



Aeschylus: Agamemnon (Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy)

Barbara Goward

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Aeschylus' Agamemnon, opening play of the Oresteia trilogy, with its brilliant theatrical effects, is a masterpiece. The revenge plot - a murder - is simple, the language and imagery complex and thrilling. The play features two extraordinary women: the powerful, dissembling queen Clytemnestra and the frenzied prophetess Cassandra. It also features another original Aeschylean creation, the omnipresent helpless chorus, who are forced to bear witness to Agamemnon's path to death. Through the chorus, the action is seen in the problematic context of justice, destiny, and the role of the gods. The play is a serious investigation of man's problematic ethical nature. This detailed study gets the measure of Aeschylus' innovative genius as poet, storyteller and theatrical wizard by setting the play against the rich traditions of archaic poetry from which drama had only recently sprung. It considers the ethical dilemmas of the plot against contemporary fifth-century Athenian religious and political thinking, and its attitude to women. It engages with the play's great influence on later Attic tragedy and then considers Seneca's Roman Agamemnon and some revenge dramas of Elizabethan England.

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