

Agamemnon (Monday, August 30, 2021)

Savannah: Quick question when Cassandra is referred to as Agamemnon's mistress, I'm assuming it wasn't as a willing mistress? Or was it?

She was a prize of war, made a slave, not at all willing.

Brandon: "and on this pedestal, these words appear. "I am ozymandius, king of kings, look upon my works ye mighty, and despair"

Pandora: Why did Cassandra not want to get out of the chariot?

She sees that if she enters the house, she will be murdered.

Olivia: I always thought the chorus was supposed to be like an off stage group of people, like a narrator. But the characters interact with the chorus. Just sort of confused on that.

Aeschylus innovated the chorus, making it much more active and in dialogue with the main characters.

Ava: At the beginning of the play the watch man is talking, he just says dear gods, but is there a specific one he's speaking or praying to, or was there a god that they believed in that would have been the one to go to?

The Greek gods are numerous, each representative of something and would be invoked depending on the occasion. Like Aphrodite, the goddess of love, or Ares, the god of war. I think here, the watchman is just invoking the gods in general, but once the Chorus enter, they primarily invoke and call upon Zeus, who was the "king" of the gods, or, the "father" god.

Sara M.: Did I understand correctly that Agamemnon Sacrificed the daughter that Clyaemnestra 'avenges' because an oracle said it would please the gods to cease a storm?

Yes, Agamemnon sacrificed their eldest daughter and child, Iphigenia, because he was told this would appease the goddess, Artemis, and ensure the Greek army successfully sail for Troy where the war was to be fought.

Abby: What is a chariot? Sorry if this is a stupid question



Brandon: I know that sacrifice and murder were really common, but how cold blooded to sacrifice your own daughter. How did he not see his own death coming?

His own hubris? Believing that it was condoned by the gods? Believing it was okay, after all, because he won the war? Believing Clytemnestra would forgive and forget? Or, she's just a woman, what kind of power would she have to avenge her daughter? All kinds of possible interpretations.

Luke P: 1. Why is Clytemnestra compared to a man so often my characters? 2. Does the spiders web also symbolize the net and Agamemnon being trapped?

She is in a position of power, ruling Mycenae for ten years during Agamemnon's absence. She refuses the counsel of the old men of Argos. She is also blatantly cheating on Agamemnon with Aegisthus. In Greek myth/saga, she is often representative of a monstrous woman/bad wife in contrast to Penelope, the faithful and obedient wife of Odysseus. Basically, Clytemnestra oversteps the gender boundaries of what the Greeks viewed to be the proper place of women/wives in a patriarchal society. And yes, the spider's web is a great image alongside the net to symbolize how Clytemnestra is laying a trap for Agamemnon.

Emily: Why were Agamemnon and Aegisthus enemies?

They are cousins—their fathers were brothers who fought over the kingdom of Argos. Thyestes (Aegisthus's father) slept with the wife of Atreus (Agamemnon's father). Atreus exacted revenge by feeding Thyestes's children to him in a cannibalistic feast, and then Thyestes cursed the House of Atreus. As his only surviving child, Aegisthus is bound to vengeance against the House of Atreus. Aegisthus is probably also driven by desire for power, like Clytemnestra.

Joe: So did Clytemnestra marry Agamemnon just to murder him for Iphigenia or was the murder of Iphigenia after they were married?

After they were married. Iphigenia was probably about 15 or 16 years old. Her murder was at the start of the Trojan war and Clytemnestra waited during the ten years of war for Agamemnon to return so she could have her revenge over the death of their daughter.

Josiah: Did Agamemnon ultimately really need to kill his daughter?

All depends on one's perspective. Clytemnestra certainly believes he didn't need to do this, but Agamemnon believes it was necessary to appease Artemis and sail to Troy with favorable winds.

Ashley: Is Cassandra the daughter Agamemnon sacrificed?

Isaac: Why did she insist that Agamemnon walk in on the carpets?

To flatter his pride and ego. The crimson carpets represent the high status of the gods. She is tempting him to believe his victory over Troy elevates him to the status of a god, impervious to fate. Agamemnon falls for it and enters the house without the protection of his men.

Connor: In the end, one of the people become mad with Aegisthus, stating he was a coward and conspiring man, and that he has no power and no man will bow down to him. Yet, both Clytemnestra and himself act as if nothing occurred and walk back into the hall as if they have a right to rule. Is that just a nod to ignorance and corrupted power, or is that actually how quickly power shifts occurred, and how quickly people actually accept matters?

This is a great question! I think for Aeschylus's time, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are representative of tyrants who rule without the consent or will of the people (important for Athenian audiences who believed in principles of democracy not the rule of aristocracy). They

are definitely an example of corrupted power, especially since they take power by killing the king. They also represent violent shifts in power rooted in the old blood feuds, of might over right, vengeance over law. This is a major theme of the trilogy, as Aeschylus showing how a society might progress from violence, war, blood vendettas to law, order, and democracy as instruments of justice and peace.

Luke W: Are there purposeful similarities between Apollo and Agamemnon, since Cassandra is unwilling with both?

That's an interesting insight. Cassandra does not want to be the slave of anyone, man or god; at the same time, she is possessed by her visions, of seeing the truth while never being believed (Apollo's curse for refusing him). Cassandra has certainly been read as a kind of feminist figure, as we'll explore in our reading of Christa Wolf's novel.

Sara: So was Cassandra murdered because of her seeing the murder of Agamemnon? Or something else?

Cassandra is viewed by Clytemnestra as an insult. Even if Cassandra is now a slave, she is after all royalty, a princess of Troy. When Clytemnestra invites Cassandra into the house and Cassandra refuses the rituals of hospitality (very important to the Greeks), Clytemnestra is insulted. Beyond that, her reasons are a bit more ambiguous. If Cassandra is a symbol of Agamemnon's power, as the victorious leader of the Greeks, then perhaps killing her is a way to consolidate Clytemnestra's own power. As a speaker of truth, Cassandra might also present a threat to a tyrannical leader or usurper, which is how the Chorus views Clytemnestra. There are various ways of interpreting Clytemnestra's insistence on murdering Cassandra, and many writers have provided different readings.

Zach: I don't really understand why he sacrificed his daughter. it seems unnecessary.

Isaac: I also do not understand why Agamemnon needed to sacrifice his own daughter.

Savannah: So wait Apollo wanted to have sex with Cassandra, she said no and he got mad, but he still protects her?

She is still his priestess, dedicated to his shrine, even though she says she is "yoked" or enslaved by Apollo's whims. The gods look after their devotees. To rape/kill Cassandra is still viewed as an insult to Apollo. Cassandra, however, seems to want to be free of both men and gods. When she discards and shreds her ceremonial priestess robes, she is claiming her own freedom from the god and her office as his priestess. She then goes into the house, willingly accepting her fate but also mourning her own death.

Brandon: greek gods were nuts

Brandon: zeus turned into a goose to impregnate a woman so hera wouldn't see him

Joe: I mean, depending on which story you read that's how medusa came to be

Sara M: Would it have been unheard of to say no to a god like Apollo?

Lots of stories/myths of humans saying no to or resisting a god. Inevitably, they are often punished for this, like Cassandra. The gods do not like to be refused or resisted. The

stories/myths seem to indicate that the gods are tyrannical or selfish but to resist them is to resist one's fate. Aeschylus, I think, is trying to work through this problem. How do humans shape their own free will when they are also ruled by the necessity or will of the gods (or forces more powerful than humans)? This also links to Agamemnon's conflict over killing his daughter at the behest of a god (or larger political expediency of leading the Greeks in war).

Katarina: Why was Clytaemnestra referred to as a man, numerous of times?

Joe: There was a story of medusa where she was raped by Poseidon in the temple of Athena as a bird which outraged Athena because her temple was disgraced by a human so she cursed Medusa to look the way we know her now

This is a great example of a myth, where the gods are insulted by other gods or in conflict with other gods, but it's humans who bear the brunt of punishment. It seems to reflect the Greeks' views of how humans can be powerless or just the pawns of the gods.

Marcela: Does zeus rape her as a swan or does he come out of swan form?

Joe: it's best not to ask questions

Savannah: God powers I guess

Zach: Zeus is the worst

Brandon: many forms, but one god d**k **(please be mindful of language)**

Olivia: I guess when you're Zeus you can just magically do that

Nikki: When the gods approach humans non disguised, do they normally announce themselves as "I am this god" or do they call themselves by another name?

Typically, humans just recognize the deity of the gods. Because they are so different from humans, even when they appear in human form. When we read *Circe* by Madeline Miller, this will return as a theme (the omnipotence and utterly nonhuman/inhuman nature of gods).

Alyssa: Is Cassandra the daughter that Agamemnon sacrificed?

Savannah: No, Cassandra is a Trojan he nabbed

Luke W: No, his daughter is Iphigenia

Sara M: By the way, Did he feed the gods his son as an offering or did they ask for him to make them a meal or something?

Jehan: he invited the gods to a feast, then fed them his son.

Sara M: Just in an act of malice?

Marcela: A lot of cannibalism

Jehan: its weird, some say it was just so he could feed the gods something they have never eaten before.

Yes, Jehan is correct. Tantalus feeds the gods his children as an act of hubris, a matter of pride, showing off, and the gods are horrified by this. Probably not by the cannibalism but Tantalus overreaching in his arrogance.

Richard: After thinking about it for awhile, and intending to not tread on already asked questions, I guess I would ask, especially considering that this play, like Homer's Odyssey, has a lot to do with the Trojan War and the aftereffects with it, why is it often inferred that Homer is most likely not an actual historical figure, whereas the playwrights of this and the Theban Plays are considered to genuinely have been real, historical figures? Is it simply because The Odyssey was passed down via oral storytelling and these were plays? I don't know, I'm curious. Also, I'm just kind of curious as to their obsession with the aftereffects of the Trojan War in their literature, especially considering that the Greek states existed, like, right up to the creation of the Roman Empire, which is a long, long span of time. It seems interesting to be that fascinated with a single war for THAT long a period of time, as if we were talking about the aftereffects of World War II some centuries later.

These are some interesting questions. The simplest way to answer this is that Homer is likely a composite of different bards (not a single author) who orally transmitted the stories through tradition and constant revision. Most scholars do not believe the Iliad and the Odyssey were composed by the same person, but both epic poems share close similarities in language and style. The texts were probably written down sometime between the 8th and 6th centuries BCE. By Aeschylus's time, along with the other Greek tragedians, there was much more of a written rather than oral culture. What we know of classical authorship and surviving texts is really a matter of time, chance, and history (like the fire at library of Alexandria). As for the Trojan War saga, the enduring obsession/interest in this story is probably due to a number of reasons: its blend of history, legend, and myth; its representation of the gods and humans; the themes of war and conflict. In one sense, I suppose, the Trojan War functions as a kind of universal archetype for all wars.

Richard: I think it's **[Troy]** supposed to be in modern-day Turkey

Richard: Somewhere in Asia Minor.

Yes, that is correct.

Jehan: Why did Agamemnon go to war for his Brother's wife?

Jehan: OR sacrifice his daughter for a war for his Brother's wife?

The myths or legends surrounding Helen and the Trojan War tell how when Helen was to be married, there was a competition amongst the Greek warriors/leaders. She was, after all, the most beautiful woman in the world, a daughter of Zeus. She ended up marrying Menelaus (the brother of Agamemnon) and all the Greek leaders swore an oath that should any man try to abduct or steal Helen from her husband, they would go to war on his behalf. This was intended, I believe, to prevent internal/civil war for the Greeks. Of course, they never accounted for the fact that a foreigner, like Paris of Troy, would abduct Helen (or that Helen might willingly run away, as some versions of the myth suggest). In any case they were bound to go to war to recover Helen.

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Savannah: Why bring Clytemnestra to that [the sacrifice of Iphigenia]?

Because Agamemnon tricked her, lying that he was summoning Iphigenia to Aulis (where the Greek army waited to sail) to be married to Achilles. It would only be natural for the mother to accompany her daughter to be married. If Agamemnon forbid Clytemnestra to be there, then she would have suspected something was wrong.

Sara: So he was torn about sacrificing her or no?

Gabrielle: What is the significance of Agamemnon killing his daughter?

Jehan: was the sacrifice accepted in Greek society?

Yes, generally, many religious rituals required sacrifice-but by Aeschylus's time, this was limited to animals or votive offerings. Human sacrifice was a remnant from a much older, less "civilized" time, represented in the old myths and sagas.

Ava: Would there have ever been a way for this family to break this so called curse of murder and cannibalism or was this part of their fate as part of this family?

This is exactly the problem/question Aeschylus is trying to solve. We get his answer by the end of the third play.

Jehan: This seems close to WW1, where a lot of countries went to war because of assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria.

Jehan: it is through suffering we learn the most, but we can learn without suffering.

Olivia: ^^

Sara: She killed a righteous king?

Sara: in their eyes

Jehan: She attempts to take power, something only a man used to have.

Savannah: I bet the chorus would be cool with vengeance if Clytemnestra was the one who sacrificed her daughter and Agamemnon wanted to kill her

Yes! And Clytemnestra accuses the Chorus of this hypocrisy and gendered double standard on p. 162.

Pandora: power was for men and she was a woman so she was compared to men.

Savannah: I know there's no hero/villain but man I kind of have to agree with her

Who is the tragic hero of this play?

Savannah: Cassandra? She gets fated to die for doing nothing wrong really

Luke W: Clytemnestra for me

Pandora: Clytemnestra

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Sara: I mean how much was Agamemnon really killing his daughter for greed?

Ashley: I have to choose Clytemnestra

Abby: Clytemnestra

Richard: I would say Clytemnestra

Sami: Clytemnestra is who I would think

Alyssa: Clytemnestra

Jehan: Why did she wait for 10 years, maybe kill him right after the sacrifice?

He went off to war; she waited for him to return at the end of the war.

Josiah: you would think Agamemnon, since the play is named by him, but it seems Clytemnestra might be another competitor

Connor: Can I pick the daughter? She was sacrificed without a choice, and also is the one who jump started all of these power struggles. She exposed her father's evil, and also exposed her mother's soon to be monstrous downfall. She herself had a tragic ending, and exposing these corruptions is a heroic act itself, even though unintentional on the daughter's part.

Brandon: I'd say Clytemnestra, because all she wanted was to avenge her daughter and rid herself of an unfaithful husband

Ashley: She has the right to avenge her daughter (coming from a mom's point of view)

Yes, that is her argument. Patriarchal rights. We'll hear more about this in the next two plays.

Savannah: One of the criteria of a tragic hero was being in conflict with the chorus but I think you can sympathize with her for watching her husband kill their daughter for a seemingly pointless war, and I kind of pity her because of that. And she's going to fall soon I'm sure

Zach: I think Clytemnestra because she is doing these "questionable" things for justice and he did horrible things for power and glory

Great answer! Yes, she is seeking justice while he is vain and sacrificed their daughter for power, glory, and wealth.

Richard: Agamemnon is barely in the play, and he murdered his own daughter. The play focuses more on Clytemnestra because she's more sympathetic.

I definitely agree with all of you that Clytemnestra is the tragic hero. Aeschylus's sympathies also seem to be with her. She is human, flawed, and faced with a terrible decision that really has no good outcome. Although her ultimate downfall occurs in the second play, by the end of *Agamemnon*, her hubris is clear: she believes that her murder of Agamemnon is just/justified and that this has put an end to the curse of blood vengeance. She believes violence is an acceptable means to peace, that by taking power through murder she is ensuring a peaceful beginning when really she is just continuing the cycle, passing this problem down to her children, Orestes and Electra, as we'll see in the next play.

The Libation Bearers & The Eumenides (Wednesday, Sep 8, 2021)

Abby: who is on the cover of the orestia?

I'm not sure, since we may have different editions of the book. If it's the same as the cover image on the website, then I believe that would be one of the Furies.

Savannah: For the Eumenides: Would all this be happening if it was a father killed? Like would the furies still show up and say that was your blood you killed? Or is it 'worse' since the mother carried the child for nine months so killing her is a worse offense? Apollo goes on about how the father is the 'real' blood on Pg. 260 does that support this very thing happening if the genders were flipped?

This is one of the central conflicts in the play. Apollo is loyal to the Father god, Zeus, and is determined to establish Zeus's reign over the old gods/laws. If Orestes had killed Agamemnon, it's unlikely the Furies would be so furious with him, but there may have been some other punishment for patricide. The Furies are far more invested in avenging matricide, since they represent the ancient female deities.

Olivia: I'm still confused as to what the furies are. Are they people? Ghosts? A metaphor?

They are goddesses but could also be read as avenging spirits. And yes, they might also function as metaphor for the old law of blood feuds.

Pandora: Why did Athena give the Furies power when they were acting like children when they didn't win the court hearing?

Athena is careful to show them respect. Even though they didn't win, they still have a great deal of power. Athena, as goddess of wisdom, sees the advantage in using persuasion and promising them reverence in Athens. She transforms their status as the Eumenides—the Kindly Ones—as benevolent goddesses of the hearth/home.

Sara: First off, I misunderstood in The Libation Bearers that Pylades was a woman, so I started out very confused in this one

No, Pylades is a man, Orestes's friend.

Savannah: From last week for the Libation Bearers: On pg. 191 Orestes talks about Apollo's oracle telling him to see this trial through, is that oracle Cassandra speaking from the Great Beyond? Or was it the Seer of Delphi/some other oracle?

That would have been the Pythia, the Oracle of Delphi. Though I do think it an interesting possibility that it might be Cassandra, who was also a priestess of Apollo. However, I think it is Apollo directing the Oracle to urge Orestes to murder Clytemnestra and then have faith in the outcome of the trial. My guess is that Apollo wants vengeance for the murder of Cassandra, but that's just an inference (never actually stated in the play).

Shelby: Are the furies that followed oresties a more conscience kind of thing or is it a real thing that people know about and just oresties can see them.

They are real. Keep in mind, in Greek myth, the gods are as visible and real to humans as other humans. They do however torment Orestes's conscience in the attempt to drive him mad.

Isaac: What's the deal with the furies? what are they? Are they like demons ghost or gods?

Connor: On the bottom of pages 266 and 267 roughly beginning at lines 790 and 820, the Furies say the same lines I believe word for word. This happens again at the bottoms of page 268 and 269 beginning lines 847 and 879. I just want to clarify, is this supposed to happen or is it a print error? If it is indeed supposed to occur, it as a response too Athene does not always make sense, as the same words are used for two different statements from her, two different times.

As we discussed in class, this is not a typo. The Furies are relentless in their drive to retain their power—vengeance as justice. They are not listening to Athena but forcing their case, making their appeal and insisting on their rights. Athena listens to them and finds a way to appease their anger through reasonable persuasion, offering them a new and different kind of power based on peace and prosperity.

Alyssa: Still a bit confused about what the furies actually are

Brandon: How do the furies work? are they something left over from the "old gods?" eldritch beings, or just some kind of force like karma?

Ava: Since Clytaemnestra's ghost is in this play, did the Greeks believe in other spiritual beings outside of the the god/godesses, furies, and ghost?

Yes, they believed in the afterlife, represented by the underworld, which was ruled over by Hades (Zeus's brother). When the Olympians defeated the Titans, Zeus took command of the sky, Poseidon the seas, and Hades the underworld. The underworld is richly imagined by the Greeks in many of their myths and stories. For example, Odysseus must make a journey to the underworld, where he encounters the dead heroes of the Trojan War, like Achilles and Agamemnon (who tells Odysseus of how he was murdered by Clytemnestra). The Greeks strongly believed in the spirits of the dead.

Marcela: I was disappointed by the outcome of Orestes's trial. He admitted to killing his mother, why was he able to walk away a free man?

Because he had Zeus, Apollo, and Athena on his side! They are determined to solidify patriarchal law and order.

Sami: Honestly the furies are really confusing on what they are

Grant: If Athena is this wise and enlightened Goddess then why does she have to enlist the help of 10 mortals to help her decide in the ruling of the "case"?

I think this represents Athena establishing justice through participation of citizens to determine the law and punishments for crimes. It's a symbolic move on Aeschylus's part, illustrating how Athens is a "civilized" city-state moving away from tyranny—the rule of one—to democracy—the rule of many. Athena is trying to model this for the Athenians. If she were the only one to decide the case (though she essentially does as the tie breaker), then she'd be a tyrant—instead she sets up a court of law with a jury that hears both sides and then votes, ultimately resolving things without further bloodshed. Aeschylus is celebrating Athens for its

attempts at founding a democracy while also warning Athens of the dangers of slipping back to the old tribal ways or rules of kings/aristocracy.

Zach: Why was Athena so quick to agree with Apollo that a man is more important than a woman. I know Athena is a very strong and powerful goddess and also very quick to anger. I'm just surprised she would go along with that.

She is the daughter of Zeus, emerging fully born out of his head. She ultimately owes her loyalty to the Father. At the same time, she is trying to convince the Furies to become more benevolent goddesses, "domesticating" them in service to the prosperity of the home, which would be the role of women in a Greek patriarchal society. This is not to say women were believed to be less important than men, only that their place should be in service to husband, family, and a well-run home. Women were viewed as important and central to upholding the family, and women who did so were praised and respected (see Penelope, wife of Odysseus). Thus, Clytemnestra is viewed as monstrous and unfeminine for trying to take the place of Agamemnon. We might even think of Electra as a human version of Athena—she is loyal to her father (the rule of the father); she's also angry at her mother, Clytemnestra, who basically keeps Electra a prisoner. Electra believes Clytemnestra fails her as a mother, since Electra remains unmarried without any of her own power or status, which she would have if she were married. In other words, women can often buy into the gender roles or rules of patriarchy if they believe it benefits them. At least, that would be a more contemporary feminist reading; keep some of this in mind when we read *House of Names*.

Victoria: With Athena agreeing with Apollo that men are more important than women, is that something that was common in that time? The mutual "understanding" that men were held higher than women?

See my answer above.

Joe: So was the entire plot of The Eumenides just a plan by Apollo to save Orestes from the Furies? If that's the case then why haven't the Furies attacked anyone else in that family? Clytemnestra killed out of revenge, so why didn't the Furies attack her?

I think the entire plot was a plan by Aeschylus to illustrate and celebrate the movement from vengeance to justice, violence to peace, chaos to prosperity. The Furies represent matrilineal rights and are on Clytemnestra's side for avenging the murder/sacrifice of her daughter, Iphigenia. Apollo is determined to make a point of humiliating and triumphing over the Furies, and reads as pretty misogynist for contemporary readers, but don't mistake Apollo's point of view with that of Aeschylus. Aeschylus, through Athena's ability to appease the Furies, is more concerned with peaceful resolution, and I think he is far more sympathetic to the Furies. Aeschylus understood, and with a great deal of wisdom, that in creating a new peaceful society, it was still important to keep elements of the old world or belief systems; he believed in balance and an ideal of equity—though not the same as our own contemporary ideals (after all, Athens still had slaves/non-citizens).

Brandon: I thought she was a Lannister. *comedy drums*



Luke P: The furies what are they, I looked it up and found that they were female chthonic deities of vengeance. What does this mean?

Chthonic translates as "in, under, or beneath the earth", from "earth") and literally means "subterranean", but the word in English describes [deities](#) or spirits of the [underworld](#), especially in the [Ancient Greek religion](#). The Greek word *khthon* is one of several for "earth"; it typically refers to that which is under the earth, rather than the living surface of the land (as [Gaia](#) or 'Ge' does), or the land as territory. (Wikipedia)

In other words, the Furies are goddesses of the underworld—which makes sense if their law is based on vengeance of the dead. Athena transforms them, still of the earth, but now goddesses of fertility, the hearth, the domestic realm.

Ashley: So what is Athena's thoughts on the tied vote that freed Orestes? Clearly the furies are angry but Athena seems to try and calm them down, by saying it's just a tie so he's really not free? I'm confused by that part.

Athena casts the tie-breaking vote that frees and clears Orestes of his crime so that he can return to Mycenae and rule in peace, the curse of the House of Atreus finally at an end. She tries to placate the Furies with the fact that it was a tied vote, that the citizens/jury listened to their side, and at least half supported them. This way, Athena reassures them that it was a fair trial—following the Mean/the middle way—and that they can take on a new role, no longer as the goddesses of vengeance since the laws of justice will henceforth be decided by a democratic trial and not bloodshed.

Jehan: That was a point that I made in my blog. Apollo seems to be fighting a proxy war against furies.

Yes, Jehan, great point! He is fighting the Furies on behalf of Zeus, but Athena finds a more peaceful resolution through persuasion, respect, and logic.

Sara: Did I miss whatever happened to Electra?

Nope, she just disappears in *The Libation Bearers*. Sophocles and Euripides both wrote tragedies exploring Electra's character and role more thoroughly. Aeschylus seems to write her off as just an avenging force to convince Orestes of the need to murder their mother. Again, we'll get a more nuanced depiction of her when we read *House of Names*.

Now that we've discussed them in more detail, who or what do you think the Furies represent?

Pandora: the old gods? they might represent the past transitioning into the future

Hunter: I felt as though they are personified woes idk

Connor: I believe they are the personified version of justice, vengeance, and corrections. Not good or evil necessarily, just the embodiment of correcting wrongdoings.

Savannah: Are they something only women could invoke? It just seems like they way we have been talking the hysterical almost harpy-esque furies would be a woman's version of a curse? I'm hoping they aren't just something a woman could invoke because I don't know how I'd feel about that

Brandon: personification of violence in pursuit of "justice"

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Ava: The furies seem to represent the over looming darkness of this blood feud

Luke W: The furies seem to act like vigilantes, taking justice into their own hands for crimes men have done.

Pandora: I agree Luke

Connor: I do agree with that passage, however, I am curious as to whether or not we should trust how Apollo depicts them. As you stated, Apollo is not an impartial judge, meaning would he not personify the furies to be more evil than they actually are? Especially using works such as vile and dark pits.

Ashley: So does Electra and Orestes just not care about their sister who died and only cares about their father they were blood

Josiah: I feel like a part the furies take is a representation of woman empowerment and how they are depicted as evil because of the time. Like "this idea is false because we believe a man is higher than a woman" is something believed in that time and is seen throughout the play, especially at the end when Athena shows that Orestes justice was more important because she was avenging his father, rather his mother's blood

Josiah: Is there a bigger significance to the amount of so many representations of justice? Was it a demonstration of how many sides there are or what they are in how people view justice?

Yes, the entire trilogy is concerned with different definitions, rules, beliefs, and practices surrounding justice. This would be a good topic to explore in your blogs!

Christa Wolf, *Cassandra* (Wed, Sep 15, 2021)

Grant: So in Cassandra's refusal to be with a "War Hero" it leads her being another female loss in the war. So now that she is looking back at it does she wish she went with Aeneas and left Troy? Or does she still stand by her values of not being associated with war in a sense? If that makes any sense.

This is a great question and is linked to Wolf's overall anti-war theme as well as her reason for writing Cassandra's story—because it's always the war heroes who are glorified and whose stories are told. We should discuss this more on Monday once we've finished the novel, since we'll have even more insights then.

Sara: I considered the priestess' a lot like nuns, but I thought nuns have to stay celibate and its obvious that the priestess are not (unless I misunderstand the group of women she was with in those scenes). The priestess' sounded more like slaves. Is this just because they are women, therefore having no rights or whatever?

The priestesses are not equivalent to nuns, since Wolf is grounding the religious offices, rituals, and beliefs in Ancient Greek customs and beliefs. Although we see similarities in gendered hierarchies with Catholicism, we should not impose our own gendered, sexual, or religious identities and roles onto the Greeks. As discussed in class, sexual intercourse was part of the ancient fertility rites, dating back to the Minoan civilization and paleolithic times. Wolf is also exploring a shift from matriarchal-centered goddess worship and/or fertility cults

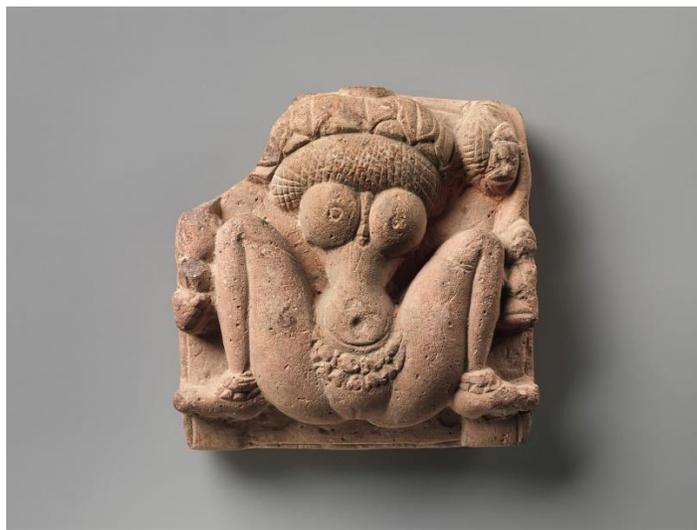
to patriarchal religions, which notably expanded over time alongside conflicts and disputes over territory. The Trojan War was most likely a dispute over territory and trading/shipping rights in the Dardanelles, as Wolf (and archaeologists) have suggested. Helen seems merely to be an excuse for the war, according to Wolf's version. She is an object to be fought over as a matter of male or national honor, but really, *Cassandra* seems to indicate, it is an economic/territorial dispute. But back to the religious sexual rites, these were considered normal in most societies that worshipped fertility goddesses. Some of the oldest archaeological finds of religious figurines, across many cultures in the paleolithic and ancient periods, were represented by fertility goddesses, such as these:



The *Venus of Willendorf* is a 4.4-inch tall carving discovered in Willendorf, Austria. It is believed to have been crafted between 30,000 and 25,000 BCE, making it one of the world's oldest known works of art.



An 8,000-year-old statuette of what could be a fertility goddess unearthed at a Neolithic site in Turkey



Lotus-Headed Fertility Goddess Lajja Gaurica. 6th century India (Madhya Pradesh)



This Minoan Mother goddess figurine (around 1600 BC), found in Crete, would have prefigured the Mycenaean and Trojan cultures by about 400 years. Minoan society was heavily influential of the societies living in Ancient Greece and Asia Minor (where Troy is presumed to have been located). You can see the serpent imagery is heavily associated with the goddess (though I'm not sure why there is a cat on top of her head). Wolf is most likely heavily borrowing from Minoan religious rites and iconography, especially in the various prophetic dreams and religious practices of Cassandra's culture.

Savannah: Pg. 3 and 5 Cassandra is given a way to commit suicide, why doesn't she take it? She knows she's going to die anyway, why not on her own terms? Did she not want to mess with fate? I know you were just talking about fate so I'm sorry if I missed you talking about the suicide options already!

We discussed this in class (see below for student responses to this question). For me, I think it's because she's compelled to remain a witness all the way up until her death. She knows death is coming and has no hope of surviving but life is also precious, every moment of it.

Pandora: Helen was never taken? Was it her choice to leave? What caused Cassandra's seizure on page 39?

Helen was taken by Paris, but then he lost her to the Egyptian king who took her from Paris. Wolf is following Euripides' play, *Helen*, as the source text for this part of Helen's myth. At the end of the Trojan War, Helen is eventually reunited with her husband, Menelaus. As discussed in class, Wolf uses this part of the myth to explore the manufacturing of war on the part of the Trojans. Helen is just a "phantom," the Big Lie, behind the war. Cassandra sees they cannot win a war based on such a lie. Cassandra's seizure on p. 39, one of her first, is brought on by her prophetic vision and understanding that so much of the war is based on falsehood, including false prophecies by Calchas, who was told to provide "favorable predictions" in support of the war. It's an instance where Cassandra suddenly sees the ugly truth of her own family and society, something that she had suppressed or turned a blind eye to, so it's ultimately a traumatic moment for her. It's like Cassandra has a physical reaction to the truth; the truth is solid and cannot be denied even though everyone around her both sees the truth and denies it at the same time.

Alyssa: Cassandra mentions her nurse a few times. Is this her nurse specifically Or is this like the families nurse?

Arisbe, the mother of Marpessa, is equivalent to something like the royal wet-nurse or nanny (not a medical nurse, though she does have lots of knowledge of medicinal herbs).

Ava: When Cassandra mentions different peoples weapons, example being Marpessa's silence and Agamemnon's blustering, are these weapons a good and or a bad thing? Are these "weapons" what leads to their ultimate demise? And what would Cassandra's weapon be?

This is a great question! The weapons could be good or bad depending on how one uses them. Silence is an especially strong theme here, as a weapon women can use to protect themselves, but it can harm them if they don't speak out. See my lecture where I talk a lot about the use of silence and speaking in the novel. Cassandra's weapons are her ability to see and speak the truth (though you could argue for other things too), but her weapons are also turned against her because no one in Troy wants to hear the truth. In this sense, Wolf plays with the whole myth of Apollo's curse—that Cassandra would be able to warn her people of the future, but no one would listen, they would call her mad. The irony, in Wolf's version, is that Cassandra eventually realizes everyone sees and knows the same things as her, they are just denying the reality, choosing to believe in propaganda and myth, choosing to conform to the political silencing that is imposed on anyone who speaks out against the war (like Cassandra).

Richard: I was going to ask two questions. One being, though it was already answered, the idea that Wolf's choice of writing this novel and what it had to do with her own time, where she's living in East Germany 40 some years after WWII, yet still paying for it.

Yes, she uses the myth to reflect on her own experiences as a child in Germany during WWII and an adult in East Germany after the war. Much of her work grapples with her past, as a member of the Aryan (Nazi) Youth party (during the war) and a reluctant Stasi informant in the late 1950s, questioning to what extent citizens are complicit with state violence or coerced to conform. Kind of linked to the Greek themes of Fate and chance/choice.

Luke W: Why didn't Cassandra take her own life? Does she not see a difference between murder and suicide, or is she just accepting her fate?

Marcela: You touched on this a little bit when you were speaking on Apollo's relationship with Cassandra. Why is Apollo in love with her, so in love to gift her with the ability to see the truth and visions if she doesn't feel the same way about him?

Above all, the Greek gods love those humans who love and revere them most. They're a pretty egotistical bunch, but basically, they can't exist without the love and faith of humans. Reminds me of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*. This is explored a lot more in Miller's *Circe*, which we're reading later in the semester. Cassandra is determined to be a priestess of Apollo, so what's not to love from Apollo's perspective if she's someone who wants to dedicate herself to his rites and worship? The problem for Cassandra, though, is she wants to be a priestess to gain power and status (in her family and society) but does not want to submit to the power of Apollo, and thus he curses her.

Abby: When Cassandra talks about Clytemnestra, she seems like she thinks she was so dishonored by the act of her killing her husband. Was she mad?

Not sure I follow the question. Especially since the word, "mad," in Cassandra's case could mean anger or insanity. I think Cassandra actually respects Clytemnestra, she sees themselves as equals (as powerful women). Neither woman has any love for Agamemnon.

Jada: Do you think Wolf is passing the sense of security she felt when relating her life to that as Cassandra's to those who read it as a way to feel the same?

I also need a bit more clarification here. I do think Wolf is relating her life to Cassandra's story, and as a way for many women (or oppressed peoples) to see themselves reflected by Cassandra. We will discuss this much more next week when we read the first essay by Wolf about why she is rewriting Cassandra's narrative and what she hopes to achieve.

Olivia: I just don't understand why she didn't commit suicide. Did she think she was continuing the line of murder? Or did she see that even if she killed herself, Clytemnestra would still kill Agamemnon?

Yes, partly, she knows she has no power to stop Clytemnestra, and I don't think she even wants to, since Cassandra sympathizes with Clytemnestra over the murder of Iphigenia. Perhaps with Cassandra choosing to live and show up in Mycenae, she thinks this might even solidify for Clytemnestra the plan to kill her husband, but Cassandra also sees it would happen either way.

Richard: The second being that, do you think she chose to write this in the way that she did, where past, present, and future (Wolf's time) are all intermingled because of Cassandra being a Seer?

I really like this insight about the temporal structure of the narrative; it does not just reflect how memory works, but as someone who can see the future and has lived through the future that she foresaw (the fall of Troy), Cassandra is simultaneously located in the past, present, and future. And yes, she is present in Wolf's future as Wolf tries to imagine Cassandra's past.

Connor: She had refused to be associated or part of the war, in the sense of being complicit, but even her refusal to be complicit, she still ended up a part of war, a prisoner and made an example of. With that in mind, and that she was prophetic, did she intentionally choose that option to be a type of martyr, or did she believe that her dissociation with war at first, would not come back to haunt her?

This is an interesting question. On one level, I think Wolf is indicating that all members of society are caught up in the war machine; that we cannot escape it. We are complicit or we resist; we are victims or perpetrators, or sometimes in-between. I believe Wolf is asking us to grapple with the moral ambiguities of wartime. I don't know if Cassandra chooses to be a martyr since she ultimately does not want to die for anyone's cause. This is worth returning to next week once we've read the rest of the novel.

Ari: Who chooses the priestess/seer and members of the group? Aside from the gods, is it its own autonomous entity where people are selected from outside of it, or its own sort of role within the society where one can only be born into it?

I think it's a combination. People can be born into it, they can be selected, or they are called to it as a vocation, or they have a prophetic gift (like Cassandra).

Savannah: Just a general comment I am living for all the Agamemnon bashing in this book. It's beautiful

Pandora: agreed

Zach: Did she have an option of just not being a priestess of Apollo after he tried to have sex with her or was she stuck in that role

She has been initiated and dedicated to that role; plus, I don't think she wants to give it up, nor does she feel she has a choice. Even if she was no longer a priestess, she would still have the gift/curse of prophecy. Cassandra also wants this role—she wants the power and status, at first—but then as the war drags on, and she is silenced for speaking out, she wants to escape. Pay attention to the passages where she talks about the caves and the women there, who function as a counter-society to Troy and the official religion, a place of sanctuary where Cassandra can discover an alternative to being a princess and priestess, a different kind of community that is about life, not “killing and dying.”

Sara: Apollo gave her the gift/curse of being a prophet but Cassandra mentions there was a night when snakes were licking their ears and it was said they will probably become prophets, so was she always destined to become a prophet and in the same vein, also always destined for everyone to forget that happened with the snakes and not believe her?

Dream imagery throughout the book is important. Mainly Wolf's point is that dreams and prophecies are not solid or one thing but up for multiple interpretations.

Brandon: So, if Helen was a myth, a lie, was it just a convenient *cassus belli* for the Greeks to take down Troy?

Yup, for both sides. The Greeks believe Troy has Helen and the Trojans know they don't have Helen. Also, as Cassandra notes with the recollection of the three SHIPS (diplomatic trips to Greece), tensions and conflicts leading up to the war had long been brewing. Helen is just an excuse and never the real cause.

Alyssa: Haha yes, I agree Savannah

Marcela: How is their fate determined?

As discussed in class, the Greeks believed fate was determined by the gods, namely the Moirai:

“...any of three goddesses who determined human destinies, and in particular the span of a person's life and his allotment of misery and suffering. Homer speaks of Fate (*moira*) in the singular as an impersonal power and sometimes makes its functions interchangeable with those of the Olympian gods. From the time of the poet Hesiod (8th century BC) on, however, the Fates were personified as three very old women who spin the threads of human destiny. Their names were Clotho (Spinner), Lachesis (Allotter), and Atropos (Inflexible). Clotho spun the “thread” of human fate, Lachesis dispensed it, and Atropos cut the thread (thus determining the individual's moment of death).” (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Fate-Greek-and-Roman-mythology>)

Joe: Following up with what Ari asked, are all seer's people who have been blessed by gods or are these mostly just people who pretend to predict the future for their own benefit?

It seems, in Wolf's novel, that it's a combination of the two. Some are truly gifted, but most are just manipulating smoke and shadows (or animal entrails), telling what people want to hear, or what they are commanded to foretell as part of propaganda and/or political strategy.

Emily: A few people have asked this but I was also curious as to why she didn't commit suicide

Shelby: when cassandra mentioned her nurse, does she know that cassandra wants to commit suicide. And Cassandra had the chance to so why didn't she.

Janelle: Why exactly is Cassandra referring to Clytemnestra the way she did on pg 9? Does she hate her for what she did or why does she say that she is the woman she thought she was.

As I said earlier, Cassandra does not hate Clytemnestra but partly admires her. Clytemnestra proves that she is far superior to Agamemnon, that she would “not share the throne with this nonentity.” She sympathizes with her, assuming he “treated her vilely while he still controlled her”—in other words, he is despicable, never knowing the true power and strength of Clytemnestra, and a fool for not seeing she would murder him for the death of their daughter. Cassandra says that Clytemnestra “is racked with hatred”—it’s palpable and easily visible when she welcomes him home. Cassandra realizes that because of the kind of woman Clytemnestra is, as someone who will no longer be controlled or insulted by her husband, “that the queen cannot spare my life.” Clytemnestra has no personal animosity toward Cassandra, she is just a symbol of Agamemnon’s insults and disrespect. Cassandra questions, “When did my hatred disappear?”—meaning, unlike Clytemnestra, she is no longer driven by hatred, anger, or revenge; at the end of her life, she is trying to reach some peace within herself and has also learned that hatred is just part of the never-ending cycle of violence.

Josiah: Do you think that Cassandra, being a form of Wolf’s interpretations, is similar or if not the same as the feminism going on nowadays? Does she help in displaying those emotions, thoughts, etc.?

Yes, absolutely! But we will save that for next Wednesday once we’ve finished the book and read the first essay. Do keep this in mind as you keep reading.

Isaac: I was a little confused about the ships, were they war ships? and what was their importance?

The SHIPS were diplomatic missions to Greece (see my answer above to Brandon’s question).

Savannah: Also real quick are they a couple? Marpessa just in love with Cassandra? Or am I misreading their interactions?

No, they are not a couple. Marpessa has grown up with Cassandra, as her childhood friend and then her servant. They do love each other, like family, but it’s also ambivalent, at least more so from Marpessa, considering she is of the lower class and never has as much power as Cassandra. They have a complicated relationship. Marpessa, like her mother Arisbe, does not at all act servile toward Cassandra, often criticizing her or exasperated with Cassandra’s blind privilege, but she is dedicated to her.

So, after looking at the passage on pp. 2-3, why does everyone think Cassandra chooses not to commit suicide?

Savannah: She wants to see how it ends? Wants to see Clytemnestra to know who will kill her?

Pandora: She hasn't seen what she's supposed to see?

Ashley: Didn't she just want to enjoy her best life

Sara: This one was really confusing for me, I think too much of it went right over my head

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Connor: I guess maybe then it takes away from her point of not being associated with war? Killing herself to get away from fate when war could have saved her, gives power to war.

Ava: Cassandra wanted to see what would happen, because she had hope that things might change.

Isaac: I think she knows she still has more to do before she dies.

Janelle: That was my same understanding ^^ I feel like she wants to see more of her life before she actually lets go completely.

Josiah: I felt like she also just wanted to see how things played out

Savannah: Is there something maybe that she wants to see herself be right in the end? I can't remember exactly where but she talks about how she'll be proven right eventually and maybe she wants to keep going to be right? Just so she doesn't feel insane because this poor girl is being gaslit constantly and seeing herself be right must be rewarding?

Jehan: I think she wanted her death to be valuable. To mean something.

Ashley: Is that part of the reason why she wants to become a priestess? Even though when she said she's felt emptiness since childhood?

These are all strong answers!

Jehan: What are some decisions or lack of action that she regrets?

That will probably become clearer as we read to the end of the novel. Many of her regrets, though, are linked to the fact that she remained so willfully blind to what was going on in Troy before she began to speak out, or that she wasted so many of the war years not living more fully, not choosing an option other than or outside of war.

Jehan: Did Calchas had prophetic powers from the gods? Cassandra on a later page appears to not believe in Calchas's prophecies. Was Calchas gifted?

No, Cassandra indicates Calchas is a fraud, whose loyalties (and prophecies) are easily bought and only used to advance his own interests. After all, Calchas is the one who convinced Agamemnon that he needed to appease Artemis by sacrificing Iphigenia.

Savannah: Okay so was it normal for priests to sleep with priestesses? Or Panthous just a really gross dude who is just like that with Cassandra

Yeah, he's pretty gross, and Cassandra eventually loathes and rejects him, but as discussed in class, sexual intercourse could be viewed as part of the religious rites. Also, the Trojans are still influenced by more matriarchal religious practices than the Greeks, which Wolf seems to associate with a greater degree of sexual freedom for the women of Troy (as opposed to the Greeks). And, as discussed in class, the Greeks and Trojans have very different norms and mores when it comes to sexual relationships (at least different from our contemporary society). For example, within Greek society there was a class of women referred to as the:

"Hetaira, (Greek: "female companion"), one of a class of professional independent courtesans of ancient Greece who, besides developing physical beauty, cultivated their minds and talents to

a degree far beyond that allowed to the average Attic woman. Usually living fashionably alone, or sometimes two or three together, the hetairai enjoyed an enviable and respected position of wealth and were protected and taxed by the state. Though they were generally foreigners, slaves, or freedwomen, their freedom was greater than that of the married woman, who was bound to seclusion. That their homes were frequented by married men was not censured by society. They were often hired as entertainers for symposia and family sacrifices. The hetairai of Corinth and Athens were especially noted for their outstanding physical and cultural accomplishments.” (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/hetaira>)

Sara: So the reason why they would seem like slaves to use is only the aspect of being forced to have sex with these men, otherwise they had respect in society?

I don't think they are forced, at least as Cassandra tells it, they are willing participants because of the religious rite of initiation. The sex would not have been seen as coerced or degrading. In fact, the one time Panthous attempts to force himself on Cassandra, she rejects him and never has sex with him again. This raises important issues, though, because we will see later how the women of Troy, including Cassandra, are subjected to rape as "spoils" of war.

Grant: I think at one point the job had decently high respect for their job but it got degraded by the patriarchy over time.

Yes, sex work was not at all viewed the way we (as a society/culture) view it now (see above).

Christa Wolf, *Cassandra* (Mon, Sep 20, 2021)

Pandora: What happened to Cassandra's faith in the gods?

I think she loses her faith during the course of the war. She sees how the oracles are used by Troy for war propaganda and how the religious rituals and beliefs become twisted in service of human conflicts.

Savannah: Pg. 79 Cassandra says "Apollo, if you do exist after all..." Does she think she got the curse/gift from some other entity? And on 98 she says she's stopped believing in the gods but how does she explain her cure/gift then? Does she think she's gone crazy and she doesn't have a gift/curse? Or am I very much overthinking this

We discussed in class at length how Wolf interprets/rewrites this part of Cassandra's myth—she takes the mythology and gives it more of a realistic representation. Cassandra's gift/curse is interpreted through her dream; also, often when she breaks out in some prophetic speech, it's not really prophecy but her seeing the "truth" of things that others refuse to see or acknowledge. Her madness really stems from the madness of her society. She also feels divided within herself—can she be loyal to her family/Troy while also remaining loyal to her own integrity and morals?

Alyssa: I noticed at the beginning of the novel and at the end where we left off on page 138 us in third person while the rest of the novel is in first person. Why did she do it this way? Was she just trying to emphasize this repetition to show importance for these closing and opening statements ?

Yes, Wolf ties things back to the beginning. We shift from Cassandra's point of view back to Wolf's perspective/present, standing before the Lion Gate at the ruins of Mycenae, as witness to the place where Cassandra died.

Olivia: Maybe I missed it, but what was the whole point of trying to set Polyxena as bait for Achilles? I mean what was going to be gained if they actually did go through with it? How would this have fixed anything?

They believed if they killed Achilles they would win the war; they succeed in killing him but still end up defeated. We discussed at length why this plan/scene is so central to Cassandra's narrative and her realization that she could no longer remain complicit with or silent about her own people's blindness and self-destruction.

Abby: What did wolf mean when she said on page 107 "They asked Apollo to take the baby from her?"

They were praying for Apollo to cause Polyxena to abort her pregnancy from Andron. It's a weird scene, since Arisbe, or any other medicinal healer would have known how to expel an unwanted pregnancy without intervention of a god.

Isaac: I think I might be missing something about the role that the gods played in ancient Greece. Why do they fight on the battlefield with humans, and why do they pick certain sides to fight with?

We discussed in class (see below for student answers to this question).

Marcela: What is the significance of the stone lions at the end of the novel?

See my answer above to Alyssa's question. The stone lions are depicted on the Lion Gate entrance to the citadel of Mycenae.

Jehan: When Troilus went into the temple, was he expecting Achilles to let him go? It seems as though Achilles is only called a murderer when he is in the temple.

As discussed in class, yes, Troilus believed the Temple of Apollo would secure sanctuary. Achilles breaks all of these "civilized" rules of war, exposing there is nothing "civilized" in war—its brutality and violence has no bounds (as represented by "Achilles the brute").

Ava: Since this was her fate, would she have been able to change it if she chose to run away with Aeneas or would her fate end up catching back up with her? Was this an inexitable fate or was it subject to change?

I think Cassandra's "fate" is not necessarily to die at the hands of Clytemnestra but that she is fated to bear witness to the truth and her life until the very end. It's against her nature to run away, like Aeneas. She has struggled and worked hard to remain a witness, to not run from the truth.

Grant: I know this may not pertain to Cassandra in the novel but I noticed that while I was doing my resource page that there are different "versions" and more specifically different versions when talking about how she receives the power to tell prophecies. So my question is how does she official get them does she sleep with Apollo first or not at all?

I don't know if there is an answer to this—the origins of Cassandra's source myth. Myths are passed down over centuries and receive different interpretations and versions based on the storyteller. Kind of the theme of our whole class. 😊

Sara: Pg 138 "The pain will remind us of each other. When we meet later, if there is a later, we will recognize each other." Is this her wondering about an after life? Because at this point she knows how it all ends?

Possibly? I think she is imagining a community of survivors who have a shared narrative of pain and trauma. Even if she knows how it all ends, I always find that Cassandra still clings to the possibility of life and survival (not just an afterlife).

Ashley: So her father disowned her because she didn't speak up of the death of his son Troilus? Or was it because he was murdered in the temple? I feel like he would be more upset over Hector since he was considered the chief hero of the family. Why would she say anything when the people didn't believe her anyways but they were all mad at her? Also, when Hector had the dream of getting "Pushed out of the war womb" was he foreseeing his own death?

To your last question, that's a great interpretation of Hector's dream! Also, "pushed out of the war womb," indicates how his own myth of war hero is born out of his death. Priam ultimately disowns Cassandra because she refuses to agree with or condone their plan to use Polyxena as bait for Achilles (as discussed in class). And it's not just this one instance but years of Cassandra trying to push back and years of Trojan women being silenced and pushed aside during the war. Cassandra also asks herself why she just didn't comply/agree—she cannot remain silent or neutral in the face of corrupt power, even if no one wants to hear her.

Brandon: Did Penthesilea actually exist in greek myth, or was she a creation of the author?

Yes, she is an actual figure of myth, as the leader of the Amazons. We didn't get into discussion of the Amazons in Wolf's novel, but certain questions are raised by Wolf's inclusion of Penthesilea: Wolf represents women who love to wage wars in the character of Penthesilea and the Amazonian warriors. How does she represent these women? Why does Cassandra keep away from these women? How is Cassandra's position and approach to war different from these women's? Do you agree with Wolf's suggestion that such women are mere proxies for patriarchy's worst excesses? (see pp. 117-120)

Layth: I read a little bit about Wolf herself and I'm wondering what prompted her to go see all the real world places that are in the Oresteia and the other greek plays.

We will discuss this Wednesday after reading Wolf's first essay where she writes about her trip to Greece and various inspirations for *Cassandra*.

Connor: Cassandra, having the prophetic foresight from Apollo, can see what is around her as it relates to time. Being as in same interpretations, this is often a curse, is there hate or disdain for the Gods, or is that not a feeling she would have because it might worsen her situation to be even more out of favor with them?

This is an interesting question. In Wolf's version, Cassandra is not disdainful of the gods, but of how humans have twisted their versions and relationships with the gods.

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Olivia: The author makes it seem like Cassandra was just another female casualty of war, but is she? She constantly talks about how Cassandra was feared by many and people from everywhere knew of her powers (even if they didn't believe her). So is she just another casualty? She's not like any other woman, not even her sister.

This is complicated. Yes, Cassandra has a lot of power and status—she often even presents herself as superior to or above other women (part of her hubris/character flaw). In the end, though, she realizes she is no different from other women, that war and patriarchy turn all women into objects, “living statues.”

Sara: End of ph 129 I think, She is talking about her overwhelming pain and it makes sense that she would be in physical pain but I was wondering if it felt like it was mental pain or just the physical pain?

So much of Cassandra's pain is mental pain—trauma and dissociation, though often accompanied by physical pain (her imprisonment/torture, her rape). She is overwhelmed by the pain of losing her home, her identity, her family, her very sense of wholeness.

Why are the gods so involved in human lives and conflicts?

Savannah: Boredom? They've got nothing to lose and might as well go fight. Need that worship/praise?

Isaac: I think its probably based on who worships them most but im really not sure

Zach: as forms of entertainment?

Olivia: I agree with Savannah ^

Pandora: I was going to say the gods were bored.

Josiah: Does Wolf's Cassandra seem similar to feminism that is going on around us nowadays? Or was it really only more similar for the time it was created; around the Cold War?

I think Wolf is speaking to the conditions of women's lives throughout much of history, as part of her feminist critique of patriarchy and war.

Janelle: on pg 117 there is a quote that says “they kill whomever they love, love in order to kill” what is meant by this

I believe this is Panthous criticizing the Amazons. He fears them and their violence (from a patriarchal perspective). He sees them as women out of control, and Cassandra doesn't seem to agree with his perspective, even though she has trouble with the Amazons—she is trying to understand how both men and women are capable of violence and hatred, that women are not just naturally pacifists. Women can be complicit with the violence of patriarchy and war.

Brandon: well, when half your city dies of the plague one year, and the next you get massive crops.....easiest explanation is fickle gods

Savannah: I guess they think Achilles is the only thing that's really giving the Greeks power? If he's out of the game they'd win or at least a better shot

Abby: They want themselves to always be right

Savannah: Cassandra knows Achilles doesn't have actual interest in women (pg. 83) and is very harsh with them so I think she's calling out using Polyxena because she knows he's not really interested in her?

Discussion of Cassandra's dream about the sun and moon—which shines brighter (p. 87)? Why does Marpessa tell her this “a completely perverted question”?

Sara: Because they are both necessary?

Brandon: no matter how she answers, a god will be pissed

Olivia: Because they both shine bright in their own way? Why compare them?

Pandora: I think its because there's multiple answers based on opinions.

Hunter: Comparison is bad when the gods are the one who created both to begin with

Josiah: Because they each have their own purpose in brightness, one is brighter in its own way

Grant: it's sort of a trick question

Savannah: Also I feel like Cassandra knows how much of a screw up Paris is so why are we trusting him to shoot the arrow?!

Ashley: unethical. Was her vision of Troilus unclear because he was killed in the temple? I thought she mentioned something about it being foggy. Or unclear.

Savannah: Want to get this out to maybe get a response for the discussion archives: I love how Clytemnestra was handled in this book, Cassandra and her bits were really interesting. (Page 42 being sooo intriguing to me) I think if fits with the theme of women being forced to play a part, or to fight each other rather than the patriarchy

I agree with this, Savannah! Clytemnestra, in Cassandra's view, is not a monster but a woman of power playing a role to retain that power. Cassandra sees and respects Clytemnestra (to an extent) and also realizes her murder is impersonal—Clytemnestra isn't jealous of Cassandra, as so many versions of the myth assert, but is trapped by her role. She cannot allow Cassandra to live because this would only weaken her own power. Cassandra doesn't agree with this but sees and accepts the fact of it.

Christa Wolf, *Cassandra* (Wed, Sep 22, 2021)

After reading the first essay by Wolf, what are some reasons for why she felt inspired to write about Cassandra?

Jehan: She saw the similarity between their circumstances.

Savannah: She talks about reading the Oresteia and how Cassandra, "took her captive" (Pg. 144) and I guess it was she also felt like a captive in her own life? Kind of like Cassandra?

Pandora: I think some reasons that wolf felt inspired by Cassandra was that their stories at similar. they are women in wartime or after wartime.

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Alyssa: She could relate to Cassandra and the experiences she was going through.

Ari: Wolf may have felt similarities between her society and Cassandra's society with issues like repression, and it's easier to write about something a person can relate to.

Emily: She felt that she was going through similar experiences and feelings as Cassandra

Brandon: Women in postwar eras tend to suffer, so I imagine she felt connected to Cassandra on some level

Luke W: She probably felt captive in East Germany, especially after all the trouble she went through to go to Greece.

Zach: Wolf saw some aspects in her own while looking at Cassandra's story.

Grant: It seems like the theme of Wolf's life was to stay true to who you are while living in a society of conformity. I think Cassandra had many experiences like this throughout the novel. One example could be that when Apollo was trying to force her to sleep with him and she ultimately refused in a time where women were expected to comply

Savannah: It could also be because she didn't like how "the male poet saw these women" (Pg. 179) and maybe the feminist in her was annoyed on how Clytemnestra and Cassandra were handled and wanted to give them a voice?

Victoria: I thought the same thing that Alyssa said. Wolf could relate to Cassandra she felt a connection

Olivia: Along with Savannah, she says that "three thousand years - melted away. So the gift of prophecy... stood the test of time." Wolf felt personally connected to Cassandra and believed her word true over Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, or even Aeschylus.

Josie: She explained how Cassandra took her captive, like Savannah said, but I also think she saw some type of similarity and connection towards her

Connor: I believe she was inspired to write about Cassandra due to the similarity between the political and "war" climates. Christa Wolf grew up after World War Two in East Germany, having to deal with the Cold War tensions and the difficulties of being a female at the time. It paired well with Cassandra who came from a similar war time and political climate of Troy, and being a prisoner of war, but also like Christa, in her life.

Sara: I believe she felt "possessed" by Cassandra because she saw so many things ring familiar to her in her own life and using her as her own outlet

Layth: She felt that Cassandra was one of the few women, who during oppression, wasn't afraid to speak out even though no one would listen.

Ava: Wolf was looking for a way to express her feelings from the war and this story was one that she felt connected to. Her having the ability to rewrite this story in her own way and making it her own was her way of coping with the affects of the war.

Pandora: Maybe she felt that Cassandra's voice was silenced and she wanted it to be heard.

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Ava: It almost seemed like she wanted her voice to be heard by anyone who wanted to hear about the impact that war can have on the civilians.

Chloe: I agree, the two seemed to have a similar story which makes sense why there was a connection between them

Luke W: She was part of the socialist party in East Germany and was an informant of the Stasi, so you could argue she was part of that issue.

Isaac: I think she saw a part of Cassandra that she related to, and she wanted to know more about her. and maybe she was unsatisfied with the role given to Cassandra in the play, I think she thought Cassandra as a character deserved a larger role

Luke P: She saw the opportunity to write about what she saw in politics and she taught lessons through Cassandra that applied to that.

Jada: It seemed like by relating herself to Cassandra she's bringing light to the subject for their voices to be heard about the lasting traumas

Shelby: Wolf saw similar stories, being held captive in east Germany made her feel trapped and controlled and wanted to speak out but she couldn't because nobody would listen like in the writing Cassandra was telling people the truth but nobody believed her not even her mother.

Josiah: Along with the sense of being similar to Cassandra and really just the feeling of censorship, I feel like Wolf also wanted to show others of the ideas that an individual may have and that we should not overlook them when it involves a serious problem, such as war.

What does Wolf hope to achieve in rewriting the Cassandra myth?

Abby: Women's rights and what life was like for women back then to show how far we came

Shelby: to let women know they should speak out the truth even if nobody believes them

Ashley: Maybe to give women a little more credit

Zach: Wolf is trying to talk about and spread awareness of women and citizens lost to war

Jada: I think she wants people to understand and realize how long this trauma and objectification have been around. It's not a modern thing that just came about but something that has slowly been trying to be fixed over time.

Olivia: I think she wants to give Cassandra, herself, and many other women a voice in the chaos of the world. Although Cassandra's story is thousands of years old, the basic themes and events are still present in today's society.

Josiah: Oh I guess I kinda accidentally mixed the two questions in my last response but I think she wanted to show that women have more credit than they have been given

Savannah: Give a different perspective? The very last line she's talking about how none of the storytellers ever mentioned this light she sees that she thinks is very important. Perspectives change over time and we owe to ourselves to relook at things

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Alyssa: She wants to be able to speak about these problems, specifically for women, and raise awareness in a way that captures readers attention

Marcela: To personify the myths and make them relatable/applicable to our society.

Ari: Wolf might be trying to introduce a new perspective to the myth, and to inspire change within society itself to be more introspective about issues such as feminism

Emily: She wants other people to hear their experiences to see a different perspective and to speak out about the problems throughout time and how they're still continuing to happen

Sara: She wanted to get a feminine (my goodness spelling is hard) perspective of those stories to show the unfair in some of how things were written like before

Ashley: Not to overlook women and their objections

Janelle: I think she wants to show other women to not be scared and learn from the past. To raise awareness especially for today's society

Grant: I think she felt a draw to Cassandra and she wanted it to be told the "right" way. As Marcella says "to personify" them for her and others in a sense

Pandora: I said this on the last questions but she saw that Cassandra's voice was being silenced and as a woman herself wanted her voice to be heard. And have a voice of a woman's hypothetical point of view during the time which were overlooked.

Ava: Wolf wanted to change how women are seen by connecting to past stories of women and showing the trends. She wants people to start to realize the lack of a voice that women have.

Isaac: I think she wants to give a voice to character that didn't have one in the play, also giving a voice to women who didn't have one

Luke P: She hopes to make a case for why women's rights she shows that women haven't had rights for thousands of years and something needs to change.

Connor: In rewriting the myth of Cassandra, I believe more perspective was given to women in war and how old literature and culture often overlooked it, yet women were there and important figures as well. They may have been left out in writing as equals to men, but that does not mean they were not figures. Another achievement is a reflection on our modern mistakes. Showing a story of the past and how people got caught up in war, can make the reader pair that with their own circumstances. Helps to avoid the mistakes of the past.

Josie: To show that women are powerful and that women deserve more credit, how life was for women back then and how it was so hard for them, especially because Wolf felt connected to Cassandra.

Layth: It's possible that she wasn't satisfied with Aeschylus's rendition. She wanted more detail and maybe she felt that her story was a perfect fit. She also has a more modern take on life and wants to revamp the story for modern day.

Savannah: In the Oresteia she's just a plot point

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Ashley: I think its crazy how even royalty got treated that way she was a princess, so not just commoners or slaves

How would you interpret this quotation from Wolf: “Storytelling is humane and achieves humane effects, memory, sympathy, understanding--even when the story is in part a lament for the destruction of one's fathers’ home, for the loss of memory, the breakdown of sympathy, the lack of understanding.” (p. 173)

Olivia: She’s saying that even if the story is sad or depressing or even horrifying, we need to continue to tell that story. Fortunately or unfortunately, those emotions and events are part of what makes us human beings. We all feel those things even if we don’t want to.

Josiah: It helps untangle loose thoughts

Savannah: Before written history, it was passed down through a oral tradition. Stories are a way to keep memory alive, hell maybe even history itself alive. Making stories universal can connect people with the people of the past?

Marcela: Story telling is important because it’s our way of connecting with one another.

Pandora: It helps people to remember the past in the present.

Chloe: Story telling is also a big way that people teach lessons from the past to future generations

Ava: Storytelling as been a form of communication from the very being of our existance. It is a form of connecting to others and it is how we pass down advice from one generation from another. Humans tell story to connect with each other and our pasts.

Zach: story telling is a way to spread ideals, keep stories alive, and make sure people learn from histories mistakes.

Sara: Storytelling is important to humanity because knowing how others felt or feel about a situation can be different and is needed to understand sypathy better

Abby: there would be no known history without the primary factors like artifacts and paintings so writing and stories are important

Ashley: It gives us something to believe in or look back on.

Alyssa: Storytelling is a way of communication that has occurred for years and years

Connor: Stories make us who we are. Our lives are stories, made up of intertwining narratives, connections, relationships, plots, drama, etc. Our lives are a living breathing novel. Without stories, we wouldn’t truly be living, we would just exist. Existing isn’t thriving, just “surviving”.

Janelle: I think maybe to not let go of the past. To keep the tradition in good ways or even in bad. It is good to remember things from the past and tell future generations

Josiah: I thinks she’s saying that stories help to explain events, actions, feelings, and/or thoughts into words

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Luke P: She trying to get across that storytelling is a way to get important messages across using real world examples. It shows us different perspectives on an issue when everyone only has their own opinion and perspective based on what they see.

Layth: Story telling is a form of delivering a message or teaching a lesson. It makes it easier to grasp and allows for different perspectives.

Ava: There has always been little fables, which give short entertaining stories that provide an overarching lesson that is buried between the excitement.

Josie: Storytelling is so important because it gives us the understanding of how that person understands the story by trying to explain the story itself. Wolf is basically saying that every story deserves to be told, and whoever tells it can tell it the way that they understood the story, giving everyone who listened a different perspective and point of view.

Isaac: Oral traditions used to be all we had as a form of communication to the future generations, they learned almost everything through stories

At the end of the novel, why does Cassandra say she “cannot love a hero”?

Savannah: I honestly did not get why she was into this guy in the first place but I think it's because Achilles was a 'hero' and maybe Cassandra believes all heroes will end up too 'big for their britches' and become changed from what they started as?

Zach: because heroes propel and continue the cycle of war, which is something Cassandra doesn't want to happen.

Pandora: Because heroes die and she didn't want to see him die.

Grant: I thought this was supposed to mean that she cannot love someone who represents something she so strongly stands against

Marcela: I thought it was because she's rejecting the patriarchy. She doesn't need a man to save her, and she'd rather die instead

Olivia: There is no hero. None of the “heroes” in The Oresteia or The Iliad are true heroes. They raped and stole women and took them as slaves. Achilles is a hero but he was still going to rape Cassandra's sister. No one can truly be a hero.

Abby: She wants to save herself and not someone else to save her

Alyssa: She knows that loving a hero will never end well because they risk their lives to be the hero, she also doesn't want to love someone that has such opposite beliefs

Sara: Heroes give themselves up for others and in a way don't stand up for themselves

Luke W: Because even though she loves him, he is part of something she hates.

Josiah: I thought it was because heroes often come from negative things, like war, and since she is anti war she dislikes all aspects of it

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Connor: I believe it has to do with her interpretation of a hero, and what she believes heroes are willing to do. She viewed them a certain way, most likely as willing to go to certain lengths to achieve their goals, like continue war and perpetuate squabbles, which she did not want to be apart of or complicit in. Not loving one was a form of branching off and having her own voice in the matter.

Josie: She didn't want to witness a person that she loved die because they are apart of something she hated

Ava: Cassandra "cannot love a hero", because having a hero means someone has lost. Sometimes heroes allow the power and the fame that they gain from their recognition of their "heroic" act, which leads them to start more conflicts in some cases. Heroes aren't a really great concept when it comes to thinking of war, because this means that so many people have died to allow someone else to gain the recognition.

Luke P: Hero's are based on how many people they kill. She doesn't want to have to rely on someone to protect her. She wants to live in a world where she can live without needing protection. Where there is no ego war.

Isaac: Maybe for Cassandra a hero is someone who personifies the war she hates

Layth: Heroes are put up on a pedestal and are normally the subjects of the plots denouement. This responsibility is possibly something that Cassandra doesn't want to be apart of and would rather end it with what is already destined for her.

Savannah: His dad [Anchises] was the only guy I loved in this play

Brandon: also, from what I understand from greek heroes, they aren't always good people

Pandora: same Savannah

Colm Tóibín, *House of Names* (Wed, Sep 29, 2021)

Sara: I was trying to understand what exactly caused Aegisthus to become imprisoned in the dungeon that Clytemnestra found him in. I understood he had guards killed so instead of a regular prison he was out in that dungeon (at least how I understood it) but what got him to be there captive in the first place?

Refer back to the underlying feud in the House of Atreus. Agamemnon's father, Atreus, murdered the children of his brother, Thyestes. Aegisthus is the remaining son of Thyestes, thus bound to revenge his side of the family, which is probably why he's been held in a dungeon. Aegisthus also seems to exert some powerful charisma and persuasion over his captors, and most obviously with Clytemnestra.

Shelby: Clytemnestra says "a hunger I had come to know too and had come to appreciate" (page 3) in the opening pages. What does the hunger supposed to mean?

I think a hunger for vengeance.

Abby: Why did they put her in that "cell" with the rock over her?

To silence her, punish her for resisting the murder of her daughter, keep her from cursing Agamemnon and the rest of the Greeks before the set sail for Troy.

Olivia: What was with the wailing ladies? Clytemnestra said that there were women screaming at night before someone died. Are these real ladies or just a figment of her imagination?

These were real women who performed an important role in the rites of mourning. Many cultures have had professional mourners, and in Greece, this role could also be linked to the Fates—here, in Tóibín's version, they might also be a reference to the Furies. Check out this article: <https://www.dw.com/en/professional-mourners-keep-an-ancient-tradition-alive-in-greece/a-55572864>.

Savannah: Two questions: Did Toibin, or even Wolf, face any backlash for their rewriting of these myths? I think you had said Wolf had a little but did Toibin? Sorry if you've gone over this and I forgot! Are there like myth purists who hate rewrites? Was Orestes taken to Iphigenia's sacrifice in the original or was that really mentioned?

No, I think myth is endlessly adaptable; most myth scholars are not myth purists. I'm not sure if Orestes is present at the sacrifice in Euripedes' version, Iphigenia in Aulis. This could be something Tóibín adds in for dramatic effect.

Marcela: What was the point of killing Cassandra? Why not just keep her captive?

Ava: Is there foreshadowing of Clytemnestra's death when she says, "Maybe the smell has entered my body and been welcomed there like an old friend come to visit." ?

This is a great point of interpretation! Yes, perhaps Clytemnestra has embraced too much death. Also, her body that gave life to her children is also a vehicle of her own death at the hands of her children.

Grant: Why did Clytemnestra distance herself from Electra after Iphigenia's death?

Perhaps grieving for Iphigenia and she also doesn't seem to like Electra that much. Later, she realizes she should have kept her daughter closer and made her an ally, provided her comfort and the truth about Agamemnon's role in the murder of her sister.

Layth: Why is Agamemnon so timid to tell his family about the sacrifice? Isn't it for a greater cause?

That's what he tells himself, but he also says it's out of his control. He tricked them with false promise of marriage, which makes him a coward, especially in Clytemnestra's eyes.

Sara: Also thought it seems like a real lapse in judgement to go from "I trust no one ever again" to "yeah,i" "I trust this man that's being held captive for murder (I think)"

Ari: Why would Agamemnon come back after sacrificing two of his daughters and have complete trust in Clytemnestra? It was clear she wasn't going to get over it so easily.

His hubris/pride. He is the king, after all, and believes Clytemnestra will just fall in line.

Luke W: I think Cassandra is killed because she is sort of Agamemnon's mistress

Alyssa: Agamemnon and the men believe in the Gods so much that they're willing to sacrifice Iphigenia. On page 32 Clytemnestra expresses having doubts about it. Did anyone else feel that any of these other characters expressed or didn't express doubts?

This is an interesting question. Is it only Clytemnestra who has lost faith in the gods? Or has everyone lost faith? Are the Greeks willing to sacrifice Iphigenia because they believe Artemis wants this, or is she just a political symbol used to unite the Greek soldiers before battle?

Zach: why did Agamemnon make Clytemnestra watch the death of Iphigenia

Probably to punish her and impress upon her that she has no power.

Savannah: Sara I thought the same thing! I mean I get why she needed to but I was screaming at her to be careful ;-;

Pandora: Why did Agamemnon go to Clytemnestra like he didn't just kill their daughter? In the beginning of the section Clytemnestra says that her daughter was fighting and screaming but later in the sections she was gagged with the cloth, was that the author trying to humanize them?

Iphigenia is gagged because Clytemnestra told her to curse the Greeks for killing her. So, perhaps here is a hint that the Greeks do believe in the gods and the power of curses, which is why they also imprison Clytemnestra. Agamemnon may be seeking absolution or some reassurance from Clytemnestra (but he's kind of an idiot).

Richard: I guess one kinda question I had, though it's a small thing, is why did Agamemnon not tell Achilles that he used a promise of his marriage to his daughter as bait? Which kind of puzzled me because Achilles is almost immediately honest with Clytemnestra about it.

Ava: Also, why did they cut Iphigenia's hair before she was sacrificed? Was this common to do? Was it part of the sacrifice ritual?

Yes, it is part of the ritual, to dehumanize her, perhaps. This would be an interesting thing to research—sacrificial rites of humans in ancient Greece.

Chloe: Why was it Iphigenia that had to be sacrificed?

Janelle: What is the meaning of this quote "We are all hungry now. Food merely whets our appetite, it sharpens or teeth; meat makes us ravenous for more meat, as death is ravenous for more death." I also noticed how food in general was constantly mentioned. Is there an significance on that?

Yes, it not only remarks upon the hunger for vengeance, but also the ongoing theme of cannibalism in the House of Atreus and its curse.

Josie: That's what I was thinking too Ava, why did they cut Iphigenia's hair???

Luke W: Is Clytemnestra the only one that doesn't really believe in the gods and their powers?

Ava: I know that Clytemnestra thought that Iphigenia was brought to the camp to marry Achilles and she thought he would break the blood feud, could have Achilles broken the blood feud if given the chance?

Perhaps Clytemnestra believes making a new alliance with a strong warrior will ensure peace and prosperity for the family. New blood to cancel out the old blood? The House of Atreus always seems a bit incestuous to me.

Connor: I'm a little confused as to what Clytemnestra means at the end saying "soon I will make Aegisthus believe that he could have what he wanted". I feel as though a man who murders and spews malice to the peasants, as he did with the weaver, would have a great ego. Her saying this, contradicts him having a huge ego, so I wonder is he just "faking" strength and exuding false confidence, or playing Clytemnestra for pity and her too dirty her hands not his?

I think your reading of Aegisthus is accurate; rather, it's Clytemnestra's character flaw to believe she is still in power and control when she has actually given up all her power to Aegisthus. He is her weapon that will not turn against her and she's too proud to see this.

Pandora: Did she "trust" him as an ally?

Sara: When we meet Orestes in the Oresteia is that him returning from where Aegisthus hid him? Or did Clytemnestra end up sending him away some time after?

No, in the Oresteia, it's Clytemnestra who sent Orestes away. Tóibín is rewriting this detail, partly to show how Aegisthus has taken control of things. He certainly would not want Orestes around to grow up and avenge his father's murder. Clytemnestra (in Tóibín's version) never wanted her son sent away but wanted to raise him into a good leader with her influence.

Chloe: ^^ I was thinking the same, I couldn't really tell if she trusted him or if she just believed that she could use him.

Marcela: Do Orestes, Electra, and Iphigenia share the same parents?

Yes, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

Abby: she made it seem like longer than 3 days

Sara: I was trying to find out more about Aegisthus and when I googled him I found a site that said Clytemnestra and Agamemnon had a 3rd daughter. Should I just act like I didn't read that?

Ha! The mysterious third daughter, Chrysothemis. She is a character who appears in Sophocles' Electra. She doesn't appear in any other versions of the myth.

Josiah: I thought it was weird how the two themes of death and a sense of hunger came into the beginning of the novel. Was there a significance for them to come into play for Clytemnestra in the beginning?

Yes, definitely significant themes throughout the novel. Death and hunger feed each other.

Jada: ^^I saw the same thing, Sara. I was really confused and I couldn't find any other info about it

Savannah: Another comment for the almighty discussion archive: It's really interesting how different Achilles and Cassandra were written in this one! Achilles was trying to help Iphigenia and was upset his name was being used to trick them and Cassandra was kind of vapid? Almost? Not really given a lot

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character wise. It's just cool seeing different versions of these two. The only consistent thing is Agamemnon sucks and is a coward

Sara: I really enjoyed seeing Agamemnon squirm when confronted by his wife and daughter about her sacrifice. It shows how he realizes its bad but still does it, really showing his obsession for the war (in my opinion)

Savannah: Me too Sara, it was very enjoyable

Pandora: The war was started because troy took Helen, did the greeks know she wasn't with them?

That's just a detail in Christa Wolf's version, but based on Euripides' Helen in Egypt. Helen's presence changes depending on which version of the myth we are reading.

Abby: i feel like tolbins version is very modernized than the other 2 books

Savannah: I think it came out in 2016?

Jehan: house of names answers a lot of questions I had about the myth from the other 2 books. Shows Clytemnestra made a mistake when Aegisthus sent Orestes away and Electra to the dungeon. Clytemnestra wanted to protect her children from her crimes but in the process alienated them from herself.

Abby: Originally published: September 29, 2016

Jehan: Did she try to get back Orestes

Savannah: Thanks Abby!

Connor: This might be a weird question, but following along the lines of a previous question about the idea of myth purists, are Greek myths and characters copyrighted, in the sense of how they are portrayed or written about in any way? Or are Greek myths and character up for free interpretation by authors how they see fit?

Pandora: He is the worst husband: killed daughter, came home with another woman. lol

Savannah: Cassandra is a variable she hasn't prepared for

Sara: ^Yup!

Jehan: house of names was much more closer to current logic than Cassandra and oresteia

Savannah: Now I need to know if there's a book humanizing Agamemnon

As far as I know, not a single one. Everyone pretty much agrees he's despicable.

Isaac: Why did Clytemnestra trust Aegisthus so much, when she didn't trust anyone else?

Pandora: She needed an ally.

Jehan: enemy of my enemy

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Savannah: I wish she hadn't but it makes sense, she couldn't do it alone? Everyone else loves her husband but he doesn't. I know she even thinks at one point that she could have chosen the elder but would that guy be good at killing? Probably not

Pandora: Again, why did they not really care that their father killed their sister?

Savannah: That is the big question Pandora

To be answered by Tóibín later in the novel when Orestes and Electra are reunited...

Colm Tóibín, *House of Names* (Mon, Oct 4, 2021)

Abby: Why was Orestes really kidnapped, like i feel like he knew something was going to happen to him after witnessing his sister be murdered.

We discussed in class how it was Aegisthus who kidnapped Orestes, without Clytemnestra's knowledge or permission. Orestes is an heir to the throne and Aegisthus would not want Agamemnon's only son hanging around reminding everyone that Aegisthus's power was illegitimate.

Savannah: Sorry if this is a silly question but were the wells poisoned for the purpose of killing Aegisthus' men? Or were there bandits or something they were trying to deal with? If it were, how did word spread fast enough for everyone to know to poison the wells?

The practice of poisoning wells was usually to fend off invading armies. The irony is that the invading soldiers are those returning from the Trojan War. Also, yes, it could have been Aegisthus's men pillaging the countryside, terrorizing the people. The point is that the country is in chaos during and after the war, with no clear leadership or safety for the people.

Alyssa: Why does Mitros refuse to share with Orestes (p 138) and Leander what the old woman told him would happen to them in the future time?

I think because he doesn't want Orestes to know how his father was murdered and perhaps trying to keep Orestes safe from his fate. This is ambiguous, though, and left up for us to interpret.

Shelby: Does Electra mourn Iphigenia?

We discussed in class how Electra does mourn for both her sister and father, seeing their reconciled ghosts. At this point, Electra is an outcast because her mother and Aegisthus are in charge, and they keep her powerless. She probably mourns for her father and sister because they represent for her the happiness and security of her childhood.

Pandora: How does two 12 or so year old boys know how to kill grown men? Or where they older when they were taken?

They would have been training from a young age to be warriors, part of the masculine roles for boys of their upper-class status within their culture. Recall how Agamemnon does a lot of sword-play with his son when he's only 7—he expects his heir to become a great warrior.

Sami: What was with the water being poisoned as Orestes was walking with the guards they had multiple farmers drink the water to test and I couldn't quite figure out why the water was poisoned

Connor: I remember you stated that this section of the story was largely based off of Tóibín's own creation, not directly pulled from passed Greek myth as Orestes time alone has been largely untouched in the past. Does this also include the creation of Leander and Mitros? Are they original characters in Tóibín's story or are they actually rooted in prior Greek myths, just represented in a different way by Tóibín?

Yes, the first Orestes section is entirely Tóibín's own creation, part of his aim to provide Orestes with a rich background and complexity of character. Many of the older myths and source texts do not provide this. The Leander character is probably meant to substitute for Orestes' friend, Pylades, in *The Libation Bearers* (who only has one line, reminding Orestes not to go against the command of Apollo). Leander and Mitros allow for more complex characters who influence Orestes as a boy and upon his return to Mycenae.

Zach: Does Clytemnestra know Electra wants her dead?

Probably not. Clytemnestra's own hubris is that she dismisses her daughter, too easily believing the role of silent, submissive daughter that Electra has been playing since Clytemnestra and Aegisthus took control after murdering Agamemnon. Clytemnestra ignores and avoids Electra, partly because she doesn't seem to like her, and partly because she'd have to confront how much she is mistreating her daughter. Of course, this only makes Electra more bitter and vengeful, especially because her mother keeps her from being able to marry or have any power.

Isaac: Why does Mitros refuse to share with Orestes and Leander what the old woman told him would happen to them in the future?

Janelle: I was also going to ask the question about the well. Why is it that they could not drink water from wherever? what was the water being poisoned with.

Richard: Considering that the author is trying to comment on relations in Ireland, does the kidnapping of Orestes have a more modern day context, as in, did things like that happen in Ireland/do happen? Just curious cause as it was happening I kept thinking about the modern context and perspective of the author and what he was trying to get across.

We discussed this a bit in class, but yes, I think Tóibín is making connections to the sectarian violence of the Irish Troubles when he was growing up. The Sinn Fein (IRA) in Northern Ireland (the Catholic faction) were responsible for multiple terrorist acts with many civilians suffering or being affected. Many children were witnesses to or innocent victims of the violence and Orestes seems to represent what happens to a child's innocence when exposed to so much violence from an early age.

Luke P: Which point of view is your personal favorite, I seem to be drawn to Orestes POV.

Personally, I love Electra only because I've always been drawn to her story (even tried to write my own version of her myth many years ago), but I also find Orestes's narrative compelling,

mainly because it humanizes his character for contemporary readers and allows us to empathize with him, which is hard to do in Aeschylus's version.

Grant: why did Electra wait for Orestes to kill her mother?

She has no power and needs an ally. Plus, as the only male heir, Orestes would have an even greater claim to Mycenae and overthrowing Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Near the end of her narrative section, she tries to set up a possible marriage with Dinos, which would have given her an opportunity to exert some control and raise a rebellion against her mother, but Dinos is oblivious and her mother just laughs at her. She has no choice but to wait for Orestes. Also, think about how much Electra mirrors her mother—biding her time, nursing her fury and need for vengeance, knowing she must rely upon a man to help her kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus—none of this very different from Clytemnestra in her plans to kill Agamemnon.

Marcela: I don't understand why was the old woman so hesitant to share stories about her life. They all lived together, did she not fully trust them to share her personal life?

I think the old woman is too traumatized by the loss of her family, being abandoned by them, sons going off to war. She also seems a bit senile and/or grief-stricken by the violence and is just grateful to have the boys stay with her and protect her.

Ava: Why was Orestes taken away to terrible conditions, because he's technically royalty, so why was he taken away and put with kids who were kidnapped?

This was against Clytemnestra's knowledge or wishes. Aegisthus is just trying to get rid of him and doesn't care what happens to him or how he's treated.

Janelle: Also why did Mitros die. I thought he was supposed to die if he left the house they were living in. I know the old lady died and he was after her but was there deaths happening at the same time significant?

Mitros seemed to be pretty weak and sickly. He'd also grown to love and care for the old woman and gives up once she's gone. Both of them dying provides Leander with the impetus for deciding to return to Mycenae, since Mitros and the old woman were the only reasons they stayed there. Leander had promised the old woman they wouldn't abandon her and he keeps his word.

Brandon: this is a lot easier to read and understand. lead and arsenic? maybe mercury/cinnabar?

Marcela: I agree Brandon, I like this book better than the other ones we've read

Sara: Is what Toibin wrote considered 'canon'? Like if someone wrote their own version of how the siblings reacted, does it have just as much pull as this novel? Is there something about this novel that would hold it higher than another?

I'm not sure if we would call the novel itself canonical—that's usually something that happens over time and depends on how a text is received by different generations of readers. House of Names, though, is part of the canon of stories revolving around the Trojan War and Mycenaean sagas. It's hard to say what would make one novel better than other versions. There are a lot out there! Luke W. provides a good answer to this below.

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Savannah: Oh okay so the wells have probably been poisoned for awhile. For some reason I assumed it happened as Orestes was kidnapped

Luke W: Sara I think the main factor is time. Just like Oresteia and other myths, as time goes on (especially hundreds if not thousands of years), we start to consider these stories "canon." Hope that helps.

Ashley: So Electra has been holding a grudge since she was 14? Do you think one of the reasons she convinces Orestes to kill her mother and Aegisthus is because he is the only male figure in her life since her mother doesn't allow her to marry? Also, why Toibin wrote the women in first person vs Orestes in 3rd person?

Yes, Ashley! See my answer above.

Olivia: I still don't understand why Electra didn't kill Clytemnestra herself. She gave Orestes the knife, knew she was alone, and made up the entire plan. She could have done it herself...

We'll have to wait to discuss this part of the novel on Wednesday.

Sara: Luke, Yeah thank you. I figured it was something like that but I was still curious enough to still ask

Luke W: Do you think Toibin drew inspiration from the well poisoning conspiracies during the time of the black death?

I have no idea, but that would be an interesting connection, Luke.

Josie: I think someone said it already, but I was wondering why did Electra wait for Orestes to kill her mom? There was time where she could've done the job if she really wanted to

Richard: I kept thinking of "The Sniper" by Liam O'Flaherty throughout the beginning of the Orestes chapter, cause it's really the only story I know of about the Irish Civil War.

Abby: Did Orestes become friends with any of the other boys?

Layth: What prompts Orestes to go with Leander?

Not sure if you mean when they escape the hostage situation or the decision to return to Mycenae. I think in either instance, Orestes looks up to Leander as a leader, and by the time they're grown, he also loves Leander and feels he has no choice but to return home or he will lose his best friend.

Marcela: I don't think Orestes made friends with anybody else, he was kind of timid. Leander spoke to Orestes first; Orestes only speaks to Mitros because they all escaped together

Josiah: Who was "controlling" Orestes as he is preparing to kill his mother?

Again, we'll discuss this in detail on Wednesday.

Savannah: I was so stressed by all of the conflicts that could have been avoided if people just TALKED

Josiah: I just realized I typed out my question and hadn't sent it 😊

Marcela: Did Electra witness the sacrifice, or was she taken to the dungeon beforehand?

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Savannah: Marcela are you talking about her sister's sacrifice?

Ari: Not a question, but the concept of sacrificing people to the gods is still kinda hard to wrap my head around.

Marcela: yea

Connor: This might have been covered already but I would like to ask, does Clytemnestra try and explain to Electra before she killed her father why she wanted to do so? Or did Clytemnestra not tell her because she did not trust her?

That was in Clytemnestra's section, where she says she regrets not explaining in detail to her daughter how Agamemnon was a monster and a coward; she regrets pushing her away in her own grief after Iphigenia's death. And then, they've grown so distant by the time Agamemnon returns, that Clytemnestra probably doesn't trust Electra or maybe she thinks she's trying to protect her. Think about how Aegisthus has come between them; he convinces Clytemnestra that Electra should be kept away when the murder happens. Clytemnestra blindly agrees, believing Electra will just be kept to her rooms; instead Aegisthus throws her into the dungeon for several days, much like how he sends Orestes away to be with the other hostage boys. Basically, Clytemnestra has given too much power to Aegisthus to the point that he is responsible for alienating her from her children (though she's at fault for this too).

Savannah: Electra was left at home for the sacrifice, she was kind of running the house as everyone else went to the "wedding" aka sacrifice

Marcela: That makes sense, thank you savannah

Savannah: Did she intend for the boys to be mistreated like that? Or was she kind of assuming they'd be looked after?

Pandora: Does Electra also blame Clytemnestra for Orestes kidnapping?

I think Electra certainly mistrusts her mother and wouldn't put it past her. And I don't think Clytemnestra intended for any of the boys to be so horribly mistreated. She was using them as hostages to gain some leverage over the leading families/men of Mycenae and probably always intended on them returning at some point. The problem with Clytemnestra, though, is she hands too many things over to Aegisthus to deal with and then turns a blind eye, pretending she has no responsibility. This is partly what infuriates Electra.

Ashley: Yes I asked about the first and third person [choices]

Savannah: I kind of thought it was because the male voice is usually given so Toibin wanted to give the women the first person voice and change the male voice being third person?

Ashley: Is it because Orestes was so young

Pandora: I think because for a lot of myths the women are silent so he gave them a voice.

Ashley: I feel like there was more emotions with the women

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Ava: The first person point of view of Clytemnestra allows us to see more into who she is and her thoughts and feelings, which were never highlighted in the past in the telling of these stories.

Connor: I also took it as kind of a parent voice for Orestes, he does not really understand completely what is happening to him so a first person perspective would have confused us, but this outside third person showed that while it confuses him, we can still decipher what is actually happening narrative wise.

Colm Tóibín, *House of Names* (Wed, Oct 6, 2021)

Savannah: On Page 206 when Electra is talking about how the gods and how their powers are fading but "you [Orestes] should feel lucky that you were touched by the old world, that in that house it brushed you with its wings." Is the being touched by the gods' power in the old woman's house the 'future' Mitros and her saw? Or was Electra implying that the gods were kind of protecting the place until it was time for him to come home?

Pandora: Is the reason Orestes and Electra hate their mother because Clytemnestra didn't tell Electra the whole story?

Shelby: Why does Electra tell Orestes they live in a "strange time . . . when the gods are fading" page 206 as well

Marcela: Why doesn't Leander try to make friends with Orestes again?

Marcela: Electra is Clytemnestra Jr

Ari: Why does Orestes face little to nothing in the way of consequences for his actions?

He does, I think, completely shunned, isolated, and left with no power to rule. Plus, he's haunted by his mother's ghost.

Abby: I feel like the ending of the book was very interesting because the way he ended it. One question I had was are Electra and Orestes close?

They don't seem to be. They barely know each other, and for Electra, her brother is just a weapon that she uses to kill Clytemnestra and gain power.

Jada: I was also wondering why they didn't become friends again because they were extremely close before.

Jehan: I thought that first person was used to interrogate a part of the story that has already been told and the third person was used to enhance and add to the myth/story.

This is a great observation! I hadn't thought of that and it makes sense.

Olivia: Why does Clytemnestra stick around as a ghost and Aegisthus doesn't? Is it because she's actually part of the family (like connected to Orestes and Electra)?

Well, in Tóibín's version, Aegisthus isn't dead. Leander keeps him alive though Electra is probably planning on offing him soon as she gets a chance.

Ava: Did Clytemnestra know she would die?

I think she's too busy lying, killing, and trying to hold onto her power, she never sees it coming. She underestimates Electra, believing the role Electra has played of submissive daughter, and she thinks of Orestes as still a boy and easily influenced. It seems she is completely shocked in the moment that Orestes kills her, but perhaps she always feared or sensed this is a possibility, as the price for killing Agamemnon.

Grant: Why does a strong "free thinking spirit" like Electra let Leander boss her around so easily? The only thing I could think of was that it's a characteristic of hers to let someone else take charge because she is still doing the work for Leander, so it's not that she is lazy. She showed this same trait in the killing and planning her mother Clytemnestra's death. So why fold like that?

She doesn't seem to fold but has spent so much time maneuvering from the shadows, she realizes that's her best strategy with Leander. Get him to trust her, and by the end of the novel, she really does seem to be the one in power/control of things.

Sami: Does Electra end up with the power or is it all this effort to not get it

Zach: did Orestes actually care for Ianthe when they married or was it just for political gain?

He seems to genuinely care for her. He doesn't have any political gain or status from the marriage. Plus, when Ianthe tells him the child is not hers but the product of a rape, Orestes does not reject her or the child. He doesn't want her to go away—after all, she's his only friend and companion.

Luke W: Was Toibin trying to create similarities between the story and modern society by having characters believe less in god/s?

Connor: I might have overlooked this, but how come Leander has so much sway in terms of political power and decision making, even though Orestes and him have had a falling out? Leander leads an army to get Aegisthus, and arranges a marriage between Orestes and his own sister in order to keep Orestes in the palace. How does he have this power and sway over state affairs?

As discussed in class, this perhaps represents the merging of democracy (the will of the people represented by Leander) and aristocracy (the royal family). Leander and Electra seem to be negotiating a peaceful leadership, and at least Electra knows that's the best strategy for saving herself and remaining in power. In this way, she's different from her mother, choosing not to be a tyrant.

Marcela: Wait so if Electra and Leander have a relationship like Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, does that mean they'll have sex too? Or did they already but Orestes didn't know?

They do seem to be functioning like the new power couple 😊

Josie: Why did Leander have so much power, why was he able to make decisions for others?

He led the revolt, he has taken the citadel, he has the will of the people and an army. Also, I hadn't thought of this, but Orestes loves him and looks up to him. Leander has always taken the leadership role in their relationship and so maybe it just seems natural to Orestes that

Leander would take over Mycenae. Orestes never even thinks to fight for his birthright, the kingship, and maybe because he doesn't want it. He just wants to be included, but the elders don't want him involved in anything. Everyone (except Electra) is horrified by his murder of his own mother, even if they all hated her. He can never be purified or forgiven for this act because there are no gods to provide this. One of the poignant things about the end of the novel is his encounter with Clytemnestra's ghost. She gives him her blessing and forgiveness, but he will never be free from the guilt of his crime, at least in the eyes of the people.

Jehan: was the story of what happened to Orestes already established or did colm toibin add that to the story?

Yes, Orestes' story, including Leander and lanthe, is largely imagined by Tóibín and not part of any source myth.

Savannah: The whole house segment feels very 'magical'? Like they have plenty of food and animals to keep but it seems like the rest of the country was having some food trouble so it was like a weird cocoon where time moved oddly

I agree with this reading. It does seem to be this place of safety removed from the real world, allowing the boys a refuge. Unfortunately, Leander wants to leave, be a grown up, and rejoin the real world while Orestes wants to stay there forever.

Isaac: Connor, I was also wondering about that

Pandora: He didn't become the king.it was I think his birthright.

Marcela: Brooo electra had Orestes do her dirty work so she could reign. She manipulated him to kill their mom

Ashley: Did Electra actually have feelings toward her father sister and brother or was she just wanting power? Even if her father was alive she wouldn't have had any power. I think she had the middle child syndrome honestly

Olivia: If I didn't know better I would have thought Clytemnestra had possessed Electra just to get back to power lol

Savannah: But wouldn't Orestes helping Leander get to his mom so he could kill her (if he wanted/anyone wanted to) count as him killing her? Wouldn't just leaving her in a dungeon be a form of death to her?

Grant: Yeah I was surprised at how easily manipulated Electra was

Ashley: I just feel like she was jealous of everyone in her family

Joe: It's crazy to me how this whole family just doesn't seem to have common sense, like each one just doesn't see that either this is going to end badly for them or even see that they're being used

Connor: I agree, Electra definitely has some sort of jealousy and attraction to what her family has, that she does not.

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Savannah: I guess the whole family just not realizing where this is heading is going back to the theme of silence? The fact no one talks to each other, and instead plot/think in silence really screws them over in the end. If they just communicated it could have ended differently, or it could have ended the same because of fate but hey who knows

Janelle: I agree^^ they all just want more and more without actually communicating. It becomes a repetitive thing within the family.

Abby: so how old was electra when her father killed her sister, did she see it happen

Josiah: I thought it was strange how the only way Orestes was able to stay in the palace was to be with Lanthe. I mean shouldn't he be punished any way since he is a matricide?!

Ava: If Orestes didn't kill Clytemnestra, would've Electra killed her mother on her own? Would have her longing for power drive her mad?

Abby: made him kill her anyway

Ashley: I think she would have tried to find a guard or someone

Janelle: I would think electra will kill her mom either way

Marcela: Electra would have killed clytemnestra herself and then frame orestes

Sara: I don't think she would have killed her herself, she would have hired someone

Connor: I doubt she would have killed her herself, due to the fact that she is just liker her mother, not wanting to dirty her own hands. She would have manipulated someone else.

Savannah: Uh I think she might have already gone mad? She talked to her sister's and father's ghost for years

Pandora: agreed

Josiah: Some framework would have to be done or get someone to do her dirty work

Sami: She probably would have gotten worse if she was waiting longer because she had to hire someone cause that's more people involved she has to to control

Marcela: Clytemnestra was a badass

Savannah: Wait I guess Orestes see his mom's ghost too, so maybe he's going a little mad too due to the isolation

Savannah: Hell yeah she is Marcela

Pandora: yes

Janelle: Agreed ^

Sara: I think I imagined her as Cersei from game of Thrones this whole time

Savannah: Oooh so its The Shinning. She got cabin fever

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Joe: Heeeeeeres's ELECTRA

Pandora: How was she so caring on the camp where the first daughter was killed and now she sees her children as threats?

Sara: Maybe she sees herself in electra?

Pandora: Because she made sure that they were safe before she killed Agamenon.

Sara: Like how she acts

Ava: They grew up and with age comes more power, she sees her son come back as a man and now he can take the power away, and Electra was just like her and one was going to have power.

Savannah: They weren't under her thumb anymore? Orestes lived for years outside of her influence so she doesn't know if she can influence them. Plus Agamemnon let them live for some reason and why do they get to live but Iphigenia didn't

Isaac: I think she had a major change in character after iphegenia was killed

Pandora: maybe she distanced herself to keep her from caring for them?

Connor: I believe she just became a little unhinged and paranoid. She was looking for villains everywhere, and with an unhinged mind, one could easily make her children out to be evil. Seeing ones child as a villain when all they wanted was to be with their family (that being Orestes as a young child, wishing to be home), usually requires irrational and crazy thinking.

Sami: Agreeing with Pandora it's also probably easier to manipulate them if she keeps her own feelings separate

Ashley: Maybe she feels some sort of guilt to the other children killing their father and feared resentment from them so she didn't want to be close to them or trust them maybe

Isaac: You can tell her mindset shifts, when she was stuck under the rock

Savannah: Also she had Aegisthus hanging around her too, and that dude is certainly something. Coming into Electra's rooms at night, seemingly having most of the guards on his side etc

Connor: I also would add that I believe she faced trauma which made her into using crazy logic (that being witnessing her child die, which is a horrible character changing experience)^^^

Pandora: This book is my favorite so far.

Abby: I agree Pandora

Sara: Same, Pandora

Pandora: Maybe as a woman she wanted to prove herself by getting power.

Ashley: I agree with Pandora this book was my favorite to it was easier to follow in my opinion

Pandora: Did the Elders have some status?

Savannah: By the end I was only really rooting for Orestes. Poor idiot man couldn't see everyone was using him 😞

Abby: yes i found Tolbin a very feminist author

I agree, and Tóibín provides a significant divergence from the ending of the *Eumenides*. Instead of following along with Athena's patriarchal logic, when Orestes learns lanthe's child is not his (not even realizing it would be impossible since they don't have intercourse, as lanthe suggests), Orestes accepts the mother (womb) is more important than the father (seed). He will be a father to lanthe's child and this is perhaps the redemptive move for Orestes, choosing to love the child and lanthe. Something I'd meant to talk about more in class but ran out of time. Great discussion today in the chat box!

Zachary Mason, *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*, Ch. 1-10 (Mon, 10/18/2021)

Pandora: [Odysseus] needed new men. Always messing something up.

Savannah: Why does the point of view change between stories? Were all of these short stories written at the same time or did they start out as shorts that got placed into a novel together? Hence the different POVs? Sorry if you've said this already and I've missed it

Since a lot of you asked this, I'll just respond here with what I said in class: Don't get too hung up on the different POVs. Mason is playing with different narrative perspectives and angles for understanding Odysseus as a character alongside different possibilities for his story. You could read each chapter as separate short stories or vignettes, though they are all tied together through repeating themes, images, and motifs. It is a very meta novel, experimenting with narrative to explore how the same myth (or mythic characters) can be told in multiple different ways.

Isaac: Why did Circe kill all of Odysseus's men, and why did she not kill him?

Marcela: Why was there a chapter made in first person?``

Ava: Is the first chapter Odysseus' reality when he comes home, and the rest of the other scenarios just made up in his head?

That's an interesting possibility! I hadn't thought of this and that would help tie together the first ten chapters, though I think as we read further there will be chapters where Odysseus isn't even present.

Grant: So him being this great explorer, he still wants to stop all his "fun" and return home? Is it because he just wants that fairytale homecoming? But he seems to be with many women so it does not seem like he has an alternate reason like there is someone or something he is trying to return to?

Abby: What does it mean to come home? In his eyes

This is a great question and one of the major themes that Mason is exploring. I don't think there is any one answer. Home and homecoming are always shifting depending on one's

circumstances or what is waiting upon Odysseus' return. So, in that sense, Mason is imagining different kinds of homecoming for Odysseus to see how that changes the whole story.

Alyssa: Why was there one chapter that was in first person? Was this meant to emphasize importance of something?

Olivia: I just don't understand how NOBODY recognizes him. Like if he was truly the ruler of the kingdom, surely someone would recognize him? I just think it feels so far-fetched. I mean you change a lot in 20 years but it wasn't like Orestes where he was a child and grew into a man far away.

Pandora: Did the author think some of what he wrote should have been the ending of the Odyssey?

Ashley: Even though Odysseus fought for the Greeks he didn't agree with Agamemnon's reason for war and was considering switching sides? Did Odysseus betray Achilles? Also, in Mason's version he saved Helen and fled with her I'm confused on why Athena would stop talking to him?

Zach: why did mason change the point of view

Luke W: Why is there a chapter written in first person? Will there be similar changes in chapters later on?

Janelle: In chapter three it says "I should have dreamed that night, of choking up a white bird that fought free of my throat, shook itself and flew away, leaving me empty and retching" what is the meaning of this and does the bird have any significance?

This is a great image. Perhaps it's a foreshadowing of how Odysseus will be emptied of himself, replaced by his double or doppelganger, the "stranger."

Connor: Due to the sort of philosophical voice weaved throughout the text, I am curious as to whether Mason picked Odysseus's story specifically for the meaning he wished to create, or picked Odysseus first and created a meaning from it. Sort of a long the lines of which came first, the chicken or the egg type question.

Ashley: I think I had to read the Stranger 3 times to understand it lol

Pandora: I thought Odysseus and Agamemnon was on different sides, why were they working together in some of the stories?

No, they both were on the side of the Greeks. Odysseus just doesn't like or respect Agamemnon (I mean, who does?), and he probably resents him for this long drawn-out war he never wanted to join.

Savannah: The Stranger was so trippy but I absolutely loved it

Olivia: ^^agreed

Josiah: What was the purpose of changing the point of view? It seemed a little off to me.

Ashley: Guest friend as well lol

Savannah: That was another fun one lol

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Pandora: was guest friend the one when the man come in his tent and said he was odysseus?

Katarina: I'm confused as to why they constantly change the point of view.

Savannah: That one is The Stranger

Pandora: oh

Savannah: Guest Friend was the king of Phaeacia and Odysseus having a philosophical talk

Savannah: Just a side note I am so happy we are on our fourth book and Agamemnon is STILL getting bashed

Ashley: Im just surprised anyone would even fight for him

Savannah: ^^

Sara: I think its been asked before but I don't remember. Is there a story that is in favor of Agamemnon?

Ashley: Ok lol

Savannah: Penelope's Elegy is a creepy one but it's also so cool

Zachary Mason, The Lost Books of the Odyssey, Ch. 11-19 (Wed, 10/20/2021)

In the different versions of his story, how is Odysseus presented as a hero? How is he an anti-hero?

Abby: He works against being a hero because he always wants to be right and he always has to be the hero in any of his storys. In other words, he never lets or wants anyone else to win

Savannah: I suppose the whole Iliad of Odysseus is more on the anti-hero end? He tries to end the war in a less than noble way with just having Helen killed. But he also runs from the battle and just hides out as a bard. He has the ability to change the narrative to give himself those heroic traits that are typically given to him

Richard: To me he seems, at least in some of the stories, to be a somewhat reluctant hero. I mean, that's just my take.

Pandora: His heroic qualities being brave, going to war even though he didn't want to. His anti-hero qualities are that is was a coward in some of the stories.

Olivia: In some versions, he's portrayed as a hero because he is leading his men throughout all of these horrific events. Most of the time, it's his men's fault when something goes wrong. He's almost like a Seinfeld; no matter what gets thrown at him he always finds a way to get out of trouble. On the other hand, he's an anti-hero because he literally loses all his men to horrible fates, cheats on his wife multiply times, falls asleep at the most inconvenient times, and ends up a coward by the end.

Sami: His anti hero qualities come from his not wanting to actually be a hero. He's just going along almost so it's not exactly heroic but also not villainy

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Ava: He is almost like a hero to himself rather than to others. No matter what situation he gets himself into, which can cause him to be like an anti-hero, he always saves himself. He allows his soldiers to be just taken by every situation, which makes him an anti-hero.

Grant: He sometimes seems to be the hero only when he wants to be and that sort of quality, to me, makes him seem more like an anti-hero because he sort of only helps when it benefits him.

Luke P: I think Odysseus is seen as a hero through his cleverness and strength he's an anti hero because of his cowardness like running from battle

Alyssa: I'd say he certainly is not a hero when he has Helen killed in order to end the war, however he is still hero-like by going to war.

Richard: Yeah, it feels like most of his "being a hero" or going to war, or anything that would fall under the umbrella of heroism is kind of like a duty he must do, and not something he wants to do at all, and he does it out of some sense of that duty or some idea that he has to, not so much that he wants to. But he's a little different in some of the stories.

Zach: his heroic traits is that he is very cunning and a great leader, but he is often portrayed as a coward and putting himself over others,

Janelle: I think Odysseus is a hero because of the way he committed acts like with the war which shows how brave he is. Along with how brave he shows he is and the strength he has he is also an anti hero because of the way he runs from the battle as well him getting his soldiers to get taken.

Savannah: Turning down Athena in the Epiphany was kind a better one of his traits, until he accidentally laughs at her instead, but he was smart about the logistics of the two being together and also didn't want to have to do what husbands typically had to do, which would be make the wife below them

Isaac: I think it depends on who you asked, some of the people would say he was a brave leader, but others would call him a cowardly fool

Connor: Odysseus has been presented as a hero through the different versions of his story, by how he has acted towards the men he has been traveling with. A hero has been described before as a leader and one who makes decisions to protect, which he does. His involvement in the war, while not necessarily noble or just, was heroic in the sense that he did it for his people. On the other side of the coin however, he has shown he can be an anti hero by the manners of which he does things. How he ended the war and ran into hiding, was against what a hero would typically do.

Ashley: Well he's very self centered which most heroes are but I wouldn't consider him one he was brave but that could be closely related to recklessness, I thought he never took into consideration his men for example sailing to the sirens not thinking about their lives or when he was wanting to kill scylla even when Circe gave him her thoughts.

Shelby: Odysseus shows that he's a anti hero from his disloyalty and pride. When he returns home from the war he shows cowardness amounts of pride and his ego makes him selfish almost as a flawed hero.

Why give us all these different anti-heroic versions of Odysseus?

Savannah: Heroes are complicated, no one is perfect, heroes should be flawed

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Isaac: Agree with you Savannah

Olivia: No one is perfect, not even a hero, a god, a king, etc.

Layth: I think that it puts a more human light on the almost deified hero.

Savannah: It's like the view we got in Cassandra kind of? Heroes can be monsters so making the reader confront the fact that heroes we all know may have had some bad traits too

Abby: to view different sides of him and his story

Isaac: Everyone's crap stinks

Ava: We need the good and the bad sides of heroes, because most are human or human-like. We as people are not perfect and there's great qualities we have and not so great qualities. We are all flawed, and this new and different take on Odysseus gives us more depths on him and almost makes a humbled version of him.

Josie: It shows a different side of him, it shows that he is not the perfect hero/human, nobody is perfect, we all have our flaws

Richard: I think that making him non-heroic or just kind of exploring his flaws kind of opens up ideas about who he might have been (if he were real) and what his life was like, how he would see himself in these situations and react. I think it's just a matter of asking questions about the archetype hero and what that is, what that looks like.

Pandora: Maybe because he wanted to see a hero in a different role.

Zach: to show that not all heroes are perfect and good interesting ones have flaws

Connor: Sometimes being too heroic is too far fetched to be reasonable to accept in a character. A person with flaws however, can be easier for the reader to accept as "realistic".

Pandora: Why are the Greeks involved in the war in the first place? Is it there fight?

Josiah: Sorry I just got back from the restroom, but I think he's only seen as a hero because of his actions, but his anti hero qualities are seen within as he is only doing it for himself really.

Luke P: No one is perfect if he was the perfect hero he wouldn't seem human it gives the reader a deeper connection if you emphasize the hero's flaws.

Grant: ^^^^I think what helps them keep their "Hero Status" is them having those flaws but also attempting to overcome or get around them.

What are Odysseus's enduring traits? In other words, no matter how much the details of his story change, how does he remain the same?

Jehan: Clever, smart and logical

Savannah: He certainly keeps his cleverness/silver tongue

Olivia: Charming/cunning

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Zach: he is always very smart. that has always been his defining trait since the illiad.

Layth: Decisive

Ashley: Self centered smart

Janelle: His determination and cleverness

Grant: His confidence never waivers, whether that's good or bad idk

Pandora: Leadership skills

Richard: If nothing else, he endures in some way or another.

Ava: Clever, cunning, charming, smart, self-centered, and a quick-thinker

Alyssa: he is Very clever and intelligent throughout

Luke W: He knows who he is and doesn't lie to himself. He doesn't try to talk and circles and say he's brave, he knows he can be cowardly

Josie: hes clever/charming, and self centered

Connor: Recklessly confident, strong

Josiah: He keeps his wit through his use of logic, cleverness, and just overall intelligence

Isaac: He has thirst for glory

Luke P: Intelligence, drive and confidence it makes him believable.

Which version of Odysseus did you like the best? Why?

Savannah: Maybe the Golem version. His white lie doesn't really hurt anyone, well I mean the Golem does but they wanted Achilles to kill anyway. He puts the Golem out of its misery at the end and everyone got the 'hero' they wanted in the end. He just gave everyone what they wanted

Richard: I think I liked the version from "A Night in the Woods" not so much because I actually preferred that version of the character over the others but because I found that story strangely intriguing.

Ashley: Probably the Sirens I'm not a huge Odysseus fan because of his arrogance but I like how the sirens didn't give him what he wanted and his men took charge the second time around and didn't listen to him when he wanted them to turn around again.

Pandora: The Golem Odysseus or the one where he found Penelope with all those men because it shows a softer side to a hero and he was very smart.

Alyssa: I felt the exact same way Ashley!

Isaac: I like the epiphany one, I think it really shows us who he is

Olivia: I like The Sirens because it shows that Odysseus is truly a human, a mortal, that is subject to temptations just like anyone else.

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Ashley: I don't even know how he has any men when he doesn't even take their safety into consideration

Josie: I agree with Isaac, I liked the epiphany one because it showed who Odysseus was and I think it's important to see how he acted

Ava: I like the version of Odysseus when he around the sirens. He is so tempted and entranced by the sirens that he gets consumed to it. It shows him his limits no matter how much his curiosity attempts to push him.

Grant: I feel like the Sirens may be the most "realistic" version in the sense that he can't expect his men to follow him aimlessly forever without regard to their safety.

Ashley: It can be annoying

Josiah: I like The Sirens because I think we are able to relate more to Odysseus because it is clearly seen that he is human and there are flaws to humans, and that nobody is perfect. It helps to make a realistic hero rather than a "perfect Superman"

Savannah: I'm not sure if we can jump back to the other stories but Odysseus maybe poisoning Agamemnon with the ring/maybe just finally giving the man what he wanted was cool. He didn't do much but he also just did what he was told and didn't brag about it

Connor: Out of Mason's versions, I would have to pick the Odysseus who went against Athena. Just that action alone seemed noteworthy and refreshing, considering a lot of greek characters would never dream of doing so. It broke the mold, and I enjoyed him doing so.

Zach: The sirens because it shows how he has limits and he is a normal person not some divine hero

Janelle: I want to say that I liked the sirens best because it shows us the true side of odysseus and it was a more normal view of a human. I found it more relatable.

Ashley: Yes I have an idea but want to hear your thoughts but why did Penelope take him into the woods (p. 61)? **(She is showing him her true self—the wild wolf side of her.)**

Savannah: Nothing really pressing but in Decrement, is Circe talking about how life is kind of a struggle and it's only in death that you really see? Or did I completely misread that one. **(Nope, this is a great reading!)**

Ava: In the original version was Penelope able to shape shift into a wolf? Because I have read some verisons that stay fairly true to Homer's original and I do not remember this detail. **(Not in original.)**

Connor: I do agree that the scene in the woods was important and well done, however I would like to ask, was there a reason why it was shapeshifting into a wolf? Is that a nod to something in Greek culture and myth or did Mason just decide to pick that. Either way it ended up working well in the story and relationship between the two. **(Mason drawing on older pre-Hellenic legends of shapeshifters.)**

Savannah: Her family doesn't have anything to do with Apollo did they? He turned into a wolf in Cassandra right? **(No connection here.)**

Savannah: I mean wolves eventually got us to pugs so they are indeed important

Zachary Mason, The Lost Books of the Odyssey, Ch. 20-30 (Mon, 10/25/2021)

What was one of the major themes within these chapters?

Isaac: Death?

Savannah: It seems to be more about Odysseus as a man? Most of the stories aren't from Odysseus' POV and he seems to be more a background character? So maybe the theme is what is a hero? Are they really that important to the grand scheme of things?

Pandora Betz: Self-doubt

Abby: One of the main themes I personally saw was the background info of his life, like more about who is he

Josiah: I really thought the theme was like what it meant to be a hero or what was a hero

Marcela: Definitely conflict within, at the end of "The Book of Winter", he rejects who he was and kind of creates a new version of himself (pg145)

Jehan: Who is Odysseus and what makes him a hero?

Alyssa: Some themes that I found to be present throughout were loyalty, and maturation of him as a character. We find out more about his life as a whole

Layth: Growth and development

Janelle: I think that maybe major theme could be the meaning of a true hero

Grant: One of the big themes I saw was less of a theme and more of a character development

Jada: I thought about heroism as well along with the background info we got which I think is important for understanding his character for the rest of the novel

Richard: I'm not sure if this is a theme, but looking back over the chapter titles and trying to remember the events within them, I would say that nearly all of them dealt with death and tragedy. They kill a serpent, Odysseus is in Hell, his son and family get swept up in a giant wave, he marries Helen and tricks everybody. So, yeah, lots of sad, depressing chapters that deal heavily with death.

Shelby: I think there is insecurity that goes along with Pandora's term self-doubt

Joe: it really started to show Odysseus more as a the flawed "Hero" than the penultimate hero

Olivia: I don't know exactly what to put for a theme but I feel like the chapters stray from the traditional story itself and focuses more on the characters/Odysseus and who he is, what he's like as a person, not a hero, and what makes him a hero.

Jehan: I think it's less about growth and more about showing the readers what was already there.

Connor: How other people's perspectives and ideas about yourself, shape and create who you are.

Victoria: I would agree with Alyssa and Layth. With finding out more of his life and background I would say the theme of maturing/maturation.

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Emily: I felt like it was more of a character arc than a theme but it was about being a hero

Ava: There seems to be a background theme of death and darkness that looms over the story that might not be very important. But it is definitely in the background.

Alexis: One of the major themes within these chapters was loyalty. Shown in a twisted sort of way when Odysseus comes home and the couple internally acknowledges their infidelities but they both still choose to stay together and be "loyal" to their relationship at least (if not to each other)

Josiah: I also saw a theme of nobody is perfect

Luke W: "Maturation" and growth. In particular of Odysseus.

Abby: I feel Odysseus was always sort of ok with the thought of death, like he knew it was inevitable

Alyssa: ^^ yes I agree!

Savannah: Okay please explain Bright Land. You kind of already did, so the woman was selkie? I didn't know if she was some kind of siren? Bringing back the sirens from the original story again, like the Sirens couldn't get Odysseus but they got his son?

Abby: What made Odysseus not afraid of death, I believe he knew it was inevitable, but did he never feel emotion, he seems like an overall numb person

Isaac: In chapter 20 Death and the King, was he trying to hang himself and Paris saved him? and then why did he kill Helen? to end the war?

Marcela: I don't understand why Mason writes the novel from different perspectives, and even switching how Odysseus's journey is told from first and second person. It gets kind of confusing for me

Pandora: Do we ever find out how Odysseus got amnesia in The Book of Winter? Who put the book behind the fire wood?

Alyssa: I agree Marcela! I was having trouble following along because of this. Is he trying to emphasize something by changing perspectives so much?

Olivia: I just want to say that I loved the story that was from the point of view of Polyphemus. I feel like in the original story Homer portrayed him as some great stupid brute who almost deserved to be harmed by Odysseus. I liked the light that this story portrayed Polyphemus in. Yes he's a monster, but he also has feelings, a life, his own troubles and worries. It almost made me think of Frankenstein and how the monster felt misunderstood and longed for normality and peace. I know that wasn't a question but I just wanted to put it out there.

Marcela: Also, I mean first and third** and not and second lol

Richard: Maybe it was because I read it quickly before I officially had to start my job, but in "Odysseus in Hell", is he just kind of floating in space? I feel like I need to go back and read that one again because after it was done I closed the book and was like, "Wait, what's going on?" But I was at my job, so I couldn't go back then and I never went back.

Savannah: I loved Blindness too Olivia!

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Joe: are we talking 2001 A Space Odyssey Richard?

Ava: In chapter 28 Phoenician, the narrator is Eumaios, so is this a story about the current moment or of the past before Odysseus' return to Ithaca.

Connor: This might be a silly question, but I am confused on what is happening in No Man's Wife. Is Penelope dead? Or is Odysseus, who is journeying through the land of the dead, communicating with her from "the beyond"? It just seemed confusing with how they spoke in certain tenses, and seemed like it could have gone either way, in regards to her status of living that is.

Richard: Not sure if this helps anybody, but I kind of thought the idea of shifting perspectives and rewriting the narrative in many different ways basically allows Mason to tear apart the idea of a hero and of stories. It's like that Joseph Campbell "Hero's Journey" thing where every story is kind of the same story but also different, depending upon perspectives and all of the window dressing you add to the story. It's like how the story itself, because it was originally a story that was told through vocal recitation, has many different versions or did have many until it was written down as a singular story.

Janelle: So why does Odysseus when he comes home shows loyalty to the relationship when they both showed infidelity and they both ignore that it happens

Savannah: He just found a tree and just kept running into it until he forgot why he was running into that tree

Marcela: That's very helpful Richard, thank you!

Janelle: Thanks Richard!

Think of The Book of Winter as similar to Memento's plot about amnesia.

Olivia: I love that movie!!!

Richard: Yeah, I've seen Memento!

Layth: Also Shutter Island

Marcela: I love Shutter Island, it's so good

Richard: Yeah, Shutter Island is great, too.

Josiah: Do you think Odysseus is portrayed as more of a monster than Polyphemus? Are they equal? Or is it the opposite way around?

Abby: in the beginning of the book, I wondered what did it really mean for him to come home?

Savannah: Not going to lie Death and the King might be the best of the bunch for me. I love the whole 'Death and the Maiden' motif

Marcela: I loved that oracle, it's so clever. It's like a Romeo and Juliet

Pandora: So like Romeo and Juliet

Zachary Mason, The Lost Books of the Odyssey, Ch. 31-44 (Wed, 10/27/2021)

What does it mean for Odysseus to return home? What kinds of homecoming are described in these last chapters?

Abby: It means different things for everyone, but for Odysseus, it means to finally relax or so he thinks

Savannah: Sometimes he's pretty happy to get home, but other times he's dreading it. Which seems accurate to how people view home, you miss it while you're gone but you realize you kind of hate it when you get back

Jehan: it means to recover from his experiences, and get back to normalcy.

Pandora: I think homecoming means to come back and face what is waiting for you good or bad.

Sara: Coming home meant seeing 'home' through new eyes and seeing what his home had turned into

Marcela: I believe that homecoming means going back to familiarity. Homecoming means going back to a place that you don't feel like a stranger. In these past chapters, I believe Odysseus's home was his adventures. In ch.44, he reminisced on his what he did on the islands and who he was with. When he went back to Ithaca, I interpreted it like he was dreading to go back. I believe he went back because he felt like he had some sort of obligation.

Shelby: I think home for Odysseus means where you're comfortable and can be yourself. You don't have to act super brave or strong you can just take a break and relax

Janelle: I think to be free and I think he is happy which is good for him because he can get back to doing other things he was familiar with.

Olivia: I feel like he's happy to be home because everything can finally go back to normal and he isn't facing life or death situations on the daily. But he also has a kingdom to rule, a wife and kids to take care of, and the weight of all the experiences he had on his journey are now just memories.

Grant: In Odysseus's mind I think when he thinks of homecoming in many different ways, in some ways it's a relief and in other ways it's sort of his duty to return back.

Ava: I think homecoming means a break from all the adventure and suspense. There is no need for running anymore and for Odysseus he can relax. It is a comfort to him to no longer be traveling all over.

Zach: he is finally getting back to what he knows and is no longer faced with an almost impossible task

Isaac: He is looking forward to finally being able to settle down and live a normal life.

Alyssa: To return home means that we finally get to return to a place where we are comfortable and we miss that comfort. However with this situation it was not the best return and he still has responsibilities to take care of upon his return.

Layth: To reestablish old responsibilities and and regain an understanding of what it means to live a normal life. For some that may be painful compared to others.

Josiah: For Odysseus, returning home means going back to more of a normalized life for himself aside from the adventures. Somewhere where he feels more relaxed is also something that comes to mind.

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Victoria: I feel like Odysseus had a sense of relief when he returned home. On page 204 it says that as he finally returned home for the first time in decades he promised himself that he would have nothing more to do with the gods and that tears were streaming down his face.

Richard: I think, within the context of the story, and all of the stories of the Odyssey, it's a journey back to something that is familiar but different. Like, a sort of death and rebirth. It's circular while also being a complete restart.

Connor: For Odysseus, coming home was a sour experience, it was the end of a journey which resulted in him facing everything that had backed up and was waiting for him to confront. The things he left behind, the things he did on his voyage. Everything. Coming home meant for him to confront himself, which hopefully resulted in him relaxing and finding comfort, which he seems to have done.

Ashley: I think as he gets older he is reflecting on all his journeys knowing some were good and some were bad just like how he felt about his home he feels somewhat comfortable being home.

Zach: Troy is so bad

Marcela: New Troy felt really fake

Savannah: Soooo the Epigraph? What just happened? Did the events of the Odyssey happen but he didn't make it in time so Penelope married a suitor and everyone left? I loved the Last Islands, fun to see one last boys trip

Abby: What made Mason want to write an added edition to the Odyssey? Why did he feel it was necessary to add the "lost stories"???

Marcela: I thought it was interesting how all the places he visited at the end of the chapter were all in ruins (like Calypso's island and the caves where the Cyclopes lived) but Troy rebuilt itself and celebrates the destruction that happened in the war.

Pandora: Why do the gods like Athena come and go as they please? And when people need their help they turn a blind eye?

Alyssa: Epigraph really confused me. I reread parts of it multiple times and I just still feel like I'm missing something maybe?

Sara: I didn't understand why Theseus left Ariadne.

Ashley: During Athena's weave what was the cloth/fabric symbolic for? Was Athena being jealous again calling Penelope a deceiver?

Luke P: How does Odysseus feel about the way he's going to be remembered when he sees the play.

Richard: I think the stories, both those regarding Odysseus and Agamemnon and most of the major players are in large part a really effective metaphor for the effects of war and warfare both on a person and on society alone. Both men meet violent ends at the ends as a result of their actions in the years spent at war. And though Odysseus' end comes years later and I have never obviously been in war it does remind me a lot of 1. Beowulf and how that ended for him and 2. that chapter in *The Things They Carried*, written by an actual veteran of war, where he drives around the lake trying to enjoy life afterward ultimately jumping in the lake because there is no going back to normal.

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Josiah: Do you think Mason's stories are more realistic than The Odyssey?

Zach: how was troy able to rebuild so quickly

Marcela: That's what I kind of wanted to know, how reliable is Odysseus as a narrator? He went back and there wasn't much; the men who journeyed with him died, there's barely any trace of his journey

Connor: This isn't a question more of a final thought, which is that I appreciated the last chapter in where Odysseus saw the actors performing on the streets, especially were he was able to recognize himself as one of the characters. Often times, people have a more fantastical and idealized form of themselves, which blinds them from being able to see themselves portrayed in other fashions, however it wasn't true for Odysseus. He didn't fall into his ego, he was able to see himself which I think says something about his character and the peace he has garnered.

Janelle: I was also curious as to what the point of that was too. Was there a significance on the cloth. I saw that it was the weave of fate but what is exactly meant by it? On pg 184

Ava: I like "Cassandra's Rule", because it tied Cassandra into the Odyssey rather than just have her in the Oresteia.

Savannah: The gods are like children, they like you for a bit but get bored eventually

Madeline Miller, Circe, Ch. 1-8 (Mon, 11/1/2021)

Isaac: So why was Prometheus punished for helping the humans? Why was giving them fire a crime, even though they help humans all the time?

Luke W: Issac I think Zeus didn't want humans to have the power of fire, because it would make them closer to gods.

Savannah: Do we know much about Circe? Or did Madeline Miller make up most of this family tree? Also I don't know why but I really loved that Prometheus and Circe connect almost right away, it was kind of sweet really

Marcela: It's kind of sad how Circe gave her everything for Glacous by literally making him a god, and then he goes and tries to marry Scylla. She was so naive and in love with him, and I thought he felt the same way. I was so disappointed with him

Abby: I think that so far a big theme in this novel is powers. Like who has powers and which power do they have.

Pandora: Why did he get punished?

Olivia: Not a questions, but I really like this book so far! More so than the others haha.

Ashley: Why did the mother see Circe and aates as lesser then their other siblings?

Marcela: I wanna know how her relationship with Hermes unfolds, is Hermes going to leave her for someone else too?

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Connor: I was wondering if we were ever told how many years Circe has lived before being thrown into exile. Is she already centuries old meaning she has spent all that time living in her father's shadow? Curious because it seems she bounced right into her new life, which I would find hard to do after centuries of living a certain way, but that might just be my mortal brain interpretation, unlike her "divine perspective".

Ava: Is Prometheus a god and then when he's punished he's trapped in the underworld he becomes something else or is he still a god or even a god at all?

Janelle: I was wondering the same thing as Ashley. Why is Circe seemed as less important than her siblings? Even when she was born her mom was disappointed she was a girl. Also another question why did Circe cut herself? I might have missed it but is there a reason as to why she did that?

Richard: I can't really think of a question. I really, really enjoy the book thus far and find it to be a really pretty, interesting, weirdly human story about gods. I guess if I had one question it would be: why did her younger brother leave? I get that it's kind of a part of being a god to be apathetic and very involved in one's own wants and needs, but I he never quite explains and he seems much more empathetic and then suddenly he just leaves.

Alyssa: Why did the mom in the novel see Circe as a lesser individual than she did the other siblings?

Shelby: I have read this book before in my high school English and my teacher had mentioned Madeline Miller as more feminist writer just like Christa Wolf,

Grant: Circe is put down and disliked by almost everyone she meets. So my question is "What keeps her going?" Maybe her fascination in mortals?

Zach: why did her younger brother leave so suddenly

Pandora: Why did family of Prometheus not care that he was being punished but what it means for the paused war between old gods and new gods?

Marcela: Going off of that, it's like what a god was explaining that a happy man does not worship and depend on gods. But take away what they most love and make them suffer, the sad man will do anything to please the gods. I think Hermes said that, pg96

Ashley: So why wouldn't they punish Circe the way they punished Prometheus?

Savannah: I think because she's Helios' kid and he is a higher ranking titan than Prometheus so hurting his child would almost be an act of war?

Josiah: Why is it only Circe and Prometheus that favor the mortals? Is every god just that power hungry?

Ava: Why is this power of transformation such a problem? Are the other gods jealous of this power? Do the gods think that this is dangerous?

Ashley: Did she want to see the color of her blood

Savannah: I think she cuts herself to feel pain, she didn't know what a lashing felt like and she hasn't really felt pain

Madeline Miller, Circe, Ch. 9-14 (Wed, 11/3/2021)

Ashley: Why was it forbidden for Circe to ask about Jason and Medea's transgressions pg163 she also mentions it when the sailors ask for her name. Wouldn't the sailors know she was a god by her eyes even if she didn't have the voice of a god?

Shelby: In Chapter Eleven it think it is, Circe casts a spell upon the Minotaur. Why does she do this

Alyssa: Not a question but I feel like we as readers can very clearly tell that Herme and Circe's relationship isn't a true and genuine relationship. Especially how Herme withholds information from Circe, when he could easily help her by giving her more details, but instead he withholds it for his own amusement it seems.

Marcela: I'm not sure if this was explained in the book, but why did Pasiphae have sex with the bull? Was she trying to play the role of Helios, like when he used to have sex with his cows?

Abby: I noticed that a huge importance to Circe is women equality. Did she ever change a woman into a creature or just men?

Savannah: I'm sorry I really don't have any questions, but I really hope I get to see some karma be handed out to a lot of characters

Pandora: Why does she stay so fascinated by humans when they prove to her that they are cruel and mean?

Olivia: Kinda related to Alyssa's question, why does Hermes keep information from Circe? Is he really that shallow/selfish?

Jada: Going off of Ashley's question, would this maybe because her role as a female in this "man's world" that they purposely don't acknowledge her as a God?

Ava: Are the pigs she has on her island other trespassers like Odysseus' men? This that why she talks to them because deep down they're human?

Richard: I find Circe interesting as a character because although she is a god (or titan) she still feels herself outside of them. She is, besides maybe Prometheus, one of the only gods we've met thus far who has any decency for their kin and for mankind, and she also doesn't seem to have as much of an ego as the other gods. I mean, immediately after she saves the sailors from Scylla, she blames herself for it. She's perhaps the only god in the story with the humility to know when she's done wrong.

Layth: Do the greek gods have their own human forms along with a god form?

Connor: I might have glanced over this if it was talked about, but why was Circe able to leave exile to visit her sister? Was she actually not allowed and did it anyways, or do the gods not care? It just seems odd that she leaves and comes back without any obvious interference from her father or Zeus.

Ashley: Pg 187

Luke W: Marcela I'm pretty sure the story goes something like this: Poseidon gives Minos (Pasiphae's husband) a bull to sacrifice, but he kept it instead and didn't kill it. In response, Poseidon makes his wife fall in love with the bull.

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Ashley: Yes she said after years passed she only spoke what was bid

Pandora: Follow up on my previous question, or does her fascination fade?

Jehan: is Circe able to turn a person from a creature back into a human? If so, why didn't she just turn Scylla back and not get punished.

Josiah: Does Circe give women any involvement in her transformations of humans to creatures? It seems like she only does it to men who wrong her

Ashley: If Madea would of stayed how do you think the interaction between Circe and Aeetas would of went? Are they equal in power?

Ashley: She's not super nice to the nymphs on her island

Madeline Miller, Circe, Ch. 15-20 (Mon, 11/8/2021)

Ashley: It left us on a cliffhanger lol

Savannah: It really did

Pandora: best mom ever

Ashley: trygon

Savannah: Honestly him and Prometheus have been by favorite character and they only show up for a few pages and it bums me out lol

Marcela: Is it bad that I already read ahead

How would you characterize Odysseus in this retelling of the Odyssey? How does Circe, in some way, make him more human?

Ashley: I had to stop myself so I wouldn't spoil anything. He doesn't seem as arrogant and annoying in this book

Marcela: Odysseus seems like such a gentlemen

Sara: Yeah I liked him better in this one

Alyssa: honestly I like him much better in this aspect. He's more respectful I feel like

Abby: in this book, he seems to be more of a respectful and responsible character

Janelle: ^^ agreed. He's more of a gentleman like Marcella said. I feel like he actually cares.

Savannah: I choose the weirdest characters to love, so maybe my gauge on what's a good character is broken but I didn't like him still. He just seemed to be using her still? He's nice but he doesn't seem to understand the fact that she has feelings for him. I understand he has PTSD probably but he still made my skin crawl and I can't quite figure out why

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Zach: he acts more respectful and less full of himself. his flaws aren't as easily to spot(other than cheating on his wife)

Ari: This version of Odysseus seems more humble, and more respectful, especially in the first meeting with Circe.

Olivia: It's a complete 180. I hated Odysseus in the original story. It almost feels like Circe is looking at him through rose colored glasses and that's why we like him.

Ashley: He was more of a nice respectful guy who respected circe vs arrogant and self absorbed

Sara: He seems more responsible for his actions I guess (sorry for taking someones' words, I couldn't think of a better way to say it

Marcela: He was a lot more kind. He wasn't a barbaric warrior that he was portrayed in the lost books. In relation to Circe, he was softer and respectful

Joe: So like did Odysseus tell Circe that his sons name was Telemachus and that's why she named her son Telegonus or is the tele part just based on the father sorta like a family name?

Ava: How Circe looks at Odysseus is so different from how we have looked at him in the past. He is charming, respectable, and a gentleman. All of those others situations that he was put into in the other books shows his terrible characteritics, but Circe is able to bring out another side of him.

Ashley: Does he remind her a Daedalus

Savannah: Oh damn am I the only one who didn't like him 😬

Connor: He seems to be less abrasive and more likeable. He does not come off as egotistical as he was in prior versions. It might be that due to prior perspectives Odysseys was looked at through a mortal lens, while Circe looks through an immortal one. With that lens, she most likely sees the goodness out of mortality as it matches with her own, unlike how other mortals look at all aspects of mortality as that is all they can compare it too.

Pandora: I like this version of Odysseus because of all the reasons others have said.

Olivia: Nah Savannah, the vibes are definitely still off

Sara: I like him better,not exactly like him though haha

Savannah: Hahaha good to know Olivia. His vibes were indeed off

Jehan: Felt unnatural after reading the previous books. Maybe he was scared of circe.

Savannah: Apparently Telegonus means "born afar"

tele = distance/far away. Kind of like telephone

So like shooting an arrow far away

Sorry I took Latin so I'm interested in looking up Greek words too lol

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Abby: Circe is the most feminist character that we have seen so far, Why is it pigs that she turns men into? Did she ever turn a man into somethings else?

Savannah: Do the nymphs enjoy Circe getting revenge on men? Since Nymphs are usually the ones getting harassed in myths? I was just kind of curious about your thoughts on it because the book doesn't really say what their reaction to it is.

Zach: was there any part of odysseus that thought about staying with circe?

Jehan: I thought nymphs were mostly harassed by gods.

Layth: I was thinking maybe telegonus would dampen her dislike for men. Maybe cause her to change her views a little bit.

Sami: Reading Circe get revenge on men was something that filled a deep hole I had of all the men I had wished I could do something like to

Alyssa: I was a little confused about the nymphs during this part of the reading, as well. I wish there was a little bit more clarity on their reactions.

Olivia: Definitely felt the same way Sami

Pandora: How did Circe become such a good mother given that her parents were not good at being parents and viewed their children as bargaining chips, something to trade for something else?

Ashley: I don't really have any questions except one what did Trygon mean when he said to Circe "Then child make another"? Other than that I thought it was funny how she was describing the toddler and teenage years of Telegonus. Pg 283

Janelle: So I was a little confused on the relationship between odysseus and circe. Why didn't he just stay with her. They did have Telegonus together. He stayed with her for a while before he went back home.

Connor: I am confused as to Athenas involvement into Circe's life. Is it purely because she is Odysseus's patron goddess, or is she in this version also in love with Odysseus, meaning she would be jealous of Circe, resulting in her wanting to kill Telegonus?

Sami: To see a physical manifestation of the pain they caused

Joe: I think Athena did still love Odysseus so it would've really hurt Circe to know that her son died and it could've made it worse had it been Odysseus be the one to kill him

Ashley: Will we figure out in the last bit why Athena wants to kill Telegonus?

Josiah: Why wouldn't Odysseus stay with Circe? There didn't seem to be anything wrong and they had Telegonus so it confused me

Ava: Why didn't Circe use her powers to keep Odysseus?

Janelle: Before Telegonus left the island circe was super protective about him and not really wanting to let him go at first. Is it just because of him possibly being in danger from Athena or?

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Savannah: It just feels a little weird because this is a feminist book but we're kind of getting only one women's view? I kind of just wish we got more women's views, but the book is about Circe so I guess it makes sense

Pandora: I think she was so protective of Telegonus because of Athena and raising him so sheltered. He doesn't know of the terrors of the human world.

Marcela: If she puts herself high than the nymphs, how feminist is Circe?

Savannah: ^^

Pandora: To answer Janelle's question.

Janelle: Thanks!

Layth: I never thought of it that way. Thank you for enlightening me.

Ashley: She experienced postpartum depression but pushed through it

Madeline Miller, Circe, Ch. 21-27 (Wed, 11/10/2021)

Abby: the ending was good, yet shocking. knew that Circe wanted to live a human life but I did not think she would of really done it

Olivia: I never thought I could love a story about a minor character so much. I usually don't like when people make up stories about other pre-set stories, but I can't help but love Circe.

Savannah: I cannot express how much I loved the fact that Prometheus' and Circe's relationship is the thing that helps end Circe's exile. Her kindness towards him lets her blackmail her dad and it makes me flipping happy. The book kind of started to grate on me just seeing Circe get knocked down again and again because I wasn't sure if it would be a happy ending because people seem to forget that a character that fights happiness should get it. But knowing that it's a happy ending made all my annoyance from before disappear because it was all worth it

Ari: I liked the ambiguity of the ending. I'm gonna pretend that nothing else bad happens, and that there's finally a happy ending

Grant: So she has always longed to be a mortal? I know she sort of looked out for them but that vision at the end, does that mean she has always wanted to be a mortal?

Emily: I really didn't expect the ending but at least it was a good ending!

Pandora: Not a question but I don't think her giving up her divinity was surprising because she has been fascinated by humans and their being able to die.

Alyssa: I was really happy with the ending, and glad it was kind of that happy ending we all wanted to see. It defiantly lived up to my expectations of what I had hoped would happen when we first started reading .

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Ava: I loved this new perspective on her and instead of her being so one dimensional and rather she is three dimensional. The book was really good and I love all of the references to nature, because I find nature so beautiful.

Janelle: I think this was by far my favorite book. Circe is honestly my favorite character. The ending was somewhat predictable but also surprising in a way.

Zach: I really liked the book and the ending. her becoming mortal wasn't very shocking to me because she had always liked humans more than the gods. I think Miller did a great job of turning Circe into a fleshed out character that I would feel for and empathize with instead of just being a witch that helped Odysseus.

Josiah: The ending made sense but I did not actually think she would ever go through with becoming a mortal. It seemed like it was her happy ending. I don't know if I just missed it or something, but did Circe still have her power and witchcraft after she transformed herself into a mortal?

Ashley: I enjoyed the growing relationship between Circe and Penelope how they go from being very cautious to family and generally caring for one another especially when Penelope tried to blame herself and Telegonus for Telegonus leaving and Circe reassuring her he wouldn't have been happy if he stayed. I did like the ending I felt through the whole novel she seemed more interested in the mortal side vs being a god.

Connor: I find it interesting how Circe was able to threaten Helios into ending her exile. Partly because it was their ignorance and fear of the unknown that got her exiled to begin with, and that exact fear and ignorance of what she could do ultimately was the tool in which ended her punishment. I guess that is just a comment on fearing the things we refuse to learn anything about, a ignorance that can hurt.

Marcela: I agree with Ava. The book gave more depth on Circe and she was more than just Odysseus's side piece. The ending was not what I expected, and I was a little disappointed with Telegonus in going with Athena. Overall, the relationship Circe built with the people she came across were genuine.

Ashley: Yes I like how she stood up to Helios to^^

Jada: I don't think the ending of the book was that shocking either especially since it has been clearly noted of her passion and fascination with mortality. To be honest I never really understood Circe at all and the novel explained her character a lot which helped

Ava: I also think that there's a slight regret in Circe for making the decision to leave her only way of life she knew, which was immortality. However, I think she knew deep down inside that was what is right for her, and now she can live a life where she doesn't meet people and then once they die she's left empty to eternality

Savannah: Eh it's Greek myth it's not that weird lol [the romance between Circe and Telemachus]

Marcela: Not as weird as the Minotaur situation

Chloe: Agreed^

Pandora: I wish we got more scenes with Prometheus and Circe.

Savannah: Me too!!

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Grant: true

Savannah: Oh in case anyone wanted to read more from her she wrote a story about Achilles too

Olivia: The Song of Achilles! I loved that one too :)

Savannah: It's great! It's a queer retelling

Olivia: A fair point; I think Miller does well

Zach: he is very different in Song of Achilles. a lot less barbaric

Jada: It's on my reading list right now haha

I also recommend *A Thousand Ships* by Natalie Haynes, a retelling of the Trojan War mostly from Briseis' perspective.

Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (Wed, 11/17/2021)

Marcela: I love the significance of the asphodels in this novel. Their death and the underworld, but also bitterness. At the end of "Helen takes a bath" (121), after Penelope and Helen have their passive aggressive argument., Helen tells Penelope to "enjoy the asphodel." Helen knows she'll always top Penelope, and that Penelope is a second choice.

Savannah: I really enjoy how the book is set up. It feels like you're sitting in an empty theater and Penelope just shows up on the stage to perform for you and once in a while the maids will steal the spotlight to tell you their side while Penelope doesn't notice them talking to you. I love books that talk to the reader directly.

Marcela: I keep forgetting that Penelope was just a child

Ashley: Are the maids only haunting her by making Odysseus leave every time he meets up with her cause they aren't close to her so she has to yell at them but they ignore her? Also, I hate the way she characterizes Telemachus he was so close to the maids growing up and just kills them as well as how crappy he treats Penelope

Ava: Are they like disembodied voices or do they have like a spiritual body? Because in the beginning it seems like they are just voices rather than having a body associated with the voice.

Marcela: When she got married, being constantly compared to Helen, her husband being sent off to war

Zach: why was Telemachus so mean to Penelope

Sara: She perceives them as friends basically but with her power over them she could never be really friends with them

Abby: Is Penelope a special character to Atwood? Why did she choose to re-write her story over all of the other greek myth characters?

Alyssa: Not a question but I really liked how Atwood challenged the original version of the Odysseus and the perspective that is brought about by that. I liked that she highlighted the struggle of women. I also

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really enjoyed that she put a focus on mental health, specifically like the killing of the maid and how that impacted Penelope psychologically.

Layth: how much of Penelope talking is atwood complaining about modern day ideas. I am referring to a few passages at the beginning of the novel.

Olivia: To be honest this version broke my heart. I almost didn't think twice about Penelope in the original Odyssey. She was just a background character in my mind. Now I wish I could reach through the pages and hug her.

Joe: I wonder how peacefully the story would've ended if Odysseus waited to hear why they were disrespecting the family instead of killing them outright, As it turns out Odysseus is apparently a mafia godfather

Ashley: I also don't know how I feel about it being brought to the 21st century lol that was a little confusing

Sara: I loved how Atwood gave us a look at Penelopes look at the modern world in her death, by talking about how these day to day things are now in palaces where no one lives but many people come to look at these objects and not use them

Janelle: I don't have a question but I think this book gave a whole different perspective from Penelope's point. We definitely got to see more of her and her life compared to other books because she was just briefly mentioned.

Connor: Why didn't Penelope tell Odysseus that she recognized him when he first appeared in the end? I believe all she did was acted surprised and watched him leave again. What exactly was her plan in doing that? Was there one, or did she simply just not want to discuss it?

Marcela: Yeah I agree Ashley, it felt like it didn't belong

Victoria: I served on a jury last month (rape case) and this totally gave me flashbacks of how people would blame the victim. It was crazy to me that people in this day in time would even think of saying something like that!

Sara: Victoria, That's terrible to hear

Pandora: On the first page, she contradicts herself. Does Atwood do this to make her an unreliable narrator? **[Yes]**

Richard: I was just kinda curious about the maids kinda poetic verse chapters. Has Atwood herself ever said that she did that simply because she's also a poet or because she kind of wanted to model that sort of Greek verse? I just found it an interesting choice and saw it myself as that sort of attempt at poetic verse.

Sami: The amount of women I've met trying to get through life with the system. One trying to throw the system out to get what they want and getting called rude names. Compared to the women who try to use the system and getting told they aren't feminist enough and are just falling into their roles

Janelle: I also wondered the same thing as Richard. Why were some chapters set up in a poetic way? Why not just write the whole book as either poetic or just regular chapters?

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Ashley: But she doesn't know everything wasn't she wanting to know why euryclies picked her maids to be hung? I know I spelled her name wrong lol

Josiah: Is Atwood showing us, through Penelope's "friendship" with the women she has power over, that it actually isn't possible to make friends with people who aren't in a position of power as yourself?

Ashley: I just didn't feel any kind of bond between them really

Joe: Since the maids are constantly forcing Odysseus to leave her I wonder if this whole story is just part of Penelope's punishment in the afterlife?

Savannah: I will defend Clytemnestra to my dying days

Savannah: Oh I thought she didn't tell that she knew to feed that male ego? She wanted to let him think that his disguise was so awesome that a 'simple' woman couldn't recognize him

Victoria: Exactly!