses the hearer’s mind from the outset with one of the principal features of Clytemnestra’s character.” He does not, however, elucidate on this ‘principal feature’. Cf. Vickers (1973), 348-49. Stanford (1937), *CQ* 31; 2, 92, notes that there is a “double antithesis” in this line: “besides ἀνήρ / γυνή there is also βουλόη / ἐπιζῶ.”

⁷¹ (1976), 92-3.

⁷² Fraenkel (1950), Denniston-Page (1957), Verrall (1889), Thomson (1966). Foley (2001), however, passes over this line very briefly (210).

⁷³ (1984), 10.

⁷⁴ Cf. Pindar, *Pythian* 11.22-28, quoted previously on pp. 28-29.

the accepted order of ‘things’ but he cannot quite name it; he knows he fears it, and that it is related to the *συμφόρα* of the house.

It is possible to interpret simply from this phrase that though her heart is ‘man-counselling’, Clytemnestra is still capable of nurturing hope and optimism, as is the common circumstance of women who wait patiently during the absence of their men, hearing and surviving the doom-filled reports that contradict hope.⁷⁵ She has progressed beyond the mere hopeful nature of her heart to include this *ἀνδρόβουλος* characteristic, indicating an ability to act, think and counsel as a man. With this alteration of character comes a change in her perception of virtue; on the surface, she ensures that she appears to be following the duties of virtue, but she waits to reveal her attempt for grasping honour. Her circumstances have provided her with a new forum in which she can display her ability to act like a man. She is no longer just the wife of the king: she rules in place of the king, during his absence. Although the Chorus offers respect (*τίειν*) to her, they qualify that this is right and proper (*δίκην*) for the *wife* of the king.⁷⁶ Her change in status and importance to the *polis* is reflected in her own behaviour; this change in her behaviour is noted by those around her, but their perception of her vacillates between what she has become and the ‘traditional’ attitude towards women.

Clytemnestra’s Quest:

There is no perfect wife placed centre stage in the *Agamemnon*; instead, we have Clytemnestra, with her vengeful heart and plot against her husband.

⁷⁵ Penelope is the prominent example who comes to mind in this context of survival, and of never giving up hope, even in the face of terrible odds against her husband’s successful return. Clytemnestra’s hope rests with Agamemnon’s safe return home, that she might enact her revenge.

⁷⁶ *Ag.* 258-260: ἤκω σεβίζων σὸν Κλυταμνήστρα κράτος

Clytemnestra's history does not appear in this play, apart from her message to Agamemnon at 605-612, which could be seen as an ironic declaration of her present status (though unknown to her husband), or she could be reminiscing about the woman she was when he left. Hogan considers this speech to be "ambiguously threatening", and examines the double meanings behind several key phrases superficially intended to convey fidelity.⁷⁷ Her part in the murder is never clearly stated by Homer, only that she was a 'willing' inhabitant of Aigisthos' *oikos* (*Od.* 3.272); her presence in another man's *oikos* is a clear statement of her own betrayal of her marriage.⁷⁸ The reports of other characters throughout the epic give only vague account of her involvement in the murder, but Agamemnon himself (in the Underworld) has a great deal to say about the betrayal of his wife:

οὐχ ὡς Τυνδαρέου κόρη κακὰ μῆσατο ἔργα,
 κουρίδιον κτείνασα πόσιν, στυγερὴ δέ τ' αἰοιδῆ
 ἔσσει ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους, χαλεπὴν δέ τε φῆμιν ὀπάσσει
 θηλυτέρησι γυναῖξί, καὶ ἢ κ' εὐεργὸς ἔησιν.⁷⁹

The behaviour of this one woman will affect interpretations of the behaviour of all other women, including virtuous ones like Penelope, whom Agamemnon praised in the lines immediately preceding.⁸⁰ The reputation of one now expands to affect the reputation of all others, no matter how 'blameless', 'prudent' or virtuous they may be; Penelope's good reputation cannot mitigate the reports of the 'evil deeds' of Clytemnestra - according to the man she killed. And yet the

δίκη γάρ ἐστι φωτὸς ἀρχηγού τειν
 γυναῖκ' ἐρημωθέντος ἄρσενος θρόνου

⁷⁷ (1984), 62ff.

⁷⁸ Just as Helen abandoned Menelaos' *oikos*.

⁷⁹ 24.199-202. At *Od.* 11.430: *κουρίδιον τεύξασα πόσει φόνον*; at 11.439, Odysseus emphasises her involvement in the plot against her husband: *σοὶ δὲ Κλυταμνήστρη δόλον ἤρτυε πηλόθ' ἐόντι*. At 11.453, Agamemnon accuses her outright of murder: *πάρος δέ με πέφνε καὶ αὐτόν*, and at 24.96-97: *ἐν νόστῳ γάρ μοι Ζεὺς μῆσατο λυγρὸν ἄλεθρον | Αἰγίσθου ὑπὸ χερσὶ καὶ αὐλομένης ἀλόχοιο*.

public reports of other characters within the epic do not emphasize her participation in the murder.⁸¹ Aeschylus approaches the theme of betrayal from another angle, focusing on a wife betrayed by her husband, and how his actions are the prime motivation behind her violent reaction.⁸²

The remnants of Clytemnestra's wifely virtue are apparent in the first play of the trilogy, although she exaggerates this virtue by her own manipulation to disguise her true intentions.⁸³ For example, at 348-50, Clytemnestra tells the Chorus of the 'many blessings' she prays for, in (apparent) reference to the army's safe return.⁸⁴ At 594-97, she claims to be the first to sacrifice in praise of the gods, "as is women's custom" (*γυναικείω νόμω* - 594). She continues to manipulate words of virtue as evidenced in her welcoming message to her husband through the Herald at 601-14, stating her adherence to virtues, and unchanged as his wife for she is "just as he left her." At 855-913, however, she begins to reveal her changed character as Clytemnestra greets her husband with a lengthy account of her loyal sufferings during his absence, and portrays herself

⁸⁰ 24.194-198.

⁸¹ Athene, as Mentor, states at 3.232-35 (trans. Lattimore): "I myself would rather first have gone through many hardships / and then come home, and look upon my day of returning, / than come home and be killed at my own hearth, as Agamemnon / was killed, by the treacherous plot of his wife, and by Aigisthos." (*ὡς Ἀγαμέμνων ! ἄλεθ' ὑπ' Αἰγισθοῖο δόλῳ καὶ ἧς ἄλλόχοιο.*) And yet her version is different from Nestor's, who asserts that he will tell Telemachos the "whole true tale" (254: *ἀληθεῖα πάντ' ἀγορεύσω*) which portrays Clytemnestra as a virtuous wife who was turned against her husband by Aigisthos (3.261-310). Menelaos speaks to Telemachos (4.90-92) about Clytemnestra's 'treachery'. At 4.512-37, Menelaos relates the news that the Old Man of the Sea gave him about his brother, and a definite description of the means of his deception and murder by Aigisthos, but Clytemnestra is not mentioned at all, and it is Aigisthos who "devised a treacherous stratagem" (529: *αἰτίκα δ' Αἰγισθος δολίην ἐφράσσατο τέχνην*).

⁸² Zeitlin (1966), 649: "The hellish mother is, of course, Clytemnestra, outraged at the death of her daughter - her motive for killing Agamemnon. Full flowering of maternal grief has blighted conjugal loyalty."

⁸³ Cf. Thalmann (1985), 226-227, for his examination of her command of language, symbolism and deceit; Gagarin (1976), 94, regards deceitful language as being womanly language. And yet, Odysseus spoke deceitfully, and is far from being regarded as womanly. The difference lies in the motivation and purpose of such language: Odysseus deceived to survive so as to return home successfully, whereas Clytemnestra deceived so as to murder Agamemnon without her plot being detected before she could succeed.

⁸⁴ Cf. Roisman (1986), for his discussion on her ambiguous and 'ominous' wishes regarding Agamemnon's arrival.

as a paragon of feminine virtue.⁸⁵ She tells the men of the city that *οὐκ αἰσχυνοῦμαι τοὺς φιλόνορας τρόπους ἢ λέξαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς* (855-56), claiming that time has worn away her ‘timidity’ (τὸ τάρβος - 858) of speaking. Though she attempts to explain that her joy at his return after his long absence is reason for this public address, it still is not virtuous behaviour for a woman.⁸⁶

Clytemnestra has been working to gain the respect and regard of the Elders of the city; her success is revealed by their grudging statement, at 351: *γύναι, κατ’ ἀνδρα σώφρον’ εὐφρόνως λέγεις*. Though they do not consistently trust her,⁸⁷ much of their respect arises from the honour they accord to their absent king, as they say (259-60): *δίκη γάρ ἐστι φωτὸς ἀρχηγοῦ τίειν ἢ γυναῖκ’, ἐρημωθέντος ἄρσενος θρόνου*. This respect is the basis of an uneasy peace maintained between the queen and the Chorus, which wavers whenever Clytemnestra attempts to act as a king; the fact remains that she is a (powerful) woman running the city, but only at the request and leisure of her husband.⁸⁸

Clytemnestra leans heavily on this regard from the Chorus, compelling them to adhere to the grudging respect they have given her (out of their respect for her husband). After she first announces the defeat of Troy, the Chorus reacts with scepticism at 276-77:

⁸⁵ Cf. Foley (2001), 209, for her treatment of Clytemnestra’s use of feminine virtue and the expected role of women to obscure her aims from both the Chorus and her husband.

⁸⁶ Halliwell (1997), 132: “Clytemnestra’s prooimium uses a formula apt for a male speaker addressing a representative gathering of the citizen body, yet she makes this the gambit for a potentially embarrassing (because out-of-place, untimely) affirmation of wifely devotion. Moreover, it is a specifically rhetorical gesture that she should *announce* her virtue to the city, not pledge it immediately to Agamemnon himself: this is not a case of personal words overheard, so to speak, in public, but of a determined flouting of the norms of shame....”

⁸⁷ Cf. 475-487: they begin to doubt Clytemnestra’s assertion of the fall of Troy, even after hearing her long explanations of the beacons; 548: they hint at things about which they ought not speak, regarding Clytemnestra’s recent actions; 615-623: the Chorus still doubts her truthfulness, and hints to the Herald that all has not been well during the absence of the army.

⁸⁸ Though why she has this responsibility is not explained, either by Aeschylus, or by the history of the story itself; but as Penelope looked after Odysseus’ *oikos* during his absence, so does Clytemnestra manage her own husband’s home. In this play, there is a tacit understanding that Clytemnestra has been managing the whole of the city in Agamemnon’s absence.

ΧΟ. ἀλλ' ἦ σ' ἐπιάνεν τις ἄπτερος φάτις;

ΚΑ. παιδὸς νέας ὡς κάρτ' ἐμωμῆσω φρένας.

They ask what 'wingless rumour' has led her to believe this news, which she counters viciously, accusing them of finding 'fault with her mind very much like a young girl's'.⁸⁹ She reminds them in this statement that she is much more than just a young child; she has grown in learning and understanding far beyond, with the inference that she has progressed further even than the average wife.⁹⁰ She goes on to prove her knowledge and her understanding of the world outside the *oikos* of her husband, by offering a detailed description of the path the beacon fires followed (281-314). And yet, she still falls back on the steadfast respect they hold for their king, for she mentions him at the end of her speech (τέκμαρ τοιοῦτον ξύμβολόν τέ σοι λέγω | ἀνδρὸς παραγγείλαντος ἐκ Τροίας ἐμοί. 315-16), possibly to give more credibility to her news, stating that it comes from the king himself. Yet the Chorus request more proof; in answer, she provides a vivid description of a city fallen in battle, and the movements of soldiers and captives alike, events and scenes about which she should know little, if not nothing, at all.⁹¹ Though her speech focuses on the sufferings of the captive survivors, this is more indication of her changing nature; the playwright is signalling her

⁸⁹ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 103: "Clytemnestra does not forget these accusations which impute to her the psychology, not only of a child, but of a woman, given to irrational hopes and, where her emotions are involved, easily convinced."

⁹⁰ Foley (2001), 207: "The *Oresteia* repeatedly raises doubts about women's moral capacity and stability in a fashion that echoes standard views in classical Athens and Clytemnestra repeatedly challenges the chorus' doubts about the authority of female speech. ...[the chorus] clearly expects women to be more readily influenced than men by dreams or by indirect and hence unreliable evidence - perishable rumors as opposed to solid visual appearances. In its view a woman's mind (literally, her boundary) or her ordinance (*horos*) is too easily persuaded or too persuasive - the sentence is almost impossible to translate (485-87). ... The tone of Clytemnestra's verbs here suggests continuous tension over this question of female competence and the truth of female speech." Ironic, really, because whenever Clytemnestra wants to be believed for the truth, the Chorus consistently dismiss her, but they do understand that she is hiding an agenda whenever she uses obscure language (cf. their warning to the Herald at 540-548 and 615-616).

metamorphosis into a more masculine entity, in terms of knowledge, attitude and speech.⁹² She challenges the Chorus at 348 - *τοιαῦτά τοι γυναικὸς ἐξ ἐμοῦ κλύεις* - daring them to treat her merely as a woman, and to doubt the veracity of her statements, at the same time highlighting that their implied doubts are based solely upon her gender. They concede that her information is happily received and long-awaited, and that she herself is more than the sum of her physical parts when they offer their conciliatory compliment at 351. As Winnington-Ingram states, this “is a compliment which she has virtually demanded.”⁹³ The apology to her manly capabilities is offered, and the doubled image of her gender-identity is further maintained in this statement. For now, not only does she possess a *kear* which is *androboulos*, but her speech also resembles that of a *sôphrôn* man.

The Decapitated *Oikos* (a home without a head):

Beyond this conditional respect, there is an underlying sense of despair and fear beneath the statements of both the Watchman and the Chorus. For the Watchman says, at 18-19:

*κλαίω τότ' οἴκου τοῦδε συμφορὰν στένων,
οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ' ἄριστα διαπονουμένου.*

In light of the principles of feminine virtue, an odd thing to say; for the woman who managed the *oikos* before is still there, managing it as is her duty. But the circumstances have changed: with the head of the *oikos* gone, and an understanding that the woman is in charge in his absence, things are not ordered

⁹¹ 320-347. Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1983), 104.

⁹² Cf. Goldhill (1986), 14.

⁹³ (1983), 103. Here begins Clytemnestra's various roles in the meta-theatre of the play itself. She first plays the role of the capable ruler, then the role of the loving, dotting, dutiful wife. The avenging hero of her daughter is her final performance before the meta-theatre ends, and she is

in the same manner as they once were. The exact nature of the *συμφορά* of the house is not clearly explained, though the Watchman hints that it is related to this different (and inverse) ordering of the house.⁹⁴ A superficial reading of this speech of the Watchman reveals the recognition of problems within the royal house of Agamemnon; but a closer reading of 37-39 indicates the Watchman is resisting spreading public report of the *συμφορά*:

. . . οἶκος δ' αὐτός, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι,
σαφέστατ' ἂν λέξειεν ὡς ἐκὼν ἐγὼ
μαθοῦσιν αὐδᾶ κού μαθοῦσι λήθομαι.

Here is an example of the referential nature of (masculine) honour in this play, and how it can be affected by the behaviour of a woman. For all forms of honour (*timē*, *kleos*) there is an audience which decides whether an action is deemed honourable or otherwise. If the general public knew of the exact events in the *oikos* of Agamemnon, his honour would be damaged; the Watchman, out of love and respect, refuses to speak aloud that which would harm his *εὐφιλῆς* master. “The watchman is important since his loyalty to Agamemnon and misgivings about Clytemnestra’s rule express the orthodox Greek beliefs about male supremacy and the unnaturalness of woman’s dominance.”⁹⁵ In contrast to this loyalty to Agamemnon is the Watchman’s fear of Clytemnestra. He watches for the beacon fires on the queen’s order, and fear is his constant companion, replaced only by sadness (12-19):

εὐτ' ἂν δὲ νυκτίπλαγκτον ἔνθροσόν τ' ἔχω
εὐνήν ὀνείροισι οὐκ ἐπισκοπούμενην
ἐμήν - φόβος γὰρ ἀνθ' ὕπνου παραστατεῖ,

eventually re-placed into the ‘proper’ order of society, as will be demonstrated below. Cf. Vickers (1973), 361-366, 381-384, for his examination of Clytemnestra the actress.

⁹⁴ See McClure (1999) for her discussion of the inversion/perversion of the usual ordering of society, in terms of the *polis* and the *oikos*.

τὸ μὴ βεβαίως βλέφαρα συμβαλεῖν ὕπνῳ -
 ὅταν δ' αἰεῖδεν ἢ μινύρεσθαι δοκῶ,
 ὕπνου τὸδ' ἀντίμαλπον ἐντέμνων ἄκος,
 κλαίω τὸτ' οἴκου τοῦδε συμφορᾶν στένων
 οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ' ἄριστα διαπονουμένου.

He dares not let himself sleep nor speak, out of fear of Clytemnestra.⁹⁶ He sings to keep himself awake and alert; during this time, he reflects upon the state of the house in comparison to what it once was. He laments the changes, so tantalizingly alluded to, but his sighting of the beacon fire cuts short his revelations to the audience. He leaves to spread the news, long-awaited by the people, and to tell the king's wife to begin the thanksgiving. But he reiterates his intention to stay silent about the events within the house of late.⁹⁷

The Carpet Scene:

On the opposite argument of honour and the necessity of reference for honour to be recognized, if there is no audience, there is no way of gauging whether someone or some certain action is honourable. Or, if an audience refuses to acknowledge an individual as the agent of a deed, then they can refuse to offer regard and honour for the action. This is the problem Clytemnestra must face: she has a potential audience - the Chorus of Elders - whom she must convince to acknowledge the murder as her deed. Clytemnestra has to convince these men that she is the power in this household, and she uses their language and understanding of masculine leadership to achieve this, although with limited

⁹⁵ Vickers (1973), 349.

⁹⁶ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 102: "He is a servant in fear, and after this paradoxical phrase we know whom he fears. He is a servant in sorrow for his master's house, and hints at the adultery of his mistress." The watchman fears Clytemnestra and the possible punishment she could bring upon him if he were to tell about the recent events within the house.

success. Throughout their exchange, the Chorus continues to question whether Clytemnestra is in her right mind, and whether or not a woman could actually murder someone.

Her further challenge is to compel the Chorus to declare her murderous act as an honourable act of vengeance, worthy of (masculine) honour and regard, gained in the same way men earn it - through deeds in the view of the people. Should she succeed in accomplishing this, she will have replaced the regard (merely the title of *aidoie*, "worthy of *aidōs*") from her husband (one man) with the regard of *aidōs* itself that comes from all the people, thereby garnering masculine honour by the accepted methods. The 'voice of the people' in this differs in various subtle ways. A woman must be aware of what the people are saying about her, but in reference to how it affects her husband; for a man, public opinion determines his 'worthiness of honour' completely, and any factor (his own actions, his behaviour, his family, his wife) can affect it. Clytemnestra is seeking to acquire that public opinion for herself, and herself alone, without reference nor consequence to her (dead) husband. She tests her proficiency in persuasion on Agamemnon himself,⁹⁸ in preparation for her confrontation with the Chorus.

This exchange is deceptively brief, lasting merely thirteen lines, though this first conversation between man and wife in ten years is crucial to the play.⁹⁹ Winnington-Ingram notes how this scene illustrates Clytemnestra's need to win

⁹⁷ He will only vaguely mention other occurrences in the *oikos*, which only the *oikos* itself is permitted to tell, if it had a voice (37-39); Cassandra is the only one who is able to hear the *oikos* divulge its secrets and its history (1085ff).

⁹⁸ Buxton (1982), 64: "It is clear the *dolos* is a subversive form of activity. It is often used in situations where one person wishes to get the better of another who is superior in power: if your antagonist will not be persuaded, and his superior strength rules out force, then your only resort is cunning. Thus women were frequently imagined in Greek myth as overcoming their inferiority to men by means of cunning."

⁹⁹ Cf. Roisman (1986), 282, for his examination of Clytemnestra's purposeful ambiguity.

over Agamemnon in a contest of intelligence before she kills him, thus being certain that she was his superior.¹⁰⁰ Goldhill notes how the “danger of the misuse of language is vividly depicted in the carpet scene, where the queen’s powerful, manipulative persuasion leads Agamemnon to his death.”¹⁰¹ Gagarin states: “And there is no doubt that Clytemnestra is more powerful and more intelligent than any of the men in the play. She demonstrates her power most convincingly in the brief dispute with Agamemnon about his walking on the tapestries (931-43), where she gains a clear victory over him in spite of the fact that (as he points out) ‘it is not a woman’s part to desire battle’ (940; cf. 1236-37).”¹⁰² But his confident assertions about Clytemnestra’s debating abilities are only tenuously supported by the text.

Agamemnon is the conquering hero, newly returned, and exhausted; he wants to go inside the *oikos* he left behind, as he reveals with his first address to his wife, 914-16:

Λήδας γένεθλον, δομάτων ἐμῶν φύλαξ,
 ἄπουσαι μὲν εἴπας εἰκότως ἐμῆι·
 μακρὰν γὰρ ἐξέτεινας·

Some commentators have seen a wry humour depicted in this line;¹⁰³ but there is more than just humour here. The playwright places character clues within the text, and here is Agamemnon’s correction of his wife’s behaviour. She has spoken too long and she has attempted to offer something that is not hers to give:

¹⁰⁰ Cf. (1983), 106. Cf. McClure (1999), 71-80, for her examination of Clytemnestra’s use of masculine language; also Halliwell (1997), 131-134.

¹⁰¹ (1986), 4. He continues: “[The] queen’s strength and transgressive power stem from her ability to weave a net of words around a victim. It is her verbal deceit that enables her to overthrow order.”

¹⁰² (1976), 93.

¹⁰³ Fraenkel (1950), *ad loc.*: “Mild banter, but not at all unkind, let alone irritable. It is the harmless jest which takes the edge off the remark.” Cf. also 414 n. 4: “W. Sewell... is right: ‘the cool and quiet distrust with which he listens to the elaborate overstrained professions of Clytemnestra and rebukes her with gentle irony.’”

honour, as Agamemnon points out to her at 916-17: ἀλλ' ἐναισιμῶς | αἰνεῖν, παρ' ἄλλων χρὴ τὸδ' ἔρχεσθαι γέρας. And yet Thomson's note that Agamemnon's "first remark [at 914] is a severe snub, and his next, that praise should come from others, is at least ambiguous" is too swift a comment on this exchange; Agamemnon re-establishes the 'correct' order of honour, and the responsibility of its distribution remains among men, not women. He attempts to return the order of the *oikos* to what it once was, and to what it ought to be (according to the Chorus and the Watchman).¹⁰⁴ He rebukes his wife's outrageous display, declaring he'll take no part of honours that are more suitable for gods, nor does he wish to be 'pampered', 'in woman's fashion'.¹⁰⁵ Foremost among his protestations against walking the tapestries is his fear of the gods, and of presuming to enjoy gestures of honour more suited for the immortals (918-25). He cautions against incurring the jealousy of other men, and the wrath of the gods by pretending to their honours; Agamemnon offers the accepted view of what is appropriate for mortals, and adheres to these ideas.¹⁰⁶

In this rejection of his wife's offered regard for his honour, he has provided her with all of her debating ammunition; she addresses each point he has raised, and uses them as proof that he should concede. For her "argument is based on the use of potentials, on undercutting Agamemnon's assertion by

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Zeitlin (1965), 499, for a general statement on the inversions of the natural order: "This error ... is the corruption of basic human values, the reversal of primal human relationships, family unity split by disharmony, love turned to hate, devotion to treachery. Iphigenia singing with love at her father's banquet and the joys a returning husband and lord bestows upon his household refer us back to the norms of standard behaviour which have been upset in this topsy-turvy world of the *Agamemnon*."

¹⁰⁵ Sailor and Stroup (1999), 171 (cf. also n. 85): "As the queen is a suspect participant in, and primary beneficiary of, Agamemnon's success, it is inappropriate for her to offer an epinikion upon his return – this must be offered by a mediating presence outside the circle of the *oikos*."

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Zeitlin (1965), for her examination of the corrupted hero, at 495: "Agamemnon is the perfect example of utter imperviousness to the implications of his acts. A conquering hero, distended with pride He is Clytemnestra's perfect victim, easily deceived by her cunning, because his deceptive image of himself renders him unable to contemplate a contradictory view."

showing him that under certain circumstances walking on the tapestries would be the right thing to do....¹⁰⁷ Where he fears the gods, she asserts that a ritual - promised to the gods on advice from a priest - could dictate this action (933), and he concedes that it is possible (934).¹⁰⁸ Clytemnestra uses Agamemnon's previous action of piety/atrocity against him; for he "had already sacrificed a treasure (*δόμων ἄγαλμα*, 208), and done it on the unquestioned authority of a religious expert (186)."¹⁰⁹ She points out that another (Priam) would have done this were he in Agamemnon's (victorious) position, and that this example ought to wipe away any concern for the "reproach of men" (*μὴ νυν τὸν ἀνθρώπειον αἰδεσθήης ψόγον* - 937)¹¹⁰ This leads directly to Agamemnon's concern for the power of public opinion, which his wife waves aside with a surprising play on words at 939: *ὁ δ' ἀφθόνητος γ' οὐκ ἐπίζηλος πέλει*. Goldhill notes "where there is no *φθόνος* there is no *ζήλος*, which, of course, does not mean (logically) that therefore *ζήλος* implies the necessity of *φθόνος*. The negatives do not prove the positive statement she seeks."¹¹¹ Agamemnon has no direct rebuttal of this

¹⁰⁷ Goldhill (1984), 77; cf. 74-79 for his complete explanation of Clytemnestra's purpose in this exchange. Cf. also Goldhill (1986), 12-13, regarding Clytemnestra's subversion of ritual acts and military language to placate her husband, and Vickers (1973), 369-370, for his examination of Clytemnestra as *peitho* personified, as represented by the chorus' statement at 385-386.

¹⁰⁸ But he does not recognize that this *is* necessary for a (sacrificial) ritual (cf. Foley (2001), 210 and n. 30); he does not understand (nor is he supposed to at this point) what Clytemnestra's intentions really are. Persuasion is a major part in the realization of the (corrupted) sacrifice, as Zeitlin (1965) states, 503: "Agamemnon's supreme act of impiety is contained in his treading on the purple carpet.... Even he knows this is an honor reserved for the gods (*A.* 922), but Clytemnestra persuades him and later argues that such an act could be a sign of reverence to the gods (*A.* 963-65)."

¹⁰⁹ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 92.

¹¹⁰ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 92: "That he secretly desired the pomp of a Priam is 'reading between the lines' - a subjective judgement and not demonstrable. If it is right, however, note that, whereas Clytemnestra's first question was directed towards the conventional Greek, her second is directed towards the *ptoliporthos* and peer of the great dynast he has conquered."

¹¹¹ (1984), 77. Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1983), 92-3.

(erroneous) observation, but retreats to a correction of her ‘proper’ behaviour

(940): οὔτοι γυναικίος ἔστιν ἡμίρειν μάχης.¹¹²

Clytemnestra replies to this cunningly (941): τοῖς δ’ ἀλβίοις γε καὶ τὸ νικᾶσθαι πρέπει. Using value terms of honour, which Agamemnon can understand, she shifts her own position from a contest between equals to that of a subordinate asking for an indulgent favour. Clytemnestra began this scene perceiving herself as her husband’s equal, but she is unsuccessful in convincing him to perceive her as more than just a wife. She wishes to succeed and changes her approach, ostensibly establishing herself in a weaker position, subservient to him, and desirous of indulgence. Even though she appears to beg, her final imperative to Agamemnon contains both power and menacing foreshadowing (942-943):

ΑΓ. ἦ καὶ σὺ νίκην τῆσδε δήριος τίεις;

ΚΛ. πιθοῦ· κρατεῖς μέντοι παρεῖς γ’ ἐκὼν ἐμοί.

“Be persuaded. Thus, willingly, give over the power to me.” She still gives orders, now this time to the rightful king upon his own return; and she still expects to be obeyed.¹¹³ Her stance is immovable on this subject and desire; but Agamemnon relents and gives in to his wife’s desire/order. His reluctance to flagrantly destroy the wealth of his house is apparent in his words (944-949), and he attempts to lessen the destruction by going barefoot.

She uses her status as wife, with all the usual appearances of obedience and virtue, although for a very different purpose. Like Penelope, she uses her wifely virtue to her advantage; unlike Penelope, her advantage is in opposition to

¹¹² Winnington-Ingram (1983), 107, states: “‘It is not for a woman to thirst for battle’ underlines the reversal of the normal roles. Clytemnestra’s reply is itself based upon a conventional conception of the relation of man to woman and is thus irresistible to Agamemnon, who condescends to her...”

her husband, focusing solely on herself, her sacrificed daughter, and the death of this man. Clytemnestra refuses to remain exclusively within her 'proper' place, and strives instead to force others to view her as something 'other' than what she is. She is not above using the blurred perception of herself against everyone with whom she comes in contact; she will remind - at opportune moments - all within earshot that she is 'merely a woman'. What she does not realize is that this shifting across boundaries will prove detrimental to her plans in the end, and that the Chorus have learned from her the ways to use this to their own advantage.

This tapestry-scene could be interpreted as Clytemnestra's test of her *ἀνδρόβουλος* abilities, for the killing itself will be easy. Her final challenge comes afterwards: for she must create a persuasive argument that can endure and surmount disbelief, skepticism, chauvinism and an intolerance of change. For ten years, Clytemnestra has enjoyed the obedience of the people, who have offered her respect out of their own respect for their king.¹¹⁴ Clytemnestra is now faced with a confused public opinion toward her, as the Chorus attempts to align these startling events with what is familiar to them, for her actions have inverted/perverted a norm of society that others do not want to see changed, challenged or obliterated.

Final Showdown

When she entered earlier to reveal her news to the Chorus of the fall of Troy, they questioned the validity of her assertion, claiming her to be swayed by "wingless rumour" as is a woman's wont. She refutes their traditional disclaimer

¹¹³ Hogan (1984), 79: "She appears to move from argument to entreaty, but **yield** translates the commonest verb for "persuasion" and so in fact climaxes her argument."

¹¹⁴ Ag. 258-260: *ήμῶν σεβίζων σὸν Κλυταμνήστρα, κράτος·
δικη γάρ ἐστι φαιτός ἀρρηγοῦ τίειν*

of a woman bearing (truthful) news and berates them for treating her like a “foolish young girl,” so recently after offering honour to the wife of the king, as is proper (*dikē*). In this first conflict of opinions, Clytemnestra wins out over the Chorus by bludgeoning them with a lengthy – though vivid – speech of the horrors of a city fallen in battle, something which they would understand; they praise her exposition at 351.

When Clytemnestra emerges from the house as a murderer, the Chorus now face a delicately balanced situation, involving recognition, responsibility and regard.¹¹⁵ How they respond to Clytemnestra’s proclamation, and subsequent arguments is important; should they tend to agree with her – that sacrificing the king was a necessary act of revenge – Clytemnestra succeeds in her quest for honour, beyond virtue. What the queen did not foresee was the possibility that the Chorus would refrain from passing judgement, or offering their opinion on how they weigh or value her actions.¹¹⁶

Clytemnestra appears from within the house, standing over the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra; she proclaims her act in explicit detail,¹¹⁷ describing how she trapped and killed him (1382-87).¹¹⁸ Her statement of her motive is vague, and the possible references are varied (1377-78):

ἐμοὶ δ’ ἀγῶν ὄδ’ οὐκ ἀφρόντιστος †πάλαί
νίκης παλαιᾶς† ἦλθε, σὺν χρόνῳ γε μὴν.

γυναικ’, ἐρημωθέντος ἄρσενος θρόνου.

¹¹⁵ Vellacott (1977), 113-15, argues (correctly) that the moral issue is the central issue of the *Oresteia*. Cf. Gagarin (1976), 96ff., for his development of the theme of sexual dominance apparent throughout the trilogy.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Cairns (2001), 212-219, for his argument that honour “is awarded by the group as a whole, and the group will not award *timē* for an action which it does not regard as valuable (and clearly, society will not regard infringement of its own norms as valuable).” (213)

¹¹⁷ Cf. Thalmann (1985), 227-28, for his notes on the language Clytemnestra used to conceal her intent, and how clearly she speaks, now that concealment is no longer needed. Vellacott (1977), 114: “Now Clytemnestra finds words for the indignation she has nursed unspoken for ten years, and for three-quarters of this play.”

¹¹⁸ Cf. Seaford (1994), 389, regarding his comparison of the material elements of funeral rituals being perverted by Clytemnestra into the tools of death.

The most likely reference is to Iphigeneia, for the audience has not been allowed to forget her, and the Chorus is well-informed of the manner of her demise. But the ‘ancient quarrel’ can also refer to the feast of Thyestes, and the curse of Atreus resulting from it; while this is also an ‘ancient quarrel’ by definition, it seems unlikely that Clytemnestra’s main concern was this curse. Her primary motive was vengeance for her own child,¹¹⁹ the history of child-killing in the house of Atreus she uses only to add legitimacy to her claim.¹²⁰ She employs a ‘legal’ vocabulary throughout this exchange, as she presents her case to the Chorus, as if they are a jury.¹²¹ The Chorus becomes a jury in two ways: a jury of a homicide/regicide, and a jury/audience of honour.¹²² She addresses them with a vocabulary that is more closely associated with men, and with an eye to that verdict of honour only they can pronounce for her. But, she must be blatant when first she claims the deed, leaving no room for doubt nor vacillation in the Chorus. She boldly proclaims at 1379-80:

ἔστηκα δ' ἔνθ' ἔπαισ' ἐπ' ἐξειργασμένοις·
 οὔτω δ' ἔπραξα, καὶ τὰδ' οὐκ ἀρήσομαι,

¹¹⁹ Plato, *Theatetus* 151C: Socrates likens himself to a mid-wife, as his mother was, but he helps men to give birth to ideas; he also tells Theatetus that he decides whether or not an idea should be abandoned, but warns him: “And if I abstract and expose your first-born, because I discover upon inspection that the conception which you have formed is a vain shadow, do not quarrel with me on that account, as the manner of women is when their first children are taken from them.” (trans. B. Jowett.) Cf. Golden (1990), 82-104, for his full discussion of relationships between parents and children, as well as the practice of exposure (cf. 94, and n. 65).

¹²⁰ Denniston-Page (1957), *ad loc.*: “Clytemnestra has reason to emphasize the long duration of the feud, but the repetition in *πάλαι νίσις παλαιάς* is more than usually inelegant.” Fraenkel (1950), 646-7: “Clytemnestra, who said (911), with an ominous double sense, ‘may Dike bring Agamemnon to his home’, now, when the murder has been achieved, repeatedly lays the greatest stress on the element of retributive justice in her deed.... Now that she has at last reached her goal, she strongly emphasizes that nothing sudden, nothing insufficiently grounded or prepared, has occurred. For her the decisive battle, long thought out and planned by her, has come in a legal process (or feud?) which reaches far back.” Zeitlin (1965), 489: “Aeschylus, therefore, unifies the murders by revealing their relationship to the sacrifice of Iphigenia as effects of the same cause - the curse on the house - and he further unifies them as all partaking of the peculiar horror and lawlessness of her death.”

¹²¹ Cf. Zeitlin (1965), 476 n. 31, regarding the legal language of Clytemnestra’s exchange with the Chorus.

¹²² Cf. O’Daly (1985), 7.

ὥς μήτε φεύγειν μήτ' ἀμύνασθαι μόρον·

She has positioned herself so that the Chorus cannot possibly deny she killed the king. Neuberg notes that Clytemnestra “simply reiterates her understanding of her position as murderer, in response to the groping, shocked accusations of the chorus ... as they come gradually to accept what she is simply saying over and over again.”¹²³ She must compel the Chorus to recognize her as the agent of this vengeance, and standing over the corpses, covered in blood and holding the tools of his containment and demise is the most obvious way to reveal her part in the death. Her use of sexual language is theatrical and obscene, as seen at 1388-1392:

οὕτω τὸν αὐτοῦ θυμὸν ὀρμαίνει †πεσῶν†,
 κάκφυσιῶν ὄξειαν αἵματος σφαγῆν
 βάλλει μ' ἑρεμνῆι ψαχάδι φοινίας δρόσου,
 χαίρουσαν οὐδὲν ἦσσαν ἢ διουσῶται
 γάνει σπορητὸς κάλυκος ἐν λοχεύμασιν.

She must be ‘obscene’ to have an indelible impact upon the Chorus; she claims she enjoyed the killing, ‘rejoiced’ in being showered by the spilled blood of her husband.¹²⁴ She is performing a role, that of an avenger, and she must obliterate any qualms the Chorus may have when questioning whether a woman is capable of (re)acting in such an extreme manner. She finishes her ‘confession’ with a chilling statement:¹²⁵

¹²³ Neuberg (1991), 45-6; he continues: “For Clytemnestra to undergo a major reorientation in her understanding of the murder which has just taken place would ... be a major twist in the *plot*, but the plot moment of the play, the murder of Agamemnon, is over, and now the play is concerned with intellectual and emotional reaction to that event....”

¹²⁴ Cf. Zeitlin (1965), 479, regarding the syncretization in this scene of libations and of purification (of blood guilt) through blood offerings; Seaford (1994), 369-78, for his examination of the ‘reciprocal perversion of ritual’; also O’Daly (1985), 9-10, for a summary of theories regarding the sexual imagery of these lines, and his reasons for rejecting those theories.

¹²⁵ I have chosen to follow the textual emendation offered by West (1998), as opposed to the original numbering found in Deniston-Page (1960), with rearrangement of Clytemnestra’s lines,

ὡς ὠδ' ἔχόντων, πρέσβος Ἄργείων τόδε,
χαίροιτ' ἄν, εἰ χαίροιτ', ἐγὼ δ' ἐπεύχομαι.

She regrets nothing; she revels in what she has done, and looks to the Chorus for their reaction, as she does throughout the rest of the exchange. They are overwhelmed with what they are seeing and hearing, and cannot move beyond this moment - seeing this woman crowing with joy over the body of her husband.¹²⁶ She challenges them with her gender, accusing them of treating her as a woman and as nothing else (*πειρᾶσθέ μου γυναικὸς ὡς ἀφράσιμονος* - 1401).¹²⁷ This time, however, she goes further, demanding more from the Chorus than they are willing to give (1402-4):

ἐγὼ δ' ἀτρέστῳ καρδίῳι πρὸς εἰδότης
λέγω (σὺ δ' αἰνεῖν εἶτέ με ψέγειν θέλεις,
ἄμοιον). . . .

In these lines, the 'foolish woman' and the 'fearless heart' stand in opposition, and Clytemnestra is confronting the dichotomy of regard that she herself has created. She wants to be 'praised or blamed' directly and for her own actions.¹²⁸ For Clytemnestra, either is recognition, and recognition is her entrance to (and acceptance within) the male-dominated sphere of the public world, with its even wider audience for the distribution of honour. "She asks to be praised or blamed (1403) by putative equals on the terms she describes: that is, as a heroic and just

so that 1393-1394 actually complete her speech with a challenge to the Chorus. The emendation offers a more fitting conclusion to her speech, allowing the 'libation' motif to be fully explored without breaking the flow of thought.

¹²⁶ Zeitlin (1965), 495: "Clytemnestra, secure in the great wealth of her house, arrogantly proclaims the justice of her act as fulfillment of the law of retribution but is unable to perceive the avenger who one day will come to her. In limitless pride she sees herself as the very spirit of vengeance, and therefore beyond the limits of human avengers and human laws."

¹²⁷ As they had done previously, cf. 277, 348, 590-93.

¹²⁸ She appears to have forgotten that one is good and desirable, the other is bad and to be avoided.

(male-style) avenger, not as a woman using speech inappropriate to her sex about her husband.¹²⁹

The Chorus cannot comprehend what she has done.¹³⁰ Though they have been warned by Cassandra that a woman will kill their king, the Chorus do not grasp the implications and repercussions of such a deed. Their first response at 1406-11 is confused, where they recognize that she is the doer of the deed, but they cannot accept that she did this without some outside influence.¹³¹ They ask whether she has eaten or drunk something that led her to wreak this havoc, and ignore the power of the people's voice.¹³² They warn her of the consequences of what she has done: exile and curses, rendering her without *oikos* and without good public opinion.¹³³ The Chorus have said that she will be ἀ<πό>πολις (1410 - without a city); this is the first step they take towards recognizing her as a member of their *polis*, beyond being merely a (female) member of an *oikos*, treading dangerously close towards Clytemnestra's trap of acquiring the regard of a man, by threatening her with the punishments of a man in the same position.

Clytemnestra is outraged at their recommended punishment, that she should be so treated, when Agamemnon killed their daughter and the Chorus 'raised no opposition' against him (1412-14) and did not exile him for his

¹²⁹ Foley (2001), 212. She continues: "In short, Clytemnestra demands to be treated on the same terms as an autonomous, masculine agent, even though she will repeatedly fail in this scene to adopt a masculine perspective on the events that have occurred."

¹³⁰ Cf. O'Daly (1985), 15-17, for his examination of the emotional outbursts of the chorus.

¹³¹ Foley (2001), 203: "This scene [between the Chorus and Clytemnestra over the corpses] offers the climactic female challenge to a masculine system of justice, language, and ethics.

Clytemnestra asks to be judged as a public autonomous actor on the same terms as a male leader about to take over the throne, but the chorus refuses to respond to the queen on her terms. They visualize her as a mad irrational housewife who has killed her husband."

¹³² Zeitlin (1965), 475: "The chorus, aghast at the death of its king and at Clytemnestra's arrogant defiance, supposes she was driven mad by the bloody deed and warns her that retribution awaits her in the inexorable workings of the *lex talionis*. She brushes aside their admonition as irrelevant to her own circumstances, and grows still more grandiose in her self-justification...."

¹³³ Zeitlin (1965), 474: "But if the chorus accepts her terminology, they will not let her shield her crime behind the pretense of sacrifice. The penalties for homicide - curses and exile - will be hers just the same."

'polluting act': οὐ τοῦτον ἐκ γῆς τήσδε χροῖ(ν) σ' ἀνδρηλατεῖν | μασιμάτων

ἄποιν';¹³⁴ She contrasts the Chorus' censure of her to that of Agamemnon,

understanding only that Agamemnon did not suffer consequences for his

murder/sacrifice, and not knowing that the Chorus too had questioned his

action.¹³⁵ She discovers (what she perceives to be) a great discrepancy between

the regard accorded Agamemnon and herself, and she reacts wildly; uttering her

own threats at those men whose recognition she seeks, she unwittingly isolates

and alienates them from her purpose (1420-25):

. . . ἐπήκοος δ' ἐμῶν
 ἔργων δικαστῆς πραχῶς εἶ. λέγω δέ σοι
 τοιαῦτ' ἀπειλεῖν ὡς παρεσκευασμένης
 ἐκ τῶν ὁμοίων χειρὶ νικήσαντ' ἐμοῦ
 ἄρχειν' εἰάν δὲ τοῦμπαλιν κραίνῃ θεός,
 γνώσῃ διδαχθεῖς ὄψε γαῦν τὸ σαφρονεῖν.

She answers their judgement with one of her own; she threatens them to prepare to treat her as an *equal*, but that they must submit to her should she succeed in an

equal trial.¹³⁶ She has become accustomed to their retreats to blaming her

gender, and gaining their grudging respect through harsh and denigrating words,

¹³⁴ Ag. 1419-20. Roisman (1986), 283: "... Clytaemnestra alludes to the norm of justice known to her and finally executed by her, viz. *lex talionis*. The perpetrator must suffer; a transgression must be paid for in kind. But the *lex talionis* known to us from the *Oresteia* is restricted to the Atreidae and an offense committed against kin; it does not apply to offenses committed by warriors against each other. But Clytaemnestra's speech reveals that, she constantly thinks in terms of family conflict. In describing the Trojan misfortune she depicts wives, sisters, and brothers flinging themselves upon the corpses of *husbands and brothers*.... Clytaemnestra, absorbed in her grief at losing a daughter and planning her personal vengeance cannot conceive of an affliction except in the context of the family; it is therefore entirely in character for her to speak in terms of the *lex talionis*, even if her conscious reference is *οἱ ὀλοαλάτες* [cf. Ag. 345-347] is not restricted to the loss of her daughter, but also implies the losses of one or both of the battling armies."

¹³⁵ But the Chorus at 799-804 admit to Agamemnon that they did not agree with his sacrifice, and thought he was "not handling well the tiller of his *prapides*." Cf. Zeitlin (1965), 475.

¹³⁶ Neuberger (1991), 41: "When the chorus evince shock at the deed and at Clytemnestra's boldness in confessing it, and warn her that she will have to suffer for it, she shows not the slightest inclination to evade the charge; on the contrary, she reasserts her own agency - 'here is Agamemnon, a corpse, the work of this right hand', she says at 1404 f. - and goes on to

supporting her judgements through ironic and undermining statements. Here, though, she attempts to push forward onto new ground she believes she has won: that the Chorus have recognized her as the agent of the action, and have warned her of the price she will pay. She takes this as a sign that she is now to be held accountable for her own actions, and she believes she can now face the Chorus of Elders on an equal level. The Elders reply in a manner that indicates they do not perceive her as an equal (1426-30):

μεγαλόμητις εἶ,
 περίφρονα δ' ἔλακες, ὥσπερ οὖν
 φονολιβεῖ τύχαι φρῆν ἐπιμαίνεται·
 λίπος ἐπ' ὀμμάτων αἵματος εὖ πρόπει.
 ἄντιτον ἔτι σε χρῆ στερομέναν φίλων
 τύμμα τύμμα <τι> τείσαι.

They consider her mad, not an avenger; they see no justice in her action, and do not offer any sort of regard of her other than bad. They deem her ‘deprived of friends’ and guilty of blood curse, which demands equal retribution. “The chorus then realizes that the curse of blood guilt is operative in her act of vengeance. Exile is not to be her punishment, as they recall the old *lex talionis*. She has shed blood; her blood must be shed.”¹³⁷ From this point in the play onwards, the Chorus place themselves in a position that demands direct response/rebuttal from Clytemnestra; now the Chorus are one step ahead of her, and she no longer leads the debate but can only (attempt to) provide answers to their objections.¹³⁸ They

pronounce herself perfectly prepared (1421 ff.) to face the punishment that such agency entails if the chorus can manage to enforce it.”

¹³⁷ Zeitlin (1965), 476.

¹³⁸ O’Daly (1985), 17: “The scene is one of confrontation: of the nine reactions of Clytemnestra from 1401 on only two (1475 ff. and 1567 ff.) agree with preceding utterances of the chorus. The sense of opposition and contrast is thereby sustained to the end: there is no ultimate convergence of views. ... It is significant that the chorus neither answers the details of Clytemnestra’s defence in this earlier part ... nor echoes the themes or words of her speeches. The invitation to an *ἀγών* (1421-5) is never fully taken up.” Cf. Vickers (1973), 384ff. for his argument that Clytemnestra

consider her to be not in her right mind, though still she must be punished in equal measure for the crime she has committed; they also state that she has no friends to defend her, with the inference that her punishment will be much easier to achieve under these conditions.¹³⁹ She replies that she has Aigisthos to defend her (1434-37):

οὐ μοι φόβου μέλαθρον ἐλπὶς ἐμπατεῖ,
 ἕως ἂν αἴθῃι πύρ ἐφ' ἑστίας ἐμῆς
 Αἰγίσθος, ὡς τὸ πρόσθεν εὖ φρονῶν ἐμοί·
 οὗτος γὰρ ἦμιν ἄσπις οὐ <σ>μικρὰ θράσους.

She has answered them as a woman, claiming to have a (male) protector; another tactical error that continues the erosion of her 'equal' status, and her previous portrayal of herself as ἀνδρόβουλος.¹⁴⁰ Throughout this response Clytemnestra uses sexual imagery, in reference to Aigisthos, to Agamemnon (with Chryseis and Cassandra),¹⁴¹ and to herself; but what does she mean to achieve with such

is 'blind' to the repercussions of her actions, and that her quick shifts in her arguments demonstrate her naivety.

¹³⁹ Cf. Zeitlin's argument (1965), 476-79, regarding the oaths Clytemnestra swore and in the names of the deities she chose, esp. 479: "...she has invoked these deities and *defines* them as the gods to whom she earlier sacrificed her husband in accomplishment of vengeance and in fulfillment of her oaths to them."

¹⁴⁰ Fraenkel (1950), *ad loc.*: "These words do not come from her ἀνδρόβουλον κέαρ. She who speaks them is not quite the same woman who a little while ago was so proud of her ability to take decisions and to act alone like a man, and who could so recently (1402) declare without any reservations that she spoke ἀτρέστοι καρδίαι. She is not yet broken; she perseveres for some time in fighting and using blasphemous language, but the descent from her summit has begun.... She feels herself in need of some powerful encouragement, hence her elaborate appeal to the gods whom she wants to support her oath. After she has thus thrust from her the latest threats of the Chorus and at the same time silenced her own secret fears, she returns, with a new unconnected opening (1438), to the subject of her triumph and to renewed assurances that her deed was just." But O'Daly (1985), 5-6, asserts that this 'psychological' interpretation of the characters is unsupported by the text; for "character is subordinated to the dramatic action and need be no more than adequate to make the latter plausible.... Rather, what we are presented with is a *development of theme*, in which both actor and chorus participate."

¹⁴¹ 1438-1443: κείτοι γυναικὸς τῆσδε λιμναγήριος,
 Χρυσήδων μείλιγμα τῶν ὑπ' Ἴλιον,
 ἢ τ' ἀγμάλωτος ἦδε, καὶ τερασκόπος
 καὶ κοινόλεκτρος τοῦδε, θεσφατηλόγος
 πιστῆ ζῆνεως, ναυτίλων δὲ σελημάτων
 ἱστοτρίβης.

(explicit) language?¹⁴² Was there a certain dictation of propriety in language, where men did (not) speak about women and sex in frank terms?¹⁴³ Again, Clytemnestra achieves only isolation, setting herself outside (aside) from the accepted norms of society by speaking in such manner, for she transgresses common policy by speaking of her husband's sexual activity and - more shockingly - her own.¹⁴⁴ It is difficult to understand the meaning of Clytemnestra's words at 1446-47; does she mean - as some argue - that killing Cassandra heightened her own (sexual) pleasure, or does she mean that Cassandra was brought to bring a 'different' pleasure to the marriage-bed and has nothing to do with Agamemnon's murder at all. Foley notes that Clytemnestra "implicitly remakes the rules of marriage and inheritance, reverses traditional sexual mores, and publicly expresses a female sexual pleasure in her triumph."¹⁴⁵ I do not agree that Clytemnestra refers to her own 'sexual pleasure' derived from her actions, rather she refers to the purpose for which Cassandra was taken - as a

¹⁴² She spoke in similarly transgressing language earlier, upon Agamemnon's arrival (855-913) she speaks freely and without shame (*ὄχι αἰσχυνομένη*, 856) about her love for her husband (appropriate greeting, not an appropriate forum or audience.) O'Daly (1985), 15: "...the language of Clytemnestra may be characterized as violent; ranging in its coarse vividness to the very extremes of Aeschylean diction; blasphemous and thus undermining whatever justification its strength imparts to her self-defence; but always ruthlessly vivid and unique." Goldhill (1986), 24: "As she distorts the exchange of words in her deceptive communication, in choosing her own sexual partner apart from the ties of matrimony Clytemnestra corrupts her position in the system of exchange through which marriage and society are constituted. The queen transgresses the boundaries of definition and social categorizations sexually and linguistically."

¹⁴³ A certain amount of 'polite' circumspection did exist; even in Homer, though more direct than in later writers, euphemisms for sexual encounters are found. Cf. *Il.IX.274-76* (=IX.132-34), for Agamemnon's promise that he never slept with Chryseis; also *Il.XIX.257-65* for Agamemnon's actual oath. More explicit are Paris' words to Helen, as he convinces her to join him in bed at *Il.III.441-46*; the difference here is a man speaking to his wife in the privacy of their own rooms; the promise of Agamemnon is stated among men; Clytemnestra, however, is speaking publicly among men. Cf. Dover (1994), 205-7, for his discussion of sexual inhibitions in Greek literature.

¹⁴⁴ Foley (2001), 215: "Clytemnestra's own 'adultery' is swept aside in her blithe treatment of Aegisthus as someone who already is and acts as her husband - he protects her, treats her as a *philos*, and lights her hearth - whereas she attributes to Agamemnon's inappropriate liaisons with women the culpability normally accorded unfaithful wives. In one blow, both the sexual double standard and the masculine right to make marriages have fallen."

¹⁴⁵ (2001), 204.

concubine, for variety in Agamemnon's bed.¹⁴⁶ O'Daly's analysis makes more sense when taken in consideration with Clytemnestra as a whole; in these lines she highlights both the purpose Cassandra fills, and the insult that her presence makes to Clytemnestra, as a wife and partner in Agamemnon's bed. He has not 'respected the marriage-bed', and thus has further damaged Clytemnestra's virtue.

The Chorus attempt to make sense of what has happened, and to interpret these bizarre events within a familiar context they can comprehend.¹⁴⁷ First the Chorus wish to escape their future through death (1448-52), and they lament the 'bad' death of their beloved king through the acts of a woman (*πολέα τλάντος γυναικὸς διαί' | πρὸς γυναικὸς δ' ἀπέφθισεν βίον*. 1453-54). Neuburg examines the shock and grief of the chorus "as they try to understand (not the agency but) the *nature* of Agamemnon's death - if God is just, *why* had Agamemnon to die? - while Clytemnestra responds each time, now in anapaests, commenting on the chorus' developing song."¹⁴⁸ They place Agamemnon at the centre of their perspective: 'he suffered much' and 'he lost his life'; the women involved serve to heighten the irony between the success of his life and the dishonour of his death. Unable to comprehend Clytemnestra's agency in their king's death, the Chorus focuses on the agency of a woman which they can understand: the inconstancy of Helen, the fatal repercussions of her actions for so many individuals, and the demands for punishment that arise from the people. Responding to the Chorus, Clytemnestra orders (1464-1465):

¹⁴⁶ O'Daly (1985), 15: "If, however, we understand *ἐμῆς* objectively then the phrase can mean "delight in me" or "my charms" We may translate: "and she brought in a supplementary side-dish to me for our bed, an addition to my charms". Cf. pp. 14-15, for O'Daly's full argument. Cf. also Pulleyn's analysis (1997), 565-567.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. O'Daly (1985), 1-4, for the appearance and use of contest-form in epirrhematic structures.

¹⁴⁸ (1991), 60.

μηδ' εἰς Ἑλέμην κότον ἐκτρέψῃς
ὡς ἀνδραλέτεϊρ'

She tries to remind the Chorus that they must focus their wrath on her, not on Helen; but Clytemnestra no longer has control over the situation, and now must 'play catch-up' to the semantic game. She takes cues from their arguments, constantly attempting to manipulate their perception to place herself at the centre of responsibility for events. Her success in achieving public regard depends upon her ability to coerce the Chorus to 'seeing' the murder from the perspective she dictates.¹⁴⁹ But the Chorus is difficult to sway to her view; after the queen decrees that Helen is not to be blamed, they change their tactics and subject of concern, noting the curse of this house, and the women used as its agents.¹⁵⁰ They describe the pose she has taken over the body of her husband (1472-73):

ἐπὶ δὲ σώματος δίκαν {μοι}
κόρακος ἐχθροῦ σταθεῖς ἐκνόμωσ
ἕμνον ἕμνεῖν ἐπέυχεται (< >)¹⁵¹

Not a flattering picture they paint of her, and their disgust at her behaviour - without considering the act itself - is apparent, in their comparison of her with carrion birds. The pollution of these birds attaches to her, for she caws and defiles the dead. At 1474-80, Clytemnestra (mistakenly) thinks they are on the right track; assuming that the Chorus has finally acknowledged the 'ancient quarrel' at 1377 and her connection to it, she believes that their invocation of the Curse of the house indicates they are about to acknowledge her deed as one

¹⁴⁹ Zeitlin (1965), 494: "If we have sought to examine the extent of this significant shift from righteous avenger to murderer, it is to show how deceptive is the appellation of avenger for those who flaunt it. They do not recognize that they are no longer entitled to that name, nor do they then recognize the new vengeance which must inevitably follow."

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Neuburg (1991), 60, and O'Daly (1985), 17-18.

¹⁵¹ Lloyd-Jones notes *ad loc.*: "Two syllables are missing; the sense can be guessed at reasonably enough." But he offers no suggestions.

honourably done, as vengeance for the (sacrificial) death of an innocent.¹⁵² The Chorus continue to ignore her interjections, turning their recognition to the avenging spirit of the house and its power (1481-84), and the fact that Zeus had to approve this all before any of it could happen (1485-87).¹⁵³ Again, they reduce her agency in the murder through their recognition that although the deities had the power to intervene, instead they allowed it to happen. At 1490-96, the Chorus lament the death of their king:

ἰὼ <ἰὼ> βασιλεῦ βασιλεῦ, πῶς σε δακρύσω;
 φρενὸς ἐκ φιλίας τί ποτ' εἶπω;
 κείσαι δ' ἀράχνης ἐν ὑφάσματι τῶιδ'
 ἀσεβεῖ θανάτῳ βίον ἐκπνέων,
 ὅμοί μοι, κοίταν τάνδ' ἀνελεύθερον,
 δολίῳ μύρῳ δαμείς
 ἐκ χερὸς ἀμφιτόμῳ βελέμνῳι.

They damage the perception of her connection to Agamemnon by calling their marriage-bed *κοίταν τάνδ' ἀνελεύθερον* - a shameful shared bed.¹⁵⁴ So many more bodies share it through the adultery of both man and woman, which was a result of the destroyed *homonoia* of the couple; and that neither benefited from this marriage. They do not name her as the bearer of the 'two-edged weapon'; although Lloyd-Jones thinks "the supplement [your wife's] seems necessary to complete the sense,"¹⁵⁵ the absence of such a clarifying phrase from the text

¹⁵² Neuburg (1991), 61: "[Clytemnestra is] applauding the chorus' abandonment of their earlier attempts to understand Agamemnon's death as emanating somehow from Helen."

¹⁵³ This looks forward to Apollo's argument in the final play, *Eum.* 614-621, when he justifies his part in the avenging murder and the prophecy given to bring it about.

¹⁵⁴ *κοίτη* has an accepted definition of "marriage bed"; this interpretation comes from my assumption that a marriage bed is shared by the spouses.

¹⁵⁵ Mere juxtaposition of those occupying the stage offers enough inference to any audience (attending or reading) to understand that Clytemnestra is understood, and any supplement is not only unnecessary, but wipes out this subtle - yet intentional - deterioration of Clytemnestra's quest for honour and regard. Denniston-Page note that the Greek does not indicate whose hand held the weapon, only that some 'hand' did it. Fraenkel has no decision on this line.

itself demonstrates that the Chorus continues to deny that Clytemnestra was agent.

She immediately responds to the Chorus with:

αὐχεῖς εἶναι τῶδε τοῦργον ἐμὸν·

A triumphant statement at 1497 from the queen, as she refines her argument in order to correct the idea that she is still Agamemnon's ἄλοχος. Rather, she returns to the Chorus' previous invocation of the curse, and attempts to support her claim of agency through the aid of the *alastor* (1498-1504):

μὴ δ' ἐπιλεχθῆις Ἄγαμεμνονίαν εἶναι μ' ἄλοχον·
φανταζόμενος δὲ γυναικὶ νεκροῦ
τοῦδ' ὁ παλαιὸς θριμυὸς ἀλάστωρ
Ἄτρείως χαλεποῦ θοινατήρος
τόνδ' ἀπέτεισεν, τέλεον νεαροῖς ἐπιθύσας.

Her argument now is that she is the *alastor*, who has taken on her form for vengeance. If she wanted to avoid responsibility and punishment, this might have been her first argument, immediately after the murder.¹⁵⁶ She does not use the *alastor* as an explanation to relieve her of the repercussions of the act; she attempts to set the interpretation of her part in the murder in a new context.¹⁵⁷ The Chorus ponders rhetorically over Clytemnestra's guilt, and they do allow this suggestion that she was helped by the *alastor* (1505-1508):

ὡς μὲν ἀναίτιος εἶ
ταῦδε φόνου τίς ὁ μαρτυρήσων;
πῶ πῶ; πατρόθεν δὲ συλλήπτωρ γένοιτ' ἂν ἀλάστωρ·

¹⁵⁶ Neuburg (1991), 41: "From the moment of her appearance on-stage at 1372 her words, if they are to be interpreted as having anything to do with responsibility and agency, have repeatedly not only admitted but insisted that she, and she alone, is the agent responsible for the deed.... Of course one might argue that at 1497 something has happened which gives Clytemnestra reason to want to alter her stance; but then one must take account of the fact that up to that point she resists that temptation so staunchly."

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Neuburg (1991), 38, for a summary of Fraenkel and Daube's theories of Clytemnestra avoiding responsibility, and 62 for Neuburg's conclusions that she is strengthening her claim for responsibility.

They are possibly misinterpreting that she is attempting to dodge the guilt of the deed.¹⁵⁸ She insists that the chorus must recognize the killing as vengeance, represented by *alastor* and enacted by her, instead of labelling it merely a killing of a husband by his wife.¹⁵⁹ In triumph she displays herself and the result of her deed to the world, receiving nothing except disbelieving shock in return. This is most certainly not an attempt to avoid responsibility for the murder; this is her final effort to obtain some sort of recognition, when faced with a group of stubborn old men who are trying to ignore the obvious.¹⁶⁰

Clytemnestra realizes that for any deed to be considered honourable, it must be recognized as such in the eyes of her peers and subjects. If the Chorus does not acknowledge her complicity in the murder, and if they do not recognize the necessity for vengeance in the name of a slaughtered girl, she will not succeed in acquiring honour for the deed. From the debate scene over the tapestries, we know that Aeschylus' portrayal of Clytemnestra has her as a quick-minded woman, who can follow a subtle argument and twist it to her own ends. She notes the awe (and horror) the Chorus holds for this Daimon, and again tries

¹⁵⁸ As Fraenkel (1950), *ad loc.*, notes: "So the Chorus says in 1470 that the daimon of the house exercises its power *ἐκ γυναικῶν*; Clytemnestra goes considerably farther here: the *ἄλαστορ* in her form and shape killed Agamemnon. Speaking thus, she is not making excuses for herself: she means what she says. The deed now appears to her so frightful that, at least at this moment, she is convinced that only the spirit of vengeance, Alastor, can have done it: he has maliciously borrowed her shape." But Fraenkel has gone too far, as I will demonstrate.

¹⁵⁹ But, as Neuburg (1991) notes, 68: "That claim, inherent in her exhortation that they cease to take into account the fact that she is a wife killing a husband, they reject." Neuburg (1991), 61, also asserts that this answer is 'natural' and 'straightforward' from Clytemnestra's perspective; she tells the chorus "*not* to think of Agamemnon's death as a *wife's murder of her husband*, but as an act of *vengeance*. And she does this by saying that she should be *labelled* not as Agamemnon's *wife*, but as an embodiment of the *concept of vengeance*." Cf. Zeitlin (1965), 480.

¹⁶⁰ Neuburg (1991), 63: "What the chorus are granting here is that vengeance is a possible (though not the only) reading of the deed. The double nature of Clytemnestra's deed is being forced ineluctably upon them; the murder is both just and unjust, and neither aspect can defeat the other."

to appropriate that regard for herself, via possession.¹⁶¹ She attempts to build up justification for her actions from a maternal perspective, relating her daughter's wrongful death at the man's hands several times.¹⁶² She admits her complicity in the deed, shows the weapon, tells the details of the plan and stresses the outcome (and outpouring) of blood. And still, her plans backfire.

Clytemnestra changes direction again, returning to her original argument of vengeance on her daughter's behalf (1525-1530):

ἀλλ' ἐμὸν ἐκ τοῦδ' ἔρνος ἀερόθεν,
 τὴν παλὺκλαυτὸν † τ' Ἰφιγένειαν †
 < >
 ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχων,
 μηδὲν ἐν Ἄιδου μεγαλαυχέϊτω,
 ξιφοδηλήτῳ θανάτῳ τείσας ἄπερ ἔρξεν.¹⁶³

She reasserts the betrayal of her maternal role - ἐμὸν ἐκ τοῦδ' ἔρνος ἀερόθεν - and the innocence of the one who suffered - [ἀνάξια] δράσας, ἄξια πάσχων.¹⁶⁴ She

¹⁶¹ That is, through possession of her body by the daimon, Clytemnestra then can possess the regard of the Daimon.

¹⁶² 1377-1378, though this could also refer to the beginning of the curse (neither Deniston-Page, nor Lloyd-Jones comments on this reference); 1414-1418; 1432-1433; 1500-1503; 1521-1527. The Chorus also related events leading up to her death in meticulous detail at the beginning of the play (140-155; 205-247), so they were definitely familiar with the sacrifice.

¹⁶³ Deniston-Page (1960), comment comprehensively on the 'anomalies' in this text, 210: "The sense requires what the MSS. have, Ἰφιγένειαν ἀνάξια δράσας ἄξια πάσχων, 'suggesting what he deserves, having done to Iphigenia what she did not deserve'. Hermann's conjecture ἄξια δράσας ἄξια πάσχων ('suffering deservedly, having done what deserved those sufferings') might stand only if it stood independently: it is impossible if ἄξια δράσας governs Ἰφιγένειαν...."

¹⁶⁴ O'Daly (1985), 7-8: "Nevertheless, her words do, to a certain extent, transmit the sense of authenticity which 1372-3 promise, for she is given arguments in which her true preoccupations – as mother, wife and lover – come to light." O'Daly goes on to note how Clytemnestra damages her own arguments through her "misuse of religious language" (8), which undermines her presentation of the wrongful sacrifice Iphigenia suffered. Though he acknowledges her valiant attempts to defend her actions, he also recognizes the inevitable failure that is embedded within her own words. Cf. 8-12 for his complete argument. Cf. Zeitlin (1965), 482-83, for her examination of the animal imagery in the omens and its simultaneous applications to several characters.

insists that Agamemnon got what he deserved in equal measure. At 1432-1434, she swears by Justice that she has nothing to fear, including retribution.¹⁶⁵

Consequences:

All these murders have led to confusion – who was justified, who was culpable – and to the question of how to set things to rights after these events. Podlecki notes each murder is an answer and requires an answer, setting up a long chain of “counterclaim” that cannot be completed without being broken.¹⁶⁶ The list of virtues of a woman is severely damaged in Clytemnestra’s claim against Agamemnon. It begins with their daughter’s death, as her ‘rights’ as a mother are ‘infringed’ by the sacrifice of her daughter – Clytemnestra has neglected to protect her child, the first of virtues.¹⁶⁷ The definition of motherhood is eradicated by the death of her first-born daughter, and no longer does Clytemnestra seek to have ‘motherly virtue’.¹⁶⁸ Because their daughter is dead, there is little motivation for Clytemnestra to adhere to the third virtue of fidelity – for ‘keeping faith with the husband’s bed’ looked to provide legitimate children of the union, as well as foster a sense of unity and *homonoia* / *homophrosyne* between the married couple. They were not of ‘unified’ minds over Iphigeneia’s death. Clytemnestra cannot consider herself a mother nor a wife, because of the pain both of these roles bring to her, all because of the actions of the man who was supposed to be the protector of their children and her

¹⁶⁵Cf. Zeitlin (1965), 473-75, for her examination of Clytemnestra’s offering the killing as a ritual offering to the gods; she explains how the Justice of the daughter that Clytemnestra invokes is also one of the recipient deities of the sacrifice that is Agamemnon.

¹⁶⁶Cf. Podlecki (1999), 70.

¹⁶⁷Cf. pp. 18-22.

¹⁶⁸Cf. pp. 71ff, for full discussion of her broken relationship with her living children.

‘like-minded’ husband.¹⁶⁹ And yet, their *homonoia* continues in a devastatingly irony, as Clytemnestra sees her adultery mirrored in Agamemnon when he returns with Cassandra as ‘an additional delight to their conjugal bed.’

The Chorus is utterly confused, and uncertain as to what they should think or do. They cannot cope with the inversion of the accepted order, where the person who ought to be burying and lamenting their king is actually his murderer as well (1541-50). Clytemnestra states that she will bury Agamemnon, but he will not receive any lamentation from the house. Neuburg writes that her reply (1551 ff.) shows “she is still proud of her deed, and her reasons for performing it (which included avenging Iphigeneia’s sacrifice) contribute to that pride, showing that she regards the act as deliberate and her own.”¹⁷⁰

The exchange between queen and Chorus slows, as assertions become repeated, and the paradox of wife/murderer is considered. The Chorus summarizes the inversion of the situation (1560-63):

ὄνειδος ἤκει τὸδ’ ἀντ’ ὀνειδούς,
 δύσμαχα δ’ ἔστι κρῖναι.
 φέρει φέροντ’, ἐκτίνει δ’ ὁ καίνων·

The Chorus also ponders the enduring nature of the curse upon this house (1564-1566):

μίμνει δὲ μῆνοντος ἐν θρόνῳ Διός
 παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα· θέσμιον γάρ.
 τίς ἂν γονὰν (ἄ)ραῖον ἐκβάλοι δόμων;
 κεκόλληται γένος πρὸς ἕται.

¹⁶⁹ Gagarin (1976), 94: “Thus Agamemnon wrongs Clytemnestra as a mother by killing Iphigeneia, and he wrongs her as a wife by leaving her alone at home to suffer in his absence for ten years. His absence is an offense against marriage from a woman’s point of view, committed in order to reaffirm marriage from a man’s point of view.” Cf. *Cho.* 920 for Clytemnestra’s statement on being abandoned by her husband.

¹⁷⁰ (1991), 42.

They wonder aloud how it would be possible to lift the curse from the house, for it will remain to punish any wrongdoing in the house, ‘while Zeus abides upon his throne.’ They have highlighted a problem which the queen had not yet considered – that by her murderous actions she has encouraged the curse upon the house to continue its residence. Clytemnestra replies to their concerns about the *δαίμονι τῶι Πλεισθενιδῶν* (1570), asserting her willingness to ‘swear a covenant’ with it, pledging her possessions as surety to release the house from it, and thereby establish a return to order.¹⁷¹

She attempts to achieve the impossible, as demonstrated by her offerings of wealth she does not actually own to an entity that does not care for such things. The tone of this speech carries a sense of relief, and of care for those whom she must protect, but as a ruler rather than as a mother. She believes her conflict with the Chorus is over, but what exactly has she gained? She has at least one admission from them that she is guilty of Agamemnon’s murder (1505-6); but did she gain their (good) regard for her deed, as an act of justified vengeance and not just a wrongful murder?¹⁷² Throughout the whole confrontation, she is met with the disbelief and incomprehension of the elders; but she loses control of the situation early on, and jumps after clues of debate given to her by the Chorus, constantly answering their concerns but rarely taking command of the argument. She convinced them that she did the deed; they

¹⁷¹ Neuburg (1991), 42, speculates over Clytemnestra’s fear of the curse: “at 1567 ff. she fears the prospect of being herself caught up in the cycle of retributive murder which dominates the House of Atreus (1574 ff.) ... but these very words imply that she thinks of herself as a murderer, as *the* murderer upon whom such vengeance would rightly be wrought if the cycle cannot be brought to a halt. This she hopes to effect by propitiating the *daemon* of the house with oaths; she would not feel a need to do this if she saw non-responsibility as exculpating her in any significant way. She doesn’t *want* to be the victim of the cycle of murder; but she doesn’t back down from her earlier stance, that she was right to kill Agamemnon, even if the danger of her own death is the cost.”

¹⁷² Cf. Neuburg (1991), 64, for his examination of the “doubleness” of the moral positions of both Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

concede that the *alastor* may have helped her. But they do not recognize that Agamemnon's death was a necessary act of revenge, nor worthy of honour and regard for the agent. She has failed in her pursuit of (masculine) honour, though at this point in the play, she is still unaware that she has failed. The entrance of Aigisthos brings her failure into a stark and unexpected light.

A Failure of Honour:

When he arrives, Aigisthos launches into a long speech of justice, past betrayals and vengeance (1576-1611), claiming himself as 'the just stitcher of this murder,' who 'from far off ... laid [his] finger on this man, binding together the whole scene of this fatal plan.' The Chorus are quick to threaten him with punishment, just as they were with Clytemnestra, but with one difference: they ask him outright about his involvement in the murder (1613-14):

σὺ δ' ἄνδρα τόνδε φήεις ἐκὼν κατακτανεῖν,
μόνος δ' ἔποικτον τόνδε βουλευῆσαι φόνον;

The Chorus ask him a direct question about the murder; the only questions they asked Clytemnestra were to check her state of mind, to make clear that her guilt is unalleviated by the (interference of the) *alastor*, and to wonder who will perform the proper funeral rites. Aigisthos' response is unrelated to the question (1617-1624):

σὺ ταῦτα φωνεῖς νερτέραι προσήμενος
κόπηι, κρατούντων τῶν ἐπὶ ζυγῶι δουρός;
γνώσῃ γέρον ὦν ὡς διδάσκεισθαι βαρὺ
τῶι τηλικούτῳι, σωφρονεῖν εἰρημένον.
δεσμοὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ γήρας αἶ τε νήστιδες
δύαι διδάσκειν ἐξοχώταται φρενῶν
ἰατρομάντις. οὐχ ὀραῖς ὀρών τάδε;

πρὸς κέντρα μὴ λάκτιζε, μὴ παίσας μογήης.¹⁷³

Aigisthos replies with violence, expecting to frighten the Chorus into submission; instead they treat him with contempt, and address him with insults (1625-27):

γύναι, σὺ τοὺς ἤγοντας ἐκ μάχης νέον
οἰκουρός, εὐνήν ἀνδρὸς αἰσχύνων ἄμα,
ἀνδρὶ στρατηγῶδι τόνδ' ἐβούλευσας μόρον;

Here the Chorus pick up a few dropped ideas and combine them to create a stronger complaint against Aigisthos.¹⁷⁴ In Aigisthos' case, the Chorus use the unacceptable acts of Clytemnestra in an unexpected manner: rather than validate the murder as an heroic act committed with honourable behaviour, the Chorus use Clytemnestra's actions as evidence of Aigisthos' ineffectual manhood, and lack of honour. Even though Clytemnestra states over and over that she killed Agamemnon, that she wielded the sword, that she did the deed, the Chorus refuses to accept this. They interrogate Aigisthos very closely when he appears on stage to claim his part in it. The Chorus now acknowledges that a woman did the deed, but criticizes Aigisthos for allowing a woman to do what he himself should have done.

They take the implied idea from Clytemnestra that Aigisthos is her 'hearth-warmer' - the usual occupation of the woman of the *oikos* - and redefine him as a woman, addressing him as such.¹⁷⁵ They develop this idea even further,

¹⁷³ Lloyd-Jones (1979), 114, notes that his "constant use of the tritest cant saying seems to be one of the features meant to characterize him as a mean and contemptible person." As Zeitlin (1965) notes about Aigisthos, 495: "Aegisthus, the weakest character, dazzled by the new power of his position, asserts in loudest and crudest voice the glory of the day of vengeance. He mocks the chorus' appeal to Orestes' return from exile."

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Goldhill (1986), 21, regarding the reduction of Aigisthos by the Chorus.

¹⁷⁵ The commentators all agree that the Chorus is addressing Aigisthos with *γύναι*, and I can see no reason to disagree. This address probably caught Clytemnestra herself off-guard, and provides a heightened sense of failure in her attempt for honour when she realizes that Aigisthos is the one

in terms that echo the virtues of a woman ('keeping the house and shaming the husband's bed'¹⁷⁶), accusing him of avoiding the war, of adultery, and of plotting Agamemnon's death. Again Aigisthos has no relevant reply to this accusation, and merely threatens them (1631-32). The Chorus continue to destroy Aigisthos' reputation and position within the *polis*; though continuing their 'feminine' theme, they alter the focus, but they no longer attribute female behaviour to him, shifting their attentions instead to the woman behind the man (1633-35):

ὡς δὴ σὺ μοι τύραννος Ἀργείων ἔσση,
ὅς οὐκ, ἐπειδὴ τῶιδ' ἐβούλευσας μάρον,
δρᾶσαι τόδ' ἔργον οὐκ ἔτλης αὐτοκτόνως.

They exhibit their disgust that Aigisthos could not actually murder Agamemnon himself, but left the deed to a woman. Only now do they (safely) acknowledge Clytemnestra's agency in the murder, but not in reference primarily to herself. They use her instead to further damage Aigisthos' public reputation, by showing the world that he is a coward who cannot act without a woman (1643-46):

τί δὴ τὸν ἄνδρα τόνδ' ἀπὸ ψυχῆς κακῆς
οὐκ αὐτὸς ἠνάριζες, ἀλλὰ σὺν γυνή,
χώρας μίαισμα καὶ θεῶν ἐγγχωρίων,
ἔκτειν' ;

The Coryphaeus berates Aigisthos for his passive role in the murder, calling him 'woman' and accusing him of remaining in the house while the woman he has

being addressed, in a manner that connotes derision and contempt, using the title that once held some measure of respect when applied to her, for it was usually combined with a masculine trait or reference. Now, when applied to a man, it takes on more of a connotation of insult, highlighting everything he does not possess as a man; thus Aigisthos is redefined as a woman by the Chorus. Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1983), 106, for his comments on the perception of Aigisthos.

¹⁷⁶ Trans. Lloyd-Jones (1979).

corrupted does his dirty work.¹⁷⁷ The Chorus understands from Clytemnestra that she too has relegated her consort to a feminine role. They cannot accept that she herself did the deed, nor can they discuss it openly, apart from one threat of punishment from the citizens.

Back to the *oikos*:

Clytemnestra took Aigisthos as her consort/husband to support her choice to remain in the *oikos*, for a woman without a husband in the home is plagued with troubles, as demonstrated by Penelope. And yet, she did not choose him to be her equal, but to be her submissive partner (1435-1437):

ἕως ἂν αἰθῆμι πῦρ ἐφ' ἐστίας ἐμῆς
 Αἰγισθος, ὡς τὸ πρόσθεν εὖ φρονῶν ἐμοί·
 οὗτος γὰρ ἤμιν ἄσπις οὐ <σ>μικρὰ θράσους.¹⁷⁸

After the confrontation with the Chorus, she realizes that they will never provide her alone with masculine regard.¹⁷⁹ She now needs Aigisthos to keep her position in the *oikos*, after he publicly states his claim to Agamemnon's house and possessions, which he will use to rule the citizens (1638-40), with threats of punishment for disobedience. Her only chance to keep some portion of the power she once had is to keep herself closely linked with Aigisthos, and can only

¹⁷⁷ Zeitlin (1965), 480 n. 35: "It is interesting to note how far this similarity [between Helen and Clytemnestra] extends - even to their choice of lovers. Paris in the *Iliad* and Aegisthus here are both referred to contemptuously as cowards and stay-at-homes."

¹⁷⁸ Both Deniston-Page (1960), (who quote Fraenkel) and Hogan (1984) note that this statement legitimizes Aigisthos' position as "master of the house" (Hogan, 99). I disagree with these assessments. The hearth was the focal point of the Athenian *oikos*, and is represented by the goddess Hestia, (cf. *Homeric Hymn* 5.21-32). Blundell (1995), 32, writes: "Clearly, the *hestia* was deeply rooted in family life, and not surprisingly it came to symbolise the sanctity of the Greek *oikos* or household." As a part of the domestic duties of the woman of the *oikos*, and in line with the 'list of virtues' previously discussed on page 19, she remains at home to tend to all business of the home - which would include tending the fire in the hearth. I conclude, then, that this statement about Aigisthos confirms that he is more womanly than is appropriate in a man.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Vickers (1973), 387, for his (superficial) examination of the reduction of Clytemnestra in stature on the stage.

justify her claim to the ruling house by establishing an equal rule with him (1672-73).¹⁸⁰

Surprisingly, she resumes her ‘wifely’ role rather easily; having been silenced by Aigisthos’ arrival on stage, her first words are to prevent further conflict (1654-56, 1661).¹⁸¹

μηθαμῶς ὃ φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν ἄλλα δράσωμεν κακά·
 ἄλλὰ καὶ τὰδ' ἐξαμῆσαι παλλὰ, δύστηνον θέρος.
 πημονῆς δ' ἄλις γ' ὑπάρχει(ι)· μηδὲν ἄλλ' ἀτόμεθα.
 . . . ὃδ' ἔχει λόγος γυναικός, εἴ τις ἀξιοῖ μαθεῖν.

She returns to her old tactics of highlighting her gender to get what she wants; Lloyd-Jones thinks that she “is surely being ironical” (with reference to similar statements from earlier, both by her and by the Chorus¹⁸²). When all are read with her struggle for recognition in mind, this last statement marks her resignation to returning to a more domesticated context, and the beginning of her (seeming) acceptance of her role as a woman.

Although she is no longer openly confrontational with the Chorus – she is, in fact, trying to protect them from harm from Aigisthos and his guards – she does retain a small amount of belligerence in her last sentence here: ὃδ' ἔχει λόγος γυναικός, εἴ τις ἀξιοῖ μαθεῖν. “For such are the words of a woman, if anyone would think to learn” still shows her defiance and her strong belief that she is right, and others should listen and learn from her. The challenging aggression

¹⁸⁰ She may have been attempting to recover the quality of *homonoia* that marks a good marriage, because Aigisthos has the same intent - to avenge a killing - as she. Upon considering her characterization throughout the play, it is unlikely to suppose that she was attempting to recreate an ideal quality in marriage; more likely that she needed to further conceal her intentions behind the seeming protection of a man in the *oikos*.

¹⁸¹ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 113: “Now she enters her new role, the consort of Aegisthus as formerly of Agamemnon.”

¹⁸² Cf. 277, 483f, 590f, 1401f.

has receded slightly, but it has not been abandoned completely, and the play ends on her words (1672-73):

*μη̄ προσημῆσις ματαίων τῶνδ' ὑλαγμάτων· <ἐγώ>
καὶ σὺ θήσομεν κρατοῦντε τῶνδε δομάτων <καλῶς>.*

She has not admitted utter defeat, and now plays this new angle - Aigisthos. Clytemnestra failed in her attempt to gain masculine honour through action on her own behalf. Though she succeeded in avenging her daughter's death by killing her sacrificer, Clytemnestra's revenge was only half-won. During the accusation scene between Aigisthos and the Chorus, Clytemnestra sees how the public sphere of men operates. Aigisthos states only once that he had anything to do with the murder, and the Chorus blames him, using the woman's involvement to reduce Aigisthos to a detestable level. She did not break free from the boundaries imposed upon a woman, no matter what she tried. She begins to understand what subtle action she needs to take, and how she can influence action in the public realm. The responsibility for her action being thus usurped, she cannot remain as she is (a woman alone, and a murderer) in the sphere of men. She thus finds a further use for the man she earlier called her 'shield' (1437), and aligns herself more closely with the man the Chorus recognizes as the 'tyrant of the Argives' (1633), claiming an equal rule between herself and him (1672-1673):

*μη̄ προσημῆσις ματαίων τῶνδ' ὑλαγμάτων· <ἐγώ>
καὶ σὺ θήσομεν κρατοῦντε τῶνδε δομάτων <καλῶς>.¹⁸³*

¹⁸³ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 113-14: "Mastery in the dual number (*κρατοῦντε*); but the first person singular (*ἐγώ*), from word-order and rhythm, receives great emphasis. It is Clytemnestra who will, in fact, be master, and it was for this mastery that she killed her husband." And yet, Deniston-Page (1960), 223, notes: "The MSS. end two syllables short in both lines. *ἐγώ* and *καλῶς* are restored from the Schol. vet. in Triclinius.... Yet it is by no means satisfactory, as Fraenkel shows, merely to add these two words to the ends of the lines..." Winnington-Ingram thus relies heavily on a disputed word that may not have been in the text to receive this sort of emphasis.

Clytemnestra makes it clear that she and Aigisthos will rule the house together. Although the presence of *ἐγώ* is disputed, it is implied by *καὶ σὺ* and her participation in reigning is further strengthened by her use of the dual form *κρατοῦντε*, and the plural noun *θήσομεν*. She may no longer rule the house herself in Agamemnon's place, but neither will she allow herself to be deprived of ruling authority completely.

Clytemnestra, abandoning her plan of visible action, attempts to salvage what little success she did achieve through subtle and background action, with Aigisthos as her shield, for "the significance of Aegisthus lies in his function as a substitute for Agamemnon. As a person he is effeminate and she can dominate him; but as a male he can command force and so is a necessary tool for her masculine will."¹⁸⁴ She attempted to acquire masculine honour, thereby redefining herself entirely as male and without the need for a male conduit to honour and recognition. It was for this final goal that she asserted her responsibility for the murder, emphasising that she was the agent, and that she be accorded the same regard and latitude as Agamemnon had been, after his sacrifice of Iphigenia. She balks at fulfilling the *lex talionis*, for Agamemnon was exempt from it,¹⁸⁵ she considers their actions to be equal and that vengeance is satisfied, and that her punishment should be the same as Agamemnon's - that is, no retribution, but glory for what he went on to achieve (which was allowed to begin by means of the sacrifice).¹⁸⁶ Her subtle cunning is still present in the

¹⁸⁴ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 109.

¹⁸⁵ Agamemnon was not punished by the people for murdering his daughter. He was punished under the *lex talionis* because Clytemnestra believed he should be, and punished him herself. She asserts that Agamemnon ought to have been punished by the people (1414-1420), in the same manner that the Chorus threatens to punish her. Cf. pp. 49-52 for previous discussion.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. the Chorus' greeting of Agamemnon at 784-809; they hail him with a grand title of honour (*Τροίης περὶ γὰρ λήπορθ'* - 784), but make only a veiled reference to the death of Iphigenia as the cause of his success (*θάρσος ἐκούσιον ἰ ἀνδράσι θηήσκουσι κομίζων* - 803-804).

Choephoroi, though her relationship with her children, and the effect her actions had upon that relationship, is the driving theme throughout the second play.

Choephoroi

Throughout the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra attempts to acquire (masculine) honour, and she demonstrates an ability to manipulate the perception of her (gendered) status to achieve what she wants. She deflects direct challenges based upon her sex, using a masculine vocabulary, in several attempts to prove that she is capable of joining the public sphere, and should be judged in a masculine context. She was unsuccessful in obtaining such judgement, being used instead to prove Aigisthos' cowardice, and not becoming the first exemplum of feminine honour.

Instead, she violated each of the fundamental virtues expected of a woman. These are, as found in Homer's *Odyssey*, to remain with the children at home and protect the household, to honour her husband's bed and to heed public report.¹⁸⁷ Using this list of virtues as a point of comparison, Clytemnestra fails on several points, though not solely through her own actions. For example, Agamemnon destroyed Clytemnestra's first virtue (to look after the children) by sacrificing their daughter. This initial act was the catalyst for Clytemnestra's subsequent reactions. She dishonoured her husband's bed by taking another 'husband,' and in doing so, she also violated the second virtue (to safeguard the *oikos*) by bringing in a new 'head' of household. She attempted to redefine the fourth (to regard the voice of the people) by changing her own status and by attempting to be a ruler, and not the wife of a ruler.

At the end of the *Agamemnon*, we saw a momentarily silent Clytemnestra, waiting patiently while the men exchanged threats of punishment

¹⁸⁷ Cf. *Odyssey* 19.524-529=16.73-77. Cf. also pp. 18-22 above.

and violence. She halted these events with demure advice at 1661, with a slight denigration of a woman speaking out in public. Her final words in this play indicate that the ‘manly-counselling, ever-hopeful heart’ has not stopped hoping for recognition of her rule in the royal house, ending the play with the beginnings of the shared rule of Agamemnon’s house between his very murderers. This woman is still present in the second play, though she blends her two roles - as woman and as ruler - more subtly than before.¹⁸⁸

In the *Choephoroi*, Aeschylus shows how her transgressions of virtue affect her children and her relationship with them. Clytemnestra has completely abandoned any opportunity of regaining some semblance of virtue. This chapter will investigate the interaction between the queen and her surviving children, tainted as it has been by the previous deaths in their family. This chapter will also examine how Clytemnestra continues to blur the boundaries between her sex and her status, as she switches from one to another, attempting to protect herself from her son’s revenge.¹⁸⁹

A Daughter’s Life:

Electra speaks of her life in the house after her father’s death, as she pours libations to him (132-37):

πεπραμένοι γὰρ νῦν γέ πως ἀλώμεθα

¹⁸⁸ Even the diminishing of her influence by means of her gender is continued, surprisingly by Aigisthos himself at 845ff., as Winnington-Ingram (1973), states, 116-17: “Hypocritical, pompous, and with a good conceit that he cannot be imposed upon, he is now to be the vehicle of subtle irony. For, like the Elders in *Agamemnon*, he doubts that the news [of Orestes’ death] is true; and he uses the same metaphor of fire to express his doubt.... Thus for the last time Clytemnestra is accused - and by one who should have known better - of a woman’s weak credulity.”

¹⁸⁹ With this disintegrating relationship, the playwright also plants early signs of Apollo’s defence of Orestes to come in the final play. For the question of biology and genetics appears, as Orestes is asked to respect his mother and the milk/blood that nourished him. But he ignores this plea, and continues as he was instructed by the god, as represented by Pylades (cf. 896-902). Kindred blood versus divine command is placed side-by-side: this will be further explored in this chapter.

πρὸς τῆς τεκούσης, ἄνδρα δ' ἀντηλλάξατο
 Αἴγισθον, ὅσπερ σοῦ φόνου μεταίτιος.
 κἀγὼ μὲν ἀντιδουλος, ἐκ δὲ χρημάτων
 φεύγων Ὀρέστες ἐστίν, ἃ δ' ὑπερκόπως
 ἐν τοῖσι σοῖς πόνοισι γλίουσιν μέγα.

She refers to herself and to Orestes as wanderers and fugitives or exiles;¹⁹⁰ they have been traded by their own mother for a husband. Clytemnestra has not only disposed of the rightful head of the *oikos*, as well as his rightful heir, she has also committed it to self-destruction by attempting to keep it under her singular management.¹⁹¹ She has disrupted the 'proper' order of the *oikos* and the children suffer from her actions. The future of the *oikos* depends upon the children produced from the marriage; if the children are destroyed, the *oikos* suffers. The image of 'Orestes-as-exile' is continued as Electra tells how he is kept apart from his possessions, and others who are 'excessive' or 'overstepping all bounds' are wearing away his inheritance, the 'labours' of his father.¹⁹²

In contrast to Orestes' exile is Electra as a slave: she is ἀντιδουλος,¹⁹³ restricted to the home, though she too 'wanders'. The concept of a man *apolis* is familiar, but a woman found in such circumstances is unusual, made more so in Electra's situation, for she still lives in her natal *oikos*. The inference could be that she has lost her status as a member of the royal house, through the death of

¹⁹⁰ Orestes also uses the metaphor of exiles to describe them both at 254; Garvie (1986), 108, makes only a single comment: "Orestes is literally, Electra metaphorically, an exile" without further development; Thomson (1966), notes only that these three lines echo each other. In their conjunction of their father's shade, Electra once again refers to herself and brother as exiles and suppliants at 336.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Vickers (1973), 397-99.

¹⁹² The echo of Telemachos' plight is apparent in this image, but the difference lies in the fact that Orestes' father will not come back to help him reclaim his rightful place.

¹⁹³ LSJ: 'treated as a slave'. Garvie (1986), *ad loc.*, notes: "Aeschylus is given to coining such ἀντι-compounds.... In the present case ἀντι denotes equivalence (cf. *Eum.* 38 ἀντίπαις, 136, 466 ἀντίκεντρα)."

her father,¹⁹⁴ and has been rejected by her mother in favour of a new husband; with her new ‘father,’ she has no ties of blood or generation, and subsists at his indulgence.¹⁹⁵

She does not explain precisely what her living conditions are; her friendly address to the Chorus of slave women indicates that she knows the women well, for she asks their advice in pouring libations to her father (85-90), and she invites them to ‘share my responsibility’ in choosing words of lamentation (100).¹⁹⁶ She looks to them for instruction in one of the duties of a woman, which she ought to have learned from her mother.¹⁹⁷ Electra’s speech is filled with bitter irony, for she cannot look to her mother for example - even though it was Clytemnestra who sent her to the tomb - because of her agency in Agamemnon’s death. A further hint of a close relationship between herself and the slaves can be found at 101: *κοινὸν γὰρ ἔχθος ἐν δόμοις νομίζομεν*. They hold a common hatred in the house, sharing it between them; one can guess easily who is the subject of that hatred, and the Chorus states more clearly in their instructions to Electra who exactly that is, when they instruct her to name those who are loyal, including herself and ‘whoever hates Aigisthos’ (111).¹⁹⁸ The Chorus offers a subtle distinction of hatred, when they tell her *τοῖς αἰτίοις νυν τοῦ φόνου μεμνημένη* (117);

¹⁹⁴ Regarding honour and its effect upon children, cf. Winnington-Ingram (1973), 142: “It is the dishonour suffered by the dead Agamemnon, which rebounds upon his children, one an exile and the other a virtual slave, that turns the scale and evokes the direct threat of Orestes to his mother’s life.”

¹⁹⁵ She cannot be married off as the daughter of a royal house for several reasons: 1) given the behaviour of both her mother and her aunt, a husband may be fearful of marrying her; 2) she is dangerous to Aigisthos and Clytemnestra, for she might be able to persuade (also her mother’s *forte*) her husband to take revenge for her father on her behalf. Cf. Eur. *EL*.14-46, and the peasant husband chosen for her by Aigisthos, “to weaken his fear by giving her to a weak man” (*ὡς ἀσθενεῖ δούς ἀσθενῆ λάβοι φόβον*).

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Neuburg (1991), 67, for his close examination of the derived definition of *αἰτίας* - words, with a greater emphasis on ‘giving help’ as opposed to ‘sharing responsibility/blame’.

¹⁹⁷ Zeitlin (1965), 505, shows that a return to ‘proper ritual’ is a theme throughout the play.

¹⁹⁸ Which also includes Orestes, though they instruct her to name him directly; cf. Garvie (1986), *ad loc.* At 764-765, even the Nurse declares her opinion of Aigisthos: *ἄνθρω πῶνδε λυμωαντήριον ἰ οἴκων*.

though she is not named, Clytemnestra is understood here.¹⁹⁹ This scene of instruction illustrates the close understanding between Electra and the Chorus, resulting from her ‘wandering’ within the home, without status in its hierarchy, having become estranged from her mother, and reduced to slavery.

Electra slowly reveals her feelings towards Clytemnestra, who has neglected her over the years. Within her initial lament for her father, she asks him (140-1):

αὐτῆι τέ μοι δὸς σωφρονεστέραν πολὺ
μητρὸς γενέσθαι χεῖρά τ' εὐσεβεστέραν.

Not for her the *androboulon kear* possessed by her mother; Electra desires to be other than that, and for an avenger to appear on behalf of all those she mentions. She continues to unveil what her mother has become since Agamemnon's death (190-91):

ἐμῇ γε μήτηρ, οὐδαμῶς ἐπόννημον
φρόνημα παῖσι δύσθεον πεπαμένη.

Electra's complaint comes through clearly: her mother no longer regards her children favourably nor with love, but she has become ‘ungodly’ at heart.²⁰⁰

Though Zeitlin postulates that Clytemnestra's choice to estrange her surviving children “works retroactively” to then include Iphigeneia,²⁰¹ it is more plausible to postulate that Clytemnestra could no longer recognize any of the children from

¹⁹⁹ Garvie (1986), 67, notes the playwright's intention to keep “the necessity for matricide ... in the background.”

²⁰⁰ “Having acquired a mind/spirit (pl. ‘heart’) ungodly towards her children.” But where does *οὐδαμῶς ἐπόννημον* fit in this translation? Garvie (1986), 93, places the phrase in close relation to the *φρόνημα* that Clytemnestra now has, “‘that by no means corresponds with the name of mother.’” I think that it makes equal (if not better) sense taken in relation to *μήτηρ*, which is more immediate to the statement Electra is making, and is further explained by the subsequent line; take it as: “My mother, not even in name, having acquired a spirit which ungodly towards her children.” Lloyd-Jones abbreviates *οὐδαμῶς ἐπόννημον* in his translation to ‘unmotherly’.

her marriage with Agamemnon as her own, now that she is ‘married’ to Aigisthos. With their father dead, she treats the children as if they were all dead; at the very least, she places them in positions of lesser status and advantage. This is only one indication of how far Clytemnestra has strayed from the list of virtues, the first of which was to stay with the children; she has exiled one from her house and estranged the other, all as a result of avenging the death of the eldest.

Nor is Electra well-disposed towards Clytemnestra, as she confesses to Orestes how important he has become to her (238-243):

*ὦ τερπνὸν ὄμμα, τέσσαρας μοίρας ἔχον
 ἐμοί· προσανδᾶν σ’ ἐστ’ ἀναγκαίως ἔχον
 πατέρα τε, καὶ τὸ μητρὸς εἰς σέ μοι ῥέπει
 στέρρηθρον - ἣ δὲ πανθικῶς ἐχθαίρεται -
 καὶ τῆς τυθείσης νηλεῶς ὀμοσπόρου·
 πιστός τ’ ἀδελφὸς ἦσθ’, ἐμοὶ σέβας φέρων
 μόνος.*

She gives to him all the love which would normally have been divided between father, mother and sister;²⁰² because two are dead and the last ‘is most justly despised.’ Electra cannot offer any affection to someone who has become ‘unmotherly’ and treats her ‘as a slave’, who has exiled her brother and killed her father. During the conjuration scene, Electra asks: *ἦ πάτερ | πάθομεν ἄχρα πρὸς γε τῶν τεκομένων;* (418-19) She suffered a great deal on account of the actions and decisions of her mother. Electra introduces the theme of Agamemnon’s

²⁰¹ Zeitlin (1965), 492, demonstrates possible explanations for Clytemnestra’s avoidance of re-invoking Iphigeneia’s death as her reason for Agamemnon’s murder through her “loss of maternal feelings towards Orestes and Electra”.

²⁰² Electra mentions Iphigeneia’s death here, saying that she was ‘ruthlessly sacrificed’; she has recognized the deed, but neglects to mention the doer, ironically for whom she is preparing a lament.

dishonour from Clytemnestra's choice of funerals, calling her *δαῖτα* | *πάντολμαε* *μᾶτερ* (429-430), for depriving him of funeral honours due.²⁰³

Electra returns to the repercussions of her mother's actions, and explains how she was shamed by being prevented from attending her father's funeral with her own lament (444-49):

λέγεις πατρώιον μόνον· ἐγὼ δ' ἀπεστάτουν
 ἄτιμος, οὐδὲν ἀξία,
 μυχῶϊ δ' ἄφειρκτος παλυσινοῦς κινὸς δίκαν
 ἔτοιμότερα γέλωτος ἀνέφερον λίβη,
 χέουσα πολύδακρυν γόον κεκρυμμένα.

Electra asserts that she lost honour in losing the opportunity to perform her one public virtue of lament. She speaks of 'dishonour' and not of a lack of virtue; she herself knows that she performed her lament within her rooms, but without an audience she cannot lay claim to performing her honourable duty to her father.²⁰⁴ This is Electra's awareness of the 'voice of the people'; her use of the word *ἄτιμος* – 'dishonoured' (which is an unusual word for a woman to use in reference to herself, mainly because women were not thought of in terms of honour, but in terms of virtue) could be an indication of a small aspect of the mother surviving in the daughter.

²⁰³ The Chorus and Orestes take up this theme, recounting in more detail Agamemnon's shame and dishonour at being denied a proper burial and lament (434-443).

²⁰⁴ The only publicly 'performed' virtue of a woman was that of lamentation. The contemporaries and peers of the deceased would be well-acquainted with his civic virtues and public honour, for this was their realm and the content and context of their own laments for the deceased. The purpose of the women's lament was to give voice to the domestic virtue of the man gone, and reveal the private *oikos* persona to the *polis* of his peers. A intrinsic part of honour was the effort made to be a well-balanced individual in all aspects of life, both public and private. Thus a woman could reveal to the public world the final facet of a man's personality and his honour by speaking of him in a domestic context: i.e. a good husband, a good father. With a woman's final lament, the total honour of a man – all of his public deeds and known attributes, added to by his wife's/ mother's/sister's/daughter's revelation of the domestic man – was thus sealed against time. Cf. the laments throughout Homer's *Iliad*, especially for Hektor: XXIV.725-745, as Andromache laments for the future of their son without his father; XXIV.748-759, Hekabe mourns the loss of yet another son to Achilles; XXIV.762-775, as Helen mourns the loss of one of the few people who was nice to her.

The mosaic of Electra's feelings towards her mother is created of varying degrees of hatred and contempt. Electra recounts her 'dishonour' by her mother's actions, though now she strives only to redress this wrong, by fulfilling her duty to her father in lamentation, ensuring that nothing she says is false. Throughout the conjuration scene, her priority is to attract Agamemnon's attention to the action that her brother is about to enact. She reminds him of their dishonoured situation, and offers her tears and a dirge (333-35), a wish that his murderers had been stopped before they killed him (368-69),²⁰⁵ she 'demands' 'justice for the unjust' (398) without naming those who are the unjust. She tells of her mother's choice to bury him unlamented (430-33), even preventing Electra herself from lamenting over the body (444-50). When Orestes prays for 'lordship of the house' (480), Electra offers her own prayer at 482: *φυγείν μέγαν, προσθείσαν Αἰγίσθωι, <πόνον>*. She does not explicitly ask that her mother be punished, though she does want to see Aigisthos suffer.²⁰⁶ She offers wedding libations to honour her father, 486-488:

*κἀγω χοάς σοι τῆς ἐμῆς παγκληρίας
οἶσω πατρῶϊων ἐκ δάμων γαμηλίου·
πάντων δὲ πρῶτον τόνδε πρεσβεύσω τάφον.*

The greater implications are the signalling of a desire to return to a proper social order, and to achieve marriage for herself (beyond the reputation of her mother's infidelity as a wife). Though Thomson is superficially correct in stating that the

²⁰⁵ She did not want him to die at Troy with more honour, as his son wishes at 345-353.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Garvie (1986), *ad loc.* for various suggested emendations of this line. The sense that Electra wants "the female equivalent of Orestes' request that he regain the mastery of the household. This would most naturally be a request for marriage in keeping with Electra's proper station, the marriage which she has in mind at 486-7...." Thomson (1966), does not explore the greater implications of her request, though he does bring in the exile/slave status of the children, when he states "The exile wants to return to the house of which he is the rightful master; the slave-girl to escape from it to another master."

‘slave-girl’ wants another ‘master’,²⁰⁷ Electra’s wish for marriage is a greater wish for her own life to return to normal, proceeding within the ‘proper’ boundaries of marriage and of a duty to fulfilling virtue, which includes a correct honouring of the dead.

The Beating of the *androboulon* kear:

The theme of retribution is prevalent throughout this first half of the play; the children and Chorus demand that Clytemnestra and Aigisthos be punished for their actions. Clytemnestra is called ‘a killer’²⁰⁸ and perceived collectively with Aigisthos as the agent of the action, as Orestes speaks of his reluctance to abandon his father’s city to *δυσὶν γυναικῶν ὄδ’ ὑπηκόους πέλειν*· | *θήλεια γὰρ φέρν’* (304-5). This recalls the Chorus’ insults to Aigisthos at the end of the *Agamemnon*, in which they question his ability to be his own agent.²⁰⁹ Aigisthos is *ὅσπερ σοῦ φόνου μεταίτιος* (134): he shares the agency with Clytemnestra, and will share the punishment. However, Clytemnestra wants to avoid the punishment that comes with the responsibility of being the agent; where she feared no retribution before (throughout the *Agamemnon*), now she has received some part of the recognition she desired, she fears facing the consequences - in the form of Orestes.

Clytemnestra’s dream of the serpent, as related to Orestes by the Chorus,²¹⁰ reveals her subconscious fears of retribution from within the family.

²⁰⁷ Cf. n. 206, above.

²⁰⁸ 144: *τοὺς κτανόντας* (both Clytemnestra and Aigisthos understood); 189: *ἡ κτανούσα*].

²⁰⁹ As Bowen (1986), 71, writes: “the dual [*δυσὶν γυναικῶν*] unites them closely. Aegisthus was called woman at *A.* 1625, to his face. Cross-sexing of Clytaemestra and Aegisthus begins very early, at *A.* 11.” Though the language is different, *Ag.* 11 and Clytemnestra’s previously observed *androboulon kear* is echoed in this as well. Thus, where Clytemnestra maintains a “man-counselling heart”, Aigisthos holds “a heart that is feminine.”

²¹⁰ As revealed by her prophetic dream of nursing a serpent, told to Orestes by the Chorus, 523-539. Cf. Devereux (1976), 185; also O’Neill (1998), 216-229; Whallon (1958), 271-275.

As the Chorus reveals, the queen has sent them to Agamemnon's grave to offer the funeral libations which she had previously denied him, in an effort to diminish the fear generated by the portentous dream (538-539). Orestes, for his part, takes the dream to be a symbol for him to follow (540-550):

*ἀλλ' εὐχομαι Γῆι τῆιδε καὶ πατρός τάφῳ
 τοῦνειρον εἶναι τοῦτ' ἐμοὶ τελεσφόρον·
 κρίνω δέ τοί νιν ὥστε συγκόλλως ἔχειν.
 εἰ γὰρ τὸν αὐτὸν χῶρον ἐκλιπῶν ἐμοί
 οὐφίς †επαῖσασπαργανηπλείζετο†
 καὶ μαστὸν ἀμφέχασκ' ἐμὸν θρεπτήριον,
 θρόμβῳ δ' ἔνειξεν αἵματος φίλον γάλα,
 ἧ δ' ἀμφὶ τάρβει τῶιδ' ἐπώμωξεν πάθει,
 δεῖ τοί νιν, ὡς ἔθρεψεν ἔκπαγλον τέρας,
 θανεῖν βιαίως· ἐκδρακονταθεῖς δ' ἐγὼ
 κτείω νιν, ὡς τοῦνειρον ἐνέπει τόδε.*

He aligns the salient parts of the serpent dream with his own infancy, and concludes that he must be the serpent, returned to punish Clytemnestra with violence.

The Plot Thickens:

Orestes demands that he be announced to the 'rulers of the house' (658); he then asks that 'someone who has the ordering of the house / the ruling woman (mistress)' (664) be brought out to him.²¹¹ Orestes makes clear his preference of speaking with the man of the house (664-67):

*... ἄνδρα δ' εὐπρεπέστερον·
 αἰδῶς γὰρ ἐν λέσχῃσιν οἶσ' ἐπαργέμους
 λόγους τίθησιν· εἶπε θαρσήσας ἄνῆρ
 πρὸς ἄνδρα κασήμενην ἐμφανὲς τέκμαρ.*

‘For shame (respect) demands that words be obscure in counsel.’ Here again is the divide of propriety found in speech between men and women, inferring that clear and understandable counsel can only be had between men. With this reminder of the ‘proper boundaries’ between the behaviour of men and women still ringing in the air, Clytemnestra emerges, with staged irony attending. She offers *xenia* to her new guests, those amenities that are proper for a woman to offer - a hot bath and comfortable beds. For the ‘hot baths’ is “a grim irony at her expense.”²¹² She has transgressed by opening the doors (boundaries) to the *oikos* herself, and offering the invitation to enter.²¹³ She follows this offer with a statement that seems deferential at first, and imparts an awareness of what affairs belong to men (672-73):

*εἰ δ' ἄλλο πράξαι δεῖ τι βουλιώτερον,
ἀνδρῶν τὸδ' ἐστὶν ἔργον, οἷς κοινώσομεν.*

Garvie notes that her statement is phrased in “seemingly innocent language” but that it is “full of ambiguities and double meanings.”²¹⁴ In these lines, he also mentions Clytemnestra’s “pretence that as a woman she is not fit to deal with matters of business.” There is the allusion to womanly ‘unfitness’ in Clytemnestra’s remark, but her ability to dissemble and to play the role of the ‘proper’ wife makes this statement suspicious; she is speaking to a stranger, after all, whom she thinks knows little of the existing unique hierarchy within the *oikos*. The final phrase of the line translates cleanly as ‘to whom we will

²¹¹ Cf. West (1998), Garvie (1986) and Thomson (1966), *ad loc.* 664, for suggested emendations for *ταπεινός*.

²¹² Vickers, (1973), 403. Also Gagarin (1976), 98: “In her first words she says that she can offer the visitors household comforts (the obvious irony of her reference to “hot baths” is the poet’s, not hers)...” Cf. also Goldhill (1984), 164-165, for his detailed examination of the irony found in these lines of Clytemnestra (668ff.).

²¹³ Cf. pp. 6-8, regarding Penelope’s inability to close off the boundaries of the *oikos* without Odysseus, according to the etiquette of *xenia*.

communicate it'; but, as Garvie notes: "there is just a hint of the sexual relationship between Aegisthus and Clytaemestra".²¹⁵ With the sexual innuendo is the inference that these two do share everything in common - presumably including information and decisions.²¹⁶

She continues to play the role of a 'proper' mother, while voicing her grief at the news of Orestes' death at 691-99:²¹⁷

οἱ ἴγώ, κατ' ἄκρας εἶπας ὡς πορθοῦμεθα.
 ὁ δυσπάλαιστε τῶνδε δαμμάτων Ἄρά,
 ὡς πᾶλλ' ἐπωπᾶις κάκποδὸν εὖ κείμενα·
 τόξοις πρόσωθεν εὐσκόποις χειρουμένη
 φίλων ἀποψιλοῖς με τὴν παναθλίαν.
 καὶ νῦν Ὀρέστης, ἦν γὰρ εὐβούλως ἔχων,
 ἔξω κομίζων ἀλεθρίου πηλοῦ πόδα ἔ
 νῦν δ' ἤπερ ἐν δάμοισι βακχείας κακῆς
 ἰατρὸς ἐλπὶς ἦν, προδοῦσαν ἔγραφε.

She blames the curse of the *oikos* for his demise, and accuses it of *φίλων ἀποψιλοῖς με τὴν παναθλίαν*.(695) Clytemnestra laments that her plan to remove her son far from the house to avoid the curse, and thus to provide hope against evil, was unsuccessful (696-699). Clytemnestra recovers from her grief to invite the messenger to be their guest, with all privileges and that he will be *οὐδ' ἦσσαν ἂν γένοιο δάμοισιν φίλος*.(708) She leaves quickly, speaking of her intention to discuss this matter with *τοῖς κρατοῦσι δαμμάτων*.(716) But her duplicity in her reaction to the news is not clearly revealed until the Nurse arrives,²¹⁸ offering a different perspective on Clytemnestra's reception of the news (737-740):

²¹⁴ (1986), 229.

²¹⁵ (1986), 229.

²¹⁶ The verb is related to the adjective *κοινός*, meaning 'to share in common', or 'partner'. This line also recalls Clytemnestra's last statement of the *Agamemnon*, of ordering the rule of the house between the two of them.

²¹⁷ Cf. Thalmann (1985), 230, for Orestes' use of deceit, as compared with Clytemnestra's use.

²¹⁸ Winnington-Ingram (1973), 116: "... [Aeschylus] makes the Nurse, and not Clytemnestra, display a mother's affection and a mother's grief." Cf. Vickers (1973), 403-4; also Goldhill (1986), 15, for a comparison of the vocabulary of nursing and that of maternity.

... πρὸς μὲν οἰκέτας
 θέτο σκυθρωπὸν ὄμμα, τὸν γ' ἐντὸς γέλων²¹⁹
 κεύθουσ' ἐπ' ἔργοις διαπεπραγμένους καλῶς
 κείνηι . . .

The nurse, speaking of the queen's private behaviour, reveals Clytemnestra's outward appearance of grief as false. Although she lamented earlier (691-699) that the 'curse upon this house' reached far enough beyond its borders 'with [its] well-aimed arrows' to destroy Orestes, her words are filled with irony, for truly she is glad that he is dead. The queen makes a show of sorrow for the servants, but this barely masks the laughter within. Her last worry for being subjected to retribution evaporates with the news.²²⁰

Before this revelation, however, Clytemnestra betrays herself before she leaves the stage (716-719):

ἡμεῖς δὲ ταῦτα τοῖς κρατοῦσι δωματίων
 κοινώσομέν τε καὶ σπανίζοντες φίλων
 βούλευ(σ)άμε(σ)θα τῆσδε συμφορᾶς πέρι.²²¹

Clytemnestra will be involved in these discussions, disregarding her assertion from before (672-673). She overlooks her earlier avowal that she had been stripped of friends by the curse, when Orestes died; now she will have 'no lack' of them, while she discusses the implications of her son's death with her lover/co-ruler. Clytemnestra continues to use language as it best suits her ends for that moment, even when faced with her imminent death.

²¹⁹ There are textual concerns in 738 (cf. Garvie (1986), West (1998), *ad loc.*). I have used West over Garvie to maintain continuity of text throughout this chapter.

²²⁰ Whallon (1958), 274: "If the [Nurse's speech] matches in significance the other parts of the trilogy, its chief function is surely to show that the woman who lovingly nourished the babe Orestes was not his mother. Clytemnestra's appeal for pity on the breast that gave him suck (*Cho.* 896-8) is accordingly a brilliant deceit."

²²¹ Cf. Garvie (1986), 239, for his explanation of the textual emendation.

Death of a Mother:

Her recognition that Aigisthos is dead is swift; she comprehends the news even though it was presented as a riddle (887). Much of her language throughout the two plays has been double-edged in meaning, thus she is familiar with such obscure statements. Thalmann notes that she loses her “exclusive power over language,” which “shows how her fate is closing in on her.”²²² She prepares to defend her achievements, intending to survive, in spite of her fears of dying in the same manner as once she killed (888). From the woman calling for *ἀνδροκμήτα πέλεκυν* (889) to be provided, Clytemnestra falters when Orestes stands before her, and calls instead for the only ally she had: *οἷ' γὰρ τέθνηκας, φίλτατ' Αἰγίσθου βία.* (893), Aigisthos, in whom she once had safety and a shield, as well as love.²²³ Now she stands alone.

In this situation “force, unprepared by cunning was futile, and on this occasion the cunning had been used against her.”²²⁴ She still has one strategy left: to play the role of mother again. In answer to Orestes’ threat of eternal rest in the same tomb with Aigisthos, Clytemnestra pulls out her secret weapon, so to speak (896-98):

*ἐπίσχες ὦ παῖ, τόνδε δ' αἶθεσαι, τέκνον,
μαστόν, πρὸς ᾧ σὺ πολλὰ δὴ βρίζων ἄμμα
οὔλοισιν ἐξήμελξας εὐτραφέες γάλα.*

She begs him to respect/revere/honour the breast that nourished him; but it was the Nurse who cared for him, after ‘receiving him from his mother’ (750) and ‘on

²²² (1985), 229.

²²³ Garvie (1986), 291: “Unimpressive as we know [Aegisthus] to be, he was still loved by Clytaemnestra. It is a side of her that hardly emerged in *Ag.* (but cf. 1654...)”

²²⁴ Winington-Ingram (1973), 117. Cf. also Buxton (1982), 108-9: “So, just as Agamemnon’s murderers killed him by *dolos*, they will in their turn fall to *dolos* (556-7). The reciprocity is paralleled in the dramatic structure: just after the mid-point of *Agamemnon* was the deception of husband by wife; just after the mid-point of *Choephoroi* is the deception of mother by son.”

behalf of his father' (762).²²⁵ And yet, her appeal to *aidōs* - to respect for a mother - seems to give Orestes pause in his purpose, and he asks his friend: *μητὲρ' αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν;* (899) "The breast is the supreme symbol of motherhood, the parent a supreme object of *aidōs*."²²⁶ Burnett shows how the imagery of monsters that surrounds Clytemnestra establishes her "as one of nature's horrors" that must be slain by the hero. But this monstrous association cannot progress too far, for "Clytemnestra must also remain a woman If she becomes wholly monstrous, then Orestes' choice will be not of male parent over female but of human over nonhuman."²²⁷ Clytemnestra exposes her humanity to Orestes, to appeal to his mercy not only for a woman but also for his mother. Now it is his turn to falter in his purpose, and to question the comparative importances of each of the murders committed or about to be committed. For a brief moment, the respect for a mother outweighed the death of a king and the order of a god.

But only for a moment. Pylades reminds his friend of his oath to the gods, and of the consequences should he break it (900-902). Orestes intensifies his dedication to his purpose, recalling his duty to the gods and his own father, with the threat of greater punishment for leaving Agamemnon unavenged.²²⁸ He emphasizes his mother's infidelity, and speaks again of his intention to kill her at Aigisthos' side, allowing them to be together in death (904-7).

²²⁵ Cf. 744-765 for the Nurse's complete account of her rearing of Orestes. These two phrases at 750 and 762 offer a subtle inference of the relation of the child to its parents. *μητρὸθεν* reads like a noun of location - similar to *οἴκοθεν*, for example, or in cases when *-θεν* is used as "an inseparable particle, denoting *motion from a place*" (LSJ). There is a sense of impersonal distance imposed here, whereas at 762, *πατρὶ* is an ethical dative, carrying a greater emotional force. The father has a greater emotional tie to the child - the nurse receives the baby 'for the father' and 'from the mother'.

²²⁶ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 144-145. Cf. O'Neill (1998), 222, n. 33: "Goldhill (1984: 179-180) argues that an appeal to *aidōs* is an appeal to be recognized as a *φίλος* rather than an *ἐχθρός*. ... For such a claim to be rejected, Clytemnestra must be seen to be an enemy of Orestes' family rather than a member of it."

²²⁷ Burnett (1998), 110. Cf. also 109-113.

²²⁸ Gagarin (1976), 99: "Orestes' need to avenge his father, to regain his inheritance, and to restore the *oikos* is greater than the prohibition against matricide."

The following stichomythic exchange demonstrates the fractured relationship between mother and son, as one tries to avoid death and the other tries to do the right thing. Clytemnestra tries again to be a mother to him now and for the future (908), but the damage to their relationship is so profound that no sweet maternal words will heal the breach. Orestes will not have the *πατροκτονούσα* living in his home (909). Failing in her attempts to be his mother again, Clytemnestra attempts to share the responsibility for the murder with *moira* (910), an argument she previously disdained as an explanation of her husband's sacrifice of their daughter.²²⁹ Orestes turns her own logic against her, saying that this is her fate (911). Clytemnestra continues her attempts to be a parent again, as she asks Orestes at 912: *οὐδὲν σεβίζῃσι γενεθλίους ἁράς, τέκνον*; He refuses to recognize that her curse could hold power over him, for she 'cast him out into misfortune' even though he was her son (913). Orestes accuses her of selling him in exchange for a husband; he does not state this outright, feeling 'shame' to mention such 'reproaches' in clear language (917). But Clytemnestra understands to what her son refers, and flings the 'faults' of his own father as her defence and blaming Agamemnon's infidelity as the reason for her own.²³⁰

The debate continues, as mother and son wrangle over the gendered hierarchy of duty and boundaries. Agamemnon struggled while she remained at

²²⁹ Cf. *Ag.* 1414-1418, as Clytemnestra asks the Chorus about Iphigenia's death and Agamemnon's attitude towards killing her:

*οὐδὲν τότ' ἀνδρὶ τῷιδ' ἐναντίον φέρων,
ὅς οὐ προσημῶν, ὡς περὶ βοτοῦ μύρον
μύλων φλεόντων εὐπρόκοις νομείμασιν,
ἔθυσεν αὐτοῦ παῖδα, φιλότατην ἐμοὶ
ᾠδὴν', ἐπιδὼν Θρηκίαν ἀημίτων.*

²³⁰ *μάτας* refers to 'faults' with little clarification of the nature implied; while discussion of her infidelity is foremost, Agamemnon's straying is also inferred. Garvie (1986), 298: "This is one of the few references in the play to Agamemnon's guilt (cf. 242 n.). Aeschylus does not let Clytemnestra use the much more powerful argument of Iphigenia's sacrifice. Our sympathy for her is not to be aroused too far."

home, with Aigisthos benefiting from his ‘toil’ (919, 921).²³¹ Clytemnestra tells her son ἄλγος γυναιξὶν ἀνδρὸς εἶργεσθαι (920), hinting at the suffering she endured while her husband was away. She appears to be resigned to her fate, saying: κτενεῖν ἕοικας ὦ τέκνον τὴν μητέρα (922), but answers his threat of her responsibility for her own death with a clearer threat of μητρὸς ἐγκότους κύνας. (924) He does not fear her curses as much as he fears those of his father; his duty to Agamemnon outweighs any duty to her, and Clytemnestra unequivocally comprehends this now. Her final statements are filled with fear (of death) and regret (of producing Orestes), and her son takes her off-stage to complete his revenge (926-30).

This play marks the beginning of the marginalization of details surrounding the crimes of both Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, foreshadowing a simplification of the issues for the final play to reach a conclusion. For although Electra recognizes that her sister’s death was cruel and unusual,²³² she does not acknowledge the agent of her death. Ironically, she is preparing a lament for her sister’s murderer. There is a conflict of interests here, as the children appear to have forgiven/forgotten the murderer of Iphigeneia, but they have not forgiven/forgotten the fact that she was murdered. They do not appear to believe that the death of their sister required revenge, in the form of the death of their father. Clytemnestra’s adultery is reduced in importance as well; for although Orestes alludes to the idea that he was ‘sold’ and sent away, he is too ashamed to mention outright what price Clytemnestra received in exchange.²³³ Through neglecting to mention the various pertinent details to these offences, Aeschylus

²³¹ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 118: “The husband supports the wife with his labour, with his valour, and in return demands that he be free from her criticism.” Cf. Gagarin (1976), 98, for the dependence of the female on the male.

²³² *Choe.* 242. Cf. p. 76, n. 202.

begins his reduction of the crimes of each these characters to smooth a very difficult path that lies ahead of him in the final play.

The separation between son and mother is irreparable; she sent him from his paternal home, killed his father, and was reported to celebrate the news of his own death. She attempts to benefit from the traditional role of mother, calling him *τέκνον* five times throughout the stichomythia, although for Orestes this is too little, too late. He knows that he was sent away for two reasons: 1) to clear the way for Clytemnestra and Aigisthos to become lovers/conspirators; 2) to be away from the *oikos*, and thus hindered in becoming an avenger for his father. Keeping the list of wifely/motherly virtues in mind, Clytemnestra denied the children of Agamemnon when she dishonoured his marriage-bed; when she considered herself no longer to be the wife of Agamemnon, she no longer recognized the children as her own. Clytemnestra sought honour throughout her life; Aeschylus continues her story as she still seeks it, in death. The Erinyes now continue her pursuit of honour in her name; and the debate of mother-child relations continues, as the hounds of Clytemnestra pursue Orestes, also in the name of vengeance.

²³³ *Choe.* 917. Cf. p.86above.

Eumenides

In this play, so many issues are addressed by the playwright, which many scholars have taken the time to explore. “*Eumenides* provides the charter-myth for the Aeropagus,”²³⁴ while others have examined the shifting focus of the effects of transgression from *oikos* to *polis*.²³⁵ One of the themes in this play favoured by scholars is the transition “from vendetta to the court of law”²³⁶ and the shift from the old gods to the new that is signalled by this transition.²³⁷ The focus of each play in the trilogy expands and contracts on two different issues: the act of revenge and the definition of vengeance. Throughout this trilogy, we have watched as revenge moved from the family, to the *oikos* in context of society, to society in general (from a purely private to a purely public sphere), with the gods as mediators and enforcers. Meanwhile, the concept of vengeance itself shifts from a general definition (those who kill without cause must be killed with cause) to a very specific redetermination: society shall decide who shall kill and be killed under a new definition of ‘legalised’ vengeance.

This is the setting for the final conflict and resolution of the issue begun by persuasion. Clytemnestra attempted to persuade others that the actions of a woman could be the same as a man’s, and could have the same result, with the same opportunity to be recognized as honourable. Although seductive, Clytemnestra’s persuasion ultimately failed to achieve her goal of acknowledgement and recognition for vengeance honourably achieved. The

²³⁴ Pelling (2000), continues, 165: “... but the trial procedures do not seem very specific to that court: they provide a prototype for *any* (at least, any Athenian or democratic) court to follow.”

²³⁵ Cf. Sailor and Stroup (1999), 167-182.

²³⁶ Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1983), 127.

conflict is now represented by new players: the Erinyes appear on Clytemnestra's behalf, to uphold her claim to revenge²³⁸ (with which feminine virtue has nothing to do), while Agamemnon is replaced by his son, and two patron deities, all of whom adhere to the original order of the *oikos*, and who do not entertain the possibility that a woman possesses anything more than virtue. The *Eumenides* is an attempt to answer the paradox posed by Clytemnestra and to reposition revenge in a *polis*-focused society.

Although Clytemnestra makes a brief appearance on stage at the beginning of the play, the action is ruled by her, even in her absence. Her actions have brought all the principle players together to assess the repercussions and future courses of action. The deities concerned are gathered to reconcile the place of vengeance within society: whether revenge should remain within the private sphere of families and their grief, or whether it should be displaced and reassigned to the public arena of legal matters. Within the house of Atreus and his descendants, the arena of vengeance is narrowed and directed inwards upon the family, with only one *oikos* decimated by the escalating deaths. An answer must be given, a new order must be established, before all the members of the house are killed and before such a situation can arise again.

This play is a mass of contradictions and turnabouts, as Aeschylus rewrites his own telling of the curse of the house of Atreus.²³⁹ No more is the sacrifice of Iphigeneia mentioned, and Agamemnon is now the murdered hero of Troy – without stain of kindred blood or any moral wrong-doing. Clytemnestra

²³⁷ Golden (1994), 381, notes the continuation of “the theme of generational conflict, developed by the matricide in *Choephoroi* and the opposition of old and young gods in *Eumenides*.” Cf. Brown (1983), 29-34, for his discussion of the greater focus on the gods in the final play.

²³⁸ Cf. *Eu.* 94-116.

is no longer an aggrieved wife with manly honour, but merely a blood-thirsty ghost who invokes vengeance upon her own son. No longer is Orestes the murderer of his mother, for he has been purified by Apollo of the pollution of matricide, achieving revenge for his father with justification and honour;²⁴⁰ still he is pursued for punishment of this crime. The act of vengeance was demanded by the oracle of Apollo, but the god could not save his agent from pursuit by the Erinyes (64-84); although he offers testimony during the trial, he cannot guarantee Orestes will walk free. Only Athena can resolve the contradictions, by shedding light upon a murky paradox.

I will examine this final play as Aeschylus' attempt to bring Clytemnestra's story to a satisfactory end, that gives an answer to the insoluble conundrum, and restores order to the chaos he depicted on stage. He has introduced several characters who are partially justified for their actions; his representations of both Clytemnestra and Agamemnon seem deliberately blurred, leaving the motivations and actions of both as paradoxical questions of ethics and honour: each are justified in their actions, but also their actions are unjustifiable. I will examine the trivialization of Clytemnestra as Orestes' trial progresses, through the failure of the Erinyes both to avenge their own agent and to resist appeasement by Athena's persuasion, who uses Clytemnestra's own tool of (insistent) persuasion to win her case.

²³⁹ Cf. Visser (1984), 193-206, as she discusses the fluid movement between the purposes of the Erinyes as they shift from fulfilling vengeance (*poine*) to pursuing pollution (*miasma*), and the opposition between these aspects as illustrated throughout the play.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Visser (1984), 194-94, for her examination of the potential for defilement that honour holds, and how the "purity of a family resides typically with the women of the household whose men are expected to defend it." She demonstrates how honour is a part of an entire family –

Clytemnestra and The Goddesses:

Clytemnestra acted not only from a position of retribution for a sacrificed child, but also from a point of honour.²⁴¹ Her role as mother and protector within the *oikos* is compromised by the sacrifice of her first-born daughter; she views her husband's action as an insult to herself, and everything which she represents. Winnington-Ingram notes how this "trilogy treats of the relationship between man and woman and of the institution of marriage. Against this institution Clytemnestra rebels, partly because it is ill adapted to such as her, partly because, in the matter of Iphigenia, her husband had violated the basis of mutual respect upon which marriage should stand."²⁴² She believes herself capable of answering this act in kind; these actions lead to the inversion of the normal order within the *oikos*. Orestes is now under obligation to answer his father's murder with vengeance: obligations arising from family (his surviving sister),²⁴³ from society and from the gods (Apollo, representing Zeus to some degree). Still, he is punished by the old gods, who uphold the old ways and laws. They seek justice on Clytemnestra's behalf, having being punished for the murder of

inherited by the children as the blood of the parents is inherited – and the protection of honour becomes the inherited duty of the children as well.

²⁴¹ Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1983), Ch. 6 for his theory that Clytemnestra acted "out of a jealousy that was not jealousy of Chryseis or Cassandra, but of Agamemnon himself and his status as a man. For she herself is of manly temper, and the dominance of a man is abhorrent to her." (105)
²⁴² (1983), 129.

²⁴³ Zeitlin (1965), 497: "An exile from home for so many years that he is unrecognized by his sister and his mother, bound not by the actual dynamics of a family relationship but rather by the obligations that are inherent in it, and impelled to his action by the external influence of Apollo, he marks a step in the right direction [towards impersonal justice, unaffected by emotions]."

Agamemnon; by the strictest definition, she did not spill kindred blood, though Agamemnon did, when he killed their daughter.²⁴⁴

But how does Clytemnestra fit into this new debate redefining revenge? Where does her ‘manly’ sense of honour appear, and how does it affect the outcome of the trilogy? She is represented by both the Erinyes (a lust for revenge),²⁴⁵ and by Athena (persuasion as a means to an end).²⁴⁶ The figure of a woman (albeit a goddess in this case) dominates the stage, and the action upon it. She directs the trial, and casts the deciding vote; she dominates single-minded creatures with persuasion, forcing them to her own will. She attempts to assuage and honour, though this is a thin veneer for the reality of deposing them from frightful power. This description can be as easily applied to Clytemnestra as to Athena. The motivations for each female’s actions are in total opposition: Clytemnestra committed murder on behalf of a daughter (killing the father), whereas Athena’s sympathies lie with the male - for she is a daughter without mother, and does not acknowledge the attachment and link between a mother and her daughter, valuing the link between father and child more.

The link between Athena and Clytemnestra is one of opposites; where one is destructive and detrimental, the other is supportive and beneficial. Where Clytemnestra would take honour and power for herself, Athena supports honour and power residing firmly with men. Clytemnestra’s search for masculine

²⁴⁴ Cf. line 212 and line 605 for their reason by blood for pursuing Orestes over Clytemnestra. At 603, they add to their justification for not pursuing Clytemnestra, stating that *ἡ δ’ ἐλευθέρα φόνου...*. Cf. Zeitlin (1965), 505-6, regarding the return to order demanded by Athena (and Apollo and Orestes), and the opposition of the Erinyes to that order.

²⁴⁵ Zeitlin (1965), 506: “The Erinyes – hateful monsters, loathed by the gods, thirsting for human blood – transport us back to that first play. Suddenly, in retrospect, all the references to metaphorical Erinyes in that play make us realize the strength of error that turned human beings into Furies. If, as supernatural beings, they transgress the limits of sacrifices to which they are entitled, one should not wonder that a mortal who assumes the role of Erinys will cross the boundary that separates avenger from bloodthirsty predator.”

honour created a situation that was out of the accepted order of society, and from this dire consequences were suffered. Athena's support of the male, and also the honour that attends any male, returns the house of Atreus to order; she also illustrates what the cost is paid should a woman attempt to be 'out of order' in the future. Clytemnestra, without her daughter Iphigenia, felt compelled to redefine her place in society, so that she could (be allowed to) take revenge upon her daughter's killer, disregarding who the killer was. Athena, with only a father to thank for her existence, does not fully comprehend Clytemnestra's predicament; the goddess sees only the imbalance that has been created by these actions, and she desires to set things in their right place. She does not consider the motive behind the revenge murder, for as a goddess, she does not have to worry about the virtues of a mortal woman. As a goddess, she holds the respect, worship and honour of men – all the things Clytemnestra wanted for herself. Athena achieved these through her support of society; Clytemnestra destroyed her chances for these by casting aside her support and consideration for a society that allowed her daughter to die. A mother without child and a child without mother – the two are connected through their parallel oppositions, for these oppositions define their actions and their view of the world and society, and their own places within it.

The Erinyes are Clytemnestra's 'vengeful hounds,' pursuing Orestes to his final payment and end; they take her place in the action,²⁴⁷ where she can no longer go, for while deities can walk the earth and affect the people there, the

²⁴⁶ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 125: "For there is a sense in which Athena is the counterpart of Clytemnestra and serves as the poet's final comment upon her character and motives."

²⁴⁷ O'Neill (1998), 223: "... when the ghost of Clytemnestra rouses the Furies to the chase, Clytemnestra is once again associated with a serpent, *δρακόνι* (128), either in her own right, or through the Furies as her intermediaries." O'Neill also notes (in n. 38): "As many of the same

dead cannot. They accept her reasons, and attempt to validate her claim to possess (a manly interpretation of) honour by hounding her killer to madness and his grave (should they capture him). They are horrible to behold, and are avengers, focussing on the spilling of kindred blood. They are the initiators of Clytemnestra's quest for revenge, as the invoked recipients of Agamemnon's spilled blood in return for the sacrificial blood of a child.²⁴⁸ They are her impetus for her own actions, and when she is no longer able to act, they respond to her invocation to act on her behalf,²⁴⁹ acting in blind dedication to it, disregarding any other arguments entirely.

Voices from Hell:

Even to the depths of Hades does the report of her deeds extend,²⁵⁰ as Clytemnestra complains to the Erinyes²⁵¹ (95-100):

ἐγὼ δ' ὑφ' ὑμῶν ἴδ' ἀπητημασμένη
 ἄλλοισιν ἐν νεκροῖσιν, ὧν μὲν ἔκτανον
 ὄνειδος ἐν φθιτοῖσιν οὐκ ἐκλείπεται,
 αἰσχρῶς δ' ἀλώμαι, προυνέπω δ' ὑμῖν ὅτι
 ἔχω μεγίστην αἰτίαν κείων ὑπο,
 παθοῦσα δ' οὕτω δεινὰ πρὸς τῶν φιλτάτων . . .

Who in the Underworld would level 'a most grievous charge' against her?

Sommerstein suggests that "the spirits of Agamemnon and Cassandra, it seems,

images are applied to Clytemnestra and her Furies, it is easy to blur the distinction between the woman and the avenging monsters who are so closely identified with her."

²⁴⁸ Cf. *Ag.* 1431-1434.

²⁴⁹ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 76-77: "[The Erinyes] represent the cause of the mother; and, if we look at this play alone, it is easy to see them in that light alone. But they do not suddenly erupt into the trilogy with the murder of Clytemnestra. From *Choephoroi* we learn that, if Orestes had failed to avenge his father, he would have been pursued by that father's wrathful hounds: that he was threatened with Erinyes either way."

²⁵⁰ This is not a new idea, as seen in the *Odyssey*, where Agamemnon reports of Penelope's fidelity and her intelligence, cf. 11.427-434, 444-449, 456, and also 24.192-198.

²⁵¹ Cf. Devereux (1976), 163 ff., for his examination of the Clytemnestra the Erinyes dreamed had come to goad them on, and the dream within a dream of their continued pursuit of Orestes.

constantly tax Clytemnestra with their murder, and spread the ill fame of it among the inhabitants of Hades.”²⁵² Agamemnon, victim of her own hands, would dishonour her, as he does twice in the *Odyssey*.²⁵³ Her own daughter Iphigeneia is there as well, but would she reproach Clytemnestra for ‘the deeds of blood’?

Clytemnestra characterizes their abilities to pursue and attack Orestes in a singularly feminine manner: *ἀτιμῶι κατασχ(ν)αίνουσα, νηδύος πυρί . . .* (138) She no longer denies the feminine aspect of her biology; she has taken the strength it lends to her ‘just’ cause for vengeance and employs it to the full. She rages that *οὐδεὶς ὑπέρ μου δαιμόνων μνηϊέται | κατασφαγείσης πρὸς χερῶν μητροκτόνων.* (101-2) At 122, she reminds them that the target of their pursuit has fled: *φονεὺς δ’ Ὀρέστης τῆσδε μητρὸς οἴχεται.* The charge that is aimed at her is not stated outright, though one can speculate. Clytemnestra is ‘dishonoured’ at the hands of the Furies, for they slumber on while she is unavenged; she has become an object of mockery for those among the dead who are avenged (for she is at a severe disadvantage in comparison), or for those who are her victims (for this failing in the pursuit of vengeance in her name suggests that her death was deserved). She claims at 114-115:

*ἀκούσαθ’, ὡς ἔλεξα τῆς ἐμῆς περὶ
ψυχῆς.*

Her whole existence depends upon her plea to the Erinyes for their continued pursuit of justice. But she is already dead: what existence does she have left?

And why are the Erinyes of such paramount importance to her? Her words

²⁵² Sommerstein (1989), 102. Agamemnon is represented as spiteful in the epic, and his debate with Clytemnestra over the nature of fame and praise would suggest that he is willing to defame her in the Underworld.

²⁵³ See p. 33, and n. 80 above.

suggest that a similar kind of society exists in the Underworld, where fame, report and public opinion still matter; thus the necessity of vengeance in her name will improve her standing within the Underworld society. Again the character of Clytemnestra is established as grabbing after fame and report, this time transplanted into an ‘exclusive’ society, where only the dead can enter. Still she believes that justice is behind her, if only the sleeping Furies will awaken, as she cries at them: *ἄλγησον ἦπαρ ἐνδίκους ὀνειδέσιν· | τοῖς σόφροσιν γὰρ ἀντίκεντρα γίγνεται·* (135-36) The Erinyes later report, at 155-61, that they feel the pain of these reproaches, aware of the anger harboured by the ghost of Clytemnestra at their lapse. She is losing status among the dead because even the most feared vengeance spirits are not pursuing vengeance in her name; by her blunt rousing and invocation of these sleeping chthonic spirits she transfers her desire for honour to them. They must now pursue honour, in a new form of revenge and punishment, in her name; they become Clytemnestra’s representative onstage, personifying her thirst for power and recognition at any cost.²⁵⁴

Who is Polluted?

The initial description of both Orestes and the Erinyes sets them on equal ground, beginning the blurred distinctions of opposing characters.²⁵⁵ They both sit within the temple at Delphi, both are a horror to see. The Pythia reports that Orestes is still considered *ἄνδρα θεομωσῆ* (40); the Furies are described as *εἰς τὸ πᾶν βδελύκτοποι* (52), and *καὶ κόσμος οὔτε πρὸς θεῶν ἀγάλλματα | φέρειν δίκαιος οὔτ’*

²⁵⁴ They are set at loggerheads with Athena, who represents a different aspect of the dead queen: her ability to argue convincingly with a flawed argument, and personal fallacy.

²⁵⁵ Devereux (1976), 158: “The obvious fact that the Eumenides never *explicitly* accept the view that mother and son are not of the same blood, implies that the Erinyes, which *arise* from the slain mother’s blood, are, in a sense, also kin-slayers (felicides), since – for them – the mother’s

ἐς ἀνθρώπων στέγας.(55-6). The Erinyes also snore *οὐ πλατοῖσι φυσιάμασιν* (53), and from their eyes drips *δυσφιλῆ λίβρα* (54). Though the prophetess does not explicitly state that the Furies are polluted and polluting, the inference is present in her words here.²⁵⁶ In her opinion, neither the man nor his escort are welcome in the god's own prophetic holiest of holies, and must be driven away in some manner by the god. Apollo describes *αἱ κατάπτυστοι κόραι* (68), stating that they are beings *αἷς οὐ μείγνυται | θεῶν τις οὐδ' ἄνθρωπος οὐδὲ θῆρ ποτε: . . . μισήματα ἄνδρῶν καὶ θεῶν Ὀλυμπίων. . .* (69-73)²⁵⁷ They are not polluting – in the same manner as Orestes – but their mere existence is loathsome, and appears as polluting. Orestes is lead away at the behest of Apollo, to take up sanctuary at Athena's temple. The Erinyes are roused from their god-induced slumber by the ghost of Clytemnestra as she goads them on to exact revenge in her name and cause.

Flight to Athens:

By the time he reaches Athens, Orestes considers himself purified; for only now (277-279) does he know that he may speak in his own defence, and can call upon Athena *ἄφ' ἄγνοῦ στόματος εὐφήμως* (287).²⁵⁸ The Erinyes scoff at his plea for protection from Apollo and Athena (299-302); they believe that his death

blood from which they spring is *identical* with the matricide's blood which they intend to ingest. In that sense they are the product of both Klytimestra's and Orestes' (identical) blood."

²⁵⁶ Visser (1984), 201: " [The Erinyes] lusted for blood, pursued blood-guilt, and was herself blood-spattered as a sign of her duty and her sphere of operations and also of her method of punishing transgressions involving bloodshed."

²⁵⁷ Cf. 350-352, 360-366 for the restraints placed upon the Erinyes: both who is subject to their duties and those with whom they may speak. There appears to be a history of resentment of the restrictions imposed upon these old gods by their younger counterparts.

²⁵⁸ Cf. 445-452 for his description of his purification and his awareness of the tradition of pollution. Cf. also Bowie (1993), 25-26, regarding his discussion of complications in Orestes' pollution; for although he claims (especially at 445-452) that he is purified, the Furies still deny he is merely because they can scent the blood on his hands.

(and blood) is theirs by right, and by the demands of their purpose, given them by Fate (334-340), and taken up by choice (354-359):

δαμάτων γὰρ εἰλόμαν
 ἀνατρώπας· ἔταν Ἄρης
 τιθασὸς ὢν φίλον ἔλην,
 ἐπὶ τόν, ὦ, δίομεναι
 κρατερόν ὄνθ' ἢ ὁμοίως
 μαυροῦμεν ὑφ' αἵματος νέου †.²⁵⁹

The Erinyes complain at 360-366 against Zeus' meddling in their duties, placing restrictions upon them and how far their office extends,²⁶⁰ this establishes a precedent of interference in the purposes and work of the old gods by the new, and the Erinyes are suspicious of further (unjust) intervention.²⁶¹ They still hold to the power of their place amongst the pantheon (391-394):

ἐμοῦ κλύων θεσιμόν
 τὸν μοιρόκραντον ἐκ θεῶν
 δοθέντα τέλεον; ἔπι δὲ μοι
 γέρας παλαιόν. . . .

Though they resent the interference from the Olympians, the Erinyes still rely upon the sanction granted by them, so that they are still honoured – and still hold power – in some measure. They will push the limits of their restrictions as far as they can, in much the same way Clytemnestra attempted; for both have 'honour'

²⁵⁹ Although this definition of their purpose describes the sacrifice of Iphigeneia (she was not in the home at the time of her death), she was not avenged – though her killer was her own father, and the foremost man in Argos.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Lloyd-Jones (1979), 231, note on 360-366, for a possible scenario of interference by Zeus in the Erinyes' purpose.

²⁶¹ Brown (1983), 27: "In *Ag.* and *Cho.* ... the Furies are closely associated with Zeus' justice. This is paradoxical, since they are creatures of darkness and horror far removed from the Olympian gods, but the paradox is inherent in their function as gods of retribution, which itself is both just and horrible. ... In *Eum.*, on the other hand, there is no explicit reference to this alliance ... no doubt because the possibility is being opened up that Zeus will, in the end, have a better deal to offer us. Here again it is useful that the presentation of the Furies on stage concentrates our attention on their repulsive nature, which any Olympian god must abhor, and diverts it from their symbolic function." Instead, through the agent of Apollo, a hostile opposition is established between the Erinyes and Zeus-as-represented-by-Apollo; the Erinyes

to some degree, but the Erinyes know that theirs is rooted “beneath the ground,” and that it is valid only because of the higher authority of the gods. Clytemnestra did not recognize either the source of her honour (Agamemnon) nor where her claim to it was rooted (the home – not the public forum).

The Erinyes, in their first Choral ode, lay out the charges of the old gods (themselves) against the new (Apollo).²⁶² They are angered by the escape of Orestes, accusing Apollo of being a thief and capable of disrespecting that which is traditional (150-154):

νέος δὲ γράϊας δαίμονας καθιπτάσω,
τὸν ἰκέταν σέβων, ἄθεον ἄνδρα καὶ τοκεῦσιν πικρόν·
τὸν μητραλοῖαν δ' ἐξέκλειψας ὦν θεός.
τί τῶνδ' ἔρει τις δικαίως ἔχειν;

Returning to their argument with the younger gods, whom the Erinyes believe are stretching their own influence and strength beyond the reach of justice, the Erinyes assert that the ‘earth’s navel-stone’ is polluted by the matricide because of this arrogance in the face of justice. They level an accusation that Apollo honours *παρὰ νόμον θεῶν βρότεια* and he destroys *παλαιγενεῖς δὲ Μοίρας* (171-72). The pollution of the god’s own oracular seat (by the presence of the matricide) is proof enough to them of these charges, though there is a difference of opinion between the Erinyes and Apollo on the source and responsibility for the pollution. The Furies themselves attack Orestes’ polluting presence in Apollo’s temple, 164-170:

φονολιβή θρόνον
περὶ πόδα, περὶ κάρα·
πάρεστι γὰς ἀμφαλόν
προσδρακεῖν αἰμάτων

constantly challenge Apollo’s authority, but they do not defy Zeus – even though they make it clear that they do not like submitting to his will.

βλοσυρὸν ἀρόμενον ἄγος ἔχειν.
 ἐφαστίωι δὲ μάντις ὠκύν) μιάσματι
 μυχὸν ἐχράνατ' αὐτόσσυτος αὐτόκλητος. . . .

When Apollo returns to his temple, he orders them out, describing their rightful place in blood-filled terms (185-92); he admonishes them: οὐ χρηστηρίους | ἐν τοῖσδε πλησίοισι τρίβεσθαι μύσος. (194-95)²⁶³ But the Erinyes are on the offensive and accuse Apollo outright (199-200):

αὐτὸς σὺ τούτων οὐ μεταίτιος πέλημα,
 ἀλλ' εἰς τὸ πᾶν ἔπραξας ὡς παναίτιος.²⁶⁴

They blame Apollo's oracle as the source of the idea to murder Clytemnestra (202); but he claims that this was done *ποινάς τοῦ πατρὸς πέμψαι* (203). They ask why they are 'reviled' by him (206) for accomplishing their assigned task: *τοὺς μητραλοίας ἐκ δόμων ἐλαύνομεν*. (210) They clearly show that the fact the woman killed her husband does not matter to them, for they state that this *οὐκ ἂν γένοιθ' ὄμαμος αὐθέντης φόνος*. (212) Visser explains the continued pursuit of Orestes by the Erinyes: "In the trial, only one facet of the Erinyes (*poine*) is presented, while its complementary opposite (*miasma*) is for the moment ignored, in spite of the fact that kin murder is the crime being tried. Apollo has purified Orestes and cured him of *miasma*. But the Erinyes are not to be deflected simply by the removal of *miasma*: at once they become Vengeances, *Poinai*, and they chase Orestes still. It is as *Poinai*, fanatics of family rights alone, that they reply to the

²⁶² Cf. Golden (1994), 381.

²⁶³ Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1983), 145.

²⁶⁴ Foley (2001), 223: "In *Eumenides*, the Furies accuse Apollo of sharing *aitia* (*metaitios*, 199) for instigating Orestes' crime and his actions following it or even being entirely *aitios* for Orestes' actions (*panaitios*, 200) due to his prophecy. Yet in the Furies' eye Apollo's position as *aitios* does not exempt Orestes from punishment for the matricide that he performed and half of the jury agrees with them. Apollo's role as *aitios* nevertheless makes possible Orestes' claim to *justice* for his action."

charges of Apollo.”²⁶⁵ Yet, Visser neglects to address the issue of the violation of the marital bond that connected Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; if the Erinyes as *Poinai* are ‘fanatics of family rights’, does that not include the bond of matrimony (sanctified by Zeus and Hera and Aphrodite) that begins each new family? This is the basis of Apollo’s first argument with the Erinyes, to which they cannot adequately answer.

Thus far the Erinyes have represented Clytemnestra’s fervent desire for bloody retribution, without consideration for a changing society – including a changing idea of Justice. They are intractable in their position on Clytemnestra’s death and need for revenge; the death of Agamemnon barely registers as worthy of note with them.²⁶⁶ Their desire for their own version of justice – without reference to the practice of Justice in society – drives them on, just as it drove Clytemnestra to the lengths she chose.²⁶⁷ They continue their pursuit of Orestes, insisting that he is betrayed by the *μηνηυπηρος ἀφθέγκτου* (245) of Clytemnestra’s spilled blood, leaving a trail upon the ground wherever he walks, and which they still smell (253).²⁶⁸ They do not acknowledge that he has been purified by Apollo (42, 280-83).

Apollo begins to delineate the precedence the younger gods have taken in the world; he points out that the Erinyes have dishonoured Hera and Zeus and even Aphrodite, because they have neglected the importance of marriage (of which all three are protectors), which *ῥρκου ᾽στί μείζων, τῆι δίκῃ φρουρουμένη*.

²⁶⁵ (1984), 202.

²⁶⁶ Neither the Furies, nor Clytemnestra (nor Athena, to an extent) put any value on the bond of marriage; this is the crux of the breakdown of female/male relationships, as I examined earlier in this thesis, cf. pp. 27-29, and 53-56.

²⁶⁷ Brown (1983), 25: “Since they are fiercely loyal to Clytemnestra and their task of avenging matricide, it is psychologically natural for them to deny that Orestes’ purification has been effective, just as it is natural for them to wish to punish Athens for acquitting him, and possible for their character to change through the influence of persuasion.”

(218)²⁶⁹ He points out their inconsistent treatment of these related crimes: the inference is that marriage is as strong a bond as blood (if not more so), and is also protected by Justice (which they claim to serve). And yet (222-23):

τὰ μὲν γὰρ οἶδα κάρτά σ' ἐνθουμουμένην,
τὰ δ' ἐμφανῶς πρᾶσσουσιν ἡσυχαιότερα.

Apollo accuses them of practising two sorts of Justice, in the case where two crimes are the same; they have chosen the crime that fits their purpose and will pursue that, though the other crime is no less deserving of justice.²⁷⁰ He maintains that they ought to give up their pursuit of Orestes since he has sought justice (in their manner) for a crime that demanded justice, which the Erinyes were not prepared to seek. But the Furies are not yet ready to give up so easily, and they shriek at Apollo's words: *τιμᾶς σὺ μὴ ξύντεμνε τὰς ἐμὰς λόγῳ.* (227) They maintain their position and their pursuit (230-31):

ἐγὼ δ' ἄγει γὰρ αἷμα μητροῖον, δίκας
μέτεμι τόνδε φῶτα κᾶκκνηγέσω.

Neither does Apollo back down, claiming that he too will protect and guard the suppliant.²⁷¹ Both have drawn their lines in the sand: Apollo will not abandon Orestes, and the Erinyes will not give up pursuit. Apollo makes a strong

²⁶⁸ Cf. Brown (1983), 25-26, for his discussion on Orestes' continued pollution, and the fawn metaphor and its applicability to the blood that follows Orestes. Cf. also Visser (1984), p. 203 f.

²⁶⁹ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 119-20, who notes that Apollo "gets on the whole the better of the first exchange" by using this argument of the importance of marriage. Also 146: "[this] is a brief preliminary debate which ... lays out a basic issue of the trial-scene to come, the Erinyes disregarding the tie of marriage, Apollo disregarding the tie of blood."

²⁷⁰ 219-221: *εἰ τοῖσιν ὄν κτείνουσιν ἀλλήλους χαλᾶς*
τὸ μὴ τίνεσθαι μηδ' ἐποπτεύειν κότῳ,
οὐ φημι Ὀρέστην σ' ἐνδίκως ἀνδρηλατεῖν.

Brown (1983), 28: "One further difficulty is that the Furies of *Eum.* claim at 210ff. that they only pursue matricides, and have no interest in the crimes of Clytemnestra, whereas in *Cho.* Orestes had to fear the Erinyes of his father if he did *not* kill his mother (283 f., 925), and in *Ag.*, as sometimes also in *Eum.* (e.g. 421), Erinyes seem to take account of unlawful murders of any kind."

²⁷¹ Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1983), 146, for his summary of Apollo's involvement with and protection of Orestes.

argument regarding the bond of marriage, which severely weakens the Erinyes' position (for several gods are flouted by Clytemnestra's crimes). The Erinyes make clear their intractable need for vengeance, punishment and Justice in the name of the mother; through their argument, the issue of punishment and pollution becomes the central argument to this play.

The Defence Begins:

Athena's initial speech lacks the regard which the Erinyes believe is owed to them; Athena admits to not knowing by sight who they are (410-412), but knows them by their names. They still must explain to her their 'privileges' and the extent of their duties to vengeance. Athena warns the Erinyes that their behaviour is unjust, though they claim to be acting justly (430):

κλυεῖν δικάϊως μᾶλλον ἢ πράξει θέλεις.

The goddess rebukes the Erinyes for attempting to condemn Orestes through mere oath-taking, and no other method (432). She halts the Erinyes' headlong pursuit of Orestes by demonstrating that their actions are not just, which would affect their own reputation.²⁷² She not only prevents Orestes from being condemned on an oath that is impossible for him to swear – that he did not murder his mother – but also she stops the Erinyes from subjecting Orestes to their own judgement and justice by swearing that he did, for they will not hear that the murder was justified.²⁷³ The Erinyes turn judgement of the case over to

²⁷² Which is tied in with their own claim to honour; as demonstrated earlier, reputation is a part of honour (and virtue), and can elevate or damage honour as based upon behaviour. This is a concept which both Clytemnestra and the Erinyes profoundly comprehend, and drives them to complete the deeds which they believe will accord them greater honour. How Athena uses their own 'lust' for honour against the Erinyes will be demonstrated in greater detail later in this thesis.

²⁷³ Cf. Lloyd-Jones (1979), 235-36, note on 429: "Orestes could not have denied having killed his mother; and once he had admitted this, the Erinyes would have regarded their case as won. But since Orestes' defense will rest upon a plea of justification, this request is unfair, as Athene points out (430, 432).

Athena to ensure that justice is served (433-434), and the assessment of Orestes' case begins.

Orestes opens his defence by assuring the goddess that he has been completely purified of his crime(445-452); he continues by reminding her of her own close relationship with his father, for together they brought down Troy (455-457).²⁷⁴ He asserts that he killed his *κελαινόφρων ... μήτηρ* (458-459) because she had killed Agamemnon; Orestes claims that by his act he was exacting *ἀντικτόνοις ποιήσι φιλτάτου πατρός*. (464) He concludes his own defence by apportioning blame to Loxias, who warned him of the consequences of a lack of action against Clytemnestra (465-467), and places himself at Athena's mercy, saying *πράξας γὰρ ἐν σοὶ πανατχῆι τάδ' αἰνέσω*. (469)

Athena now asserts that she is in a difficult position to decide such a case; she recognizes that Orestes has been purified of the murder, and thus brings no harm to the city (473-75). She also recognizes the claim the Erinyes have in this case, and that their authority must not be dismissed out of turn; Athena fears the consequences should the Furies be denied the honour of their office (476-79):

*αὐται δ' ἔχουσι μοῖραν οὐκ εὐπέμπελον,
καὶ μὴ τυχεύσαι πράγματος νικηφόρου,
χώραι μεταῦθις ἰὸς ἐκ φρονημάτων
πέδοι πεσῶν ἄφερτος αἰανῆς νόσος.*²⁷⁵

Athena is highly aware of the paradox of the case: that any verdict will result in disaster (480-81). The lines that immediately follow are missing; she concludes

²⁷⁴ Again, there is a play upon honour here, and its reflexive nature: the honour of the father is inherited by his sons, and past alliances are continued through family lines, under the ties and obligations of *xenia*. Orestes reminds Athena that they each have an obligation of alliance to the other, which was begun by his father; thus the alliance ought to be continued. As she helped his own father, so is she obliged to help him.

²⁷⁵ Here is an echo of Clytemnestra; her 'office' and 'honour' as a mother were ignored by Agamemnon, and the consequences of the dismissal of her own power were quite fatal. Athena fears the actions of the Erinyes will be as fatal, harming more people, i.e. the people of Athens.

her speech with a declaration to establish a new court that will try cases of murder.

The Erinyes are furious that this “new covenant” of the Areopagus will wipe out their office, and that Orestes’ case will provide a new precedent for others to exploit to excuse violence done against parents. This choral ode is their attempt to validate a continuing need for them, and for their particular pursuit of Justice. They believe that if their power is undermined (previously awarded them by fate, and sanctioned by the Olympian Zeus), Justice itself will fail (508-25). They propose that Justice cannot exist without some sort of restraint, fulfilled by the threat of dire punishment as meted out by themselves (538-44).

The Erinyes demand that Apollo give evidence of his involvement in the murder of Clytemnestra;²⁷⁶ he claims to be both a witness and advocate for Orestes, for he himself has purified the man, and *αἰτίαν δ’ ἔχω ! τῆς τοῦδε μητρὸς τοῦ φόνου*. (576-80) The Erinyes are instructed to speak first, and they begin their interrogation of Orestes, demanding close and accurate responses for each question they ask. Their first question is direct and to the point, and their confidence in their case is overwhelming (587-589):

ΧΟ. τὴν μητέρ’ εἶπέ πρῶτον εἰ κατέκτονας.

ΟΡ. ἔκτεινα· τούτου γ’ οὔτις ἄρνησις πέλει.

ΧΟ. ἐν μὲν τόδ’ ἤδη τῶν πριῶν παλαισιμάτων.

Their questions focus mainly on the facts of the murder; they avoid questions about the motive, for this opens up the discussion to conjecture which might justify the murder. Abruptly, Orestes himself begins to direct the questioning towards the motive for the murder – Clytemnestra’s killing of Agamemnon. He

asserts that *δυοῖν γὰρ εἶχε προσβολὰς μiasμάτων* (600), for she both killed her own husband, and Orestes' father at the same time. "Orestes' defense is that he was carrying out vengeance, exercising his right. But the Erinyes cannot, as is their normal way, respond by invoking *miasma*. Apollo has outwitted them by removing their weapon of defence before the trial: Orestes has been purified. While the trial is in progress, the Erinyes have only their *support* for the principle of vengeance with which to oppose Orestes' *right* to vengeance."²⁷⁷

The Erinyes counter his claim – that Clytemnestra is polluted – by reasoning that *ἦ δ' ἐλευθέρα φόνωι* (603), but because he still lives, he is still guilty. And yet, had he not killed her, would the Erinyes consider her free of guilt? Orestes asks them why they did not pursue her after the murder of Agamemnon; they retort: *οὐκ ἦν ὕμαιοις φωτὸς ὃν κατέκτανεν*. (605) Orestes asks if he has the same blood as his mother; the Furies believe that they must share blood: *πῶς γὰρ σ' ἔθρεψεν ἐντὸς ὧ μαιφόνε | ζώνης;* (607)

But Orestes does not answer their following question: *ἀπέρχη μητρὸς αἷμα φίλτατον;* (608) He turns instead to his prime witness and defender, Apollo, to give his testimony and his opinion of the act. Orestes has complete control of his own questioning by his accusers, and leads them neatly to an argument that they might not want to encounter, considering the circumstances of the ruling judge. But the Erinyes seem unaware that they have lost command of their prosecution; they respond to Orestes' arguments each time, much as Clytemnestra did during her 'prosecution' by the Elders, in which she directed

²⁷⁶ As Lloyd-Jones (1979) notes on 574-575: "The leader of the Chorus is in effect telling Apollo to mind his own business – a prelude to challenging him to prove his right to take part in the proceedings."

²⁷⁷ Visser (1984), 204-5.

the debate as much as she responded to it.²⁷⁸ The Erinyes are poorly equipped to cope with arguments outside their narrow focus of avenging a kin-killing. Unlike the woman they represent, they cannot extemporize on the philosophical concerns that have taken over the debate, brought on by questioning the definition of kindred blood. The Erinyes are not as astute as the late queen; once Apollo begins his defence and argument, they have no winning response to turn the whole process in their favour.

Pointing Fingers:

Apollo defends his own participation in the murder through sanction of a higher power; he tells the Furies that none of his prophecies are spoken without permission of Zeus (616-21). As Orestes includes Apollo in the blame for the murder (594),²⁷⁹ so now does Apollo include Zeus. Apollo recounts the circumstances of Agamemnon's murder, emphasizing the absence of honour for a king in such a death: *ταῦτα πρὸς γυναικός, οὐ τι θουρίοις | τόξοις ἐκηβόλοισιν ᾧστ' Ἀμαζόνος* (627-28). To the Erinyes' accusatory query that, on Zeus' orders, Orestes was *τὸν πατρὸς φόνον | πράξαντα μητρὸς μηδαμιοῦ τιμὰς νέμειν;* (623-24), Apollo replies that (paternal) vengeance and (maternal) respect are not the same. He outlines the circumstances of Agamemnon's death at the hands of his wife, reminding jury and audience alike of who the aggrieved party is and of what she was capable (625-639).²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Cf. pp. 44-63 above, for examples of the shifting debate between Clytemnestra and the chorus, throughout which the lead of the argument is switched between both the queen and the elders as each confounds the other in turn.

²⁷⁹ So do the Erinyes claim at 199-200 that Apollo is responsible in this murder, for they claim that "in all things you have so acted that the blame is yours alone." And yet, they still pursue Orestes because – according to the restrictions placed upon them – they are forbidden to exact vengeance from an Olympian god.

²⁸⁰ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 121: "The death of a man is different (*οὐ ... τι ταῦτόν*, 625) – different, that is, from the death of a woman. This particular man is qualified as noble and as a

The Furies retort that Zeus was responsible for attacking and imprisoning his own father Kronos.²⁸¹ Apollo replies, 645-648:

πέδας μὲν ἂν λύσειεν, ἔστι τοῦδ' ἄκος,
καὶ κάρτα πολλὴ μηχανῆ λυτήριος·
ἀνδρὸς δ' ἐπειδὴν αἰμ' ἀνασπάσῃ κόνις
ἅπαξ θανόντος, οὐτίς ἐστ' ἀνάστασις.

Mere chains can be broken, but death cannot be overcome, Apollo tells the Furies. He states that although Zeus cannot reverse death, he is able to accomplish many other things: τὰ δ' ἄλλα πάντ' ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω | στρέφων τίθησιν οὐδὲν ἀσθμαίων μένει. (650-651) While Apollo's primary reason is to illustrate Zeus' ineffectiveness against the finality of death, this statement also serves as a reminder to the Furies that they have their offices and privileges at Zeus' leisure, and could be as easily deprived of them. They are chastised and shown to be on thin ground in this area of argument. The Erinyes do not force this issue any further, asking instead whether it is right that Orestes be allowed to live in his father's house after accomplishing his mother's murder, insisting that he is still polluted and will not be allowed to take part in any city activities. (653-56) Apollo does not respond, for he has already asserted the completion of purification by his own hands; he will not be dissuaded from introducing an entirely new argument: he attacks the nature of the biological bond between parent and child.²⁸²

king, by divine right. His death is rendered the more shocking by the fact that a woman killed him, not in open fight but by treachery...."

²⁸¹ At the behest of his mother, cf. Hesiod's *Theogony*.

²⁸² Macleod (1982), 143: "So when Apollo and Athena say that the man is the only begetter of the child, that is the statement, in physical terms, of a principle thought necessary for moral and social order ... and Aeschylus' poetry has made it immediate to the spectator through his portrayal of Clytaemnestra and the reactions of the chorus and characters to her deed. Apollo has not told the whole story, for Agamemnon himself sins against marriage by bringing a concubine into the house and by killing the daughter he shares with his wife; but neither is the god's argument mere sophistry."

The Argument Of Blood and Biology:

Apollo attempts to refute the Erinyes' claim that Orestes has shed kin-blood;²⁸³ if he is successful in his proof, then Orestes is no longer responsible for kindred killing and is thus freed from the justice of the Furies. The argument of communal blood earlier provided by the Furies allows Apollo an opening to his own argument, "the purpose of this ... is to defend matricide from the charge that it violates the relation of kinship, and the god has been driven to the position at which it is the only argument which can do so."²⁸⁴ Was this an accurate representation of the ideas of reproduction among the Greeks, or was it simply a literary vehicle, used by the playwright to demonstrate a return to an acceptable social order and an appeal to a patriarchal ideology that placed man firmly over woman in importance and prominence? "Such a [biological] doctrine, perhaps already known in Athens, might be welcomed in a masculine society as a counterpoise to the manifest uncertainty of fatherhood."²⁸⁵ The god lays out his theory clearly (657-659):

*καὶ τοῦτο λέξω, καὶ μάθ' ὡς ὀρθῶς ἐρῶ.
οὐκ ἔστι μήτηρ ἢ κεκλημένη τέκνου
τοκεύς, τροφός δὲ κύματος νεοσπόρου*

²⁸³ Visser (1984), 201: "Kin murder, like incest, was the ultimate foul-up, the most sickening confusion of all. It confused love and hate, belonging and enmity, familiarity and passion. Kin murder also confounded the roles of prosecutor and accused, for how could a family protect its honor by striking at it? Precisely where people are closest, there the lines defining them must be drawn with utmost clarity, and the basic human rights, duties, and distinctions upheld, for they are at the root of all the others. In kin murder, the provinces of honor / shame and pollution were no longer complementary but coextensive."

²⁸⁴ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 122-23. Cf. also 146-47.

²⁸⁵ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 123.

He proves his point through “the analogy and endorsement of Athena”²⁸⁶ (662-664):

τεκμήριον δὲ τοῦδὲ σοὶ δείξω λόγου·
 πατὴρ μὲν ἂν γένοιτ’ ἄνευ μητρός· πέλας
 μάρτυς πάρεστι παῖς Ὀλυμπίου Διός.

Because she was born of only a father, Apollo offers the goddess as proof that the female is merely ‘the nurse of the newly sown conception’ and that ‘as a stranger for a stranger / preserves the offspring.’ The bond between father and child is bolstered, making Agamemnon the most important member of this *oikos*, and thereby justifying that vengeance for his murder was a warranted and necessary deed. Though she had turned her back on the virtues needed in a mother, as described in *Choephoroi* of her treatment of Electra²⁸⁷ and the fostering/exile of the infant Orestes, this final argument of Apollo denies the opportunity of maternal virtue through a natural bond. “Now Apollo argues that the mother is no true parent of the child, acting only as a receptacle for the father’s seed: a theory which can be paralleled in contemporary thought – Anaxagoras said something similar – but which is likely to have seemed too sophistic to be plausible. ... there is a ‘progressive diminution’ of Clytemnestra, in *Choephoroi* she is not much of a parent and now she is no parent at all.”²⁸⁸ This marks the final marginalization of Clytemnestra, as her ‘wrathful hounds’ fail in their purpose, and her intentions to gain even posthumous honour fail again.

²⁸⁶ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 123. Also Pelling (2000), 174-75: “Once again, it is easy to relate this to an earlier theme, that of the man-woman Clytemnestra; this corrects, a god-goddess rather than a man-woman, a force for good instead of evil. But it is not a very *satisfactory* mode of correction, building on that most special of special cases, Athena’s birth.”

²⁸⁷ Cf. discussion on pp. 72-79 above.

The God-Goddess:

Athena calls the voting to begin; the Furies offer a threat to the citizens if they are dishonoured, and Apollo reminds them of the power of his and Zeus' oracles. Another heated exchange between them fills the time for the jurors to cast their votes. During what amounts to petty bickering, several threats and insults are cast between the deities, and Apollo asserts that the Erinyes ἔν τε τοῖς νέοισι καὶ παλαιτέροις | θεοῖς ἄτιμος εἶ σὺ· (721-722) The Erinyes suggest that the outcome of the trial will decide their doubt ὡς ἀμφίβουλος οὔσα θυμοῦσθαι πόλῃ. (733) Athena has the final word on the trial, as the judge of it, and will cast her vote last, for the following reasons (735-741):

ψήφον δ' Ὀρέστηι τήνδ' ἐγὼ προσθήσομαι.
 μήτηρ γὰρ οὐτίς ἐστίν ἢ μὲν ἐγείνατο,
 τὸ δ' ἄρσεν αἰνῶ πάντα (πλήν γάμου τυχεῖν)
 ἅπαντι θυμῶι, κάρτα δ' εἰμὶ τοῦ πατρός·
 οὔτω γυναικὸς οὐ προσημῆσα μόνον
 ἄνδρα κτανούσης δωματίων ἐπίσκοπον·
 νικᾷ δ' Ὀρέστης κἄν ἰσόψηφον κριθῆι.

She tacitly recognizes both Apollo's and Orestes' tributes to her: she acknowledges that she has no mother and that she favours the male in all things. She will honour the 'overseer' of the home, who had been Agamemnon and Orestes' father; thus she honours the alliance that Orestes has inherited. This speech also demonstrates how well Apollo knows the judge: she does not support marriage (out of all things associated with the male), and he does not offer the previous argument of the strength of the marriage-bond that confounded the

²⁸⁸ Pelling (2000), 174.

Erinyes before, because this argument would have weakened his case with the judge herself.²⁸⁹

Athena's reasons have been called 'embarrassing,'²⁹⁰ and yet are true to her nature as a god-goddess, who can assert her masculinity with a productive outcome.²⁹¹ A statement of importance has been made, and the male is dominant in all things now, as Pelling notes: "The house of Atreus, once so perverted, has now been set aright, and Orestes is now in a position to promise such an alliance [between Argos and Athens]: that is itself an index of the proper reordering of the *oikos*."²⁹² Clytemnestra had gone unpunished for some time, until Orestes arrived to avenge his father's wrongful death; now that imbalance of injustice is corrected, and Clytemnestra is ultimately proven wrong in her actions.²⁹³ "There is thus a bitter irony, when the goddess, who in all things commends the male and is free to exercise her preference in action, condemns the woman of manly counsel for seeking the domination which her nature demanded."²⁹⁴

The previous crime of Agamemnon – of which so much was said in the first play – is never mentioned here.²⁹⁵ The issue needed to be simplified in some manner, in order to ease the way to conclusion. Even Clytemnestra's

²⁸⁹ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 126: "But the issue of the trial had come to turn upon two other relationships, in which she had no part. The argument was between Apollo, who stood ... for the marriage-*lie*, and the Furies, who stood for the bond between child and mother."

²⁹⁰ Cf. Lloyd-Jones (1979), note on 736.

²⁹¹ Unlike the fatal results of Clytemnestra's attempts to assert her own masculinity.
²⁹² (2000), 171.

²⁹³ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 126: "Everything, then, that Clytemnestra's nature demanded and her sex forbade or hampered, Athena is free to do, by virtue of her godhead. She is god-goddess to Clytemnestra's man-woman; and her masculinity wins her praise and worship, while that of Clytemnestra leads to disaster for herself and others."

²⁹⁴ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 126.

²⁹⁵ Possibly because by his death he was purified of the guilt of it. Cf. the Erinyes's justification of their pursuit of Orestes instead of Clytemnestra, *Eum.* 603. Winnington-Ingram (1983), 134: "We cannot suppose Electra to be criticizing her father, but those who had heard the earlier play were bound to recall how Aeschylus represented the sacrifice as a cruel and sacrilegious act." Cf. also p. 134, n. 191.

second crime of adultery goes unmentioned in this play; the inclusion of this affair would have distinguished the extent of the crimes of the two, and allowing for an easier assessment of the case. But, for some reason, the playwright has excluded mention of these two separate, but related, crimes of the deceased. Although the crime of regicide is terrible (even with the motivation of a child sacrifice), the crime of matricide is as horrible to contemplate, even with the concept of punishment and revenge as motive. The citizens would be divided as they struggled with the concept, and the equal votes demonstrate that there is an equal weight of horror behind both murders.²⁹⁶

Persuasion's Final Victory:

After the acquittal of Orestes, the Erinyes can no longer struggle to save Clytemnestra's honour; instead they must fight to save their own. "The final resolution in *Eumenides* is not the trial of Orestes but the subsequent argument between Athene and the Furies; and it is through the power of *peitho* that the younger goddess effects the conversion of these potential demons of blight to their new role as bringers of prosperity and fertility and as guardians of justice within the framework of the city."²⁹⁷ They howl their repeated threats of revenge on their own behalf,²⁹⁸ for the slight against their offices and honour, because their prey was set free and beyond their reach. As Lloyd-Jones notes,

²⁹⁶ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 147: "The votes are equal, which is surely an indication that the dilemma of Orestes was absolute, the conundrum insoluble. It is the 'vote' of Athena, who commends the male in all things, which ensures that Orestes shall go free and his house be saved from extinction." Cf. also 127f.

²⁹⁷ Buxton (1982), 110. Also Zeitlin (1965), 506-7: "The horror evoked by the vivid description of the Erinyes makes it clear that the cure of the malady of the house of Atreus cannot be brought about by the verdict of acquittal for Orestes. The Erinyes themselves must be reconciled so that they change their dress, their habits, their functions, and their names. Only then is there hope that the dreadful pattern of the *Agamemnon* will not repeat itself. The cure for them lies in the healing powers – the *meiligma* and *thelktērion* – of Athena's persuasion (*Eu.* 885-86)."

²⁹⁸ 778-793=808-823; 837-846=870-880.

their verbatim recitations indicate their resistance to Athena's honeyed appeasements to join her in honour among the citizens.²⁹⁹

As Clytemnestra with Agamemnon, so too does Athena wear down the Furies with repeated appeals for new and shared honours, to give up old ways and take up new ideas and means towards honour.³⁰⁰ She offers them a new definition of their old offices: to protect the living citizens of Athens, instead of the dead. Athena offers many varied descriptions of the new sorts of honours they can expect from the land they should think to protect, balanced with equal parts flattery (795-796) and threats of physical violence (827-829). Eventually, the Erinyes realize that Athena will not take no for an answer from them, as the goddess offers yet another argument in favour of agreeing with her (881-887):

*οὔτοι καμοῦμαί σοι λέγουσα τὰγαθά,
ὡς μήποτ' εἴπημις πρὸς νεωτέρας ἐμοῦ
θεὸς παλαιὰ καὶ πολισσούχων βροτῶν
ἄτιμος ἔρρειν τοῦδ' ἀπόξενος πέδου.
ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν ἀγνόν ἐστί σοι Πειθοῦς σέβας,
γλώσσης ἐμῆς μείλιγμα καὶ θελκτήριον,
σὺ δ' οὖν μένοις ἄν·*

The Erinyes begin to question the goddess about the honours, and are persuaded by her words. As they try out these new words of blessing,³⁰¹ Athena encourages them and emphasizes the great honour they are offering to the citizens of Athens, for which they must give honour in return. But, as Devereux notes: "... even after their 'transformation', the Eumenides never fully accept the view that the mother is not kin to her children – that they do not have the same blood. That

²⁹⁹ (1979), *ad loc.* Also Sommerstein (1989), 240: "The strophe and antistrophe of each pair are identical word for word: there could be no better way of indicating the stubborn resistance of the Erinyes to all persuasion."

³⁰⁰ 794-807, 824-836, 848-869, 881-891, 903-915.

theory is propounded only by Apollon (657 ff.). The Eumenides do not *explicitly* accept it; they are simply bribed to behave as if they did.³⁰² And yet, after Apollo's argument, the issue of blood relation is not directly addressed by any of the characters for the rest of the play. Only Athena makes an oblique reference to her own genealogy at 736-738,³⁰³ using this as her reason for favouring the male over the female, and thus deciding that the death of a man and king outweighs the murder of a mother.

The Erinyes failed in the debate to win Clytemnestra's honour; but their acceptance of the re-established *status quo* offered them a new life of acceptance and respectability, after many long years of isolation from the rest of the Olympians. The Erinyes abandon Clytemnestra's cause, yielding gradually to their new status as guardians and benefactors. The Eumenides accept their new titles and domains and lead the procession towards new honours;³⁰⁴ Clytemnestra is quite forgotten in the glow of future honour.

The final play of Aeschylus' trilogy redresses several anomalies previously introduced on the stage, though cleverly disguised. He began the action with a woman who exhibited an (unhealthy) male attitude towards honour, born from a feminine motivation – that of motherhood, and outrage of its violation. In the second play, he shows the same woman still possessing a manly appetite for honour who is not only aware of, but is also unafraid to exploit,

³⁰¹ 916-926, 938-949, 956-967, 978-987.

³⁰² Devereux (1976), 158. He continues: "In practice, this means only that they retain the right to punish the matricide under a *new* dispensation: not as a kin-slayer, but as a slayer of a member of the social 'in-group' – as guardians of peace within the *city* (infra)."

³⁰³ μήτηρ γὰρ οὐτός ἐστιν ἢ μὲν ἐγένετο,
τὸ δ' ἄρσεν ἀνὼ πάντα (πλήν γάμου τυχεῖν)
ἄπαντι θυμῷ, κάρτα δ' εἰμι τοῦ πατρὸς.

³⁰⁴ Buxton (1982), 110-11: "Instead of curses, blessings are what the Furies, soon to be the Kindly Ones, are invited to heap upon the land of Attica; and best of those blessings is fruitfulness of earth and of man (907 ff.). The Furies retain their privilege, the punishment of

society's expectation of female virtue, including the bond of motherhood, to get what she wants. Aeschylus develops still more female figures to dominate the stage: first the Erinyes, embodying all that is frightful and horrible to see; secondly Athena, who represents the proper embodiment of masculine honour in a feminine body. For Aeschylus could not create a single character that could represent Clytemnestra in full. The Erinyes represent the darkness of her character, despicable and painful to look upon. The god-goddess Athena illustrates the ideal of feminine honour to which Clytemnestra aspired; they also shared the skill of persuasion, that aided them in their goals. The Erinyes demonstrated how badly Clytemnestra had strayed from her original path of honour, as they howled for blood and vengeance and would barely listen to reason. As they become the Eumenides, they demonstrate not only the power of Athena's persuasive reasoning and argument, they also indicate the futility of Clytemnestra's quest for honour by showing how simply an appeasement and a promise of new respect turned them to become supporters of the proper order of society.

wrongdoers (cf. esp. 932-7), but it is the *charis* they offer which receives all Aeschylus' emphasis and most of his poetry."

Conclusions

The virtues of a wife and mother are to stay with the children, look after the *oikos*, be faithful to her husband and marriage, and to be aware of public report and opinion. To fall short in any of these is to damage the rest in a domino effect. This failure is reported to and by the people, for a woman's audience of virtue was the same as her husband's audience of honour. This same audience decides whether the behaviour of a woman is virtuous or otherwise, and how this report of her should reflect onto her husband and his honour. As established earlier in this thesis, a woman's virtue (both her physical chastity and her domestic behaviour) can affect her husband's honour; if she is a good wife (like Penelope, she follows the list of virtues), she will enhance the public reputation of her husband. Should she stray from the list of virtues, she brings dishonour to her husband, and his reputation is damaged for having a bad wife (like Helen, for being unfaithful, or Clytemnestra, for killing her husband).

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated how not only does a wife affect her husband's honour, but also how a husband can negatively affect his wife's virtue. A woman's virtue may be judged by her husband's audience, but she looks to her husband for praise and recognition of her virtue. If he does not acknowledge her virtuous behaviour, she is less motivated to be virtuous. If, like Agamemnon, he does something that contradicts a woman's virtue (killing a child), he effectively denies that she can be virtuous by destroying the very elements of virtue (she cannot be a mother without children, and she cannot protect that which is dead). When a woman fails in one aspect of virtue, all others are affected. If her husband is responsible for an act that leads to a failing

in her virtue, a woman would be confused as to how she should act.

Clytemnestra took this confusion one step further, and decided to punish Agamemnon for causing her failure in maternal virtue.³⁰⁵

The very definition of motherhood is a child, and the safe rearing and nurturing of that child. This is the first in the list of virtues, and is the prime motivation for marriage, fidelity and inheritance. To lose a child was a difficult experience for a family.³⁰⁶ Clytemnestra is angry that her firstborn was taken from her and killed; she is angry that her daughter's killer is the very man who accepted her as his own child, and chose to be father-protector for her. Instead he breaks his word and sacrifices her, rendering Clytemnestra's maternal virtue null and void. Agamemnon's action "insulted Clytemnestra in her status as a wife,"³⁰⁷ affecting the other aspects of wifely virtue in varying degrees. Because Clytemnestra lost one child, the people would always remember that sacrificial death, no matter what sort of mother she might be to her surviving children.

Whether a woman could exact revenge for damage done to, or a denial of the existence of, her virtue is a difficult issue; but Clytemnestra attempted it. What happens in the mind of a woman described as *androboulos* when that implicit regard is ripped away by the contrary action of her husband? For if she

³⁰⁵ Winnington-Ingram (1983), bundles all of Clytemnestra's motives for killing Agamemnon, 105: "[Clytemnestra] hated Agamemnon, not simply because he had killed her child, not because she loved Aegisthus, but out of a jealousy that was not jealousy of Chryseis or Cassandra, but of Agamemnon himself and his status as a man. For she herself is of manly temper, and the dominance of a man is abhorrent to her. Thus, when she kills her husband, it is not only an act of vengeance, but also a blow struck for her personal liberty."

³⁰⁶ Golden (1990), 90: "When all precautions [to prevent a young child's death] failed, parents' sorrow was often great. Xenocleia died of grief for her eight-year-old son. [IG2¹12335, about 360.] Other bereaved parents are said to have wished they'd never had children at all. [Pl. *Alcib.II* 142BC, Eur. *Rh.* 982, *Supp.* 786-793, 1087, 1091.]" Golden also contrasts the sacrifice of Iphigenia to the "self-sacrifice of Heracles' daughter," 96-97: "Contrast Demophon. Though aware that the death of a young girl is necessary to save the descendants of Heracles from Eurystheus' army, this king of Athens refuses; no one would willingly be so senseless as to give up children, who are very dear (Eur. *Hclid.* 408-414)." Cf. Herodotus, 6.27.2, and Thucydides, 7.29.5, for terrible deaths of children.

³⁰⁷ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 110.

no longer respects him, nor cares for him as the source of her reward for virtue, what then? Her own regard for the necessity of the virtue as a means to achieve and receive her reward was damaged. If he denies the only method by which a woman may obtain the good regard of her husband, she will no longer seek it. As with Achilles, who asked, ‘why do this, if my reward is to be removed from me?’ so with Clytemnestra.³⁰⁸ She was a mother to her children, regarding her husband as her protector and theirs; he guaranteed their safety when he accepted each child born as his own. After killing an innocent maiden, her own daughter, for the sake of a woman, her own sister, who did not acknowledge the necessity of feminine virtues, what was Clytemnestra to think?

Hereafter, Clytemnestra could not be a good mother, who cared for her children, because always she would have one missing; this would reflect badly on her abilities as a protecting mother. She makes no allowance for the fact that a divine order brought about the sacrifice; the goddess sent that demand to her husband, not to her. Agamemnon is held to blame for the event, and he must pay accordingly.³⁰⁹ She acts to eradicate the damage done to her virtue by redefining herself and thus her place in society, and by redefining her audience of virtue as her audience of honour. No longer will the audience’s judgement be reported in relation to her husband’s honour and how it is affected by her actions, for she would receive their assessment directly, should she have succeeded.

She was unable to convince the Chorus to treat her as an equal, and to regard her act of vengeance as honourable. Instead, they use her admission of

³⁰⁸ See O’Neill (1998), 226-7, for the literary connection between Achilles and Clytemnestra. Cf. also Zanker (1994) for his examination of Achilles and his honour.

³⁰⁹ As maintained by Grube’s theory (1970) of culpability in the face of divine command, 48. Beck (1975), summarizes Grube, 17: “For the Greeks there was no excuse for being swayed and, therefore, every person enjoyed freedom of will or was responsible and could be held responsible.”

agency in the murder to persecute Aigisthos and damage his honour: for he has used a woman to do his dirty work, making him too much a coward for honour. The Chorus immediately relegates Clytemnestra to her original place in society as merely a woman, after she came so close to achieving her goal. In order to keep the power of the ruling class and enjoy the privileges it brings, she becomes a diplomatic intermediary between the Elders and the easily-insulted Aigisthos; she will not be left out of the discussions of men. She has dismissed her own need to be a wife; her need for honour is greater.

Clytemnestra continues her high-profile role inside and outside the *oikos* in *Choephoroi*; she comes out of doors to make offers of *xenia* to strangers, and is part of the discussions of the state with the men. Although she is active as a leader, Clytemnestra has abandoned her role as a mother. She has estranged herself from her remaining children: she sent her son for fostering far from home, amounting to exile essentially, while her only living daughter remains at home, unwanted but under close restrictions that forbid her from lamenting her dead father, and also prevent her from marriage. The children now want her to suffer for her crime against their father; with as little regard for her as she harboured for them, they plot together for her death. Clytemnestra is still willing to alter her status and blur her roles whenever it is necessary, as it is when she faces a murderous Orestes. She repeatedly pleads for mercy and respect, for she is his mother. Electra has repudiated her, for she is not even a mother 'in name' (190), and Orestes has promised a god and his father that she will be punished. Clytemnestra's persuasion has failed to save her, and she dies at the hands of her estranged son. But something more diabolical arises to take her place, which has

all of her tenacity and none of her subtlety; the Erinyes take over Clytemnestra's path and they seek revenge.

Clytemnestra appears one last time, again to direct and control the action of her own fate. But this time, she cannot fight for herself, and she must give over her goals into the hands of another to accomplish. Still does her thirst for honour inform her every word: she instructs the Erinyes to avenge her death successfully, for she loses honour among the dead while she remains unavenged. They follow her goal as single-mindedly as she had, to their own failure in the end. The arguments led the Erinyes into a trap, allowing no escape. With only the ambition of Clytemnestra, but lacking in her rhetorical power of persuasion, the Erinyes cannot escape the net of arguments that are thrown about them. They are led by Orestes through their own examination of him to the question: "Do you deny your mother's blood?" Apollo then picks up that leading question and presents a biological metaphor of the order of society, with men as the progenitors and the head of the *oikos*, and women are only meant to store and manage what is given to them by men. The Erinyes cannot question the god's argument, for the judge of the trial is proof-positive that the female has nothing to do with procreation, and to question Apollo's theory is to question the very existence of Athena. They are trapped by this logic, and Orestes is acquitted.

In consolation, Athena has offered the Erinyes new titles, by which they would receive praise and glory as protectors of Athens. The Erinyes concede only after Athena continues to exercise her proficiency in persuasion (a small, and final, reminder of another of Clytemnestra's attributes); they leave Clytemnestra's quest for honour behind them, and accept new ones for

themselves. The woman who turned an *oikos* upside-down, killed a hero and tried to become a man is abandoned.

The complex details of the crimes in the first play are streamlined in the second play, allowing for other details to go ‘missing’ by the resolution of the third play. The atrocity of Iphigeneia’s sacrifice is recognized as horrible by the Chorus in the first play, and brings Agamemnon’s honour into question but he is not punished, because his audience understands that he was acting on the demand of a deity. By the *Choephoroi*, the unnecessary death of her sister is lamented by Electra, but the murderer is not named again. By the final play, the circumstances surrounding Iphigeneia’s death have completely faded from mention; there are only two deaths at the centre of the conflict, and to allow the particulars of the previous crimes (which were the catalysts for the actions that followed) would only confound the debate, and delay any sort of decision. As Iphigeneia’s significance fades, so does the significance of Clytemnestra’s virtue fade, until all that is left is a woman who killed a king, and a mother killed by her son. The agenda of the first play is forgotten, and the virtue of a woman – as well as her attempts to gain honour through action – no longer informs the action of the final plays. For her transgression from the accepted order of society in the first play, she is punished by death in the second, and she is punished again in the third with oblivion. The woman who sought honour and recognition is abandoned; as Justice is rewritten and served, her vengeance is negated. All she strived to achieve is undone, as the *oikos* is returned to its proper order and the dead are laid to rest.

It has been accepted that a woman’s virtuous behaviour reflects onto her husband’s honour, and her virtue (whether physical chastity or any other

element) is linked with his honourable reputation. A woman becomes the representative of the *oikos*, and her virtue represents the very heart of the home; if her virtue is compromised by her own action or that of an interloper, her husband's honour is damaged, for his reputation now bears the regard from his peers that he cannot protect his home and wife. By this same argument – that a woman's virtue affects a man's honour – a man must recognize that his actions (in the pursuit of honour) also affect the virtue of his wife. Should a husband neglect to acknowledge that an action done in the name of maintaining honour results in a sacrifice of his wife's virtue, he will have to suffer the consequences of the damage he has inflicted upon her virtue as much as she does. Agamemnon sacrificed his wife's maternal virtue in his pursuit of masculine honour. Aeschylus has dared to pose the question: what might happen if Clytemnestra sacrificed her husband's honour in retribution for his damage to her virtue?

Aeschylus has shown his audience the queen's systematic stripping away of the expected roles and behaviours of women. In his account of her story, Aeschylus has questioned the position of women in society, emphasizing the necessity of mutual regard and an awareness of the effects one spouse can have upon another. He has demonstrated the need for a man to consider his wife's virtue in the course of his actions, as much as she must consider her husband's honour in her own. Honour and virtue belong to men and women, and one can damage or elevate the other. Society will not recognize a woman as having honour, deeming it a perversion of the accepted order of society, as revealed by Clytemnestra's example throughout the action of the *Oresteia*.

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