

A G A M E M N O N

An Actor's Resource



A Dramaturgical Packet
By
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PRONUNCIATIONS

Aegean eh-GEE-uhn

Aegiplanctus eh-jih-PLANK-tuhs

Aegisthus eh-JISS-thuss

Agamemnon ag-uh-MEM-nahn

Arachne uh-RACK-nee

Argos AR-gohs

Asopus uh-SOH-pus

Athos ATH-ohs

Atreus AY-tree-uhs

Aulis AW-liss

Calchas KAL-kuss

Cassandra kuh-SAN-druh

Cithaeron SITH-er-on or sith-EER-on

Clytemnestra kly-tem-NESS-truh

Gorgopis

Hellas HELL-uhs

Hermes HER-meez

Iphigenia if-uh-jeh-NYE-uh

Leda LEE-duh

Lemnos LEHM-nuhs

Makistos muh-KISS-tohs

Menelaus men-uh-LAY-uhs

Messapian meh-SAPE-ee-uhn

Orestes or-ESS-teez

Orpheus OR-fee-uhs

Phocis FOE-siss

Priam PRY-am

Saronis suh-ROHN-iss

Scamander skuh-MAN-der

Strophius STROH-fee-uhs

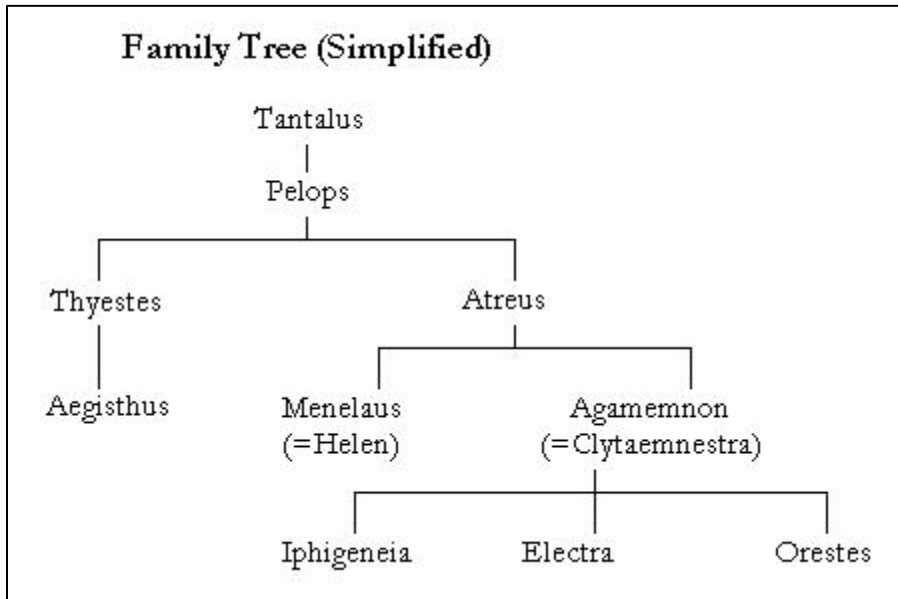
Tantalus TAN-tuh-luhs

Thyestes thigh-EHS-teez

***THE ORESTEIA* BY AESCHYLUS**

The Oresteia is the only surviving trilogy of tragedies from the Ancient Greek theatre tradition. It won first prize at the City Dionysia festival in Athens in 458 BC. It chronicles the events that end the curse of the House of Atreus. For the origin and course of the curse, see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atreus>.

The House of Atreus:



SYNOPSIS

Agamemnon details the homecoming of Agamemnon, King of Argos, from the Trojan War. Waiting at home for him is his wife, Clytemnestra, who has been planning his murder, partly as revenge for the sacrifice of their daughter, Iphigenia, and partly because in the ten years of Agamemnon's absence, Clytemnestra has entered into an adulterous relationship with Aegisthus, Agamemnon's cousin and the sole survivor of a dispossessed branch of the family, who is determined to regain the throne he believes should rightfully belong to him.

The Libation Bearers is the second play of the *Oresteia*. It deals with the reunion of Agamemnon's children, Electra and Orestes, and their revenge. Orestes kills Clytemnestra to avenge the death of Agamemnon, Orestes' father.

The Eumenides (also known as *The Kindly Ones*) is the final play of the *Oresteia*, in which Orestes, Apollo, and the Erinyes go before Athena and eleven other judges chosen by her from the Athenian citizenry at the Areopagus to decide whether Orestes is guilty of the murder of Clytemnestra, or pardoned for avenging her act of regicide.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GREEK JUSTICE

Only forty years before *The Oresteia* was first performed, one of the first known democracies was formed in Athens. The Athenian Democracy model is known as a “direct democracy,” which features wide-scale voting participation by the public at large (rather than relying on elected officials). The system was stable and effective and served as a model for many other Greek city-states.

The law courts of the Athenian Democracy relied on a jury system. The jury courts were large, consisting of 200 to 1500 members. A lottery from a pool of 6,000 jurors ensured that there would be a wide range of social classes on any given jury.

Competing Models of Greek Justice

According to Tom Drake at the University of Idaho, *The Oresteia* outlines three increasingly evolved/advanced models of Greek justice.

1) *The Agamemnon*

Fate: Tragic house of Atreus. Children’s behaviors are the results of their grandparents’ travesties. We cannot escape the tragic cycle and must fulfill it, even as it destroys us and those whom we love.

Justice: Aeschylus suggests that if we are willing to see Clytemnestra's side of the story, we should be willing to see Agamemnon's, and if we can see theirs, we must also accept Orestes'. In short, there can really be no justice using this model because each perspective cancels or calls into play all the others.

2) *The Libation Bearers*

Fate: We now begin to suspect that so long as we give into black/white laws, the cycle will never end. Apollo orders Orestes to kill his mother; he must violate the same taboo (murder, especially of a family member, especially of a parent) in order to punish the violation of that taboo.

Justice: Aeschylus shows us that this simplistic, ancient, black/white personal/instinctual vision of justice destroys social order, including those who *commit* the retribution (Orestes) and also the community.

3) *The Eumenides*

Justice: Justice must serve ALL INVESTED PARTIES. Retribution is a small measure of “Justice” The city learns to live with new, democratic law; justice will be determined by the people because a) it affects them, and b) only they can step outside of the perspective of the invested parties to deliver justice that is impartial and fair.

MILITARY HOMECOMINGS: EMOTIONAL TRUTHS FOR VETERANS & THEIR FAMILIES

Military Homecoming Montages

There is no denying the powerful emotions felt by returning veterans and their families.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZhZCSM3mXk>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzCaA6IazFA>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOBdPnJPevw>

Assimilation into Society: The Realities of PTSD

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can affect anyone who has come into contact with a traumatic event, defined by the American Psychological Association as:

“Direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one’s physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate.” –DSM-IV-TR, pg. 463.

Individuals diagnosed with PTSD may exhibit the following symptoms: intrusive recollection of the traumatic event, avoidance of stimuli, numbing of responsiveness, or hyper-arousal, leading to a decreased ability to function in daily life.

Brothers

We may sneer at the dramatic Hollywood treatment, but situations like these (and worse) are a reality for many veterans:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xYyCCjLpZs>

NPR Author Interview

Pulitzer Prize-Winner David Finkel’s *Thank You For Your Service* follows the lives of veterans with whom Finkel was embedded in Iraq as they return home.

<http://www.npr.org/2013/10/01/224493078/thank-you-for-your-service-follows-americas-soldiers-home>

Words After War

Words After War is dedicated to building a community of thoughtful, engaged, and skilled veteran writers. Through high-quality literary programming, we provide veterans, their families and civilian supporters with the tools they need to tell their stories.

<http://wordsafterwar.org>

Veteran Voices of Pittsburgh

Veteran Voices of Pittsburgh’s mission is to preserve and share the voices, images, and experiences of Pittsburgh are veterans of all branches of service and eras, including peach and war-time service.

<http://veteranvoicesofpittsburgh.com/>

SYBILS, ORACLES, AND RAPE AS A WEAPON OF WAR

DEFINITION:

Sybil

An honorary title for any one of ten historical women in ancient Greece and Rome believed to be oracles or prophetesses:

“The Sibyl, with frenzied mouth uttering things not to be laughed at, unadorned and unperfumed, yet reaches to a thousand years with her voice by aid of the god.” Heraclitus, 5th c. BC

While the character of Cassandra is not considered one of these ten historical Sybils, she has been granted a similar gift of prophecy and embodies the specific qualities found within the Prophetess Archetype:

“You are possessed by the gods. The gods speak through you. You have no choice. You are the Oracle. You are a vessel for the strange sounds of the gods. You are connected to blood, to the moon, and to strange riddles. For those who consult you, it is up to them to decipher the meaning of what you tell them. You have no control over what sounds come out of your mouth. The gods speak through you unbidden, unwilled, and they leave as quickly as they come. The sounds that come out of your mouth are not words, but nonsense rhymes and sounds that the listener must decipher.” Frankie Armstrong, *Acting & Singing with Archetypes*, 2009

“How did rape become a weapon of war?”

News article by Laura Smith-Spark.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4078677.stm>

Women, War & Peace

A five-part special series on PBS. “I Came to Testify” tells the story of 16 women in the Balkans whose testimonies helped an international court to legally define war-time rape as a punishable crime.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace/full-episodes/i-came-to-testify/>

“Lives Blown Apart”

Amnesty International’s report on crimes against women during wartime. 2004.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ACT77/075/2004/en/944d7605-d57f-11dd-bb24-1fb85fe8fa05/act770752004en.pdf>

CONTRIBUTE TO OUR WORDPRESS

Dramaturgical resources can be found virtually anywhere, but no matter what form the resource takes, its content should enrich the artistic vision of the production. I have created a WordPress blog for everyone's use to help expand and intensify our experience with *Agamemnon*.

WordPress entries can contain any material that you feel will help to unlock moments in the play for your fellow production members. This can include historical or anachronistic, literal or abstract material; visual or aural imagery such as paintings, photographs, advertisements, music, sound effects; or articles and interviews that illuminate moments or characters in the play.

Check the blog at least once daily, and try to contribute as often as you can. Remember that a picture is worth a thousand words, and something you found during a simple Google image search could open up someone else's understanding of the play in dramatic ways.

WordPress login information:

Website: www.agamemnon14.wordpress.com

Username: agamemnon14

Password: Agamemnon14!