'Orestes' at the Barbican

On the 22nd March, we were given the fantastic opportunity to see a production of Orestes at the Barbican, performed by a theatre school rather than university students like in 'Oedipus'. We had not studied Orestes and so the plot was unfamiliar to us, a short summary informed us about how Orestes and his sister were facing a death sentence for committing matricide, to which they hatch a terrible plot to alter their fate.

Upon arriving at the theatre, we are overwhelmed by the dark, particularly modern set, with fog trailing behind and two characters already on stage in almost a state of hopelessness. Having little to no knowledge of the story itself, we were entranced by each character, Orestes' madness, Electra's fear for her brother and their fate, with added tension from the ritualistic and chilling singing of the chorus. Orestes is not on our syllabus, but the production itself gave an insight into a modernised version of an Ancient Greek play, without the limitations of the Ancient Greek theatre, and an experience it first-hand rather than simply reading it.

Everyone was, honestly, on the edge of their seats as the play developed, with the two gory, bewitching messenger speeches, that narrated the horrific, violent scenes that occurred offstage. Compared to 'Oedipus', the unified singing and dancing functions of the chorus were more clearly seen, the chorus chant 'slash, slit, kill', stomping their feet creating a sense of foreboding as they anticipate the death of Orestes' aunt. I and everyone else was astounded particularly when the theatre was swallowed by darkness and part of the stage fell back illuminated by golden lights to showcase the god's coming down to solve and intervene in human affairs. (Like the 'deus ex machina' used in the Ancient Greek times, to hold up characters of the god's above the mortals.) The production was overall exhilarating and importantly allowed us to experience the emotions like an Ancient Greek audience.

Alyssa, 12SEA & Santhana 12NHO