Agamemnon Essay, Research Paper

In Agamemnon by Aeschylus, Clytaemnestra is the character with the majority of the power because of her ability to manipulate the other characters. She is not influenced or swayed by Aegisthus to murder her husband. She kills to gain justice for her daughter s death, as she feels their law justifies her acts. Clytaemnestra manipulates the other characters into believing that she is weak, she toys with the other characters to further empower herself. In her mind, it is a benefit that she will gain more power over the kingdom and retain her concubine, Aegisthus. From the beginning, Clytaemnestra was a woman with power. Her first action in Agamemnon was to command. She was later described by the chorus of elderly men as growing strong in her house, with no fear of the husband. (Line 151-152) The Chorus looked to her for guidance and protection, alluding to her as their lone defender, single-minded queen. (Line 257-258) Her power was recognized by the Chorus, We ve come, Clytaemnestra. We respect your power. Right it is to honor the warlord s woman one he leaves the throne. (Lines 258-261) This line immediately sets up the fact that Clytaemnestra has gained power in Argos during Agamemnon s absence.

It is in this first address to Clytaemnestra that we learn that power is a main aspect of her. When Clytaemnestra explains that she is lighting the alters because the war against Troy is over, which she knows because of the torch signals, she says that they are her proof, my burning sign the power my lord passed on from Troy to me! (Line 318-319) This is one of the many examples of how Clytaemnestra was not given proper credit for her resourcefulness, and how her subjects sometimes looked down upon her. These feelings come from the customs of the culture where women were looked upon as inferior to men. Even the chorus, though it claims it respects her, mocks her behind her back. Thus, most characters in this play display different facades for the surrounding audience of people. Even though the Chorus did not initially believe her report about the victory at Troy, this does not compromise the respect and fear they feel for their queen. They justify their disbelief the easiest way they can, with the notion that women are easily swayed by gossip. Clearly, it was more their doubts about believing victory had come after ten years, rather than just their mistrust of woman that led them to their doubt.

This is not to say that women were seen as equals to men, but her situation does not appear as bad as it was described. Clytaemnestra is not only seen as powerful in this encounter, but full of self-command (line 355) It is this description of her that compliments the knowledge that it is her evil scheming that leads to the murder of Agamemnon. Aeschylus sets up a very self-driven woman who prospers on her position of power. In Agamemnon , the power that Clytaemnestra held was rooted in her desire to murder her husband in revenge for her daughter s sacrifice. Law bound her to avenge her daughter s death. Aeschylus created a character that became overwhelmed with hatred for another. After this initial view of Clytaemnestra is made, Aeschylus starts to complicate her character in an address to the chorus. She says of Agamemnon, and for his wife, may his return and find her true at hall, just as the day he left her, faithful to the last. (Lines 601-603) The irony of this statement is that she has a concubine, Aegisthus, which the chorus knows about, so her statement is known as a lie. She does not have faithful emotions towards her husband, but feelings of revenge and hatred. Thus, when she also sees that Agamemnon has a concubine, Cassandra, this further enrages her to seek revenge on her husband.

Clytaemnestra was willing to do anything to follow through on the murder of her husband. The murder has become her life, and later in the play, her death. Thus, she openly lied to the Chorus when claiming that she was a faithful and loving wife who had not changed since Agamemnon s departure. (Line 603) She also puts on a front when Agamemnon returns, playing the role of a helpless wife, lonely for her husband. Clytaemnestra s character changes from being the bold leader of the house, to an adoring wife. She says, I am not ashamed to tell you how I love the man. (Lines 832-843) This is such a contradictory statement compared to her real feelings for Agamemnon, which are of hatred and disgust. She is putting on a facade to hide her real motives. Her power lies in the ability to manipulate Agamemnon, without him realizing it. She becomes both deadly, but very cautious not to get caught. In this way, Aeschylus creates a woman very aware of the way she portrays herself.

The parts of Agamemnon, where she did reveal her true feelings came when she talked about her children, And so our child is gone, not standing by our side, the bond of our dearest pledges, mine and yours, by all rights our child should be here. (Lines 864-866) While she is most likely talking about Orestes, it seems to be that these lines have meaning on several levels. Not only was she informing her husband of their son s whereabouts, she also seemed to mourn over the death of Iphigeneia. Further, she suggests that the exile of Orestes was her husband s fault, saying, You risk all [for] the wars. (Line 872) It is in these few lines that Aeschylus presents the weakness of Clytaemnestra, her inability to protect her children and her anger because she cannot. Agamemnon gives up his last amount of power when Clytaemnestra convinces him to walk into his house on the crimson paintings, probably foreshadowing his blood at his death.

Clytaemnestra justified her murder to the Chorus, it was clear that she felt no shame or regret for him. She claimed complete responsibility for the crime, saying, I did it all. I don t deny it, no. (Line 1400-1401) She felt happy in murdering her husband because the act represented her life focus. In her mind, she fulfilled her life s destiny and duty. Clytaemnestra called herself the ancient spirit of revenge. (Line1529-1530) In her mind, she has set things straight by killing Agamemnon. In her words, it was an act for act, wound for wound. (Line 1555) To her, it was a justified and deserved murder. She was not influenced by sympathy for Agamemnon, she was confident in her decision. She says to the chorus, you try me like some desperate woman. My heart is steel, well you know. (Lines 1426-1427)

In Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra was clearly not influenced by Aegisthus, however, she did she take an inactive role in the murder. Clytaemnestra does take the action of murder, but she stabs Agamemnon s back, which displays the murderess as deceitful and full of trickery, killing a man who was unaware. In terms of Clytaemnestra s relationship with Aegisthus, Clytaemnestra clearly is equal, if not more powerful. Though Aegisthus claimed he planned Agamemnon s death, he had no active part in the actual murder. Clytaemnestra is the one who obtains justice in this play. Although Aegisthus presents himself as the ruler of Argos, Clytaemnestra was the one who discouraged him from killing the men of Chorus by saying, No more, my dearest, no more grief. We have too much to reap, right here, our mighty harvest of despair. Our lives are based on pain. No bloodshed now. (Line 1687-1891) At this point you can see Clytaemnestra s transformation from an intense woman driven by a desire for vengeance to a more relaxed character as her life is complete with the death of Agamemnon. Aeschylus Clytaemnestra was a woman who was driven by the desires of her revenge. In her mind, she was now driven by the act of vengeance. Murder, to her, was not a horrific act, but she felt it was her duty. This is not to say Clytaemnestra was almost inhuman because of her quest for vengeance. She did have one very humanizing feature, the love she had for her children. Whether Clytaemnestra is seen as the murderer of Agamemnon or merely a helper, her character surfaces though her handling of this event. She is powerful and cunning. She is a character driven by power and revenge with the need to get what she desires, no matter what act she must perform.