

The Golden Masque of Agamemnon – The Cast

The sanctuary of the oracle of Apollo, Delphi (Greece)

The Pythoness , the human voice of the oracle of Apollo, the god's 'mouthpiece'	Vanessa Sunitha Köhler
Calchas , High Priest of Apollo, a Trojan who has defected to the Greeks after Apollo warns him of Troy's impending defeat. Agamemnon's personal priest after he has prophesied victory for the Greeks	Gwyneth van Son

The Royal House of Atreus and the court at Mycenae, Argos (Greece)

Agamemnon , King of Argos and Supreme Commander of the Greek expeditionary army at Troy: the 'King of Men'	Florian Bänsch
Menelaus , Agamemnon's brother, King of Sparta and husband of Helen. Her elopement to Troy with the Trojan Prince Paris is the official reason for the Greek army besieging Troy	Katharina Lehmann
Clytemnestra , Queen of Argos, wife of Agamemnon, sister of Helen, later Aegisthus' mistress	Christine Müller
Aegisthus , Agamemnon's cousin, later Clytemnestra's lover	Juliane Reichmann
Orestes , son to Agamemnon and Clytemnestra	Tobias Turowski
Iphigenia , daughter to Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, 11 years old at the start of the play	Juliane Reichmann
Electra , daughter to Agamemnon and Clytemnestra	Friederike Neuber
Cilissa , nurse to the royal children	Lemya Demirkapi
Pylades , Orestes' friend and companion on his later wanderings	Aenne Lotze
Thybius (Talthybius), a soldier in the Greek army, Agamemnon's right-hand man (especially for 'odd' jobs) and thus very knowledgeable about events – even those after his death...	Franziska Ptok
Arab Dancer	Lemya Demirkapi
Chorus of Greek women:	
Macaria	Anja Taudte
Althaea	Ribanna Mitrović
Alcmene	Alexandra Kind
Polydora	Marlena Melzian
Watchman at Mycenae	Katharina Lehmann
Messenger	Aenne Lotze
Heroes of the Greek army laying siege to Troy	
Odysseus , King of Ithaca, general. Wily, cunning.	Anja Taudte
Ajax , King of Salamis, general. A fighting machine, but not exactly the brightest candle in the hall...	Anette Cyris
Achilles , prince of Phthia, general of the Myrmidons, a crack unit in the Greek army	Tobias Turowski
Pyrrhus , Greek hero, mighty soldier	Anette Cyris

Is your mobile phone switched off?

Handy schon ausgeschaltet?

The Royal House of Troy, Asia Minor in what is today north-west Turkey

Priam , elderly King of Troy, father of Hector and Paris	Alexandra Kind
Hecuba , the Trojan Queen, wife of Priam, mother of Hector and Paris	Marlena Melzian
Cassandra , her daughter, gifted with prophetic powers by Apollo, but then cursed to have her prophecies never believed when she refused the god's love	Verena Mertz

Gods, Goddesses and other (un)holy figures

Athene , daughter of Zeus, Goddess of war and wisdom, enemy of Troy	Anette Cyris
Apollo , God of light, healing, music, archery, justice and prophecy; patron god of the shrine at Delphi. Usually impartial in politics, he sides with Troy, and is thus against Athene and the Greeks	Katharina Lehmann
Hermes , Messenger of the Gods	Katharina Lehmann
The Furies , daughters of Hell, their Greek name – the Eumenides – means literally “The Happy Ones” or “Kindly Ones”. Spirits of punishment who pitilessly avenge wrongs done to family members and especially murder within the family:	
Remorse	Florian Bäntsch
Guilt	Gwyneth van Son
Shame	Verena Mertz
Regret	Katharina Lehmann /Juliane Reichmann

Guards, Singers, Soldiers, Townspeople, Attendants, Courtiers, Musicians, etc.

The action starts in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi and keeps returning there, with visits to the Greek army's camp at Aulis before sailing to Troy; the court at Mycenae; the siege at Troy; and Athens. The period is 1200 BC.

There will be one interval of 20 minutes. A bell will sound three minutes before the performance continues to warn you.

The first part runs for about 90 minutes, the second for about 60 minutes.

Please switch **mobile phones** and **peeping watches off**: the actors and your neighbours will be greatly distracted by any bleeping and by your using them in any way (including SMS-ing) during the performance.

If you wish to take photographs, please note that the use of flash (*Blitzgeräte*) in the theatre is **strictly forbidden**: the flash itself (and especially any 'pre-flash' programme) is extremely distracting to audience and actors alike. If you would like a souvenir of friends' performance, we will be making a video recording of a performance and can provide you with a copy on request.

In the interests of other members of the audience and the cast, anyone using a mobile phone or flash will be requested to leave the theatre immediately.

If you wish to smoke in the interval, you can do so on the balcony at the back of the theatre.

The Golden Masque of Agamemnon – the plot

Is your mobile phone switched off?

Handy schon ausgeschaltet?

Our play is based on *The Oresteia* by the ancient Greek tragedian Aeschylus, a trilogy about the House of Atreus – the royal house of which Agamemnon is a central member – and deals with many central themes, such as theology, justice, politics and blood relationships. *The Oresteia* is the only complete trilogy of Greek tragedies to have survived. John Wiles has added in elements of other ancient Greek plays to flesh out the story of Agamemnon and his family, while also providing important background information for a modern audience.

The first part opens with the Greek army trapped at Aulis, on the eastern coast of Greece, by an unfavourable north wind. Agamemnon begs first Calchas, his personal priest, and then the Pythoness, mouthpiece of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, to tell him how to appease the gods and gain a favourable wind. It is revealed that Agamemnon has angered the goddess Artemis and that the only way he can sail to Troy is by sacrificing Iphigenia, one of his daughters, to the goddess. He does this, the wind changes, and the army sails for Troy, after an interlude in which we learn how the blood curse on the royal House of Atreus began and is continuing.

Enraged by the news that Agamemnon sacrificed their daughter just to gain a fair wind, his wife, Clytemnestra, starts an affair with his cousin, Aegisthus, who murdered Agamemnon's father when a child, and begins a reign of terror in Argos in her husband's absence at Troy.

We see the Greek generals arguing and plotting before Troy, and the sack and plunder of that great city, as well as experiencing the prophecies of Cassandra, daughter of Hecuba and Priam, Queen and King of Troy, before she is taken to Greece by Agamemnon as his mistress. On Agamemnon's return to Argos, ten years after his departure for Troy, Clytemnestra, still burning with fury at his treatment of her down the years and the sacrifice of her daughter, murders her husband and his mistress and rules Argos with her lover.

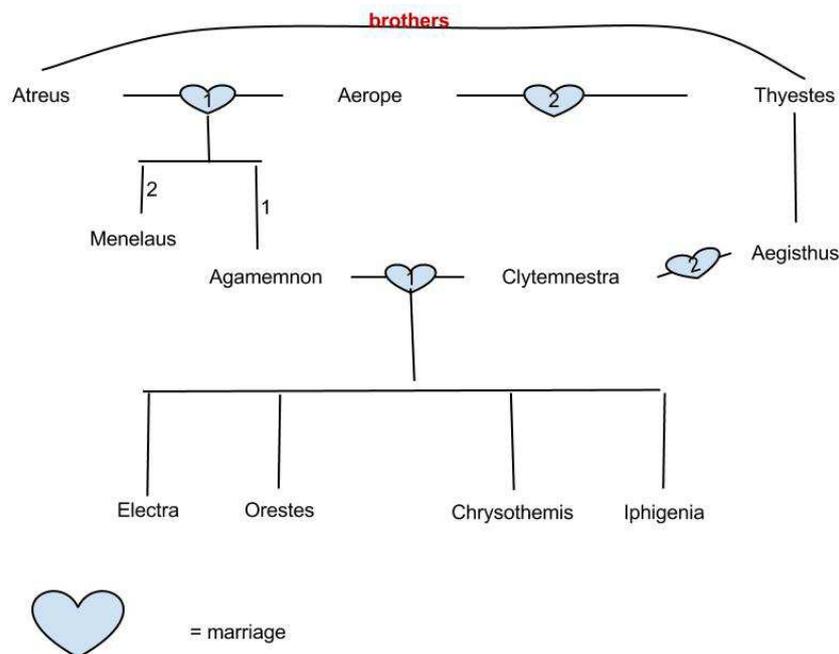
The second part of the play portrays the reunion of two of Agamemnon's remaining children, Electra and Orestes. To avenge his father's death, and following the instructions of Apollo (via the Pythoness), Orestes kills both his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus, only to be viciously chased by the female incarnations of his mother's curse, the Furies. Mad-dened by his own deeds and the inability of self-justification, he flees, pursued mercilessly by the Furies until Apollo advises him to travel to Athens and face trial for his matricide. The trial is presided over by the goddess Athene, with the Furies as the accusers and Apollo as his advocate. Every party finally gets to tell their side of the story, but how is Athene going to decide who is right and who is wrong – and how will Orestes ever escape the vengeful Furies?

The Golden Masque of Agamemnon – the House of Atreus, or A Trail of Blood: Who kills whom?

1. **Thyestes** takes **Aerope** from her rightful husband, his brother **Atreus**
2. **Atreus** murders two of **Thyestes'** sons and serves them to his brother (i.e. their father) in a pie to take revenge
3. **Aegisthus** (the remaining son of **Thyestes**) kills **Atreus** (his uncle) to avenge his brothers
4. **Agamemnon** kills **Clytemnestra's** first husband and their child in order to marry her himself
5. **Agamemnon** sacrifices **Iphigenia** for a wind to Troy
6. **Clytemnestra** and **Aegisthus** kill **Agamemnon** to avenge **Iphigenia** (and **Thyestes**)
7. **Orestes** kills **Clytemnestra** and **Aegisthus** to avenge **Agamemnon**
8. **Orestes** kills **Aegisthus'** son, **Aletes**, to prevent him seeking to avenge his father's death by killing **Orestes**

Is your mobile phone switched off?	Handy schon ausgeschaltet?
------------------------------------	----------------------------

We will hear about these deaths in *The Golden Masque of Agamemnon*, and will actually experience almost all of them...



***The Golden Masque of Agamemnon* – going below the surface**

In his notes on the play, John Wiles says:

The Golden Masque is an attempt to bring together all the stories of Agamemnon in a way which will make them challenging, theatrical and evocative to young people who may never have heard of the Greek legends.

In all my plays for young people I have concentrated – usually unknowingly – on the theme of heroism. In many ways this has run counter to the general trend of drama today, but I firmly believe that what we still crave (individually and collectively) is an identification with something bigger than ourselves, some cause, some theme, some faith that transcends ourselves and gives our life some meaning. To find *no* meaning in life is to render life meaningless; I believe the search continues in spite of ourselves.

Myth – the great stories which go back to the birth of mankind – is one of the ways this search proceeds. The huge questions which tease and torment us – Who am I? Where did I come from? What is the earth? What are the planets? What is death? Is there a life beyond? – have been asked since the dawning of time, and it is in the myths that some of the (contemporary) answers have been given. There is much in the Agamemnon stories which would prove familiar once we have gone beyond the superficial strangeness of the incidents. Basically the narrative proceeds from retribution through justice to regeneration. Euripides, from whose play *Iphigenia in Tauris* I culled the last scene, even seems to anticipate the Christian precept of rebirth as the result of sacrificing oneself completely. Having offered to die for Pylades, Orestes seems at last to be looking into his own dark soul and finding there – in confronting his destiny – the opportunity of making his split self a unity once more. In sacrifice is his new life. It is only the last-minute

Is your mobile phone switched off?

Handy schon ausgeschaltet?

discovery that he is Iphigenia's brother which saves his life, but the shadow-self has been embraced and he has accepted himself for what he is.

The Greek dramatists themselves reflected in their plays the changing face of society as they saw it. The nature of the gods, the meaning of revenge, the emergence of justice as a moral precept instead of vengeance and (in *Iphigenia in Tauris*) even a justice tempered with mercy: all these issues were being raised in the society which first saw the performances of the Oresteian plays. Today the same issues worry us. As for the answers, surely they continue to evade us?

But what *is* myth? Do we need myths today? Why did ancient (and not-so-ancient) societies need them? Do we have any equivalent today? And this brings us to a still deeper question: what is religion? Why do we – many of us – continue to practise sacred rites, despite the best efforts of atheists to prove that 'There is no God'? Why do we continue to read, even study, accounts of deeds and events that totally rational thinking would tell us could not have happened, that no human being could actually have experienced or performed?

Roger Scruton talks in a fascinating essay¹ of the concept of myth as a distinctive operation of the human psyche:

A myth does not describe what happened in some obscure period before human reckoning, but what happens always and repeatedly. It does not explain the causal origins of our world, but rehearses its permanent spiritual significance ... Nietzsche and Wagner ... show[ed] the place of the sacred in human life, and the kind of knowledge and understanding that comes to us through the experience of sacred things ... The lesson that both thinkers took from the Greeks was that you could subtract the gods and their stories from Greek religion without taking away the most important thing. This thing had its primary reality not in myths or theology or doctrine, but in rituals, in moments that stand outside time, in which the loneliness and anxiety of the human individual is confronted and overcome, through immersion in the group ... By calling these moments "sacred", we recognise both their complex social meaning and also the respite that they offer from alienation.

The timeless nature of myth, the way in which it allows us to use religion as a solution to violence in our society – in part through the idea of the scapegoat (*Sündenbock*), sacrificed to release us from wrongdoing – the manner in which religious ritual can resolve conflict, the use of ritual to anchor the individual in the group: all this brings us back to the ancient Greeks. During the great festivals, when the athletic games were held and dramatists competed against one another, war ceased and men from kingdoms previously facing each other over drawn weapons competed for the honour of a laurel wreath. Peace descended, at least for a while: no matter what one's nationality, all were united in one group come to worship the god(s). And during this peace, people watched as actors, often playing out highly dramatic, sometimes truly awful events from mythology, sought to show their audience the way to a better life. Scruton:

One purpose of the theatre is to provide fictional substitutes for the original crime, and so to obtain the benefit of moral renewal without the horrific cost. In [Rene] Girard's view, a tragedy like Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a way of retelling the story of what was originally a ritual sacrifice in which the victim can be sacrificed without renewing the cycle of revenge. The victim is both sacrificed and sacred, the source of the city's plagues and their cure.

¹ "The Sacred and the Human", *Prospect*, August 2007, pp. 32-35

They comprise a flock of students of English & American Studies, English-Speaking Cultures (BA) and Transnational Literature (MA) at the University of Bremen. This is the fifteenth year of Foule activities; *The Golden Masque of Agamemnon* is their eighteenth production.

The name (*das Vogelparlament*) comes from a dream-poem by Geoffrey Chaucer, centring on a conference of birds – or fowls – to choose their mates on St.Valentine's Day. For this reason, many have considered it to have been written in celebration of a marriage, perhaps that of the young King Richard II to Anne of Bohemia in 1382. At the end of the poem, the debate is unresolved, and the birds agree to assemble a year later to decide. (Anyone interested in following up a German link should consult the traditional folksong entitled *Die Vogelhochzeit*.)

Our “Parlement of Foules” assembles twice a year, once in fully fledged form (with performances in midsummer) and once in a slimmed-down version (with performances in November). We look forward to seeing you here in the Schnürschuhtheater again, observing our ‘debate’. If interested, contact Michael Claridge at claridge@uni-bremen.de; work on the next smaller-scale production will begin in September 2012, and on the larger-scale one in January 2013.

If you are involved with teaching and would like details of future productions, send an email to the above email address, so that we can add you to the mailing list of the Bremen English Drama Network, informing lovers of English-language drama (not only in schools) about relevant activities, workshops, performances, guest lectures etc. in and around Bremen. This is sponsored by S-E-T Studienreisen and includes not only information on *the Parlement of Foules* performances but also advanced notice regarding the regular visits to Bremen by Patrick Spottiswoode, the head of the education department at Shakespeare’s Globe, London.

Bremen University's Faculty of Modern Languages and Literatures offers an MA degree (*Masterstudiengang*) entitled “Transnational Literature: Literature, Theatre, Film”, containing the option to focus primarily (but not exclusively) on theatre. This includes the possibility of working on a stage production in either French or English, work that can focus on acting, assistant direction, publicity, and many other areas. We believe Bremen is the only university in Germany offering such a qualification within the modern-foreign-languages area. The “English-Speaking Cultures” BA degree includes a biennial course entitled “Shakespeare’s London and Shakespeare’s Globe” with an eight-day excursion to London and workshops in Shakespeare’s Globe, as well as the opportunity to participate in *Parlement of Foules* productions.

The *Foules* would like to express their gratitude to...

Our very good friends at the **Schnürschuhtheater** for housing us yet again and help with props, and especially to Anke Lindner for lighting and technical advice

On a personal note... Michael would like to express his heartfelt gratitude to:

Julia Arroja da Silva (aka Jules), for soooo many ideas and also providing a supporting (if suitably critical) ear and mega-assistance ‘in times of trouble’

Claudia Claridge partly for the Trojan horse (QUIET, Ajax!), but especially for steady support and love down the years, particularly during the last nine unexpectedly foul months

Those current and former colleagues at Bremen University who have given him and the *Foules* project unstinting support over the past months and years, especially **Elisabeth Arend**, **Jana Nittel**, **Norbert Schaffeld**, and the ‘fabulous four’ fanatical *Foules* supporters for fifteen years: **Janet Sutherland**, **Logie Barrow**, **Ian Watson** and **Andrew Winter**

© Another disobeisant production 2012

Is your mobile phone switched off?	Handy schon ausgeschaltet?
------------------------------------	----------------------------