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RECONCILIATORY REVISIONISM IN COSTANZA CASATI'S *CLYTEMNESTRA* (2023): REFIGURING HOMERIC *ARETÉ* AND *MĒTIS* THROUGH THE DIALOGICS OF GENDER AND GENRE

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This article critically examines Costanza Casati's approach to rewriting key classical hypotexts in *Clytemnestra* (2024). These texts include Homer's the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Euripides' *Electra* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. The analysis is theoretically grounded on the dialogue between gender and genre, serving both as a lens for understanding Casati's literary intervention within the broader reception of Clytemnestra and as a means of articulating her feminist stance within mythological revisionism. I position *Clytemnestra* as a major development in a longstanding humanising tendency —one that begins with Homer's fleeting mention of her in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, expands in tragic poetry, and culminates in Casati's novel— by further amplifying the character's story and voice. Central to this analysis is the concept of refiguration, which explores how Casati reimagines Clytemnestra's past as a Spartan princess, resignifies her *mētis* from a tool of deceit

to a means of female agency, and transforms the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra from acts of vengeance into acts of compassion by situating Clytemnestra within a framework of female heroism that draws upon the heroic code of conduct in the *Iliad*. The key findings illustrate what I term Casati's reconciliatory revisionism —characterised by canon expansion, source regeneration, and character rehabilitation— which unfolds through a three-step process: engaging in dialogue with classical sources, incorporating archetypes that have shaped Clytemnestra's reception, and achieving reconciliation on multiple levels.

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Keywords: genre; refiguration; reconciliation; Clytemnestra; Costanza Casati.

1. Introduction

Once dismissed as a passing literary trend, the recent proliferation of adaptations of Greek and Roman myths has now matured into what Clark terms "a new literary genre" (2024). Within this burgeoning genre, Clytemnestra has inspired numerous retellings, with authors foregrounding her perspective and positioning her as the central figure in *Clytemnestra: The Mother's Blade* (2017) by Grossack and Underwood, *Clytemnestra's Last Day* (2017) by Katz, *A Thousand Ships* (2020) by Haynes, *Daughters of Sparta* (2021) by Heywood, *A Spartan's Sorrow* (2022) by Lynn, *Elektra* (2022) by Saint, *Clytemnestra* (2023) by Casati, and *Clytemnestra's Bind* (2023) by Wilson. This expanding body of work marks a particularly prolific phase in the contemporary reception of the Homeric and classical Clytemnestras.

Contemporary mythological retellings have become a significant area of literary and scholarly inquiry, attracting growing critical attention for their role in reinterpreting the classical tradition within the framework of classical reception studies. The doctoral theses of MacMillan (2019) and Judge (2022) have played a crucial role in analysing modern rewritings of classical myths through a feminist lens. Cáceres and Soldevila characterise these adaptations

as "postmodern narratives" (2023, 65; my translation). In contrast, Szmigiero (2023) argues that they should be understood as new metanarratives rather than mere counternarratives, interpreting classical rewritings through post-postmodern aesthetics. The critical study of mythological retellings from a feminist perspective within the field of classical reception has been led internationally and prolifically by Cox and Theodorakopoulos, whose work primarily examines contemporary female authors' engagements with Homer's epics (2013a, 2013b 2019). Wilson, a classicist and "the first woman to have translated the *Odyssey* complete into English" (2019, 291) has further emphasised the pivotal role of female translators in the reception of the *Odyssey*, a "text which inscribes and valorises androcentric values" (2019, 291). Hauser re-examines the roles of Homeric women by drawing on archaeological discoveries in *Mythica* (due April 2025). Cox has also examined the presence of Virgil (2011) and Ovid (2018) in contemporary women's writing, while Theodorakopoulos (2012) provides a broader perspective on women's writing and the classical tradition. Authors from this new wave of mythological reimaginings have also contributed to the critical analysis of their own and other novels in various publications, such as Haynes's *Pandora's Jar* (2020) and *Divine Might* (2023).

The lack of research on contemporary rewritings of Clytemnestra's myth substantiates Cox and Theodorakopoulos's argument that "the unprecedented momentum with which women writers have taken charge of classical reception in the last two decades has been largely overlooked in academic circles" (2013a), a neglect that continues to persist within critical discourse. Since such rewritings are classified as a genre, I propose an integrated theoretical framework that combines gender and genre-focused approaches within classical reception studies, contributing to the revitalisation of genre studies as a means of approaching the classical reception (Bär and Hauser 2020; Cheney and Hardie 2012; Hurst 2020). While the scholars mentioned above have employed genre studies to trace a genealogy of classical reception, my approach shifts the focus to the act of generic reception as a critical site of exploration. This perspective aligns with reception theory, which posits that "meaning is realised at the point of reception"

(Martindale 1993). Just as there is no "originary meaning wholly free of subsequent accretions" (Martindale 1993, 7) in hypotexts, classical genres similarly lack fixed, immutable characteristics, evolving through processes of "transformation which occurs in the course of evolution" (Opacky, quoted in Duff 2000, 123). The evolutionary approach to genre formation is key to understanding Casati's *Clytemnestra* within the broader reception history of the character. I argue that Casati's novel engages with its sources —Homer's the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Euripides' *Electra* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*— as part of a shared project between ancient and modern authors to humanise Clytemnestra and refigure her voice and myth. This humanising tendency can be traced through the dialogics of genre, providing a space to engage with the classical tradition. As genres evolve —from epic to tragedy, and from tragedy to novel— the distinctive features of each shape Clytemnestra's myth, illustrating how this evolution has contributed to her increasing richness and the growing depth of her character across different literary forms.

In contrast to epic and tragic poetry, the novel —which Bakhtin identified as the 'dominant genre' of the modern era[1]— most fully exploits this tendency due to its idiosyncrasies. Embracing dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia, and subversion, the novel facilitates intertextual dialogues. Feminist appropriations of Bakhtin's theories, particularly the concept of feminist dialogics (Bauer 1988), provide a critical framework for understanding how Casati's novel interacts with the classical canon, articulates revisionist goals within the broader context of mythological reinterpretation, and reimagines Clytemnestra. Through dialogism, Casati engages ancient sources, reworking epic and tragic narratives to challenge their authoritative, often androcentric perspectives. As

[1] Although contemporary authors in this new wave of retellings predominantly favour the novel, it is important to recognise that, throughout the history of reception, both male and female writers have extensively revisited mythological narratives through a range of other genres, including poetry and drama, with these genres also contributing to the development of fully rounded characters.

a polyphonic figure, Clytemnestra embodies her classical antecedents while asserting a new, unified voice. Her portrayal, shaped by heteroglossia, reflects the contradictory discourses that have historically informed her reception. Ultimately, by placing Clytemnestra at the centre of the novel, Casati harnesses the subversive potential of the genre, transforming her from a tragic antagonist into a heroine of modern fiction. The concept of refiguration —understood both as "the adaptation of a legend or myth by the addition of new features" and as the creation of a new "paradigm for subsequent receptions" (Hardwick 2003, 14)— serves as the guiding framework for the following analysis.

1.1. Addressing historical reception problems[2]

Komar's monograph, *Clytemnestra: Revenge or Reconciliation?* (2003), remains the most authoritative study on the factors that have inspired adaptations and reinterpretations of Clytemnestra's myth from the late 1970s to the 1990s. During this period, there was a surge in adaptations of her myth aimed at reclaiming her as a feminist icon. The influences shaping the contemporary reception of Clytemnestra, however, differ significantly from those that informed her reinterpretation in this earlier phase, as the desire of contemporary authors to articulate 'herstory' responds to the need to challenge and correct the misinterpretations she has endured throughout literary history.[3] Casati asserts that her "first reaction to

[2] Although space precludes a thorough examination of Clytemnestra's reduction to the 'bad wife' archetype, it is important to note other literary traditions that reinforce this portrayal. In Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies, figures such as Gertrude in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the Duchess in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* reflect Clytemnestra's defiance of patriarchal norms, often leading to tragic outcomes (Dawson and McHardy 2018).

[3] Claire Heywood articulates her motivation for writing *Daughters of Sparta* as a desire "to rehabilitate Helen's reputation, to vindicate her for the blame that's put on her for running away, for causing the war" (Heywood, direct message to author, April 3, 2024). Similarly, Hannah Lynn explained her interest in rewriting Clytemnestra's story in *A*

[Clytemnestra's] story was just rage" (2023). Her anger, however, stemmed not only from "all the things that Clytemnestra endured in the myth" but, more significantly, from "how she was perceived by modern audiences" (Casati, 2023). Consequently, this frustration became the principal impetus behind Casati's rewriting, which sought to challenge the erroneous belief that she lacked a voice in the main sources for her novel.

Although Clytemnestra is only briefly mentioned in the *Iliad* (Book 1) and the *Odyssey* (Books 3 and 11) and lacks both a distinct voice and direct speech, Homer's epics nevertheless present a female character rich in interpretative possibilities. This is evidenced by the fact that these epics served as the primary hypotexts for the later classical tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles,

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Spartan's Sorrow by highlighting her focus on "the lesser-heard perspectives. The voices of the people, in particular women, who played such vital roles in these stories and yet are treated as little more than anecdotes. No one's life is anecdotal, and all voices deserve a chance to be heard" (Lynn, direct message to author, November 1, 2023). Susan C. Wilson makes a compelling argument, asserting: "I am interested in characters who have been unfairly judged. From at least Homer until very recently, storytellers have consistently represented Clytemnestra as the ultimate wicked woman. [...] There's nothing more to say. [...] *Clytemnestra's Bind* is the story of this journey" (Wilson, direct message to author, January 10, 2024). Alice Underwood and Victoria Grossack, authors of *Clytemnestra: The Mother's Blade* "felt that Clytemnestra had been maligned for millennia, in part because she was primarily treated as an instrument in the story of Agamemnon. Even people familiar with the *Oresteia* generally know little about Clytemnestra's back story and have no idea that she came to be Agamemnon's wife because he killed her first husband and her first child. That seems pretty important in understanding her relationship with Agamemnon and her reaction to Agamemnon killing Iphigenia" (Grossack and Underwood, direct message to author, February 10, 2025). Saint, author of *Elektra* argues that "Clytemnestra is a heroine who feels relatable to the modern reader, someone whose actions while murderous make sense. She is a bereaved mother with no recourse to justice except that she makes for herself" (Saint, direct message to author, October 6, 2023).

and Euripides, each of whom reinterpreted different aspects of her story, thereby collectively deepening the complexity of her character and voice. Anderson's critical analyses of the character of Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia* (1929, 1932) is grounded in the fundamental premise that "Aeschylus presents a superb woman, complex in emotions, direct in action" (1929, 150). As Casati explains, "many people assume that retellings occur because women were one-dimensional," yet, as she affirms, Clytemnestra "wasn't one-dimensional at all" (2023). According to Casati, in the classical sources she draws upon to shape and articulate her voice, Clytemnestra emerges as a multifaceted figure —a richness reflected in the subtitle of Casati's novel. 'Mother' represents a facet of the queen portrayed principally by Euripides in *Iphigenia in Aulis* and more indirectly in *Electra* and Sophocles' *Electra*, all of which build upon Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. 'Monarch' aligns with Aeschylus' vision of Clytemnestra as the embodiment of Argos' political *kratos* (κράτος, power) —one of the few, if not the only, female mythological figures respected by the coryphaeus of the *Agamemnon* (Aeschylus 2002, 258-259[4]) precisely for her role as supreme ruler. 'Murderer' evokes her depiction in Homer's the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and, later, more sordidly, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. The final epithet of Casati's novel, 'Magnificent,' encapsulates these paradigms, collectively constructing a polyphonic character that both recovers and expands upon Clytemnestra's classical portrayal.

In addition to contesting the view that Clytemnestra occupies a secondary role in the sources Casati engages with, she also draws attention to the longstanding tendency, throughout the reception history of Clytemnestra's myth, for her narrative to be subsumed within the dominant mythological framework of Agamemnon. Modern mythographers, following a structural model akin to Hesiod —who locates her story within 'The Returns' (1914, 524)— continue to divide her narrative into two parts. Gantz, widely regarded as one of the most authoritative modern mythographers, adheres to this pattern, situating her within 'Agamemnon' (1993,

[4] Sources are referenced according to the verses rather than the pages of the translations from the selected editions.

664–676), where she is both wife and murderer, and 'The Return from Troy' (1993, 662–717), where she shapes the hero's *nostos*, becoming the personification Agamemnon's *hamartia*, the cause for his "great error or frailty" (Aristotle 1920, 47). She also appears in 'Orestes' Revenge' (1993, 676–686), her story thus culminating in her own death and Orestes' vengeance.

Casati's novel also serves as a critique of archetypal reductionism, which has historically diminished the roles of women in their narratives, constraining their interpretative potential and reducing them to mere stereotypes rather than recognising them as fully developed characters. Casati argues that "over the centuries, these women became clichés and embodiments of the bad wife, the bad lover, the bad mother" (2023). This tendency is evident in Clytemnestra's reception, where she is frequently framed in binary opposition —most notably to Penelope. Although this reductive juxtaposition between Clytemnestra and Penelope can be traced back to Agamemnon's profoundly misogynistic speech in Book 24 of the *Odyssey* (Homer 2018, 201-204), it is important to note that Agamemnon's speech is neither representative of Homer's portrayal of women in his epics nor indicative of the depth that classical tragedians ascribe to Clytemnestra.

Moreover, both artistic and critical approaches of Clytemnestra have often been filtered through the masculine Aeschylean and feminine Senecan archetypes (Hall, 2005), rooted in a Derridean notion of *différance* in male-female attributes. Casati's novel emerges from a critical tradition that has persistently challenged the archetypification of Clytemnestra, most notably articulated by Moss, who asserts that "Medea and Clytemnestra reject the stereotype," (1988, 517) arguing that in the *Oresteia*, "Clytemnestra functions with little dependence upon stereotypical female attributes" (1988, 519). This interpretation sees classical Clytemnestra resisting simplistic categorisation.

As opposed to the tradition stated above, critical approaches to Clytemnestra's reception similarly rely on gendered dichotomies. Winnington-Ingram (1948) provided one of the earliest feminist readings, arguing that the *Oresteia* is structured around a fundamental conflict between the sexes. Zeitlin's influential essay,

The Dynamics of Misogyny (1978), built on this premise, analysing the *Oresteia* through the lens of sexual difference and the male-female opposition embodied in the Agamemnon-Clytemnestra dynamic. Whereas she contends that "a whole series of antitheses form about the polarisation of male and female roles" (1978, 171), Collard argues that Aeschylus is not "mounting an early and deliberate 'feminist' platform with this Clytemnestra," but rather presents her as "an instrument of the retributive family-demon and of the female Furies" (2002, xxvii). These critical analyses remain foundational for feminist readings of Clytemnestra's reception and essential in reclaiming her as a feminist reference within the classical tradition. An interpretative framework based on the male-female dichotomy, however, also risks perpetuating a reductive paradigm that reinforces binary gender constructs, ultimately erasing the fact that "[t]he character of Clytemnestra is constructed [...] around an uncertainty regarding her sexual inscription" (Katz 1994, 89) and overlooking the fluidity that define her character throughout the classical tradition.

2. Costanza Casati's Clytemnestra

Casati demonstrates deep respect for the classical sources, asserting that her novel "is not designed to give Clytemnestra a voice, since she already has a powerful voice in the sources," but rather "humanise the character by expanding on her motives and narrative arc leading to the tragic climax —the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra" (Casati, direct message to author, November 3, 2024). Consequently, it is more fitting to approach Casati's work not merely as an adaptation or a rewriting, but "as an origin story for the *Agamemnon*" (Casati 2023). Casati's artistic manoeuvre to balance tradition and innovation involved exploring the interpretative potential of the silences and gaps —the fissures in meaning— within the sources, alongside the key traits of characterisation and plot, to construct a plausible narrative that, while original, remains faithful and complementary, allowing it to be easily read alongside the hypotexts. Intertextuality, as she argues, serves a clear purpose in the narrative: "to create a narrative that was true to the sources but

also quite fresh" (Casati 2023), preserving the essence of the sources Casati uses while adding new dimensions to the story.

A clear example of refiguration that introduces new elements to the hypotexts, is evident in Casati's invention of Clytemnestra's youth, particularly her adolescent years as a Spartan princess, a narrative that spans from the first chapter, when she is sixteen years old, to chapter 14, concluding with Clytemnestra's arrival in Mycenae. This extensive period, given that the book has 35 chapters, underscores the importance of developing her past to understand her future actions. Casati draws upon studies based on actual historical evidence from classical Sparta to delve into Clytemnestra's Spartan identity. Historical research allows Casati to present Clytemnestra as a Spartan woman, for whom fighting provides a sense of belonging, while hunting is essential for survival. Defeating the weak becomes a necessity rather than a choice and protecting others strengthens her connection to the Spartan social consciousness. Her violence is thus not seen as an inherent trait, but as one of the few resources on which she relies to assert control over her fate and her life, as well as to fight against the threats posed by the patriarchal system in general and by Agamemnon in particular.

A key aspect of refiguration that Casati employs to account for and reinterpret the defining traits of the classical Clytemnestra is the strategic use of parallelism and contrast with other characters. Casati presents Clytemnestra as the antithesis of her mother, Leda, highlighting her defiance of patriarchal authority, unlike Leda's submission to Tyndareus. Her ambition for *kratos* in Mycenae stems from her lineage rather than unnatural ambition. Although Clytemnestra and Agamemnon are opposed to one another, they share a defining trait common to both epic and tragic poetry: ὕβρις (*hubris*, excessive pride). However, while Agamemnon's *ὕβρις* in classical sources stems from his ambition, power, and wealth, in Casati's version, it is driven by the suffering Agamemnon has inflicted upon Clytemnestra. The novel contrasts Clytemnestra's rational and empirical nature with Calchas' μαντική (*mantikē*, prophecy), as seen in the *Iliad* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, revealing oracles as tools Agamemnon and other Trojan War heroes manipulate to maintain power.

The novel's characterisation technique, rooted in mirroring and contrast, underscores the Odyssean nature of Clytemnestra's character. She describes Odysseus as "cunning," "polytropos," and "many-minded" (103)[5] —epithets that are equally applicable to her own persona. Their connection extends beyond shared qualities to a deeper emotional resonance, as Clytemnestra admits an attraction to him, remarking, "[m]aybe in another life, I would have married you" (118). This attraction holds significant weight, as both Tantalus[6] (her first husband), and Odysseus embody alternative forms of masculinity, presenting a stark contrast to the "brut[ish]" (119) figures referred to by Odysseus, such as Agamemnon and Menelaus.

Their shared qualities, however, is not a modern interpretative choice by Casati, but rather has its roots in Homer's the *Odyssey*, where "Odysseus' central quality (μῆτις): 'mētis,' [...] means 'cunning,' 'skill,' 'scheming,' or 'purpose'" (Wilson 2018, 36). As the female counterpart to Odysseus in her craftiness, Clytemnestra's traits are even reflected in the etymology of her name. In Ancient Greek, Clytemnestra (Κλῠταιμνήστρᾱ) is derived from the adjective κλῠτός, ή, όν, meaning "renowned, glorious" (Liddell and Scott 1889, 1564), and the imperfect verb μήδομαι, meaning "to plan and do cunningly or skilfully, to plot, to contrive" (Liddell and Scott 1889, 936). Her name can thus be interpreted as "renowned for her planning or cunning." While in the *Odyssey* Odysseus' *mētis* contributes to his heroism and defines the epic genre, in Clytemnestra's reception history, the same qualities are often used to condemn her as an agent of vengeance.

Although Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides each illuminate different aspects of Clytemnestra —thus shaping a

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[5] Quotations from the primary source are cited by page number only.

[6] Euripides further humanises Clytemnestra in *Iphigenia in Aulis* by adding the crucial motive of Agamemnon's murder of her first husband, Tantalus, and their first-born child. In this play, Clytemnestra confronts Agamemnon with reproach: "you married me against my will, and took me with violence, by killing my former husband Tantalus; and you dashed by baby living to the ground, tearing him violently from my breast" (2017, 1148-1150).

nuanced portrayal in the sources Casati engages with— she remains marked by a certain ambiguity. This is largely due to Aeschylus' construction of a paradigmatic characterisation, in which her cunning (*mētis*) complicates attempts to fully comprehend or sympathise with her. In *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra's words consistently carry a double meaning (Aeschylus 2002, 264-267); her true intentions are concealed (Aeschylus 2002, 587-614) and her language is often characterised as a persuasive trap (Aeschylus 2002, 905-913) used to manipulate her audience (Aeschylus 2002, 885-894). As the embodiment of Peithos, the goddess of persuasion, she openly deceives other characters (Aeschylus 2002, 942). In her novel, Casati reinterprets the *mētis* of Aeschylean Clytemnestra, presenting it not as a negative trait typically associated with manipulation —used to deceive Agamemnon and bring about his death— but as a vital survival strategy, a resource for navigating and resisting the patriarchal structures that seek to subjugate her. Through this reconfiguration, Clytemnestra's *mētis* becomes a means of asserting her agency in a world intent on diminishing her. In doing so, Casati also provides a nuanced context for the Aeschylean *mētis*.

Clytemnestra's *mētis* is central to one of the novel's core themes: perception. Throughout the narrative, the Aeschylean Clytemnestra she constructs is a calculated performance —a strategic deception that conceals a more intricate, multifaceted self, which emerges in private scenes. The narrator lays bare Clytemnestra's deceptions, drawing the audience into the workings of her self-construction. In doing so, the reader is not merely a passive observer or accomplice but the exclusive space in which these multiple Clytemnestras are enacted. As such, only the reader can grasp her true self, engaging in a more authentic reception of the character. Casati's use of *mētis* serves as a metafictional strategy in several interrelated ways. It grants Clytemnestra agency in shaping her reception both within the narrative and in the reader's interpretation. This approach also interrogates the very nature of reception, revealing how narrative structures and reader expectations shape meaning. Ultimately, Casati critiques reductive interpretations of Clytemnestra, defending the multifaceted

portrayals of the character in the sources for her novel against historically entrenched, one-dimensional representations.

More significantly, Casati presents a statement about the ideological function of language in shaping both characterisation and reception. While Homer does not exclusively associate *mētis* with male characters —since it is also linked to female figures such as Athena (daughter of the Titan goddess Metis) and Penelope— it has nonetheless been historically framed more negatively in Clytemnestra's case. By celebrating her *mētis*, paralleling that of Odysseus, Casati critiques the hypocrisy and gendered double standards that underpin the traditional narratives surrounding Clytemnestra —particularly how her actions have been judged harshly in contrast to those of her male counterparts. The unmasking of the double standards used to interpret classical female figures is further achieved through Clytemnestra's irony and scepticism toward the mythological narratives employed by male heroes to justify their ruthless actions. This critique reaches its zenith in Casati's reimagining of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, presented in 'Aulis,' one of the novel's most expansive chapters. In this retelling, Odysseus mirrors his portrayal in Homer's epics, using his *mētis* to support Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, a plot that also undermines Clytemnestra's power. Casati's novel provides a more nuanced exploration of the mother-daughter relationship before the events of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, with Casati employing the conventions of tragic irony to present Clytemnestra as a victim. Despite her acute awareness throughout the narrative, Clytemnestra fails to recognise the signs of Iphigenia's impending murder, unable to grasp the extent to which Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Diomedes are prepared to go in their pursuit of glory. As a result, this chapter becomes one of the moments in which the reader most empathises with the queen, framing the death of Iphigenia as a sufficient motive for Clytemnestra's vengeance. In this light, Odysseus is no hero, but a traitor, and his *mētis* takes on a negative tone. As Casati writes, "Clytemnestra's grave error was to trust. [...] She trusted a man who is a master of exploits. And he tricked her. The many-minded, Odysseus is called, but he is just a traitor" (278).

Casati's interpretation of the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra serves as a notable illustration of how she intertwines

elements of the classical hypotexts while simultaneously providing a novel and alternative perspective on the source material. Her version informs chapter 34, "The Lion Comes Home". The chapter is structured in several parts, each depicting the murder of Agamemnon in Aeschylus's play as a sacrifice, echoing Seaford's critical analysis (1984) of Agamemnon's death as a form of ritual. Furthermore, the narrative is recounted from various perspectives —such as those of Cassandra, Aegisthus and Electra— providing a pluralistic account of the events, with each section narrated by a different character. This polyphonic structure represents a significant act of narrative justice, as Clytemnestra's interpretation does not dominate the others; rather, the events are presented through a more pluralistic approach, in line with a common tendency in contemporary retellings that challenge the notion of a single, authoritative narrative. The murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra in classical sources represent the clearest instance in which Clytemnestra "is a dramatic figure of singular power, one towards whom an audience's feelings shift constantly" (Collard 2002, xxvii) and specifically in the *Agamemnon*, "Aeschylus shows amazing skill in directing sympathy, first toward and then away from Clytemnestra" (Anderson 1929, 153). In Casati's version, however, Agamemnon's death lacks the same tragic emotional weight found in the classical texts, and our empathy remains consistently aligned with Clytemnestra. This is largely because it is foreshadowed by earlier killings committed by Clytemnestra. For instance, Cynisca aids Agamemnon in the murder of Tantalus and Clytemnestra's firstborn child. Clytemnestra also executes two members of the Mycenaean council, Polydamas and Lycomedes, who question her authority as queen and finally, she kills Calchas.

One of the key innovations in Casati's novel is her reinterpretation of Agamemnon's murder in contrast to its portrayal in Homer's epics and later tragic sources. While Aeschylus, in line with his depiction of Clytemnestra as an instrument of vengeance, frames the act as one that perpetuates the cycle of bloodshed within the Atreides and paves the way for Orestes' matricide, Casati presents Agamemnon's death as an act shaped by the heroic code of conduct. As Felson and Slatkin note, "the heroes' mourning is regularly accompanied by active responses of anger and

vengefulness, as well as pity, and often by an acknowledgment of responsibility" (2004, 97). In Casati's novel, Clytemnestra's mourning, grief, and dehumanisation stem primarily from Agamemnon's murder of Tantalus and her children, as well as the damage he has inflicted upon her life and reputation. Following Homeric heroism, her grief —much like Achilles' wrath after the loss of Patroclus— manifests as action, transforming her rage into the catalyst for Agamemnon's death. Thus, Casati does not seek to sanitise or absolve Clytemnestra, nor does she present her as an alternative, exonerated version of the character. Rather, Casati's Clytemnestra, much like her Aeschylean counterpart or the Homeric heroes, fully assumes responsibility for her actions. She does not kill out of mere malice but acts within a recognisable moral system — one that legitimises her actions through the lens of epic justice. Casati exposes a gendered double standard through the heroic code of conduct, paralleling the biased distinctions she highlights in language: Achilles is heroised for avenging Patroclus, while Clytemnestra is condemned for avenging her children. Crucially, Agamemnon's final words —"You can't kill me, […] We are one and the same" (389)— explicitly underscore the deep intertwining of their narratives. Thus, in Casati's vision, Agamemnon's death serves as both a symbolic liberation of Clytemnestra's narrative from the generic confines of epic and tragic poetry, which often reduce her story to one of vengeance through its conception, interpretation, and reception via Agamemnon's *hamartia*.

Casati departs from the classical tradition by removing Clytemnestra's direct involvement in Cassandra's murder. This reinterpretation signifies a role reversal from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, where Aegisthus kills Agamemnon, and the jealous adulteress Clytemnestra is responsible for Cassandra's death. Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* presents these murders offstage, with the audience only hearing violence, creating a narrative silence. Casati, in turn, capitalises on this silence, offering an alternative account in which Aegisthus is the murderer, while Clytemnestra retains agency and indirect responsibility for Cassandra's fate. In a moment of ambiguity, Clytemnestra challenges Aegisthus, asking, "'[w]hy did you have to sacrifice her?' she shouts. [...] 'I thought you wanted her dead,' he says" (392). This reversal is not arbitrary but a

deliberate narrative choice, serving multiple purposes. It demystifies the heroism surrounding Agamemnon's death by Aegisthus, distancing it from the typical heroic duel. By absolving Clytemnestra of responsibility for the murder and developing Clytemnestra's understanding towards Cassandra, Casati refigures her role towards Cassandra as a gesture of female solidarity. This perspective offers a solution to a challenge faced by feminist critics who struggle to reconcile this aspect of the narrative with their analyses of gender dynamics.

Casati frames Clytemnestra's absolution from Cassandra's death through themes of compassion, piety, and empathetic understanding —traits that represent the final phase of the Homeric heroic code and recall Achilles' heroic journey. In the *Iliad*, ἀρετή (virtue or excellence) is central to heroism, encompassing bravery, honour, and compassion. While it denotes general excellence, it often specifically refers to "manly qualities" (Liddell and Scott 1889, 216) in Homer's epics. By ascribing compassion to Clytemnestra, Casati shifts the focus from the conventional male heroic ideal to an alternative female model of heroism. Clytemnestra's evolution bears a striking resemblance to Achilles' transformation in the *Iliad*. Initially defined by martial excellence, Achilles' ἀρετή evolves into a profound capacity for compassion. Similarly, in Casati's novel, Clytemnestra is not merely a figure of retribution, but one who, despite being dehumanised and embodying vengeance, is still capable of feeling pity for Cassandra's suffering. In an early passage, Clytemnestra "wishes she could save Cassandra from further pain" (377). In the *Iliad*'s most enduring and emotionally resonant passage, Achilles, moved by compassion for Priam, chooses to return Hector's body for proper burial rites. Just as Priam elicits compassion from Achilles through empathetic understanding, reminding him of his father Peleus, Clytemnestra's awareness is stirred when Cassandra invokes the memory of her deceased daughter, Iphigenia and, crucially, of herself: "*I was once sitting like you at this very table. Not a slave, but a prisoner in the king's house* (376; italics in the original).

By transferring the Homeric code of conduct to Clytemnestra, Casati's novel offers an alternative and often overlooked reading of the *Iliad*, which has traditionally read as a martial narrative. As

Kokalaki argues, "compassion serves as the synthesis of the *Iliad*, the ultimate resolution of conflict, and the essential step towards the pinnacle of humanity. [Compassion is] the sentiment that elevates [the Greek heroes] to glory" (2020, my translation). Casati's dialogic engagement with tradition is mutually enriching, with her Clytemnestra acting as the vehicle for a compassionate reinterpretation of the *Iliad*. This exemplifies the dialogic nature of reception. "[P]lacing classical and post-classical texts side by side is not just about tracing the influence of the ancient world on later cultures," James contends. Instead "[t]he modern manifestation of myth can become an interpretative tool for probing the complexity of the original narrative" (2011, 2). This may explain the rise of *Iliad* rewritings in contemporary literature —not only to reclaim women's stories but also to emphasise compassion in our "fluid modernity" (Bauman 2000, 6). In terms of the reception of Clytemnestra, Casati's narrative mirrors the redemptive quality granted to Achilles in the *Iliad*. Just as the epic redeems Achilles, the novel redeems Clytemnestra through Cassandra, who serves not as a prophet, but as a redemptive figure.

3. Concluding remarks

Following the analysis of the main refigured events, Casati's approach can now be more confidently articulated. I argue that the term *reconciliatory revisionism* effectively encapsulates Casati's conciliatory approach to the classical canon and her feminist stance in the act of rewriting, defined by canon expansion, source regeneration, and character rehabilitation. Her method of rewriting can be divided into three clearly defined stages. Firstly, there is a clear *dialogism* with classical hypotexts and her reception history. Secondly, within these novels, there is the *inclusion* of the Aeschylean and Senecan archetypes that have shaped and constrained both her literary and critical reception. Ultimately, the novel proves to be a genre that fosters *reconciliation* across multiple, yet interconnected, levels.

From a critical perspective, Casati reconciles the act of rewriting with the authority exerted by canonical source texts —an

act of reconciliation most clear in her conceptualisation of the novel as a genre, which serves as both a space for dialogue with tradition and a means of illuminating it. Rather than subscribing to the notion that the canon must be deconstructed to articulate a female voice, Casati's novel engages in a cross-fertilisation of epic and tragic poetry, simultaneously embracing and reshaping their distinct forms and meanings. Casati's novel manifests as a space where the implications of the classical genres that have articulated Clytemnestra's story coexist, showing how the novel "is unique because of its extreme receptiveness to the primary genres and because it retains as its structural principle [...] the interplay of voices that constitute the materials from which it derives" (Duff 2000, 10). Clytemnestra is a complex heroine —one whose motivations, emotions, and ethical dilemmas place her firmly within the epic tradition while simultaneously subverting it. This idea, in turn, exemplifies two interconnected conclusions: if generic reconciliation, rather than deconstruction, is what initially facilitates and ultimately fulfils the humanisation of Clytemnestra, then this humanisation not only repositions genre at the heart of contemporary critical and theoretical discourse but also demonstrates that epic and tragic poetry can embrace the potential for articulating feminist language and discourse, moving beyond the restrictive readings traditionally applied to these genres.

At an internal level, reconciliation is achieved through the novel's quality as a polyphonic space where the various Clytemnestras envisioned in classical sources coexist. Moreover, the divergent and sometimes contradictory interpretations given to her character are intricately woven together in this narrative, resulting in a complex portrayal that, precisely because of her authenticity, allows the reader to reconcile with one of the most vilified figures in the history of classical reception. It can be concluded, then, that in line with Komar's title question, "*Clytemnestra: Revenge or Reconciliation?*," the concept of reconciliation has evolved from a possibility in the 1990s to a reality in Casati's contemporary Clytemnestra.

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