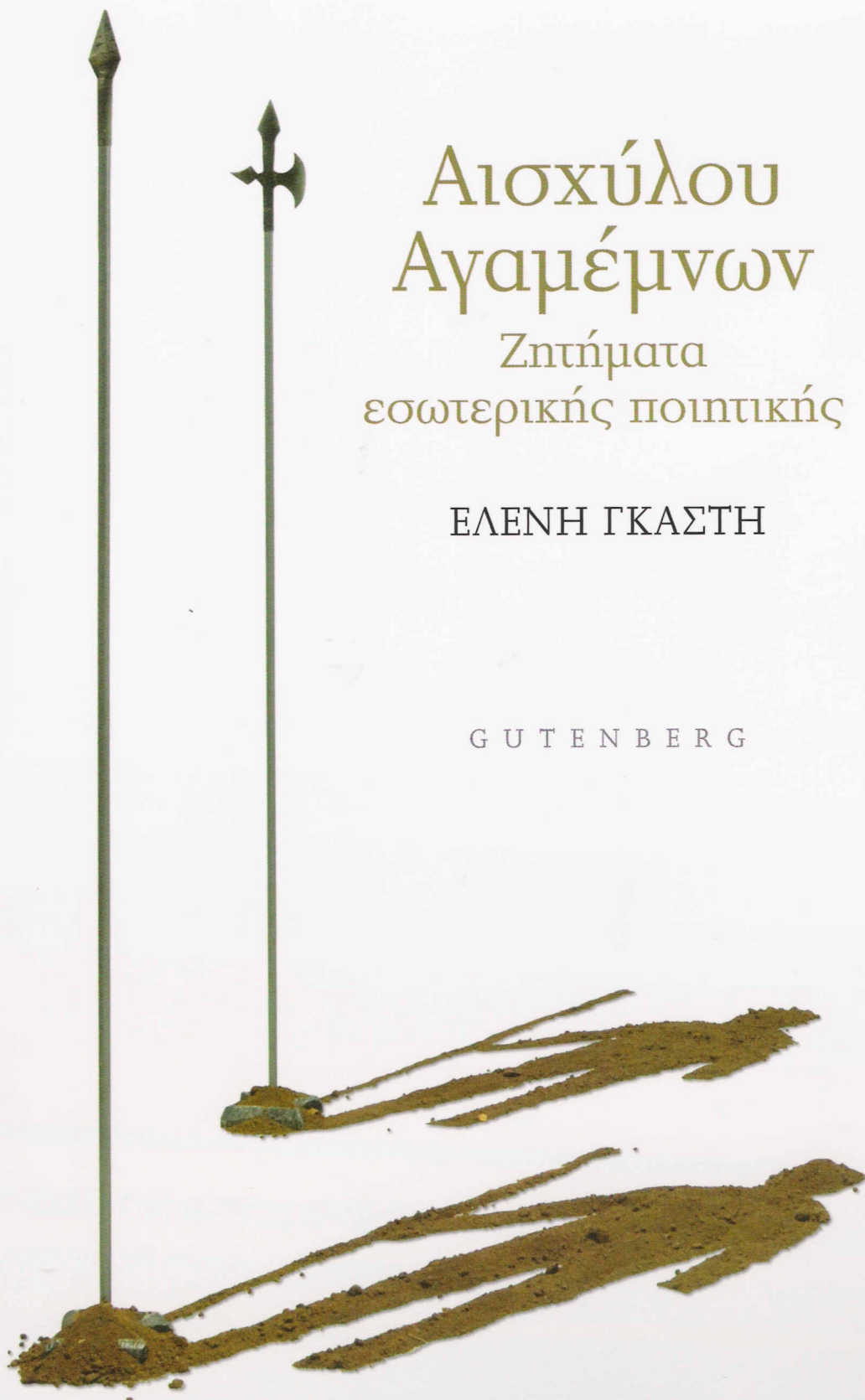


# Αισχύλου Αγαμέμνων

Ζητήματα  
εσωτερικής ποιητικής

ΕΛΕΝΗ ΓΚΑΣΤΗ

G U T E N B E R G



## SUMMARY

### Poetic self-consciousness in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

This study is intended to examine all those neglected elements involving the construction of a self-conscious scheme, as an implicit statement of poetics embedded within *Agamemnon's* dramatic structure. In an effort to look more closely at the playwright's poetics the present study takes the form of an episode-by-episode examination of the play, with focus placed on poetic self-awareness giving special attention to issues such as the conditions of poetic creativity (*Agamemnon* raises questions about inspiration, the use of the mythological tradition as a means of providing the audience with the necessary epistemological security, intertextuality and intratextuality), authorial presence and audience response. In so doing, Aeschylus participates in a larger conversation about the tragedy as mimetic art and about catharsis as a pattern of theatrical response by re-examining questions involving the ontological essence of poetry and language.

Though Aeschylus frequently makes reference to his art, these poetic self-references are oblique and far subtler than in any other play of Sophocles or Euripides. I suggest that such a metatheatrical perspective can open up new ways of interpreting Aeschylus' dramaturgy, since scholarship has not insisted on this aspect of his work, with the exception of two short articles one of Untersteiner (1952) and one of Wilson & Taplin (1993); besides the fundamental work of Lanata (1963) on Preplatonic Poetics and Jakob's study (1998) on the Poetics of Greek Tragedy are confined to the examination of the standard passages from *Agamemnon*, i.e. lines 104-107 and 975-996. This inquiry thus engages the techniques of close-reading in the service of a text-centered analysis of *Agamemnon* in an effort to further explore Aeschylus' aesthetic self-consciousness



through a reevaluation of the standard «poetological» passages on the one hand and to provide helpful observations regarding self-reference in this particular play on the other.

What follows it is a schematic overview of the conclusions reached throughout this study: 1) I have tried to offer an explication of the metapoetic potential of terms such as *χάρις*, *πρᾶξις*, *τέλος*. This type of metapoetic self-consciousness much concerned with inspiration (*χάρις* = divine origin of the poetic creativity) and audience reception (*Agam.* 354 *χάρις πόνων*) may have been one albeit oblique means open to the tragic poet to engage in the debate about the ordering of the plot (*πρᾶξις*) and its narrative economy that necessitates the end (*τέλος*).

2) The dynamic use of the Homeric intertexts and the emphasis given by Aeschylus to the well-known poetological terms such as *Μῆνις* and *Ἔρις* suggest that *Agamemnon* shows a self-consciousness not only about the technical parameters of its structure but also about the active relationship between narrative and audience. By setting in motion the intertextual process Aeschylus demands from his audience to notice the manner of the creation of the text and evaluate that manner against the predecessor text.

3) The representation of Cassandra's passionate inspiration reaches deepest in the reconstruction of the process of poetic creation. Cassandra's prophetic madness is a powerful image of poetic inspiration but no less telling for the construction of audience response. On our view Cassandra's scene read as *mise en abyme* or as «mirror-text» foregrounds important events of the trilogy as a whole by revealing its poetic self-assertiveness and calls for the audience's intellectual appreciation of the poet's craft. Thus Cassandra's scene functions as a programmatic passage that reveals various aspects of the poet's personal excellence (memory as the basic poetic mechanism, poetic wisdom and skill, authorial control recognized in dramatic economy and in the use of self-referential deixis) and it is to be read as an authorial or authoritative reality.

4) Of particular interest are the ways in which *Agamemnon* draws attention to its own «playness» by including the character of Clytemnestra as a metatheatrical figure, i.e. as an internal actor and a doubly theatrical figure who plays a role within her role. Aeschylus also displays theatrical self-consciousness through the use of words recalling the theater and its conventions to the minds of the audi-

ence. By subverting even temporarily the theatrical conventions in lines 1346-1371 Aeschylus creates a commentary on generic expectations and on the performative function of the tragic Chorus. These metadramatic comments call attention to the poet's role as creator of a dramatic construct.

In trying to define Aeschylus' conception of poetry, we must note that he generally does not value self-expression per se, but this is not to say that as a poet he was unconscious or unconcerned for his art. Although no single portion of this study can claim that Aeschylus sought to elaborate a systematic poetic theory, *Agamemnon* appropriated and explored various poetological problems. In his dramatization of a myth of conflict and suffering such as that of the Arteids, Aeschylus addresses issues of politics, religion and ethics in ways that overlap with early Greek poetics.