

## Clytemnestra's Silent Movements

This paper revisits the ambiguity of when Clytemnestra enters the acting area during Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and how long she remains there. As Oliver Taplin observed (1977: 280), "The movements of Clytemnestra in *Ag(amemnon)* are notoriously problematic." Does she enter during the parodos when the chorus addresses her and then remains until her first speech, and beyond; does she enter then and exit before the parodos ends; or does she not enter until her first full speech, then establishing a pattern that she only enters immediately before each speech, which would entail that she does not enter at Agamemnon's arrival until she addresses him? Despite the persistent common belief that entrances in tragedy are normally announced, Hamilton (1978: 64) pointed out that the absence of an announcement is as frequent as its presence and, moreover, (65) that Aeschylean entrances are problematic, with notifications generally restricted to servants, with royalty rarely so.

Thus, first, I shall consider the relative scholarly neglect of her whereabouts, after Taplin (1972a: 89–94) blankly dismissed, almost 50 years ago, Denniston and Page's argument (1957: 117) that she is on stage between lines 40 and 1068—in other words, for an enormous part of the play. While Denniston and Page surely erred in positing this scale (likely influenced by the later *Medea*), I also find that Taplin's reasoning is shaky, if not overly subjective.

I then turn to translations of the play in which significant Aeschylean scholars have played a role. These translations do not agree whether Clytemnestra silently enters before line 83 (e.g. Lattimore, even in the revision by Griffith and Most) during the parodos and remains onstage, still silent, for an uncertain length of time, or whether she only enters at line 258 for the first episode (e.g. Meineck). They are more widely split as to when, precisely, she enters during the carpet scene.

The recent commentary by Raeburn and Thomas (2011) suggests her presence during the parodos would “wreck the audience’s attention which Aeschylus’ songs presuppose.” I have more faith in the audience’s attention than Raeburn and Thomas, a confidence I base on another scene in the play wherein a significant female character stands silently for an extended period of time before speaking: Cassandra. Indeed, I shall argue that the visual tableau of the silent Clytemnestra—both in the parodos and at the opening of the great “carpet scene”—is parallel to and a preparation for that of the silent Cassandra. Thus, I counter Taplin’s argument (1972a: 90) that “[t]here is no real dramatic gain in Clytemnestra’s unexplained silence,” by deploying the concept of the mirror scene, which Taplin himself pioneered in first in *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (1977: 99–103) and in *Greek Tragedy in Action* (2003: 91–103).

#### Bibliography

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