

Agamemnon, Chryseis, and the Politics of Abuse: Violation of Women and Gods
in *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018)

Although Agamemnon's captive Chryseis never speaks and barely appears in Homer's *Iliad*, she plays a pivotal role in the plot. When Agamemnon refuses her father Chryses' ransom, the priest's prayers to Apollo result in the plague which devastates the Greek army. Spurred by Hera, Achilles addresses an assembly concerning the issue, leading to Chryseis' return, Agamemnon's taking of Achilles' captive Briseis, and ultimately Achilles' withdrawal from the fighting. Yet Chryseis' screen text history is minimal. She briefly appears in the 1962 Italian film *Fury of Achilles*, spared mistreatment by Agamemnon and doing little, while she is one of many female characters conflated with Briseis in 2004's *Troy*, reflected in Briseis' position as Apollo's priestess. The BBC/Netflix limited series *Troy: Fall of a City* more prominently features Chryseis, first presented as silently assisting her father Chryses, in his capacity as Apollo's priest, in Cilicia in Episodes 3 ("Siege") and 4 ("Spoils of War"), then more importantly as Agamemnon's captive in Episode 4. I read Chryseis' inclusion against the *Iliad*, Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia in Episode 2 ("Conditions"), and Achilles' treatment of Briseis in Episode 4 to illustrate how she highlights Agamemnon's abusive, violent, or disrespectful behavior toward women, the gods, and fellow Greeks, especially Achilles.

Episode 3 emphasizes the religious context and establishes the pre-Iliadic background for Chryseis. Although she neither speaks nor is named, she is among the Cilicians praying to Apollo when Hector and Paris arrive to solicit help from Andromache's father Eetion. Eetion asks "High Priest Chryses" to bless Paris and Hector, which he does, with Chryseis by his side. In Episode 4, moments before Achilles' raid on Cilicia, she stands by Chryses, performing rituals

accompanying the prayers to feed the Trojans. When the raid begins, her first word of the series, “Father”, establishes her identity and is followed by her capture by the Greeks.

In contrast to the *Iliad*, Agamemnon chooses Chryseis for himself, prefacing his selection with “You’re not her,” and against the objection that “She’s the priest’s daughter,” establishing her as a substitute for Iphigenia (unlike the *Iliad* where he equated her with Clytemnestra) and his choice as a violation of the gods. The longest scene between them reiterates Agamemnon’s obsession with his loss and need for forgiveness as he projects his guilt over his daughter’s death onto Chryseis. When she refuses and exclaims “I thank the gods that you are no father of mine,” Agamemnon brutally rapes her. Her subsequent response “Apollo sees everything. He will punish you” shifts the Iliadic Apollo’s plague from Agamemnon dishonoring Chryses to sexually violating Chryseis, with no prayer or supplication necessary to initiate the devastating plague; as she notes to Agamemnon, it is unnecessary for her father to “fight” for her. Agamemnon’s repeated violation of Chryseis (never shown, but indicated by her screams) also positions her as a possible Helen substitute, who, Agamemnon told Menelaus, “needs to answer to me too,” since he holds her responsible for Iphigenia’s death.

Chryseis’ narrative further parallels and reverses the sacrifice of Iphigenia. There, Agamemnon’s disregarding proper rituals offended Artemis, leading to adverse winds, with violence done to a woman as remedy, an action encouraged by Odysseus since “Your men will not follow a king the gods have abandoned.” Here, violence to a woman leads to Apollo’s offense, manifested in the plague, with Agamemnon suffering another loss of a woman to appease the deity; as the priest Litos explains to Odysseus regarding Agamemnon’s violation of a woman and god, “A single king has the power to damn a nation.” Agamemnon’s impatience with

the lack of success (and thus justice) for killing Iphigenia leads him to believe he can do whatever he wants with impunity, including his religious impiety and violation of Chryseis.

Their interaction also contrasts with Achilles' kindly treatment of Briseis, to whom he shows concern and respect; he saved her since he believed she "deserved to live." Even when she threatens Patroclus' life, Achilles remains calm, with a simple veiled threat. Once the plague strikes Achilles personally (Patroclus) and Briseis tells him the only remedy is Agamemnon's return of Chryseis, Achilles quickly, succinctly, and unlike the *Iliad*, privately orders Agamemnon to return his plaything to save the men.

Their conflicting beliefs about women and honor lead to their Iliadic quarrel. As Agamemnon attempts to reassert his kingly power and position, his view of an exchange for having to surrender "something precious" for Achilles (Chryseis' return saves Patroclus' life) recasts her as Iphigenia, drives him to seek compensation via Briseis (whom he treats disrespectfully and ultimately loses too), and personalizes and problematizes the situation as Agamemnon's continued violation of women and gods leads to Achilles' withdrawal from the fighting.