

Shared Experience in association with
Guildford's Yvonne Arnaud Theatre presents

SHARED
EXPERIENCE

ORESTES

BLOOD & LIGHT

by **Helen Edmundson**
based on *Euripides*

Education pack by **Gillian King**

Contents

The Pack and Company Credo	2
Shared Experience Expressionism	3
Who was Euripides?	4
Grecian Life and Times in the 5th Century BC	5
The Birth of Democracy	9
An Interview with Nancy Meckler – Director	11
The Design of the Production	12
An Eye for an Eye	14
Telling the Story – by Helen Edmundson	16
Killing for Honour?	18
Scene Study	20
Timeline for the Play	22
The Curse on the House of Atreus	24
An Interview with Peter Salem – Composer	27
Reunited Siblings	28
Cast Interviews	29
The Gods of this Production	35
What do I Want?	37
Writing a Review	40

Company Credo

We are committed to creating theatre that goes beyond our everyday lives, giving form to the hidden world of emotion and imagination.

We see the rehearsal process as a genuinely open forum for asking questions and taking risks that redefine the possibilities of performance.

At the heart of our work is the power and excitement of the performer's physical presence and the unique collaboration between actor and audience – a Shared Experience.

The Pack

This pack is intended as an introduction and a follow-up to seeing a performance of *Orestes*. I've included background material, such as the history and culture of the time, and also information specifically on our production, which includes interviews with the creative team.

Although this cannot be an exhaustive account of the whole production, I hope that it introduces some of the ideas and approaches central to Shared Experience and this production. Scattered through the pack are questions and exercises that I hope will be useful in provoking discussion and in practical work of your own.

Gillian King



Tim Chipping and Alex Robertson

Shared Experience Expressionism

In our everyday lives we hide much of what we think and feel, for fear we would be considered foolish or even mad. I believe we have a longing to see expressed in the theatre that which we conceal in life; to share our 'madness' and understand that we are not alone.

Central to Shared Experience's approach is the desire to go beyond naturalism and to see into the character's private worlds. There will be moments on stage when we literally enact whatever a character is secretly feeling or imagining. In more realistic scenes the social façade is a thin layer beneath which bubbles a river of barely suppressed emotion. During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to explode and take over. In a scene where someone is secretly feeling very angry, when we allow the inner to erupt onto the surface they may viciously attack the other person; if the other character is feeling afraid they might crawl under the table. Having allowed the inner to erupt, the actor must return to the scene and struggle to conceal it. Although we may see two people drinking tea, we sense that underneath the social ritual it is as if murder is taking place.

This emphasis on subjective experience runs through all areas of the production. For example, the setting of the play will be more expressive of what a place feels like than what it realistically looks like. In *Jane Eyre* everything on stage was grey or black to express the loneliness of Jane's inner world. In *War and Peace* the set was a hall of mirrors to suggest the vanity and narcissism of the aristocracy in Tolstoy's Russia. In *The House of Bernarda Alba* the house feels like a prison. We decided to make the door colossally large and encrusted it with locks and bolts. It is this emphasis on the 'inner' or the subjective experience which characterises expressionism and it is at the heart of Shared Experience's approach.

Polly Teale



Gone to Earth photo: Robert Day



Madame Bovary photo: Robert Day



A Passage to India photo: John Haynes

Who was Euripides?

Euripides, ranked nowadays with Aeschylus and Sophocles as the greatest of the Greek tragic playwrights, was born at Salamis in the 5th century BC on the same day, according to tradition, as the Greeks defeated the Persians in the great sea battle of Salamis. Little is recorded of his early life, but in any event, he received a thorough classical education and studied under Socrates and other philosophers before applying himself to dramatic composition. He wrote about 80 dramas, probably more, and of these, 18 complete versions still exist. It is a testament to his reputation, gained especially after his death, that his plays were widely appreciated throughout the Roman and Byzantine empires and more have survived to modern times than those of Aeschylus and Sophocles together.

He was not, however, so widely acclaimed in Athens during his life. His plays were first entered in the great Attic drama festivals in 454BC. It was not until 12 years later that he won first prize and despite his prolific output, he won the prize only five times in all. This might have been, in part, because he departed from tradition; the structure of his plays was considered unconventional and his characters, although drawn generally from classical mythology, were represented more as contemporary Athenians, speaking the language of everyday Athens. Both factors may have led many to feel he was questioning the traditional values on which Athens was based. Nor was he averse to silencing his critics in the audience, telling them to be quiet and that he came to instruct them not to be instructed by them.

His private life gave his detractors ample opportunity to ridicule him. He was austere and reclusive, taking no part in public life. Despite his ability to imbue his characters, especially women, with passion and sympathy, he was never able to relate to women in real life. His two marriages both ended in failure. He was, throughout his life, jealous of Sophocles and he eventually retreated to live a solitary life in a cave.

The writers of Greek comedy lampooned him mercilessly and Aristophanes in particular satirised him in his comedy *The Frogs*. Late in life he moved from Athens to the court of King Archelaus of Macedonia where he was received with courtesy and friendliness but died horribly at about 80 years of age. Reputedly, he was walking alone when he was attacked and savaged by wild dogs.

Euripides' known plays include: *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Trojan Women*, *Helen*, *Orestes*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *The Bacchae*, *Andromache*, *Children of Heracles*, *Hecuba*, *Electra*, *Suppliants*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Madness of Heracles*, *Ion*, *Phoenissae* and *Cyclops*.

Grecian Life and Times in the 5th Century BC

Society

The distinguishing features of ancient Greek society were: the division between the free and the slaves, the differing roles of men and women, the relative lack of status based on birth, and the importance of religion. The way of life of the Athenians was common in the Greek world compared to Sparta's special system.

Social Structure

Only free people could be citizens entitled to the full protection of the law in a city-state. In most city-states, unlike Rome, social prominence did not allow special rights. For example, being born in a certain family generally brought no special privileges.

Sometimes families controlled public religious functions, but this ordinarily did not give any extra power in the government. In Athens, the population was divided into four social classes based on wealth. People could change class if they made more money. In Sparta, all male citizens were given the title of 'equal' if they finished their education. However, Spartan kings who served as the city-state's dual military and religious leaders came from two families.

Slaves had no power or status. They had the right to have a family and own property but they had no political rights. By 600BC chattel slavery had spread in Greece. By the 5th century BC slaves made up one-third of the total population in some city-states. Slaves outside Sparta almost never revolted because they were made up of too many nationalities and were too scattered to organise.

Most families owned slaves as household servants and labourers; even poor families might have owned one or two slaves. Owners were not allowed to beat or kill their slaves. Owners often promised to free slaves in the future to encourage slaves to work hard. Unlike in Rome, slaves who were freed did not become citizens. Instead, they were mixed into the population of metics, which included people from foreign countries or other city-states who were officially allowed to live in the state.

City-states also legally owned slaves. These public slaves had a larger measure of independence than slaves owned by families, living on their own and performing specialised tasks. In Athens, public slaves were trained to look out for illegal counterfeit coinage, while temple slaves acted as servants of the temple's deity.

Sparta had a special type of slaves called helots. Helots were Greek war captives owned by the state and assigned to families.

They cooked food and did household chores so that women could concentrate on raising strong children while men could devote their time to training as hoplites. Their masters treated them harshly and helots often revolted.

Slave *Is this a good country they have brought me to?
Is this a good country they have brought me to?*

Where To Live

For a long time, the way of life in the Greek city-states remained the same. People living in cities resided in low apartment buildings or single-family homes, depending on their wealth. Residences, public buildings, and temples were situated around the agora. Citizens also lived in small villages and farmhouses scattered across the state's countryside. In Athens, more people lived outside the city walls than inside (it is estimated that from a total population of 400,000, 160,000 lived inside the city, which is a large rate of urbanization for a pre-industrial society).

Electra *They married me to a farmer, a peasant, a man much older than myself, so that any son I should chance to have would be too low to set himself against them.*

The Household

A common Greek household was simple if compared to a modern one, containing bedrooms, storage rooms, and a kitchen, situated around a small inner courtyard. Its average size, in the 4th century, about 230 square meters, was much larger than the houses of other ancient civilizations which indicates a better standard of living.

A household consisted of a single set of parents and their children, but generally no other relatives. Men were responsible for supporting the family by work or investments in land and commerce.

Women were responsible for managing the household's supplies and overseeing slaves, who fetched water in jugs from public fountains, cooked, cleaned, and looked after babies. Men kept separate rooms for entertaining guests because male visitors were not permitted in rooms where women and children spent most of their time.

Wealthy men would sometimes invite friends over for a symposium. Light came from olive oil lamps, while heat came from charcoal braziers. Furniture was simple and sparse, which included wooden chairs, tables, and beds.

Women

With the notable exception of Plato, Athenian philosophers believed that women had strong emotions and weak minds. For this reason they had to be protected from themselves and they had to be prevented from doing damage to others. Guardianship was the system developed to deal with this perceived quality in women.

Every woman in Athens had a *kyrios* (guardian) who was either her closest male birth-relative or her husband. Although she could own her clothing, jewellery, personal slave and purchase inexpensive items, she was otherwise unable to buy anything, own property or enter into any contract. Her *kyrios* controlled everything about her life (compare this with the *pater familias* in Ancient Rome). Citizenship for a woman entitled her to marry a male citizen and to join certain religious cults closed to men and non-citizens, but it offered no political or economic benefits.



Slave costume design: Niki Turner

Helen *You are unlovable, Electra. And Unloved.
It happens sometimes; a child is born who cannot be loved.
The third of three girls, what possible use could you be?
You were a prelude to Orestes; a mistake, a slip.*

A girl in Athens was normally married soon after puberty to a man who was typically in his late twenties or early thirties. Her father or other guardian provided the dowry and arranged the match. The betrothal symbolised the groom's acceptance of the qualities of the dowry as well as the qualities of the bride.

It is quite possible that Athenian reality never quite lived up to Athenian ideal. There is some evidence to suggest that at least some women could read and write and were well informed on the issues of the day. Vase paintings etc, would suggest that women frequently gathered together. Women and men, however, did not socialise together – at least, respectable women and men did not. If a man had guests in his home the women would be expected to remain in the women's quarter. There are few paintings that show husband and wife together after the wedding.

Marriage

As in the rest of the ancient world the most important reasons for marriage were:

1. The management and preservation of property
2. The production of children as future care givers and heirs

Love and affection may have been an important additional function in Ancient Egypt, but they played little or no part in an Athenian marriage. Only children whose parents were both citizens could become citizens. Simply being born in Athens was not enough. In arranging the marriage, citizenship and wealth were important considerations. Since a fair amount of property was involved, a guardian would want to choose the son of a relative or close friend, so marriage usually took place within a small circle. Rich married rich and poor married poor.

The marriage ceremony itself took place soon after the betrothal. In the evening, following a ritual bath and the wedding banquet in her own home, the bride entered a cart with the groom and joined in a torchlit procession of friends and family to the groom's home where the new couple were invited in by the groom's mother. The final act in the ceremony was the consummation of the marriage in a private corner of the groom's house.

A wife's duty was to bear legitimate children (i.e. heirs) and to manage the household. She was expected to remain inside her home except for attendance at funerals and festivals of the specific cults that were open to women. A woman seen outside on her own was assumed to be a slave, prostitute, concubine or a woman so poor that she had to work. Childcare, spinning and weaving were the most important activities in the daily routine of the good wife. One writer said that the best woman was the one about whom the least was heard, whether it be good or bad.

Electra *The best day...the best day was when my Father came home triumphant in wine and pride and said he had betrothed me to a prince, though I was only six years old, Prince Kastor of Sparta, a demigod, a god to be. That day I was the centre of my Mother's eye.*

Jobs

The majority of Greeks worked in agriculture, probably 80% of the population, which is similar to all pre-industrial civilizations. The soil in Greece is poor and rainfall is very unpredictable, and research suggests the climate has changed little since ancient times, so frequent weeding and turning of soil was needed. Oxen might have helped with ploughing, however most tasks would have been done by hand. The Greek farmer would ideally plan for a surplus of crops to contribute to feasts and to buy pottery, fish, salt and metals.

Food

Ancient Greek food was simple. Poor people mainly ate barley porridge flavoured with onions and other vegetables, cheese or olive oil. Few people ever ate meat regularly, except for the free distributions from animal sacrifices at state festivals. Sheep when eaten was mutton: bakeries sold fresh bread daily, while small stands offered snacks. Wine diluted with water was a favoured beverage.

Orestes *It was my favourite thing, when I was young, to sit and eat beneath the trees, when all the work was done. All of us together, my guardians, my friends, sitting beneath the orange trees, within the whisper of the sea, feasting until the sun went down.*

Fashion

Greek clothing changed little over time. Both men and women wore loose tunics. The tunics often had colourful designs and were worn cinched with a belt. People wore cloaks and hats in cold weather, and in warm weather sandals replaced leather boots. Women wore jewellery and cosmetics – especially powdered lead, which gave them a pale complexion. Men grew beards until Alexander the Great created a vogue for shaving.

Electra *That cloak. My Father sent for us, asked us to bring Iphigenia to the coast, to her wedding – so we thought. My Mother wore that cloak. She said it would reflect the sun, set alight my Father's heart and he would soon be gone to war. Make him remember her. You were there.*

Keeping Fit

To keep fit and to be ready for military service, men exercised daily. Almost every city-state had at least one gymnasium; a combination exercise building, running track, bathing facility, lecture hall, and park. In most cities (other than Sparta) gymnasia were open only to males, and exercise was taken in the nude. City-state festivals provided great amounts of entertainment. Gods were honoured with competitions in music, drama, and poetry. Athenians boasted that their city hosted a festival nearly every other day. Huge Panhellenic festivals were held at Olympia, Delphi, Nemea, and Isthmia. Athletes and musicians who won these competitions became rich and famous. The most popular and expensive competition was chariot racing.

Medicine

Medicine in Ancient Greece was limited in comparison to modern medicine. Hippocrates helped separate superstition from medical treatment in the 5th century BC. Herbal remedies were used to reduce pain, and doctors were able to perform some surgery, but they had no cure for infections, so even healthy people could die quickly from disease at any age.

Education

Education was private, except in Sparta. During the Hellenistic period, some city-states established public schools. Only wealthy families could afford a teacher. Boys learned how to read, write and quote literature. They also learned to sing and play one musical instrument and were trained as athletes for military service. They studied not for a job but to become an effective citizen. Girls also learned to read, write and do simple arithmetic so they could manage the

household. They almost never received education after childhood. A small number of boys continued their education after childhood. While they were teenagers, they studied philosophy as a moral guide in life, and rhetoric to help make persuasive speeches in a court of political assembly. In the Classical period, this training was necessary for an ambitious young man. A crucial part of a wealthy teenager's education was a loving mentor relationship with an elder. The teenager learned by watching his mentor talking about politics in the agora, helping him perform his public duties, exercising with him in the gymnasium and attending symposia with him. The richest students continued their education to college, and went to a university in a large city. These universities were organised by famous teachers. Two of Athens' greatest universities were the Lyceum and the Academy.

Orestes *And I could ask my questions then. Everything which puzzled me. And they'd try to give me answers, through the wine. To explain why men were always fighting, and why the Gods were loathed to intervene, and what makes a king a great king, and why we have to die. And they'd laugh at me and call me the questioning boy.*

The Birth of Democracy



Jeffery Kissoon

Ancient Greek civilization rose to wealth and power as a series of city-states each ruled by a monarch, to whom the Greeks referred as a tyrant. The start of the decline of ancient Greek civilization was marked by the Peloponnesian war in the 5th century BC, which was effectively a rebellion against the traditional rule of tyrants. The Spartans championed the Tyrant System whereas the Athenians rebelled and replaced their tyrant with a forum of wealthy citizens. The Athenian approach was to let the forum decide issues via a discussion followed by a vote, and this is generally considered the birth of democracy. Hence the performance of the Athenian assembly at this time must be considered the ultimate example of democracy in action.

Athens is one of the first recorded and probably the most important democracy in ancient times; the word 'democracy' (Greek meaning 'rule by the people') was invented by Athenians in order to define their system of government, around 508BC.

Athenian democracy was based on a forum of the male citizens of Athens and an elected group of officials who had limited decision-making power. Giving this decision-making power to elected officials was considered by the ancient Athenians to be taking away the power of the people, effectively making the state an oligarchy. Few checks on, or limits to, the power of the assembly existed, with the notable exception of the *graphe paranomon*, which made it illegal to pass a law that was contrary to another.

One of the reasons why this system was feasible was because of, by modern standards, the relatively small population of Athens, only 300,000 people. Additionally, there were severe restrictions that dictated who had the right to participate as a citizen, which excluded over half of the total population. Citizenship rights were strictly limited to male, adult, non-slave Athenians of citizen descent. Therefore, women, children, slaves, foreigners and resident aliens — groups that together made up the majority of the city's population — had no rights to participate in the assembly.

Pay for political service was a democratic principle, although the forms of service which were covered changed over time. In contrast to the professional wages paid to politicians and public servants today, this pay was low, about as much as a man could earn doing unskilled manual labour. That is to say, it was aligned with the earning power of the very poorest citizens and intended only to cover what they might otherwise have earned during the days or parts of days they gave over to political service.

ORESTES

BLOOD & LIGHT

SHARED
EXPERIENCE

Orestes *It was all but finished before I arrived. The decision almost made. A few last men were shouting against us, seizing their share of vitriolic glory. I did hear one man speak for us, a grey haired man with the wisest eyes who said they should all think of Agamemnon first, and what was done for him. He said we should be banished. Nothing more. But a hundred voices came back at him, all chanting "stone them stone them", and our Grandfather chief amongst them, livid and red-faced, springing to his feet, his arm raised in the air. I stepped out before them and I spoke. They recoiled in horror, gawped at me as though I was already dead. But I was not afraid of them. I used the anger that had risen up inside me, my anger with Menelaos. I cried out that we had done Apollo's will, that they should take their outrage and lay it at His feet. But they shouted me down, they drowned my words. A stone hit me hard on the head here. But I did not buckle. I stood firm.*



Jeffery Kissoon, Alex Robertson, Tim Chipping and Mairead McKinley

Exercise:

Read the speech above from *Orestes*. Try to stage this speech and the story contained in it in several ways:

- What happens if you have a very large cast?
- What happens if you only have five actors?
- What happens if you use masks?
- What happens if you are not allowed to use language but only sound and movement?

Forum Theatre

Two students create a short scene about an issue or subject they feel strongly about. For example it could show A being bullied by B. At the end of the scene A 'goes out' to the audience/other members of the class and asks for help and advice as A and B are going to re-run the scene again. This time either A or anyone in the audience can stop the action and ask for or offer advice, tactics or maybe even what exactly A should say to B.

The audience are like directors or participants in the scene. Hopefully with their help A should find some resolution within the scene. For example A could find a method or style of talking that limits or stops B's desire to bully A.

Consider the play *Orestes*. What could your scene be about? Only one person in the pair can speak to the audience and get their help. B changes through the changed actions and words of A.

An Interview with Nancy Meckler (Director)

Looking back at Shared Experience's last works, *Orestes* seems to be quite a departure for the company.

Well, Greek tragedy deals with larger than life situations, so it really suits our physical expressionism. Also, my first production for Shared Experience was *The Bacchae* by Euripides, and the first play I directed when I first came to live in England was *Antigone*, so maybe not such a big leap after all. I have always been interested in *Orestes* as a play as it is so rarely performed, a bit of a find, and although it is difficult I was interested in its resonance with our own times.

Helen Edmundson, the writer, agreed that its modern political relevance was a powerful argument for taking the play and finding a way to make it work as a satisfying piece of theatre. She has taken huge liberties with the adaptation, which has been an exciting process for us all.

What elements of the play challenge you at this early stage of rehearsals?

The emotions are so huge. That's always a challenge. Overlook them and you alienate an audience, undercook them and you don't do justice to the play. Each character has to deliver exceptionally long speeches, some lasting over a page. In Ancient Greek theatre the characters may have behaved as if they were in a public debate, with the other characters onstage standing about listening with interest before they made their equally long reply. This can make the staging feel static and under-energised. We are trying to find ways to get more movement into the scenes and still support the importance of the words.

The play takes place in the bedroom of Electra and Orestes' mother, several days after they have murdered her. They have retreated there as a place of safety, afraid the citizens would tear them apart if they went outdoors. So the Designer and I have made the decision for the room to be round, because a circle feels so much like a safe place, while also suggesting that there is no way out. It is a womb and a tomb, a refuge and a trap all at the same time. In the early days of rehearsal we were experimenting with how to move in the circle and where to place the bed so that it becomes a part of the storytelling and not just a huge piece of furniture in the room.



Nancy Meckler

The Design of the Production

During the original discussions Nancy Meckler (Director) and Niki Turner (Designer) both decided they didn't want to set the piece in any specific time period. The story has strong resonances today so should feel that it represents both periods: they were aiming for a timeless quality. When it was originally performed it was seen as a new adaptation of an old story, and a story that had a resonance with the audience then.

The play is set in Klytemnestra's bedroom, which is represented by a gold disc on the floor. By using a circle as our playing space it gives the sense that there is nowhere to hide. There are no corners to retreat to and there is the sense of being watched from all sides.

To add to the sense of being watched the Director and Designer placed 'red men' – tailor's dummies/figurines located on three sides of the stage. These represent the people of Argos and the people of the Assembly who are soon to decide the fate of Electra and Orestes. Tyndareos (Electra and Orestes' grandfather) will also be dressed in red as he is the representative within the play of government and society.

There is a large door in the playing space and this is the only way into or out of the room. This door is covered in Klytemnestra's gold shoes. The shoes make the room more easily recognisable as a woman's room and suggest a woman of wealth. This door becomes a drawbridge and raised area for the final moment of the show.

To add to the sense of femininity there is a stool and a tray on which are Klytemnestra's perfumes and make-up. The room also contains many of Klytemnestra's dresses draped over the bed or on the floor.

In order to create as much space as possible for the scenes to be played out, there is very little furniture onstage. Apart from the stool, the only other item is a large gold bed. This makes the room instantly recognisable as a bedroom and is a place for Orestes and Electra to sleep. Klytemnestra's bed is also referred to several times during the play, the first of which is during the opening speech. The bed is also heavily decorated, with an eagle on the headboard, the symbol often used to represent Zeus (Helen's father).



Dress for Killing costume design: Niki Turner

How the original production of *Orestes* would have been staged

At the end of the 4th century BC, theatres consisted of steeply raked seating made from stone, cut into the side of a hill in a fan shape of about 200 degrees. These theatres could often hold more than 18,000 spectators.

The shape and the acoustics of the design allowed the actors to be clearly seen and heard by all the spectators at all times. In the centre of the stage was a circular dancing floor (orchestra), with an altar for sacrifices dedicated to Dionysus. Behind this orchestra was a longer stage area, with a building behind it. This stage building or skene was used as the actors' dressing room and the front of the building was decorated to illustrate a palace or temple or whatever was called for in the play.

Props may have been brought on, for example statues, chariots and so on. There were also two pieces of machinery the performers could utilise. The ekkyklema which translates simply as 'something that rolls out' which could be a platform to showcase tableaux or to reveal dead people – all killed offstage! The second piece would have been useful in the original version of *Orestes*, as Apollo would have been lifted onto the top of the stage buildings by a type of crane, and this is often called the deus ex machina, 'the God from a machine'.

The chorus of fifteen people stayed in the orchestra area. There they sang and danced the choral odes which separated the acts of the play. The chorus were trained by a skilled chorus master called a khoregos. Occasionally they asked questions to the actors or chanted in a lyrical dialogue with the actors. Any individual roles or lines were given to the chorus master.

There were only ever three actors on the stage and it was a very skilful job to have, as only a handful of actors were considered good enough to perform at these huge festivals. They wore masks and full costume and often doubled roles playing kings and slaves in the same play. If they played a high status character they were often accompanied by 'non speaking extras' all in full costume to add to the visual spectacle. These extras were called doryphoremata or 'spear carriers' – just as they are often glibly referred to today.

An example of this style of theatre still exists at Epidaurus in Greece and is regularly used for productions today.

Questions:

- If this play included Electra re-meeting Orestes, and the subsequent murder of Klytemnestra, how would you design the new set? What challenges would you face?
- Shared Experience mainly tours to proscenium arch theatres. If you could choose where this play was performed (outdoor venues, in churches, in shopping centres etc) and in what configuration (traverse, in-the-round etc) what would you choose?

Exercise:

Create a short scene about something that has recently featured in the news. Only two members of the group can 'act' (that is speak), the other members must sing, question and debate with the actors and comment on the actors and the action in unison.

An Eye For an Eye

The instinct for revenge or retribution often stems from a legitimate concern to right a perceived wrong. Electra and Orestes are simply carrying on the cycle of revenge and retribution that began many years before. They killed their mother who had killed their father who had killed their sister.

EXERCISE:

Read the extract below. How would you react if you were Tyndareos? Would you have the courage to ignore the baying crowds, ignore your daughter's death and pardon Electra and Orestes? Would that be the right thing to do?

Electra *You claim you are the great upholder of the law, you claim you are the champion of due process and restraint*

Tyndareos *I do not claim so. It is so.*

Electra *And yet you cry for us to be thrown to the mob. You want to see us stoned, battered, torn from limb to limb in some stinking alleyway.*

Tyndareos *Because you are beyond the law. You put yourself beyond the law.*

Electra *Then you be the one to bring the law to bear. You with your weight and your wisdom. You are not a child alone and desperate as he was, as I was.*

Tyndareos *Oh, so you are children now.*

Electra *You be the one to break the chain of death on death. You be the one to stand before the assembly and demand that we be dealt with according to the law.*

Tyndareos *Too late for that. The people are frantic for your blood.*

Electra *So your law is not as strong as you claim it is.*

Tyndareos *How dare you?*

Electra *It is a light thing. It can be blown and bent by the breath of angry people.*

Tyndareos *Your crime provokes beyond all reason.*



Jeffery Kissoon

Exercise:

In groups choose an Electra, an Orestes, a Tyndareos, a Menelaos and a Helen. These characters can work with a friend to create an argument promoting their past actions and what they think should happen in the future. For example Orestes may 'blame' his actions on the Gods, whilst Electra's reason may be tempered by her cruel upbringing.

They should present their case or argument to the rest of the class who form the citizens in the Assembly. The citizens have a short time to decide what action should be taken.

Breaking the Cycle with Forgiveness

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up in South Africa at the end of its apartheid regime provided a great example of supplanting revenge with a process of forgiveness. Nelson Mandela, the country's first post-apartheid president, had been imprisoned for over a quarter of a century. He invited his white jailer, the man who kept the keys when he was a political prisoner, to be an honoured guest at his presidential inauguration. Mandela's gesture was a transaction of forgiveness, a gesture of forbearance from revenge.

Exercise:

Read through the dynamics of forgiveness below and create a series of either short scenes or tableaux that reflect each stage. You can choose to set your scenes in whatever era you choose from Ancient Greece to modern day.

The dynamics of forgiveness:

1. Sympathy for the victim. First, we must truly and strongly acknowledge the pain and suffering of the victim and acknowledge the desire to strike back. This is natural and understandable, and must not be pushed aside or minimised, otherwise we alienate the victim. But of course retaliation is not necessarily to be encouraged, given what we know about cycles of revenge.

2. Remorse. To help elicit forgiveness, the offender must show genuine remorse if possible. Naturalistically understood, remorse – the expression of regret – shows the victim that the offender is not likely to repeat his offence. He seems to have learned a lesson and doesn't pose a threat any longer. So forgiveness – not exacting punishment – is easier once genuine remorse and regret are expressed. This is to say that the desire to punish or strike back tracks the situation – it is responsive to what the threat is perceived to be. As the threat is perceived to diminish, the need and desire to punish lessens as well.

3. Restitution. Similarly, it helps greatly if the offender can offer restitution of some sort. This paying back helps to balance the scales, and helps to heal the wound. Restitution substitutes in a way for the damage in kind we'd like to inflict, and it doesn't actually further damage the offender, but might actually help to rehabilitate and heal him.

4. Acceptance. For the offender to feel remorse and express it, there has to be some hope that this expression will be accepted



Jeffery Kissoon and Alex Robertson

Question:

- Mahatma Gandhi said 'An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind'. How hard do you find it to forgive and reconcile after an argument or a bad action against you?

Telling the Story – by Helen Edmundson

It was Nancy (Director) who approached me about the idea of doing *Orestes* and she gave me a copy of Euripides' play to read.

I found it very puzzling – it has a strange mixture of tone and a lot of structural deficiencies. It's classed as a tragedy and yet it has a 'happy' ending, where everything is resolved amicably.

But what I did find exciting in it were the themes and ideas it is dealing with, particularly that of people turning to violence as a means to answer grievances.

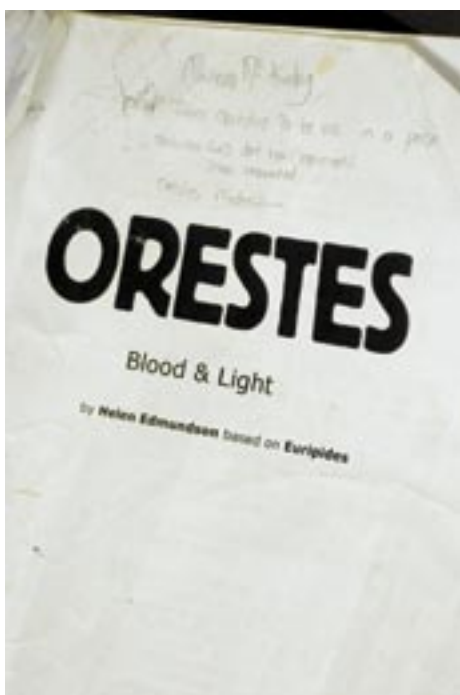
Orestes and Electra feel let down by the laws of the land and by the rest of their family. They are isolated and misunderstood and threatened with physical violence themselves and so, to them, violence seems like the answer – the logical step. This seemed to me to be very relevant to situations and trends that we are facing in the world today – terrorism, suicide bombers, disillusion with democratic government etc. Moreover we can add to this the fact that Orestes and Electra believe that God is telling them to use violence, and that they feel it is their destiny and that they are being called to act – something which has great relevance to what is happening today.

I began to see that this strange play, written centuries ago, could really speak to us in lots of different ways. It could say as much about Tony Blair and George Bush as about the July 7th bombers, as much about corruption and lack of honour amongst our leaders as about honour killings in religious communities.

I read up on the mythology surrounding the story. I read up on Homer, I read all other Greek plays which touched on the tale. Interestingly and excitingly, I found that there were lots of different versions of the story. I could see that the ancient Greek playwrights had done exactly what I was about to do – adapted the story in order to explore what they wanted to explore – to draw attention to particular ideas, to take the audience on a particular journey, invoking sympathy or understanding of characters, or criticising characters depending on what they wanted to say. By the time I had finished my research, I felt confident and free to write what I wanted to write.

I followed my instincts with my telling of the story. There were certain broad things I knew at the outset – that I wanted it to be a proper tragedy, that I didn't want a God to come down at the end and sort everything out, that I wanted Orestes to be idealistic and Electra to be damaged. And of course I had the themes in my head. But aside from that, I just wanted to put myself in all the different characters' shoes and see what came out.

In terms of style, I knew I wanted to keep largely to the rules of Greek plays – the formality, the set arguments, the way that characters come in, say their piece and leave etc. I also wanted to find a rhythmic, heightened language – not so tight as in the Euripides – but something which would take us to the right emotional level. I wanted to enjoy the words, use them to dictate pace and to touch the audience somewhere beyond intellect, in the way that a piece of music can.



ORESTES

BLOOD & LIGHT

SHARED
EXPERIENCE

Unlike in some Greek plays, the role of the chorus in Euripides' play is not an active one or a particularly useful one. Its main function seems to be as witness to the events and to give the sense that the events happening in this family will have much wider repercussions – that they matter and affect the world. I ended up feeling that I could use the Slave in my piece to give a similar feeling and so I decided not to have a chorus.

I also decided to cut Pylades from my play. This was partly because I wanted to take Electra much, much further and Pylades tends to squeeze her out and take over her role. Moreover I wanted to explore the intense relationship between Electra and Orestes, to show how Orestes becomes everything to her, and Pylades tended to dilute this.

I talked through the first draft with Nancy and then made some changes and we took the second draft into rehearsal. I will be making further small changes over the next week or two. The excellent actors bring ideas and questions and we gradually prise the play open and I discover things about it too. It's an exciting time. I try to back off a bit in the middle of rehearsals so that Nancy and the actors can start to take ownership of the text and feel free to interpret it.

Once they start running sections of the play, I'll start going back in to see how it's playing and to be helpful if I can be. I can't wait to hear the music – I know Peter Salem (who I've worked with many times before) will do a brilliant job of creating atmosphere. I also can't wait to see how they stage the extremely tricky ending. I throw down these challenges to Nancy (not purposefully of course) and she always amazes me with the ingenuity of what she comes up with.



Alex Robertson and Mairead McKinley

Killing For Honour?

The Guardian, April 18, 1999
by Jason Burke

Lal Jamilla Mandokhel never stood a chance. The 16-year-old was raped a month ago near her home in the mountains of Pakistan's north-west frontier. For bringing shame on her village, she was publicly executed.

She lived in a land where the government's authority ends a few metres from the roadside and where the only laws are those of the tribe and of the gun.

Her 'crime' was committed in a dirty hotel in the dusty Pakistani frontier town of Parachinar, a few hours trek along a mountain track from Afghanistan. Over two nights, Lal Jamilla was repeatedly raped by a man who worked as a junior clerk in the local government's department of agriculture. When her ordeal ended and she made her way back to her village, the elders, sitting in the traditional council or jirga, decided that only her death would restore the honour of the tribe. She was dragged from her home and shot in front of a large crowd. The government is keeping the man who raped her in custody 'for his own protection'.

To the Pathans, their traditional code – pakhtunwali – is law. Honour is everything. A guest must be looked after, an insult must be avenged. A murderer must be killed by his victim's relatives and if they can't find him, they must kill his brother, father or son.

Feuds run on for generations. Sex outside marriage, consenting or otherwise, is punished by the death of both parties. Last week the people of the area stood by the sentence on Lal Jamilla. 'She should die and he should die, too. Otherwise the doors of moral corruption are open and they will never be shut again,' said Javed Ibrahim Parachar, a local member of parliament.

The Times, June 17, 2006
Sister is stabbed to death for loving the wrong man by Steve Bird

Children were made to watch an attack on a woman who was forbidden to marry outside her caste.

A BUSINESSMAN is facing a life sentence for stabbing his sister to death in front of his two young daughters in a so-called honour killing. Azhar Nazir, 30, and his cousin, 17, used four knives to cut Samaira Nazir's throat and repeatedly stab her after she fell in love with an asylum-seeker from what they saw as an unsuitable caste. Miss Nazir, 25, had rejected suitors lined up to meet her in Pakistan and had been summoned to the family home in Southall, Middlesex. Miss Nazir, a businesswoman described as "strong-willed", was heard to shout at her mother, Irshad Begum: "You are not my mother any more." She was then held down as a scarf was tied around her neck and her throat was cut in three places. Nazir's daughters, aged 2 and 4, were screaming and were splattered with blood. Police fear that they were ordered to watch as a warning to them. Neighbours called the police after hearing the screaming.

She was articulate and well-educated and had studied travel and tourism at Thames University. She was described as the brightest in the family.

She clashed with her family when she told them that she wanted to marry Mr Mohammad, who became known to the family after he came to the country illegally.

He told jurors: "We were as boyfriend and girlfriend for about five or six years. But we couldn't tell her family because Samaira said her father was a very strict man who would not allow any female in his family to marry outside of his caste or tribe. We had discussed marriage. Samaira wanted to tell her family herself. Her father was very upset and said I was only after their money." She received 18 stab wounds and three cuts to her throat.

Questions:

- How important is honour to you, your family, your community and your country?
- The footballer Zinedine Zidane was red-carded in the World Cup Final, his last ever match, for head-butting a player who allegedly insulted his mother and sister.
How far would you go to protect your family honour?
- Is loyalty to family finally more important than loyalty to the state or obeying the law?

Exercise:

The Belief Line:

Create or draw a line from one end of the room to another other. One end is 'Strongly Agree' the opposite end is 'Strongly Disagree'. Take it in turns to propose a statement to the group. Each member of the group must stand on the line according to their response or belief.

Some example statements might be:

1. If you live in a restricted regime/society you must respect the rules at all times.
 2. 'An eye for an eye'
 3. Revenge can be justified.
 4. Child murderers should be hanged.
- Where do you stand on the line?
 - Think of some questions you could put to the characters in the play, where would they stand on the line?



Alex Robertson and Mairead McKinley

Scene Study

We read through this scene at the start of week two of rehearsals, and then as a group we discussed lots of questions that arose. In pairs or small groups read through this section and then consider some of the questions we discussed at the end.

Electra *She (Helen) was the cause of everything, it's true. It was for her my father took our sister's life, for her my mother killed him, for her we killed our mother too. She is evil.*

Orestes *She's up there now, in her room and she is smiling. This is a happy day for her.*

Electra *She will be making lists of what she will and will not keep, going through my father's things, labelling, discarding as though we are already dead.*

Orestes *And when he comes she'll walk in here with him. They'll find our bodies and throw them on the pyre and know that everything is theirs and it is over. It is my life. And your life. I cannot make my peace with this.*

Electra *Let's kill her then.*

Orestes *Kill her?*

Electra *Let's take her with us.
Let's break his heart.
Let's wreck his victory.
Let's finish her.*

Orestes *Kill her?*

Electra *The Gods would be pleased, I'm certain, to see the end of Zeus's monstrous creation. And the people too would love us then. They will love us, won't they? No more "matricides". We'll be the heroes who rid them of a curse, a scourge, the mistress of lust and vanity, the shame of all her sex. This is why Apollo brought them back. Not so Menelaos could save us but so that we can do this thing, this service to the earth. Our gift before we die.*

Orestes *You are more than a woman. You are a man too. You are the bravest, strongest creature I have ever known. We do it then.*

Electra *Yes.*

Orestes *How?*

Electra *We'll go to her, our knives concealed. Look broken, suppliant. We'll ask if we can speak to her alone. We'll tell her we're about to die, fall on our knees and cry, beg her forgiveness for everything we've done. And when her guard is down and she is all condescension and concern, well then...*

Orestes *Then I will run her through.*

Electra *She won't expect it. She is so arrogant, so vain, she'd never believe we would dare to strike.*

Orestes *Who will be with her?*

Electra *Only her women. I can keep them back with this.*

Orestes *And what if there are soldiers there? Menelaos' men?*

Electra *Well, then we will die fighting. They will do our job for us.*

Orestes *There will be blood. There will be more blood.*

Electra *Poison. Not blood. It is poison in her veins. Be glad to see it flow.*

Orestes *Does she look like my mother?*

Electra *No.
No.*

Orestes *There is no time left. Let's pray together.*

Questions:

- Helen has caused the deaths of millions of men in the Trojan War. Orestes and Electra have only killed one murderess (their mother). Do they have a case that they are more 'moral' and 'just' than Helen?
- Do they deserve to die?
- Do Orestes and Electra feel the same way about their impending deaths? If not, how do they feel?
- Is Electra's line 'Let's kill her then' a thought that has arrived logically or is it a moment of inspiration? Is she surprised that she says this?
- Why does Orestes repeat the line 'Kill her?' Is his repetition a form of denial (No way!) or is it questioning (Do you really mean that?)? Or does he mean something else?
- Why does Electra bring in the idea that the Gods would be pleased? Is this a sudden revelation, has she always believed this or is this a clever argument to convince Orestes to do the deed?
- If killing his mother drove Orestes mad, now that he is slowly recovering, what would this new suggestion do to him? How does he react?
- Why does Electra want to kill Helen so much?

Exercise:

Consider these questions, how do your answers affect how this scene should be staged? Stage this section in the round – on a circular stage. Do your answers to the questions change or develop after you've seen the action 'on its feet'?



Mairead McKinley



Mairead McKinley and Clara Onyemere

Timeline for the Play

c.1220BC

The Trojan War. This is a Greek legend based on the story of Paris, a Trojan Prince who, aided by the Goddess Aphrodite, steals and seduces Helen (allegedly half-God half-mortal and the most beautiful woman in the world) from her husband Menelaos. Menelaos enlists the help of his brother, King Agamemnon of Mycenae and the result is a bloody war lasting ten years, including the deaths of Achilles and Hector.

According to the myth, it was won by a plan orchestrated by Odysseus. On his instruction, the Greeks sailed away, as if in defeat, leaving behind a huge wooden horse. Thinking the horse was an offering to the Gods, the Trojans wheeled it into the city. At nightfall, Greek warriors emerged from the horse, opened the Trojan city gates to their army and destroyed Troy.

The myth was, however, turned on its head when German archaeologist, Heinrich Schliemann, discovered the real city of Troy – which had in fact been burned down c.1220BC. The Trojan War probably reflected a real war between the invading Greeks and the people of Troas, possibly over control of trade through the Dardanelles. A war over trade routes and not love! The events of the final year of the war constitute the main part of *The Iliad* of Homer.

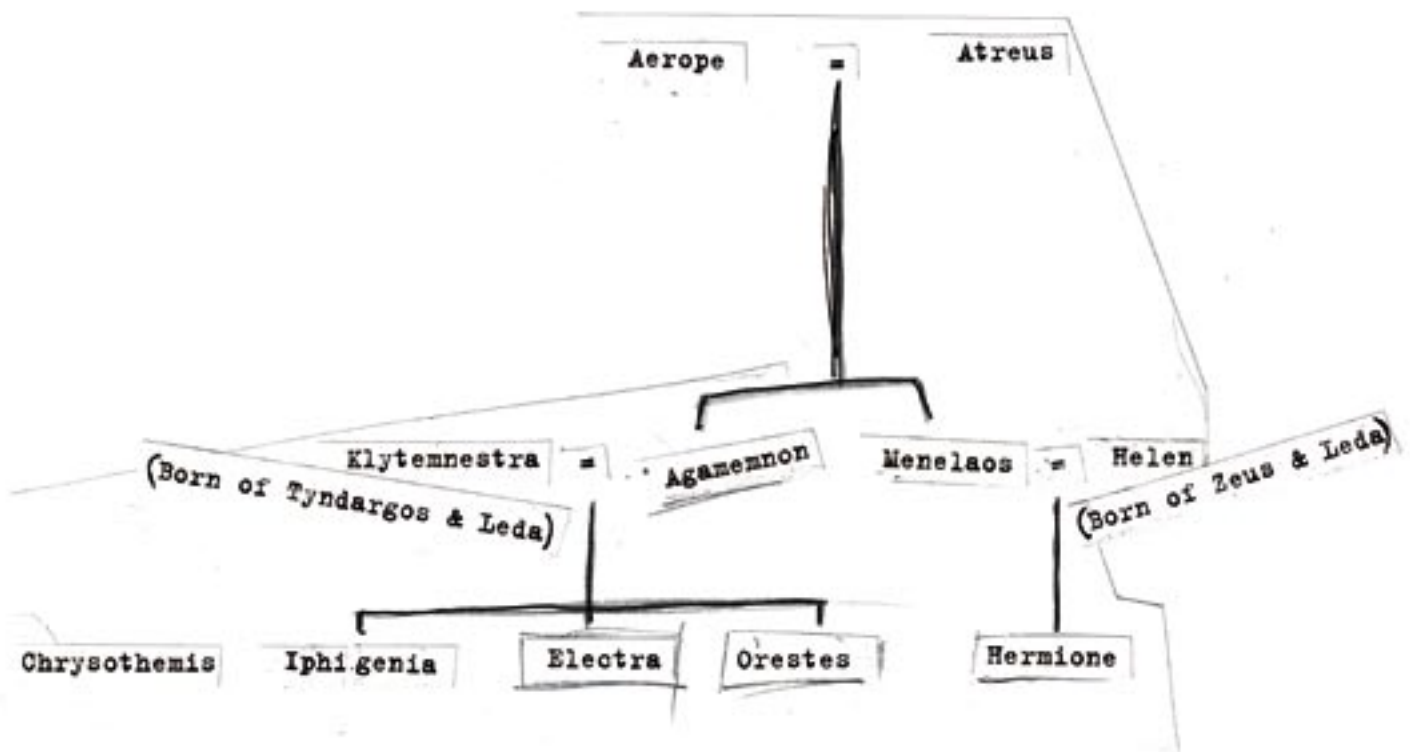


Menelaos costume design: Niki Turner

Timeline

- 800-500BC Growth of Greek city-states, such as Athens and Sparta
- c.800-650BC Tyrants (self made dictators) rule many Greek states
- 594BC Solon of Athens reforms laws and defines citizenship
- 484BC Euripides is born
- 480BC Athenian victory over the Persian Armada at Salamis inaugurates its period of naval supremacy
- 478BC Temple of Apollo built at Delphi
- 459-446BC War between Athens and Sparta
- 454BC Euripides enters his plays into Athenian Drama Festivals with no luck
- 447BC Construction of the Parthenon begins on the Athenian Acropolis
- 442BC Euripides wins his first plaudits as a playwright
- 431BC Peloponnesian War begins between Athens and Sparta
- 429BC Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex* is performed in Athens
- 408BC Euripides writes *Orestes*
- 404BC Peloponnesian War ends with Sparta victorious
- 402BC *The Bacchae* is performed posthumously and wins Festival first prize
- 399BC Socrates is found guilty of 'corrupting the youth of Athens' and is forced to commit suicide
- 385BC Plato opens his academy in Athens
- 353BC Philip II of Macedon invades Greece
- 343BC Aristotle becomes tutor to the young Alexander the Great
- 336BC Assassination of Philip – his son Alexander the Great crushes revolts by Greek cities
- 334-323BC Alexander begins the consolidation of the Greek world and Hellenistic Age

The Curse on The House of Atreus



The family of Atreus (father of Agamemnon and Menelaos) traces its origins back to Tantalus, a son of Zeus. Tantalus was famous for his eternal punishment in Hades, as described in *The Odyssey*, where he is always thirsty but can never drink, hence the origin of the word tantalising.

Pelops, Tantalus' son wished to marry Hippodameia, the daughter of King Oenomaus. Oenomaus set up a contest (a chariot race against himself) for all those who wished to woo his daughter. If the suitor lost, he was killed. A number of men had died in such a race before

Pelops made his attempt. Pelops bribed the King's charioteer (Myrtilus) to disable the King's chariot. In the race, Oenomaus' chariot broke down (the wheels came off), and the King was killed. Pelops then carried off Hippodameia as his bride. Pelops also killed his co-conspirator Myrtilus by throwing him into the sea. Before he drowned, Myrtilus (in some versions Oenomaus) cursed Pelops and his family. This act is the origin of the famous curse on the House of Atreus.

The next generation down follows the story of Pelops' sons, Atreus and Thyestes. Atreus married Aerope, and they had two sons, Agamemnon and Menelaos. Thyestes had two sons and a daughter, Pelopia. Atreus and Thyestes quarrelled and Thyestes had an affair with Atreus' wife, and was banished from Argos by his brother Atreus.

ORESTES

BLOOD & LIGHT

SHARED
EXPERIENCE

However, Thyestes petitioned to be allowed to return, and Atreus, apparently wishing a reconciliation, agreed to allow Thyestes to come back and prepared a huge banquet to celebrate the end of their differences.

At the banquet, however, Atreus served Thyestes the cooked flesh of Thyestes' two slaughtered sons. Thyestes ate the food, and then was informed of what he had done. Overcome with horror, Thyestes cursed the family of Atreus and left Argos with his one remaining child, his daughter Pelopia.

In some versions, Thyestes had one small infant son who survived the banquet, Aegisthus. In other accounts, however, Aegisthus was the product of Thyestes' incestuous relationship with his daughter Pelopia.

Agamemnon and Menelaos, the two sons of Atreus, married Klytemnestra and Helen respectively, two twin sisters, but not identical twins (Klytemnestra had a human father; whereas Helen was a daughter of Zeus). Helen was so famous for her beauty that a number of men wished to marry her. The suitors all agreed that they would act to support the man she eventually married in the event of any need for mutual assistance. Agamemnon and Klytemnestra had three children, Iphigenia, Orestes, and Electra.

When Helen (Menelaos' wife) ran off to Troy with Paris, Agamemnon and Menelaos organised and led the Greek forces against the Trojans. The army assembled at Aulis, but the fleet could not sail because of contrary winds sent by Artemis. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia in order to placate Artemis.

With Agamemnon and Menelaos off in Troy, Aegisthus (son of Thyestes) returned to Argos, where he became the lover of

Klytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife. They sent Orestes into exile, to live with an ally, Strophius in Phocis, and humiliated Electra, Agamemnon's surviving daughter (either treating her as a servant or marrying her off to a common farmer). When Agamemnon returned, the two conspirators successfully killed him and assumed royal control of Argos.

Orestes returned from exile and, in collaboration with his sister Electra, avenged his father by killing Klytemnestra and Aegisthus. In many versions this act makes him lose his self-control and he becomes temporarily deranged. He then underwent ritual purification by Apollo and sought refuge in the temple of Athena in Athens. There he was tried and acquitted. This action put the curses placed on the House of Atreus to rest.



*Tim Chipping, Alex Robertson
and Mairead McKinley*



Claire Prempeh



Alex Robertson

Excerpt from *Orestes* script

(Orestes is holding Helen and Menelaos' baby in his arms)

HELEN'S DEAD BODY IS CARRIED IN BY A SOLDIER

Menelaos *No. No. See what you have done*

ORESTES LOOKS AT THE BODY BUT WILL NOT SEE IT

Orestes *Apollo is coming. He is coming. Do you see, Electra? The light is here.*

Menelaos *Do you want more blood on your hands, Electra?*

Orestes *Apollo, take me now. Take me to you.*

Electra *Orestes. Come to me. Orestes.*

HE STEPS ONTO THE VERY EDGE OF THE DROP.

Orestes *Sit me by your side. In the light.*

Menelaos *Stop him.*

Electra *Orestes. Come to me.*

Menelaos *Don't hurt her. Please.*

Electra *Orestes.*

Orestes *It would be good to leave this world.*

HE STEPS OFF THE EDGE, THE BABY IS STILL IN HIS ARMS.

Electra *No.*

FOR ONE MOMENT, HE IS SUSPENDED IN THE AIR, IN LIGHT.

Orestes *Look. I am a God.*

DARKNESS.

END

Question:

- Different writers of this story describe Orestes' actions as either righteous and justified or vengeful and evil. How would you interpret his actions?

Exercise:

- Helen Edmundson based this play on Euripides' *Orestes*. In the Euripides version, the God Apollo appears and banishes Orestes for one year, after which he will face a trial by the Gods, have his land given back to him and he is ordered to marry Menelaos' daughter. Helen goes back to the Land of the Gods.
- Helen Edmundson's version of the story has a much more immediate conclusion. What are the benefits of this theatrically? In small groups, create three frozen pictures that best represent the scene.

Question:

- The characters are in an endless cycle of violence and revenge. Does this ending signify a continuation of this cycle or is there a way out?

An Interview with Peter Salem (composer)

How do you arrive at creating the sound and music for the play?

The subtitle of the play – *Blood and Light* – identifies two key thematic strands, which run through the play. Light refers to the actions of the Gods, and blood to the passions and anguish of man.

This contrast appears in many ways (for example: the contrast between Electra's godlike and golden early memories of her mother and her mother's butchering of Agamemnon; Electra's view of Agamemnon as a glorious wronged hero when, as Helen points out, in the past he had been no less brutal than her mother; Orestes' divine inspiration which leads him to bloody acts; purification by butchery). I thought it would be a good way into this play to look at musical representations of light and blood. So there is luminous, 'golden' music for some visions and memories of Klytemnestra, for religious ritual, prayer and inspiration and dark pulsing visceral music which relates to the anger, anguish and violence of Orestes and Electra.

Another area I have looked at is trying to create a feeling of the threatening presence of the world outside the palace – the mutterings and murmurings of the Athenian assembly.

There is also the love and strong bond which develops between Electra and Orestes which may be heightened with sound.

And then there is the lullaby, which Helen (Edmundson – writer) felt should be Syrian.

Do you do any historical research?

The play is not supposed to be set in any specific time . . . but I have been reading quite a bit of Greek philosophy recently!



What instruments are you using and why?

Luminous sounds (gongs, santur, Tibetan prayer bowl, string harmonics) for light.

Electronically generated pulse, drones and textures and distorted saxophone for blood.

Various voice samples and bell sounds for the assembly voices and other listed sound effects. Voice for the lullaby.

What is your favourite scene?

There are lots of good moments: Electra taking on Tyndareos, the dressing scene before the proposed joint suicide should be good, Electra's monologue and Orestes' increasing madness towards the climax.

Any major challenges for you?

Finding a Syrian lullaby and getting hold of someone in the middle of summer who can speak Arabic to teach it. I finally got hold of an excellent Lebanese musician, Abdul Salam Kheir.

Reunited Siblings

Reunions between birth relatives separated for example by adoption, can spark off intense sexual and emotional feelings. Psychiatrist Maurice Greenburg analysed 40 case histories and interviewed ten people who said they had experienced this attraction. When meeting their lost relative for the first time the respondents all experienced 'an overwhelming and complicated rush of emotions' and an 'almost irresistible sense of falling in love'. They all said they had a need to discover an unusual form of closeness and intimacy with their relative, who had felt the same way.

When these feelings become so intense that they threaten to cross the line into the realm of physical and deep emotional involvement, many break off the relationship completely, or limit its scope rather than try to talk about it. Others can be so overcome by fear of another separation that they too keep silent but, instead of pulling away, may view a sexual relationship as the only way to keep the connection alive.

Electra *Orestes, my brother, my only brother. You were gone from me for so long, taken away from me. Your skin smells of islands where I have never been, your hands are larger than mine, your muscles are harder, stronger than mine and yet we are the same. You are me. You are my insides. And I am yours. We are bound together in this and all things. Orestes, my brother, sleep now. Lie down. Sleep. Sleep beside me, your sister. Feel my fingers amongst your hair. Sleep now. Hearts together. My own heart. Sleep.*



After Killing costume design: Niki Turner

Exercise:

In partners A and B. A observe B walking around the room. Watch out for rhythms, pace and mannerisms. A join B and 'fall in to step' with them (following their pace, rhythms and using their mannerisms). Swap over.

Then choose three mannerisms and a way of walking which you can unify as a pair – show the rest of the group your unified physicality by walking around the room together and sitting on two chairs in unison.

An Interview with Alex Robertson (Orestes)



Alex Robertson

How important is the back-story to you? What has happened to Orestes before the start of the play?

It is very important as it encompasses me killing my mother and even before that I'm away from my family in another country. It is there that I began to learn how to be a king.

As the play starts I'm in stasis. I want to be an honourable king and have therefore avenged the death of my father, but it is purgatory – believing in the Gods, but also trying to believe in myself as a man.

Does Orestes regret any of his actions?

Yes, he regrets not spending more time with Electra. He would love to have played with her, been bored with her, basically had any connection with her. If he had then things might have been different. He at times regrets killing his mother but then he believes in Apollo and believes he was right to do it. He flicks between the two.

What are the challenges for you as an actor with this play?

The big emotions, massive emotions that you hope you'll never experience in real life, like your mother killing your father and you killing her! To be able to play those emotions you have to be able to access emotions in yourself that can help you play these scenes. This can be scary. The challenge is to really use your imagination and find that place.

An Interview with Mairead McKinley (Electra)



Mairead McKinley

How has Electra's past shaped her present?

Everything has made me into what I am today (as Electra). She was the third daughter born into a family desperately wanting a son. Finally after another ten years Orestes is born. Electra had great love for her older sister Iphigenia, who was the only person who gave Electra any attention and love. At the start of this play Electra has finally got someone who loves and needs her.

What challenges does the production throw up for you?

The first thing that comes into my head is that when I walk on stage at the beginning of the show I can't leave again until the very end. On the plus side, that means I will be completely immersed in the world of *Orestes* and hopefully I can maintain the rhythm of the journey. On the minus side, it may mean that I become aware of Mairead the actor during the performance and if that happens I will have to find a way back in actually on stage instead of being able to leave and recompose myself.

Another thing that's a bit scary is that in terms of my dialect we want to establish a pure sound but keep the essence of my Irish-ness. However in times of great emotion, which this play is full of, I have a tendency to lapse into a stronger brogue than normal.

Why is avenging her father's death so important to Electra, after all he killed her favourite sister?

Electra was much younger at the time of Iphigenia's death and as a child not in any position to avenge her in any way. However, when her father was murdered we believe she was in her twenties and watched as her mother and Aegisthus killed him in cold blood (in our version in his own bath). The effect of seeing how vicious her mother could be makes it impossible for Electra to ever love her again and the vision of her father struggling for his life remains with her until her own death.

What do you consider to be Electra's vices and virtues?

Her vices are:

She speaks her mind
Her unpredictable nature/lack of control
Her suspicious mind

Her virtues are:

Her love for Orestes
Her want for justice

An Interview with Tim Chipping (Menelaos)



Tim Chipping

How important is research to you when starting a play like *Orestes*?

Well the characters are historically available so you can access history, but there are a lot of different versions of the story and therefore conflicting emotions. You can get a good idea of how powerful he was, who he was the son of and where he was in the world, which helps.

What do you feel about Helen?

I really do love her. It's complicated; as of course honour is involved, I went to war to get her back and the implications of the war to my people are huge. But I am a very powerful man and so I don't have to reveal at this stage just how desperately I do love her.

What are the challenges for you as an actor approaching this play?

It is difficult playing a king having not been one myself. Having that status, that ultimate power and never questioning that power or that enormous confidence. I am the son and brother of great kings and I had the ability to send my whole country to war. So status is the big challenge for me.

What do you consider to be Menelaos' vices and virtues?

His virtue is that he is a very loyal man who loves his family; his vice would be his lack of self-belief and his struggle between law and power versus his family.

An Interview with Clara Onyemere (Helen)



Clara Onyemere

With a play like *Orestes* set in such a different time and world to the one we live in today – is research important to you?

Research for every play isn't always necessary I feel, but I have done some on this – looking at place and time and what happened to Helen of Troy. Research can be useful as back up, but there comes a time in rehearsals when you have to let it go.

What are the challenges for you as an actor in this production?

I'm usually cast to play characters with big emotions, so the challenge for me playing Helen is not to rely on how I look or how I've previously accessed big emotional parts, but to find something new, something specific to Helen.

What are Helen's vices and virtues?

They really intermingle I think. Her vice I suppose could be her beauty or maybe that's a virtue? She is very vain though, and selfish. Her desire for passion leads to a terrible war and retribution. But aside from this I do like her a lot. She's only half human being half God too, but the human side is very intelligent and instinctive and her needs are universal. She wants inner freedom and not to be possessed.

How have you found working with Shared Experience?

I'm loving it, you have time (five weeks) to really explore the challenges and issues without panic setting in! We also do an incredible amount of physical and vocal work which is wonderful!

An Interview with Jeffery Kisson (Tyndareos)



Jeffery Kisson

What research is it useful for you to do prior to rehearsals?

I looked at the play *Electra* and other versions of the story, but I was so impressed with this version that I wanted to discover how to play Tyndareos in this story and that you need to do in rehearsals. Of course ideas and research does drip into our ideas throughout the whole rehearsal process.

What challenges as an actor do you face?

Well I've only got one scene but with long speeches. He is very high status and he is the oldest character. The challenge is to craft my performance so that Tyndareos feels complete. I want people to believe he lives and breathes outside of this scene

What do you think his vices and virtues are?

They are probably mixed in together I think. We see the hypocrisy of the man, as he allows his personal emotions to affect his and the country's laws. He manipulates power, but you have to have great strength of character to do this.

An Interview with Claire Prempeh (slave)

In rehearsals Nancy is referring to your character as Irm (pronounced err-um) why is this?

We wanted to give the slave a name as she is only referred to as 'Slave' in the script. Initially I tried playing her with a Ghanaian accent, but then we considered the routes that Menelaos' ships may have travelled and where he might have found his slaves. We decided that my character should come from Syria and I have a Pakistani friend who is called Irm and I thought the name sounded right for this character.

How have you found the accent?

Well we have had a voice teacher in to help me, basically with this accent you pronounce all the syllables in a word, so for example we often only pronounce the word 'family' with two syllables, she would pronounce 'fam-il-lee'. It is quite a clipped sound and I have to roll my 'r's'.

What are the challenges for you as an actor with this part?

I find it quite hard playing such a submissive part as I'm usually cast as quite high status roles. That's my main challenge, if I was a slave I would be assertive and strong and would probably be beaten or killed!

You sing a lot in this production. How has that been going?

The music is beautiful, I sing lullabies, mainly songs that free her soul and take her back to her own children she was forced to leave behind. The music sounds very Islamic and holy to me. I love singing anyway so it's fun to do.

How have you found the experience so far of working with Shared Experience?

It's great, we explore so much and there is real freedom to do that. But there is also a good structure. We have a lot of movement sessions, which have been so helpful at freeing us up to explore the big emotions in the play both physically and vocally. We've learnt some great breathing exercises that help you to feel really centred and to never run out of breath even if you are physically working very hard.



Claire Prempeh

The Gods of this Production

Apollo, Orestes' and Electra's inspiration and Zeus the father of Helen

Helen *Why did I do it? Why did I go? Because I am a bitch on heat? Because Menelaos was not man enough to keep me? Because Paris was not made to be resisted, who shall we blame? Leda my mother? Zeus my father, for covering her with his wings and giving me this face, this power, this light to draw men on? Who shall we blame? Let's unpick the earth like a tapestry until there is nothing left.*
Electra. *Electra. You are lying to me or you are lying to yourself. Apollo told you to do it. Did he so?*

Electra Yes.

Helen *The Gods speak and you obey.*

Electra Yes.

Apollo

Apollo was the god of prophecy, music and healing. He sometimes gave the gift of prophecy to mortals whom he loved, such as the Trojan princess Cassandra.

Apollo was one of the most important Olympian Gods, son of Zeus and Leto (a mortal), and twin brother of Artemis. Immediately after being born, Apollo ascended Mount Olympus where he was given ambrosia and nectar to make him immortal.

He is considered the ideal of manly beauty, so that a very handsome man might be called an 'Apollo'. For years, ancient statues of young men were all commonly referred to as 'Apollo', though this was later replaced by the more accurate term kouros or 'young man'.

Apollo replaced the Titan Helios as the Sun God; however, the Greeks didn't delete Helios completely but referred to both of them as the Sun Gods.

Like the majority of Greek Gods, Apollo was constantly intervening in human affairs. Of all the heroes besieging the city of Troy in the Trojan War, Achilles was the strongest warrior. He had easily defeated the Trojan captain Hector in single combat, but Apollo helped Hector's brother Paris slay Achilles with an arrow.

The arrows of Apollo and Artemis invariably killed, and the Greeks

explained epidemics of diseases by supposing that they were shooting their arrows at people; and so, by praying to Apollo, the epidemic might be made to stop. In this way, Apollo became associated with the cure of diseases.



Clara Onyemere

ORESTES

BLOOD & LIGHT

SHARED
EXPERIENCE

Zeus

Zeus was the youngest son of Cronus and Rhea. When he was born, his father Cronus intended to swallow him as he had all of Zeus' brothers and sisters, but by the time Zeus was due to be born, Rhea went to Crete to give birth and passed him to Gaia, her mother, who hid him in a cave. Then she wrapped up a great stone in infants' coverings and gave this to Cronus to eat, pretending it to be Zeus.

When Zeus had grown to maturity, Cronus was tricked into bringing up all that he had swallowed including Zeus' brothers and sisters, and these Gods helped him to gain control of the universe from the Titans and Cronus. Then King Zeus, Poseidon and Hades divided up the universe between them. Hades got the underworld, Poseidon the sea, and Zeus as supreme God, got the heavens.

The Greeks believed Zeus to be a Father figure, a God of the skies and high heavens who lived on the top of Mount Olympus. They believed him to be the only God who concerned himself with the entire universe. In ancient Greece, there was an altar to Zeus in every room, as he was also thought to protect possessions, peace in the household and marriage.

For this reason Zeus had many temples and festivals in his honour, the most famous being Olympia, the magnificent Temple of Zeus. The Olympic Games were also held in honour of Zeus. Zeus was anthropomorphic. This meant that he could transform into any animal or human being that he wished.

Exercise:

Consider the attributes of these two Gods. Then in small groups create a short scene – perhaps between the characters in this play or Greek citizens. How could Apollo or Zeus intervene and change the course of the scene? Dramatically how can you make this work? Do they physically appear? Do they change into human form or control through invisible powers?



Zeus

What Do I Want?



Jeffery Kissoon



Alex Robertson
and Mairead McKinley



Tim Chipping and Jeffery Kissoon



Jeffery Kissoon
and Clara Onyemere

Each character in the production has a 'want', something that drives them through their lives and the play. This is called the Super Objective. Also there is an 'obstacle' that stops them from achieving their objective.

Throughout rehearsals, Nancy, the director, and the actors discuss what each character's objective and obstacle might be. The actors discussed the ideas below in the very first week of rehearsals. These are never carved in stone as through the rehearsals ideas grow and change.

Character: Helen

Super Objective: To have total freedom and to rule with Menelaos, free of the past.

Obstacles: Her past actions; being a beautiful woman and having human emotions and passions and seeking refuge with men.

Favourite Line: 1. 'Let's unpick the earth like a tapestry until there is nothing left.'
2. 'Yes, Yes. Ring your virginity like a leper's bell.'

Character: Orestes

Super Objective: To fulfil my destiny and become King. (Worthy, honourable, great and good.)

Obstacles: My dead mother and my conscience.

Favourite Line: 'Look. I am a God.'

Character: Tyndareos

Super Objective: To maintain control.

Obstacles: I am unsure of Menelaos.

Favourite Line: 'Your age has left you hard.'

Character: Slave (Irm)

Super Objective: To find peace.

Obstacle: Being enslaved.

Favourite Line: 'I ran to her, my legs were slow, he roared, an animal, he fell onto his knees weeping loud'.

Character: Electra

Super Objective: I want to be with Orestes and I want to be seen.

Obstacle: Orestes' madness and my behaviour and anger. Being a woman.

Favourite Line: 1. 'May the Gods damn you for what you have done to me'.
2. 'How can there be peace when there is so much anger in our hearts'.

Character: Menelaos

Super Objective: I want power. I want to make my mark.

Obstacle: Living in Agamemnon's shadow all my life.

Favourite Line: 'We are a family now'.

Question:

Choose one character. What do you feel their Super Objective is for:
a) The whole play and b) a particular scene?



*Claire Prempeh
and Mairead McKinley*



*Alex Robertson
and Mairead McKinley*

Exercise:

Two chairs are placed in the empty space and two actors each sit on a chair. Each actor is given a 'want', for example:

- To punish
- To want forgiveness
- To enthuse
- To freeze
- To protect
- To blame

Using only the chairs and their position relating to the other person and in the room, each actor must try to change the emotional state of the other. No words or sound needed!

One person 'speaks' by moving their chair in relation to the other person and the space, then the second actor 'answers' by moving his/her chair.

They pursue their 'want' in opposition to their partner. Their objective is to win their case and to change/dissuade the other actor of theirs.

Looking at the characters' wants through movement

At the start of week two of rehearsals, Liz Ranken, the Movement Director, took the cast through some fairly rigorous yoga sun salutes. Fully warmed up they began to jog/run in a circle and slowly their footfalls and outbreaths became organic to the group and in the same rhythm. Liz slowed the actors down and they all stood in the centre of the circle facing outwards with their backs or sides touching each other. As their breathing began to slow down Liz encouraged them to gently sway as a group, as if they were an island being gently pushed and swayed by the sea.

Encouraging their imagination she described a seashore with rocks, pools, fish swimming and sand and asked the actors to slowly walk away from the group imagining their feet in the water. She asked them to look down and see not their feet – but their characters' feet in the water. How do they look? How do they move? Where do they hold their balance? Slowly she worked through the characters' bodies asking them to consider tension in their bodies and how their character tries to relieve it.

The actors walked around the room and made eye contact and greeted their fellow characters. Electra avoided Helen, Helen allowed Menelaos to touch her in greeting then shook off the touch when he passed by. Orestes was enthusiastic and status-free.

Liz asked the actors first to consider one movement their characters would make and then to allow that movement or stance to bleed into their second and third movement. Using just this discovered physicality and vocal sounds, each actor revealed a flow of movements and vocalised what they wanted. The Slave, for example, wanted to be free and to find peace.

To end, Liz Ranken asked the actors to create a sculpture of their character, a sculpture that reveals something of their inner self.

Exercise:

Choose a character from the play. In small groups, create a sculpture that you feel embodies their personality and desires. What would the sculpture be made of? Plastic? Glass? Rock? Where would you choose to exhibit this work? Why?



Left to right: Mairead McKinley, Liz Ranken, Claire Prempeh, Ellie Jones (assistant director) and Alex Robertson

WRITING A REVIEW

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A REVIEW

Say what you saw
Say what you think
Reflect on your responses
Write freely from the heart

Don't worry about given theories
Create your own theories

Describe the tiniest moment that remains vivid
Question that moment
Find out what it says to you
Say why it spoke to you

CONSIDER

The light, the sound, the movement, the colours and textures of the play
The words, the music, the rhythms of the text
The set, the costumes, the style of the production

THE OBJECTS:

The Bed
The Dresses
The Box

The characters
The story
The ending...

(and try to say everything you want
in just 300 words!)

Send your review to

SHARED EXPERIENCE

The Soho Laundry
9, Dufour's Place
London W1F 7SJ

Or e-mail:

admin@sharedexperience.org.uk