CASSANDRA – FEMININE CORRECTIVE IN AESCHYLUS'S AGAMEMNON

Andrea Doyle
University of Johannesburg

ABSTRACT

In Aeschylus’s Agamemnon the representation of Cassandra recalls Iphigenia and contrasts with Clytemnestra. The uneasy relationship between Cassandra and Apollo seems to be an Aeschylean innovation. Cassandra’s betrayal and rejection of the god reveals problems about her own position as Virgin Bride and Sacrificial Virgin. Aeschylus links her to two husbands, a divine one and a mortal one, Apollo and Agamemnon. Through use of bridal imagery and language one may read bridal overtones into the scene of Cassandra’s arrival and may also be forgiven for confusing, at first, the identity of her spouse. Cassandra is not just a prophetess and unwilling bride of Apollo; she is also a foreign woman, a slave and a concubine – the war trophy of Agamemnon. As illegitimate bride to the victorious king, her virginal status is called into question. Wohl insists on allying Cassandra with other virgins of tragedy, such as Iphigenia and Iole, while the text itself occludes her status as she oscillates between virgin, concubine and legitimate wife in her language and behaviour.1 This article proposes that the prophetess functions as a feminine corrective for the problematic aspects of the other feminine figures in this play, notably Iphigenia, unwilling Bride of Death and Clytemnestra, Bad Wife and murderer of Agamemnon.

The Problem

The figure of Cassandra is perhaps the most complex one of the Oresteia trilogy. This is because she seems to be a combination of archetypes: the Virgin Bride, the Sacrificial Virgin, and the Wife. This article analyses these archetypal aspects of Cassandra in the following terms: the links between Cassandra and Iphigenia; Cassandra and her relationship with the god Apollo; Cassandra and her relationship with the god Apollo

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and Cassandra as Good Wife of Agamemnon in order to determine her function in the _Agamemnon_.

**Cassandra and Iphigenia**

Cassandra makes her appearance on the stage with Agamemnon (782). We thus associate her first and foremost with the returning king. This association, however, is twofold, for not only is she his illegitimate bride but, as we shall see, she is also figured as a bride of death, thus subtly recalling Iphigenia.

In the following lines, we find frequent reference both by the chorus and Clytemnestra to Cassandra as a wild animal, captured and about to be sacrificed:

Xo. έντός δ' ἄλοιφα μορφήμων ἄγρευμάτων (1048)
Cho. caught within the hunting nets of fate

Xo. τρόμος δὲ θηρὸς νεαρέτων. (1063)
Cho. She is like a wild creature newly captured.

Κλ. ἦτες λιπασμα μὲν πόλιν νεαρέτων
ήκει, χαλινόν δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται φέρειν
πρὶν αἰματηρῶν ἐξαφθίζεσθαι μένος. (1065-67)

Cl. leaving her newly captured city
she has come having no experience of the bit
until she reaches exhaustion foaming with blood.

Xo. εἶκου' ἀνάγκης τήσει καύσιον ζυγών (1071)
Cho. submit to your fate and bear the unaccustomed yoke

This metaphor is commonly applied to Greek brides whose wildness and bestial qualities were described as requiring the taming yoke of marriage. Just as Iphigenia is lifted up to the altar ‘like a goat’ (δίκαιον χιμαίρας, 232) and she is ‘bridled’ by the ‘force of the bit’ (βία χαλινῶν, 238), Cassandra’s death is also rendered a sacrifice by use of metaphor in the chorus words, πῶς θειλάτου / βοῶς δίκην πρὸς βωμὸν εὐτόλμως πατέις; (‘How can you,

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2 All translations are the author’s own unless otherwise specified.
3 This is a common motif in Greek lyric. See also Seaford 1987:111.
like a cow driven by a god, walk to the altar with such courage?’, 1297-98). Mitchell-Boyask has formulated the process as follows:

Thus, as the reality of the imminent sacrifice comes into clear focus, Cassandra moves from being a wild to a domestic animal, and hence an animal suitable for ritual slaughter. But she is also thus tamed, like a bride.

Cassandra and Iphigenia are linked more closely and more subtly in the following lines: ἐπὶ δὲ καρδίαν ἐδραμε κροκόβαφής / σταγών (‘a saffron liquid drop of fear runs through my heart,’ 1121-22) 6 Visually evocative here is the chorus’s use of the word κροκόβαφής literally ‘saffron-dipped’ or ‘dyed’. 7 The same colour, described in an almost identical phrase, is used previously by the chorus to describe Iphigenia’s sacrificial robes pouring to her feet moments before her death (κρόκου βαφάς, 239). This functions as a linguistic link between the two figures, emphasising their similar roles both as Brides of Death and Sacrificial Virgins. 8 The adjective here, in 1121, is used to describe the chorus’s fear of another sacrifice alluded to just before by Cassandra in 1118-19: αὐτὸς ἀκόρετος γένει / κατολοχιζάτω θύματος λευσίμου (‘let the ravenous fury of the race / howl in rage over a sacrifice to be horribly avenged’). Cassandra here envisions the murder of Agamemnon while the chorus seems to remember the sacrifice of Iphigenia prompted by Cassandra’s use of the word θύμα.

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4 Cassandra is not, of course, ‘brought’ to her death but approaches it of her own free will. This is discussed further in the section Cassandra and Clytemnestra.
6 See Zeitlin 1965.
7 Mitchell-Boyask 2006:9-10 asks: ‘Why use this color for this emotion here? Yellow is the color of fear, as Denniston and Page note on this line, but I suggest the presence of this color in this passage has more to do with textual memory, with the Chorus articulating both passages, as the language and imagery of Iphigenia’s sacrifice suddenly return and they return for very specific reasons. First, Cassandra has just for the first time used the word “sacrifice” (1118 ...) to describe the main and most urgent subject of her vision, and the Chorus’s language thus mnemonically races back to the sacrifice it narrated earlier. ..., not at all a particularly common word, here describes the blood rushing to the Chorus’s heart, which it sees as the color of the blood of men fallen by the spear in battle. They directly recall the hue of Iphigenia’s robes which are also falling to the earth (239).’
8 The deep saffron colour from the crocus stamens was the colour worn by Greek brides. For more on Aeschylus’s Iphigenia as ‘Bride of Death’ see Seaford 1987:124-25 and n. 186, 187.
Cassandra's bridal metaphor in 1178-79, describing her role as prophetess visually and linguistically links her with her predecessor – the sacrificial daughter Iphigenia: καὶ μὴν ὁ χρυσὸς οὐκέτ’ ἐκ καλυμμάτων / ἔσται δεδομένῳ νύμφης δίκην ("no longer shall my prophecy timidly peep / as from under the veils of a young bride"). ιδοὺ δ’, Ἄπολλων αὐτὸς ἐκδώσεν ἐμὲ / χρηστιμαλὼν ἐσθήτ’ ("See how Apollo himself tears off / my prophetess's clothing", 1269-70). Cassandra begins to remove her clothing in an attempt to divest herself of any physical signs of Apollo's ownership of her. This scene cannot but remind us of Iphigenia and the sexuality inherent in her death scene. Lost are my father's altars, but the block is there / to reek with sacrificial blood, my own", 1277-78). Like Iphigenia, she is a sacrificial victim and she identifies herself as such. Cassandra can thus be seen as the recollection of Iphigenia – the living representative of the dead virgin on stage.

As Cassandra approaches the doors of the palace, she calls them the 'Gates of Hades' (1291; see also 1309, 1311), associating the palace with the House of Death itself, thereby strengthening the links between herself and Persephone, the archetypal Bride of Death, as well as Iphigenia, the Bride of Death (1291-94):

5 McClure 1999:98 notes that at this point Cassandra's speech shifts from lyric to speech metres as she ceases her lamentations and now addresses the chorus directly. "This metrical change underscores the movement from involuntary speech to voluntary speech. Accordingly, Cassandra begins by comparing the revelation of her prophecies to the unveiling of the bride ... the idea of sexual exposure entailed by public female speech evokes the conflation of sexuality and speech inherent in Clytemnestra's earlier use of the verb ἀσχημοσθαι (856), but whereas the queen flaunts her public words, Cassandra underscores their impropriety." Non-ritual public speech indicates the lack of shame in women akin to public display of the female body.

10 See below pp. 62-65.

11 Mitchell-Boyask 2006:7 envisions her as figuratively naked now: 'one might compare this “offering” of her bridal attire to Apollo as evoking the bride's dedication of her clothing after her wedding and the bath she knows awaits her as a bridal bath.'

12 Truus, Lattimore 1953.

13 It has also been pointed out that the Cassandra scene evokes the tradition of Iphigenia's marriage to Achilles in a meta-textual sense (Mitchell-Boyask 2006:2). See also Seaford 1987:127-28.
Ka. "Αιδών πύλας δέ τάσσῃ ἐγώ προσευνέτων ἐπεφυμα δὲ καιρίας πληγής τυχέων, ψε ἀδοφάδεως, αἰμάτων εὐθυνημών ἀπορρέντων, ὀμία συμβάλω τόδε.

Ca. I address these gates of Hades, and I pray the stroke strike clean, so that as I die there is no convulsing, an endless flow of blood, and I may then close my eyes.

While Iphigenia is gagged to prevent her improper curses from falling upon her murderers, Cassandra, after a long silence of thirty-four lines, speaks out. Her silence is made remarkable by the fact that it is commented upon by both the chorus and Clytemnestra (1047-68). Her dramatic silence signifies many things: most significantly it is the dramatic negation of speech in response to Clytemnestra’s brazen verbal improprieties which are bound up with her sexual misconduct and fictional construction of herself as the faithful wife (606-14; 859-86).

Clytemnestra’s speech is masculine in its lack of modesty and reticence before the public, yet feminine in terms of its content. ‘Clytemnestra’s speech vacillates between gendered subject positions: she is by turns persuasive like a man, and deferential, like a woman, freely reformulating herself to suit the occasion.’14 At the beginning of his response to her welcome speech Agamemnon censures his wife for publicly praising him, saying that it is not for her to do so.15 Later in their verbal sparring session he tries to curb her wife’s appropriation of persuasive and agonistic language – the syntax of men – when he says οὗτοι γυναικῶς ἔστιν ἰμερείν μάχης (‘this desire for battle is not becoming of a woman’, 940).16

Clytemnestra’s speech has been deceitful, masculine in its political diction and powerful in its ability to persuade. Cassandra’s silence thus signifies the opposite of this. Her silence compels others to speak for her and to infer and

15 Agamemnon to Clytemnestra (915-17): ἀποστιχία μὲν εἰπάς εἰκότως ἐμή; μακρῶν γὰρ ἐξετεινας· ἄλλην ἐναιδίμως αἰνεῖν, παρ’ ἄλλων χρῆ τόδε ἔρχεσθαι γέρας. There is one way your welcome matched my absence well. You strained it to great length. Yet properly to praise me thus belongs by right to other lips, not yours. (Emphasis mine, trans. Lattimore 1953).
16 For more on the impropriety of Clytemnestra’s improper public speaking see McClure 1999:79 commenting on Clytemnestra’s use of the verb νικάω: νικημένη (912) and νικᾶθαι (941).
interpret her position. Her silence thus renders her mysterious and closed, and also signifies her ‘otherness’—for she is foreign and a slave. At the same time she is the possession of Agamemnon, she is his εξαλειτής / ἄνθος (‘chosen flower’, 954-55). This prepares us for her configuration to the stereotype of the silent, veiled bride and confirms for us her function as counter to Clytemnestra. Cassandra’s voluntary silence mediates between the forced silence of Iphigenia and the improper speech of Clytemnestra.

**Cassandra and Apollo**

The relationship between Cassandra and Apollo is problematic and fraught with tension. Cassandra tells the chorus of her relationship with Apollo (1202-12). The positioning of the account of her relationship with Apollo is not insignificant. Her story is couched between two stories of marital infidelity: the seduction of Atreus’s wife by his brother Thyestes and Clytemnestra’s affair with Aegisthus. The significance of this is discussed further on.

The conjunction of the complex tale of her history with the god and her introduction to this story with the bridal metaphor above provides strong linguistic proof that Cassandra’s portrayal as a Bride of Death doubles as a Bride of Apollo. The image places Cassandra at precisely the same intersection of violence and eroticism that we have seen over and over again in this play. The ὀχυρή is Apollo’s breathes on her in this struggle is both sexual delight and divine grace, the ὀχυρή biaios of fetishization. If that is the origin of Cassandra’s destructive prophetic ability, then this potential site of otherness and purity is abruptly foreclosed in this line. Far from standing outside the play’s sadism, ‘ek-static’, Cassandra emerges from it, another product of its destructive passion (Wohl 1998:115); and ‘Aeschylus casts Apollo as the failed suitor, the persecutor and rapist of Cassandra (whether actual or notional) well before he walks on stage, and his invisible assault on her during the Agamemnon strongly itself suggests a rape’ (Mitchell-Boyask 2006:3).
between herself and Apollo, which does not preclude undertones of sexual violence.

What is revealed in the following dialogue between the prophetess and the chorus serves to negate the question of Cassandra’s purity: she confesses to sexual deception (1207-12):

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Xo. ἡ καὶ τέκνων εἰς ἔργον ἠλθὲτον νόμῳ; 20
Ka. ξυναινέασα λοξίαν ἐφευσάμην.
Xo. ἤδη τέκναισεν ἑυθέως ἴρμιμένη;
Ka. ἤδη πολιταις πάντ' ἐθέσπιζον πάθη.
Xo. πῶς δὴ ἁνατος ἠσβα λοξίου κότω;
Ka. ἐπειδὴν οὐδέν' οὐδέν', ὡς τάδ' ἡμπλακον.

Cho. And did the two of you lie in love together?
Ca. I promised Loxias, but then deceived him.
Cho. Were you already possessed with his divine skills?
Ca. I was already prophesying to the citizens their sufferings.
Cho. How did you escape the harm of Loxias’s wrath?
Ca. Since then no one has believed anything I have uttered.
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The exact nature of Cassandra’s deception is not made explicit. There are a number of meanings for ἐφευσάμην (1208): ‘I cheated, I lied, I deceived or I broke a promise.’ Thus we can infer that Cassandra at first agreed to and then refused sexual intimacy with the god. Thus the phrase τέκνων εἰς ἔργον (1207) should be taken to mean sexual intercourse rather than childbearing itself. 21

Directly after Cassandra tells of her betrayal of Apollo, she sees Clytemnestra’s betrayal of Agamemnon with Aegisthus. Her story of deceit is told within the context of her versions of other sexual infidelities that have stained the House of Atreus: the adultery of Thyestes (1193) and the adultery of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus:

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Ka. αὕτη δίπως λέανα συγκοιμωμένη
     λύκῳ, λέοντος εὐγενοῦς ἀπουσία (1258-59)

Ca. This is the woman lioness who lies
     with the wolf, when her noble lion is away

Ka. λέωντ' ἁναλακν, ἐν λέχει στρωφόμενον
     αἰκουράν, αἴμοι, τῷ μαλόντι δεσπότη (1224-25)
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20 The use of the dual form ἠλθὲτον proves that the meaning here refers to sex and not childbearing.

21 See Wohl 1998:241 n. 52 on the deception of Cassandra.
Ca: The cowardly lion spends his time in bed, ah me, he watches over the house for the master’s return.

The text seems to invite us to read Cassandra’s story as another story of sexual betrayal by the female. For Cassandra does not only betray Apollo, but she also spurns him as both master of her prophecies and of her body. The following lines show Cassandra’s attempts at rejection of the god are figured as rejections of both his mantic and sexual demands:

Ka. ίοι ίοφ, δι κάκα, 

υπ’ αυ με δεινός ὁρθομαντεῖας πόνος 

στροβει τεράσσων φρονίμους (1213-15)

Ca. Oh, what viliness!

Once again the dread pain of true prophecy spinning in my head, whirling with premonitions.

Ka. παπαῖ, ολον τὸ πῦρ ἐπέρχεται δὲ μοι. 

ἀκοι, Ἀδελφαῖ Λυκειοῖ, οἶ ἐγὼ ἐγώ. (1256-57)

Ca. Oh, how it burns, the fire invades me! 

Ah Lycean Apollo! The pain, the pain!

She describes the onset of prophecy in terms of a painful assault, and thus recalling the image of the physical struggle she describes earlier in 1206.

In the speech that follows, a most disturbing scene is enacted which brings to a climax the crisis point of her rejection of her divine master (1264-76):

Ka. τί δὴ τ’ ἐμαυτής καταγέλωτ’ ἐχω τάδε, 

καὶ σκήπτρα καὶ μαντεῖα περὶ δέρι στέφη; 

σὲ μὲν πρὸ μοίρας τὴς ἐμῆς διαφερᾶ. 

ίτ’ ἐς φίλον πεσόμα τ’ ὑπ’ ἄμεθομαι. 

アルバム ἄτην ἀν’ ἐμοῦ πλουτιζέτε. 

Ἰδοὺ δ’, Ἀπόλλων αὐτός ἐκδόθην ἔμε 

κρηστηρίαν ἑσθητ’, ἐποπτεύσας δὲ με 

καὶ τοῖδε κόσμοις καταγελωμένην μετὰ 

φίλων ὑπ’ ἐχθρῶν οὐ διχορρόποις μάτην. 

κακουμενή δὲ, φοιτάς ὡς ἀγύρτια, 

πτωχός τάλαινα λιμοθῆς ἤρεσκόμης. 

καὶ νῦν ὁ μάντης μάντων ἐκπράξεις ἔμε 

ἀπίγαγ’ ἐς τοιάδεθα σανασίμως τόξας.

Ca. Why then do I clothe myself with these mockeries, and this staff and this mastic garland around my neck?
These at least I will destroy before my death. Perish! This is how I repay you as you lie fallen. Enrich someone other than me with Ruin. See how Apollo himself tears off my prophetess's clothing, after watching me in these fancy clothes, a laughing stock among loved ones and by enemies who doubted in vain. I have borne being called a wandering beggar gypsy, a wretched vagabond half-starved. And now the prophet has finished with me, his prophetess and he has led me away to such a death. 22

We imagine Cassandra tearing off her clothing in a frenzied attempt to rid herself of her signs of ownership. It is as if she is attempting to erase her relationship with Apollo from her memory. Even if we do read this as a vain effort to restore her lost purity in preparation for her brutal 'sacrifice', the effect of stripping off her garments is the same as Iphigenia's pouring robes (239) – it highlights rather than hides her sexuality and eroticises their deaths.

Doubts as to Cassandra's sexuality are somewhat allayed by her utter devotion and loyalty to the patrilineal cause and the plight of Agamemnon. She seems to reject the god as husband and master in order to cleave to her new 'husband', her captor Agamemnon. This is perhaps what motivates Clytemnestra to call her, albeit sarcastically, πιστὴ ἠλπίνως ('faithful wife', 1442). 23 As the next section will show, Cassandra manifests most clearly the signs of the πιστὴ ἠλπίνως towards Agamemnon, bringing into sharp contrast Clytemnestra's blatant infidelities.

Cassandra and Clytemnestra

While Cassandra rejects her divine spouse, she embraces her mortal (albeit illegitimate) one with a fervent loyalty even into death. In her 'marriage' to Agamemnon this spear-won bride or 'chosen flower' as he calls her, shows herself to be the ideal wife in contrast with Clytemnestra, the fickle and murderous legitimate one.

22 Mitchell-Boyask 2006:7 of 1214-15 and 1256-57 notes: '... these lines prepare us for actions that form both her second rejection of Apollo and the god's imagined stripping of her clothing in the final consummation of their marriage in death (1269-70) ... First she unveils herself and then her bridegroom reveals the rest of her body. She reacts to this baring of herself by trampling on the symbols of the one who disrobbed her.'

23 Also translated as 'true wife' (McClure 1999:97), 'faithful bedmate' (Foley 2003:92), 'trusted bedmate' (Wohl 1998:114).
When Cassandra first speaks, she speaks in the language of lament and prophecy – both accepted genres for women in tragedy.24 These invocations contain the pure sounds of horror, characteristic of tragic emotion; they clarify the prophetess’s speech as ‘emotional, involuntary and therefore without guile.’25 Η μανία ται γε και κακων κλεις φρενων (“She is possessed by madness and hears only her own dark thoughts’); she is in the grip of Apollo’s divine mania, as Clytemnestra disparagingly remarks in 1064, and thus her speech is involuntary. Clytemnestra, however, does not know that Cassandra will rebel against Apollo’s possession in favour of Agamemnon.

In the next lines, Cassandra’s visions begin:

Ka.  
μοιάθεου μεν οὖν πολλὰ συνείστορα,
αὐτόφονα, κακὰ καρτάναι
αὐδρὸς σφαγείου καὶ πέθου ραντήμιον. (1090-92)

Ca.  
Despised by the Gods, witness of many
murders of its own kin, powerful
in the slaughter of its men and the blood-drenched floor.

Ka.  
μαρτυρίοισι γὰρ τοῖσ’ ἐπιπεθομαι.
κλαυμένα τάδε βρέφη σφαγάς
ὅπτ’ αἱ σάρκας πρὸς πατρός βεβρωμένας. (1095-97)

Ca.  
Running in blood. Look –
Look – the witnesses:
Children covering their eyes,
Sobbing blood through their fingers,
Children chopped up, screaming
And roasted, eaten
By their own father.26

While the chorus expect her to prophesy her own misfortunes (κρήσειν έοικεν ἀμφὶ τῶν αὐτῆς κακῶν, ‘It seems she will foretell her own evil fate’, 1083), her visions focus instead on the House of Atreus and the sufferings that have befallen the ancestors of Agamemnon. Beginning with the entity of

νέους, ἀνείρδων προσφερεῖς μορφώμασιν;
παιδίς θανάτως ὑποτεί πρὸς τῶν φίλων,
χειρας κρεών πλήθουτες αἰκείας σφαδός,
σῶν ἐντέρους τε απλάγχη, ἐπολυκτιστῶν γέμος,
πρέσσου’ ἔχοντες, ὃν πατὴρ ἐγείσατο.
the House itself, Cassandra then sees the three sons of Thyestes, the children brutally murdered by their uncle Atreus, the father of Agamemnon. She then sees the murder of Agamemnon himself at the treacherous hands of Clytemnestra (1125-29), followed by her own death at his side: ποτέ μὴ δὲ ἔδρο τὴν τάλαναν ἠγαγες; / οὐδέν ποτ' εἶ μὴ ἐξουθανομένην. τί γὰρ; ('Why have you led me here, wretchedly unhappy? / If not to die with him. What else could it be?', 1136-39).27 These lines reveal how she sees Agamemnon’s death as synonymous with her own.

In the lines below, Cassandra laments the illegitimate marriage of Paris and Helen, contrasting yet again this illicit union with her devotion to Agamemnon (1156-61):

Ka. ἰὼ γάμου, γάμου Πάρθιδος, ὀλέθριον φίλων, ἰὼ Σκαμάνδρου πατριον ποτῶν, τότε μὲν ἄμφι σὰς δίόνας τάλαν', ἕμπτόμαι τροφαίας; νῦν δ' ἄμφι Κωκυτῶν τε κάρχηρουσίως ὁχθοὺς οὐκα θεσπισθήσειν τάχα.

Ca. Oh, the marriage, the marriage of Paris, deadly to those men so loved! Oh Scamander, the waters drunk by my father, Once I too drank from your waters and was nurtured. Now on the banks of Cocytus and sorrowful Acheron will I soon sing my prophecies.

This is ironic as her ‘marriage’ to Agamemnon has more in common with that of Paris and Helen, in the sense that she, like Helen, is a foreign and illegitimate bride whose coming disrupts a household.

Once she establishes a shared fate for herself and Agamemnon, Cassandra sees Orestes’s return (1280-85);

Ka. ἠξεῖ γὰρ ἡμῶν ἄλλος αὐτοῖς πατρός, μητροκτόνου φίλημα, ποιμάτωρ πατρός· φυγὴς δ' ἀλήθης τῆς γῆς ἀπὸκενος κάτεισιν, ἀταὶ τάσει θανακωσμοί φίλοις· οἰμώμοι γὰρ ὅρκος ἐκ θεῶν μέγας.

27 Cf. Foley 2003:93-94: ‘Cassandra’s assimilation of herself to Agamemnon in this respect is … universal and striking. Here, as elsewhere, the barbarian slave concubine, with her repeated reminders of proper wifely etiquette and her demonstrated loyalty to the patriline, becomes a foil whose presence highlights the inappropriate and destructive behaviour of the unfaithful wife and demands pity and sympathy for her plight from the audience onstage, the chorus, and off.’

67
Ca.

For there shall come another to avenge us,
a son, born to kill his mother, avenger of his father.
An exile and a wanderer, banished from this land
he will return, to finish these hatreds among kin.
For the oath is great and sworn by the gods,
that he shall cast men down for his father who lies fallen.

Cassandra's vision above concerns itself with the legitimate, male offspring
of her 'husband' and his divinely sanctioned vengeance. ἥξει γὰρ ἤμων ἄλασον ἑαυτοῦ τιμῶρος (For there shall come another to avenge us, 1280 [emphasis mine]). What is more, she imagines Orestes returning to avenge both their deaths, not just that of the murdered king. Her insistence on legitimate proximity to Agamemnon is repeated once more at the end of her mantic speeches in 1313-14: ἄλλοι' εἴμι κάτι δόμοισι εἰκόσιοι 'ἐμὴν / Ἀγαμέμνονος τε μοῖραν (But now I shall go into the house lamenting both my / and Agamemnon's fate'). She plays the part of submissive, legitimate wife perfectly, allying herself with her spouse while emphasising the tragedy of his house and his death as taking precedence over hers.28 This is also true of Sophocles's Tecmessa, for example, who, as a 'spear-won' bride takes care to emphasise her intimacy with Ajax and her loyalty to him: ἐχομεν στοναχαζοι οι κεφαλαιναι / τοῦ Τελαμώνος τηλόθεν οἰκου (We who care for him and his father's far-off home / Have cause indeed for grief, Soph. Aj. 203-04). Her assertion that she cares for Ajax as well as his father's house position her as a wife and as a new bride: the house of her husband and his oikos become hers. When Ajax appeals to Zeus to aid him in his plans for murderous revenge followed by his own death, Tecmessa claims that her life is meaningless unless her husband lives: 'Ὅταν κατέχῃ ταῦθ', ὅμων κάμοι θανατεῖν / εὐχαίрей τί γὰρ δεῖ ζῆν με σοὺ τεθησίνος; (When you pray that prayer, why, pray for my death too; Why should I live when once my lord is

28 Fraenkel 1950, 3:583, on 1263 says: 'Here, as in 1137 and 1325f., Cassandra holds fast to the idea that hers is only a secondary part in the whole fearful story.' Yet Wohl 1998:24 n. 41, points out: 'It is true that in the broadest narrative structure of the trilogy, Cassandra's death is less important than Agamemnon's; however, in the poetics of this play, her death is given more space and more emotional elaboration. In fact, her anticipation and lamentation of her own death replace his death in the linear development of the play: he goes in to his death, but what we see next is her visions; then when she goes in to her death we hear his death cry. Thus, while his death may be more significant to the narrative, in terms of dramatic effect, hers replaces his.'
dead?’, 392-93). Here Tecmessa is once again emphasising the closeness of their relationship by avowing her life to be worth nothing if he should die.29

Cassandra allies herself totally with the sufferings of Agamemnon and his house. Her empathetic visions of ancestors of the line of Atreus and her prophetic concerns of its future reflect a loyalty far exceeding that of a newly arrived spear-won bride. She, as Foley notes, ‘gradually fills the structural role of proper “wife” abandoned by Clytemnestra.’30 She is constructed, in part, as a foil for the negative Bad Wife figure of Clytemnestra. The terminology used of both concubines and wives in tragedy allows for confusion and ambiguity of status. The word λέκτρα is used to describe a wife, a concubine, a marriage-bed and a marriage simultaneously while the word εὐνή also describes the marriage-bed shared by wives and concubines alike.

While Clytemnestra insists on representing her in the degrading terms of a spear-won concubine (1035-46; 1065-68), Cassandra’s words and the imagery in the play counter this, rendering her instead virginal, in the sense of a young bride or legitimate wife (950-55):

Ag. ... τὴν ξένην δὲ πρεμιμνωσ τὴν ἔσκαμμε: τὸν κρατοῦν τα μαλακῶς θεὸς πρόσωβεν εὐμενῶς προσδέρκεται. ἐκών γὰρ αὐδεὶς δουλίῳ χρήσαι εὐγεί. αὕτη δὲ πολλῶν χρημάτων ἐξαρετον ἄνθος, στρατοῦ διώρθη, ἐμοὶ εὐνέσπετο.

Ag. Bring this foreign girl inside and treat her kindly.
He who uses his power gently
is watched by the God from afar.
For no one willingly bears the yoke of slavery.
For she was given to me by the war host —
a flower exquisite beyond all my treasure
and she is my companion.

Agamemnon arrives with his ‘spear-won’ bride in a carriage — an image which evokes the bridal carriage or procession.31 He is the first to draw attention to her and identifies her clearly as a trophy or war prize, yet asks

29 Andromache, in Euripides’s play of the same name, demonstrates a similar loyalty and subservience to Neoptolemus as his ‘spear-won’ bride in blatant contrast to Hermione, his legitimate wife, who, after plotting to kill her rival, runs off with another man, Orestes defiantly claiming her as his promised bride.

30 Foley 2003:92.
31 Foley 2003:93.
for kind treatment towards her from his legitimate wife in public, and that she be taken into the house.

Cassandra imagines herself as part of the motive for Clytemnestra’s murder of her husband (1260-63):

Ka. ... ὁς δὲ φάρμακων 
tεύχοντα κάμον μισθὸν ἐνθῆσαι ποτῷ: 
ἐπεύχεται, θήγουσα φωτὶ φάγανον, 
ἐμῆς ἀγωγῆς αὐτιπέισασθαι φίλον.

Ca. As the sorceress prepares her draft, she pours in my death as payment with her anger, as she whets the blade for her husband, murder in return for having brought me here.

She envisages her death as a μισθὸν, ‘payment’, which Clytemnestra pours into the sorceress’s draft of Agamemnon’s murder. Since her visions exclude the sacrifice of Iphigenia, she sees no other reason than sexual jealousy on Clytemnestra’s part. So she calls herself a πρόσφαγμα (‘preliminary sacrifice’, 1278) for Agamemnon. Her own death is rendered indistinguishable from Agamemnon’s as she claims in 1139, her suffering τὸ γὰρ ἐμὸν θρόω πάθος ἐπεγχέασα (‘poured out beside his’, 1137).

In this light, it comes as no surprise that Clytemnestra identifies Cassandra as a rival. This identification casts doubt on Cassandra’s sexual purity and renders her an object in the exchange-of-women process. When, at the end of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra stands exultant over the bodies of her victims, Agamemnon and Cassandra, she presumes a sexual relationship between them. She calls the prophetess a κοινόλεκτρος (‘sharer of his bed’, 1441), as well as a πιστὴ ξένευνος (‘faithful wife’, 1442) — a term used of wives and mistresses alike. Her terminology clearly indicates she viewed Cassandra as a rival and potential replacement. Clytemnestra then follows with a vile insult ναιτλὼν δὲ σελιμάτων / ἱσοτριβής (‘slut of the sailors’ beaches’, 1442-43).32

Of course, coming from Clytemnestra it is undoubtedly slanderous, yet it does cloud the issue of the sexuality of Cassandra. As both sacrificial virgin and concubine, described variously in bridal and spousal terms, her sexual purity cannot be assumed.

The passages which follow show how the prophetess contributes in no insignificant way to the vilification of her rival, making much of her monstrous infidelity, her treachery and her perversion of masculine martial

qualities: τοιάδε τόλμα· θῆλυς ἄρσενος φοινεύς·, 1231; ὡς δ᾿ ἐπώλολύζατο / ἡ παντότολμος, ὡσπερ ἐν μάχης τροπῆ, 1236-37:

Ka. τί τόδε φαίνεται; 
ἡ δυκτὴν τί γ᾿ Ἀιδοῦ, 
ἄλλ᾽ ἄρκυς ἢ ἰψευνος, ἢ ἐναιμία 
φόνου. (1114-17)

Ca. What is that thing appearing? 
Some deathly net. 
But the trap is his wife, 
being the accomplice in his murder.

Ka. ἅπεχε τῆς βοὸς 
τῶν ταῦρων ἐν πέπλοισιν 
μελαγκέρῳ λαβοῦσα μηχανήματι 
τύπτει· πίτυς, δ᾿ <ἐν> ἑνώρῳ 
τεύχει. 
δολοφόνου λέβητος τῦχαν σοι λέγω. (1125-29)

Ca. Keep the bull away from the heifer; 
held fast in the complex mesh of the web she traps him and strikes with black horn. And he falls in a water-carrying vessel, a treacherous urn of murder I tell you.33

Ka. νεών τ᾽ ἄπαρχος Ἰλιοῦ τ᾽ ἀναστάτης 
οὐκ ἀλέν ὅλα γλώσσα, μυστήριος 
λείξασα κάκτεινασα φαιδρόν ὅς ἀίκην, 
ἄτης λαβῃσαν τεῖξεται κακῇ τύχῃ. 
τοιάδε τόλμα· θῆλυς ἄρσενος φοινεύς· 
ἐστιν – τὶ νῦν καλοῦσα δυσφιλὲς δάκος 
τύχομι· ὃν· ἄμφοβαναν, ἢ Σκῦλαν τινὰ 
ολίκουσαν ἐν πέτραισι, καυτίλων βλάβην, 
θυσίαν Ἀιδοῦ μητρί' ἄσπουδὸν τ᾽ Ἀρη 
φίλους πνεύσαν; ὡς δ᾿ ἐπώλολύζατο 
ἡ παντότολμος, ὡσπερ ἐν μάχης τροπῆ.

33 Cf. Wohl 1998:114: 'In Cassandra's gendered visions, Clytemnestra is the cow who will attack the bull. The metaphor suggests not only the inversion of natural order (in which the bull threatens the cow), but also the confusion of sex and violence endemic to the play but especially attribute to Clytemnestra.' Cassandra's imagery in 1114 and following conflates Clytemnestra with the deathly net, the trap itself, the murder weapon. This conflation is continued in the passage which follows where Clytemnestra becomes the treacherous urn, the bath in which she murders her husband; cf. Wohl 1998:114: 'The dynamic of the First Stasimon is collapsed even further. Whereas the “commodification” of Helen initiated a war that sent men home in urns, here the woman herself becomes the urn, the engulfing, devouring, suffocating instrument of male objectification.'
The commander of the fleet and of Ilium does not know what deeds shall be brought about by the hateful bitch, whose tongue
licks his hand, joyfully with lifted ears
who, like a clandestine death, strikes him unsuspecting.
Such daring, when a female is the murderer of the male.
She is - what shall I call the hateful beast and hit the mark? A Serpent with two heads, a Scylla living in a rocky cave, a plague for sailors, raging mother of Death, breathing implacable slaughter on loved ones? How she shouted for joy bruised as in the turning point of battle, feigning delight at his safe return.

In 1319 Cassandra refers to Agamemnon as δυσδίμαρτος, literally 'ill-wived'. She also uses the following descriptions of Clytemnestra: ἀφίες ἦ ξύνεως (the trap is his wife', 1116); τῆς βοὸς (the heifer', 1125); μισητής κυνός ('hateful bitch', 1228); Σκύλλων τυνα; ('a Scylla', 1233).34 And yet this does not clarify things for the chorus, who do not understand her. For despite saying quite explicitly in 1231 θῆνας ἄρεινος φανεὺς ('a female is the murderer of the male'), the chorus asks her: τίνος πρὸς ἀνδρός τοῦτ ἄρας ποροσύνεται; ('what man prepares this evil?'), she responds with ἦ κάρτα χρησμῶν παρεκόπης ἐμῶν ἀρα ('What man? You have not divined my prophecy').

In the place of the Bad Wife, Cassandra has substituted herself. This substitution is cleverly emphasised in the language of the following passage in which Cassandra sees Clytemnestra's murder as revenge for her own.

Moreover, the linguistic indiscrimination between wife and concubine, in the context of tragedy, allows for these roles to collapse into one another. This

allows for behaviour rather than terminology to determine legitimacy in a female character. Moreover, it allows for the male fantasy of the concubine as perfect wife to take shape:

Despite her status, for example, the tragic concubine often sets herself apart from the majority of tragic wives through the perfection with which she enacts the role of marital partner (from the male perspective). ... Concubines ... can demonstrate their loyalty by being permitted to take action and speak persuasively on stage, where their gestures are praised or tolerated without suspicion by male characters. Yet their dependant social and economic status forces them into the role of compliant wife that is so often rejected or compromised by their legitimately married rivals. ... Above all, the loyal and noble concubine brings into play the fantasy of a world in which wives are fully a man’s property and echo their desires and aspirations ... and inheritance remains under paternal control. 35

Conclusion

Aeschylus’s Cassandra seems to function partly as a corrective for the corrupted sacrifice of Iphigenia and Clytemnestra. She is carefully constructed to mediate between the silent, sacrificial Virgin Daughter and the murderous, unfaithful Wife. At first, aspects of Cassandra mirror Iphigenia the silent virgin and then she goes on to construct herself along the lines of a legitimate wife who embraces the cause of her husband and dies willingly by his side. Aeschylus has taken care to show the suffering of Cassandra as bound up with her new lord and master, Agamemnon, whose painful fates she articulates, thus providing for us a vision of male suffering which serves to re-affirm the bonds of patriliny rendered so fragile by the wicked wife.

Cassandra functions, then, in many ways as the voice of the ideal sacrificial virgin daughter and the ideal wife – Iphigenia and Clytemnestra perfected. She goes willingly to the altar for sacrifice, without the need for a gag to check problematic speech. She thus resolves the resistance of Iphigenia and offers herself up to death in the manner of those father-loyal virgins who attempt to render themselves subject rather than object in the masculine world of exchanged women. Not only does she forgive Agamemnon, she praises him as λέοντος εὐγενῶς (’a noble lion’, 1259),

35 Foley 2003:94. Foley’s chapter on concubines (87-105) discusses Sophocles’s Tecmessa in Ajax; Aeschylus’s Cassandra; Euripides’s Cassandra in Trojan Women; Deianeira and Iole in Sophocles, Trachiniæ and Euripides’s Andromache in Andromache among other less prominent tragic concubines.
By positioning herself as good wife to Agamemnon, correcting the infidelities of Clytemnestra, Cassandra's 'marriage' to Agamemnon also functions as a corrective for the disrupted marriages in the play, of which there are many: the infidelity of Atreus's wife with her brother-in-law Thyestes; the fake marriage which lured Iphigenia to Aulis; the corrupted marriage of Helen and Menelaus and, last but not least, the corrupted marriage of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon.

But the playwright has complicated Cassandra as a simple corrective by inserting her relationship with the god Apollo whom she betrays in her own admission. The representation of the relationship between prophetess and god in marital terms casts doubt on the sexual purity of Cassandra as she becomes linked to more than one male figure. Once Cassandra rejects Apollo, she moves beyond her own passive role as she envisions for herself a role of greater importance than the text allows. This contributes not insignificantly to the tragedy of Cassandra. For she imagines her death as important enough to the action, that Orestes will return to avenge it as well as his father's and that Clytemnestra's death is, in part, retributive compensation for her own murder (1317-19).

In her final speech above, she prays to the Sun that her death be avenged (1323-26):

Ka. ... ἡλίου δ' ἐπεύχωμαι
πρὸς δεσπόταν φῶς τῶν ἐμᾶς τιμῶρος
ἐχθρῶς φόνευσιν τὴν ἐμὴν τίνειν ὅρον,
δούλης θαυμασθής, εὐμαρῆς χειρόματος.

Ca: I invoke the power of the Sun in prayer
when in that final blaze of light, my avengers
cut down the enemies, that they avenge my death
at the same time,
a slave who died, an easy victim.

But Cassandra is mistaken in these visions and unanswered in her prayers. Nowhere in Libation Bearers is there mention of her fate or her murder that accompanied Agamemnon's, nor is any kind of justice or vengeance done for her.

36 ἴδει γὰρ ἡμῶν ἄλλος αὐτίμωρος ('For there shall come another to avenge us', 1280), discussed earlier.
Bibliography


adoyle@uj.ac.za
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