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**INTENT AND METHOD: A STUDY OF FEMALE
CHARACTERS
IN AESCHYLEAN AND EURIPIDEAN DRAMA**

by

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**COLBY COLLEGE
WATERVILLE, MAINE
1994**

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Abstract

Aeschylus and Euripides used tragic female characters to help fulfill the purpose of religious celebration and to achieve the motivation of public reaction. The playwrights, revising myths about tragic woman and redefining the Greek definition of appropriate femininity, supported or questioned the very customs which they changed. Originally composed as part of a religious festival for Dionysus, the god of wine, revelry and fertility, the tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides were evaluated by Aristotle. He favored Aeschylus over Euripides, but it appears as if his stipulations for tragic characterization do not apply to Aeschylean and Euripidean women. Modern critics question both Aristotle's analysis in the *Poetics* as well as the tragedies which he evaluated. As part of the assessment of Aeschylus, the character of the Persian Queen, Atossa, appears as a contradiction the images that Greeks maintain of non-Greeks. The *Persians* is discussed in relation to modern criticisms and as on its function as a warning against radical changes in Athenian domestic life. The *Oresteia*, a trilogy, also charts the importance of an atypical woman in Aeschylean tragedy, and how this role, Clytaemnestra, represents an extreme example of the natural and necessary evolution of families, households and kingdoms. In contrast to Aeschylus' plea to retain *nomoi* (traditional custom and law), Euripides' tragedy, the *Medea*, demonstrates the importance of a family and a country to provide security, especially for women. Medea's abandonment by Jason and subsequent desperation drives her to commit murder in the hope of revenge. Ultimately, Euripides advocates changes in social convention away from the alienation of non-Greek, non-citizens, and females. Euripides is, unfortunately, tagged a misogynist by some in this tragedy and another example— the *Hippolytus*. Euripides' Phaedra becomes entangled in a scheme of divine vengeance and ultimately commits suicide in an attempt to avoid societal shame. Far from treatises of hate, Euripidean

women take advantage of the little power they possess within a constrictive social system. While both Aeschylus and Euripides revise customary images and expectations of women in the context of religiously-motivated drama, one playwright intends to maintain civic order and the other intends to challenge the secular norm.

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An Introduction to Aeschylean and Euripidean Intent and Method

Aeschylus and Euripides employed tragic female characters, as they did male ones, to serve the function of religious celebration through spiritual reflection and to fulfill their secondary purpose of inspiring personal reaction to social convention. While both playwrights consciously manipulated common perceptions of women and the Greek concept of femininity, neither Aeschylus nor Euripides employed female roles as specifically discussing the situation of women in Athens and the rest of the ancient world; Aeschylus and Euripides portrayed their tragic characters as representations of the effects of Fate as controlled by the gods' whims and fulfilled by human actions. This relationship between the divine and the mortal affects the experience among all human beings; Aeschylus and Euripides sought to define the human responsibility to political process and social construction in fifth-century Athens.

Within this religious context, Aeschylus's and Euripides's choices of female characters illustrates the human reaction to restriction; whether by law or by custom, all human beings are bound to certain behaviors and beliefs, and the experience of women in fifth-century Athens represents such a regulated situation. Aeschylus and Euripides recognized this confinement, and they used the experience of women to comment upon the political and social conventions of fifth-century Athens. Both tragedians depicted atypical women reacting to plausible, but extreme, situations.

Aeschylus employed unusual images of women, defying expectations of foreign women as impious and ignoble and emphasizing destruction caused by aggressive and vengeful women. Such characters serve as examples for the need to maintain Athenian custom, particularly political institutions. Aeschylus's portrayal of Atossa, the Persian queen, supports his condemnation of radical

changes manifested in Athenian domestic policy; the unexpected "Greekness" of this Persian noble connects the fate of Greece with the fate of Persia. His depiction of Clytaemnestra also defies assumptions; Aeschylus magnifies the Homeric image of a vengeful queen to illustrate the destructive forces which threaten the *oikos*' stability.¹ In both the *Persians* and the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus redefines convention and myth in order to maintain that very tradition which he reinvents.

Euripides, too, perverts accepted perceptions by emphasizing the pain of displaced women and exaggerating the power of female sexuality. His characters question- instead of perpetuate, as Aeschylus did-- the validity of convention, particularly social values. Euripides emphasizes the jealousy of Medea, Jason's abandoned wife, to reevaluate social expectations; she is trapped, without marital, familial or national security, by circumstances beyond her control. And Phaedra, the lusty stepmother, shows the futility of regulating personal relationships with laws; divine will (in this play, Aphrodite's doing) controls more than human legislation could ever hope to limit. In both the *Medea* and the *Hippolytus*, Euripides revised feminine images as a means of questioning these traditions. While both Aeschylus and Euripides may or may not have agreed with the common perceptions of women, they manipulated, in their tragedies, these accepted perceptions to symbolize their acceptance and skepticism of both the boundaries of human existence and the breadth of human experience.

Evidence for the secular concerns of Aeschylus and the social questions of Euripides can be found within their tragedies, as well as the historical context in which they occurred. I limit my discussion of Aeschylean and Euripidean

¹I use *oikos* to refer to the household, its family members, the established hierarchy among relatives, and the interaction between its members.

intent and method to six tragedies and focus upon the "mortal" female roles; I will examine Aeschylus's intent in the *Persians* and how he achieves it with his portrayal of Atossa, and I will do the same with the *Oresteia* (the *Agamemnon*, the *Libation Bearers* and the *Furies*) and his depiction of Clytaemnestra. Euripides's purpose and his methods will be illustrated with Medea in the *Medea* and Phaedra in the *Hippolytus*.²

²I concentrate upon tragedies and do not analyze satyr-plays or the depiction of goddesses in tragedy because the scope of my research and length of this paper could not allow an adequate appraisal.

Chapter One

The Dionysian Festival: Tragedy's Origins and the Implications for Aeschylus and Euripides

Before understanding the secular interests of Aeschylus and the social concerns of Euripides, their shared and primary purpose must be addressed first: tragic performances served as part of an annual religious celebration. This religious context is crucial to understanding the secondary intention of Aeschylus and Euripides-- social commentary. Both Aeschylus and Euripides revised the traditional tragic composition, and this change in tragedy's structure reflects the tragedians' thematic innovations. Furthermore, the public nature of the tragic performances legitimizes their secular concerns.

By the fifth-century, the Dionysia had evolved into a structured event. It occurred during the winter and early spring of each year, and three authors presented four plays each as part of a larger celebration to Dionysus, the God of wine, revelry, and fertility.³ Festivities for Dionysus, symbolized by the goat, began as songs, perhaps of mythical stories or bawdy fantasies. The word "tragedy" is derived from *tragodoi* or these beginning choruses who impersonated goats, *tragos*, to honor their fertility god.⁴ Sir Paul Harvey attributes Arion with inventing choral odes which were later developed in the Peloponnese, especially at Sicyon.⁵ Harvey further credits Thespis with introducing the satyr element during sixth-century Athenian festivals. However,

³The Lenaea, another festival, occurred during mid-winter and also honored Dionysus. This theatrical celebration emphasized comedy and was attended only by Athenians, whereas the Dionysia involved Greeks from throughout the country.

⁴"The subjects of tragedy...were probably at first connected with the story of Dionysus; later their range was extended to include stories of heroes; they were only rarely drawn from history. We have the record of only one tragedy (by Agathon) where the plot and character were entirely imaginary" (Harvey, p. 434).

⁵"In its remote beginnings Greek Tragedy was a song and dance performed by a Chorus, nothing more; and at its later and decadent stages, after the death of Euripides, the choral song and dance had sunk to the status of interludes marking divisions in the action of the play" (Jones, p. 67).

Aeschylean and Euripidean choruses served as intermediaries between the plays' actions and the audiences' responses.

By the time Aeschylus and Euripides were composing their plays during the fifth-century, the sets of plays included a tragic trilogy, initially linked thematically, and a fourth play, the comic satyr play. Judges voted for prize placements of the plays and awarded these honors according to lot. Quite significantly, this method involves an ordered Fate and it reflects similar dramatic themes in the tragedies, particularly the pattern of conflicts between divine order and human will. Such dramatic formulas originated from mythical traditions and festival precedents. Every tragedy began with a *prologos*, or introductory monologue or dialogue which establishes the context and sometimes the actions of the following scenes. The *parados* followed and involved the Chorus's entrance and first odes. *Episodia* named the scenes within the play and these "acts" were divided by *stasima*, choral songs. Lastly, the *exodus* marked the final scene and the departure of the Chorus.

Although Athenian audiences retained the Homeric tradition of epic heroes and the lyrical past, dramatic innovations did occur. Dramas usually employed one actor and a chorus, but Aeschylus modified this convention by introducing a second actor.⁶ The two actors now provided less stilted scenes and more flexibility in plot; more characters could be portrayed, longer dialogues exchanged, and smoother transitions between "acts." Although innovative in his changes in actors, Aeschylus retained traditional costumes; Harvey describes the casts as outfitted in "masks, headdresses, robes and thick-soled shoes."⁷ Euripides, however, adopted more casual dress, perhaps emphasizing the realistic and common aspects of his characters. Euripides

⁶Aeschylus also includes two Choruses in the third play of the *Oresteia*, the *Furies*.

⁷Harvey, p.435.

decreased, too, the importance of choral odes and allowed the actors more dialogue.⁸ These alterations in tragic style reflect the other variations that Aeschylus and Euripides applied to their thematic intentions.

The importance of the Chorus relates to the social dynamics of fifth-century tragedy, especially for Aeschylus and Euripides.⁹ The Chorus' performance depended upon a beneficiary, the *choregos*, to finance the costumes and fund the rehearsals. Although the state allocated actors for each production and used state funds for the actors' salaries, the *choregos* covered all other production costs. Furthermore, a victorious drama brought fame to the author and reflected the wealth and status of the patron. Such notoriety for the tragedian and the *choregos* illustrates how drama involved political and social aspects and the Dionysian Festival inspired more than religious celebration.

Greek Women in the Dramatic Audience

The members of the audience whom Aeschylus and Euripides directed their messages also determines the intent of their dramas. The playwrights identified those people who would be watching the tragedies and would then project their image towards those audience members. All citizens attended the dramatic performances of the Dionysian Festival and the government funded admission for those Greeks too poor to pay. Both Aeschylus and Euripides directed their opinions to these Greek men, familiar with the Homeric epics and tradition of myth. Furthermore, Aeschylus and Euripides could assume these

⁸Oates claims, p. xx, that "...in Euripides, particularly in his later plays, the Chorus merely sings lyrical interludes which have little or no coherence with the play." I accept Oates's idea that Euripides reduced the Chorus. I reject, however, that Euripides alienated the Chorus from the plot; Euripides chose to focus upon the struggles of the individual characters, relying on the audience's familiarity with the myths to understand the plot. Subsequently, the need for the Chorus decreased as the flexibility of two actors increased plot manipulation.

⁹"...the circumstances surrounding the original performances of these plays indicate a great deal of state control and supervision as well as religious significance...The public and civic nature of the festival also ensures its effectiveness as a vehicle of ideas for collective identity and action" (Taaffe, p. 3).

men spoke of politics, laws, and society in the *agora*, and the playwrights may have addressed issues recently debated in the market place-meeting area. They might have hoped, too, that the ideas of their tragedies might be included in such discussions.

While we are assured of the presence of males in the audience, the participation of women remains debated. We have documentation of women involved in other religious celebrations, such as the *Thesmophoria*, a three day festival during October or November, to celebrate Demeter and Persephone. This festival excluded men, and women participated in secret celebrations of fertility and preservation of crops.¹⁰ If women engaged in such religious events, then it is plausible that they were included in the Dionysia.¹¹ Furthermore, the ancient biography of Aeschylus, *the Life of Aeschylus*, "tells the story that the Chorus of the Furies in the *Eumenides* was so terrific that boys died of fright and women had miscarriages."¹² In order for pregnant women to be so terrified, they must have been in the audience and seen the *Furies*. We may, however, never know for sure if women viewed the tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides. More importantly to my discussion of Aeschylean and Euripidean intent, this ambiguity in the historical record implies that the presence of women in the audience was not noted because their participation or exclusion was not of interest to the Greeks.

Current scholarship favors reappraisal of women's experience in the ancient world.¹³ While this new focus upon women enhances our

¹⁰Euripides's *Bacchae* relates the mysterious religious festivities of women, particularly Dionysian frenzies.

¹¹I must acknowledge that these secret revelries differed from the Dionysia because of they were specifically for women and were private as opposed to the public festivities for Dionysus.

¹²Kitto, p. 233.

¹³Many of the books cited in my "works cited and consulted" section were published within the past ten years; Sarah Pomeroy, a pioneer in the discussion of women in ancient history, began publishing as early as 1975. Considering the longevity of classical scholarship, these books and the ideas in them are quite new.

understanding of the Greeks, there is the danger in deceiving ourselves. This increased interest in the study of women can only yield so much information; for the most part, history records remarkable individuals and extraordinary achievements.¹⁴ While such women existed in Athens and the rest of the ancient world, few were in the position to accomplish the unusual, and even fewer were educated or encouraged enough to note their own importance. The very fact that male sources supply our limited knowledge of women in the ancient world illustrates both how women received little recognition or self-representation as well as the opportunity for achievement.

Modern historians must also acknowledge personal bias. The wish to prove equality, or at least less inequality, among the sexes in ancient Greece does not ensure the actuality of equality: "all historians of ancient Greek society have projected onto it the problems and contradictions of their own world."¹⁵ Chauvinism (and racism) in scholarship have skewed our vision of the human experience in ancient Greece and throughout history, but we must recognize that fifth-century Athens perpetuated class and gender distinctions.¹⁶ Without discrediting my own conclusions in this paper, such recent scholarship motivated my initial research; classicists apply modern feminist theory to ancient history and texts to elicit more information, applicable to the historical record and the modern experience. We must be wary, however, not to allow our hopes to overpower our evidence. My interpretations of Aeschylus and Euripides intend to reconcile these scholastic trends with my reactions to secondary literary criticism and my analysis of texts and historical facts.

¹⁴I include, in my notes of my discussion of the *Hippolytus*, some examples of extraordinary women.

¹⁵Sagan, p. 3. This idea seems to apply to all historians, regardless of their field of specialty.

¹⁶Sagan, p. 3, p. 245. Aristotle perpetuates this idea in his discussion of characterization in the *Poetics*. Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* addresses the racist and ethnocentric opinions in classical scholarship.

Chapter Two

Aristotle's *Poetics*: An Ancient Reaction to Aeschylus and Euripides

Few ancient Greek opinions about drama remain, and Aristotle's incomplete treatise on tragedy and comedy provides us with the most information. Within this commentary, Aristotle tells the evolution of epic, tragedy, and comedy and he discusses the four varieties of tragedy: complex, calamity, character, and spectacle. He explains, too, the important elements- reversal and discovery- within the six components of tragedy: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song. He applies this curriculum to determine if a play is a tragedy, if it is simple or complex one, and if it evokes emotions such as fear and pity in the audience.

Critics note the difficulty in applying Aristotle's concepts to actual dramas. Subsequently, Aristotle's commentary is not universally accepted: "It is widely felt, and sometimes stated that Aristotle's theory of Tragedy cannot be fitted at all comfortably to the surviving fifth century plays; and this discrepancy is usually explained in one of two ways: by stressing the time gap between the end of classical drama and the writing of the *Poetics*, or by alleging that Aristotle was personally ill-qualified to be a literary critic and theorist."¹⁷ Such criticism holds little merit; Aristotle wrote the *Poetics* with the specific intent to discuss drama, directly mentioning fifth century tragedians such as Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides. If modern critics cannot reconcile Aristotle's definition of tragedy with the remaining dramas, perhaps the awkwardness lies with our lack of information rather than with lapses of time and poor personal qualifications.

¹⁷Jones, p. 50. : "You can see from his [Aristotle's] dry and thin account of the hero's character, when he admired Socrates and had the entire wealth of his creation to draw on, that Aristotle was more than a bit of a scientific pedant" (Jones, pps. 16-17).

Obviously, Aristotle responded to Aeschylean and Euripidean tragedies years after they were performed; Aristotle lived between 384 B.C.- 322 B.C., and Aeschylus's earliest known tragedy, the *Persians*, is dated in 472 B.C. and Euripides's the *Alcestis* at 438 B.C.¹⁸ But this expanse of time cannot account for any difficulties in relating Aristotle's commentary to fifth century drama. Aristotle's hindsight implies both his objectivity to his topics because he was not a contemporary of Aeschylus or Euripides, and his subjectivity to secondary opinions about tragedy. Aristotle may have reacted to others' ideas or incorporated them into his treatise. Furthermore, if applied to modern critics of Aristotle, this concept of time restrictions as a determinant of validity negates, by its very definition, these theories against Aristotle's *Poetics*; if Aristotle's treatise on tragedy, written one hundred years after the dramas, does not "fit comfortably" with its subject (tragedy), then perhaps John Jones's book, published in 1962, cannot "fit comfortably" with its subject (Aristotle's opinion of tragedy).¹⁹ The manipulation of time cannot ensure that ideas will lose their potency. Some opinions fall in and out of favor, but the timeless appeal of Greek tragedy demonstrates the longevity of responses to it.

Criticisms of Aristotle's personal qualifications also lack strength. We cannot absolutely determine the legitimacy of his argument because we have little of others' opinions to compare with his. The *Poetics* remains incomplete, too, because we do not have Aristotle's entire commentary on Greek theater. Therefore, we cannot know if he was incorrect about tragedy and correct about comedy, or more insightful about tragedy than comedy, or absolutely right or wrong about both. The speculation continues; if the plays of Aeschylus and

¹⁸Jones dates the *Poetics* at 335 B.C.

¹⁹If this principle is applied even further, then my reaction, in 1994, to Jones would also be deemed invalid because of the lapse of time between my commentary and my subject. While my reaction to Jones may seem extreme, I wish to emphasize that an argument such as his is not absolute.

Euripides we do possess defy Aristotle's definition, perhaps the lost dramas do adhere to it. Regardless of these problems and possibilities, Aristotle's *Poetics* still remains the source with which to understand the ancient conception of tragedy.

Aristotle Defines Tragedy

Aristotle conceives tragedy as a rhythmic and metrical art evolved from religious celebration and as a manifestation of the human need to reify those emotions and concepts which, although intangible, define our personal experience. True tragedy condenses human existence into a comprehensible episode: "... for tragedy is not a representation of men but of a piece of action, of life, of happiness and unhappiness, which come under the head of action; and the end is aimed at is the representation not of qualities of character but of some action; and while character makes men what they are, it is their actions and experiences that make them happy or unhappy."²⁰ Aristotle further qualifies tragedy when he categorizes drama as demonstrative of the complex, calamity, character and spectacle. Within these tragic types, each should employ plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song to achieve "a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude- by means of language enriched with all kinds of ornament, each used separately in the different parts of the play: it represents men in action, and it does not use narrative; and through pity and fear it effects relief to these and similar

²⁰Fyfe, p. 25. Nussbaum conceives tragedy as such: "[tragedies are] in short, (1) characters engaged in an action that is the deepest importance of their entire lives, and (2) the non-intellectual elements of the human soul. Debate is not an outgrowth of and a response to tragic events: debate and discourse are the event. Inquiry is the action" (Nussbaum, p. 130).

emotions.²¹ The ideal tragedy, complex, most successfully manipulates these components to evoke a catharsis.²²

Aristotle explains that, within an ideal tragic plot of reversal and discovery, the characters reveal the "choice" through their speech and implied action. Aristotle values more what the audience inherently knows before the tragedy and subsequently realizes during the performance more than what the audience sees on stage. He favors descriptions of action rather than the actual representation of that action.²³ As Aristotle conceives tragedy as a representation of human activity, so he envisions verbal description as the best way to convey action.

Defined by the outline of the plot, the ideal character adheres to four characteristics: goodness, appropriateness, likeness, and consistency. A "good" character implies a person with accepted and admirable qualities, such as devotion to the gods, appreciation of Greece, loyalty to one's family, and interest in personal excellence and virtue. The reversal of this good character's fortune occurs because of a fatal flaw, usually *hubris*, and such arrogance and irresponsibility to the gods inevitably provokes divine anger: "This is the sort of man who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, and yet it is through no badness or villainy of his own that he falls into misfortune."²⁴ Aristotle notes that women may be portrayed as "good" characters but will remain inferior to men, as will slaves: " But this [goodness] is relative to each class of people. Even a woman

²¹Fyfe, p. 23. Jones, p. 21.

²²Oliver Taplin elaborates: "so if the audience is not moved, then the tragedy, however intellectual, is a total failure; if its passions are aroused, but in a thoughtless, amorphous way, then it is merely a bad tragedy, sensational, melodramatic... By enthraling its audience tragedy unites emotion and meaning so as to give us an experience which, by creating a perspective on the misfortunes of human life, helps us to understand and cope with those misfortunes" (Segal, pps. 11-12).

²³Aristotle's preference may explain his negativity towards Euripides who employed "artificial" means to resolve tragedies such as the *Medea*. Other ancient writers, such as Aristophanes, also criticize Euripides for contrived resolution.

²⁴Fyfe, p. 47.

is 'good' and so is a slave, although it may be said that a woman is an inferior thing and a slave beneath consideration."²⁵ Perhaps he implies that the "goodness" of all people who are not free, Greek males is relative, and these men represent the most "good" with all others' merits must be measured in comparison.

Aristotle also requires that characters appear "appropriate." They should comply with expected gender roles; specifically, women should not appear "manly or clever". None should seem atypical. Similarly, he specifies that characters be "like" in their depiction; Fyfe translates "like" to imply "like the traditional person," shown according to their mythical representations or as customarily envisioned. Lastly, characterization must remain consistent, and, if originally conceived as traditionally inconsistent, this character must continue to be "consistently inconsistent." Perhaps goodness, appropriateness and consistency are connected; if one adheres to the expected role, then one would constantly maintain these traits in that consistency is also expected of the good and appropriate character. Possibly goodness and appropriateness include consistency. But Aristotle distinguishes these four qualities as separate, and because of this distinction, we do not know if a good, traditional, and appropriate character who behaves inconsistently is preferable to a constantly bad, radical, and inappropriate character. Perhaps good, traditional, and appropriate characters always behave consistently, but Aristotle does not categorize these qualities according to importance; we will not know, if such a characterization was portrayed, which traits Aristotle would prefer.

Apart from these specifications for plot and characterization, Aristotle also discusses the linguistic requirements of tragedy. He lists the final four elements as separate- diction, thought, spectacle and song. Proper word choice and use

²⁵Fyfe, p. 55.

of metaphor help define the quality of a tragedy. These components appear more clearly connected with the each other, and his lengthy grammatical commentary lends to understanding that "the clearest diction is that made up of ordinary words."²⁶ Commonplace words, enhanced by spectacle and song, affect the thought, or "the ability to say what is possible and appropriate."²⁷ Ultimately, these linguistic methods and devices enable the characters to discover and discuss the reversal of fortune represented by the plot. Ideally, all six elements complement each other and inspire the audience to reflect upon the representative action.

²⁶Fyfe, p. 85.

²⁷Fyfe, p. 27.

Aeschylus and Euripides Within the Scheme of Aristotelian Tragedy

Aristotle constructs his definition of tragedy as a means to organize the vast history of Greek literature.²⁸ Although he establishes general specifications to determine the quality of drama, he also addresses directly the playwrights. Aristotle supports Aeschylus but finds fault in many aspects of Euripides's talent, or what he perceives as a lack of talent.²⁹ Applying his own conventions of tragedy, Aristotle claims that most Euripidean choruses do not share in the action, rendering them irrelevant. Later discussion of the *Hippolytus* and the *Medea* will illustrate how the Chorus participates in the tragic action, but in both plays the Chorus actively responds to the plights of the heroines.

Aside from this general disdain, Aristotle cites Iphigenia in *Iphigenia in Tauris* as an inconsistent character, but will not concede that perhaps Euripides adheres to Aristotle's "consistently inconsistent" method of characterization.³⁰ Traditionally, myths concerning the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra differ; in Aeschylus's version, Iphigenia remains unaware that her father, as in other versions, tricked her to falling at the sacrificial altar by telling her she was to wed Achilles. Conflicting stories exist about her fate, too. Some relate that Agamemnon does slaughter her, while others tell that Artemis rescued her. Such discrepancies in myth may explain Euripides's failure to portray her consistently.

²⁸Aristotle concludes his discussion of epic and tragedy by favoring tragedy because it is better at releasing "pity, fear and other such emotions in the audience": "...the better of the two [epic and tragedy] is tragedy" (Fyfe, p. 117).

²⁹Fyfe, p. 47. Aristotle does not refute Euripidean drama as "tragic" but will not accept it as "tragedy"-- poor tragedy.

³⁰I should note that most characters in tragedy have different myths surrounding them, and the tragedians' choice to adopt or adapt one, all, or none of these myths could qualify as a "consistently inconsistent" portrayal; by employing one or none of the traditions, the character is constantly different from the undeveloped myths. And by using all of the myths, the character must constantly change to fulfill all the images.

Aristotle also objects to Euripides's treatment of Medea.³¹ He finds the killing of her sons to be "ineffective" and the ending to be "inartistic." Again, Euripides reworks accepted myths in the *Medea*, but surely Medea's angry torment and subsequent crimes effectively evoke fear and pity in the audience, terror at her fierceness and compassion for her pain. The alleged awkwardness of the *machina* can also be seen as Euripidean innovation; Aristotle states that the "poet must show invention and make skillful use of the tradition."³² Perhaps Euripides intends to expand upon the existing means of introducing the divine element into the mortal drama.

Aristotle thinks that in the *Orestes*, Euripides depicts Menelaus as "needlessly depraved." In the discussion of characterization, Aristotle does not specifically qualify what constitutes an "appropriate" role aside from what is not suitable for a woman. This criticism of Euripides's Menelaus seems subjective beyond the already personal conception of Aristotle's ideal tragedy.

Similarly, Aristotle compares the linguistic skill of Aeschylus and Euripides: "for instance, Aeschylus and Euripides wrote the same iambic line with the change of one word only, a rare word in place of one made ordinary by custom, yet the one line [of Aeschylus's] seems beautiful and the other [Euripides's] trivial."³³ Citing Aeschylean diction and thought as more plausible because the words are more "commonplace," Aristotle sees Euripides's word choices as pretentious. Instead of writing "eats," Euripides uses "feasts upon." Furthermore, Aristotle implies that Euripides's extraordinary words do not effectively imitate natural speech, and, subsequently, Euripides does not

³¹Later in my paper, I provide a lengthy discussion of Medea and Euripides's treatment of her, as well as other female characters.

³²Fyfe, p. 51.

³³Fyfe, p. 89.

properly use metaphor, "by far the greatest thing."³⁴ Again, Aristotle extends beyond his originally subjective treatise to apply an even more personalized critique.

At times, it seems that Aristotle's definition of tragedy applies to Aeschylean and Euripidean drama, regardless of Aristotle's slanderous criticism of Euripides. Yet, certain methods of female characterization in these tragedians' dramas defy Aristotle's stipulations. Overall, the culminating elements of Aeschylean and Euripidean tragedies evoke fear and pity in the audience. Not only does Aristotle accept Aeschylus's linguistic style as reflective of true tragedy, but vague descriptions of tragedy also allow for Euripides to be considered more favorably than Aristotle's specific criticisms suggest. Towards the conclusion of his treatise, Aristotle writes: "since the poet represents life, as a painter does or any other maker of likenesses, he must always represent one of three things- either things as they were or are; or as they are said and seem to be; or things as they should be."³⁵ Following this broad artistic intent, Aristotle concedes that "Euripides portrayed them [people] as they are."³⁶ Perhaps the discrepancy from his earlier criticisms implies, as some modern critics claim, a lack of personal qualification on Aristotle's part. Such contradictions may also suggest that Aristotle supports both the intent and method of Aeschylean drama but accepts the purpose the Euripidean drama while objecting to the tragedian's execution.

³⁴Nietzsche refutes Aristotle's disdain for Euripides' word choices, seeing a positive evolution in tragedy: "Through him [Euripides], everyday man pushed his way through the auditorium on to the stage, and the mirror in which only great and bold features had hitherto found expression now show the painful fidelity that also reflected the blemished lines of nature...Euripides taught the people to speak for themselves... In this transformation of ordinary language...it was no longer a mystery how to represent everyday life on stage, and which maxims to use...Euripides was able to pride himself on having portrayed mundane, commonplace, everyday life, which anyone was in the position to judge" (Tanner, pps. 56-57).

³⁵Fyfe, p. 101.

³⁶Fyfe, p. 103.

Regardless of how Aeschylus's and Euripides's plots may be manipulated to adhere to Aristotle's plot specifications, their female characters defy the Aristotelian concept of characterization. These tragedians subvert expected images of women in order to inspire "fear, pity and such emotions" in the audience. Although Aristotle conceived the *Poetics* years after Aeschylus wrote, his requirements do not mesh with Aeschylus's characterization. Aeschylus portrays Atossa, the Persian queen, in the Greek pantheon-- a contradiction of "likeness of a traditional person." One would expect a Persian queen to worship Persian deities. Instead of perpetuating images of "barbarism," Aeschylus envisions Atossa as he would Greek nobility, a woman deserving of respect because of her husband's and son's status, her devotion to the gods, and her loyalty to her family.

Aeschylus's Clytaemnestra, too, toys with characterization conventions; his treatment of this aggressive and conniving woman may be seen as inappropriate because she is both "manly and clever." But Aristotle may not rebuke Aeschylus for this depiction of the murderous queen because she represents the vindictive and plotting wife.³⁷ We cannot know if Aristotle would accept her masculine qualities because tales such as the *Odyssey* portrayed her as such or if he would prefer a newer version adhering to all his traits. Aristotle gives no sense of the hierarchy of characterization techniques, and perhaps this ambiguousness prevents a determination about Clytaemnestra.

Regardless of Aristotle's criticism, Euripides adheres to all the requirements in his treatment of Phaedra in the *Hippolytus*. Aphrodite's jealous scheme against Hippolytus involves the virtuous and "good" Phaedra, rendering her a love-sick liar, through no personal flaw, as part of Aphrodite's

³⁷Aeschylus exaggerates Homer's story in the *Odyssey*; now, instead of Clytaemnestra waiting at home with Aegisthus, her lover who kills Agamemnon, the fifth-century version depicts the adulterous queen as the murderer.

revenge. Phaedra appears appropriately female, although some discussion remains as to how plausible some of her requests are, and depicted according to legend. But she consistently acts as a lustily depraved queen. The actions in the *Hippolytus* successfully evoke horror in reaction to the deaths of Phaedra and Hippolytus, as well as compassion for the characters' plight.

Euripides's Medea, too, initially seems a "good" woman reacting to a reversal of fortune through her husband's wrong-doing not her own personal misbehavior. As with Aeschylus's Clytaemnestra, Euripides portrays Medea as "inappropriately" clever but in accordance to her traditional image as plotting against Jason. The resolution of Medea's revenge-- killing her children to spite Jason-- also seems consistent. Throughout the tragedy, Euripides includes us in Medea's torment and her recognition of her frenzied state of mind, and, although disgusted by the murders, the audience participated in Medea's thoughts which culminated in this extreme event. While Aristotle objects to the awkwardness of Medea's exit, overall, she is part of the audience's release from internalized "fear and pity."

Whether in adherence to traditional imagery or because of literary innovation, Aeschylus and Euripides manipulate atypical feminine roles. These characters may not coincide with Aristotle's contrived image of characterization, but all the women are part of the playwrights' greater attempt to inspire a cathartic reaction in the audience. In hopes of honoring the gods, commenting upon current events, and addressing the human experience, both Aeschylus and Euripides redefine expected roles to fulfill the traditional intent of tragedy.

Chapter Three The *Persians*: Atossa Warns the Greeks

Religious concern within a public context inspired Aeschylus's *Persians* of 472 B.C.³⁸ This play serves as a commentary upon the tenuous relationship between divine response to mortal action and as an example of the gods' possible reaction Greek impropriety, manifested as political reforms in Athens. Aeschylus uses the character of Atossa, the Persian queen, to establish the Persians as worthy opponents of the Greeks and to show that the offended gods caused the Persians' loss; Aeschylus presents Atossa as a noble and pious woman, believing in Greek theology, to create an image of equality between the Greeks and their foe.³⁹ Atossa recognizes the danger of offending Zeus, and her loyalty and distress seem a typically Greek reaction instead of a barbaric one, as if she could be a Greek wife and mother.⁴⁰ The queen illustrates the

³⁸Aeschylus challenged Athenian public consciousness and risked disapproval by producing the *Persians* only eight years after the Persians sacked Athens and razed the Acropolis. Apparently, the Athenians reacted poorly to an earlier treatment of Xerxes' defeat at Salamis; another tragedian, Phrynichos, produced a play, the *Phoinisai*, dealing with the same event and was fined because it was so unsuccessfully received. The reasons for the Athenians' reaction are unclear, as is the actual date of the production. Both George Thomson (p. 309) and Joseph Roisman (p. 22) date the *Phoinisai* at 476 B.C. The significance of Aeschylus' production is that it occurred after the end of the war and after an initial dramatic attempt to discuss the war. We can see how Aeschylus weakened the impact of his historically painful topic by placing the *Persians* second in a non-cohesive tetralogy, between the lost *Phineus* and the *Glaukos Potnieus*, and ending with the satyr play, *Prometheus Pyrrhaeus*.

³⁹"In the fifth century the Persians represented the 'barbarian' *par excellence* and an Athenian was characteristically taught to disdain those habits of luxury that had rendered the mighty kingdom of Darius and Xerxes an adversary whom the Greeks against all odds had successfully vanquished. They had reason to feel confident that they could repel the invader from without, but the real dangers to their survival lay inside their own communities... Persian behaviour, as an image of the exotic, though at times it might attract could also provide a paradigm of what to avoid" (Francis, pps. 3-4). This dichotomy between Greeks and non-Greeks is prevalent throughout Greek history; an excellent example of Greek reluctance towards foreigners is Alexander the Great's attempt to synthesize Macedonian culture and Persian custom. During the late fourth century B.C., the Macedonian court resisted (unsuccessfully) Alexander's efforts to introduce Persian practices.

⁴⁰Podlecki explains "in choosing this contemporary subject, Aeschylus ran a risk; he had to engage the audience in the tragic fate of Xerxes, and this would require a nearly total abstraction from the natural stirrings of pride at their own part in bringing about the defeat of this bitter enemy. They had almost to forget who they were and to concentrate on the common humanity which they shared with their former enemy, a man subject, as are all men, to the *phthonos* of heaven and the vicissitudes of fortune" (Podlecki, p. 8).

similarities between the two powers, and this connection serves as Aeschylus's warning to the Greeks not to offend the gods with arrogance and receive a punishment similar to the Persians'.⁴¹

The *Persians*' as Reaction to Athenian Politics

Unfortunately, Aeschylus's most obviously politically motivated and historically titled drama, the *Persians*, receives the fewest praises: "...*Persae* is not the greatest of the surviving plays of Aeschylus: it may well be the least great."⁴² With this play, however, Aeschylus attempts to show the potentially negative reaction of the gods to what he saw as a perversion of *nomoi*, tradition and lawful custom, by radical factions.⁴³ He addresses the political upheaval following the Persian invasion, which he experienced, and he subsequently questions the fate of Athens following Greece's triumph.

Born in 525 B.C. in Eleusis, an Athenian suburb noted for its sanctuary to Demeter, Aeschylus grew up in the midst of Athens's own artistic, political, philosophical, religious and intellectual maturation. This evolution from mediocre *polis* to magnificent power affected Aeschylus profoundly: "...the Athens in which Aeschylus spent his childhood and early adolescence represented archaic Greek civilization at its acme. In 510 B.C, however, began a series of events, primarily political, which were first to shake and finally disintegrate that brilliant cultural fabric."⁴⁴ Having served in the Persian War at

⁴¹Thomson, p. 311. "Aeschylus then, contemplating the events of the Persian invasion, found in this moral theme the design which, in his view, governed and shaped them. He has accordingly knitted together the historical facts to make them reveal this underlying moral and religious design, and the shape the moral scheme has impressed upon the story survives as the fundamental tragic plot" (Owen, p. 27).

⁴²Winnington-Ingram, p. 5. Broadhead, too, debates the merits of the *Persians*, and he ultimately defines specific scenes as "tragic" or a "farce."

⁴³*Nomos* literally means "law," but also implies the maintenance of and adherence to traditional Greek ideals. *Nomoi* serves as the plural, "laws."

⁴⁴Herington, p. 20. Fagles agrees: "His story, the *Oresteia*, resounds with national purpose" (Fagles, p. 20). 510 B.C. is significant because it marks the end of the Pisistratidae tyranny.

Salamis and Plataea and seeing his brother, Cynefeirus, killed at Marathon, Aeschylus survived the beginnings of Pericles's revolution but remembered what Athens was before.⁴⁵ Although born into a good family and guaranteed a secure future, the tragedian reacted to the changes in Athenian life.

While Aeschylus may have lauded Pericles's artistic and literary philanthropy, S.J. Lurge believes Aeschylus supported Pericles's foreign policy-perpetuating Athenian democratic ideals-- but rejected domestic reformations.⁴⁶ Lurge explains that Aeschylus opposed changes in requirements for candidacy as archon and objected to Pericles's abolition of the board of *nomophylakes*, the legislative controllers and democratic functionaries; Anthony Podlecki asserts that Aeschylus's negative response to the *nomophylakes* stemmed from the earlier replacement of the *Aeoropagus*, the Athenian court, by this new board. As Aeschylus valued democracy, he may have also reacted badly to Pericles's payment for jurors, making the jury more vulnerable to bribery. Furthermore, a decree in 451 B.C. altered qualifications for citizenship, requiring both parents to be Athenians. Aeschylus might have concluded that the implications of population fluctuations extended to other Athenian traditions; citizenship included the right to prosecute in court, and Aeschylus attributed the sporadic floods and decreases in legal activity to reflect the variations in population.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Herington describes Aeschylus amidst the transition: "...but during the last decades of Aeschylus's life that [Athenian] society, and with it that [mythical] language, were being transformed with an abruptness absolutely unparalleled in the ancient world, whether Greek or Eastern" (Herington, p.15).

⁴⁶Podlecki, pps. 93, 96-98. Interestingly, Pericles served as Aeschylus' *choregos* for the *Persians* production: "the *choregos* [sic] assigned to Aeschylus that year [472 B.C.] was Pericles...Auspiciously for their sponsor, Aeschylus's plays won first prize... The assignments of poets to *choregoi* appears not to have been random, at least not always" (Kagan, p. 36). This implies Aeschylus' interaction with politicians and his interest in Pericles in particular.

⁴⁷Pomeroy believes this law was "prompted by the realization that the number of citizens was too greatly increased. This same law was later relaxed [repealed in 411 B.C.] but reinstated by Nikomenes of Aristophon of the Thirty Tyrants when the population had dwindled and it was necessary to increase the number of citizens" (Women's History and Ancient History, p. 66). Apparently, this law was enforced and revoked according to need; in 411 B.C., the Athenians

Although Aeschylus could not have foreseen these reforms when he produced the *Persians* in 472 B.C., he could have understood the radical changes in Athenian life; Pericles altered Athenian domestic policy and encouraged an artistic and intellectual renaissance. While Aeschylus's craft benefited from these changes, the tragedian recognized the principle of challenging the *nomoi*, the tradition, and simultaneously acknowledges and rebukes this mortal power in the *Persians*.⁴⁸ Podlecki goes so far as to suggest that Aeschylus chose the Persian War as a dramatic topic because the playwright hoped to make an unfavorable comparison between Pericles and his predecessor, Themistocles, "the champion of all of Greece."⁴⁹ Evoking the memory of his personal friend and ally, Themistocles, Podlecki believes that Aeschylus bolsters the image of this savior of the Persian War and diminishes the greatness of Pericles.⁵⁰ It is an extreme interpretation, but indicative of Aeschylus's public interests as manifested in his drama.

The *Persians* Within the Greek Pantheon

Instead of a statement against Pericles as an individual, the *Persians* serve, according to Whitney Oates, as a study of "human affairs as a means of throwing light upon the problems of religion and theology, which he [Aeschylus] considered more universal and significant."⁵¹ Aeschylus appeals to the Greek

were forced to fight in Decelea for the entire year instead of just during the summer. Subsequently, the population figures required boosting because Athens had also been involved in the 415 "Sicily Expedition." The Athenians used citizenship regulations to increase or decrease population counts according to military and political requirements.

⁴⁸Herington says "...mere human actions and passions may have been seen as ultimately shaking the entire fabric of that universe, as dividing the ultimate powers of Earth and Sky themselves" (Herington, p. 11).

⁴⁹Plutarch writes, too, that "no man was ever more ambitious than Themistocles" (Scott-Kilvert, p. 81).

⁵⁰Podlecki, p. 26.

⁵¹Oates, p. xxx.

tradition of respect for the gods.⁵² He employs Homeric ideals in the *Persians*, especially with the dignified figure of Atossa, as an example to discourage what he perceives as a lack of *arete*, virtuous excellence, and the rebuttal of *nomoi*, traditional law and custom. Robert Fagles states that Aeschylus celebrated Greek "compassion and lasting self-control." Such temperance reaps honor and mercy from the gods.

Aeschylus connects the *Persians* and the Greek cultures when he constructs a Greek theology for the *Persians*.⁵³ This application of Greek ideals and practices in the Persian Court provides Aeschylus with the opportunity to make comparisons with the *Persians'* fate and the possibility of such a downfall of the Greeks.⁵⁴ Aeschylus depicts all the *Persians* as worshippers of Zeus, but it is Queen Atossa who acts as a suppliant. Fearing her son has died in combat, Atossa, beseeches the Chorus to help assuage her fright. Aeschylus presents the Persian Court as fiercely loyal, a respectable characteristic:

Atossa: "Advise my reasons, *Persians*, old sureties:
All my gains with your counsel lie."
Chorus: "O Queen of Persia be assured that never
Twice dost thou to tell us word or deed,
Which our willing strength can guide, for we
Are loyal, whom thou dost call thy counselors"
(lines 171-176).⁵⁵

⁵²"Aeschylus is going to interpret the [Athenian] campaign, not in terms of Athena saving her city, but of Zeus maintaining moral order in the world" (Winnington-Ingram, p. 3).

⁵³Helen North supports Moses Finley's idea that Aeschylus depicts the *Persians* as the antithesis of the Greeks (North, p. 33). While I agree with her that "Aeschylus draws in Xerxes as a paradigm of *hubris*," I disagree that, and will subsequently prove my position in this paper, Aeschylus "makes an unequivocal contrast between the barbarians whom he represents and the Greeks whose triumph at Salamis and Plataea is due to their possession of the virtues that their enemies lack."

⁵⁴Edith Hall's *Inventing the Barbarian* asserts that Aeschylus helped develop and perpetuate the chasm between Greeks and non-Greeks, and she claims that the *Persians* represents an ethnocentric and conventional depiction. I disagree because Aeschylus altered tragic composition as well as myths, and this innovation reflects his simultaneous affirmation of convention through his unconventional depiction. Furthermore, Aeschylus's capacity to sympathize with "barbarians," especially Cassandra, is apparent in the *Oresteia*, which I discuss later.

⁵⁵This translation is from Oates, as are all the citations from the *Persians*, unless otherwise noted.

They alleviate her concerns by recommending that she offer libations to the gods, specifically Zeus. Furthermore, the Persian Court suggests that the Queen be neither "excessively fearful [n]or confident about Xerxes' fate." She agrees to this advice, so Greek in its balanced appraisal and hope for equilibrium. Aeschylus continues to portray the Persians within a Greek context. Going before the Olympians, Atossa maintains a realistic optimism:

"...I know I pray
For what is done and gone, but a brighter
Fortune, in time to come, may there be"
(lines 521-530).

Aeschylus places the Persians within a pantheon familiar to the Greeks and endows the "barbarians" with similar ideologies, implying that perhaps the Persian acceptance of Greek divinity deals more with the Greek conception of spirituality than their foes'. This intentional depiction of the Persians within the Olympian realm shows Zeus as omnipotent, imposing a universal system of morality and fate:

Chorus: "Deceitful deception of god-
What mortal man shall avoid it?
With nimbleness, deftness and speed,
Whose leaping foot shall escape it?
Benign and coaxing at first
It leads us astray into nets which
No mortal is able to slip
Whose doom we can never flee" (lines 93-101).

Such a lamentation illustrates divine control over all humanity and would have been just as fitting an expression of despair for a Greek chorus. Aeschylus first constructs this universal system of gods and mortals to link the Persians and

Greeks under a common theology, then the tragedian displays the Persians as human in their responses. He creates a less barbaric image of the Greek foe and emphasizes their shared emotions.

The Greek Perception of Humanity in the *Persians*

Aeschylus appeals to Greek memories of loss and bereavement, establishing the Persians as capable of the same feelings as the Greeks. Subsequently, if the Greeks can recognize this common humanity, perhaps they will realize the potential for a shared destiny. When the Chorus learns of Persia's fall later in the play, they bemoan the fate of the country. Their song of grieving women left at home evoke images of Greek widows tearing at their hair in traditional mourning ritual:

"Beds with longing fill with tears,
Persian wives in softness weep;
Each her armed furious lord
Dismissed with gentle love and grief,
Left all alone in the yoke" (lines 131-135).

As the Persians sob, so the Greeks might remember their own tears and the unity it inspired among the Greek states.⁵⁶ As if the Persian reaction is interchangeable with the Greek, Aeschylus composes speeches to reflect universal pain endured by both the victors' and losers' wives:

"Many with delicate hands,
Rending their veils,
Drenching their breasts,
Swollen with tears,
Sharing their woe,

⁵⁶The Persian War was one of the few times when Greece fought as a unified force. The Peloponnesian War, a battle for power between Athens and Sparta, represents how rarely the Greeks states could organize themselves in a cohesive fashion as a country.

Ladies of Persia
Softly are weeping
Desiring each
Him to behold
Wedded but lately,
Couches forsaking,
Soft as their coverlets
(Youth was voluptuous)
Their sorrows, insatiate woe" (lines 536-543).

Having shown the common emotional bond between the Persians and the Greeks, Aeschylus increases this connection with his portrayal of Atossa, personalizing the Persians' dignity as a people and subsequent worthiness as opponents. The Persian queen exemplifies a noble wife and steadfast mother, a woman respected by the Persians and one whom the Greeks should note also.

Atossa's Physical Appearance as a Representation of the Persians' Merit

Aeschylus further validates the Persians as noble and comparable to the Greeks with his treatment of Atossa. With frequent references to her age and status, he characterizes her as a regal queen. The comments about her age add to her image as a resilient and respectable woman. The Chorus lauds Atossa, performing her tasks as a wife as she mourns her husband and as a mother as she waits for her son, with stately epithets:

"O, Most Majestic Queen of Persians,
In ample folds adorned,
Hail, aged Xerxes' mother,
Consort of Darius, hail!
Mistress of the god of the Persians,
Mother of a god thou art..." (lines 155-160).

The Court acknowledges her worth by relating her to revered male figures, the beloved king Darius and the one-admired prince Xerxes. The Greeks would

understand such an association among wives and their prominent male relatives because they evaluated women with similar specifications. Furthermore, Aeschylus has Atossa name herself in such terms: "His [Darius's] queen I'm come." This self-perception links Atossa to her noble Greek counterparts. Lastly, Aeschylus secures the queen's respectability with the notation of her ample "robes." While this may appear an obvious description for a queen, Aeschylus adopts common images of regal Greek woman and applies them to this foreign queen; by virtue of her ordinariness, she looks and acts as Greek royalty would, and her fine dress further equates the Persians and the Greeks by implying a shared appreciation for luxury and acknowledgment of those deserving such wealth.⁵⁷

The Chorus also refers to Atossa as the "light whose splendor equals eyes of gods" (line 202). This Persian queen is equated with the gods, and, having participated in Greek forms of worship to Greek gods, she is compared to Greek deities. With such descriptions, Aeschylus evokes images common in Greek tradition and reinforces the link between Persia and Greece; Homer used epithets attributing divine qualities to "mortal" women. Homer supplies Helen and Nausikaa with appearances like Artemis's or "with the gods' loveliness upon her" (Odyssey, 4.121, 8.457). With Atossa, Aeschylus mimics this Greek custom of describing mortal women as divine in appearance and, subsequently, he links the Persians with Greek tradition.

Atossa's Loyalty as Further Evidence of the Persians' Worth

Aeschylus extends this connection between Persia and Greece when he carefully chooses Atossa's speeches. He accentuates her blind loyalty to her

⁵⁷"He [Aeschylus] creates her [Atossa], however, not after the women from the Trojan legends, but in an Athenian mold" (Keuls, p. 335).

son and this fidelity excuses her ignorance when she questions the Chorus: "My friends, where is Athens said to be?" Her lack of interest in the details of the war affords her the time to concentrate upon her son and his shame. Instead of focusing upon understanding the war as a whole, Atossa devotes herself to knowing only about Xerxes. Such a keen interest in her son epitomizes her respectability as a mother.

Aeschylus equips Atossa with a Greek sense of personal and familial dignity; the public perception of the individual's behavior defines that person's worth. Atossa recognizes Xerxes' *hubris* but refuses to accept it as a personal fault in her son. Rather, external opinions motivated his arrogance:

"Wicked men counseled this [Xerxes's downfall], furious
Xerxes learned, saying you [Darius] acquired wealth
By spear, while he, in cowardice, played
The warrior at home, and multiplied
By nothing his ancestral wealth. So often
These wicked men reproached him [Xerxes], until he
Did plot his martial way toward Greece"
(lines 752-758).

Sensing the pressure her son must endure, Atossa refuses to abandon her princely son. Aeschylus makes clear how admirable this maternal loyalty is; although his loss shamed the royal family and devastated the country, the queen remains steadfast:

"O god! how many sorrows move against me!
But one torment has the deepest fang,
Hearing that dishonor folds about my son
Its robes. But I shall go gather up
Adornments, and try to meet my son.
When evils come upon those we dearly love,
Never shall we betray them" (lines 845-849).

Atossa unflinchingly supports her family, and, never forsaking her child, she fills the country with certain hope: "O for my palace a greater light,/ And after blackest night a whiter day" (lines 300-301). This devotion to the arrogant prince receives encouragement from Darius, but the Persian Court cannot bear the humiliation:

"Oh! alas, Oh! what a great and good life was ours,
Civily ordered, as long as the aged
Ruler of all,
Mild, unconquerable king,
Equal to god,
Darius ruled the land...
Many heroes, Persia's bloom,
Archers, thick array of men,
Myriads have perished...
...Asia kneels" (lines 853-858, 923-927).

Although the country despairs, Darius perpetuates Atossa's maternal love. He acknowledges the cause of Persia's humiliation but still encourages Atossa to comfort the shamed Xerxes:

"And you, aged mother whom Xerxes loves,
after you have gone to your house
and found him splendor that suits a king,
go out to face your son
whose anguish at the fullness of disaster
has torn his bright embroideries
to shredded rags about his body.
But speak kind words in a calming voice.
He will listen only to you and only you can comfort him"
(lines 830-835).⁵⁸

Once again, Aeschylus appeals to this Greek notion of maternal acceptance. Atossa's compassion reflects both her humanity and dignity, subsequently

⁵⁸This quotation comes from Lembke's translation but the rest are from Oates.

bolstering the image of all Persians. Her virtues represent the common merits shared by the Persians and the Greeks.

Atossa and her Reaction to the Persians' Fate as a Warning to the Greeks

According to Aeschylus, the Persians succumb to Athenian forces because of Zeus's systematic enforcement of universal morality, not because the Athenians fought valiantly.⁵⁹ Hearing the anguish of his court and queen, the ghost of Darius appears to explain Zeus' indignation. As Aeschylus depicts Darius as a wise and temperate king, the playwright evokes images of past Persian leaders and Greek memories of similarly grand kings. Atossa's reaction to her husband reinforces his regal image.⁶⁰ When the royal apparition first appears, Atossa, Darius's "aged consort [and] Noble Queen," greets her departed husband, her relief evident:

"O King, exceeding mortal happiness
By mortal fate! How, as long as you beheld
The eyes of sun, you spent, how envied! a blessed
Life like a god's; and now I envy you
Your dying, ere you saw this depth of woe.
Everything, Darius, you will hear
Succinctly: Persia is destroyed" (lines 708-714).

Once Atossa and the Chorus inform Darius of Xerxes's dishonor, the kingly apparition explains the circumstances of his son's downfall. Atossa serves as

⁵⁹The Herald notes that the Persian loss was the will of spurned gods: "Had numbers counted/
The barbarian [Persian] warships would have surely won;/ The Greeks but numbered thirty tens,
and ten/ Apart from these a chosen squadron formed;/ But Xerxes, and this I know full well, a
thousand/ Led; and seven and two hundred ranked/ As queans in swiftness. The count stood
so/ Seemed we unequal?/ Some deity destroyed/ Our host, who weighing down the balance
swung/ The beam of fortune. The gods saved the city/ Of the goddess [Athena]" (lines 339-347).

⁶⁰S.M. Adams views Atossa as "...fulfilling her function as part of the dramatic machinery to bring
on the ghost of Darius" (Segal, p.39).

an audience to Darius's explanation of Xerxes's disrespect and subsequent defeat:

"...The spring
of evil's found: my son in ignorance
Discovered it by youthful pride;
...Mortal though he was,
By folly thought to conquer all the gods
and Neptune" (lines 744-747).

Darius establishes the nature of Xerxes's offense against the gods, and Aeschylus constructs a situation of mortal mistakes and divine retribution, familiar to the Greek audience. Atossa merely absorbs the calm wisdom of her husband's analysis:

"...The lowest depths of woe to suffer, payment
For his pride and godless arrogance.
They [the Persians], invading Greece, left no awe,
They did not hesitate to plunder images
Of gods, and put temples to the torch;
Altars were no more; and statues, like trees,
Were uprooted, torn from their bases
In all confusion. Thus their wickedness
Shall no less make them suffer..." (lines 806-814).⁶¹

Aeschylus applies Greek morality to the Persians, as if to give an example of the destruction of those worthy of success but defiant of the gods. The discussion between Darius and Atossa solidifies the conceptual relationship between the Persians and the Greeks; their similar characteristics provide an apocalyptic connection between their fates, as if Darius's advice to Xerxes might apply to the Athenians' turmoil:

⁶¹Herodotus recorded the campaign of Xerxes, and the historian describes the Persian prince's *hubris* (7.22-7.25). One incident illustrates this arrogance particularly well; Herodotus relates how Xerxes commanded his troops and Greek natives to build a canal at the Isthmus by Mount Athos, by the Greek city of Sane: "as far as my [Herodotus'] guess goes, it was out of mere arrogance that Xerxes made them dig the channel, because he wanted to show his power and leave a memorial behind him. For with no trouble at all it was possible to draw the ships across the isthmus, but instead he bade his men dig a channel" (Greene, *The History: Herodotus*, p. 470).

"Therefore advise
Him [Xerxes], admonished by reason, to be wise,
And cease his boastful temper from
Sinning against the gods" (lines 829-832).⁶²

Aeschylus affirms the idea that as the gods have reacted to improper behavior, they may do so again. The Athenian victory over the Persians represented punishment for Xerxes's *hubris* not reward for Greek superiority. Having created a foreign kingdom within Greek concepts, Aeschylus associates these enemy powers through shared theology, emotion, and social systems. Aeschylus manipulates the figure of Atossa as the revered and noble queen to ensure that the Greek audience recognizes her respectable and human aspects. Once Aeschylus convinces the Greeks of their universal nature, he suggests that the Greeks should fear a fate similar to the Persians if they behave disrespectfully to the gods. Zeus enforces a common morality, and what the tragedian views as a corruption of *nomoi* might be similarly disdained by the gods.

Just as Aeschylus uses the *Persians* as a means to condemn the radical trends in fifth-century Athens and the divine ramifications of such tinkering, he similarly addresses perversion of *nomoi* in the *Oresteia*. Aeschylus does depict Atossa and Clytaemnestra, the main female character in the trilogy to be discussed next, differently. While Aeschylus revamps the image of barbarians in the *Persians*, he revises the image of femininity in the *Agamemnon*, the *Libation Bearers*, and the *Furies*. Instead of a paradigm of queenly grace, motherly devotion, and wifely loyalty, Clytaemnestra appears the antithesis of female virtue. Yet this perverse character seems necessary in the evolution of the *oikos*; just as Aeschylus warns of chaos to follow *hubris* in the *Persians*, so

⁶²"We know well enough that the excess of Xerxes's sacrilege at the sack of Athens brought about his inevitable catastrophe. So too, if a Greek behaves like a Persian, he can expect Zeus *dikaiois* will not spare him merely on account of his Hellenic blood..." (Francis, p. 32).

he illustrates this type of destruction brought about by greedy arrogance. Aeschylus ultimately restores the household's continuity but it is with pain and violence that the *oikos* becomes whole.

Chapter Four

The *Oresteia*: Clytaemnestra as an Agent of the *Oikos*' Evolution

Produced in 458 B.C., Aeschylus's prize-winning trilogy the *Oresteia* consists of the *Agamemnon*, the *Libation Bearers*, and the *Furies*.⁶³ Aeschylus manipulates his characters, the royal descendants of Atreus, to discuss the cyclical corruption and vindication of Natural Order; his treatment of Clytaemnestra symbolizes the phases of the *oikos* and ultimately the *polis* and, through her, we see the inevitable deterioration of relationships, the chaotic pain which follows such destruction, and the glorious rejection of these hardships.⁶⁴ With this infamous queen, the tragedian perverts accepted roles, especially women's, to discuss the morality of personal responsibility for maintaining the "natural" way of the world; Clytaemnestra's evolution throughout the plays illustrates how human lust for adventure, power, and sex can corrupt "good" intentions. Furthermore, these passions contaminate not only the one who seeks them but also those around him, or in this case, her. Ultimately, Aeschylus relies on the gods to vindicate the sins of mortals.

Clytaemnestra's Alleged Motivation

Traditionally, Clytaemnestra murders her husband and his concubine because she grieves for her daughter and hopes to right her death by Agamemnon's hand. Although the Chorus's description of Iphigenia's sacrifice wrenches the heart, Clytaemnestra's motives extend beyond maternal grief; she envies Agamemnon's adventures in Troy and seeks the power which is denied her because of her gender. We cannot, however, completely ignore Aeschylus's

⁶³We do not have the *Proteus*, his satyr play.

⁶⁴Froma I. Zeitlin believes "the *Oresteia*'s program is to trace the evolution of civilization by placing the *polis* at the center of its vision and endowing it with the creative power to coordinate human, natural and divine forces" (Peradotto, p. 159). Fagles, p. 14.

compelling image of Iphigenia, swathed in golden robes, as Agamemnon slashes her throat to appease Artemis:

"The father prayed, called his men to lift her
with strength of hand swept in her robes aloft
and prone above the altar, as you might lift
a goat for sacrifice, with guards
against the lips' sweet edge...
Pouring then to the ground her saffron mantle
she struck the sacrificers with
the eyes' arrow of pity,
lovely as in a painted scene, and striving
to speak..." (lines 231-244).

This image pains the audience and Clytaemnestra legitimately mourns her daughter's death. Usually envisioned as calculating and unfeeling, Clytaemnestra may be capable of maternal love even though she lacks marital devotion. Fagles envisions her as "a mother, human, vulnerable."⁶⁵ Aeschylus exposes Clytaemnestra's tender emotion masked by vehement action; after the queen murders her husband and his concubine, she defiantly admits her crime and explains her motivation to the Chorus. She claims to seek retribution for Agamemnon's treachery and kills her husband as punishment for his crime:

" He filled our cup with evil things unspeakable
and now himself come home has drunk it to the dregs...
he slaughtered like a victim his own child, my pain
grown into love, to charm away the winds of Thrace"
(lines 1396-7,1417-18).

Such emotion cannot be counterfeit, but Clytaemnestra also hints at her objection to Agamemnon's power to make such a choice; she notes that his decision as commander prompted favorable sailing conditions. With this event,

⁶⁵Fagles, p. 41. Clytaemnestra exposes this humanity when she first speaks at Agamemnon's homecoming: "In the lapse of time/ modesty fades; it is human" (lines 857-858).

Aeschylus quietly raises the question of one's loyalty to one's family or one's loyalty to one's country; Agamemnon must decide which of the two he values more, and his anguish is apparent as he chooses the death of his daughter to ensure the lives of his countrymen:

“...the kings
dashed their staves to the ground and could not hold
their tears.
The elder lord [Agamemnon] spoke aloud before them:
'...What of these things goes now without disaster?
How shall I fail my ships
and lose my faith of battle?
For them to urge such sacrifice of innocent blood
angrily- for their wrath is great- it is right. May all be
well yet' ” (lines 211-216).

Agamemnon acts for the good of his soldiers-- they will be able to sail because of this sacrifice. But Clytaemnestra values her family more than her country's safety, and she particularly discusses her personal pain without addressing her daughter's surprise and terror. Clytaemnestra's concerns revolve around her reaction to events without consideration for others. Obviously, her grief motivates Clytaemnestra to react angrily towards her husband, but other factors also inspire the "woman-lioness."

Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus as Lovers

Aeschylus emphasizes Clytaemnestra's sexuality. Characterized as masculine, she appears a dominating character, and such aggressiveness applies to her sexuality. Zeitlin comments that "... the queen's primary motive was maternal vengeance for her child, Iphigenia; her second one was the sexual alliance she contracted with Aegisthus in her husband's absence."⁶⁶

⁶⁶Peradotto, p. 167.

While few question Clytaemnestra's loss of a daughter and her subsequent torment, little suggests that the murdering queen cared for Aegisthus.

Clytaemnestra sought Aegisthus's company for the security he gave her and as a retaliatory affair in response to Agamemnon's infidelities. This adultery serves Clytaemnestra's purposes other than sexual gratification: to have a malleable companion to help with her schemes. Clytaemnestra never praises Aegisthus for his passion nor does she express any fervor of her own. In her speech to the Chorus following the murders, she refers to her lover in terms of a reliable companion and in the context of her husband's adultery:

"...Aegisthus makes the fire shine on my hearth,
my good friend, now as always..
.. while he [Agamemnon],
this other, is fallen, stained with this woman you behold,
plaything of all the golden girls at Ilium..."
(lines 1435-1439).

Clytaemnestra discusses Agamemnon's concubine more than she focuses upon her own adultery. Obviously, she experiences more hurt by Agamemnon's infidelity than he expresses about her lover, but she may also focus upon Agamemnon and Cassandra more because Aegisthus seems a weak and unworthy lover; the Chorus questions this "lion who lacks a lion's heart" when he boasts of being "the lord of the men of 'Argos'" because they want to know why he let a woman commit the crime. They cannot respect such a weakling, a lover who stays in his beloved's house "like a woman" follows her husband (line 1625). One wonders, too, why all other able-bodied men fight at Troy, but Aegisthus remains at home, seducing others' wives. We see later in the trilogy that Clytaemnestra's attachment to Aegisthus is not strong. When Orestes murders Aegisthus Clytaemnestra's reaction is brief: "Beloved, strong Aegisthus, are you dead indeed?" (line 893). She immediately appeals to her

son not to kill her and there is no more discussion of Aegisthus's death. Perhaps Aeschylus establishes Aegisthus as ignoble and spineless to illustrate that jealous lust for power influenced Clytaemnestra more than sexual attraction to her lover.

Clytaemnestra's Lust for Power

While Aeschylus touches upon Clytaemnestra's sexuality, he emphasizes more her passion for adventure over her sexual desires. While Cassandra would not have experienced battle herself, she would have been privy to Agamemnon's accounts of his activities. And as Agamemnon's concubine, Cassandra traveled--unwillingly-- more than Clytaemnestra did. Not only does the Queen despise Cassandra for sharing Agamemnon's bed, but she envies the girl for being a part of her warrior-husband's adventures:

"...and here she lies, the captive of his spear, who saw wonders, who shared his bed, the wise in revelations and loving mistress, who yet knew the feel as well of the men's rowing benches" (lines 1440-1443).

She, with "male strength of heart" wishes to participate in the dramas of war, unhappy to remain at home: "...she [Clytaemnestra] hated Agamemnon, not simply because he had killed her child, not because she loved Aegisthus, but of Agamemnon himself and his status as a man."⁶⁷ Clytaemnestra imagines the distant battle terrains, hanging upon the messenger's descriptions of "Macistus' sentinel cliffs," "the Saronic strait," and "the Aegean Sea blossoming with dead men." She envisions the fighting and transports herself to distant battlefields. After the Herald relates the Achaeans' victory, she echoes his description:

⁶⁷Winnington-Ingram, p. 105. Pomeroy notes, too, that "it is not a compliment to a woman to be classified as masculine" (*Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, p. 98).

"Trojans are stooping now to gather in their arms
their dead, husbands and brothers; children lean to clasp
the aged who begot them, crying upon the death
of those most dear, from lips that never will be free"
(lines 326-329).

Clytaemnestra's gruesome narration illustrates her fascination with the frenzy of warfare and the surge from victory. Yet she must satisfy her passion for adventure through domestic prowess, the only domain in which women can, and are encouraged, to succeed. She maintains an active role in the kingdom's upkeep during Agamemnon's absence, as if being the "Apian land's singlehearted protectress" provides the same excitement as Ilium's battlefields. While Agamemnon praises his wife for her management of the *oikos* in his absence (line 914), Clytaemnestra recognizes that her experience at home is not equivalent to Agamemnon's activities:

"What I tell you [Agamemnon and Chorus] now
I learned not from another; this is my own sad life
all the long years this man was gone at Ilium.
It is evil and a thing of terror when a wife
sits in the house forlorn with no man by, and hears
rumors that like a fever die to break again,
and men come in with news of fear, and on their heels
another messenger, with worse news to cry aloud..."
(lines 859-865).

This "watchdog of the house" yearns for the thrill of travel and the power derived from victory. But pragmatism squelches any thrill Clytaemnestra may have derived from vicarious experience. She knows that she must either relinquish any power she may have acquired during Agamemnon's absence or create a situation in which she may continue her influence. Clytaemnestra blatantly expresses this in the final lines of the *Agamemnon* when she gloats:

"These are howls of impotent rage; forget them, dearest;

you and I have the power; we two shall bring good order
to our house at least" (lines 1672-1673).

Clytaemnestra envisions herself as regaining the control she had before Agamemnon returned. Perhaps she recognizes Aegisthus's weakness (maybe the reason she chose him as a lover) and she will further manipulate him. The queen expresses her thirst for control in less obvious ways, too. Her constant monitoring of the beacons from Troy hint at her need to know the battle's outcome as well as the return of her husband. She refuses to fail; and when she succeeds, she ensures that all know of her deed:

"I stand now where I struck him down. The thing is
done.
Thus I have wrought, and I will not deny it now.
...my heart is not fluttered as I speak before you.
You know it. You can praise me or blame me as you wish;
it is all one to me. That man is Agamemnon,
my husband; he is dead; the work of this right hand
that struck in strength of righteousness. And that is that"
(lines 1379-1380, 1401-1406).

Boldly, Clytaemnestra asserts her vengeance and power, challenging the Chorus to subdue her and gain control if they can or to "keep your place" if they cannot beat her. Taking advantage of the chaos, she recognizes the Chorus's sorrow and fear that they feel after losing victorious Agamemnon. Aeschylus uses this blatant strength to establish Clytaemnestra as different from typical expectations of women; she represents the energies and desires bounded by conventions of femininity.

Aeschylus Celebrates Personal Responsibility

Clytaemnestra's perversions yield the ruin of the *oikos*, but this destruction involves the greater cycle of order in the Aeschylean cosmos

because she the evolution from dissolution to discord and finally to resolution.⁶⁸ This idea of disruption and vindication saturates many of the choral odes:

Justice so moves that those only learn
who suffer; and the future
you shall know when it has come; before then, forget it.
It is grief too soon given.
All will come clear in the next dawn's sunlight.
Let good fortune follow these things.. (lines 250-255).

The faith that "may the best win through" pervades the *Oresteia* and Clytaemnestra induces such reactions. Without her, the Chorus could not react to evil, nor could they maintain that "Man's fate that sets a true/ course yet may strike upon/ the blind and sudden reefs of disaster" (lines 1005-1008). Aeschylus employs Clytaemnestra and responses to her as proof that redemption for the *oikos* and the *polis* exists.⁶⁹

Aeschylus continues his trilogy with a discussion of how the members of the *oikos* must repair the damages done to it; individual destruction requires communal rejuvenation. Moving outside the palace walls, the *Libation Bearers* and the *Furies* address the ramifications of personal corruption affecting the larger community: "Aeschylus insists that each generation create a new alliance between the forces in contention for its world; and he presents their conflict in a range of ways, from cosmic to intensely personal. From a theological conflict between Will and Necessity, or Zeus and the Fates- the gods of the sky and the powers of the Earth; to a social, political conflict between the state with its

⁶⁸Jones reflects upon Aeschylus' faith in the inherent quality of Order to right itself: "That 'May the good prevail!' [choral refrain] is echoed and re-echoed, in direct and oblique statement, ironically, pathetically, devoutly, blasphemously, and even hopelessly..." (Jones, p. 71). Lattimore translates these lines (121 and 139) to mean "but good win out in the end," and this translation implies the existence of a definite contest in which "good" will struggle but ultimately be victorious.

⁶⁹The Watchman's prologue pleads "Now let there be again redemption form distress,/ the flare burning from the blackness in good augury" (lines 19-20).

patriarchal bias and the family with its matriarchal roots; to psychological conflict between our intellect and our hunger for release, our darker vengeful drives that can invigorate our dreams of ideality, equity and balance."⁷⁰ This search for resolution dominates the *Libation Bearers*; the Chorus recognizes the royal family's pollution and fears the gods' reactions. Individual misbehavior may provoke communal punishment:

"What can wash off the blood once spilled upon the
ground?
...Through too much glut of blood drank by our fostering
ground
the vengeful gore is caked and hard, will not drain
through.
...Swarming infection boils within.
...But as for me: gods have forced on my city
resisted fate...
And mine it is to wrench my will, and consent
to their commands, right or wrong" (lines 47, 76-80).

Such despair threatens to divide and destroy the kingdom and only Orestes's vengeful murder of his mother and her lover hint at the possibility that Order will rightly prevail. The Chorus proclaims that "the spirit of Right/ cries out aloud and extracts atonement/ due: blood stroke for the stroke of blood/ shall be paid. Who acts shall endure" (lines 310-313). Aeschylus emphasizes being steadfast to reap the rewards of reinstated Order. The Chorus advises Orestes to retain his convictions, remaining strong in a difficult situation:

"You must be hard, give no ground, to win home.
The dice of fortune shall be thrown once more, and lie

⁷⁰Fagles, p. 22. Stephen Halliwell concludes, too,: "Much of the traditional Greek understanding of character lies in the attempt to find ways of affirming the authentic force and integrity of human agency and responsibility, the components of character, at the point where many different potencies- internal and external; psychological, social, nature and divine- intersect and become intangled" (Pelling, p. 59).

in a fair fall smiling
up at the new indwellers come to live in the house"
(lines 455, 969-971).⁷¹

There remains hope for the future. Orestes acknowledges that this perseverance requires truthfulness, too, and he speaks in the same direct manner as his mother: "A man takes courage and speaks out/ to another man, and makes clear everything he means" (lines 667-668).⁷² Again, Aeschylus toys with expectations to establish the responsibility of morality; Orestes slays his mother but, before killing the queen, he provides her with a detailed explanation as a means of acknowledging and deferring his guilt: "You killed, and it was wrong. Now suffer wrong" (line 930). These lines echo Clytaemnestra's resolution in the *Agamemnon* when she explains that Agamemnon deserved his fate: "With the sword he struck,/ with the sword he paid for his own act" (lines 1528-1529). The Queen understands the cyclical nature of retribution, and her unconditional participation in this evolution mirrors Orestes's reaction. Orestes's anger about Clytaemnestra's treachery incites the prince to commit murder, and Orestes realizes the repercussions of his actions. Standing over the corpses of Clytaemnestra and her lover, Orestes expresses his bittersweet relief:

"Now I can praise him [Agamemnon], now I can stand by
to mourn and speak before this web that killed my father; yet
I grieve for the thing done, the death, and all our race.
I have won; but my victory is soiled, and has no pride"
(lines 1014-1017).

⁷¹The Chorus suggests this attitude as part of the acceptance that all human beings face challenges, some self-induced and some uncontrolled: "There is no mortal man who shall turn/ unhurt his life's course to an end not marred" (lines, 1018-1019).

⁷²Ironically, Clytaemnestra also takes responsibility for her murderous actions (in her speeches to the Chorus), but only after she commits the crime. Ultimately, the Queen blames the Furies for her dreadful reputation. Orestes, however, makes his intentions clear before the action occurs and maintains his culpability.

The *Furies* resolve this vengeful cycle involving Clytaemnestra and her family and ultimately responds to the reinforcement of order within the *polis*. The forces of guilt which stalk Orestes must be addressed by the individual for the benefit of the entire household, and their belligerence motivates Orestes to seek exoneration. Aeschylus must mend this desperate situation and he turns to divine assistance.

The Role of the Gods and the Mortals in Maintaining the Natural Order

Establishing the correct relationship between the gods and humans, Aeschylus opens the *Furies* with the Pythia, priestess to Apollo. After reinstating the divine forces' ultimate power, he creates the image of Orestes's haunting misery, the Furies. Early in the play, Apollo describes these repulsive apparitions:

"..See now
How I have caught and overpowered these lewd
creatures.
The repulsive maidens have been stilled to sleep, those
gray
and aged children..." (lines 67-69).

Orestes will not escape their clutches until he can break free from the evil which brought them. Through Apollo, Aeschylus instructs the plagued prince to seek justice in the Athenian court, "Pallas' citadel."⁷³ Just as the youth suffers from the evils of his mother, so Aeschylus conceives the Athenian need to review the decrepit state of the *polis*.⁷⁴ The Chorus of Eumenides maintains the principle

⁷³Apollo encourages Orestes: "Remember: the fear must not give you a beaten heart" (line 88).

⁷⁴"It is generally recognized that a great part of the interest in the trilogy, particularly in *Eumenides*, is sociological, in the sense that Aeschylus has dramatized a signal advance in the organization of human society..." (Winnington-Ingram, p. 127).

of retribution, and, ironically, the Furies warn Orestes of the necessity to restore the balance of justice:

"We hold we are straight and just. If a man
can spread his hands and show they are clean,
no wrath of ours shall lurk for him.
Unscathed he walks through his lifetime"
(lines 311-315).

The gods, however, often impede this pursuit of the victory of the ordered good influences. Aeschylus reintroduces Clytaemnestra as a part of the relationship between human action and divine culpability. Her ghost evokes the memories of her crimes in the *Agamemnon*, and her presence constantly implies that she is the reason for the subsequent turmoil in the *Libation Bearers* and the *Furies*. Athena explains the connection between mortal behavior and immortal responsibility, resolving that:

"Fury is a high queen
of strength even among the immortal gods
and the undergods, and for humankind
their work is accomplished, absolute, clear:
for some, singing; for some, life dimmed
in tears; theirs the deposition" (lines 950-955).

Clytaemnestra understands how the divine influences the human, and she hopes to appeal to the immortals' sense of obligation. When Clytaemnestra murdered Agamemnon and Cassandra, she recognized her role as an agent of justice, order as fated by the gods. The Queen's ghost accuses the Furies for her infamy and entreats them to punish her murderer. In a perversion of the traditional supplicatory formula, she awakes the sleeping Furies, admonishing them as the cause of her misfortune:

"It is because of you I go dishonoured thus
among the rest of the dead. Because of those I killed

my bad name among the perished suffers no eclipse
but I am driven in disgrace. I say to you
that I am charged with guilt most grave by these. And
yet I suffered too, horribly..." (lines 95-100).

Yet she implores to no avail; Aeschylus makes ordered justice the victor. Throughout the trial, the gods debate Orestes's fate, as they have always controlled the outcome. Athena refuses any false verdict and supports the correct method to derive the correct answer: "I say, wrong must not win by technicalities" (line 432). Aeschylus demands an unconditional win and leaves no doubt that the good prevails.

The Resolution of the *Oresteia*

Aeschylus intends to address the individual desires which threaten the security of the *oikos* and ultimately the destiny of the *polis*. By perverting typical images of women, Aeschylus uses Clytaemnestra to show the individual's influence- potentially helpful or hurtful-upon other members of the community. Her untamed grief, wish for adventure, and hunger for power causes extensive damage in the order of the royal household. Aeschylus re-establishes the continuity of the *oikos* by emphasizing the personal culpability of mortals and the inherent divine responsibility.

Aeschylus uses these three plays, as well as the *Persians*, as a means of predicting, portraying and preventing the chaotic response of the gods to the human disrespect. While Aeschylus alters common stereotypes and reworks myths in order to protect this tradition of *nomoi*, Euripides both manipulates custom and imagery to question these conventions. As with Aeschylus's Atossa and Clytaemnestra, the following is an interpretation of royal female characters and their roles in the schemes of the gods and their personal culpability in Fate. In the *Medea* and the *Hippolytus*, Euripides grapples with Aeschylean concerns

about convention, in these examples, social restriction. Ultimately, Euripides defies those customs which Aeschylus maintained.

Chapter Five

The *Medea*: Medea and the Human Capacity to Challenge the Uncontrollable

Euripides's 431 B.C. production of *Medea* won third prize in the Dionysian Festival. This play focuses upon the human being's ability to cope with a situation created beyond her control. Euripides presents a woman struggling to change circumstances that plague her, but her gender and her past actions limit her potential for a painless resolution.⁷⁵ Euripides intends to show the importance of security in one's family and one's country; he does so by depicting a woman, without resources, who attempts to regain a sense of safety and continuity. Medea's reactions to her plight represent our sometimes outrageous responses to uncontrollable circumstances.

Some critics envision Euripides's *Medea* as a commentary upon the Peloponnesian War, which began in 431 B.C. John Ferguson sees Euripides's depiction of marital discord as symbolic of the deterioration of relations between Sparta and Athens. Bernard Knox thinks Euripides represented "the happiness of Athens [that] was to end like the marriage bliss ends and death and destruction follows."⁷⁶ This interpretation neglects to consider that the play occurs in Corinth and Medea is a foreigner. Neither the location nor Medea's alienation connect with Sparta and Athens. Furthermore, nothing in his personal life or dramatic works suggests a keen interest in public life. Although alive during the Peloponnesian War, Euripides never served in the military and favored private pursuits such as expanding his personal library.⁷⁷ Little evidence exists in the *Medea*, or the bulk of Euripides's dramas, to suggest that this tragedian involved himself with political and historical concerns, especially

⁷⁵Goodwater, p. 7.

⁷⁶Burian, p. 3.

⁷⁷Decharme, p. 119. Born on Salamis, Euripides lived from 480 B.C. - 406 B.C.

in comparison to Aeschylus.⁷⁸ While Euripides does refer to the pain of separation and the importance of patriotism, he discusses these within the context of one woman's experience of the universal human condition.

Euripides as Misogynist or Feminist or Humanist

As many critics misjudge the *Medea* in a historical context, so do they mistakenly view Euripides's play as a misogynist treatise.⁷⁹ Other Euripidean dramas suggest a disdain for females and rumors of Euripides's failed marriage also provide false evidence of his misogyny.⁸⁰ Oates explains that "because Euripides has been unflinching in the delineation of his feminine characters, the biographers concluded that this never could have happened, had he not had some bitter personal experience with women."⁸¹ Traditionally, Euripides is rumored to have educated his servant, Cephisophon, as a literary apprentice, and then been betrayed by Cephisophon, when he seduced Euripides's wife, Melito. His wife's adultery allegedly motivated Euripides's misogynistic reputation.⁸²

The *Medea* perpetuates such confusion. It receives comment as being potentially hateful because some of Medea's statements appear derogatory:

⁷⁸ Decharme's portrait of Euripides is of a "reclusive" and "pensive" man, preferring private intellectualism to the "active life" (Decharme, p. 6.).

⁷⁹"Euripides has drawn...wicked women, who cause great harm. But he has drawn them without blame or condemnation; and instead with clear insight and an intense compassion for their predicament, as they are brought to tragedy against all reason" (Powell, p. 63).

⁸⁰In the *Andromache*, Euripides writes for Hermione "Listening to bad women was my ruin/ But never, let me say it again, never should men of sense who/ have a wife at home, allow other wives to visit her frequently./ They teach mischief./ ...There is the source of all the infidelity in/ men's homes. Therefore, guard your housdoors well, with/ bolts and bars. When other women get in, they do no good./ and much mischief" (Hadas, p. 122).

⁸¹Oates, p. xxx. Mason believes, too, "...that Euripides was unfortunate in his wives, which may account, in part, for his cynical temper" (Oates, p. 14).

⁸²Decharme discusses, too, the possibility of Euripides being married twice. After divorcing his first wife, Melito, Euripides may have married Choerile, who also behaved unfaithfully. Decharme notes that we have no evidence of such events. Furthermore, Choerile is an obscenity and may have been used by comedians to name Melito (Decharme, p. 8).

"We women are the most unfortunate creatures.
Firstly, with an excess of wealth it is required
For us to buy a husband and take for our bodies
A master; for not to take one is even worse.
And now the question is serious whether we take
A good or bad one; for there is no easy escape
For a woman, nor can she say no to her marriage"
(lines 231-237).

While Medea laments the female experience, we see later in this speech that she also notes the difficulty of being a stranger in Greece.⁸³ Euripides might not be attacking women as much as he reacts to the difficulties of being different in a culture valuing ethnic continuity. Other speeches of Medea could fuel misinterpretation. When Medea approaches Jason to falsely ask for forgiveness, she appeals to his sense of superiority and assuredness. In order to ensure that she will have enough time to enact her murderous plan and to make the children's death even more painful to Jason, she gathers the children about her husband and says:

"Jason, I beg you to be forgiving to me...
But we women are what we are- perhaps a little
Worthless; and you men must not be like us in this,
Nor be foolish in return when we are foolish"
(lines 869-891).

Hardly a sincere attempt at making amends, Medea also toys with the reputation she will receive after she completes her vengeful scheme. Although she sees her treachery as a response to Jason's, she concedes that potentially she will be blamed more severely.

⁸³Medea understands the alienation of being "among new modes of behavior and manners" (lines 238). Roger Just sympathizes with Euripides's female characters and their reactions towards their difficult situations: "Euripides has been variously judged a misogynist and the champion of women- a division which, at least, testifies to the complexity of his female portrayals...The complicating factor is that Euripides also presents women's actions as emanation from the insecurity of their position" (Just, p. 194).

Jason's remarks must be considered in context, too. He informs his wife that he is leaving her and will marry a younger, Greek princess. Medea refuses to accept his abandonment. Although Medea has few recourses, she makes clear her attempts (and success in a bittersweet manner) to ruin his marriage plans. Naturally, Jason resents his wife because she obstructs his plans. After Medea reproaches him for his betrayal, Jason berates women for what he perceives as their oversexed and skewed attitude:

"But you women have got into such a state of mind
That, if your life at night is good, you think you have
Everything; but, if in that quarter things go wrong,
You will consider your best and truest interests
Most hateful. It would have been far better for men
To have got their children in some other way, and
women
Not to have existed. Then life would have been good"
(lines 569-575).

Jason's preoccupation with female sexuality only reflects his own urges; not only does he intend to have children with his new bride, but he cannot comprehend how Medea sees his rejection as a betrayal of all their past adventures and achievements. Jason criticizes the alleged vices of Medea, and women in general, which actually motivate him. Personal ambition may have inspired Jason to marry the Corinthian princess in order to receive her dowry: the kingdom. But Jason's own sexual urges play a part, too. His belief in the zealous sexuality of women suggests that he intends to fulfill his own desires because, "knowing" that women are controlled by lust, he can, therefore, be sure that his libido will always be satiated; his new bride will provide physical pleasures as well as produce heirs. Furthermore, it is his sexual motivation which blinds him to Medea's torment. While Jason considers women unaware of activities outside the bedroom, in actuality, it is his sexuality which negates Medea and her concerns. Jason absorbs himself with his own desires and can

barely conceive of Medea's wants. He attempts to console Medea's hurt pride and remedy her confusion, appeasing her insecurities:

"...Please keep calm.
It was not-- the point that seems to upset-- that I
Grew tired of your bed and felt the need of a new bride"
(lines 549, 555-556).

But Jason's consolations do not address the other, non-sexual aspects of his relationship with Medea because he refuses to acknowledge Medea's loyalty and worth as a partner in practical matters. Jason criticizes women in general as he reacts to his wife's stubbornness and jealousy, but Euripides could not identify with this character, portrayed as the supreme cad not the ultimate hero.

The Corinthian Chorus's response, however, easily supports opinions of misogyny. Although appropriate to the actions of "Colchis' [*sic*] wretched daughter," many of the odes provide fodder for those who see Euripides as a hater of women. In one instance, the Chorus recoils from Medea. The Chorus cannot contain their revulsion at Medea's extreme revenge:

"What horror more can be? O women's love
So full of trouble,
How many evils have you caused already!"
(lines 1290-1292).

Such speeches, however, occur *after* the Chorus realizes the extent of Medea's revenge. Initially, the Chorus commiserates with Medea, lamenting her future as an exile. They sympathize with a mother and her children, wandering throughout Greece without male protection.⁸⁴ Naturally, the Chorus admonishes this mother when they learn she has poisoned a young woman

⁸⁴Greek women remained in the custody of males throughout their lives. A girl belonged to her father until she married and became the ward of her husband. If widowed, a woman would be appointed a guardian, usually her son or another male relative.

and butchered her own children. Even when the Corinthian women condemn Medea, it is for her actions within a system of constraint based upon ethnicity and gender; the Chorus recognizes Jason as ignoble, and it is only when Medea acts horrifically do they chastise her. The Chorus responds to her murderous rage, but, before she repulses them with her anger, Euripides presents them as Corinthian women sympathetic to her.

Loss of Marital, Familial and National Security

The *Medea* refutes misogyny claims against Euripides.⁸⁵ While mention of Medea evokes images of excessive vengeance, analysis of the entire play illustrates the experience of a woman forced to address abandonment by her husband, exile in a foreign country, and the possible loss of her children to a young, Greek stepmother.⁸⁶ Because most of the dialogue occurs before the murders, Euripides emphasizes Medea's situation and the process of her decision-making. While he means for the horror of her actions to affect the audience, this revenge cannot be separated by the circumstances motivating it. The playwright chooses a woman to represent the recognizable universal situation of a human need to control one's destiny and to react emotionally to circumstances beyond control.

Euripides imagines both a realistic and exaggerated scenario. He chose to alter the traditional myths about Medea instead of selecting three known

⁸⁵*I [Pomeroy] can scarcely believe that so subtle a dramatist as Euripides, who called into question traditional Athenian beliefs and prejudices surrounding foreigners, war and the Olympian gods, would have intended his audience to simply accept the misogynistic maxims. Euripides is questioning rather than dogmatic" (Pomeroy, *ibid.*, p. 107). I should also note that I do not believe Euripides, with this choral speech, is choosing to favor one gender over the other; this seems more a dramatic technique to show the drastic change from compassion to repulsion in the Chorus' reaction.

⁸⁶*...Medea would have been quite readily recognized. She is a woman whose mate has tired of her and has preferred her to a younger, more advantageously situated maiden... Too much attention... is paid by the critics to the specifics of her situation, which, unlike the extremity of her actions, link her to other women, then and since" (Meagher, pps. 121-122).

versions; in the first, Medea accidentally poisons her children in an attempt to serve them a drink of immortality. The second story had the Corinthians revolt against Medea and murder her children in retaliation against their hated queen, and the final legend tells that Medea kills Creon, leaves her children in the safety of a temple to Hera, and she escapes to Athens. Creon's family seeks revenge, however, and murders her children, yet blame Medea. But Euripides changed the story to incorporate elements of all those myths-- the children's murder and Medea's accountability for their deaths and her wish to flee the situation. By introducing Medea's conscious act, Euripides empowers this woman and appeals to our frantic sense of hope and our wish for action, no matter how wrong or ludicrous, if we think it will end our pain.

With Euripides's new treatment of this myth, Medea's predicament is plausible because of her status as an alien woman; divorce occurred in the ancient world, and the children's citizenship, at least in 431 B.C. in Athens, depended upon their parents' Greek ancestry. A woman risked abandonment by her husband if he felt she did not fulfill her responsibilities to the *oikos*: marital fidelity and maintenance of the familial lineage. Jason explains his remarriage because of concerns for his sons' legitimacy as Greeks:

"Make sure of this; it was not because of a woman
I made this alliance in which I know I live,
But, as I said before, I wished to preserve you
and breed a royal progeny to be brothers
To the children I have now, a sure defense to us"
(lines 593-597).

Medea, too, remarks upon her "barbarism" when she tells Jason, "No, you thought it was not respectable/ As you got on in years to have a foreign wife."⁸⁷

⁸⁷lines 591-592. Jason, however, sees Medea's foreignness as a handicap, and thinks he has improved her by Hellenizing her; "Firstly, instead of living among barbarians./ You inhabit a Greek land and understand our ways./ How to live by law instead of the sweet will of force" (lines 536-538). Meagher explains further: "Euripides lived in a time of already established and ever-

She acknowledges her advance in years and her alien status to reflect poorly upon Jason and threaten the legitimacy of their children, but she refuses to forget her devotion to him. She relates their past and reminds Jason of how she helped him:

"I saved your life, and every Greek knows I saved it,
Who was a shipmate of yours aboard the Argo,
...so gave you the safety of the light.
And I myself betrayed my father and my home,
And came with you to Pelias' land Iolcus.
...[I] took away your fear" (lines 476-487).

Euripides realistically expresses Medea's abandonment, and her distress also appears believable. The Nurse's initial monologue also explains that Medea's "heart [is] on fire with passionate love for Jason" has been broken, and "poor Medea is slighted, and cries aloud on the/ Vows they made to each other, the right hands clasped/ In eternal promise" (lines 20-23). The betrayed wife reacts to her husband with anger and hurt by calling him names- "O coward in every way"- and lamenting her loyalty to such a traitor:"

"Jason wrongs me, though I have never injured him.
But on me this thing has fallen so unexpectedly,
It has broken my heart. I am finished. I let go
All my life's joy. My friends, I only want to die.
It was everything to me to think well of one man,
And he, my only husband, has turned out wholly vile.
...how senselessly I am treated
By this bad man, and how my hopes have missed the
mark!" (lines 692, 225-239, 497-498).

Euripides continues with these conceivable circumstances when he attributes much of Medea's pain to a loss of security, beyond Jason's

developing pan-Hellenic consciousness. What this means in simplest terms is that the word "Greek" was, in practice, felt to designate something essential, specific, and enduring. Although there was some recognition of a humanity common to all men, humanity was too uneven and diverse and humanity in the mind too abstract to challenge the more concrete and exalted reality of being Greek" (Meagher, p. 12).

abandonment. Not only will he remarry, but he will gain control of Corinth. Medea, however, must survive without a family's comfort or a country's support:

"Yet what applies to me does not apply to you.
You have a country. Your family home is here.
You enjoy life and the company of your friends.
But I am deserted, a refugee, thought nothing of
By my husband- something he won in a foreign land.
With whom I can take refuge in this sea of woe.
...What town will receive me?
What friend will offer me refuge his land,
Or the guaranty of his house and save my own life?
There is none..." (lines 252-258, 387-389).

Euripides focuses upon the unexpectedness of Jason's treachery to illustrate how women specifically fear such abandonment and how all humans in general must realize the precariousness of their situation. Medea's utter despair can only be resolved if she can re-establish her security: "What profit have I [Medea] in life?/ I have no land, no home, no refuge from my pain" (lines 796-797). The Chorus initially commiserates with Medea, using her example as a way of reaffirming their own needy faith in their country:

"O country and home,
Never, never may I be without you
Living the hopeless life,
Hard to pass through and painful,
Most pitiable of all.
Let death first lay me low and death
Free me from this daylight.
There is no sorrow above
The loss of a native land" (lines 642-651).⁸⁸

Euripides increases the bitterness of Medea's fate when Jason offers to send Medea and her children into exile. While Jason offers to support her monetarily, he cannot assuage her fears of being a woman, alone with her children,

⁸⁸The Chorus laments with Medea: "Oh, unfortunate one! Oh, cruel!/ Where will you turn? Who will help you?/ What house or what land to preserve you/ From ill can you find?/ Medea, a god has thrown suffering/ Upon you in waves of despair" (lines 357-363).

plagued by her dangerous reputation, a notoriety achieved during her exploits to help Jason. Euripides, however, perverts this image of a helpless woman.

Medea as an Extraordinary Example

Having established a plausible, if unpleasant, situation, Euripides challenges us to comprehend Medea's subsequent actions. His first deviation from "fathomable" circumstances occurs when we realize the power of Medea's intellect and its retributive nature. The Nurse hints at Medea's potential to "think of some dreadful thing:"

"I am afraid...
For her heart is violent. She will never put up with
The treatment she is getting" (lines 37-39).

While this sense of foreboding suggests the horror ahead, the Nurse makes an even more disturbing admission when she says that Medea is "a strange woman" (line 44). Perhaps the servant thinks Medea's oddness derives from her crippling rage, but perhaps Euripides intends to create Medea as an unusual character, her situation common but her response uncommon.⁸⁹ The Chorus, too, comments upon the slighted wife's capacity for evil, and the female intellect-- not the actions which have transpired thus far-- in the play which renders her extraordinary:

"Often before
I have gone through more subtle reasons,
And have come upon questions greater
Than a woman should strive to search out.
But we too have a goddess to help us
And accompany us into wisdom.

⁸⁹Medea warns Jason and the Chorus: "Surely in many ways I hold different views/ From others..." (lines 579-580).

Not all of us. Still you will find
Among many women a few,
And our sex is not without learning"
(lines 1081-1089).⁹⁰

Medea, "a clever woman," recognizes her intellect too, and ironically denies her intelligence to achieve her vengeance. When she implores Creon to postpone her banishment for a day, she refutes her reputation of magical and witty powers to assure him she is not a threat:

"...Often previously
Through being considered clever I have suffered much.
...For being clever, I find that some will envy me,
Others object to me. Yet all my cleverness
Is not so much" (lines 292-305).⁹¹

This feigned lack of intellect reflects her greater scheme; Medea has tricked men in the past- her father, her brother- and will do so again to punish Jason for his maltreatment.⁹² Every self-deprecating remark develops into a plot to pacify those who fear Medea:

"Things have gone badly every way. No doubt of that
But not these things this far, and don't imagine so.
There are still trials to come for the new wedded pair,
And for their relations pain that will mean something.
Do you think that I ever would have fawned on that man
[Creon]
Unless I had some end or gain to profit in it?
I would not have even spoken or touched him with my
hands" (lines 364-370).

⁹⁰I recognize that this speech refers to those few women who have not had children and the Chorus thinks these women lucky not to worry about children. But I still feel that Euripides is acknowledging the variety in the female experience, as well as the commonness of women's potential for careful thought. In fact, this Chorus' sentiment represents such feminine capacity.

⁹¹Bernard Knox sees this denial: "She admits she is *sophe*- an intellectual, a person of great capacity- but points out that it has not done her any good. Men distrust superior intelligence in general, but they really fear and hate it in woman" (Segal, p. 291).

⁹²"She is a hero, then, but since she is also a woman, she cannot prevail by brute strength; she must use deceit" (Segal, p. 277).

Medea secures her plan when she beseeches Aegeus, the king of Athens, and arranges to meet him in Athens, leaving her children in Corinth, to become his wife. Calling herself a "weak woman" in Aegeus' presence, Medea resolves to murder Jason's new bride and kill her children. Such a decision requires careful preparation and even more intense consideration.⁹³ Euripides includes the audience in all of the betrayed wife's decisions, and, having seen how Medea arrives in an uncontrollable situation, we sympathize with her pain but know the danger of her blinding anger.⁹⁴ Yet, in the midst of her rage, Medea's revenge contains some logic.

Although murder seems excessive, Medea rightfully resents her husband's remarriage. Furthermore, she fears for her children's safety and refuses to leave them to strangers in Corinth or drag them with her during her exile. Apart from these considerations, her personal reputation concerns her:

"Let no one think me a weak one, feeble-spirited,
A stay-at-home, but rather just the opposite,
One who can hurt my enemies and help my friends;
For the lives of such persons are most remembered"
(lines 807-810).

For all her resolve, Medea does waver. If Medea did not have a heart, it could not have been broken in the first place. Euripides constructs and executes this extraordinary retaliation, but he retains the comprehensible element first

⁹³Knox conceives Medea's dilemma to be internalized: her predicament can only be furthered if she allows it: "there is only one person who can and does pose a real obstacle to Medea's plans, who can effectively confront her with argument- Medea herself" (Segal, p. 276).

⁹⁴Although Nussbaum comments upon tragedy in general, one of her observations applies particularly well to Medea's torment: "We see thought and feeling working together, so that it is difficult to distinguish the one from the other: the painful memory of pain dripping from the heart. We see, too, a two-way interchange of illumination and cultivation working between emotions and thoughts: we see feelings prepared by memory and deliberation, learning brought about through *pathos*. (At the same time we ourselves, if we are good spectators, will find this complex interaction in our own responses)" (Nussbaum, p. 47).

introduced. Medea does reconsider her "kind of madness" and debates in front of the children's Tutor:

"Oh, Oh, what can I do? My spirit has gone from me,
Friends, when I saw that bright look in my children's
eyes.

I cannot bear to do it. I renounce my plans
I had before. I'll take my children away from
This land. Why should I hurt their father with the pain
They feel, and suffer twice as much of pain myself?

No, no I will not do it. I renounce my plans.

Ah, what is wrong with me? Do I want to let go

My enemies unhurt and be laughed at for it?

I must face this thing...

I know indeed what evil I intend to do,

But stronger than all my afterthoughts is my fury,

Fury that brings upon mortals the greatest evils"

(lines 1043-1051, 1078-1080).

This decision, based on a driving anger, damns Medea almost more than the actual infanticide; Euripides exposes her clarity of thought and the irony that, although Medea knows the frenzy motivates her, she will still sacrifice her children and inflict more pain upon herself. During this fluctuation between madness and sensibility, she gives herself no way to ever exonerate herself from eternal blame, and what she sees as a powerful and dignified response inspires pity in the Chorus:

" Heaven, it seems, on this day has fastened many
Evils on Jason, and Jason has deserved them...

O Earth, and the far shining

Ray of the Sun, look down, look down upon

This poor lost woman, look, before she raises

The hand of murder against her flesh and blood"

(lines 1231-1233, 1251-1254).

Medea subsequently repulses the Chorus with her deeds, and Jason, too, reviles her when he discovers the corpses of his children. Calling her a "worker in evil," Jason curses her:

"You hateful thing, you woman most utterly loathed
By the gods and me and by all the race of mankind,
You who have had the heart to raise a sword against
Your children, you, their mother, and left me childless-
You have done this, and do you still look at the sun
And at the earth, after all these most fearful things?
I wish you dead...[You are]
A monster, not a woman, having a nature
Wilder than that of Scylla in the Tuscan sea.
...Oh, my life is over!" (lines 1323-1350).

Jason's hate-filled monologue mirrors Medea's earlier speeches of despair, litanies of hate against her spouse. Euripides may consciously relate Jason's pain to Medea's suffering; this association furthers the image of a human being tormented by a situation without many "good" choices.⁹⁵ Unfortunately, Medea's personal pain tempers her victory. While Jason grieves, he will find sympathy and will remain within the security of his *oikos*. But Medea will torment herself and wander in exile, plagued by her reputation.

Resolution in the *Medea*

Euripides intends for the *Medea's* resolution to remain ambiguous.⁹⁶ Maybe Medea achieves her vengeful goal and deserves recognition for her perseverance. Or, perhaps Medea's bleak future implies a lack of foresight on her part; she says earlier in the play that she chooses her actions to ensure her personal profit, and yet she leaves herself without her children and without any

⁹⁵This connection becomes even more apparent when Jason begs to "kiss the dear lips of my children," but Medea refuses his request, as he ignored her pleadings. She hopes to place him in powerless and frustrating circumstances just as Jason created for Medea.

⁹⁶Ironically, Euripides cannot supply the answers he accuses others of not providing. The Nurse says: "It is right, I think, to consider/ Both stupid and lacking in foresight/ Those poets of old who wrote songs/ For revels and dinners and banquets/ Pleasant sounds for men living in ease:/ But none of them all has discovered/ How to put an end with their singing/ Or musical instruments grief/ Bitter grief from which death and disaster/ Cheat the hopes of a house" (lines 190-198). Such a comment sarcastically equates Euripides' intention as one of either encouraging the solution to the pains of humanity or admitting that we have been and will be eternally searching for answers.

secure future. Euripides's ending ultimately conceded that " mortals must bear in resignation their ill luck" (line 1020). The *Medea* illustrates the emotional logic often experienced in response to unbearable and uncontrollable circumstances, and this human need to right a situation motivates people to make choices, some good and some bad. The circumstances which affect decisions include past actions as well as the potential for future security. Euripides employs Medea as an example of such typical scramblings but uses the dramatic context to exaggerate the manifestations of her pain.

As with the *Medea*, Euripides portrays the experience of a woman with few choices in the *Hippolytus*. Phaedra, the Cretan bride of Theseus, becomes part of a divine scheme for revenge. While Phaedra cannot claim ethnic alienation as Medea does, both women are bound by certain expectations about behavior. Phaedra's means of escape are also self-destructive.

Chapter Six: The *Hippolytus*: Phaedra Threatens the *Oikos* and Other Social Conventions

Euripides produced the *Hippolytus* in 428 B.C. and this play, the second version of his story, won first prize. His first treatment of Phaedra fell upon an unreceptive audience and was lost.⁹⁷ In this version, Euripides employs the figure of Phaedra as a means to confront the forces which threaten or are perceived to endanger the *polis* and the *oikos*.⁹⁸ Phaedra represents the potential power of the weaker members of the community to challenge the superiors' positions; her sexuality frightens Hippolytus, her step-son, as he begins to face the expectations of maturity, and her deceit devastates her husband, Theseus.⁹⁹ Through Phaedra, Euripides shows how social conventions both protect and perpetuate the fragility of the *oikos*.¹⁰⁰ The constraints upon Phaedra's desire ensure she will never act upon her lust and risk contaminating the family's lineage with illegitimate children.

⁹⁷Because we do not have both versions we cannot know if Euripides altered the plot, changed the format or completely reworked the play. Jasper Griffin remarks that the revised play contained similar themes and implies that Euripides rewrote it to improve its "dramatic integrity": "I do not myself believe that chagrin at the failure of a play would in itself have motivated Euripides to produce a quite different play on the same theme. He was unusually unsuccessful in the competitions- -four prizes only, we are told in his long career- -and he must have been hardened to criticism and even derision long before 428...Nothing else which we know of Euripides suggest that he attached so much weight to meeting the taste of the *demos* [people]." He will admit that "the Phaedra of the second play is a respectable matron, not the sort of floozie who traditionally starred in this story-pattern" (Pelling, p. 131-133). Powell and Burian maintain, however, that Phaedra appears a "virtuous woman" in the second tragedy (Powell, p. 44).

⁹⁸"Obligation to family and state were the strongest compulsion in the lives of citizens, both male and female" (Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, Slaves*, p. 60). "Far from being a personal relationship inspired by an emotional choice, marriage usually took place for social and financial reasons, for example, the necessity of keeping the family fortune intact (in marriage between siblings) or the desire to establish or maintain bonds with other families..." (Cantarella, p. 46).

⁹⁹He [Euripides] understood those who are weak rather than wicked... He was on the side of the underdog, and saw things from the standpoint of an alien, a woman, a slave, a peasant" (Ferguson, p. 6-7).

¹⁰⁰"...[the] feminine body supplies the objective correlative to the broader questions of intersubjective explored in the play" (Burian, p. 68).

Yet this insecurity about female sexuality will never be resolved as long as strict moral codes prohibit the exhibition of it as well as the possibility of addressing it. Subsequently, Euripides questions such ideas of sexual conduct and shows how this possibility of loss of power can never be resolved; Phaedra defies social convention but only temporarily affects the *oikos*, affirming the fear that women could potentially destroy their families even though morality dictates otherwise.¹⁰¹ Euripides depicts a love-lorn woman and her stepson in extreme terms, but the tragedian manages to make a connection between the two characters.¹⁰² Ultimately, as Griffin thinks, Phaedra serves as a tool to understand Hippolytus and the progression of the "natural order" of the household. Ironically, it is the jealousy of Aphrodite which drives the goddess to manipulate Phaedra's attentions as punishment for Hippolytus's disrespect to the love-goddess and his devotion to Artemis instead.¹⁰³ This diminishes Phaedra's threat to Theseus' household and allows Euripides to suggest the futility of such fears which we can never rid ourselves of the uselessness of restrictions we place upon ourselves.

101 "By presenting its traditional ideals in moral disarray, Euripides fostered the radical critique of Athenian society; and by creating a new canon of heroes, he provided what might have been the first elements of that society" (Meagher, p. 41). Ferguson, too, mentions that Euripides challenges the elite ideals of Greeks, especially in relation to "Barbarians." Euripides' questioning of what it means to be "Greek" may account for his popularity beyond Athens. Burian explains how Euripides' plays appealed to audiences in Asia Minor, Palestine and Egypt. Plutarch, too attests to Euripides' wide-spread popularity; Athenian prisoners during the Sicilian Expedition, c. 413 B.C., recited his poetry and impressed their captors so much that they were freed: "A few [Athenian prisoners] were rescued because of their knowledge of Euripides, for it seems that the Sicilians were more devoted to his poetry than any other Greeks living outside the mother country...they had been given their freedom in return for teaching their masters all they could remember of his [Euripides'] works, while others, when they took flight after the final battle, had been given food and water for reciting some of his lyrics" (Scott-Kilvert, pps. 242-243).

102 "The drama is built, to be sure, upon the erotic tensions between male and female and on the contrasts between the genders, so that when Hippolytus reenacts and imitates the words, gestures, and actions of the other, we recognize the workings of the dramatic rule of reversal into the opposite which defines a tragic *peripeteia* [reversal of fortune]" (Burian, p. 67).

103 Pelling, p. 133.

Euripides as Misogynist or Feminist or Humanist

As with the *Medea*, critics debate the *Hippolytus* as a treatise on misogyny or feminism. Ancient reactions to Euripides may influence these modern detractors. In 411 B.C., the comic playwright, Aristophanes, produced the *Thesmophoriazusae*.¹⁰⁴ In this comedy the women of Athens meet at the temple to Demeter and Persephone and plot how to stop Euripides from further insulting them. One of the women expresses her dissatisfaction with Euripides's "slander upon womanhood:"

"Give him [Euripides] some actors,
a Chorus, an audience, and there he goes
proving that women are good-for-nothings, incarnate
wine-jugs, walking sinks of lust, deceivers,
babblers, fly-by-nights, knives in the flesh
of honest men" (Fitts, p. 36).

The Athenian women voice their objections and bargain with Euripides; they release his father-in-law, who has sneaked into their secret proceedings, in return for a more flattering portrayal by Euripides. Depicting the "so-called poet Euripides" as a buffoon, Aristophanes's message may be misconstrued as a condemnation of misogyny. Aristophanes does mock Euripides and his reputation for "libel" against the Athenian women, but the comic also implies that women deserve such criticism.¹⁰⁵ Aristophanes presents the Thesmophoriac revelers as angry at Euripides for exposing them; instead of objecting to Euripides because he lies about their activities, the women resent

¹⁰⁴Interestingly, Aristophanes imagines what occurs among the female revelers during the festival which I noted earlier in my discussion of women in the Greek audience. The action of the play takes place during the second day of the festival.

¹⁰⁵"Feminist performance criticism and literary theory highlight a facet of the play that sets the spirit of Dionysus, god of theater and transformation, against the spirit of Demeter, goddess of fertility and rebirth; at the end, Dionysus triumphs. Masculine power over representation on stage is reaffirmed, as is the innately comic representation of women by men" (Taaffe, p. 76).

his "truthfulness." One woman admits defeat, and, according to Aristophanes, Euripides accurately, if awkwardly, describes women's deceptions:

"It's no use,
we can't do the things we've been doing all our lives,
but they [our husbands] get suspicious, thanks to
Euripides
and his Advice to Husbands" (Fitts, p. 36).

Not only does Aristophanes criticize Euripides's ability as a playwright, but he implies that it is not difficult to depict the treacherous doings of women: switching babies, acquiring lovers, drugging husbands, murdering fathers, and lying about pregnancy.¹⁰⁶ Aristophanes's comedy should not be misinterpreted as a condemnation of Euripides's alleged misogyny. Instead the *Thesmophoriazusae* illustrates Aristophanes's disdain for Euripides's skill as an author, and as Aristophanes's own ambiguous reaction to women.

Misuse of contextual evidence, as seen with Aristophanes, also applies to Euripides's reputation for female-hating sentiments. Vulnerable to misinterpretation, the *Hippolytus* includes infamous tirades, "proof" that Euripides despised women. In one speech, we see how the prince reacts to the Nurse's admission of Phaedra's desire:

"Women! This coin which men find counterfeit!
Why, why, Lord Zeus, did you put them in the world,
in the light of the sun? If you were so determined
to breed the race of man, the source of it
should not have been women...
...Curses on you!
I'll hate you women, and hate and hate and hate you,
and never have enough of hating..
Either let someone teach them to be chaste,
or let me trample on them forever" (lines 614-668).

¹⁰⁶Aristophanes does not exonerate Euripides...None of the male characters who borrow the female figure or female language succeed in creating the illusion of women. By contrast, the 'real' women of the *Thesmophoria* cannot be seen as completely successful wither" (Taaffe, pps. 102, 101).

The length and redundancy of this speech presents Hippolytus as an immature young man who, understandably, reacts vehemently against the advances of his stepmother. Unfortunately, his response seems excessive, and nothing suggests that Euripides shared the sentiments of this inexperienced youth. Powell asserts that "Euripides was certainly not a misogynist."¹⁰⁷ Euripides focuses upon other forces- mortal insecurity, divine jealousy and self-created restraints- to counteract this play as a misogynistic statement.

Questioning Sexual Morality and the Fear Which Motivates It

Euripides does address female sexuality in the *Hippolytus*, consciously commenting upon the specific restrictions upon women and the expectations of young men: "In the case of Phaidra [*sic*], Euripides has given us a woman of great moral integrity, and takes all the guilt from her by means of Aphrodite on the mythological level, and by the Nurse on the human level. He clearly means his audience to feel nothing but compassion for this new Phaidra [*sic*], torn apart by love imposed on her by a merciless goddess, fighting against it, failing and dying."¹⁰⁸ Phaedra's loyalty to her family and her actions' effect upon its reputation temper her desire for Hippolytus:

¹⁰⁷Powell, p. 32, p. 63. Meagher agrees: "In the fifth century, however, Euripides comes the closest of anyone to arguing for the essential equality of all human beings, men and women, masters and slaves, Greeks and Barbarians" (p. 144).

¹⁰⁸Powell, p. 47. Aphrodite's opening monologue tells of her jealousy and her vengeful plan to exploit Phaedra's passions as retribution against Hippolytus: "Hippolytus, son of Theseus by the Amazon/ pupil of holy Pittheus,/ alone among the folk of this land of Troezen has blasphemed me/ counting me the vilest of Gods in Heaven.? He will none of the bed of love nor marriage,/ but honors Artemis, Zeus' daughter,/ counting her greatest of the Gods in Heaven/ ...But her [Phaedra's] love shall not remain thus aimless and unknown/ I will reveal the matter to Theseus and all shall come out./ Father shall slay son with curses-/ this son is hateful to me/ Her suffering does not weigh in the scale so much/ that I should let my enemies go untouched/ escaping payment of that retribution/ that honor demands that I have" (lines 10-49).

"...I have found one single blessing
in this unhappy business, one alone,
that I can pass on to my children after me
life without contaminated name,
and myself profit by the present throw
of Fortune's dice. For I will never shame you,
my Cretan home, nor will I go to face
Theseus, defendant on an ugly charge,
never- for one life's sake" (lines 715-722).

The Chorus notes, too, that "she [Phaedra] has chosen a good name rather than life" (line 774). Phaedra defies her sexual urges because she hopes to ensure the dignity of her children. Yet, she fails to maintain a virtuous reputation; she is remembered for her inappropriate lust. It is Hippolytus and Theseus who resolve their misunderstanding and gain good favor. Perhaps Euripides comments that such loyalty is futile; for all her efforts, Phaedra commits suicide without consummating her love for Hippolytus, the object of her desire dies gruesomely, and her husband grieves for all his losses. Conventional morals still cannot assuage Phaedra's lust, and its very existence contributes to Theseus's reactions and Hippolytus's death. Ultimately, this morality constructs the boundaries of the situation and perpetuates the circumstances which it attempts to prevent.

Phaedra's actions inspire questions concerning fifth century Athenian morals.¹⁰⁹ Hippolytus challenges Theseus about his insecurity about his wife and her perceived threat to the *oikos*. Hippolytus assures his father that he neither seduced nor raped Phaedra, and does not seek to upset the order of his royal household:

"Then tell me how was it *your* wife who seduced me:
was it because she was more beautiful

¹⁰⁹"In order to oppose the norm of tragic drama, Euripides had to oppose his audience and affront their strongly expressed preferences" (Michelini, Euripides and the Tragic Tradition, p. 70.)

than all the other women in the world?
Or did I think, when I had taken her,
to won your place and kingdom for a dowry
and live in your own house? I would have been
a fool, a senseless fool, if I had dreamed it.
Was rule so sweet? Never, I tell you, Theseus,
for the wise. A man whom power has so enchanted
must be demented" (lines 1011-1015).

Euripides uses Theseus's misdirected insecurity to show how laws cannot fully monitor intents and actions: "under the calm, organized, compulsively rational exterior of Pericles [and fifth-century Athens], ... lies the eros of domination. Man is an animal driven by his nature onto projecting his personal conflicts on to the state, in good part to control them and keep them from disorganizing the psyche."¹¹⁰ Social restrictions ultimately only dictate Theseus's response to Phaedra's actions because they cannot stop her lust, and practically provoke her to extreme measures.¹¹¹

Harrison shows how female infidelity risked the corrupting the lineage of the *oikos*; if an adulteress became pregnant, her bastard threatened the transfer of property to legitimate male heirs, as well as diminished the respectability of the family because she showed little loyalty. This fear of contamination through feminine sexuality motivates laws to govern marital fidelity.¹¹² Women who engaged in extramarital affairs were punishable by death because "the Athenians thought sexual intercourse outside of marriage was a more serious offense if the woman consented than if she did not. Seduction was worse than

¹¹⁰Sagan, p. 368.

¹¹¹"The characters [in the *Hippolytus*], like the situation, have a larger dimension of meaning than purely dramatic; they are individual examples which illustrate the fundamental proposition implied in the situation- -the futility of human choice and action" (Segal, p. 321).

¹¹²"A husband was not required to be sexually faithful to his wife, but a wife was required to be so by her husband" (MacDowell, p. 88). In fact, men sought out the company of *hetairae*, prostitutes who entertained guests at dinner parties. These fancy women learned how to play musical instruments and sing. Perhaps because of their frequency at these parties and exposure to public conversations, these prostitutes could have provided more diverse interaction than secluded wives. Married men also participated in homosexual relationships with young men.

rape, because it implied corruption not only of the woman's body, but also of her mind; she ceased to be loyal to her husband."¹¹³ Willing seduction of another man's wife or unmarried daughter rated a higher punishment than rape because it implied the conscious betrayal of another man's family and the willingness of his wife to participate. While rapists were fined 100 drachmas, tradition allowed adulteresses to be put to death. If they were not killed, their husbands often divorced them and the adulteresses were forbidden to wear symbols of respectable status, such as jewelry and hair ornaments. Euripides introduces such morality in the *Hippolytus*; Phaedra acknowledges the penalties for adultery, which would have been accepted by the audience:

"...I know the scandal:
and all too well I know that I am a woman,
object of hate to all. Destruction light
upon the wife who herself plays the tempter
and strains her loyalty to her husband's bed
by dalliance with strangers...
I cannot bear that I should be discovered
a traitor to my husband and my children"
(lines 405-421).

Obviously, the Athenians both concerned themselves with and participated in such infidelities enough to establish laws forbidding them. Such an unbalanced system of justice illustrates both the power of those in control and the instability of their position; excessive insecurity prompts extreme measures to alleviate it.

Phaedra and Fifth-Century Conventional Expectations about Women

Euripides continues with Phaedra as both a challenge to and an explanation for social conventions. Throughout her bouts of love-sickness, lusty Phaedra begs

¹¹³MacDowell, p. 124.

to be outside, and such requests conflict with common images of Greek women as sequestered indoors:

"Bring me to the mountains! I *will* go to the mountains!
Among the pine trees where the huntsmen's pack
trails spotted stags and hangs upon their heel.
God, how I long to set the hounds on, shouting!
And poise the Thessalian javelin drawing it back-
here where my hair hangs above the ear-
I would hold in my hand a spear with a steel point"
(lines 215-221).

The peculiarity of Phaedra's want to go outside varies according to the extent of separation of women. Most agree that women were segregated from the public sphere of Athenian life: "Women of all social classes worked mainly indoors or near the house in order to guard it. They concerned themselves with the care of young children, the nursing of sick slaves, the fabrication of clothing, and the preparation of food."¹¹⁴ Perhaps Athenian women did or did not exist in a system as rigid as *purdah*, but a division was made between the male, public, and female, private, sectors.

Not only does Phaedra defy Athenian morality with her desire, but she challenges other norms.¹¹⁵ Euripides depicts Phaedra as literate; her "letter full of lies" provides Theseus with "proof without lot-casting" of his wife's alleged rape. Although Euripides endows other female characters with the ability to read and write, Phaedra's literacy is as peculiar in the Athenian world as is her brazen sexuality.¹¹⁶ Obviously, Euripides uses this "tablet fastened to her dear hand" as a dramatic means to further the plot, but it still deserves note because women in the ancient world usually lacked the education given to men: "With

¹¹⁴Pomeroy, *Women's History and Ancient History*, p. 72.

¹¹⁵Burian, p. 8.

¹¹⁶"It seems likely that an Athenian woman (and the same applies to most other cities) had to be exceptionally fortunate or an unusually strong personality with unusual pretensions if she were not to remain illiterate" (Harris, p. 108). It seems, however, that females in literature are more often portrayed as literate; Homer's Penelope and Euripides's Iphigenia seemed able to read and write.

regard to free Greek women, even the optimists recognize that the majority must have been illiterate, and this could have easily extended to ninety-five percent of them or more."¹¹⁷ Whether Phaedra's literacy illustrates a stock characteristic of Euripides's feminine roles or is an individual peculiarity to her, Euripides nonetheless establishes unconventional talents for Phaedra. Her letter manages to destroy her husband and acts as a catalyst for Hippolytus's death. Such unusual and extreme measures exemplify her desperation in a restrictive environment.

¹¹⁷Harris, p 106. Harris claims that the red-figure vases which depict women reading book-rolls represent the Muses or *hetairai*. Yet Mason cites examples of mortal, free women who were educated. We have documentation of Apasia the priestess who reportedly discussed state affairs with her politician-lover, Pericles, philosophized with Socrates and wrote poetry with Sophocles and Euripides. Other women of note include: Glyceria the "witty lover" of Menander, Leontium the disciple of Epicurus, Perictione the pupil of Pythagoras and Themista the wife of Leon and "female Solon." These examples prove that not all literate women were minor divinities or prostitutes. Furthermore, the limited numbers suggest their remarkableness.

Phaedra as an Universal Example

Euripides further constructs an uncommon situation when his heroine pleads to be released. Yearning for the outdoors, an unusual place for a woman, Phaedra's hope to escape her physical boundaries mirrors her wish to be rid of her behavioral and emotional limitations. Yet he legitimizes Phaedra's peculiarities because he places her in the domain of Artemis, a deity celebrated by women:

"Artemis, mistress of the Salty Lake,
mistress of the ring echoing to the racers' hoofs [*sic*],
if only I could gallop your level stretches,
and break Venetian colts!" (lines 228-231).¹¹⁸

This invocation of the hunt goddess reflects the object of Phaedra's want-- Hippolytus. Euripides connects these two characters as a means of discrediting the mistrust felt for in the periphery of the *oikos's* power scheme. As a suppliant to Artemis, Phaedra not only acknowledges her own wildness couched in convention, but also equates herself with Hippolytus and his extremes. She adopts her stepson's favorite goddess and her prayer (as cited above) mimic his initial speech:

"Loved mistress, here I [Hippolytus] offer you this
coronal;
it is a true worshipper's hand that gives it you
to crown the golden glory of your hair.
With no man else I share this privilege
that I am with you and to your words
can answer words..." (lines 81-84).

With these supplications, Euripides makes a spiritual connection between two people who have yet to assert their power in the community. This relationship

¹¹⁸The Temple to Artemis at Brauron served as a sanctuary for women who died in childbirth and was visited by virgins as well as family members of deceased mothers.

between Phaedra, threatening with her sexuality, and Hippolytus, challenging with his youth, increases towards the end of the play; both the queen and the prince meet the same fate-- death. Theseus blatantly associates Phaedra and Hippolytus, making a connection between their sexuality and implying other similarities:

"...but I know that young men
are no more to be trusted than a woman
when love disturbs the youthful blood in them"
(lines 967-969).

Euripides suggests that Theseus's insecurities cannot be solved with moral restrictions; humans remain incapable to prevent the regulate which inspire such fears. The biggest threat to the *oikos* occurs because of violation of divine conventions. Artemis tells Hippolytus how well his family behaved, but Aphrodite could not resist her scheme:

"I have come here for this- to show you that your son's
heart
was always just, so just that for his good name
he endured to die. I will show you, too,
the frenzied love that seized your wife, or I may call it,
a noble innocence. For that most hated Goddess,
hated by all of us whose joy is virginity,
drove her with love's sharp prickings to desire
your son " (lines 1297-1303).

Throughout the play Euripides shows that laws and ethics cannot squelch emotions and, ultimately, the whims of the gods, not the wills of humans, bring about destruction. Codes of conduct may be contrived but neither the inherent goodness nor evilness of human beings, specifically women in Phaedra's case, can be completely controlled. The jealousy of Aphrodite exonerates Phaedra; the queen remains innocent in her lust because she, clinging to chastity, is part of a divinity's scheme. During a discussion with the Nurse, Phaedra pleads that

"God keep me equally guiltless in his sight!" She refuses to express her devotion to Theseus because honor "lies in silence" for she seeks "to win good out of shame":

"...Silence was my first plan.
Silence and concealment. For the tongue
is not to be trusted...
It would always be my choice
to have my virtues known and honored"
(lines 393-403).

Just as Euripides connects Phaedra and Hippolytus through their prayers to Artemis, so he equates the queen and the prince with their chaste dignity. Aphrodite ensnares both Phaedra and Hippolytus in a vengeful trap, while they pride themselves on their purity. Hippolytus boasts:

"There is one thing that I have never done, the thing
of which you think that you convict me, father,
I am a virgin to this very day.
Save what I have heard or what I have seen in pictures,
I'm ignorant of the deed. Nor do I wish
for such things, for I've a maiden soul"
(lines 1003-1007).

Despite this persistence to remain pristine, the gods still control humanity's fate. Such adherence to conventional morality does not affect divine will. Euripides maintains a cynical perception of the inevitable, noting life's constant suffering. While he comments upon the particular turmoil of women, he implies the universal human experience:

"Unhappy is the compound of woman's nature;
the torturing misery of helplessness,
the helplessness of childbirth and its madness
are linked to it for ever.
My body, too, has felt this thrill of pain,
and I called on Artemis, Queen of the Bow;
she has my reverence always
as she goes in the company of the Gods"

(lines 161-169).¹¹⁹

His remarks address women specifically, but the relationship established between Phaedra and Artemis, and Hippolytus and Artemis, connect the experience of the genders surviving among the self-induced boundaries of laws and the uncontrollable constraints of nature. Although a bleak realization, Euripides conveys this solidarity through suffering, especially in the Nurse's speeches:

"The entire life of man is misery:
he finds no resting place, no haven from calamity.
But something other dearer still than life
the darkness hides and mist encompasses:
we are proved luckless lovers in this thing
that glitters in the underworld: no man
can tell us of the stuff of it, expounding
what is, and what is not: we know nothing of it.
...We all must suffer sometimes: we are mortal"
(lines 189-196, 207).

Euripides makes another conscious decision to associate characters in their common destiny when he chooses the Nurse's words. Euripides equalizes this earthly existence with the Nurse's relationship to Phaedra and Hippolytus; her betrayal of Phaedra's lust becomes part of Aphrodite's scheme. This divine vengeance excuses the Nurse's treachery, as it explains Phaedra's, and this lessens the mistrust the audience may feel. Hence, Euripides enables his portrayal of the Nurse to be a further expression of the essence of human experience:

"The ways of life that are most fanatical

¹¹⁹Oates writes that "we can only conclude either that Euripides believed it to be a matter of little importance that man strive to understand the nature of the divine power, which is ultimately inscrutable and therefore should be completely accepted as such, or that he was so interested in analyzing man's emotional and psychological states that he never finally came to grips with the problem of religion" (p. 762). Euripides does make a decision, however, and this bleak realism pervades his scripts.

trip us up more, they say, than bring us joy.
They're enemies to health...
If in the sum you have more luck than ill,
count yourself fortunate- for you are mortal... "
(lines 261-264, 471-472).

The truth in her words appeals universally; the Nurse, presumably a slave, shares the wisdom of her experience to characterize the lives of her noble lady, her princely ward, her royal lord, and her audience. She evaluates the behavior of Phaedra and Hippolytus, the dramatic representation of mortals floundering within their self-imposed restrictions.

The Resolution of the *Hippolytus*

Euripides creates the *Hippolytus* within the context of divine jealousy, and all actions which follow cannot be divorced from his belief in the will of the gods. Although Euripides employs a woman as the devastated and destructive force, he comments upon the human condition as it applies to all people; fear of disrupting the *oikos* inspires morality, which cannot prevent the forces behind this insecurity. Phaedra serves as an extreme example of the pain caused by the conflicts of human desire, social morality and divine retribution. Her plight becomes common as Euripides associates the characters of Hippolytus and the Nurse with her.

Chapter Seven: Intent and Method in Aeschylean and Euripidean Drama

Aeschylus and Euripides employed female characters in their dramatic celebration to the gods, particularly Dionysus. Writing their plays specifically for the Dionysian Festival, both playwrights used their dramas as a means of honoring the god of wine and revelry. They included discussion of divine activity and its effects upon human behavior as well as the relationship between the mortals' choices and the gods' whims. Aeschylus and Euripides also took advantage of the public nature of the Dionysia, and within this religious context, the tragedians addressed secular concerns.

Using their plays as a vehicle for debate, Aeschylus and Euripides either condemned reforms or questioned accepted norms in fifth-century Athens. Both playwrights reinvented traditional myths and images of women in the ancient world and the Greek perception of femininity. While Aeschylean and Euripidean drama share methods of portrayal, each tragedian manipulated female roles to derive different conclusions; Aeschylus reworked traditional conceptions of barbarians and customary images of Homeric women. These variations of conventions illustrated his opposition to the corruption of the very *nomoi* he revised. Euripides, too, reinvented myths about foreign women and female sexuality. But he did so in an effort to question social conventions.

For the most part Aeschylus and Euripides shared religious intentions, and their methods reflect concern for secular issues. They also both possess a keen sense of what it means to be Greek. Although Aeschylus hopes to maintain Greek standards and Euripides debates their validity, both tragedians understand the distinctions between Greek and barbarian. This national identity is subtly implied throughout Aeschylus's the *Persians*, but even in the *Oresteia*

Aeschylus foreshadows Euripides's discussion of familial and national security in the *Medea*. At the very end of the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus, the champion of Greek *nomoi*, endows Aegisthus with a sense of alienation which echoes Medea's laments. Granted, Aegisthus is not a female character but his sentiment reflects Aeschylus's ability to understand the experience of a foreigner. When Aegisthus acquiesces to Clytaemnestra's bullying and accepts his position her consort, he notes the desperation of his situation: "Exiles feed on empty hopes. I know it. I was one" (line 1668). Although he will enjoy the power he derives from being the queen's lover, he acknowledges the alienation of being away from his family. Perhaps, too, he recognizes the precariousness of his position; Clytaemnestra's crime will not go unpunished and neither will his participation go unnoticed. Just as Medea understands the ramifications of her actions, so Aegisthus foresees his potential misfortune. Aeschylus hints at those issues which Euripides addresses directly.

Ethnic bias does not always inspire this compassion for the alienated which appears throughout Aeschylus's works and pervades in Euripides's tragedies. The idea that human beings are distinct and apart may be not be a hardship but a hope. Throughout Euripides's the *Hippolytus*, Phaedra pleads to be released from the web of lust Aphrodite has constructed. Begging to escape to the hills as a follower of Artemis, Phaedra appeals to our sense of rebellion; she wants to flee the constraints of sexual morality. Similarly, Aeschylus depicts Clytaemnestra maneuvering within the confines of her restricted position. Clytaemnestra appears enthralled with the details and execution of her vengeance. At one point, however, she shares Phaedra's escapism. Having waited for her husband's return and plotting in his absence, she sighs "Oh, it is sweet to escape from all necessity" (line 858). Just as Phaedra hopes for

release, so Clytaemnestra wishes for freedom from expectations. Again, Aeschylus suggests what Euripides discusses.

The intent of Aeschylean and Euripidean drama seems a natural progression; initially, both plays share dramatic motivation. Having understood the purpose of tragedy as religious celebration, both tragedians maintain traditional dramatic intentions with variations upon structural and thematic compositions. Yet, the secondary motivations of Aeschylus and Euripides represent the diversity of the playwrights. While they may both pervert and invert images of women in the ancient world, they do so as a means to different ends; Aeschylus supports the *nomoi* and Euripides refutes the *nomoi*. Ultimately, both Aeschylus and Euripides understand the dynamics of the relationships between the divine and the mortal, and their depictions of women represent this interaction. Furthermore, each tragedian illustrates, with characters such as Atossa, Clytaemnestra, Medea and Phaedra, how "wisdom comes alone through suffering" (the *Agamemnon*, line 177).¹²⁰ These female characters provide symbolic episodes of the human experience and the playwrights' attempts to validate it.

¹²⁰Line 177, the *Agamemnon*. Although Aeschylus composed these lines, they seem as if Euripides could have written them.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Hanna Roisman, Chair of the Classics Department, for her efforts as my Senior Scholar tutor and for her constant encouragement throughout this project. I also express my gratitude to Joseph Roisman, of the Classics and History Departments, for his research advice and for his editing suggestions. And I appreciate the enthusiasm and interest of David Simon, of the Art Department.