

A guilty or innocent
way: a look at
clytemnestra's
actions essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When a person is accused of a crime they are either found innocent or guilty. This is the basic idea of justice and it is what many feel needs to happen if someone has done something controversial. In the play *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus, the story of Clytemnestra guilt or innocents is questioned. She does many things that people are not too happy with and those controversial actions throughout the story, mainly in the first part Agamemnon get her into the trouble.

As we explore the case that builds against her innocents by exploring the killings of Agamemnon and Cassandra and the boastful expression about the killings. This action causes a great deal of rage in Clytemnestra. One could very well understand why she would act this way. Clytemnestra see's the killing of her daughter as just being killed for her husband's gain. She also feels that he could have chosen a different virgin to sacrifice. One the other hand, if one looks at Agamemnon's problem they could be otherwise.

Agamemnon was the general of his army and the leader that his men looked up to. So when the profit came to him saying I will give you wind for a virgin sacrifice he took it as sacrificing someone close to him. He thought along the lines that he was asked for a reason to be the one doing the actual sacrifice. So Agamemnon chooses his daughter the virgin and sacrificed her with good judgment for what was best for the army.

The issue is that Clytemnestra does not see it this way and that is what causes the future events that make us to question her innocence.

Agamemnon is the husband of Clytemnestra, father of three and the leading General in the Trojan War. The Prophet Calchas approach Agamemnon and

tells him that the sacrifice of a virgin will send wind to allow his troop's ships to get off to battle. Agamemnon decides to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, to get the wind needed to go to battle. Iphigenia does not realize what is happening to her until it is too late. Although she tries to escape her fate, she still is given to Calchas as the virgin sacrifice.

Clytemnestra has the ten years of the Trojan War to plan her revenge on Agamemnon. Upon his return Clytemnestra shows him some love. That love she showed quickly changes to rage and hatred when Clytemnestra she's Agamemnon with his mistress Cassandra. Even though Clytemnestra had planned the murder of her husband now she had another victim.

Clytemnestra spends time with him and acts as if she is happy and in love.

She then puts him in a robe and takes him to the bath. Clytemnestra then gives three swings with an ax in order to kill Agamemnon. Clytemnestra also plans to kill Cassandra so she calls in Cassandra. Cassandra knows that is she will be killed upon entering the house, but after some self deliberation she goes in anyway. So with the same ax that killed Agamemnon, Cassandra is now killed. Both of these acts are considered murder because the killing of another person is murder and murder is illegal.

Now there are a few exceptions to this rule. If one looks at the case of Agamemnon killing Iphigenia, that was for a sacrifice that the Gods asked for. Although this can be seen as murder in the long run it really is not the same as the kind of murder that Clytemnestra committed. She had pre-meditated murder. There was the reasoning of revenge behind the whole idea of killing Agamemnon and Cassandra.

A defense that Clytemnestra could use is the idea of blood vengeance. The idea of this is killing someone in your blood line for vengeance is accepted. The issue with this is that Agamemnon was not in Clytemnestra's blood line, they were married. Marriage bonds are not nearly as strong as blood bonds. This comes up later on in the story when Orestes kills Clytemnestra.

This is more accepted because it is in the blood line. The killing of Cassandra was not exactly in Clytemnestra's original plan. When Clytemnestra saw Cassandra she was filled with rage, for the simple fact that this woman had taken to bed her husband. One might argue that Clytemnestra did not really mean to kill Cassandra, it is just she was simply blinded by rage and hatred.

But Clytemnestra called Cassandra in the house for the reason of killing her. So rage or not she still thought about killing her before she did it. By rethinking the murder she can't use the excuse of rage or hatred. The plotting of the murder of Agamemnon was a well thought out and well executed plan. Clytemnestra spent ten years thinking about killing him. For that reason alone Clytemnestra is guilty.

She tells the Chorus, " I say you will see Agamemnon Dead...No words heal this" (1245-1247). She then continues on to discuss more of the thought of killing her husband with the Chorus. With the two dead Clytemnestra takes the two bodies out front of her home and displays the bodies. It is here that she then tells the story of how she killed the two. She goes into great detail about the blows she gave to Agamemnon and the way he screamed (1384). She says " I'm not ashamed to speak openly" (1373).

She goes on to tell that she is proud of what she has done and does not feel bad about it. In line 1380 Clytemnestra says, " This is my work, I do not deny it," this shows that she knew exactly what she did. If one combines what she is saying in lines 1373 and 1380 she is speaking openly that she did and she does not care about what she has done. The manner in which she talks about the murders, she sounds proud. Someone who is innocent does not talk in a proud manner about what they have done. If one feels that they are innocent they tend to be sorry about what they do.

Clytemnestra is not sorry about what she has done. Clytemnestra was a person of great guilt. She goes through the story plotting the death of her husband, committing the murder, and then discussing what she did. These are not the actions of an innocent person. Through the actions Clytemnestra commits she proves time and time again that she is guilty of the crimes she commits.

For the actions she had her death was coming to her. She seems to have gotten exactly what she deserved.