

CLYTEMNESTRA AND THE WOMEN:
How Clytemnestra challenges the gender
norms of Homeric literature.

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In Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, the character of Clytemnestra consistently confronts the gender-norms of Homeric literature. Her man-like behaviour is noted by the townsmen of Argos, and eventually culminates in the slaying of her husband Agamemnon, on his return back from Troy. Clytemnestra's remorseless speech and audacious actions is contrasted with the meek deliberations of the Argive townsmen, who falter at the screams of their king. This essay seeks to examine how Clytemnestra's pursuit of justice requires a subversion of her role as a woman in the norms of Homeric literature, and how by righting the sacrifice of Iphigenia through the mete of blood, Clytemnestra acts in the role of the (male) Homeric hero instead.

In order to begin an examination of Clytemnestra, and how her actions challenge the gender-norms of Homeric literature, it is important to have an clear understanding of what these norms are in the first place. A gender norm is a set of behaviours and attitudes considered appropriate or acceptable for a given gender. Such norms naturally differ throughout history and culture, and it would be anachronistic for modern-day gender-norms to be used as a baseline of comparison. Likewise, it would be fallacious for one to speak about the gender norms of “Ancient Greece” — for as Herodotus can attest, the cultures of the Mediterranean are diverse and heterogenous. This is why, the distinction of “Homeric literature” is made. For *Agamemnon* is a play set within the framing context of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* — stories from the proverbial ‘Age of Heroes’. Therefore, by examining *Agamemnon*, as well as the *Iliad* and the *Odyessy*, we can establish a baseline of what these norms are — as well as how Clytemnestra breaks them in *Agamemnon*.