

## The Power Dynamics between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon through shared animal imagery in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

This paper proposes a fresh examination of the power dynamics between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* by analyzing the shared animal imagery, particularly the recurring dog metaphor, and how it highlights their equality. While most scholarship interprets Clytemnestra as subverting traditional gender roles (Zeitlin 1978, 1996), this study argues that Aeschylus presents Clytemnestra and Agamemnon as equals in their power struggle, connected through a nuanced use of identical metaphorical language.

The analysis begins with Clytemnestra's self-identification as a "faithful dog" (lines 606-607), a term that positions her as both the protector of the household (*oikos*) and as someone with control over the domestic sphere. Later, Agamemnon is described similarly, as the "watchdog of the house" (line 896), illustrating his role as the returning ruler and defender of the home. This shared dog imagery does more than reinforce stereotypical gender roles (Foley 2001); it establishes a dynamic of equality, where both characters function as protectors, dominators, and aggressors within their own spheres.

Further supporting this argument, this paper compares Aeschylus' use of animal metaphors to other instances in ancient Greek literature, such as the lion imagery used to depict powerful warriors in Homer's *Iliad*. While shared animal metaphors in these works often highlight opposition or ultimate victory, Aeschylus' phraseology in *Agamemnon* subtly constructs a balance of power. Both Clytemnestra and Agamemnon are positioned as equally capable of dominance—within the home, in the political sphere, and ultimately, in their confrontation. This shared metaphor evolves as the play progresses, reflecting their parallel trajectories of control, deception, and violence.

Cassandra's later use of the dog metaphor to describe Clytemnestra as a "dog with a hateful tongue" (lines 1228-1230) further develops the metaphor by transforming it into a symbol of savagery and betrayal (McClure 1999). Yet, even in its negative connotation, it underscores Clytemnestra's equal capacity for aggression and power—traits that Agamemnon himself exhibits as a ruler and conqueror.

By focusing on the evolution of the dog metaphor and its shared application to both protagonists, this paper provides a deeper understanding of how Aeschylus constructs equality in power through shared imagery. This approach challenges more conventional readings that emphasize subversion and highlights Aeschylus' sophisticated handling of gender, authority, and rivalry in one of his most complex tragedies (Goldhill 1992). Ultimately, this analysis suggests that Aeschylus invites the audience to recognize Clytemnestra and Agamemnon as equals in their shared pursuit of dominance, making their eventual downfall a reflection of their equal footing in both power and tragedy.

### Bibliography

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