

CHTHONIC DISRUPTION IN LYCOPHRON'S *ALEXANDRA**

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that Lycophron's Alexandra follows earlier texts in presenting challenges to Agamemnon's power as metaphorical re-enactments of primordial theogonic conflicts between Zeus and the forces of chaos. The Alexandra figures Agamemnon as Zeus and portrays Achilles, Clytemnestra and Cassandra as chthonic monsters opposed to the Olympian order. Employing intertexts with epic and tragedy, the poem highlights these figures' symbolic antagonism with Agamemnon–Zeus and their connections to each other. It presents a radically resystematized vision of the cosmos that champions the chthonic, the disordered and the feminine over the Olympian, the ordered and the masculine. Cassandra uses this backdrop to reinterpret her own story, inserting herself into the cosmogonic narrative as a resister of Olympian patriarchy who triumphs over masculine domination.

Keywords: Lycophron; Cassandra; Achilles; *Oresteia*; gender; cosmogony; monsters; Hellenistic poetry; Typhon; Echidna; Erinyes

Early on in Lycophron's *Alexandra*, the notoriously cryptic Hellenistic poem in which Cassandra prophesies the events of the Trojan War and its aftermath, Achilles is referred to as a 'Pelasgian Typhon' (Πελασγικὸν Τυφῶνα, 177).¹ This phrase is a classic example of the 'name-codes' that give the *Alexandra* its reputation for obscurity: the poem almost never calls heroes, gods, or places by their proper names, but instead refers to them by riddling appellations that must be deciphered,² and which often encode information about Cassandra's evaluation of characters' roles, morality and agency.³ For example, Gigante-Lanzara argues that the likening of Achilles to the monster Typhon is meant to produce a horrifying effect and to suggest that he himself is monstrous.⁴ Such a reading is in line with the prevailing interpretation of Achilles' character in the

* I thank my graduate student Laura Moser (this article was born out of the many productive sessions that we spent discussing the *Alexandra*); as well as Joel Christensen for comments on a draft.

¹ 'Pelasgian' is here used as a synonym for 'Thessalian', while 'Typhon' references the monstrous challenger of Zeus well known from the *Theogony*. See S. Hornblower, *Lycophron: Alexandra* (Oxford, 2015), 163. The Greek text of Lycophron's *Alexandra* used in this article is Hornblower's. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

² M.G. Ciani, "'Scritto con mistero" (osservazioni sull'oscurità di Licofrone)', *GIF* 25 (1973), 132–48; C. Cusset, 'Le bestiaire de Lycophron: entre chien et loup', *Anthropozoologica* 33 (2001), 61–72; E. Sistakou, 'Breaking the name codes in Lycophron's *Alexandra*', in C. Cusset and É. Prioux (edd.), *Lycophron: éclats d'obscurité* (Saint-Etienne, 2009), 237–57; C. Cusset and A. Kolde, 'The rhetoric of the riddle in the *Alexandra* of Lycophron', transl. E. Kondracka, in J. Kwapisz, D. Petrain and M. Szymański (edd.), *The Muse at Play: Riddles and Wordplay in Greek and Latin Poetry* (Berlin, 2012), 168–83.

³ See Sistakou (n. 2), 243 on the name-codes as 'ethical markers' chosen to manipulate the reader's judgement of the characters.

⁴ V. Gigante-Lanzara, *Licofrone: Alessandra* (Milan, 2000), 220. Cf. E. Sistakou, *The Aesthetics of Darkness: A Study of Hellenistic Romanticism in Apollonius, Lycophron and Nicander* (Leuven, 2012), 158 n. 93. 'Typhon' might reference Achilles' enormous size: F.-H. Massa-Pairault,

Alexandra, which usually assumes that the poem's orientation to him is purely one of blame.⁵ However, the theogonic connotations of the name 'Typhon' expand Achilles' symbolic role beyond that of simple antagonist: a paradigmatic opposition between Olympian and chthonic forces is introduced into Cassandra's narrative, one that centres around the character of Agamemnon, who is given the riddling appellation 'Zeus' (335, 1124, 1369–70). The resulting web of cosmogonic imagery is elaborated through Cassandra's portrayals of Achilles, Iphigenia and Clytemnestra, and culminates with her narration of her own chthonic apotheosis.

The *Alexandra* follows earlier texts such as the *Iliad* and the *Oresteia* in presenting challenges to Agamemnon's power as metaphorical re-enactments of primordial theogonic conflicts between Zeus and the forces of chaos. Like its literary antecedents, the *Alexandra* figures Agamemnon as Zeus and portrays Achilles and Clytemnestra as chthonic monsters opposed to the Olympian order. However, unlike earlier texts, the *Alexandra* presents a radically resystematized vision of the cosmos that champions the chthonic, the disordered and the feminine over the Olympian, the ordered and the masculine. This inversion of cosmic hierarchies allows Cassandra to reinterpret her own story as a triumph rather than a defeat.

The establishment of appropriate gender relations is important in the theogonic narratives of Greek mythology. In the chaos at the beginning of creation, all categories, including the masculine and the feminine, mix and overlap promiscuously, leading to parthenogenesis and monstrous hybrid forms.⁶ In the unfolding of the *Theogony*, the divine feminine always champions the disruption of the existing status quo by promoting the attempts of the younger gods to seize power from their elders.⁷ As the cosmos moves from chaos to order, the feminine is separated from the masculine and subordinated to it. Zeus ends the threat of divine succession by swallowing Metis and appropriating the power of generation, neutralizing the feminine by subsuming it within the masculine.⁸ The *Oresteia*, as a re-enactment of the primordial cosmogonic struggle, valorizes the domination of the female by the male through marriage and brings the dangerous chthonic feminine Erinyes safely under patriarchal control.⁹

In the *Alexandra*, however, there is no such definitive re-establishment of the patriarchal Olympian order. Agamemnon–Zeus appears as a strangely disempowered

'Lycophron et les Géants', in C. Cusset and É. Prioux (edd.), *Lycophron: éclats d'obscurité* (Saint-Etienne, 2009), 487–505, at 488.

⁵ Y. Durbec, 'Le pire des Achéens: le blâme d'Achille dans l'*Alexandra* de Lycophron', *ARF* 10 (2008), 13–30; C. McNelis and A. Sens, *The Alexandra of Lycophron: A Literary Study* (Oxford, 2016), 101–30. The poem certainly presents Achilles as an antagonist to the Trojans and to Cassandra's own family, since he kills her brothers Troilus (307–13) and Hector (258–68). In Hellenistic literature in general, Achilles is typically presented as either effeminate and love-sick or as a dark sadistic figure, remarkable for his cruelty: K. King, *Achilles: Paradigms of the War Hero from Homer to the Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987), 110–218; M. Fantuzzi, *Achilles in Love. Intertextual Studies* (Oxford, 2012); E. Sistakou, *Reconstructing the Epic: Cross-Readings of the Trojan Myth in Hellenistic Poetry* (Leuven, 2008), 158–76. In the *Alexandra*, Achilles exhibits all of these traits: effeminate cowardice, excessive erotic passion and savagery (Sistakou [n. 4], 158).

⁶ J.S. Clay, 'The generation of monsters in Hesiod', *CPh* 88 (1993), 105–16.

⁷ J.S. Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos* (Cambridge, 2003), 17.

⁸ Cf. M. Arthur, 'Cultural strategies in Hesiod's *Theogony*: law, family, society', *Arethusa* 15 (1982), 63–82.

⁹ F. Zeitlin, 'The dynamics of misogyny: myth and mythmaking in the *Oresteia*', *Arethusa* 11 (1978), 149–84; N. Rabinowitz, 'From force to persuasion: Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as cosmogonic myth', *Ramus* 10 (1981), 159–91.

figure, with his authority and even his divinity called into question.¹⁰ Cassandra, on the other hand, achieves apotheosis and becomes a goddess who helps girls evade unwanted marriages, served by maidens dressed as the Erinyes (1137–40). She not only escapes patriarchal control but also aids other women in doing so, while the Erinyes of the *Alexandra* remain unpacified. The *Alexandra* thus presents an alternative cosmogony in which chthonic feminine forces are never overcome by the Olympian order, and its heroine triumphs over male domination. This valorization of the monstrous exemplifies the ‘dark’ and ‘gothic’ themes that Sistakou has argued are characteristic of Lycophron and of Hellenistic retellings of the Trojan myth in general, but it also reflects the point of view of its heroine.¹¹ Filtered through Cassandra’s female perspective, the true horror is not chthonic chaos but the gendered hierarchies that seek to violently impose themselves upon her.¹²

This paper begins by examining how the *Alexandra* recapitulates a metaphorical theogonic narrative. It traces how the *Iliad* and the *Oresteia* present the conflicts between Achilles and Agamemnon, and Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, as re-enactments of cosmogonic struggles, and then shows how the *Alexandra* draws upon these works by using parallel motifs and intertextual resonances to construct its own cosmogonic conflict. Agamemnon is set up as a representative of patriarchal control whose actions of violence and domination against Cassandra and her double Iphigenia carry metaphorical resonances of Zeus’s elimination and subjugation of the monstrous feminine. Achilles’ and Clytemnestra’s figuration as chthonic monsters combined with their allegiance to Iphigenia sets up a framework of imagery in which opposition to Agamemnon is linked to chthonic resistance to Olympian patriarchy. Through an identification of herself with Iphigenia and other monster-maiden hybrids such as Scylla and the Sirens, Cassandra inserts herself into this framework as the principal chthonic resister of masculine domination. The paper concludes with an analysis of how the *Alexandra*, unlike the *Theogony* and the *Oresteia*, champions the chthonic feminine over Olympian patriarchy by dramatizing Cassandra’s ultimate escape from the masculine order.

ZEUS AND TYPHON

The *Alexandra* repeatedly associates Agamemnon with Zeus by means of its obscure ‘name codes’. After narrating the deaths of Agamemnon and herself, Cassandra tells the reader that Agamemnon ‘will be called Zeus by wheedling Spartans’ (Ζεὺς Σπαρτιάταις αἰμύλοις κληθήσεται, 1124), apparently a reference to an actual Spartan cult attested during the Hellenistic period in which Agamemnon was worshipped as Zeus.¹³ This identification is repeated at lines 1369–70 when she refers to

¹⁰ McNelis and Sens (n. 5), 173–9.

¹¹ Sistakou (nn. 4 and 5).

¹² For the ideology of the *Alexandra* as a reflection of Cassandra’s female perspective, see Sistakou (n. 4), 134.

¹³ The Hellenistic historian Staphylos of Naucratis reports that the Spartans worshipped Agamemnon as Zeus (*FGrHist* 269 F 8): Hornblower (n. 1), 398. The evidence is not just literary but also archaeological: ‘Amyclae was the site of a cult of Agamemnon and Alexandra . . . The original cult may have been in honour of Zeus and Alexandra, with Agamemnon taking the place of the former and Cassandra of the latter’ (note on Pind. *Pyth.* 11.32 in P.J. Finglass, *Pindar: Pythian Eleven* [Cambridge, 2007], with references to the archaeological publications; see now G. Salapata, *Heroic Offerings: The Terracotta Plaques from the Spartan Sanctuary of Agamemnon and Cassandra* [Ann Arbor, 2015]).

Agamemnon as ‘Zeus who has the same name as Zeus Lapersios’ (Ζηνὶ τῷ Λαπερσίῳ | ὁμόνυμιος Ζεὺς).¹⁴ Similarly, when foretelling the death of Priam at the altar of Zeus, Cassandra describes her father as ‘having been slain at the altar of Agamemnon’ (ἀμφὶ τύμβῳ τῶγαμέμνονος δομαίς, 335). By conflating Zeus and Agamemnon, the *Alexandra* draws on the identification of Agamemnon with Zeus and his Olympian order prominent in the *Iliad* and the *Oresteia*. As in these works, the link between Agamemnon and Zeus in the *Alexandra* suggests that challenges to the authority of Agamemnon have a theogonic dimension.

By using name-codes to link Zeus to Agamemnon, a figure with whom Achilles is frequently in conflict in the mythological and literary traditions, the poem adds an extra layer of meaning to the appellation ‘Pelagian Typhon’. These epithets suggest that the antipathy between Achilles and Agamemnon is analogous to the cosmic conflict between Zeus and the monster Typhon who attempts to depose him as ruler of the gods.¹⁵ In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the earliest source for the myth, Typhon (Τυφῳεύς) is Gaia’s youngest child, the product of her union with Tartarus (820–2). In Hesiodic cosmology, Gaia, the primordial feminine force, always supports the efforts of the younger generation to overthrow the older generation, a ‘continual impetus for change [that] constitutes a radically destabilizing force in the cosmos’.¹⁶ Typhon thus represents one of the final efforts of the chthonic feminine to overthrow Zeus’s Olympian order.¹⁷ The importance of the Zeus/Typhon cosmogonic conflict as a frame of reference for interpreting the *Alexandra* is subtly suggested by repeated references to Zeus’s battles with Typhon and other monsters such as the giants throughout the poem, which continually redirect readers back to this mythic paradigm.¹⁸

It is particularly appropriate for Cassandra to compare Achilles to Typhon given the role of Achilles’ own mother Thetis in the cosmic succession myth. As told by Pindar in *Isthmian* 8, Themis foretold that Thetis would give birth to a son greater than his father (φέρτερον πατέρος, 36) if she ‘mingled with Zeus or one of his brothers’ (Ζηνὶ μισγομένην | ἢ Διὸς παρ’ ἀδελφροῖσιν, 35). For this reason, the gods agreed to marry Thetis to a mortal to avoid the birth of this new god who would have the power to overthrow Zeus (36–45). Achilles is thus himself a product of the disruptive feminine drive for succession. If events had unfolded differently, he would have been Thetis’ immortal son, a divine challenger of Zeus like Typhon, but one who, according to Themis’ prophecy, might well have been successful.¹⁹

The *Alexandra*’s likening of the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon to a theogonic contest for divine succession expands upon similar parallels in the *Iliad*.

¹⁴ ‘Lapersios’ has been interpreted as referring to this Spartan cult of Zeus–Agamemnon, although its meaning is obscure: Hornblower (n. 1), 473.

¹⁵ The monster Typhon is known by various related names in Greek (Τυφῳεύς/Typhōεύς, Τυφῳών/Typhōn, Τυφῳών/Typhāōn, Τυφῳός/Typhōs). Cf. L. Käppel, ‘Typhoeus, Typhon’, in *BNP* (Leiden, 2006).

¹⁶ Clay (n. 7), 17. See also Arthur (n. 8) on the succession myth in Hesiod.

¹⁷ Apollodorus’ account of the Typhon myth makes explicit that Gaia intended for Typhon to overthrow Zeus, stating that she gave birth to him in revenge for the gods’ overthrow of the giants (1.6.3). Whereas in the *Theogony* Zeus overcomes Typhon by virtue of his greater power, in Apollodorus’ version Typhon is stronger and is only defeated in the end by trickery. An alternate account of Typhon’s birth in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* says that Hera, angered by Zeus’s fathering of Athena, prayed to Gaia that she would bear a son greater (φέρτερος) than Zeus (339). Here again Typhon was conceived by feminine and chthonic forces as a challenger to Zeus’s power.

¹⁸ See lines 688–9, 709, 1353–4.

¹⁹ See also [Aesch.] *PV* 768. For Achilles’ and Thetis’ roles in the succession myth as assumed by the *Iliad* although not explicitly mentioned, see L. Slatkin, *The Power of Thetis and Selected Essays* (Washington, D.C., 2011²).

As Barker and Christensen have argued, the *Iliad* presents the quarrel between the two heroes as a re-enactment on the mortal level of the themes of *mēnis*, *eris*, *timē* and *damos* that characterize conflicts between the gods in the *Theogony* and elsewhere in early Greek hexameter poetry.²⁰ For example, similarities between the quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon in the *Iliad* and the argument between Zeus and Poseidon in Book 15 invite us to view the two situations as analogous to each other, with the mortal conflict carrying the same theogonic overtones as the divine conflict.²¹ Agamemnon represents the power of Zeus in the mortal realm, which the disruptive Achilles seeks to challenge.²²

In *Iliad* Book 15, Zeus, angered by Poseidon's presence on the battlefield, tells Iris to order him to depart. He declares that Poseidon must obey him, 'since I say that am much greater than him in might, and the elder by birth' (ἐπεὶ εὖ φημι βίη πολὺ φέρτερος εἶναι | καὶ γενεῇ πρότερος, 15.165–6). *pherteros* ('greater') resonates with poetic accounts of the succession myth in archaic poetry (*Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 339; Pind. *Isthm.* 8.33), especially in conjunction with a conflict between an older and a younger figure. Zeus's rebuke to Poseidon thus hints at a potential theogonic struggle for power, but one in which Zeus is confident in defeating his younger challenger, as he did with Typhon. This right of primacy owing to prior birth is also claimed by Agamemnon in the speech he asks Odysseus to convey to Achilles: 'Let him yield to me in respect to how much I am kinglier and how much I boast to be the elder by birth' (καὶ μοι ὑποστήτω ὄσσον βασιλεύτερός εἰμι | ἦδ' ὄσσον γενεῇ προγενέστερος εὐχομαι εἶναι, 9.160–1). Although Agamemnon describes himself as 'more kingly' (βασιλεύτερος, 9.160) instead of 'greater' (φέρτερος, 15.165), in *Iliad* Book 1 Nestor tells Achilles not to quarrel with Agamemnon because Agamemnon is 'greater' (φέρτερος, 1.281) since he rules over more people (ἐπεὶ πλεόνεσσιν ἀνάσσει, 1.281).

Even more strikingly, Poseidon frames Zeus's demand that he leave the battlefield as an unfair attempt to claim more *timē* ('honour') than is his fair share. He characterizes himself as ὁμότιμον ('having the same honour', 15.186) as Zeus, and describes the division of the sky, sea and underworld between himself, Zeus and Hades in language that is similar to how the division of spoils among the Achaeans is described. Poseidon says that he and his brothers were each 'allotted' their share of the cosmos (ἔλαχον, 15.190; ἔλαχε, 15.191; ἔλαχ' 15.192), just as Achilles says that he was 'allotted' (ἔλαχον, 9.367) his war prizes. According to Poseidon, by forcing him to leave the battlefield, Zeus is contravening the previously agreed division of *timē*: 'everything was divided in three, and each has their share of honour' (τριχθὰ δὲ πάντα δέδασται, ἕκαστος δ' ἔμπορε τιμῆς, 15.189). These statements resonate with Achilles' complaint in *Iliad* Book 1 that it is not fair for Agamemnon to demand another prize after the division of spoils has been made (1.125). Both Poseidon and Achilles accuse an authority figure of having overstepped the bounds of that authority by laying claim to *timē* that was not rightfully theirs.²³ These close verbal and thematic resonances in the *Iliad* invite

²⁰ E. Barker and J. Christensen, *Homer's Thebes* (Washington, D.C., 2019). Cf. L.C. Muellner, *The Anger of Achilles: Mēnis in Greek Epic* (Ithaca, NY, 1996).

²¹ I thank Justin Vorhis for this parallel. For the theogonic overtones of the quarrel between Zeus and Poseidon, see B. Graziosi and J. Haubold, *Homer: The Resonance of Epic* (London, 2005), 71. For the link between the Zeus/Poseidon argument and the Achilles/Agamemnon conflict, see Muellner (n. 20), 28–31.

²² Cf. Nestor telling Achilles at *Il.* 1.279 that he should obey Agamemnon because, as a king, Agamemnon derives his *kudos* ('glory') from Zeus.

²³ For Achilles' and Agamemnon's conflict over *timē*, see D. Wilson, *Ransom Revenge and Heroic Identity in the Iliad* (Cambridge, 2002).

comparisons between these two conflicts, divine and mortal. As the conflict between Zeus and Poseidon is likened to a quarrel between mortal *basileis*, the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles takes on resonances of a struggle for divine succession, with a younger figure challenging an elder for the title of φέρτερος. The *Iliad* seems to call attention to Achilles' thwarted role as a potential challenger to the reign of Zeus in a way that may have piqued the interest of Alexandrian readers.

ACHILLES' MONSTROUS HYBRIDITY

In referring to Achilles as 'Typhon', the *Alexandra* may also be picking up on the monstrous hybridity that Achilles exhibits in the *Iliad*, just as Typhon does in the *Theogony*.²⁴ Clay has described how the *Theogony*'s monsters 'blur or defy the evolving categories of the ordered universe' such as mortal/immortal, human/animal, young/old and male/female.²⁵ Typhon's appearance is bestial, elemental and divine: he has a hundred snake heads that are described as θεσπεσής ('divinely wondrous', 827) and δεινής ('terrible/awesome', 829), and which flash with fire (824–8). The voices that emanate from his heads are sometimes 'like the gods understand' (ὥστε θεοῖσι συνιέμεν, 831) and sometimes the sounds of animals, such as a bull, lion, or puppies (832–4). Achilles in the *Iliad*, particularly in the period between the death of Patroclus and the ransom of Hector, is also characterized as transgressing the boundaries of divine/mortal and human/animal. He is superhuman in his abilities and strength, like a god or the raging elemental force of fire to which he is frequently compared, but also bestial in his savagery and his desire to consume raw flesh.²⁶ The word used to describe Achilles' rage, μῆνις, elsewhere in Homer used only of the anger of gods,²⁷ has been taken as a further marker of how the *Iliad* problematizes Achilles' status as a mortal/divine hybrid: his god-sized emotions cause him to transgress normal human social boundaries.²⁸

The *Alexandra* plays up the bestial and monstrous aspects of Achilles' character. He is described as a 'fiery wolf' (αἴθων λύκος, 245) when he leaps onto the shores of Troy, a 'savage serpent' (ἄγριον δράκοντα, 309) when he kills Troilus, and an eagle (αἰετός, 261) when he kills Hector.²⁹ This 'instability of metaphor' figures Achilles as a multiform creature, possessing aspects of different animal bodies.³⁰ His slaughter of Hector is characterized as particularly savage: 'He will bloody his body with talons and jaws and stain the waters of the land and the ground with gore' (ὄνυξι γαμφηλαῖσιν θ' αἰμάσσων δέμας, | ἔγχωρα τίφη καὶ πέδον χραίνη φόνω, 266–7). The image of the eagle rending Hector's bloody corpse with its jaws calls to mind Achilles' cannibalistic

²⁴ For recent work in Classics on monstrous hybridity, see F. Spiegel and G.M. Chesi (edd.), *Classical Literature and Posthumanism* (London and New York, 2019).

²⁵ Clay (n. 6), 115. See also Clay (n. 7), 151–2.

²⁶ King (n. 5); S. Schein, *The Mortal Hero* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), 79; T. Neal, 'Blood and hunger in the *Iliad*', *CPh* 101 (2006), 15–33, at 33. For a provocative reading of Achilles as 'cyborg', see R. Wilkie, 'Epic hero as cyborg: an experiment in interpreting pre-modern heroic narrative', *Fragments: An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of Ancient and Medieval Pasts* 2 (2012) (online).

²⁷ Schein (n. 26), 91.

²⁸ C. Warwick, 'We two alone: conjugal bonds and homoerotic subtext in the *Iliad*', *Helios* 46 (2019), 115–39, at 134. For demigods as counterparts of the hybrid monsters, see Clay (n. 7), 150.

²⁹ The elements of 'fire', 'wolf' and 'serpent' again evoke Typhon, who has dragon heads (δράκοντος, *Theog.* 825), shoots fire (828) and has the voice of a puppy (σκυλάκεσσιν, 834).

³⁰ For Lycophron's use of metaphors, see Cusset (n. 2) and Sistakou (n. 2).

desire to consume his flesh in the *Iliad* (22.346–7), further conflating mortal and bestial actions. In addition, the eagle is described as ‘shrieking an unmixed, horrible cry with its mouth’ (κλάζων τ’ ἄμικτον στόματι ῥυγίστην βοήν, 263). *amikton* (‘unmixed’) suggests a cacophony of disparate sounds that do not mingle, evoking the shrieks of Typhon that resemble the cries of many different animals.³¹

Achilles in the *Alexandra* also exhibits monstrous hybridity in that he transgresses the boundaries of masculinity and femininity. Cassandra describes the episode in which Achilles dresses as a girl on Scyros to avoid being sent to war (276–80):

ὁ νεκροπέρνας, ὃς προδειμαίων πότιμον
καὶ θῆλυν ἀμφὶ σῶμα τλήσεται πέπλον
δύναι, παρ’ ἴστοις κερκίδος ψάσας κρότων,
καὶ λοῖσθος εἰς γῆν δυσμενῶν ῥίψαι πόδα,
τὸ σόν, ξύναιμε, κἄν ὑπνω πτήσων δόρυ.

The corpse-seller, who fearing in advance his fate
Will dare to put a woman’s dress around his body,
Handling the rattling shuttle at the loom,
And cast his foot upon the land last of our enemies,
Cowering before your spear, brother, even in his sleep.

According to Cassandra, Achilles wears women’s clothes and performs women’s work because of a desire to avoid fighting, opening himself up to charges of effeminacy and cowardice. But by describing Achilles as ‘cowering before Hector’s spear’, Cassandra conjures up an image of a terrified female figure menaced by a warrior’s weapons. Similar imagery describes Xerxes later when he is said to fear the Greek fleet ‘like a girl fears the dark twilight... terrified by a bronze weapon’ (ὡς λυκοψίαν κόρη κνεφαίαν ... χαλκηλάτῳ κνώδοντι δεμιατουμένη, 1431–3). Both images impugn the masculinity of a male character, but also resonate with the theme of female helplessness in the face of male violence. Crucially, while Xerxes is likened to a girl only with respect to his fear, Achilles undergoes a kind of temporary transformation by assuming the female role through his dress and actions. He is not only *like* a terrified girl at the loom, he actually takes on the lived experience of a woman, making him a hybrid figure, both savage warrior and frightened maiden.³² The passage thus has a double function—it undermines Achilles’ martial reputation, but also suggests that, in terms of the poem’s depiction of the conflict between male and female, Cassandra is presenting Achilles as conceptually allied with the female, just as Typhon is allied with the chthonic feminine in the *Theogony*.³³

The *Alexandra*’s presentation of several key episodes suggests that the poem deliberately downplays Achilles’ role as an enactor of specifically patriarchal violence in the mythological tradition in favour of aligning him with the female and the chthonic. It would have been easy for the *Alexandra* to vilify Achilles by playing up myths in which he enacts violence against young women, such as his slaying of Penthesilea or his ghost’s demand for the sacrifice of Polyxena over his tomb.³⁴ However, the

³¹ Compare the βοήν ἄμικτον (‘unmixed cry’) of victors and vanquished at Aesch. *Ag.* 321, which is likened to oil and vinegar refusing to mix.

³² I thank Laura Moser for this insight.

³³ For Achilles’ adoption of feminine behaviours and practices in the *Iliad* and other archaic and classical sources, see C. Warwick, ‘The maternal warrior: gender and *kleos* in the *Iliad*’, *AJPh* 140 (2019), 1–28.

³⁴ For Achilles and Penthesilea, see Paus. 5.11.6; Quint. Smyrn. 1.40; Fantuzzi (n. 5), 267–86. For the ghost of Achilles demanding the sacrifice of Polyxena, see Eur. *Hec.* 37–41.

Alexandra conspicuously does not do this; instead, it attributes the sacrifice of Polyxena to Neoptolemus only (323–6), who is said to perform the deed ‘imitating the sacrifices of his dark mother’ (μητρὸς κελαινῆς χέρνιβας μιμούμενος, 325).³⁵ While the *Alexandra* does mention the death of Penthesilea (999–1001), this passage mentions Achilles not as her killer but as the avenger of the desecration of her corpse by Thersites, again positioning him as the champion of the female against the male. In a poem with such an emphasis on the victimization of women by male heroes, these details signpost Achilles’ unique role in the *Alexandra*’s thematic structure as a masculine figure aligned with chthonic feminine disruption.

ACHILLES AND IPHIGENIA

In addition to exhibiting monstrous characteristics himself, Achilles in the *Alexandra* is associated with the threatening chthonic feminine and with the challenge to patriarchal authority through his close connection to Iphigenia. The poem narrates Iphigenia’s sacrifice, transportation to the Black Sea, and transformation into a cannibalistic underworld goddess, all while demonstrating Achilles’ intense emotional attachment to her (183–201). The *Alexandra* presents Iphigenia and Achilles as having a much closer relationship than better-known works such as the *Iphigenia at Aulis*. She is said to be his wife (δῆμορτα, 190) and the mother of Neoptolemus (164). Achilles is portrayed as loving her deeply, searching for her for five years after she is whisked away by the gods during the attempt to sacrifice her; he is described as ‘longing’ (ποθῶν, 190) for her and ‘groaning’ (στένοντος, 194).³⁶ This search represents an abandonment of the war and of the Greek cause, indicating that Achilles values Iphigenia more than his own heroic reputation.³⁷

Crucially, the poem describes the post-sacrifice Iphigenia that Achilles searches for as a terrifying chthonic figure, conflated with Hecate and boiling the flesh of dead men in a cauldron ‘seething with flame from the depths of Hades’ (Ἄιδου τε παφλάζοντος ἐκ βυθῶν φλογὶ | κρατήρος, 197–9).³⁸ Hornblower argues that δαιταλοργία (‘cook’, 199) suggests that the flesh will be eaten, adding to the horror of the image.³⁹ Iphigenia is also referred to as a *graia* (γραῖαν, 196), ‘old woman’, as she performs sacrifices, subtly evoking the *Graiai* from the *Theogony*’s catalogue of monsters, daughters of Phorcys and Ceto who are ‘grey from their birth’ (ἐκ γενετῆς πολιάς, 271).⁴⁰ Like them, Iphigenia exhibits a monstrous hybridity of youth and age, a virgin now transformed into a hag.⁴¹ She becomes like the many monster-maiden hybrids of the Greek cultural imagination, such as Scylla, Medusa and Echidna.

³⁵ In other words, Neoptolemus performs human sacrifice just as his mother Iphigenia performs human sacrifice in Tauris: Hornblower (n. 1), 191. The poem thus positions him as imitating the savagery of his female rather than his male parent.

³⁶ For Achilles’ actions as a demonstration of his emotional commitment to Iphigenia, see McNelis and Sens (n. 5), 108.

³⁷ Cf. Sistikou (n. 5), 166; McNelis and Sens (n. 5), 109.

³⁸ For the conflation of Iphigenia with Hecate here, see Hornblower (n. 1), 167 with references.

³⁹ Hornblower (n. 1), 167.

⁴⁰ See Hornblower (n. 1), 167 for γραῖαν.

⁴¹ For youth/age hybridity as the defining feature of the *Graiai* in the *Theogony*, see Clay (n. 7), 153.

The depiction of Iphigenia as implicitly threatening or monstrous goes back to Aeschylus.⁴² In the *Agamemnon*, the chorus describes Iphigenia as δίκαν χμιαίρας ('like a *chimaera*', 232), while she is lifted above the altar to be sacrificed. *chimaera* can mean 'young goat', which is usually how this passage is translated, but we may also read in it an allusion to the monster Chimaera, a fire-breathing goat-lion-snake hybrid.⁴³ This simile implicitly justifies the necessity and rightness of Iphigenia's death—as Zeus and the heroes must eliminate the monstrous feminine to preserve the order of the cosmos, Iphigenia must die to preserve her father's authority over the Greeks.

However, Iphigenia's role as a double of Cassandra complicates a negative reading of both herself and Achilles in the *Alexandra*.⁴⁴ This doubling also goes back to the *Agamemnon*, in which Cassandra is figured as a second Iphigenia as a young female 'sacrifice' whose death is overlain with erotic and nuptial imagery.⁴⁵ In the *Alexandra*, Iphigenia's experience also mirrors Cassandra's. She is one of the many young female victims of male violence in the poem whose fates resonate with Cassandra's own. Achilles' allegiance to her positions him in alignment with Cassandra and with the poem's other females victimized by men, as does Cassandra's own figuration of him as a maiden cowering before Hector's spear. Iphigenia is also linked to Cassandra by their shared survival of death through transformation into chthonic beings, representing not just female victimization but the valorization and triumph of the chthonic feminine over Olympian patriarchy.

ACHILLES VS AGAMEMNON IN THE *ALEXANDRA*

The *Alexandra* sets up a subtle rather than overt opposition between Agamemnon and Achilles, particularly since the plot of the *Iliad* is left out; the opposition is largely constructed metaphorically and through metanarrative. However, hints of more direct conflict between the two heroes are seen in the *Alexandra*'s presentation of the Iphigenia story, which refigures their Iliadic quarrel. Agamemnon can be seen as a surrogate father for Achilles in the *Iliad*, making Achilles' hostility towards him a kind of rebellion against paternal authority.⁴⁶ In the *Iliad* this father-son conflict is over honour, but in the *Alexandra*, where in characteristic Hellenistic fashion the emphasis is on Achilles as a romantic figure rather than as a warrior, the conflict is

⁴² For example, V. Wohl, *Intimate Commerce: Exchange, Gender, and Subjectivity in Greek Tragedy* (Austin, 1997), 76 argues that Iphigenia in the *Agamemnon* is figured as a latent second Helen who must be killed in order to prevent her from developing dangerous adult female sexuality.

⁴³ J. Tralau, 'The justice of the *chimaera*: goat, snake, lion, and almost the entire *Oresteia* in a little monstrous image', *Arion* 24 (2016), 41–68.

⁴⁴ For Iphigenia as a double of Cassandra in the *Alexandra*, see C. Cusset and P.L. de Bellefonds, 'Le figure très hellénistique d'Iphigénie dans l'*Alexandra* de Lycophron ... Quels parallèles dans l'iconographie?', *Aitia* 4 (2014) (online).

⁴⁵ For Cassandra as a double of Iphigenia in the *Agamemnon*, see Wohl (n. 42), 107–13; H. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton, 2001), 93; G.M. Chesi, *The Play of Words: Blood Ties and Power Relations in Aeschylus' 'Oresteia'* (Berlin, 2014), 51. For Cassandra's death in the *Agamemnon* as a sacrifice, see Wohl (n. 42), 113; P. Debnar, 'The sexual status of Aeschylus' Cassandra', *CPh* 105 (2010), 129–45, at 136; Chesi (this note), 51.

⁴⁶ H. Avery, 'Achilles' third father', *Hermes* 126 (1998), 389–97; N. Felson, 'Threptia and invincible hands: the father-son relationship in *Iliad* 24', *Arethusa* 35 (2002), 35–50, at 39; R. Holway, *Becoming Achilles: Child-Sacrifice, War, and Misrule in the Iliad and Beyond* (Lanham, MD and Plymouth, 2012).

transferred onto the circumstances of Achilles' marriage to Iphigenia.⁴⁷ While the poem does not specifically tell us that Achilles is angry with Agamemnon for Iphigenia's sacrifice, the deep emotional anguish that he experiences at the loss of Iphigenia suggests that he perceives himself as having been harmed by (and implicitly rejects) Agamemnon's exercising of patriarchal father-right over the life of his daughter. Achilles' abandonment of the Greek army to seek Iphigenia for five years (200–1) suggests that he values Iphigenia's life more than the war effort, and thus would not have supported Agamemnon's decision to kill his daughter to allow the fleet to sail.⁴⁸ Further, Achilles' five-year departure from the army in the *Alexandra* mirrors his withdrawal from the war in *Iliad* Book 1 as a result of his quarrel with Agamemnon over the latter's theft of Briseis, providing additional metanarrative support for the paradigmatic opposition between Achilles and Agamemnon in Lycophron's poem.

Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia in Aeschylus is an exercise of his patriarchal authority, an authority validated in the *Oresteia* by the trilogy's disavowal of Clytemnestra's right to take vengeance for her daughter.⁴⁹ Achilles in the *Alexandra*, however, remains loyal to his monstrous wife, seeking her for five years in deep emotional anguish. Like Typhon to whom he is compared, Achilles sides with the monstrous feminine against his father-in-law/surrogate father Zeus-Agamemnon. The story of Achilles and Iphigenia at the beginning of the poem thus prepares the reader to decode the *Alexandra*'s anti-theogonic cosmogony in which Cassandra herself later participates.

CLYTEMNESTRA AS CHTHONIC MONSTER

The characterization in *Alexandra* of Agamemnon as Zeus and of his opponents as chthonic monsters assaulting the Olympian order is also found in the poem's presentation of Clytemnestra. Just as the association of Typhon with Achilles draws upon the latter's role in the succession myth in earlier texts, so the *Alexandra* recapitulates the *Oresteia*'s framing of the gendered conflict within the House of Atreus as a metaphorical cosmogonic struggle in which Clytemnestra and the Erinyes represent the chthonic feminine forces of chaos attempting to overthrow Olympian patriarchy.⁵⁰ In the *Oresteia*, Clytemnestra is frequently described with serpent imagery and compared to hybrid monsters such as the Gorgons.⁵¹ For example, in the *Libation Bearers*, Orestes calls her *echidna*, 'viper' (249, 994), and *muraina*, 'seasnake' (994). *echidna* has theogonic overtones, since it evokes the half-snake half-woman Echidna, daughter of Phorcys and Ceto, mate of Typhon and mother of monsters.⁵² This imagery ties Clytemnestra closely to the Erinyes, who are often identified with Gorgons and

⁴⁷ Here the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon in the *Iphigenia at Aulis* may serve as inspiration. For Achilles as a romantic figure in the *Alexandra* and in Hellenistic literature generally, see Sistakou (n. 4).

⁴⁸ For Achilles valuing his relationship with Iphigenia over war/heroic glory in the *Alexandra*, see Sistakou (nn. 4 and 5).

⁴⁹ For the sacrifice of Iphigenia in the *Agamemnon* as an exercise of a father's patriarchal authority to dispose of his daughter in the way that is most advantageous to him, see Wohl (n. 42), 68.

⁵⁰ For this reading of the *Oresteia*, see Zeitlin (n. 9) and Rabinowitz (n. 9).

⁵¹ See, for example, Cassandra's description of Clytemnestra at Aesch. *Ag.* 1233–44, discussed below. Serpent imagery in the *Oresteia* is multivalent, since Clytemnestra dreams of Orestes as a serpent who bites her breast (*Cho.* 527–33) and Orestes identifies himself with the serpent (542–50). Multiple metaphorical frameworks for serpent imagery can coexist in the same play.

⁵² Rabinowitz (n. 9). In the *Libation Bearers*, the chorus calls for Perseus' spirit to rise within Orestes (*Cho.* 831–2), implying that Clytemnestra is a Gorgon who must be defeated by a monster-slayer.

serpents.⁵³ As Zeitlin has shown, the *Oresteia* symbolically associates the Erinyes with chthonic dragons, linking their conflict with Apollo to his battle with Peithon, the nurse of Typhon.⁵⁴

Just as the *Oresteia* identifies Clytemnestra with the Olympian order's chthonic opponents, it also identifies Agamemnon with Zeus, as in Orestes' reference to 'the eagle father who perished in the windings and coils of the terrible *echidna*' (αἰετοῦ πατρός, | θανόντος ἐν πλεκταῖσι καὶ σπειράμασιν | δεινῆς ἐχίδνης, *Cho.* 247–9). The eagle is an emblem of Zeus, while the name 'Echidna', wife of Typhon, calls to mind Zeus's conflict with the chthonic dragon. This image suggests that Clytemnestra's unchallenged victory over Agamemnon 'would symbolize the undoing of Zeus' ordering of the universe'.⁵⁵ Orestes' role as slayer of Clytemnestra implies a parallel to the non-Hesiodic versions of the Zeus–Typhon conflict in which Zeus is initially defeated and only restored to power through the aid of the younger gods.⁵⁶ In the *Oresteia*, this conflict between Olympian and chthonic forces is linked to the conflict between male and female.⁵⁷ The wife's overthrow of her husband's authority is made symbolically equivalent to the triumph of the monsters over the gods, and of chaos over order, while the monstrous female's defeat is presented as necessary for the continued functioning of both society and the cosmos. Thus Zeitlin has argued that 'the basic issue of the trilogy is the establishment in the face of female resistance of the binding nature of patriarchal marriage where wife's subordination and patrilineal succession are reaffirmed.'⁵⁸

Through intertextual resonances, the *Alexandra* signposts its adoption of the *Oresteia*'s pattern of associating Clytemnestra with the monstrous and chthonic, particularly through serpent imagery. As Cassandra in the *Alexandra* narrates the death of Agamemnon, the intertexts with the *Oresteia* are first signalled by her description of Clytemnestra as a 'lioness' (λεαίνης, 1107), which calls to mind the Aeschylean Cassandra's reference to Clytemnestra as a lioness (λέαινα, *Ag.* 1258) as she prophesies Agamemnon's murder. The *Alexandra* then calls Clytemnestra δράκαινα θυγάς ('she-dragon viper', 1114) and *echidna* (ἐχίδνης, 1121). Again, we see textual and thematic parallels to the Aeschylean Cassandra's use of serpentine, monstrous and chthonic imagery to describe Clytemnestra. In the *Agamemnon*, Cassandra calls Clytemnestra ἀμφίβητον ('a serpent that goes both forward and backwards', 1233), Σκύλλαν ('Scylla', 1233) and Ἄιδου μητὴρ ('mother of Hades', 1235).⁵⁹ By referring to Agamemnon as 'Zeus' and by calling Clytemnestra δράκαινα (1114) and *echidna* (1121), the *Alexandra* alludes to and reiterates the Aeschylean figuring of Clytemnestra's attack on Agamemnon as that of a chthonic dragon assailing the rule of Zeus. In this context, the reference to Achilles as 'Typhon' appears as part of a larger

⁵³ For Clytemnestra as an Erinys in the *Oresteia*, see Rabinowitz (n. 9), 179; Chesi (n. 45), 35, 42. For the Erinyes as Gorgons, see *Cho.* 1048; *Eum.* 48. On the snaky appearance of the Erinyes, see *Cho.* 1049–50; *Eur. Or.* 255–6 and *IT* 286; cf. A.F. Garvie, *Aeschylus Choephoroi* (Oxford, 1986), 345.

⁵⁴ Zeitlin (n. 9), 164; cf. *Eum.* 128 δεινῆς δρακαίνης ('terrible she-dragon'). Compare *Eur. Or.* 255–6 δρακοντώδεις κόραες ('maidens with dragon faces'); *IT* 286 Ἄιδου δράκαινον ('she-dragon of Hades').

⁵⁵ Rabinowitz (n. 9), 166.

⁵⁶ Nonnus, *Dion.* 1.145; Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.6.3. Cf. Rabinowitz (n. 9), 175.

⁵⁷ Zeitlin (n. 9).

⁵⁸ Zeitlin (n. 9), 149. For the *Oresteia* as the final validation of patriarchy, see also M. Griffith, 'Brilliant dynasts: power and politics in the *Oresteia*', *CA* 14 (1995), 62–129.

⁵⁹ For the Aeschylean influence on this section of the *Alexandra*, see Hornblower (n. 1), 392–6. For Aeschylean influence on the *Alexandra* in general, see Cusset (n. 2).

pattern in which Agamemnon is identified with the Olympian order and his opponents are presented as chthonic monsters and agents of cosmic disorder. The appellation 'Echidna' suggests a link between Clytemnestra and Achilles–Typhon as a male/female chthonic pair.

There is also potential to see Clytemnestra and Achilles as thematically allied in the *Alexandra* through their shared relationship to Iphigenia, as they are in *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Achilles in the *Alexandra* is deeply erotically and emotionally attached to Iphigenia, while the desire of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra for revenge in recompense for Agamemnon's sacrifice of her daughter would have been well known to readers of Lycophron.⁶⁰ Indeed, through another intertext with the *Oresteia*, the appellation *echidna* for Clytemnestra in the *Alexandra* may be meant to evoke Clytemnestra and Iphigenia's mother–daughter connection.⁶¹ Again, the chorus' description of Iphigenia as δίκων χιμαίρας ('like a *chimaera*', 232) becomes important. According to the interpretation of Hes. *Theog.* 312–19 adopted by Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 2.3.1), the Chimaera is the child of Typhon and Echidna.⁶² The reference to Clytemnestra as *echidna* in Aesch. *Cho.* 249 thus has the potential resonance of recalling Clytemnestra's slaughtered Chimaera-daughter while simultaneously recasting both mother and daughter as monsters whose elimination is justified and necessary. We can see *echidna* at *Alex.* 1121 as possibly picking up this resonance of a monstrous mother-daughter pair. Further evidence that the *Alexandra* is in dialogue with the reference to Iphigenia as δίκων χιμαίρας at *Ag.* 232 is found in the poem's characterization of the sacrifice as the catalyst of Iphigenia's transformation from innocent virgin to monstrous hybrid. In the *Agamemnon*, the word *chimaera* figuratively implies that Iphigenia is rendered monstrous at the moment of her sacrifice, an implication that the *Alexandra* makes literal.

Achilles, Clytemnestra and Iphigenia in the *Alexandra* thus form a trio of figures closely tied both by their own familial relationships and by the familial relationships of the chthonic beings to which they are compared. Achilles and Clytemnestra are metaphorically linked as monstrous mates 'Typhon' and 'Echidna', and are literally linked by their relationship as son-in-law and mother-in-law. Similarly, the relationship of Typhon and Echidna to the Chimaera highlights Achilles' and Clytemnestra's links to Iphigenia. Achilles and Clytemnestra in the *Alexandra* are in this way presented as being conceptually allied against Agamemnon through their mutual attachment to Iphigenia.⁶³ The association of Achilles and Clytemnestra with the chthonic feminine and of Agamemnon with Zeus further aligns opposition to Agamemnon with opposition to Olympian patriarchy, a theme prominent in Cassandra's narration of her own fate.

⁶⁰ For Clytemnestra's desire for revenge for Iphigenia as her primary motivation for killing Agamemnon in the *Oresteia*, see M. Neuberger, 'Clytemnestra and the alastor (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1497ff)', *QUCC* 38 (1991), 37–68.

⁶¹ The *Alexandra* makes Iphigenia the biological daughter of Helen and Theseus (103) rather than of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, following a tradition that Pausanias (2.22.6–7) attributes to Stesichorus (fr. 86 Finglass), Euphorion (fr. 86 Lightfoot) and Alexander of Pleuron (fr. 11 Magnelli). Hornblower (n. 1) suggests that 'the effect of ... this variant is to deny Clytemnestra a decent motive for killing Agamemnon' (145). However, in the tradition cited by Pausanias, Helen gives her baby daughter to Clytemnestra to raise (παῖδα ἦν ἔτεκε Κλυταμνήστρα δοῦναι, Paus. 2.22.6). To readers familiar with the work of these poets, a reference to Iphigenia's birth from Helen would not necessarily preclude a mother-daughter bond between Clytemnestra and Iphigenia.

⁶² For the ambiguity of the Chimaera's parentage in Hesiod, see Clay (n. 6), 113 with references.

⁶³ Cusset and de Bellefonds (n. 44) point out that Agamemnon is not emphasized as the sacrificer of Iphigenia in the *Alexandra*. However, the role of Agamemnon in the sacrifice is so well known that we should assume it is implied by the *Alexandra* unless explicitly contradicted.

CASSANDRA AS CHTHONIC MONSTER

If we take our cue from Hesiod and Aeschylus, the association in the *Alexandra* of Achilles and Clytemnestra with the chthonic opponents of Zeus should be read as character assassination by Cassandra. However, this reading is complicated by Cassandra's own relationship to the sphere of chthonic monsters, by her resistance to the hegemony of patriarchal marriage championed by the *Oresteia*'s Olympian paradigm, and by her opposition to Agamemnon. On the level of metanarrative, Achilles' and Clytemnestra's function as antagonists becomes secondary to their symbolic role in constructing a cosmogonic narrative in which Cassandra herself also participates and triumphs. Against the metaphorical backdrop of primordial struggle developed by the complex ties between Achilles, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon and Iphigenia, Cassandra's own role as a resister of Olympian patriarchy is not only emphasized but also valorized.

In the poetic tradition, Cassandra's role as a resister of marriage is likely old, perhaps going back to the epic cycle or even further.⁶⁴ Christensen writes of the mythological Cassandra that 'in her refusal of male advances (divine and otherwise) she represents a challenge to a patriarchal and misogynistic world order'.⁶⁵ Certain texts neutralize this threat by suppressing the tradition of Cassandra's resistance or by demonstrating her acquiescence to patriarchy.⁶⁶ In the *Oresteia*, for example, Cassandra sides with Agamemnon against Clytemnestra, expressing horror at Agamemnon's imminent death (*Ag.* 1100–29, 1223–30), and exhibiting disapproval that a woman dares to slay a man (1231–2).⁶⁷ Other texts stress Cassandra's resistance to marriage and patriarchy. For example, in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, Cassandra calls her relationship with Agamemnon a 'marriage' (γάμον, 357; γάμοι, 363; γάμοισι, 405), but rejoices in Agamemnon's death and the part she will play in it (353–60), showing herself to be firmly anti-husband. Similarly, the theme of future divine vengeance against Clytemnestra for her actions, prominent in the prophecy of the Aeschylean Cassandra (*Ag.* 1279), is absent from Cassandra's speech in the *Trojan Women*, suggesting that she does not see Clytemnestra's murder of her husband as a transgression necessitating punishment.

The *Alexandra* most closely follows the *Trojan Women* in Cassandra's portrayal of Agamemnon.⁶⁸ For example, she calls Agamemnon her 'husband' (πόσιν, 1118), but forgoes the chance to emphasize the impiety of Agamemnon's murder or to characterize the death of Clytemnestra as the restoration of divine balance.⁶⁹ McNelis and Sens have further argued that language in the *Alexandra* casts Agamemnon in an unflattering

⁶⁴ J. Christensen, 'Revising Athena's rage: Cassandra and the Homeric appropriation of *nostos*', *YAGE* 3 (2019), 88–116.

⁶⁵ Christensen (n. 64), 99.

⁶⁶ See Christensen (n. 64) on how Homeric epic suppresses the tradition of Cassandra's resistance to marriage.

⁶⁷ For Cassandra siding with Agamemnon against Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia*, see Wohl (n. 42), 110–16; Foley (n. 45), 93; Chesi (n. 45), 45–7. For Clytemnestra as shared enemy of Cassandra and the chorus in the *Agamemnon*, see E. Pillinger, *Cassandra and the Poetics of Prophecy in Greek and Latin Literature* (Cambridge, 2019), 35.

⁶⁸ The *Trojan Women* influences the *Alexandra* in its focus on the future misfortunes of the Greeks in contrast to the glory that Cassandra's family will win after death: C. Cusset, 'Tragic elements in Lycophron's *Alexandra*', *Hermathena* 173 (2003), 137–53, at 141; McNelis and Sens (n. 5), 218.

⁶⁹ McNelis and Sens (n. 5), 190.

light.⁷⁰ In the passage about her own murder, Cassandra says that she will die ‘calling out to my master and husband, who does not hear’ (βοῶσα δ’ οὐ κλύοντα δεσπότην πόσιν, 1118) and describes Agamemnon’s future cult: ‘my husband, the lord of the slave bride, will be called Zeus by wheedling Spartans’ (ἐμὸς δ’ ἀκοίτης, δμοῖδος νύμφης ἄναξ | Ζεὺς Σπαρτιάταις αἰμύλοις κληθήσεται, 1123–4). McNelis and Sens suggest that the adjective αἰμύλοις undermines the honour of Agamemnon’s cult in Sparta, and that the appellation ‘lord of the slave bride’ (δμοῖδος νύμφης ἄναξ, 1123) is a snide parody of Agamemnon’s lofty Homeric epithet ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν (‘lord of men’). They also argue that the *Alexandra* uses intertextual resonances with the *Odyssey* to portray Agamemnon’s death as fundamentally unheroic.⁷¹ In *Odyssey* Book 11, Agamemnon says that he heard Cassandra crying out as he died but was unable to help her (11.421–3), while in the *Alexandra* Cassandra says that he does *not* hear her (1118), implying even less agency for the dying king.⁷² Furthermore, while the *Alexandra* does mention Orestes’ killing of Clytemnestra, it is not portrayed as the fulfilment of divine vengeance, as it is in the *Oresteia*, but as the ‘inglorious’ end of the House of Atreus ‘succumbing to its own family curse’.⁷³

The intertextual valences of ‘master’ and ‘husband’ in the context of Agamemnon in the *Alexandra* are complex and require unpacking, but overall point to a negative valuation. Hornblower has suggested that Cassandra’s reference to Agamemnon as her ‘lord and master’ (δεσπότην πόσιν, 1118) implies allegiance to him.⁷⁴ When Cassandra in the *Oresteia* calls Agamemnon ‘master’ (δεσπότη | ἐμῶ, *Ag.* 1225–6) it does seem to suggest allegiance, or at least deference, and the resonance of these lines could be seen as informing the interpretation of Cassandra’s use of δεσπότην for Agamemnon at *Alex.* 1118. In the *Trojan Women*, however, Cassandra’s characterization of Agamemnon as her ‘husband’ (γαμέτας, 311; πόσιν, 341) is accompanied by her intense hatred for him, her criticism of his actions, and her denigration of his achievements.⁷⁵ We should read these negative connotations of ‘husband’ as carrying over into Cassandra’s use of ‘husband’ to describe Agamemnon in Lycophron, especially given Cassandra’s hostility to the concept of marriage in the *Alexandra*. Cassandra describes herself as ‘refusing marriage’ (γάμους ἀρνούμενη, 348) and uses the word ‘marriage’ (γάμος, 412; γάμων, 1151) to refer to her rape by Ajax. Marriage to her is thus equivalent to rape, something that happens to her against her will and fundamentally violates her selfhood.⁷⁶ Her characterization of her ‘marriage’

⁷⁰ McNelis and Sens (n. 5), 173–9. Hornblower (n. 1), 398 takes issue with the translation of αἰμύλοις as ‘wheedling’ with a negative valence, although the word is clearly used negatively at Hes. *Op.* 374 when applied to Pandora.

⁷¹ McNelis and Sens (n. 5), 174–5.

⁷² McNelis and Sens (n. 5), 174–5.

⁷³ Sistikou (n. 4), 172.

⁷⁴ Hornblower (n. 1), 395.

⁷⁵ Cassandra in the *Trojan Women* criticizes Agamemnon for having ‘destroyed what he loved on behalf of what he most hated’ (ἐχθίστων ὑπερ | τὰ φίλτατ’ ὄλεσ’, 370–1), leaving his family to gratify his brother for a woman’s sake (372), and for pursuing a woman who left her husband willingly (373). Cassandra also argues that the Greek victory is meaningless and that the Trojans have the only true glory (374–405).

⁷⁶ The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* likens marriage to rape by portraying Persephone’s marriage to Hades, contracted with Zeus’s consent, as rape from the female perspective. See N. DeBloois, ‘Rape, marriage, or death?: Perspectives in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*’, *PhQ* 76 (1997), 245–62. Cassandra goes further by referring to a rape that is in no way a legal marriage (i.e. not enacted with her male relatives’ consent) as a marriage.

to Agamemnon similarly conflates marriage and slavery, since she refers to Agamemnon as 'master husband' (δεσπότην πόσιν, 1118) and to herself as 'slave bride' (δμοίδος νύμφης, 1123), implying an equivalence between 'husband' and 'master' and between 'slave' and 'bride'. δεσπότην πόσιν highlights Cassandra's unwillingness to be sexually subjugated by a man, and her hatred of marriage in general. Furthermore, Cassandra describes how, after her apotheosis, she will become a divinity fundamentally opposed to marriage as an institution.⁷⁷ After death she will become a goddess who aids women fleeing from marriage (1126–40), and she tells how she will cause girls to be deprived of marriage (παίδαξ ἐστερημέναξ γάμων, 1145) through the practice of sending Locrian maidens each year to Athena's temple at Troy to atone for the rape committed by Ajax.⁷⁸ When she becomes a goddess, her maiden followers will dress as the Erinyes, bearing rods and painting their faces red (1137–40). The garb of the Furies is appropriate for girls who refuse marriage, since the Erinyes themselves are virgins who resist patriarchal rule.⁷⁹

This link between Cassandra and the Erinyes in the *Alexandra* highlights how her refusal of marriage and male sexual advances aligns her with the challenge to the patriarchal/Olympian order represented by Clytemnestra and the Furies in the *Oresteia*. Whereas Aeschylus presents the subjugation of male to female through marriage as being as necessary to the proper functioning of the cosmos as the subjugation of the chthonic to the Olympian and of chaos to order, the figure of Cassandra in the mythological tradition embodies female resistance to patriarchal hegemony through her refusal to accept masculine sexual domination. She is thus a dangerously disruptive figure, comparable to the monsters that threaten the rule of Zeus.

The guard's descriptions of Cassandra at the beginning and end of the poem in which he identifies her with a series of monstrous females including the Sirens (1463) and the Sphinx (7, 1465) highlight how she is viewed as monstrous from the masculine perspective, both because of her 'unnatural' virginity and because of her disturbing and incomprehensible prophecies.⁸⁰ However, Cassandra's own presentation of certain female monsters suggests that she also identifies herself with them. At line 669, she calls Scylla an Ἐρινύξ μξισπάρθενοξ κύων, an 'Erinyes who is half-maiden and half-dog'. Similarly, in her description of the Sirens, Cassandra emphasizes their virginity by referring to them as 'girls' (κούραξ, 712; κόρηξ, 719; ὄρνιθόπαιδοξ, 731).⁸¹ By referring to Scylla and the Sirens as 'maidens', Cassandra humanizes them and suggests an affinity between them and herself. The title of Erinyes also associates Scylla with Cassandra and her followers, who are themselves both virgins and Erinyes.

Cassandra's presentation of the Sirens as well seems designed to highlight parallels between them and herself.⁸² The guard describes Cassandra as having an αἰόλον στόμα ('changeable mouth', 4), while Cassandra describes the Sirens as singing an αἰόλω μέλει ('changeable song', 671). In the *Alexandra*, the Sirens die because Odysseus evades

⁷⁷ For Cassandra's apotheosis in the *Alexandra*, see lines 1126–40.

⁷⁸ For the Locrian Maidens, see Hornblower (n. 1), 405–12.

⁷⁹ For the 'sterile' virginity of the Erinyes in the *Oresteia*, see Zeitlin (n. 9), 159. For the deified Cassandra and her Erinyes followers as symbols of 'perverse femininity' in the *Alexandra*, see Sistakou (n. 4), 151.

⁸⁰ Sistakou (n. 4), 135. Cf. A. Looijenga, 'Unrolling the *Alexandra*: the allusive messenger-speech of Lycophron's prologue and epilogue', in C. Cusset and É. Prioux (edd.), *Lycophron: éclats d'obscurité* (Saint-Etienne, 2009), 59–80.

⁸¹ For the Sirens as virgins like Cassandra, see Hornblower (n. 1), 276.

⁸² Cf. Hornblower (n. 1), 121, 276, 292.

being captured by their song and they are compelled by fate to throw themselves into the sea (712–14).⁸³ They, like Cassandra, are female figures who are destroyed because they failed to influence the actions of male figures with their utterances. The Sirens are twice likened to nightingales (ὠιδόνων, 653; ὠιδών, 670), symbols of female mourning.⁸⁴ This appellation suggests some degree of sympathy on Cassandra's part: female figures likened to birds in the *Alexandra* are generally tragic victims of male aggression.⁸⁵ For example, Cassandra calls her sisters Laodice and Polyxena nightingales (ὠιδόνας, 314) when describing their deaths. Furthermore, the description of Cassandra's spirit leaving her body in death is eerily reminiscent of the death of the Sirens. The Sirens are described as 'diving toward the Tyrrhenian Sea on wings' (Τυρρηρικὸν πρὸς κύμα δυπούσας περοῖς, 715), while Cassandra rises 'floating in the air on wings' (ἠνεμομένη περοῖς, 1119). In these parallel passages, dying virgins move through the gulf of the air 'by means of wings' (περοῖς), the Sirens descending while Cassandra ascends. In death, Cassandra seems to take on the hybrid form of the monsters to whom the guard compared her. The Erinyes, too, are sometimes portrayed as winged, as when Orestes in the *Iphigenia in Tauris* describes the Fury rushing at him as 'rowing with her wings' (περοῖς ἐρέσσει, 289).⁸⁶ In her winged ascension, Cassandra can be seen not just as a Siren but as an Erinyes, doubly monstrous and triumphant.

This story pattern of a young woman preyed on by men who transcends her oppression through apotheosis, the crucial culmination of Cassandra's own narrative about herself, is also repeated a number of times throughout the poem in her narration of other figures. Iphigenia, another victim of Agamemnon, undergoes the same transformation from slain girl to terrifying chthonic deity and foreshadows Cassandra's own fate. The Sirens and Scylla, monsters whom Cassandra has specifically designated as 'maidens', similarly achieve divinity and immortality. The Sirens will be given a divine afterlife, worshipped as goddesses on the coast of Italy (717–31).⁸⁷ Scylla, Cassandra tells us, was killed by Hercules, but was then restored to life by her father (44–9). The poem implies that Scylla after her resurrection is immortal, since she does not 'tremble at Leptynis, the underworld goddess' (Λέπτυνιν οὐ τρέμουσαν, οὐδαίαν θεόν, 49).⁸⁸ In the *Alexandra*, Cassandra not only seems to identify with slain monstrous females and to regard them as worthy of sympathy, but also

⁸³ Lycophron appears to allude to a variant of the Siren mythology in which they are fated to die if they are ever cheated of their prey. This version of the story appears for the first time in the *Alexandra* (Hornblower [n. 1], 292).

⁸⁴ For the nightingale as emblematic of female lament, see N. Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, transl. C. Pache (Ithaca, NY, 1998), 59. For Cassandra as a female mourner in the *Alexandra*, see Hornblower (n. 1), 127–8.

⁸⁵ E. Aston, *Mixanthrōpoi: Animal-Human Hybrid Deities in Greek Religion* (Liège, 2011), 75; Hornblower (n. 1), 292. Cf. Cassandra calling herself a dove (φάσσα, 357) as she is raped by Ajax. This characterization of the Sirens as female victims of a male figure is heightened by Cassandra's statement that Odysseus will 'kill' (κτενεῖ, 712) them. Male aggressors are conversely often depicted as birds of prey, e.g. *Alex.* 260: Achilles as an eagle; 357: Ajax as a vulture; possibly also Zeus as vulture (but meaning swan) in *Alex.* 88.

⁸⁶ For winged Erinyes, see P.J. Finglass, 'Erinyes or hundred-hander? Pindar, fr. 52i(a).19–21 Snell–Maehler = B3.25–7 Rutherford (*Paeon* 8a)', *ZPE* 154 (2005), 40–2, at 42 n. 27. This passage is also a possible intertext for *Alex.* 1119 given Cassandra's association with the Erinyes and the dative plural περοῖς.

⁸⁷ The Siren Parthenope, for example, is described after her death as an οἰωνὸν θεάν, a 'bird goddess' (721). As with Cassandra's own posthumous cult, the distinction between hero/tomb cult and the worship of the gods becomes blurred.

⁸⁸ Leptynis is a title of Persephone (Hornblower [n. 1], 134), here a metonymic reference to death.

includes them as part of her own narrative of resistance and empowerment, making them virgins who have escaped male violence in the same way that Cassandra will enable her future worshippers to do.

Through the transformation and apotheosis of Cassandra, Iphigenia and other monstrous maidens, the *Alexandra* presents a significant negation of the pattern found in the *Theogony* and repeated figuratively in the *Oresteia*, wherein monsters are systematically eliminated by heroes to bring order to the cosmos.⁸⁹ The monstrous feminine is not eliminated by masculine violence or brought under patriarchal control, but instead rises again to new life and power. Similarly, unlike in the *Oresteia* where Cassandra sides with Agamemnon and patriarchy over chthonic resisting females, the Cassandra of the *Alexandra* is firmly on the side of the monsters. The *Alexandra* thus produces not just an alternative cosmogony but an undoing of the Olympian order itself: the monstrous feminine escapes containment and attains freedom.

CONCLUSION

The (from the Greek perspective) perverse upending of traditional hierarchies in the *Alexandra* examined in this article is not just an exercise in Hellenistic ingenuity, but also has political implications. The hostility towards the Greeks in the poem is paired with the glorification of Rome, probably reflecting a political agenda of flattery directed towards the rising power of the Roman empire, possibly by an author with ties to southern Italy.⁹⁰ However, tying Agamemnon to Zeus and systematically denigrating him may also criticize the tendency of Hellenistic monarchs to associate themselves with the king of the gods.⁹¹ If the traditional date for the poem is correct and the *Alexandra* was written in early third-century B.C.E. Alexandria, we might even read into the text a specific criticism of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who was linked with Zeus in various laudatory poems by Callimachus, Theocritus and others.⁹² Such criticism of the supposed divinity of Hellenistic kingship might appeal to the staunchly anti-monarchical citizens of the Roman Republic. Thus we may see the *Alexandra* functioning as both a darkly Hellenistic rereading of traditional myths and as a subtle piece of political propaganda arguing for Roman superiority.

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⁸⁹ Clay (n. 6). For Cassandra's 'serene future' (*un avvenire sereno*) in the *Alexandra* in contrast to her story ending in death in Aeschylus and Euripides, see S. Mazzoldi, *Cassandra, la vergine e l'indovina. Identità di un personaggio da Omero all'Ellenismo* (Pisa, 2001), 252.

⁹⁰ For an overview of questions of date, authorship and relationship to Rome, see Hornblower (n. 1), 36–49; S. Hornblower, *Lycophron's Alexandra, Rome, and the Hellenistic World* (Oxford, 2018); A. Rozokoki, *The Negative Presentation of the Greeks in Lycophron's Alexandra and the Dating of the Poem* (Athens, 2019).

⁹¹ O. Murray, 'Philosophy and monarchy in the Hellenistic world', in T. Rajak (ed.), *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers* (Berkeley, 2007), 13–28, at 23.

⁹² M. Fantuzzi and R. Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge, 2002), 353; R. Strootman, 'Literature and the kings', in J. Clauss and M. Cuypers (edd.), *A Companion to Hellenistic Literature* (Oxford, 2010), 30–45.