

Hello, I'm Matt Brent and this presentation will focus on Clytemnestra as she is depicted in art. To begin, we have to set our scene. In Aeschylus' play *Agamemnon*. We have the character of Cassandra the prophet, and one of her lines she states. But murder waits for me. A two edged sword hacks me to death. Here we have Cassandra being depicted right in front of the ruins of Troy. But she is not our character that we want to focus on here. Rather, it's the act that happens to her and that is done by Clytemnestra.

In this first work of art by Clytemnestra about Clytemnestra, uh, it's titled *Clytemnestra Hesitating Before Striking Agamemnon*. This is from 1817 and was painted by Pierre Narcisse Square in and understand this particular work of art. We have to think about her situation. And in an article that appeared in the *Journal of Women's Studies* titled "Women Tyrant, Mother, Murderess: an Exploration of the Mythic Character of Plight of Nestor in All Her Forms," its author, Rachel Wolfe, states, "Clytemnestra has been said from her first appearance in surviving written works to reflect badly on all women."

Now, that may be true, but we have to remember both in the play and in this work of art, that she did not act alone. And that is plainly displayed here in this work. So while Clytemnestra may be depicted right in the center, to the left of her is her lover. Against this, in the background is her sleeping husband, Agamemnon. So these three characters are engaged in what's going to become murder. Uh, and it's important for us to really take a look at what's going on here. So Clytemnestra is about to murder her husband while he sleeps. And let's take a look at some of the emotion that's occurring in this particular work of art.

So both Clytemnestra and against this have different facial expressions. Tell us a little bit about what's going on and what they may or may not be thinking about. So on the right we have Clytemnestra with just an expression in her eyes that could be anger or concern. Her lips are

together tightly. Uh, and so, you know, she may be just ready to go. Uh, but then again, she might be hesitating to do so, as the title suggests. But what's also more interesting is the expression of her lover behind her. So I guess this. He also has a look in his eyes, a look of anger and his mouth. Unlike Clytemnestra's, is open, so perhaps he's whispering to her. His commanding her. "Do it! Kill Agamemnon". What's also interesting here is that I guess this is right here. It is on her shoulders, almost pushing her forward, and his left hand is pointing to her, her husband, as if to say, go, go, do it. So while his mouth may be telling her his hands are directing her as well.

Now if we turn to the sleeping Agamemnon, we see him sleeping peacefully. His eyes are closed, he is in bed and he's vulnerable. He's not wearing any armor. He's not wearing any clothes. He's not even under the covers. Really. His chest is bare. Uh, and so this is perfect for any murderer, but especially a minister in this case, to be able to come in and just attack it because he has no defenses at this point. In fact, in this work of art, his armor is depicted on the wall behind him. So here he is in bed, completely vulnerable to attack.

Now our next work of art is titled *Clytemnestra After the Murder*. And this was painted in 1882 by John Collier. Now, to understand this work of art, we have to learn a little about what was happening when this work was painted. Uh, according to Fiona Macintosh in a work called "Agamemnon in 19th century Britain", which appeared in a book, *Agamemnon and Performance 458 BC to AD 2004*, Macintosh explains how in 1880 there was a production of Aeschylus' Agamemnon performed um at a at a university in England, and this performance was done in the original Greek, but it was updated to the point where the actors no longer had to wear masks. But the actors were still all men. And in this particular case, the actor who played Clytemnestra was a gentleman named Frank Benson. And John Collier's painting here is actually, uh, Frank Benson

in his role of Clytemnestra. So while this is a portrait of the character Clytemnestra, it's important for us to be aware that this is a man in that role.

Clytemnestra is appearing after the murder. Uh, and this is a little different than the play, because at the play, in the play, she comes out of, uh, the palace and confronts the chorus. Uh, whereas here it's more depicted that she's coming out of the room. Uh, and we can see her holding the curtain back. What's of note to me in this particular, uh, depiction is that in an exclusive play, uh, Clytemnestra states, right after the murder, he, her husband Agamemnon, he collapsed, snorting his life away, spitting great globs of blood all over me, drenching me in showers of his dark blood. And I see this. And while there are some red tinges to her dress, I think that's more lace or the fabric than actual blood. But if we zoom in, we could see a little drop there. Uh, above the right breast, approximately on the right breast. So not exactly drenched in blood. Now there is blood. And we can see that on the murder weapon. Uh, but in this particular depiction, I don't think, um, they actually got that element correct, as it was described in the play. But again, keeping in mind that this depiction is based on a play that Collier observed. So perhaps in that version of the play, they didn't do it as is described in the actual play itself.

Now, much like before in our previous painting, we can see emotion on the face of Clytemnestra again, reminding us that this is an actor. Uh, Frank Benson. Um. Still lips are together. We see emotion in the eyes. Uh, curious what is being thought here? Uh, I did it. Or what did I do?. Uh, there's a lot of things that can be interpreted, uh, through these facial expressions.

Now, John Collier, uh, nine years later, decided to revisit the character of Clytemnestra in his art. Uh, and so he produced what we see on the screen now also titled "Clytemnestra". This

also occurs after the murder occurred. And so there are some differences here, as you might observe. Uh, in this one, uh, Clytemnestra is bare chested, and perhaps it's like Agamemnon was and the previous portrait, and not wearing clothing that weren't armor shows the vulnerability of Clytemnestra. Uh, here she's also not covered in blood, but her weapon is certainly dripping blood on the tile, as we can see.

Uh, looking at these two side by side, we can clearly see differences between the two. Um, in terms of the setting of the production. Uh, on the left again, she emerges out of the bedroom on the right. Perhaps she's emerging out of the bedroom, which is kind of depicted to the left, but there's no curtain, and she's about to go down the steps, and maybe here she is about to emerge outside of the palace to then talk to the chorus.

Now, if we return to the original quote I provided from the prophet Cassandra, she noted that she was going to be done and by a double edged sword. And in each of these productions we see three different weapons. In the first production, we see what essentially looks like a knife. In the second we have an axe, and in the third we finally have that double edged sword. And while these are minor things, um, looking at the way they are produced in art really separates a little bit from the original source material in a scoreless work. Uh, both of these by John Collier. Uh, bloody weapons our original one Guerin. Uh, because she hasn't done the deed yet. There's no blood on it. But we have to consider the fact that each of these weapons would be used differently. Uh. Um. In the play, when Cassandra emerges, she describes the actual event where she essentially strikes her husband three times and he cries out with a knife and with a sword. That might be possible, but with such a big axe, if she were to haul all that up and then strike him with it, that one swift blow, depending on where it was, would probably kill him right then and

there, and he wouldn't cry out. Uh, so there are some differences here in the weapons that are displayed in these works of art and how it's depicted in the play itself.

Now, in each of these, it's important to think of the struggle that Clytemnestra had, uh, with her whole situation. Uh, Joseph of man and his work. The case for Clytemnestra. He states that the fundamental conflict in the Oresteia is between two worlds. The domestic world of Clytemnestra and the heroic world of the warriors who have been engaged in the Trojan War for ten years. That conflict seems to manifest a natural, because inevitable difference between the ways in which women and men see the world, either because of their experience of it or because of the expectations it has imposed on them. Clytemnestra here was clearly a victim of this, and I think each of these depictions, uh, does a pretty good job of showing really her as not only the victim, but also as the murderer.

For reference, the works that I cited within this presentation are displayed here on this slide. Thank you.