

"A Second Tripled-Bodied Geryon": Gendered Bodies and the Rhetoric of Vengeance  
in *Agamemnon* 863-74

In the early part of her *ἀγών* with Agamemnon, Clytemnestra employs a vivid metaphor to illustrate the various tales of Agamemnon's many reported deaths:

εἰ δ' ἦν τεθνηκῶς ὡς ἐπλήθυσον λόγοι  
[πολλὴν ἄνωθεν, τὴν κάτω γὰρ οὐ λέγω]  
τρисώματός τ' ἂν Γηρυῶν ὁ δεύτερος  
χθονὸς τρίμοιρον χλαῖναν ἐξηύχει λαβῶν,  
ἅπαξ ἐκάστωι κατθανὼν μορφώματι.

And if he had died, as the reports were spreading,  
[a lot on top, for I don't speak of that below],  
he would have boasted [to be] tripled bodied, a second Geryon,  
taking on a tri-fold cloak of earth, having died once for each form.  
(*Agamemnon* 869-73)

In the immediate context of her description, Clytemnestra appears as a concerned wife, dealing with anxiety about her husband, who is exposed daily to the vulnerability of the battlefield. The grotesque and shocking nature of the image looks back to a repeatedly punctured body (καὶ τραυμάτων μὲν εἰ τόσων ἐτυγγανεν/.../τέτρηται δικτύου πλέω λέγειν [Ag. 866 and 868]) and seemingly provokes pity for Clytemnestra with Agamemnon envisioned as the monster Geryon, slain by Heracles and wrapped up in shrouds of earth each time a messenger returns with a new, gruesome story. Though the metaphor has received some comment (e.g. Fraenkel

1950; Denniston and Page 1957; Raeburn and Oliver 2011), its full importance to the play has yet to be explained. This paper examines how the Geryon allusion characterizes Clytemnestra as Heracles and therefore makes Agamemnon's body (or that of Geryon) central to the interpretation of gender, rhetoric, and vengeance in the play (Goldhill 1985; Foley 2001; Cawthorn 2008; Raeburn and Thomas 2011). Ultimately through the metaphor, Clytemnestra shows her intentions to murder Agamemnon and envisions her capacity for masculine κλέος through vengeance as a Heraclean ἔργον (Ag. 1405-6).

I first argue that it would be more natural to associate Agamemnon with Heracles, especially because they have similar narratives structurally: they both sack Troy, murder family members, and die – at least partially – at the hands of their wives. However, it is Clytemnestra who assumes a Heraclean role in the *Agamemnon*, while Agamemnon is relegated, in the metaphor through foreshadowing, to the role of vanquished foe. Therefore, my argument hinges on two corpses, Geryon and Agamemnon, and two martial conquerors, Heracles and Clytemnestra.

As a γυνή who holds an ἀνδρόβουλον κῆρ (Ag. 11), Clytemnestra appropriates masculine space within the πόλις, οἶκος, (e.g. Ag. 11; 931-44; 1344), and ἀγών (e.g. Ag. 940-43; 1421-25; 1497-1512; cf. Larmour 1999; Wolfe 2009; Raeburn and Thomas 2011). She achieves κλέος most obviously through her use of language (e.g. Ag. 264-350, 931-44, 1299-1314, 1394; cf. Larmour 1999). However, she manifests a physical inversion of κλέος when she stands triumphantly over Agamemnon's body (Ag. 1379-80, 84-5; Foley 2001). Clytemnestra places herself in the role of Heracles precisely through a 'masculine' κλέος achieved in decidedly male arenas. Retroactively, the slain triple-bodies take on new meaning in a literal 'cloak and dagger' trick as she replaces bodies with wounds and shrouds with nets and strikes Agamemnon three

times (Ag. 1384-86).

In contrast, I next focus on Agamemnon's body as a mirror of the slain Geryon. Agamemnon has left the context of the ἀγών/battle where he was most vulnerable (and yet capable of male κλέος; see Larmour 1999; Cawthorn 2008), to occupy a space where his body should be safe and reintegrated into the domains of the domestic and political. Instead his body becomes feminized through loss of control and the explicit image of successive penetration (Cawthorn 2008).

Finally, I revisit Clytemnestra's use of Geryon to anticipate the dualities of corpses and victors, collectively emphasizing Agamemnon's shame and her own Heracleian victory as a warrior and avenger (Ag. 1421-25; 1497-1512). As her own rhetoric has it, she spoke καίριως (Ag. 1372; cf. 1292) earlier in the play. Therefore the allusion to Heracles-Geryon and the interpretation I put forward in this paper should be regarded as another part of Clytemnestra's subtle rhetoric of vengeance.

#### Bibliography:

Cawthorn, Katrina. 2008. *Becoming Female: The Male Body in Greek Tragedy*.

London: Duckworth.

Denniston, J. D., and D. Page, eds. 1957. *Agamemnon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Foley, Helene P. 2001. *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fraenkel, Edward, ed. 1950. *Agamemnon*. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Goldhill, Simon. 1986. *Reading Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Larmour, David H. J. 1999. *Stage and Stadium: Drama and Athletics in Ancient Greece*.

Hildesheim, DE: Weidmann.

Raeburn, David, and Oliver Thomas. 2011. *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus*. Oxford:

Oxford University Press.

Wolfe, Rachel M. E. 2009. "Woman, Tyrant, Mother, Murderess: An Exploration of

The Mythic Character of Clytemnestra in all Her Forms." *Women's Studies: An Inter-disciplinary Journal*, 38.6: 692-719.