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University of Alberta

Silence, Suicide, and Sacrifice: Women in Classical Drama

by

Joni Petruskevich

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Philosophy

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Abstract

Silence, Suicide, and Sacrifice: Women in Classical Drama

This thesis looks at the lives of women in ancient Greece, the Greek ideal for women, and the depiction of many of the female characters in classical drama. My hypothesis: there is an ontological difference posited between men and women—namely, that men are active and women passive—which will have profound ethical and political consequences, with women being virtuous in different ways than men, about different matters than men. Specifically, a woman's virtue lies in obedience and other-interest, silence, and self-sacrifice. I propose that, according to this model, a woman does not try to find the mean in regards to serious ethical choices, for it is not her role to choose. The purpose of this examination—illuminated by relevant issues from Aristotle's ethical, political, and literary theory—is to demonstrate how the plays can lead to important revisions of how we interpret the Aristotelian theory of the mean.

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Introduction

In the fifth chapter of his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as "a mimesis . . . of ethically serious subjects." For a contemporary critic, one such subject is the position of women in Greek drama. This question is of interest for several reasons, for it provides an opportunity to examine both the status attributed to women in the extant plays and the theoretical implications of this attribution. In particular, I feel that an examination of the dramatists' treatment of their female characters—illuminated by relevant issues from Aristotle's ethical, political, and literary theory—will lead to revisions of how we interpret the Aristotelian theory of the mean, especially its application to the moral conflicts in Greek drama.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will briefly summarize the status of women in Classical Athens and the views of some twentieth-century classicists on this topic. Studying the position of women in Greek society proves useful in providing a background against which to consider the position of women in drama. There are excellent studies of the lives of women in classical Athens, including *Women in the Classical World* and *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity.* These texts treat such matters as female infanticide, education, marriage, prostitution, health issues (including childbirth), and housekeeping. One point I will emphasize is the seclusion of citizen women: their restriction to the home and their lack of opportunity to participate in public matters, whether political or social. Also of interest are the views of twentieth-century commentators on the status of women in ancient Greece, since whether a woman's life is deemed loathsome or decent is often based on how the commentator interprets the role of literature in describing the lives of actual women. Two issues arise from this point: firstly, why are there so many great, powerful, intelligent women in drama if their reality was so different and might this be a means for the playwright to comment on the status of women in society? Secondly, is it accurate to describe the situations of the women in the plays as decent when the plays also contain many misogynistic comments?

In the second chapter, I will describe Aristotle's theory of female nature and what a woman's status should be, so that it accords with her nature. Much has been written about Aristotle's misogyny and its place in his philosophy, but I have always been interested in whether or not his theories stand once the questionable hierarchies are eliminated, and I believe this is important in understanding both the tragedies themselves and Aristotle's critical stance on them. I plan to examine Aristotle's views on women in his biological, political, and ethical works in order to determine whether Aristotle is using a one-sex or two-sex model and how this use determines what constitutes a virtuous woman. My hypothesis: there is an ontological difference posited between men and women (a duality

that implies opposition and strife rather than complementarity), namely, that men are active and women passive, a difference which will have profound ethical and political consequences, with women being virtuous in different ways than men, about different matters than men. Specifically, a woman's virtue lies in obedience and other-interest, silence, and self-sacrifice. I propose that a woman, then, does not try to find the mean in regards to serious ethical choices, for it is not her role to choose. Consequently, a female character in a tragedy or comedy who is faced with a moral decision is a paradox, a point that unquestionably influences the way classical dramatists portray the character and actions of the female characters, the way the other characters respond to them, and the way critics have responded to them. The question, ultimately, is whether and how Aristotle's biology and politics warp either his ethics or poetics.

The third chapter will be a brief one of transition, moving from a discussion of the ideal or stereotypically virtuous woman to the woman of classical literature. I plan to focus on the notion of a woman's reputation and the paradoxes inherent in a virtuous woman's pursuit of glory. An interesting character to end with is Ischomachos's wife in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, in particular her husband's praise of her.

Chapter Four returns us to the main focus of this thesis, the treatment of women in Greek drama. In the first section, Aristotle's definition of a good tragedy will be reviewed, as well as its implications for tragedies that focus on women. Cynthia Freeland labels many of these tragedies "victim tragedies," where the defining characteristic is the absence of personal *hamartia* as the cause of a character's reversal. Euripides' *The Trojan Women* is a paradigm of this sort of tragedy, one that fails to meet Aristotle's criteria for good tragedy.

In the following sections, I will consider some of the better known female characters of tragedy, bringing some of the details and difficulties of their characterizations to light. The study will begin with Jocasta as a particularly heroic character who is nonetheless denied hero status in *Oedipus Rex*. Two feminist claims will be central to this discussion: Sheila Murnaghan's notion that a suicidal wife demonstrates the theoretical link perceived between women and the body, and Carol Gelderman's claim that Greek tragedy is dedicated to promoting male individualism. Section Three looks at the ambiguous nature of other tragic wives, like Alcestis and Evadne. Both women simultaneously fulfill and belie the traditional role of wife, but in the end the deviation reinforces the norm.

In Section Four, I will turn to Iphigenia as she is portrayed in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. My critical focus will be on providing a Girardian analysis of the sacrifice, exposing the sacrifice as a result of mimetic rivalry. Clytemnestra, whose portrayal exposes the binary drawn between male and female nature and the ethical alternatives open

to both, will also be discussed (Section Five). What I am most interested in is her nature and her ability to act—in particular, her characterization as manly—rather than the moral status of her murder of Agamemnon. Michael Shaw's analysis is typical of modern criticism, for he focuses on the wife as the keeper of the household and the husband as tender of the state, and he interprets the *Oresteia* as depicting the need to maintain a balance between the two spheres. I propose, instead, that it is the belief that excess can correct excess, producing a harmony, that is constantly brought into question in the tragedies. The next tragic woman I will look at in detail in Section Six, then, is Antigone, who is theoretically of the same kind as Clytemnestra and whose characterization also deconstructs the boundary between the private and the public.

Section Seven will focus on three of Euripides' virgins, Macaria, Iphigenia, and Polyxena, and how they cling to their contingency and free will in the face of certain death. I hope to illustrate how such plays explore the connection between contingency and ethics in light of the various types of modalities portrayed in the dramatic action. And Section Eight moves from Euripidean innocents to two Euripidean villains, Hecuba and Medea. Here I want to highlight the ambiguous status of these dehumanized women, both of whom epitomize the Other of Greek maleness—being foreign, female, and ultimately bestial. Medea herself returns us to an examination of the role of women in ancient Greece.

The final section will focus on the female characters in New Comedy. Unfortunately, very little has been written on the female characters, despite the fact that women are the title characters of many New Comedies. I plan to use the comedies of Menander to expose how, in times of moral crises, women's alternatives tend to be limited to silence and sacrifice, including silence as sacrifice.

Chapter Five and the Conclusion will look at how the Aristotelian theory of the mean and the Aristotelian form of virtue ethics can help us critically evaluate Greek—and, indeed, contemporary—literature, and how this reading, in turn, forces us to re-evaluate the binary drawn between male and female characters. Here I will reverse my previous strategy and explore how Aristotelian ethics could have influenced his politics, biology, and poetics. Following Martha Nussbaum's project in *Love's Knowledge*, where she deconstructs the distinction between philosophy (especially ethics) and literature, I plan to demonstrate how the conclusions drawn from Greek drama can be applied more generally.

Chapter One: Women in Ancient Greece

Section One: Historical Conditions

Within the last few decades, an increasing amount of textual and archaeological research focused on women in the ancient world has been performed. It is thus with some trepidation that I offer this summary: one risk is the production of a totalizing fiction, a description that overgeneralizes so that it portrays women in the aggregate, disregarding age, rank, wealth, or citizenship status. However, since literature treats the depiction of women, and since such appearances arguably influence the treatment of real women, I will try to provide a glimpse at the lives of women in areas that pertain to the topic of this thesis.

It is safe to state that the average age for a first marriage of a citizen girl was fourteen (Pomeroy 68), an age considered likely to ensure virginity (Lacey 162); consequently, she entered her husband's house uneducated and inexperienced,[1] especially in relation to her new husband, who was typically sixteen years her senior. Before marriage she would have spent her time in her father's or guardian's house, learning how to perform domestic duties, and after marriage she would be confined to her husband's home, maintaining his household and raising his children.[2] A citizen woman's work largely resembled the work of her female slaves (if the household was wealthy enough to afford any): spinning, weaving, cleaning, and cooking (Pomeroy 72). Although poor women of any class were forced to seek employment—generally in some domestic capacity

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[1] The ignorance of the girl bride is described in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus:*

> "'It would please me very much, Ischomachos,' I said, 'if I might also inquire about this—whether you yourself educated your wife to be the way she ought to be, or whether, when you took her from her mother and father, she already knew how to manage the things that are appropriate to her.'
>
> "'How, Socrates,' he said, 'could she have known anything when I took her, since she came to me when she was not yet fifteen, and had lived previously under diligent supervision in order that she might see and hear as little as possible and ask the fewest possible questions? Doesn't it seem to you that one should be content if she came knowing only how to take the wool and make clothes, and had seen how the spinning work is distributed among the female attendants?'" (VII.4-6)

[2] Socrates' remark to Kritoboulos in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* is generally considered a fair description of the relation between the typical Greek husband and wife:

> ". . . In any event, speak the whole truth to us, Kritoboulos," he said, "for you are in the presence of friends. Is there anyone to whom you entrust more serious matters than to your wife?"
>
> "No one," he said.
>
> "And is there anyone with whom you discuss fewer things than your wife?"
>
> "There aren't many, in any case," he said.
>
> "Did you marry her when she was a very young girl and had seen and heard as little as possible?"
>
> "Yes, indeed."
>
> "Then it's even more wonderful if she knows anything of what she ought to say or do than if she goes wrong." (III.12-13)

(Pomeroy 73)—a citizen woman of sufficient means was unlikely to ever perform errands outside the home, but sent a slave in her stead (Fantham 103). Her seclusion was necessitated not merely by the amount of domestic labor she was responsible for, but also because outside the women's quarters of her home "she might encounter men who were not close kin and who therefore posed potential threats to her chastity and the legitimacy of the family's heirs" (Fantham 103). The production of a legitimate male heir was so crucial that a husband "of a raped or adulterous woman was legally compelled to divorce her" (Pomeroy 86), even though the woman was considered the passive, not the active and thus legally responsible, party. While prostitutes were less restricted than citizen wives, their work was certainly unenviable and their status, in the vast majority of cases, even lower.

The maintenance of the household and the production of legitimate heirs are thus obviously the two main functions of citizen women. Unfortunately, physical well-being was not generally deemed necessary for these tasks. Women were often given less to eat than men and had no exercise outside their housework.[3] Most women bore their children between the ages of sixteen and twenty-six (Pomeroy 85), making this a particularly dangerous period of their lives. The infant mortality rate was so high that it is unlikely that infanticide, even female infanticide, was heavily practiced, although female infanticide is obviously an effective means of population control (Pomeroy 69-70).

I have been unable to determine if women attended the theatre, for, even by restricting my sources to those who are considered experts, there is no consensus.[4] A. E. Haigh, who is thought to have collected all available material on the subject, believes that there is enough evidence to make the presence of women more believable than not[5] (325-28) and, further, that it was unlikely that "there was anything disreputable in a woman visiting the theatre" (329). Victor Ehrenberg, however, declares that, despite Haigh's collection of evidence in support of the presence of women, "I cannot prove the contrary,

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[3] But who needs the gymnasium when there is laundry:

> *Ischomachos* :
> And I said it would be good exercise to moisten and knead the bread and to shake out and fold the clothes and bedcovers. I said that if she exercised in this way, she would take more pleasure in eating, would become healthier, and so would come to sight as better complexioned in truth. (*Oeconomicus* X.11)

[4] My favorite piece of evidence on this issue relates to a performance of *The Eumenides* and the horrific appearance of the Furies. Peter D. Arnott writes that "According to a famous story, their appearance was so frightening that women in the audience miscarried on the spot" (26). Pomeroy attributes this tale to the *Life of Aeschylus*, likely written by Didymus in the first century B.C. (238, n. 8).

[5] He cites, for instance, Plato's assertion in the *Gorgias* that educated women prefer the tragic to the comic poet and Aristophanes' numerous references to women and boys being part of the audience.

but I still believe in it" (Ehrenberg 269), claiming simply that "the joke of *Peace*" does not prove anything and that there is some evidence to the contrary in *Lysistrate*, *Thesmophoriazousai*, and *Ekklesiazousai*. In a more recent study, however, the authors of *Women in the Classical World*[6] claim that, although there is evidence on both sides, it is more likely that some women did attend the festivals in honor of Dionysus (70). It is fair to conclude, though, that the target audience of the poets was male. And, as Pomeroy observes,

> What is interesting about this controversy is that, numerous though they probably were over the years [at the theatre], the women, absent or present, were not noticed by our ancient authorities. (Pomeroy 80)

Even participation in the various festivals could hardly compensate for the drudgery of a typical day, the lack of intellectual and social stimulus, and the inability to actively participate in political matters. In summary, except in the case of a handful of fortunate courtesans who were educated and welcome in the social arena, seclusion and silence are the keynotes of a woman's life in Classical Athens.

Section Two: Modern Opinions on the Status of Women in Ancient Greece

A cursory survey of the conclusions of twentieth-century classicists on the status of women[7] tells us more about the classicists than about the women. In 1923, F. A. Wright declares,

> The fact is—and it is as well to state it plainly—that the Greek world perished from one main cause, a low ideal of womanhood and a degradation

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[6] This excellent text was written in a collaborative manner by five authors: Elaine Fantham, Helene Peet Foley, Natalie Boymel Kampen, Sarah B. Pomeroy, and H. Alan Shapiro. There is no indication which authors produced which sections of the book. I am focusing on their third chapter, "Women in Classical Athens: Heroines and Housewives."

[7] In a recent article, Marilyn A. Katz examines the ideology underlying our interest in this topic, claiming "we now know that the status question is the wrong one, but we have not made it clear why this is so, nor do we have a clear understanding of why the study of women in Greek antiquity was originally formulated around this issue" (21). Katz concludes that the question was not first raised by scholars of classical antiquity but "formed part of the intellectual currency of the eighteenth century, and played an important role in the general debate over the form and nature of civil society" (35). According to Katz, in the establishment of a social contract, a theorist needed to determine a woman's place in a civil society of male individuals, a place which was to accord with her nature. Rather than searching for the true history of women, then, Katz examines "the history of the history of women" which "can only be achieved, not by dismissing as outdated what has gone before, but by exposing the ideological foundations of a hegemonic discourse that has dominated the discussion of ancient women and that continues to make its powerful influence felt in the discussion of women generally as part of civil society at the present moment in history" (40).

> of women which found expression both in literature and in social life. The position of women and the position of slaves—for the two classes went together—were the canker-spots which, left unhealed, brought about the decay first of Athens and then of Greece. (1)

Later on she makes the now famous claim that

> A woman's life at Athens in the fifth century B.C. was a dreary business. She was confined closely to the house, a harem prisoner, but without any of that luxurious ease which the harem system has sometimes offered as a solace for the loss of freedom. An Athenian house was small, dark, and uncomfortable, and a woman's day was occupied with a long round of monotonous work. Occasionally she was allowed out of prison to walk in some sacred procession, . . . but all the amusements of the town were closed against her. (57-58)

No less polemical, it seems, are the classicists who determine that women were not restricted to their houses and were, overall, respected.[8] Donald Richter is one of the more recent proponents of this view, claiming that the evidence supporting the subjugation of women in classical Greece has been misinterpreted. He believes that women were esteemed for their domestic labor, but admits, albeit without censure, that there "is, of course, a healthy strain of misogyny and misogamy running through Greek literature, especially that of the Lyric age" (Richter 5). He points out that it is not the quiet, obedient wife who is targeted, though, but women exhibiting "intransigence and impudence"(5). As for the seclusion of women, this was

> occasioned by a quite normal measure of husbandly jealousy. In view of the licentiousness for which Athenian women were notorious, the perennial suspicions of the husband were probably fully justified. (7)

Most commentators are not as openly prejudiced[9] and purport to base their claims on the position of women as proven by the evidence available. Their subjectivity is, in fact, often masked by the type of evidence considered:

> The critical factor appears to be the heroines of Aeschylus and Sophocles. The scholars who consider Antigone and Electra, for example, as "real"

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[8] C.f. A. W. Gomme, "The Position of Women in Athens in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C." and H. D. F. Kitto's *The Greeks*. The conclusion of both authors is that the women of the day were not treated like slaves, were not secluded, and were, in fact, well-respected.

[9] It is extremely tempting to lay out the many misogynistic comments that are made about the women of ancient Greece and their treatment, and it is only with great restraint that I can keep this topic from hijacking this thesis.

> evidence for women of the fifth century B.C. will believe that the status of women was high.[10] On the other hand, evidence from orators and other prose writers points usually to a low status, while comedy and Euripides give ambiguous testimony. The scholars surveyed do not give equal weight to all available evidence, but deliberately exclude or explain away the literature not supporting their positions. (Pomeroy 59-60)

What Pomeroy does not consider, however, is the very interpretation of the position of the heroines of Greek tragedy, such as Antigone, Electra, or Clytemnestra, as high. There is no question that some of these women are strong, intelligent, and determined, for instance, but there is contradictory evidence in every play which demeans the female characters, and the targets of the derogatory attacks are generally a woman's strength and status.

Besides, as the authors of *Women in the Classical World* remark, "Drama is a problematic source for the lives of both women and men in Classical Athens (see further Foley 1981, Zeitlin 1985, Just 1989, Des Bouvrie 1990)" (69). One of the difficulties is that the tragedies tend to be based on what Aristotle calls traditional plots (*Poetics*, ch. 9), myths from the distant past, while the comedies are often farcical fantasies, in no way trying to accurately represent reality. Some commentators[11] claim that the strong female characters from the ancient myths suggest an earlier period when society was a primitive

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[10] An example: L. A. Post writes, "I also agree [with A. W. Gomme] that the striking importance of women in Greek literature accurately reflects their place in Greek life" (421). She concludes that "the rule that a good woman did not pass her threshold is inevitably broken in literature. . . . In Comedy, Old and New, we hear much of women who visit and borrow and help one another in childbirth. . . . The really effective rule seems to have been that women should keep silent among men and above all should not be heard like barking dogs in the streets, whether in altercation with their own husbands or with other men. In truth, women by ingrained habit shunned observation and resented interference" (438-39).

[11] E. F. M. Benecke :

> It is of considerable assistance for a proper comprehension of the earliest literature, if one remembers that at the time of its production the enslavement of women had only comparatively recently taken place.
>
> The reason of the influence of primitive women over primitive man is probably not very far to seek. In early times women were regarded with superstitious reverence—one need only watch a woman making lace, say, to be able nowadays still to quite appreciate the feeling—and with natural woman's wit for a time kept up the illusion, the hard head of man taking some time to come to maturity. But when man did at last wake to the fact that he was physically, and therefore, for practical purposes, generally superior, an inevitable reaction set in, and the history of early Greece shows women as occupying on the whole a very low position—a position, too, which became lower still with advancing civilisation. (7)

matriarchy (Gelderman 221).[12] This supposition, however, can tell us little about classical drama and is best left behind. Pomeroy does believe, though, that

> a city-state such as Athens flourished only through the breaking of familial or blood bonds and the subordination of the patriarchal family within the patriarchal state. But women were in conflict with this political principle, for their interests were private and family-related. Thus, drama often shows them acting out of the women's quarters, and concerned with children, husbands, fathers, brothers, and religions deemed more primitive and family-oriented than the Olympian, which was the support of the state. This is the point at which the image of the heroine on the stage coincides with the reality of Athenian women. (97)

The distinction drawn here is not an ontological one, but one that was necessitated by the role of women in the *polis*, as determined by citizen males and philosophers like Aristotle.

The discrepancies of opinion from twentieth-century commentators on the position of women in classical Athens—from factual issues such as whether women attended the theatre to more elusive questions of how well women were treated—suggest that women were not the focus of ancient commentators, and the archaeological evidence that would help piece together women's lives is scanty, with the unfortunate result that we are unlikely to ever really know the truth about the status of real women in classical Athens.

The one thing that is clear, though, is that whatever a woman's status was in Athens, it was defined by the male citizens, relegating women to the status of Other. As Simone de Beauvoir explains, even when the roles created by the men for women were respected by them, through their position as creator, the men defined and controlled women's roles and respectability:

> when, terrified by the dangerous magic of woman, he sets her up as the essential, it is he who poses her as such and thus he really acts as the essential in this voluntary alienation. (73)

Athena, paradigm of the motherless ideal, is a fabulous female who is no mortal woman, the absolute Other for both men and women. De Beauvoir notes that antifeminists are "glad

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[12] Later on, Gelderman writes:

> Now let me pause for a moment to point out that many eminent modern scholars, most notably Levi-Strauss, refuse to accept *any* kind of theory of primitive matriarchy. And yet it is difficult to imagine why a people organized on strictly patriarchal principles, and among whom the status of woman was so low, should come to portray so many powerful women as show up in Athenian tragedy. (225)

This is a fair question.

to exalt woman as the *Other* in such a manner as to make her alterity absolute, irreducible, and to deny her access to the human *Mitsein*" (71).

The relevance of de Beauvoir's position is that whether the roles designed for women are abominable or admirable tells us little about the women who fill these roles, but much about the men who designed them. The characters created by male tragedians should also be read with caution: displaced not only by the fact that female characters are fictional, these women are doubly displaced in that their words and actions are ultimately those of the male playwright.

Chapter Two: Aristotle's Woman

> For Poetes wrate agaynste women in wanton ditties, to content men with newe fangled devises. But the reproche to women, given by Aristotel, was in treatynge of matter wayghty and seriouse, whereby it appereth, that the saide words so spytefully spoken, proceded only of cankred malyce.
>
> Thomas Elyot[13]

Women in practice are forever shadowed by women in theory, and Aristotle had much to contribute to the latter.[14] Much has been written about Aristotle's misogyny and its place in his philosophy[15]—whether it is simply an aberration inspired by cankered malice or consistent with his overall philosophy. I have always been interested in whether or not his theories stand once the questionable hierarchies are eliminated,[16] and I believe this question is important in understanding both the tragedies themselves and Aristotle's critical stance on them. Feminist theory has forced the recognition that an inquiry that appears to be value-neutral is in fact riddled with presuppositions, and the answers found are unsurprisingly influenced by the questions asked. First principles, a philosopher's

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[13] Spoken by Candidus in Thomas Elyot's *The Defence of Good Women* (London: Thomae Bertheleti, 1540) sig. C4v. Quoted in Horowitz 213.

[14] This section could obviously be a thesis topic of its own. Because I am most interested in turning to the classical literature itself, I have tried to limit the scope of this discussion. I have relied heavily on the work of Okin, Green, and Garside for this section. In fact, what matters most to my topic is not what Aristotle philosophically believed, but how he suggests actual women and their opinions be treated, and how these views have been understood and applied by others.

[15] See, for example: María Luisa Femenías, "Women and Natural Hierarchy in Aristotle" (*Hypatia* 9.1 (Winter 1994): 164-72); Christine Garside, "Can a Woman be Good in the Same Way as a Man?" (*Dialogue* 10 (1971): 534-44); Stephen R. L. Clark, "Aristotle's Woman" (*History of Political Thought* 3.2 (Summer 1982): 177-91); Judith M. Green, "Aristotle on Necessary Verticality, Body Heat, and Gendered Proper Places in the Polis: A Feminist Critique" (*Hypatia* 7.1 (Winter 1992): 70-96); Robin Schott, "Aristotle on Women" (*Kinesis* 11.2 (Spring 1982): 69-84); Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Aristotle and Woman" (*Journal of the History of Biology* 9.2 (Fall 1976): 183-213); Arlene W. Saxonhouse, "From Tragedy to Hierarchy and Back Again: Women in Greek Political Thought" (*American Political Science Review* 80.2 (June 1986): 403-18); Johannes Morsink, "Was Aristotle's Biology Sexist?" (*Journal of the History of Biology* 12.1 (Spring 1979): 83-112); and Susan Moller Okin, Section 2 of *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979).

[16] In the case of his ethical theory, it seems fair to say that his misogyny is not essential to the theory of the mean. Unlike rule-based theories, where certain values always seem to be given priority over others and which are conducive to ignoring either rights or responsibilities, Aristotle's virtue-ethic makes room for both particular people and circumstances, while the doctrine of the mean seems more inimical to prejudice than an incentive for it.

assumptions about the fundamental and incontrovertible truths on which the rest of the system can be based, are by definition the very place for bias to creep into a philosopher's corpus, influencing everything to come, even if the result is a theoretically coherent, consistent, and logical whole.

Aristotelian thinking is grounded on several basic assumptions that have far-reaching consequences. First, Aristotle is basically conservative. As Susan Moller Okin points out, Aristotle "starts out from the basic belief that the *status quo* in both the natural and the social realm is the best way for things to be" (74).[17] His conservatism is a logical consequence of his functionalist assumption—that a thing's essence or nature is its function—and the teleological assumption "that (all the things which Nature employs) are determined by necessity, but at the same time they are for the sake of some purpose, some Final Cause, and for the sake of that which is better in each case" (*Generation of Animals* V.789b, qtd. in Okin 75). In other words, Aristotle's world view is essentially hierarchical, where "what is inferior is always for the sake of what is superior" (*Politics* VII.14.1333a22).[18] This hierarchy is both natural and necessary.

The Aristotelian hierarchical principle is more expansive than the notion of the Great Chain of Being: it pervades everything in every way. Judith M. Green, for example, believes that Aristotle's political conclusions on women and slaves are more than aberrations from an otherwise sound conceptual schema; rather, they are necessary consequences of fundamentally flawed first principles of oppositions:[19]

> The general principles of Nature . . . concern the systematic interaction of dualistic oppositions, such as activity and passivity, up-ness and down-ness, heat and cold, form-making and form-receiving. (Green 74)[20]

It is difficult to tell where the corruption enters. The notion of dualistic principles does not appear in any *a priori* sense to necessitate opposition, struggle, or oppression. Indeed, dual principles invite an interpretation of distinction with complementarity rather than strife, reciprocity rather than relative superiority.

If Green is right, the problem lies primarily in principle-bundling and hierarchization, where one principle is considered hierarchically above its correlate because of an often arbitrary relationship with other principles:

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[17] For example: *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.1.1145b3-7.

[18] Translation by J. L Ackrill unless otherwise noted.

[19] In the *Physics*, Aristotle declares that the fact "That opposites are principles is universally agreed" (188a19).

[20] Green uses *The Physics*, Vols. 1 and 2, trans. Philip H. Wickstead and Francis M. Cornford. Cambridge: Harvard UP/Loeb Classical Library, 1929, 1934.

> According to the *Physics*, these dualistic oppositions are systematically organized into principle-bundles; that is, activity tends to go with up-ness, heat, and form-making among natural things that have any one of these characteristics, whereas passivity tends to go with down-ness, cold, and form-receiving (188a26ff and 190b29ff). Correlates tend to embody opposite dualistic principle-bundles that determine their proper places relative to one another within a frame of reference (205a10-12). Natural relative up-ness and down-ness is the fundamental determinant of a thing's proper place, and this characteristic is determined by the dualistic principle-bundle that is embodied in the thing's substance (208b9-25 and 211a4-5). Aristotle gives no name to this fundamental principle of location according to relative natural up-ness and down-ness that he claims organizes and directs the activity of correlates and compounds throughout all of Nature. This may be why many commentators have failed to notice it. Nonetheless, it is clearly a fundamentally important principle: it is the one I refer to . . . as the principle of necessary verticality.

Although I remain unconvinced that there is anything inherently prejudicial in viewing the physical realm of forces (motion, for instance) in this way, extending the principle of necessary verticality into the biological and then the human realm without reflection is clearly problematic. Indeed, these correlative relationships are mentioned throughout Aristotle's corpus, in the metaphysical, biological, political, and ethical treatises, and they unfortunately include the relationship between male and female, for "The distinction of sex is first principle" (*Generation of Animals* 716b10). The consequences of this theorizing do not remain in the abstract realm of first principles, but are played out in the social arena:

> That one should command and another obey is both necessary and expedient. Indeed some things are so divided right from birth, some to rule, some to be ruled. There are many different forms of this ruler-ruled relationship. . . .
>
> For wherever there is a combination of elements, continuous or discontinuous, and a common unity is the result, in all such cases the ruler-ruled relationship appears. (*Politics* I.5.1254a21-31)

The metaphysical is the basis of the physical; the universal is instantiated in the realm of the particular.

Turning first to Aristotle's position on women in the *Metaphysics*, then, he admits: "One might raise the question, why woman does not differ from man in species, female and male being contrary, and their difference being a contrariety" (X.9.1058a29-31). He

answers that "contrarieties which are in the formula make a difference in species, but those which are in the compound material thing do not make one. . . . [M]atter does not create a difference" (X.9.1058b1-7). Physical sexual difference is obviously not an ontological difference. Why, then, is it that "as between male and female the former is by nature superior and ruler, the latter inferior and subject" (*Politics* I.5.1254b13-14)? The bodily differences do not make a metaphysical difference, but something does. It must be a question of gender and Green's principle-bundles, but precisely where the misogyny enters escapes me.

Biologically, there are two sexes, the difference necessitated by Nature for the purposes of reproduction (*Politics* I.1.1252a28-29). The material differences in the body are for reproductive purposes; otherwise, the differences are supposed to be ontologically uninteresting. In fact, Thomas Laqueur argues that Aristotle uses a one-sex model where the female is simply a lesser instantiation of the male (29):

> For just as the offspring of deformed animals are sometimes deformed and sometimes not, so that of a female is sometimes female and sometimes not—but male. For the female is as it were a male deformed, and the menses are seed but not pure seed; for it lacks one thing only, the source of the soul. This is why in all animals that produce wind-eggs the egg that is being constituted has the parts of both, but has not the source, and therefore does not become ensouled; for the source is brought in by the male's seed. (*Generation of Animals* II.3.737a25-33)

But if the female is a "deformed" male, the male must be the norm: "For even he who does not resemble his parents is already in a certain sense a monstrosity; for in these cases Nature has in a way departed from the type. The first departure is indeed that the offspring should become female instead of male; this, however, is a natural necessity" (*Generation of Animals* IV.3.767b6-10, qtd. in Horowitz 202). Nature deviated from the norm only by necessity, the need to reproduce the species. That a female exists at all, then, even in this less than fully actualized state, is for the purpose of reproduction: her primary function (Okin 81).

The important difference, then, lies not in the matter alone, but in a woman's function: "Only insofar as sex was a cipher for the nature of causality were the sexes clear, distinct, and different in kind" (Laqueur 29). But the causal difference is important ontologically, for the male contributes the formal and efficient causes for reproduction and the female the material cause:

> For there must needs be that which generates and that from which it generates; even if these be one, still they must be distinct in form and their

> essence must be different; and in those animals that have these powers separate in two sexes the body and nature of the active and the passive sex must also differ. If, then, the male stands for the effective and active, and the female, considered as female, for the passive, it follows that what the female would contribute to the semen of the male would not be semen but material for the semen to work upon. This is what we find to be the case, for the catamenia have in their nature an affinity to the primitive matter. (*Generation of Animals* I.20.729a25-35, qtd. in Green 81)

Johannes Morsink cautions that "If we are to avoid begging the question, we must not at the outset label Aristotle's theory that the male contributes the all-important form and the female the mere matter of the offspring a sexist theory" (84) and denies that "the form-matter hypothesis, which runs throughout Aristotle's biology, is a value-ridden and an *a priori* premise" (87). Laqueur, on the other hand, writes, "Aristotle did not need the facts of sexual difference to support the claim that woman was a lesser being than man; it followed from the *a priori* truth that the material cause is inferior to the efficient cause" (151). Laqueur's position is certainly Aristotle's own:

> Since their source is the male and the female, it must be for the sake of generation that male and female exist in those that have them. But the proximate moving cause (in which is present the definition and the form) is better and more divine in its nature than the matter; and it is better that the more excellent be separated from the worse. Because of this the male is separated from the female wherever possible and as far as possible. (*Generation of Animals* II.1.732a1-8)

Aristotle's sexism was, as Horowitz notes, not so much an "explicit end-point, a doctrine to be proved or justified, but was rather a value-ridden premise underlying his arguments on other topics" (205). A woman is inferior because the feminine principle is bundled with the inferior set of opposites at the level of first principles: misogyny is assumed from the start. The subordination of Woman at the universal level stems from the feminine bundle of first principles where ontological distinctions lie, and women are the particulars who theoretically suffer the consequences, where the notion of physical species similarity masks the metaphysical difference/contrariety: it is in this way that matter matters, even if on the surface it makes no difference. Why it was the female who was subordinated rather than the male is still a question, but now one of a social rather than philosophical bent. As Christine Garside reflects,

> We still have not answered the question "Why is woman a privation?" and Aristotle gives us no more help. It is just the state of things. (537)

While the bundling of binaries may seem a trivial move, then, the consequence of this simple dualistic distinction is not trivial in any way: Aristotle's entire world view is based on gendered first principles where the feminine and its correlates are located beneath the masculine and its correlates.

This rather prolonged diversion into Aristotle's natural and metaphysical philosophy has been necessary groundwork for understanding the role of women in Aristotle's political thinking. The *Politics* opens with the claim that the *polis* or state is the "most sovereign" (I.1.1252a4) association that aims at the highest good, holding "priority over the household [*oikos*] and over any individual among us" (I.1.1253a19-20). Functionalist concerns have again immediately come to the fore, and since the state is an association of its members, Aristotle would approve if we began by examining the function of the individual first. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he claims that *eudaimonia*—happiness—is the "final and self-sufficient end of human activity" (Okin 76). Happiness will be achieved when "man" fulfills his function, a function that is unique in being for its own sake rather than a means to some higher purpose: "If then nature makes nothing without some end in view, nothing to no purpose, it must be that nature has made all of them for the sake of man" (*Politics* I.8.1256b20: Penguin).[21] Since Aristotle felt that the distinguishing feature of man is his reason, "the activity of reason, which is contemplative, seems. . . to aim at no end beyond itself, and to have its pleasure proper to itself" (*Nicomachean Ethics* X.7.1177b, qtd. in Okin 77). There are necessary preconditions for achieving *eudaimonia*, however, including both reason and "certain essential external goods. . . such as riches, friends, many and good children, leisure, noble birth, and beauty" (Okin 77). Since leisure is a precondition for the contemplative life, and "a lot of things need to be provided before leisure can become possible" (*Politics* VII.15.1334a11: Penguin), someone other than the contemplator needs to supply these necessary "things." The household is the perfect association to provide man's material needs, and it requires two things for proper functioning: "women and slaves. . . and the poet Hesiod was right when he wrote, 'Get first a house and a wife and an ox to draw the plough.' (The ox is the poor man's slave)" (*Politics* I.2.1252b9). Three hierarchical pairs make up the household: "master and slave, husband and wife, father and children" (I.3.1253b1). We have already discussed the metaphysical principles that ground these hierarchies and need only emphasize that Aristotle believes them to be natural.

Turning now to the morality of the people who fill these roles, Okin points out that Aristotle equates "natural" with "good" in the *Politics*:

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[21] Although the Ackrill translation is often clearer, it is heavily abridged, so I have often turned to the Penguin edition of the *Politics*.

> when he makes the extraordinary statement that "dealing with . . . animate beings, we must fix our attention, in order to discover what nature intends, not on those which are in a corrupt, but on those which are in a natural condition" [*Politics* I.1254a], it is necessary to perform a substitution of the two equivalents—the nature of a thing, and the goodness pertaining to that thing—in order to give the proposition any content. (Okin 79-80)

Ultimately, Aristotle can justify the Greek household, since "the conventional function of any person determines that person's goodness, and a person's nature, or natural condition, is also equated with his or her goodness" (80). Women can then be naturally excluded from the good life and relegated to fulfilling their functions as child-bearers and household managers,[22] for "Men and women have different parts to play in managing the household: his to win, hers to preserve" (*Politics* III.4.1277b16: Penguin). Rigid sex roles must be preserved in the human community, since "To argue from an analogy with wild animals and say that male and female ought to engage in the same occupation is futile: animals have no household-management to do" (*Politics* II.5.1264a36: Penguin).[23] The consequence for women is that the division of labor is absolute: man is a political animal and he functions in the *polis*, "a political association ruled by a government of equals" (Femenías 167). The *oikos* serves the *polis*—and conflicts of interest between the state and the *oikos* are determined in favor of the state. Women lack both the freedom and deliberative capacity to participate in the state, but must recognize that the interests of their husbands are for their own benefit as well. While these relations of necessary verticality are for the participants' mutual benefit, there can be "neither justice at the juridical level, nor friendship at the ethical level" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1161a34-b2; qtd. in Femenías 167), for the inequality of the participants must be recognized:

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[22] Judith Swanson makes the extraordinary claim that this role frees a woman to be a philosopher: "The inclination to privacy, quietude, or a 'passive' way of life is both a female and a philosophical one. The female nature does not, unlike the male nature, resist the quiet life essential for thought. Aristotle is not, then, as [Stephen R. L.] Clark contends, 'disposed to regard femaleness as a privative rather than a positive attribute'; femaleness is positive because it prefers privacy [*Aristotle's Man.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1975, 207]" (Swanson 63). Since she also defends slavery, I have chosen not to take this on.

[23] The functionalist account was not just a philosophical tool, but has practical consequences for the women of classical Athens. Consider the following statement from Demosthene's account of the lawsuit *Against Naera:*

> For this is what living with a woman as one's wife means—to have children by her and to introduce sons to the members of the clan and of the deme, and to betroth the daughters to husbands as one's own. Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households. (Qtd. in Okin 20)

> The friendship of man and wife . . . is the same that is found in an aristocracy; for it is in accordance with virtue—the better gets more of what is good, and each gets what befits him; and so, too, with the justice in these relations. (*Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.1161a; qtd. in Okin 87)

The political justice which operates in the *polis* can exist only between equals, and since the *oikos* is an association of unequals, there can only be "household justice" (*Nicomachean Ethics* V.1134b, qtd. in Okin 86) where the authority of the master of the house is respected.

I want to turn now to what it means for a man or woman to be good, especially as being good means fulfilling one's function. Since this thesis is centered on Greek drama, the *Poetics* makes an interesting starting point. Consider the first two items in Aristotle's list of the aims of characterization:

> (a) first and foremost, that the characters be good. Characterisation will arise, as earlier explained (ch. 6), where speech or action exhibits the nature of an ethical choice; and the character will be good when the choice is good. But this depends on each class of person: there can be a good woman and a good slave, even though perhaps the former is an inferior type, and the latter a wholly base one.
>
> (b) that the characters be appropriate. For it is *possible* to have a woman manly in character, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be so manly or clever. (*Poetics*, ch. 15)

What does it mean, then, for a character to be good? Aristotle implies that a good choice for a woman would be a poor choice for a man, that some behaviors or roles are appropriate for a man, but not a woman, and vice versa. Is a good woman, then, truly good? Or is this like asking Plato if there is such a thing as a good thief?

Christine Garside observes that Aristotle's virtuous person is a man of practical wisdom, having "a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to things that are good or bad for man" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1140b4-5, qtd. in Garside[24] 534) and the "only virtue special to a ruler is practical wisdom" (*Politics* III.iv, 1277b16: Penguin). By definition, then, absolute excellence—as well as *eudaimonia*—is achievable only by "the leisured and fully rational men" (Okin 89). In regards to *arete*, Aristotle claims that the difference in virtue between men, women, and slaves is qualitative, not quantitative (I.13.1259b32: Penguin):

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[24] All of her quotations are from the translation by W. D. Ross. I primarily used the Penguin edition and have made a note of these usages.

> Thus it becomes clear that both ruler and ruled must have a share in virtue, but that there are differences in virtue in each case. . . . For rule of free over slave, male over female, man over boy, are all different, because, while parts of the soul are present in each case, the distribution is different. Thus the deliberative faculty in the soul is not present at all in a slave; in a female it is present but ineffective, in a child present but undeveloped. (*Politics* I.13.1259b32)

Some translators write that the female's deliberative capacity "lacks authority" (cf. W. D. Ross), but either way, the woman is again a defective male, and the result is that her virtue "is not practical wisdom but correct opinion" (*Politics* III.4.1277b16). He then adds that not only are women incapable of having moral virtue[25] in its entirety, but they do not need it either (the adage that "nature makes nothing in vain"[26] continues to be efficacious):

> We should therefore take it that the same conditions prevail in regard to the moral virtues also, namely that all must participate in them but not all in the same way, but only as may be required by each for his proper function. The ruler then must have moral virtue in its entirety. . . . And the other members must have such amount as is appropriate to each. So it is evident that each of the classes spoken of must have moral virtue, and that restraint is *not* the same in a man as in a woman, nor justice or courage either, as Socrates thought; the one is the courage of the ruler, the other the courage of a servant, and likewise with the other virtues. (*Politics* I.13.1260a14: Penguin)

Although he repeats that the virtues differ in kind between the classes of people, it might also appear that a quantitative distinction has crept back in when he speaks of the "amount" of virtue. This is also true of his claim that "we laid it down that a slave is useful for necessary tasks, so the amount of virtue required will not be very great" (*Politics* I.13.1260a24: Penguin). But a more consistent way to look at it is to consider the degree of excellence inherent in the types of courage, for example, in each class: the courage of a master is a better sort of virtue than the courage of a slave. In fact, what would be a virtue

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[25] In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claims that it "is also plain that none of the moral excellences arises in us by nature" (II.1.1103a18-19) but the sort and degree of virtue that is within an individual's capacity are naturally predetermined.

[26] Susan Moller Okin's remarks on this passage are excellent:

> when he ascribes to the various members of the household different amounts of reason, we are not surprised to find that each has just that portion of rationality that is necessary for the performance of his or her function. . . . Why should nature, who makes nothing in vain, have given women full rationality, when her function does not require it? (Okin 91)

for one member of the *polis* could be a vice in another: "For instance, the poet singles out 'silence' as 'bringing credit to a woman'; but this is not so for a man"[27] (*Politics* I.13.1260a24: Penguin); "A man would seem a coward if he had only the courage of a woman, a woman a chatterbox if she were only as discreet as a man" (*Politics* III.4.1277b16: Penguin). In terms of the doctrine of the mean, then, Aristotle feels that a different continuum must be used for locating the virtue of courage for a man, a woman, and a slave, and that some kinds of continua will be appropriate for one class but not the others. Chastity and marital fidelity will also obviously be important to the good woman.[28]

A woman's virtue is not only different than, but also inferior to, a man's: "virtues and actions are nobler, when they proceed from these who are naturally worthier, for instance, from a man rather than from a woman" (*Rhetoric* I.1367a, qtd. in Okin 92). As Okin discovers:

> What has happened is that Aristotle arrives at the conclusion that woman is inferior to man by a completely circular process of reasoning. Because he perceives woman as an instrument, he has assigned her an entirely separate scale of values, and then he measures her against the scale of male values, and finds her inferior. But the functionalist treatment of women is itself founded on the assumption of the Aristotelian hierarchy, in which woman is "naturally" placed in an inferior position. (Okin 92)

When measured against the virtues of men, "virtuous" women are either defective or excessive "men." Even ethically, then, a woman is a deformed male. She is "virtuous" when she does what she is told and aids her man in living in a state of eternal *eudaimonia*. Her functions are not aimed at her own self-sufficiency, believed to be crucial to

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[27] Aristotle is referring to Sophocles' *Ajax:*

> *Tecmessa:*
> In the depth of night, after the evening flares
> Had all gone out, Ajax, with sword in hand,
> Went groping toward the door, intent
> Upon some pointless errand. I objected,
> And said: "Ajax, what are you doing? Why
> Do you stir? No messenger has summoned you:
> You have heard no trumpet. Why, the whole army now's asleep!"
> He answered briefly in a well-worn phrase,
> "Woman, a woman's decency is silence."
> I heard, and said no more; he issued forth alone. (285-94)

[28] This is something that can be aided, though, by delaying marriage to the age of eighteen: not only is a girl less likely to produce defective babies (including females), or to die in childbirth if intercourse is delayed, but "It is also more conducive to restraint that daughters should be no longer young when their fathers bestow them in marriage, because it seems that women who have sexual intercourse at an early age are more likely to be dissolute" (*Politics* VII.16.1334b29: Penguin).

eudaimonia, but for the benefit of her husband's household; correspondingly, then, her virtues should focus on other-interest rather than self-interest. In speaking of the point of the master-slave, husband-wife relation, Femenías concludes,

> The aim of this asymmetric relation is nothing but the care of the quality of life of the free man in the case of the slave, and of the adult male of the species and children in the case of women. On this analysis, it is easy to recognize the category of being-for-other which . . . is seen as the proper way of being of women, with the consequent loss of self consciousness or being-for-oneself that this implies. (Femenías 168-69)

As we will soon see, the demand to be-for-another will place the female characters of Greek drama in precarious positions.

An Aristotelian woman is, in sum, metaphysically, politically, biologically, and ethically passive. Her virtue lies in obedience and other-interest, silence, and self-sacrifice:

> The result of all this is that a woman is virtuous by obeying not commanding (1260a 24), by being silent, (1260a 30), by preserving not acquiring (1277 b21), by having true opinion not wisdom (1277b 27), and by entering into friendships of inequality not equality. In short, a good woman lives very differently from a good man. (Garside 535-36)

A woman, then, does not try to find the mean in regards to serious ethical choices, for it is not her role to choose and she lacks the capacity to choose. Forever excluded from the continua of virtues that are of real ethical import by her nature, a female who is faced with a serious moral decision—something that extends beyond the realm of giving birth and managing the household—is a paradox. Even if she were to try to enact the male virtues, she is doomed to fail— having only at the best of times correct opinion, not practical wisdom[29]—or to be condemned, since such actions are only virtuous when performed by men.

The one question that is in the background throughout this piece, then, is what happens when we are faced with the women in Greek tragedy and comedy who confront these decisions, for, as we noted earlier, Aristotle himself defines tragedy as "a mimesis . . . of ethically serious subjects." Another crucial issue lies in a woman's role as keeper of the *oikos*: naturally fitted both to preserving the household and her children and to obeying

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[29] Recalling that women cannot have practical wisdom, consider Aristotle's assertion that:

> It is clear, then, . . . that it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, nor practically wise without moral excellence. (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI.13.1144b30-32)

her husband, what will she do if these two demands conflict, when to perform one means to forsake the other?

Chapter Three: The Ideal Woman

"Woman's virtue is man's greatest invention."
- Cornelia Otis Skinner

The Ideal Woman of ancient Greece is, as noted in the first chapter, the product of the male imagination. Unfortunately, real women are supposed to instantiate this Ideal in their personalities, and, most importantly, in their behavior. As Nicole Loraux explains, feminine worth (*arete*) "is always subordinated to a career as a 'good wife'" (27). A woman must exhibit the other-interested feminine virtues, being passive, obedient, silent, chaste, and everything necessary to managing a household, such as being frugal, diligent, and industrious. This inattention to her own interest means that her sense of self is to be subordinated to the expectations of those around her; good women were not valued "for their personalities in any positive sense" (Okin 20). The notion that a good woman could be a strong individual is thus incoherent by definition; in fact, it is difficult to distinguish oneself as any sort of individual by being passive or silent or even an outstanding housekeeper. It will thus be interesting to look at what men thought women should do in order to be considered "good women" and to look at the female characters of Greek literature with this in mind.

We have already considered the practical consequences of virginity and chastity in the first section of Chapter One—girls are married young and confined to the homes of either their fathers or husbands. Again, the degree of actual seclusion is a controversial point, but that a good woman would stay indoors seems to necessarily follow from the dual demands of "conscientious housekeeping" (Richter 6) and modesty. Although it is wrong to make too much of the attestation that there were women who behaved "with so much concern for their modesty that they were embarrassed even to be seen by their male relatives" (Lysias III.6),[30] the logical conclusion of female modesty—which is inextricably linked to sexual modesty—is that a good woman would avoid leaving the seclusion and protection of her house.[31]

Obscurity seems to be the goal of a good woman. Consider Pericles' exhortation to women:

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[30] The context is that an angry drunken relative burst into the women's quarters at night.

[31] It is astounding how many commentators remark that a woman would want to stay indoors for her own protection (cf. Lacey) without remarking that the responsibility of restraint should lie with the male offenders rather than the female victims. That this notion of "protective solicitude" (Richter 7) neglects the male's responsibility simply evidences the underlying belief that it was not really the "notoriously unsafe Athenian streets" (5) that are to blame, but "the sexual laxity of Athenian women" (3).

> If I also must say something about a wife's virtue to those of you who will now be widows, I will state it in a brief exhortation. Your reputation is glorious if you do not prove inferior to your own nature and if there is least possible talk about you among men, whether in praise or blame. (Thucydides 2.45.2, 431 B.C.E., qtd. in *Women in the Classical World* 79)

A woman's silence was to be met by an equal absence of talk about her. Strangely, the good woman who deserves the most praise would be the one who received the least notice, and thus, the least praise. Renown is consequently not attainable even by good women, and a reputable woman has become an oxymoron. But when one considers that renown must be earned, the exclusion of women is not surprising. Women's virtue lies either in passivity or housework, an activity which is difficult to glorify ("Achilles may be brave in battle, but no one sweeps the floor like Ischomachos's wife!").

Unfortunately, women are placed in a very precarious position when the notion of even having a reputation is considered disreputable, for it is impossible for a woman to control what men say about her, "whether in praise or blame." Consider the fate of Andromache in *The Trojan Women*:

> *Andromache:*
>
> But I, who aimed the arrows of ambition high
> at honor, and made them good, see now how far I fall,
> I, who in Hector's house worked out all custom that brings
> discretion's name to women. Blame them or blame them not,
> there is one act that swings scandalous speech their way
> beyond all else: to leave the house and walk abroad.
> I longed to do it, but put the longing aside and stayed
> always within the inclosure of my own house and court.
> The witty speech some women cultivate I would
> not practice, but kept my honest inward thought, and made
> my mind my only and sufficient teacher. I gave
> my lord's presence the tribute of hushed lips, and eyes
> quietly downcast. I knew when my will must have its way
> over his, knew also how to give my way to him in turn.
> Men learned of this; I was talked of in the Achaean camp,
> and reputation has destroyed me now. At the choice
> of women, Achilles' son picked me from the rest, to be
> his wife: a lordly house, yet I shall be a slave. (641-60)

Reputation, even a good one, has destroyed Andromache.

Perhaps, however, Pericles has gone too far even in the Greek sense of defining a woman's virtue. Nonetheless, reputation remains a precarious problem for a woman who strives to be good because of the nature of her virtue. As noted, good women do not so much earn their reputation as have it bestowed upon them by men:

> What matters is not that they are modest, chaste, and obedient, but that men perceive them as such. Imprisoned in their passive situation, women cannot actively affirm or defend their honor. (Dreher 76)

This type of reputation—a passive virtue—can be granted and lost, but not actively defended or increased by the woman in question. Dreher argues that a woman's "identity depends upon men's perceptions of her, and the illusion of doubt can quickly sully even the most virtuous reputation, leaving her no defense" (85-86).

There does seem to be an acceptable path to fame for an honorable woman, however, and this lies in the ultimate act of other-interest: self-sacrifice. Pomeroy believes that "Self-sacrifice or martyrdom is the standard way for a woman to achieve renown among men; self-assertion earns a woman an evil reputation" (109). There is one other remarkable aspect of self-sacrifice and martyrdom: its perfection results in the destruction of its agent. The one act that a woman may perform and achieve true glory, even from men, then, is her own death, when performed for the sake of others. Here her agency permits her to fulfill her function as the instrument of the happiness of others, but, whereas a woman's agency is otherwise inappropriate or threatening to the social order, her death assures the concomitant destruction of the threat that her agency may ever be exercised again.

If glory can be achieved only by a woman's death, however, and a man wants a wife who is—or at least strives to be—both an Ideal Woman and likely to live for a few years—to raise the children and keep the house—then the Ideal Woman does not need to be a woman of glory. We have already noted that heroic ideals are not in keeping with Woman as the stereotype of passivity; a good wife, however, meets even Aristotle's criteria. A thorough description of a good wife is found in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. Xenophon's Socrates is engaged in conversation with Kritoboulos when the topic of a wife as "co-worker" arises: "But I hold that a woman who is a good partner in the household is a proper counterweight to the man in attaining the good. For while the possessions usually come into the house through the man's actions, they are expended for the most part in the course of the woman's housekeeping; and when these things turn out well, the households increase, but when done badly, the households diminish" (III.15).

The discussion begins with the acknowledgment that a female child requires guidance if she is to be a good wife—that is, a good household manager. Xenophon manages to combine outrageous condescension with true compassion:

> "When sheep fare badly," said Socrates, "we usually fault the shepherd, and when a horse behaves badly, we usually speak badly of the horseman; as for the woman, if she has been taught the good things by the man and still acts badly, the woman could perhaps justly be held at fault; on the other hand, if he doesn't teach the fine and good things but makes use of her though she is quite ignorant of them, wouldn't the man justly be held at fault?" (III.11)

Socrates tells Kritoboulos of a discussion he had with Ischomachos whose wife "is quite able by herself to manage the things within the house" (VII.3), freeing Ischomachos from spending time indoors. Ischomachos explains to his wife her role as his "partner":

> *Socrates:*
>
> And Ischomachos replied: "Well, Socrates," he said, "when she had gotten accustomed to me and had been domesticated to the extent that we could have discussions, I questioned her somewhat as follows. 'Tell me, woman, have you thought yet why it was that I took you and your parents gave you to me? That it was not for want of someone else to spend the night with—this is obvious, I know, to you too. Rather, when I considered for myself, and your parents for you, whom we might take as the best partner for the household and children, I chose you, and your parents, as it appears, from among the possibilities chose me.'" (VII.10-11)

Xenophon's Ischomachos goes on to describe how a woman is the perfect partner for her husband. The description which follows is that of an "ideal" marriage:

> "'Since, then, work and diligence are needed both for the indoor and for the outdoor things, it seems to me,'" he had said, "'that the god directly prepared the woman's nature for indoor works and indoor concerns. For he equipped the man, in body and soul, with a greater capacity to endure cold and heat, journeys and expeditions; but in bringing forth, for the woman, a body that is less capable in these respects,'" he said that he had said, "'the god has, it seems to me, ordered her to the indoor works. But knowing that he had implanted in the woman, and ordered her to, the nourishment of newborn children, he also gave her a greater affection for the newborn infants than he gave to the man. Since he had also ordered the woman to the guarding of the things brought in, the god, understanding that a fearful

> soul is not worse at guarding, also gave the woman a greater share of fear than the man. . . . But because it's necessary for both to give and to take, he endowed both with memory and diligence in like degree, so that you can't distinguish whether the male or the female kind has the greater share of these things. As for self-control in the necessary things, he endowed both with this too in like degree; and the god allowed the one who proved the better, whether the man or the woman, to derive more from this good. Since, then, the nature of each has not been brought forth to be naturally apt for all of the same things, each has need of the other, and their pairing is more beneficial to each, for where one falls short the other is capable. Now,' I said, 'O woman, as we know what has been ordered to each of us by the god, we must, separately, do what is appropriate to each. The law too praises these things,'" he said that he had said, "'in pairing man and woman; and as the god made them partners in children, so too does the law appoint them partners. And the law shows that what the god has brought forth each to be capable of is fine as well. It is a finer thing for the woman to stay indoors than to spend time in the open, while it is more disgraceful for the man to stay indoors than to concern himself with outdoor things....'" (VII.22-30)

Ischomachos's wife is an excellent student who learns how to take care of the household items by herself (VIII-IX), for which Socrates compliments the woman's "manly understanding" (X.1). She does what is expected of her, stays indoors, and avoids cosmetics (X.2-13). And thus is a harmonious marriage attained. Although described in the guise of a "partnership," the pairing of these two units into a seemingly androgynous unit which provides a balance or harmony between "indoor" and "outdoor things" will be an interesting model against which to measure many of the tragedies.

Chapter Four: Greek Drama

Section One: *The Trojan Women* and the *Poetics*

Before proceeding directly to the tragedies themselves, I would like to review some of the elements of the *Poetics* that are central to this thesis and examine the consequences of Aristotle's view of what makes a good tragedy. Halliwell translates Aristotle's definition of tragedy as "a representation of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude—in language which is garnished in various forms in its different parts—in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative—and through the arousal of pity and fear effecting the *katharsis* of such emotions" (ch. 6). Six elements are considered essential to tragedy: plot-structure, character, style, thought, spectacle, and lyric poetry. Aristotle writes that "the most important of these elements is the structure of events, because tragedy is a representation not of people as such but of actions and life, and both happiness and unhappiness rest on action." The emphasis is thus on the characters' actions, and—although it may seem tautological to point this out—the emphasis is on the characters' agency, for "it is in their actions that they achieve, or fail to achieve, happiness" (ch. 6). This seemingly obvious and value-neutral statement will have important consequences for female characters whose virtue lies in passivity and obedience and a failure to participate in the political sphere. Aristotle highlights one other aspect in this defining chapter, that "tragedy's greatest means of emotional power are components of the plot-structure: namely, reversals and recognitions." Although this is a point he relates to plot, not character, it will be interesting to consider what sort of characters undergo reversal and recognition, and who are denied the moment of recognition, as we examine the main female characters in the later sections. In chapter 11, he adds a third component of the plot-structure—suffering—and it will also be interesting to see if the burden lies on the male or female characters.

Hamartia is another pivotal element of tragedy. Since tragedy represents those who are "better than ourselves" (ch. 2), without *hamartia* we would have a plot-structure which Aristotle believes should be avoided, for "good men should not be shown passing from prosperity to affliction, for this is neither fearful nor pitiful but repulsive" (ch. 13). It is crucial, then, that the character act in error, either unwillingly or unknowingly. Cynthia Freeland calls this "a specific kind of agent-centered moral luck":

> When he says in the *Poetics* that the change in fortune of a tragedy will occur owing to a frailty or mistake (*hamartia*) of the hero, he is emphasizing that tragic unhappiness requires the agent's contribution; think for instance of Deianeira trying to win Heracles back through the centaur's magical love potion. . . . This means that he rules out both passive heroes who do not

> act but simply suffer, as well as persons whose mistaken choice signals a real flaw in character. (119)

As Freeland points out, Aristotle's criteria for a good tragedy rule out critical appreciation for what she calls "victim tragedies" (119) like *The Trojan Women,* where the characters who suffer are not suffering in response to any error of their own, but where external forces and the choices of others (not their own actions and choices) have been the cause of their reversal. That this sort of tragedy is inferior in Aristotelian standards is clear, but that it really is an inferior tragedy (in whatever objectivist terms of literary criticism we choose) is not. First a woman is denied agency and political power, and then her suffering is viewed as repulsive rather than tragic.

Indeed, in a victim tragedy, the women are in no way responsible for their fate. Freeland explains that "Hecuba suffers because she is female, in her case, wife and mother" (127). In *TheTrojan Women*, "they suffer in a way appropriate to women whose fates are decided as a consequence of powerful men's deeds" (127). They are given no individual freedom, no power over their own lives, no control over anything but how they deal with their suffering, and even then they are restricted. Consider the scene where the Greek herald comes to take Astyanax from his mother, Andromache, having been ordered to have the baby thrown from the walls of Troy:

> *Talthybius:*
> He must be hurled from the battlements of Troy.
> *(He goes toward Andromache, who clings fast to her child, as if to resist)*
> No, wait!
> Let it happen this way. It will be wiser in the end.
> Do not fight it. Take your grief as you were born to take it,
> give up the struggle where your strength is feebleness
> with no force anywhere to help. Listen to me!
> Your city is gone, your husband. You are in our power.
> How can one woman hope to struggle against the arms
> of Greece? Think, then. Give up the passionate contest. This
> will bring no shame. No man can laugh at your submission.
> And please—I request you—hurl no curse at the Achaeans
> for fear the army, savage over some reckless word,
> forbid the child his burial and the dirge of honor.
> Be brave, be silent: out of such patience you can hope
> the child you leave behind will not lie unburied here,
> and that to you the Achaeans will be less unkind. (725-39)

What could be a more tragic, a more serious ethical choice, than to have to choose between fighting those who want to kill a woman's innocent baby and submitting in order to ensure his burial?

Freeland's conclusion is telling:

> Though men and women do get represented and treated differently in tragic plots (and it would be surprising if they did not), Aristotle does not notice this fact. My claim is that his emphasis on choice and action preselects plots that are more likely to concern the "important," i.e. state or political decision-making of men rather than the domestic sphere appropriate to women. Moral luck or fate itself strikes the genders in significantly different ways. We may rush to excuse Aristotle for not having regarded tragedies as gender-specific, because we might ourselves balk at the thought. We can think of important women protagonists in ancient tragedies, strong women who did indeed make significant choices. But there are nevertheless questions to be raised concerning general differences between roles of female and male protagonists in ancient tragedies—how they met their specific tragic ends. (127)

And Euripides could not have told this story in any other way. What happens to these women might be repulsive, but to exclude their suffering from the realm of the tragic is a ruling that should be made in full recognition of the power differential and differing levels of contingency between men and women. One point that Freeland fails to emphasize, though, is that Aristotle specifically says that it is repulsive when "men" are shown faultlessly passing from prosperity to affliction, and by "men" he means men. He does not necessarily think it repulsive, then, when this happens to women, although it is still not great tragedy because that, by definition, must involve *hamartia.*

As Freeland notes, though, there are women in tragedies who choose. But I hold that significant differences remain in the way female heroes are treated, as opposed to their male counterparts, that their level of contingency remains at the forefront of their actions, and that the ethical import of the decision to make a choice at all is an issue that arises only in regard to female characters.

Section Two: Jocasta

Carol Gelderman wonders how a city like Athens whose citizens (I'm assuming she means male citizens)[32] restricted their women so severely "should have produced figures like Clytemnestra, Electra, Antigone, Hecuba, Phaedra, Medea, and all the other heroines who dominate play after play of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides" (221). Although I agree with Gelderman that these figures tend to surpass "the men in character, spirit and will" (221), I was struck by the figures who are absent from her list. She lists mostly title characters, without questioning the subordinate roles given to women in some of the other tragedies. What does it mean when Aeschylus begins the *Oresteia* with a tragedy named for Agamemnon rather than Iphigenia? Why is Sophocles' first Theban play the tragedy of Oedipus rather than Jocasta?

If a woman's only concern is to bear children and take care of her responsibilities to the *oikos*, staying out of the public realm and affairs of state, then Jocasta's opening words seem inappropriate:

> Foolish, quarreling men!
> Why lose control of your words?
> What is the matter? Are you not ashamed,
> When the land is withering with plague
> To stir up private troubles? (22)[33]

Jocasta is a queenly character: concerned about her state, anxious to resolve the dispute between Creon and Oedipus, and, unlike Oedipus, who is blind to the truth, quick to realize her horrible situation. And yet he is the hero, not she. Oedipus is the topic of our studies, the subject of our pity. Her last words to her son are intended to spare him her anguish; his final speech to her dismisses her roughly: "Quickly, go someone, fetch the shepherd here. / Leave the Queen, let her gloat over her noble birth!" (36). Reducing her to the universal, indeed, stereotypical woman, Oedipus, in his self-absorption, strips her of her individuality and noble character:

> It looks as if the Queen, with more than
> Woman's pride, feels shame for my descent.
> I am the child of Fortune,
> I cannot be ashamed. (36)

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[32] It is surprising how often the commentators slip into the language of citizens and women, or women and slaves. There is a reductive tendency toward two categories, which I think colors the discussions.

[33] I have provided page references rather than line numbers for this play since they are not provided in Trypanis's translation.

Aristotle writes that the tragic hero undergoes reversal, recognition, and suffering (ch. 11). The better poet will focus on the moment of recognition, leading us through the character's thoughts and suffering, building the plot's cathartic moment. Aristotle notes that the "finest recognition occurs in direct conjunction with reversal—as with the one in the *Oedipus*" (ch. 11). Oedipus tells his tragic story again and again, until both the characters and the audience are filled with his suffering, submerged in the guilt, pain, and loss. Recognition comes from within: we must hear it from the hero's lips, not a messenger's. But Jocasta leaves the stage in silence, as good tragic women tend to do:[34]

> *Chorus:* Why has the Queen left us, my Lord,
> Shaken by such deep passion?
> A storm of sorrow will burst
> Out of her silence!
> *Oedipus:* Let it burst out!
> Let everything come out, however low! (36)

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[34] The pattern is repeated in *The Women of Trachis* and *Antigone*. After Hyllus accuses Deianira of killing Heracles she leaves the stage without responding:

> *Chorus: (To Deianira)*
> Why do you go off in silence? Surely you see
> that by silence you join your accuser and accuse yourself?
> *Hyllus:*
> Let her go, and I hope a fair wind blows
> to carry her far out of my sight. For why should she
> maintain the pointless dignity of the name
> of mother when she acts in no way like a mother?
> No, let her go—goodbye to her. And the delight
> she gave my father, may she find the same herself. (813-20)

And in *Antigone*, when Eurydice learns of Haemon's death:

> *Chorus:*
> The Queen has gone. She did not say a word—
> Good or bad.
> *Messenger:*
> Strange! Perhaps she did not wish
> To show her sorrow in public.
> In the privacy of her home, amongst her maids,
> She will mourn for her son.
> She is not untaught of discretion.
> *Chorus:*
> Strained silence is dangerous,
> As dangerous as excessive lamentation. (1243-51)

The next time we hear of her is from the messenger, stating simply, "Queen Jocasta is dead" (41).[35] Her reversal from Queen to corpse, the catalyst for Oedipus' dramatic sacrifice of sight, is too abrupt to be cathartic, too far removed to be considered an essential plot element in itself, rather than simply the impetus for the hero's own act. Yet why does Jocasta not deserve hero status? It would be nice to say that she was too good, that to focus on her would fall under Aristotle's category where "good men [and women?] should not be shown passing from prosperity to affliction, for this is neither fearful nor pitiful but repulsive" (ch. 13). And yet, this seems unlikely, for Jocasta, too, committed the unspeakable crime of incest.[36] Rather, she lacks any particular characteristics that would distinguish her as a heroic individual. She is concerned more with others than with herself, and her nobility is thus typical of a woman. As noted in the previous section, the ideal woman, the universal ideal of a woman, is farther removed from the individual/self than for a man. Jocasta begins as a good yet public woman (in the universal sense), is then viewed as a stereotypical woman (a general universal), and dies as a good woman (the body become corpse). She is not the matter from which a hero is formed.

Turning to the title character, though, if Oedipus' character is a universal—where, as Aristotle claims, "A 'universal' comprises the *kind* of speech or action which belongs by probability or necessity to a certain *kind* of character" (ch. 9)—he is permitted often to slip into the kind of speech or action that is typical of the particular individual. His argument with Teiresias is rife with his self, even though it begins with concern for the city. Thus, the argument begins with Oedipus exclaiming,

> What did you say? You know and will not tell us?
> You plan treason, you plan to rule the city! (12)

But as his anger mounts, so does his concern for his reputation and his position:

> Come, tell me, where was your skill
> When the Sphinx was chanting her riddles?
> Why did you not say something then
> To help the city of Thebes?
> That riddle was not for the first-comer to read,
> What was needed was true prophetic art.

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35 In Eurydice's case we hear "the Queen has just died" (1266) from the messenger. Deianira's death is told more gently by the nurse: "Deianira, motionless, has moved away / to start upon the very last of all her journeys" (875).

36 A twentieth-century reader might consider the exposure of her baby to be a crime sufficient to villainize Jocasta, but this would not be the reaction of her contemporaries. Infanticide was not criminal, and, in fact, it was not the mother's place to decide whether a child would be killed or reared.

> But you were found wanting. You had none.
> No birds would help you, and no god.
> No, I had to come, Oedipus the ignorant,
> To strike her dumb, to find the answer by my wit,
> Without the help of birds!
> And it is me you try to drive away,
> To stand closer to Creon's throne. (14)

Is Oedipus here a "certain *kind* of character"? Rather, I believe that Gelderman is correct that

> Greek tragedy as a whole is directly indicative of the growing pains of male individualism; it is, after all, the drama of the individual hero facing his tragic destiny. It is in this sense that drama became an outlet, and in a way, a propaganda tool for male self-assertiveness. This very self-assertiveness is the essence of tragedy, for it is not a worship of uniformity and of the status quo that makes a hero or a great dramatist, but individuality and difference. (225)

Jocasta's only act of distinction is her suicide.

Sheila Murnaghan suggests that the suicidal wife demonstrates the link perceived between women and the body:

> In a number of plays the unruliness that is thought to reside in the body asserts itself and, as a consequence, wounded and suffering bodies make their way into the theatrical space. As a number of critics have recently pointed out, this phenomenon can be correlated with the greater prominence of female figures in tragedy than in any other public activity in classical Athens aside from ritual. In that culture (as in many, perhaps all, others) women were felt to be more closely identified with the body than men and to have, because of their natural involvement in childbirth, a special connection to bodily pain, and because of the inner space enclosed within their bodies, a special susceptibility to penetration and possession by demonic external forces. Thus female figures in tragedy are often the primary site of physical suffering that is then communicated to men, and male figures often experience pain by becoming or feeling themselves to become like women. (35)

Murnaghan's description seems right, but is more descriptive than explanatory. The mysteries of childbirth are sufficient to explain why the female rather than the male would be the one linked with the body and the unspoken, if such a split must be posited, but not

why this split is posited in the first place. We return, then, to bundled first principles with no further philosophical justification possible.

We are left to ponder what would have become of Jocasta had she lived. It seems fair to ask if there might be any other acceptable conclusion that includes her survival.[37] Indeed, if Jocasta focuses on her role as mother of her other four children, rather than her role as wife, the children's well-being could have influenced her choice.[38] This is not to say that a revised *Oedipus* would be a better tragedy, but that Sophocles' decision to focus on her marital relationship makes Jocasta's choice seem more determined or inescapable. It certainly does not make her a bad wife: even though suicide is not a heroic act, we have already concluded that glory is not a good woman's concern.

But suicide is primarily a woman's death in tragedy, a negative form of agency for a woman in a situation where she has, or feels she has, no alternative. As Nicole Loraux points out, though, in *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, she does have a choice: the means of death, a rope or a sword. Hanging "was more disgraceful and associated more than any other with irremediable dishonor , . . . a 'formless' death, the extreme defilement that one inflicted on oneself only in the utmost shame" (Loraux 9). Hanging is also ultimately a "woman's way of death" (9), a passive submission to lifelessness, although she has the choice of a more active and thus more manly ending—sacrificing herself on a sword. Loraux asserts that a generalization can be made about suicidal women, "to the effect that hanging was associated with marriage—or rather, with an excessive valuation of the status of bride (*nymphe*)—while a suicide that shed blood was associated with maternity, through which a wife, in her 'heroic' pains of childbirth, found complete fulfillment" (15). So perhaps a more motherly (Sophoclean) Jocasta may have stabbed herself instead of the hanging—but either way she is dead[39] and the audience faces not a hero but a corpse. That a woman's liberty or contingency should be restricted to the means of her suicide is hardly the matter of heroes.

Section Three: The Ambiguity of the Good Tragic Wife

In itself the setting of women on the stage was already an excellent opportunity for the Athenian citizen to ponder the difference between the sexes. It was a chance to state the difference before obscuring it, and then

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[37] Prof. Richard Bosley posed this question to me in September 1996.

[38] Nicole Loraux sees Euripides' characterization of Jocasta in the *Phoenissae* as essentially different: "She is no longer, as she is in Sophocles, above all a wife; she is exclusively a mother, and her manly death should be seen as a consequence of this critical reshaping of the tradition" (15).

[39] As my mother puts it, it doesn't make that much difference: dead is dead.

> to find it again, all the richer for having been obscured, and more firmly based for having been finally reaffirmed. (Loraux, x)

Nicole Loraux holds that the means of death of the tragic woman is linked in a critical way to the standard opposition between men and women. She can choose a feminine or womanly death by hanging (like Sophocles' Jocasta) or move into the male arena and stab herself (like Euripides' Jocasta), an action which apparently blurs the male-female binary. But, as Loraux notes, "Paradoxically, . . . the confusion even at its very height aims only to reinforce the standard opposition" (Loraux 16).[40] For a female character to invoke a "manly" death foregrounds the distinction; the ambiguity can exist only because there are strict categories in place, and the expected is so obvious that the category confusion disconcerts the audience. At the same time, ambiguity also accents the "real" borders which cannot be crossed; as Loraux explains,

> the genre of tragedy can easily create and control a confusion of categories, and also knows the limits it cannot cross. To put it another way, the woman in tragedy is more entitled to play the man in her death than the man is to assume any aspect of women's conduct, even in his manner of death [a man who kills himself does it in a manly way]. For women there is liberty in tragedy—liberty in death. (17)

I believe that Loraux's position on tragedy's fixation on ambiguity in death and the ambivalence of this ambiguity itself can be extended beyond a female character's choice in the manner of her suicide to all of her choices in the course of the play. We have already noted that a woman with a serious ethical dilemma is a paradox. The woman who accepts her role as moral agent is thus necessarily in an ambiguous moral realm. This is especially true of a wife, who, as Xenophon and Aristotle make clear, owes her husband absolute loyalty and obedience.

An obvious example of this is the *Alcestis*, the story of a woman who agrees to die in her husband's place because no one else will. It is not a great tragedy by Aristotle's standards, but since his standards are under examination, the *Alcestis* will be my starting point. An obvious problem is that Alcestis[41] has no *hamartia* that causes her downfall; rather, it is the cowardice of Admetus, her husband, that is at fault. This has led to declarations like the following from Richmond Lattimore: "But the principal character is Admetus. The theme of the drama is not 'if a wife dies for her husband, how brave and devoted the wife,' so much as 'if the husband lets his wife die for him, what manner of

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[40] I will return to this point in the section on Antigone.

[41] That Alcestis' death is as much a sacrifice as a suicide is just another instance of Euripides' deviating from the norm while reinforcing it.

man must that husband be?'" (Intro. 3). In one sense Lattimore is right, for focusing on Admetus is the only way to make a good Aristotelian analysis of *hamartia*. But this focus too easily dismisses the agency of Alcestis. Her act of sacrifice demonstrates a virile courage and assertiveness far beyond Aristotle's view on a woman's virtue, while at the same time Alcestis is fulfilling her expected role as devoted wife. Consider the chorus's opinion of her decision:

Chorus:
Let her be sure, at least, that as she dies, there dies
the noblest woman underneath the sun, by far.
Maid:
Noblest? Of course the noblest, who will argue that?
What shall the wife be who surpasses her? And how
could any woman show that she loves her husband more
than herself better than by consent to die for him? (150-55)

Admetus' life has been bought at the price of Alcestis' manly death; her manliness in effect feminizes him. Alcestis herself proclaims that Admetus "must be our children's mother, too, instead of me" (376). The chorus confirms this by offering him the distinctively wifely choice of how to kill himself:

Chorus:
O son of Pheres, what a loss
to suffer, when such a wife goes.
A man could cut his throat for this, for this
and less he could bind the noose upon his neck
and hang himself. (226-30)

Alcestis' glory as "the best of all women" (994) is inextricably linked to Admetus' shame, which he himself recognizes:

Admetus:
And anyone who hates me will say this of me:
"Look at the man, disgracefully alive, who dared
not die, but like a coward gave his wife instead
and so escaped death. Do you call him a man at all?" (995-97)

We could question Alcestis' judgment and wonder whether Admetus is worth the sacrifice, especially as he reproaches her for leaving him and their children. F. A. Wright declares, "*Alcestis' motive is not love for her husband, but love for her children.* . . . It is because Alcestis does not wish her children to be left *fatherless* that she consents to death" (128). This interpretation fits Alcestis into Loraux's generalization of the typically virile death of

the mother, and makes sense since a fatherless child was considered orphaned. The chorus, however, reads it as a wife's sacrifice for her husband. Either way, it is a serious ethical choice beyond the scope of a "good" wife's realm, but one which is forced upon her by her husband. She is simultaneously crossing a forbidden ethical boundary and embodying "the best of all women." The ambiguity is obvious, but, as with Jocasta, Alcestis' reward is death.

Many critics note that Alcestis is not particularly likeable. Lattimore, for instance, admits that "she appears cold and self-righteous" (Intro. 3).[42] But this, too, is the fate of the woman who wins glory. The situation is worse for the woman who seeks glory, like Evadne in Euripides' *The Suppliant Women.* Choosing to die as a loyal wife, Evadne could have hanged herself in her bedchamber in the fashion of a good wife. Instead, like a warrior in battle, she seeks a valorous death, by leaping from a rock into her husband's funeral pyre. But there will be no praise for Evadne like that earned by Alcestis, for Evadne does not die quietly out of sight or for the good of her husband, but falls before the eyes of the chorus and her father, declaring, "I want it known by everyone in Argos" (1067). A good woman would know that she does not seek honor, that it can only be bestowed, but Evadne believes her death is a "victory" (1059) "Over all women on whom the sun looks down" (1061). Instead, the chorus is shocked by her "wildly daring deed" (1076) and exclaims as Evadne dies, "Woman! Terrible the deed you brought to pass!" (1072). As Loraux explains, "the chorus, made up of mothers in mourning, does not really believe either in her virtue as a woman, which is tainted by excess, or in her courage, whose 'virility' is unseemly in the good wife she professes to be" (29). But, like Jocasta and Alcestis, Evadne is still dead, and she still dies a wife. Although deviant, she fits the tragic norm: she simultaneously behaves in an unwomanly manner by exhibiting (negative) agency and confirms her role as traditional wife.

These examples are not meant to suggest that all the tragic wives are ambivalently feminine or behave ambiguously—they do not even all die. Some of the wives, like Andromache in *The Trojan Women* and Tecmessa in *Ajax,* are simply good, obedient wives, whose role is to play the unambivalent victim. But the norm is reinforced by both types, for the fates of all are tied to their roles as wives.

Section Four: Iphigenia

In Iphigenia's case, we are shifting the focus from wife to virgin, from suicide to sacrifice. If suffering and pity are central to a tragedy, then Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* has it

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[42] He forgives her, though, in light of the disappointment she must feel in her husband.

all. But if the audience's pity is intended for the title character, then the play has failed for me. That some commentators believe this is the case is clear from Nancy Sherman's remarks in her essay "*Hamartia* and Virtue," where she discusses the killings performed by Agamemnon:

> . . . Agamemnon, in sacrificing Iphigeneia, acts knowingly, without misapprehension of the immediate circumstances. There is no ignorance of object, instrument, or immediate effect. Yet still, the choice to kill a daughter, though more voluntary than that of Deianeira or Oedipus' killings, involves a kind of ignorance. There is ignorance of how painful the consequences will be, of the magnitude of the disaster, of the wrath of a mother and so on. (Sherman 192)

Not only is Agamemnon's act unpardonable, his choice has shown him to be bad; as already mentioned, Aristotle declares that "Characterisation will arise . . . where speech or action exhibits the nature of an ethical choice; and the character will be good when the choice is good" (ch. 15). Agamemnon's is a paradigmatic ethical choice (save his daughter or sacrifice her in order to sail to Troy), and his choice is evil, not because of the consequences, which Sherman dwells upon, but because of "just what values they [Medea and Agamemnon] destroy by the actions they commit" (Sherman 184). This aside from Sherman should have been central to her argument. The Athenians were not committed Utilitarians, and their actions should not be viewed in that way. Agamemnon deceives his family and betrays his own daughter. Philip Vellacott's analysis of Agamemnon's choice is convincing:

> It has often been said (e.g., by Page, in his introduction, pp. xxv-xxviii) that Artemis compelled Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter. Peradotto insists that Artemis "compels Agamemnon to nothing, but creates a situation in which he may either cancel the war, or else pursue it by inflicting on his own household the kind of slaughter he will perpetuate at Troy." The decision made "depends on the kind of man Agamemnon is." It is not true that Aeschylus shows him as having no alternative, that to disband the expedition was impossible; still less that Zeus commanded him to sail against Troy. . . . He was the kind of man who would put his own glory first and the sanctity of kindred blood second. When he sacrificed his daughter he freely "put on the bridle of necessity," and thereafter necessity led him inevitably to his death. (*The Logic of Tragedy* 52)

It is, however, too tempting to focus on the moral agent, here, rather than the passive victim. Agamemnon's contingency is real; Iphigenia has no choice. Unlike Euripides'

Iphigenia in *Iphigenia at Aulis*, this daughter is dragged to the sacrificial altar unwillingly, frightened, and betrayed:

> *Chorus:*
> Her supplications and her cries of father
> were nothing, nor the child's lamentation
> to kings passioned for battle.
> The father prayed, called to 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, to check
> the curse cried on the house of Atreus
> by force of bit and speech drowned in strength.
>
> Pouring then to the ground her saffron mantle
> she struck the sacrificers with
> the eyes' arrows of pity,
> lovely as in a painted scene, and striving
> to speak—as many times
> at the kind festival table of her father
> she had sung, and in the clear voice of a stainless maiden
> with love had graced the song
> of worship when the third cup was poured.
>
> What happened next I saw not, neither speak it. (227-48)

Euripides' Iphigenia offers herself freely to her father's knife, but Aeschylus' does not choose her passivity or her silence; not only is she not a moral agent, she is stripped of her humanity, not a woman but a "goat." Perhaps this is because Aeschylus' focus is on Agamemnon, and to focus on Iphigenia's thoughts would be to violate the single plot structure lauded by Aristotle (*Poetics*, ch. 13).

But I feel that a Girardian analysis of the sacrifice is more telling. Iphigenia's humanity is not mentioned because she absolutely does not matter. Agamemnon looks at his decision as, firstly, his decision, and the choice is between going to Troy as the leader and abandoning his ambition while risking the violence of the men he has gathered. Although he does consider his duty to her, he quickly shifts the responsibility to the gods and the other soldiers until Iphigenia is not the object of the decision and he is not its

subject. In reality, though, the choice is utterly personal, for the dilemma is not even decided on the basis of a conflict between *oikos* and *polis;* Agamemnon's duty to his child is not met by an equal duty to the state. Rather, as Helene Foley observes, "Iphigeneia dies not to save a threatened city or family but for a Panhellenic war which has not yet begun and apparently does not have to be undertaken" ("Marriage and Sacrifice" 159). René Girard posits that "the function of sacrifice is to quell violence within the community and to prevent conflicts from erupting" (14). The victim must be sufficiently like the community to serve as a substitute, "while still maintaining a degree of difference that forbids all possible confusion" (12). Through the sacrificial act, the violence of the community which results from an explosion of mimetic competition[43] is transferred to a deity. Foley summarizes the Girardian sacrificial crisis in the play:

> The leaders of the army have been locked in a competitive struggle for power, or "mimetic rivalry." Social hierarchy is collapsing; the leaders reject or are inadequate to power. . . . Mob violence is imminent, as the army is gripped by an *eros* for war and revenge. In accord with the Girardian scenario, Iphigeneia's sacrifice restores . . . the religious system and ensures social unanimity. At the same time the violence of the community is only partially obscured and transferred to Artemis. . . . As is typical in Greek tragedy, the play comes close to exposing the Girardian sacrificial mechanism and to challenging the system through this deconstruction. ("Marriage and Sacrifice" 176)

What the Girardian analysis lacks, however, is a gendered analysis of the sacrificial ritual. The omen which precedes the sacrifice is described by the leader of the chorus:

> Kings of birds to the kings of ships,
> one black, one blazed with silver,
> clear seen by the royal house
> on the right, the spear hand,
> they lighted, watched by all
> tore a hare, ripe, bursting with young unborn yet,
> stayed from her last fleet running. (114-20)

Few animals could be more passive and unoffending than a hare, and few sights more pitiful than an attack upon a pregnant animal and her unborn young. And thus, Iphigenia, the virgin, is offered to the kings, as a symbol of passivity and innocence, denied her

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[43] We are aware from the tensions Agamemnon mentions upon his return that the leaders were involved in a struggle for power.

future as mother.[44] In this way, Iphigenia symbolizes the horror of the kings' ambition and their insensitivity to what they have chosen to do at Troy. A member of the family, yet a person necessarily outside the war effort because of her sex, Iphigenia can stand as a substitute not just for those to be killed at Troy, as Calchas suggests, but for the thousands of Greek soldiers who will die as well. Thus it is her sex that makes her the paradigmatic Girardian victim, resembling her sacrificers, but not to be confused with the soldiers who demand her blood. No son, indeed no man, could have stood in for Iphigenia, for Artemis would not demand the blood of one who has already become a *de facto* sacrifice to the war. Patriarchy benefits only those men who survive it.

Section Five: Clytemnestra

"But there is also the feeling that Clytemnestra is really the better man of the pair."
- F. A. Wright

Clytemnestra is an enigma. She is either a man or a monster, according to her fellow characters and later critics. Vellacott declares that "It would be possible to collect, from a score of scholarly books and articles, enough vituperation of Clytemnestra to fill a chapter" (*The Logic of Tragedy* 63). What Aeschylus has actually created, however, is a tragic heroine, and, as mentioned previously, this is a strange creature, indeed. But she is far more deserving of the heroic title than her husband; Vellacott claims that Aeschylus "has shown nobility in Cassandra, and firmness and courage in both Cassandra and Clytemnestra, while Agamemnon lacks both nobility and firmness, and displays ferocity rather than courage" (53). While Agamemnon might appear the good leader, the victorious hero, he is forever doing what he knows to be wrong, placing the responsibility on others, and ultimately serving only himself. Agamemnon is a terrible father and a terrible king. While he was away, Clytemnestra not only plots her revenge, but takes care of the abandoned *oikos*. We learn that she is vengeful, dangerous, and adulterous, as well as intelligent, determined, and persuasive.

Much has been written about Clytemnestra's killing of her husband, proclaiming her either to be a treacherous, power-hungry beast or the personification of Justice herself. What I am most interested in, here,[45] though, is her nature, her ability to act (rather than her action against her husband) and, in particular, her characterization as manly. For

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[44] "Both the sacrifice of Iphigenia and the destruction of Troy are closely related to the mutilation of the pregnant hare....While a creature teeming with young is the very personification of a pitiful victim, in another sense the pregnant hare who contains her young within her is a promise of proliferation of victims who resemble her" (Zeitlin, "Corrupted Sacrifice" 494).

[45] In regards to Agamemnon, that is. Her treatment of Cassandra is entirely different.

example, when the watchman introduces the play, he stresses Clytemnestra's "male strength of heart" (11) and his fear of her. Michael Shaw's analysis of Clytemnestra's character and actions is typical. He begins by looking at the wife's role in Athens, a description which mirrors Aristotle's and Xenophon's:

> The wife's virtues are those demanded by the *oikos*, mother love, industry, and the ability to create harmony. There are certain negative virtues as well. She will not normally be known in public. . . . She will be obedient since most decisions involve the outside world and are part of the man's preserve. (256-57)

The husband's image, on the other hand,

> is determined by the fact that his sphere lies outside the house. His basic duty is to defend the *oikos* in the outside world. . . .
>
> Since the success of a man's actions is measured by the honor the community gives him, honor is his highest goal. (257)

And, following upon the binary logic which declares that the couple is the original *Mitsein*:[46]

> A society which ignores the female is sterile and lacks emotional foundations. One that ignores the male is plunged into interfamilial feuding. The male and the female are exclusive and hostile; yet, since Greek civilization is a unity of *oikos* and *polis*, the two principles must be kept in balance. (257)

Shaw's belief in this strained balance is shared by many, but as a believer in the Aristotelian mean, I find it difficult to image how a balance could ever be struck between two opposites on two separate continua.[47] This world view, where the *polis* is male and the *oikos* female, is inherently incompatible with the ethical notion of the mean, except in ethical situations that genuinely do belong exclusively to one sphere or the other.

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is an obvious example of a situation where the moral agent needs to consider every dimension of the ethical questions, rather than focusing on the virtue-continua deemed appropriate for the male and female as Aristotle advises and as Shaw seems to feel the tragedy itself advises. When we compare the mean discovered on Shaw's bipolar sets of continua to that found on a more inclusive set of continua, we should see that the agent is actually operating outside the mean, neglecting some aspects of

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[46] "Male and female stand opposed within a primordial *Mitsein*, and woman has not broken it. The couple is a fundamental unity with its two halves riveted together. . . " (de Beauvoir xxv).

[47] I will return to this question in Chapter Five.

the situation and overemphasizing others simply because these factors were excluded paradigmatically. In the case of the *Agamemnon*, the characters need to discover the balance as individuals, and not hope that their excess/defect will be offset by their partners'.[48] And it is this belief—that excess can correct excess, producing a harmony—that is constantly brought into question in the tragedies.

To return to Clytemnestra in particular, then, Shaw's theory is that there is a pattern of the "intrusive female":

> [Part of its] general outline is roughly the following: (1) a man, acting as pure male, does something which threatens the pure female;[49] (2) the pure female comes out of the *oikos* and opposes the male; (3) there is an impasse; (4) the female, taking some male attributes, acts. . . . (265)

Thus, a woman (like Clytemnestra) becomes male by acting in the male realm with male goals when there is a conflict between *polis* and *oikos*. That the action of a woman is extraordinary is confirmed by the chorus, who (when Cassandra tells them of the plot against the king) ask, "What *man* is it who moves this beastly thing to be?" (1252, emphasis added). Shaw concludes that it is the poet's duty to restore the harmony, where there "is no need for the woman to intrude into this society, because it has not betrayed her" (266). Yet I argue that this type of society is inherently unstable and incapable of maintaining any sort of balance.[50]

That Shaw's analysis is simplistic is obvious. The "universally" good man might act out of concern for the *polis*, but not Agamemnon.[51] Further, when Clytemnestra plans to assassinate Agamemnon, she certainly acts out of more than (and even against, considering her other children) *oikos*-related values. Aya Betensky writes that Clytemnestra "does not see herself solely as the representative of a female realm, a chthonic mother figure in opposition to males" (13). Shaw's analysis is superficial, for it is not the fact that Clytemnestra leaves the *oikos* that makes her manly and dangerous, but the fact

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[48] I plan to use *The Oresteia* as my primary example in the conclusion where I will focus on moral agency.

[49] "In each case the man has decided that certain values are paramount, because of reasoning that is fundamentally society-oriented, while the woman represents complementary values, which society has slighted" (266).

[50] I will be returning to this point in Chapter Five. The problem here, though, is not that more than one continuum is involved, but that these continua are seen as "exclusive and hostile."

[51] Vellacott, in his essay "Has Good Prevailed? A Further Study of the Oresteia," notes that Agamemnon is choosing between "on the one hand the fragile inner authority of love, home, and parenthood, and on the other the harsh external pressure of military reputation" (115). Nowhere does he mention the good of the state.

that she acts at all. Keeping in mind that, by their nature, women were viewed as passive even in childbirth, women could only be good, not do good, even if they did, in fact, do good (whether or not goodness applies to Clytemnestra is not a question I want to answer here). I do not mean to imply that this was Aeschylus' view of Clytemnestra, but it is clear that the character he created is not a victim, and this causes her downfall in the eyes of others: the "exemplary female has always been a male ideal" (Gelderman 226). And a passive creature she must be.

My point is that active tragic heroines did not have a chance. But Clytemnestra is not blameless. The murder of Cassandra[52] places Clytemnestra in the strange position of the jealous wife or woman scorned. It is here that she truly goes to excess, even as a man. The corruption continues with her role as Aegisthus' lover. Whatever heroic individualism Clytemnestra possessed in her fierce loyalty to Iphigenia disappears here. She is reduced to the stereotypical jealous woman, just in time for Orestes' matricide.

It is tempting to go on to consider the misogyny of the conclusion of the *Oresteia* at length, but I will remark that the trial of Orestes ultimately becomes the trial of Clytemnestra, and she loses. The mercy shown by Athena for Orestes certainly demonstrates moral progress (from retribution to legal justice and the jury system), but not for the reasons she and Apollo offer. Whatever progress is achieved in the trilogy is at the expense of Woman. The Furies' demand for Clytemnestra's right to justice is not answered, but set aside. Apollo begins by claiming that Clytemnestra is guilty of a heinous crime and deserves her punishment,[53] and in his final argument he moves from the particular woman (Clytemnestra) to women in general, claiming that even the kinship tie that incites the Furies' anger is nonexistent:

> *Apollo:*
> The mother is no parent of that which is called
> her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed
> that grows. The parent is he who mounts. A stranger she
> preserves a stranger's seed, if no god interfere. (658-61)

Hauntingly reminiscent of Aristotelian biology, the ethics of this claim which erases the crime of matricide are clearly laughable, if not to Aristotle then to a modern audience. How this trial could be summarized as "the claims of the familial domain . . . [where] the nature

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[52] Curiously, it is Cassandra, not Agamemnon, who experiences recognition.

[53] Apollo's argument is that the matricide is justifiable retribution for Clytemnestra's crime which was not a case of justifiable retribution because it is far worse to kill a man (king) than a woman. This must mean that both Iphigenia and Clytemnestra do not amount to one Agamemnon. Poor Cassandra does not matter at all.

of the mother-child bond [is] both the foundation and the paradigm of all kinship ties" versus "jural-political claims . . . of 'law and order' represented by Apollo's 'rational' arguments from and for male superordination" (Harris 154) I will never know. Apollo's arguments add nothing to the notion of the *lex talionis* except that it is acceptable for a man but not a woman. Even worse, though, is Athena's decision, when she declares,

> This is a ballot for Orestes I shall cast.
> There is no mother anywhere who gave me birth,
> and, but for marriage, I am always for the male
> with all my heart, and strongly on my father's side. (735-38)

Athena's response has nothing to do with fairness or concern for civic order. Yet twentieth-century critics continue to proclaim that "the brute instincts of blind retribution have been civilized and given a place in human society. The family blood-feud has been made forever obsolete, to be replaced by the new and higher morality of the *polis*" (Podlecki 78). This is the consequence of Athena's compromise, certainly, but not the reasoning behind her decision.

It is impossible for us to know Aeschylus' own opinion on the justice of Athena's decision, so to say that he embraces misogyny and is blind to the problems of the trial is unfair. Froma Zeitlin does just that:

> For Aeschylus, civilization is the ultimate product of conflict between opposing forces, achieved not through a *coincidentia oppositorum* but through a hierarchization of values. The solution, therefore, places Olympian over chthonic on the divine level, Greek over barbarian on the cultural level, and male over female on the social level. (*Dynamics* 149)

That this is the conclusion of the *Eumenides* is true; that it is Aeschylus' opinion is speculation.[54] I prefer to think that Aeschylus knew what he was doing[55] and that an audience is free to determine the ethical status of the play for themselves in any case. But although Zeitlin's claim is not necessarily true of Aeschylus, it is an accurate description of what happens in the *Eumenides*. This play—with religious, cultural and social implications—revolves around the antagonism of the male-female dichotomy, the same

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[54] Philip Vellacott, for example, would disagree with Zeitlin. He claims that "Aeschylus presents the trial of Orestes not as a civilized alternative to murderous revenge but as an inadequate and corruptible substitute for a positive and humane moral standard" ("Has Good Prevailed?" 118). I favor Vellacott's view.

[55] R. W. Livingstone tries to answer this in "The Problem of the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus." He believes that "Aeschylus was interested far less in Orestes than in the political issues of the day" (129), pleading for reconciliation in a contemporary political struggle: "It was because he was interested in this rather than in Orestes that he based the acquittal on grounds very lame in themselves" (129).

dichotomy that I exposed in the section on Aristotle, or, as Zeitlin expresses it, "That same polarizing imagination can only conceive of two hierarchical alternatives: Rule by Men or Rule by Women" (*Dynamics* 153). The *Eumenides* takes this paradigm to its logical conclusion where we do not find Shaw's balance of the male and female principles, but where choosing "always for the male" becomes synonymous with "the emergence of civilization" (Owen 121).

Section Six: Antigone

Strangely enough, I have come to view Clytemnestra and Antigone as alike. Like Clytemnestra, Antigone becomes a "female intruder" the moment she decides that she has a choice to make. Ismene, rather than deciding not to bury her brother, maintains her inertia as the ideal passive woman:

> *Ismene:*
> No, no, remember we are women.
> We must not fight with men, we must obey;
> Now and in the future the stronger will rule.
> I beg the dead to forgive me, but I am forced
> To obey my master. It is foolish for a woman
> To meddle in public matters. (60-65)

It is Antigone's decision to choose, not to disobey necessarily, that makes her manly. Her courage is that of a man, certainly, for she is willing to face death in order to defend her principles. And upon discovering that Polyneices' body has been buried, both Creon and his guards immediately suspect that a man has acted. Pomeroy points out that during her confession, "Antigone refers to herself with an adjective in the masculine gender (464). Creon, in turn, perceives her masculinity and refers to Antigone by a masculine pronoun and participle (479, 496)" (100). Antigone is precariously close to being condemned by Aristotle: "it is not appropriate for a woman to be so manly or clever" (*Poetics*, ch. 15).

In fact, Creon seems as angered by the fact that he was disobeyed by a woman as the fact that he was disobeyed:

> *Creon:*
> If she will go unpunished, she is the man
> Not I. . . . (486-87)
>
> We will not allow a woman to defeat us.
> If I am to fall, let a man's blow overthrow me,
> But I will not be weaker than a woman! (671-73)

Greek tragedy is again focusing on a conflict between the sexes, and the ambiguity created within Antigone and the other characters' perceptions of her is tremendous. Loraux feels that Antigone denies her femininity; Segal declares she embraces it, that she, in fact, represents femininity as her essence:

> Antigone's full acceptance of her womanly nature, her absolute valuation of the bonds of blood and affection, is a total denial of Creon's obsessive masculine rationality.
>
> Antigone's acceptance of this womanly obligation stands out the more by contrast with Ismene's rejection of it. . . . Ismene feels her womanhood as something negative, as a weakness. Antigone finds in it a source of strength. Ismene capitulates to Creon's view; Antigone resists and finds in her "nature" a potent heroism which cuts across Creon's dichotomizing of things and has its echoes even after her death in the equally womanly, though less significant, death of Eurydice. (Segal 70)

The strange thing is that both critics are partly right, for Antigone is ambiguous, the instantiation of the paradox of a woman faced with a serious ethical dilemma.

The nature of the dilemma is not simplistic either. Okin writes that "Antigone represents the paradigm of [the] conflict of loyalties . . . [between] family and civic obligations" (33). Once again, a Greek tragedy appears on one level to focus on a simple conflict between home and state, female and male, but if this is the case, it would seem that Antigone and Creon would themselves satisfy the demands of the conflict's portrayal. But the issues are far greater than this:

> We must avoid seeing the protagonists as one-dimensional representatives of simple oppositions: right and wrong, reason and emotion, state and individual, or the like. Such oppositions have some validity, but a validity purchased at the price of oversimplification. . . . (Segal 62)

Indeed, Antigone's role has been described as far more than that of defender of the *oikos:*

> When Antigone buries her brother or invokes unwritten laws in the *Antigone*, she surely represents something more than the strictly oikos-related interests that Shaw's theory would require, that is, the question of public policy toward traitors. (Foley, "The 'Female Intruder' Reconsidered," 1)

Antigone's own words, however, confirm that she is burying not Polyneices the traitor, but Polyneices her brother. There is an obvious difficulty in the claim that Antigone represents family loyalty, though, for her action in fact has disastrous foreseeable effects on her family, robbing Ismene of a sister, Creon of a niece, and Haemon of his wife-to-be,

never mind the fact that Antigone will never have a family of her own. Her principles must represent much more, then, and indeed she declares that Creon has assumed an authority which is not his:

> *Antigone:*
> Yes, that law was not spoken by Zeus,
> Nor by Justice of the god below.
> Your orders have no power to force
> My human will to break the unwritten
> And unfailing laws of the gods. (449-53)

This brings us back to the *Eumenides*, then, where Aeschylus faces a conflict between civic justice and an older universal demand for justice.

Where Ismene has safely remained submissive and silent, Antigone commits two crimes for a woman, the act of rebellion and her words against Creon. Infuriated by both "insults," Creon accuses Antigone of turning her "crime into an act of glory" (497). Antigone has won glory, too, as an intensely individualistic woman; after Ismene refuses to bury her brother, for instance, Antigone declares,

> I will not force you. Even if you had wished
> I would not welcome your help. Be what you will.
> But I will bury him—and it is good to die
> In doing so. Pure in my crime, he will love me,
> When I lie down in death by his side. (66-70)

And just as Alcestis' bravery emasculates Admetus, just as Clytemnestra's strength and determination uncover the impotence of that play's chorus of old men, so Antigone exposes the cowardice of the chorus:

> *Antigone:*
> All these men standing here would say
> That I was right, but terror has sealed their mouths.
> For sacred royalty has all the power
> To do and say what it wishes. (503-06)

Although we could question Antigone's judgment in goading a man who has the power to execute her, she exposes how easy it is for the dualistic world view that gives power to one realm to go off balance.

With Antigone unwilling to defend herself, Ismene speaks on her sister's behalf, trying to displace the threat of Antigone's masculinity by reaffirming her femininity and their family bonds: "But your son? Will you kill his promised wife?" (567). Creon, however, is eager to strip Antigone of her glory, and wants to take away Antigone's role as

a moral agent; he reduces her to a universal clump of Aristotelian matter when he replies, "There are other fields for him to plough" (568).

And Antigone dies a Woman, bemoaning her lost marriage and her childlessness, and in her burial chamber she hangs herself like a tragic wife: "By killing herself in the manner of very feminine women, the girl found in her death a femininity that in her lifetime she had denied with all her being" (Loraux 32). But the *Antigone* is a play of ambiguity and transgression: the burial of Polyneices is at one and the same time the act of a man, but the concern of a woman. The problem with Antigone's reversion to the woman-type at her death, where she regrets her fate and acknowledges her suffering, is not that it is not pitiable, but that it diminishes her heroic status, for of

> all tragic heroines, Antigone was the most capable of learning through suffering and achieving a tragic vision comparable to that of Oedipus. Her death erased that possibility. (Pomeroy 101-02)

Up to this point, Antigone has been a true hero, an individual taking responsibility for her actions, but, unlike her father, she does not suffer and endure. I feel the reason her status as hero is cut short is that she becomes the sacrificial victim who is needed to act as a catalyst for Creon's own reversal. Like Agamemnon with his daughter, Creon sacrifices his niece to his ambition. It is as though the play could not be complete with the focus on a triumphant though doomed woman, for her heroism vanishes, and our attention is turned instead to Creon's losses of son and wife and his recognition of his folly.

Pomeroy concludes her discussion of Antigone with a plea for androgyny:

> *Antigone* and many other tragedies show the effect of overvaluation of the so-called masculine qualities (control, subjugation, culture, excessive cerebration) at the expense of the so-called feminine aspects of life (instinct, love, family ties) which destroys men like Creon. The ideal, we can only assume—since Sophocles formulates no solution—was a harmonization of masculine and feminine values, with the former controlling the latter. (Pomeroy 103)

To read the tragedy with this as its solution is to learn that really only the men need to expand their virtue: to include the so-called womanly virtues into their characters so that their decisions will be based on less restricted grounds. A passive woman remains ideal under this system: Ismene's obedience is all that is required. The difficulty lies in dividing the world into these two realms in the first place: even if the women were the more powerful, there still would be no chance for a balance.

Section Seven: The Virgins—Macaria, Polyxena, and Euripides' Iphigenia

Antigone's death is exceptional in that she is the only tragic virgin who dies not by execution but by suicide (although the suicide was a conscious choice to avoid Creon's tortuous means of execution). Euripides' tragedies are rife with dead virgins, but they are not always the passive victims one might expect. What interests me most is how they, without exception, embrace whatever contingency they have even in circumstances where there seems to be none. In other words, they manage to assert themselves as moral agents in situations of apparent necessity, and they do this even when others, who have far more control, cower behind "necessity's yoke" (*Agamemnon* 217).

In *The Heracleidae* is a virgin whose death is almost incidental to the tragedy. Macaria, one of Heracles' daughters, exhibits the virtues which Aristotle would consider proper to her sex, being very concerned about her reputation:

Macaria:
Strangers, before all else, I hope you won't
Think it was brazen of me to come out.
I know a woman should be quiet and
Discreet, and that her place is in the home.
Yet I came out because I heard your cries. *(Speaking to her guardian Iolaus)*
Although I'm not the family head, I have
A right to be concerned about the fate
Of my own brothers, and I'd like to know,
For my sake too, what new thing has turned up
To plague you—as if this were not enough. (474-83)

Iolaus informs her that the ensuing battle will be lost without, what else, the sacrifice to Demeter of a "Young lady of respectable descent" (409). Macaria immediately volunteers:

Macaria:
And on that issue, then, we stand or fall?
Iolaus:
All other matters being equal, yes.
Macaria:
Then all your Argive fears are over, since
This volunteer is quite prepared to die,
And let herself be led off to the slaughter. (497-502)

Macaria refuses the offer for lots to be drawn so that the issue might be decided by chance, emphasizing that her decision is not only good for her family, but for herself, and that her self-sacrifice is a conscious act of will:

Macaria:

Why, even if I survive the deaths
Of my own brothers, I'd have no hope left
(Though people have been known to sell their friends
Upon that chance). But who would marry me,
Or want this friendless girl as mother of
His sons? To end things now is much to be
Preferred to *that* shame, even though a girl
Not so well-known might well make the other choice.
Come, lead me to the place where I'm to die.
Then wreathe me and begin whenever you like;
And go and win the fight. I hereby put
Myself on record that of my free will
I volunteer to die for these and for
Myself. The brave have found no finer prize
Than leaving life the way it should be done.

And, of course, the others are impressed:

Chorus:

A girl who gives her own life to save these
And says such things leaves nothing unsaid.
No words could be compared to hers; no acts
Of flesh and blood rank higher than her own. (520-38)

Macaria's decision is presented as freely made, rational, and courageous.[56] If the decision were to do anything but die, she would probably be perceived as a threatening woman. As it is, she can gain the glory of the good woman in death.

Euripides' Iphigenia in *Iphigenia at Aulis* also volunteers to be sacrificed, although we know she is going to die regardless of whether she acquiesces or resists. Indeed, when she first learns of her father's treachery, she pleads for her life:

Iphigenia:

. . . But only with tears can I
Make arguments and here I offer them.

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[56] I am not ignoring the horror of the fact that her alternatives are so severly constrained that she chooses death over a life without a husband.

O Father,
My body is a suppliant's, tight clinging
To your knees. Do not take away this life
Of mine before its dying time. (1214-18)

Achilles, who is angered by what he perceives as an "insult and injury" (961) in the use of his name in luring Clytemnestra and Iphigenia to Aulis, promises to defend the girl. At the climax of the play, we hear Clytemnestra's panic:

Clytemnestra: Oh, the mob—what a terror
And an evil thing!
Achilles: But I will defend you!
Clytemnestra: You—one man fighting a thousand! (1357-58)

As the mob of soldiers approaches, led by Odysseus, Clytemnestra's hysteria mounts:

Clytemnestra: Will he, if she resists, drag her away?
Achilles: There is no doubt—and by her golden hair!
Clytemnestra: What then must I do?
Achilles: Hold fast to the child—
Clytemnestra: And so save her from murder—
Achilles: It comes to this— (1366-68)

What follows has led to a notorious moment in literary criticism, for Iphigenia changes her mind:

Iphigenia:
Mother, now listen to my words. I see
Your soul in anger against your husband.
This is a foolish and an evil rage.
Oh, I know when we stand before a helpless
Doom how hard it is to bear.
. . . And now hear me, Mother,
What thing has seized me and I have conceived
In my heart.
I shall die—I am resolved—
And having fixed my mind I want to die
Well and gloriously, putting away
From me whatever is weak and ignoble. (1370-78)

Iphigenia goes on to provide a collection of the same ridiculous arguments that Agamemnon used to justify her sacrifice, and several new ones, including the fact that, because of her, Troy will be punished so that "never more will / Barbarians wrong and

ravish Greek women" (1379-80), that her one life is not worth abandoning the effort of thousands of men, that Achilles should not die for her, that she should not oppose the divine will. This change of heart led Aristotle to cite this tragedy as an illustration "of inconsistency . . . (for the girl who beseeched bears no resemblance to the later girl)" (*Poetics*, ch. 15). Further, the translator Charles R. Walker separates Achilles and Clytemnestra's exchange from Iphigenia's speech with the stage direction: "(*Who for some minutes has not heard them, breaks from her reverie)*" (p. 289). If, indeed, Iphigenia is completely unaware of the situation around her, then the claim of inconsistency of character would hold, but this is to assume that she is irrational and unobservant. Thousands of men are about to storm the tent where she hides with her mother, and Achilles has sworn to die to protect her. Her mention of her "helpless doom" and the repetition of Clytemnestra's remarks on "thousands of men" demonstrate that she is aware of the circumstances, and nothing is lost by affirming this recognition except the conviction that she is an irrational and inconsistent girl. The play makes sense once we hear the irony of Iphigenia's defense of her father, for it is said for her mother's sake. Iphigenia would rather sacrifice herself than suffer the consequences of a battle between the three of them and thousands of killers. In the play, two people take responsibility for their actions in the face of unbeatable odds: Achilles, because he is insulted that he was used, and Iphigenia, because she would rather die gracefully, knowing that her mother will survive, than be taken by force. The people with real power hide behind the necessity of the act for all the reasons Iphigenia gives, where in fact they have every opportunity to do the right thing. The one person whose fate is sealed still accepts her role as a moral agent and acts accordingly.

The notion that Iphigenia has any real contingency in this situation might be questioned in light of my acknowledgment that her "fate is sealed." Indeed, her death is hypothetically necessary for the assault on Troy (cf. *Metaphysics* V.5), and she has no means of avoiding this end. But Aristotle does not demand a strictly logical evaluation of contingency in a circumstance such as this:

> What sorts of acts, then, should be called compulsory? We answer that without qualification actions are so when the cause is in the external circumstances and the agent contributes nothing. But the things that in themselves are involuntary, but now and in return for these gains are worthy of choice, and whose moving principle is in the agent, are in themselves involuntary, but now and in return for these gains are voluntary. They are more like voluntary acts; for actions are in the class of particulars, and the particular acts here are voluntary. What sort of things are to be

> chosen in return for what it is not easy to state; for there are many differences in particular cases. (*Nicomachean Ethics* III.1.1110b1-8)

Aristotle also provides a case that illustrates the ambiguity of trying to determine whether or not an act is freely chosen:

> Something of the sort happens also with regard to the throwing of goods overboard in a storm; for in the abstract no one throws goods away voluntarily, but on condition of its securing the safety of himself and his crew any sensible man does. Such actions, then, are mixed, but are more like voluntary actions; for they are worthy of choice at the time when they are done, and the end of an action is relative to the occasion. . . . Such actions, therefore, are voluntary, but in the abstract perhaps involuntary; for no one would choose any such act in itself. (III.1.1110a8-19)

In Aristotle's own words, then, Iphigenia is not behaving inconsistently, but has made a choice worthy of a "sensible man."

It is ironic that Achilles, the defender of the previous virgin, is the cause of our next subject's sacrifice. *Hecuba* is a difficult tragedy, one which many critics feel is bordering on the melodramatic. Once again, Euripides looks at the victims of power and their actions in the face of limited choices. Polyxena is demanded by the ghost of Achilles, and as the ghost of her brother explains, the matter is decided, "asking what one slave was worth / when laid in balance / with the honor of Achilles" (135-37). Powerless to prevent this, Hecuba informs her daughter of her fate:

> *Hecuba:*
> —The Greeks,
> in full assembly,
> have decreed your death,
> a living sacrifice
> upon Achilles' tomb.
> *Polyxena:*
> O my poor mother!
> How I pity you,
> this broken-hearted life
> of pain!
> What god
> could make you suffer so,
> impose such pain,
> such grief in one poor life?

Alive, at least
I might have shared
your slavery with you,
my unhappy youth
with your embittered age.
But now I die,
and you must see my death:—
butchered like a lamb
squalling with fright,
and the throat held taut
for the gashing knife,
and the gaping hole
where the breath of life
goes out,
and sinks
downward into dark
with the unconsolable dead.

It is *you* I pity,
Mother.
For *you* I cry.
Not for myself,
not for this life
whose suffering is such
I do not care to live,
but call it happiness to die. (193-215)

Like Macaria, Polyxena acknowledges that her life does not include the prospect of future happiness, and her concern is for her mother's suffering, not her own. I think it is reasonable to read these passages as scenes of recognition, not of the girls' own *hamartia*, but of the suffering inherent in their lives as tragic women. And although Polyxena has no more chance than the lamb she describes so pitiably, she dies with the dignity of a warrior:

Talthybius:
. . . Then,
grasping his sword by its golden hilt, he [Achilles' son] slipped it
from the sheath, and made a sign to the soldiers
to seize her. But she spoke first:

"Wait, you Greeks
who sacked my city! Of my own free will I die.
Let no man touch me. I offer my throat
willingly to the sword. I will not flinch.
But let me be free for now. Let me die free. . ."
"Free her!" the army roared,
and Agamemnon ordered his men to let her go.
The instant they released their hold, she grasped her robes
at the shoulder and ripped them down the sides
as far as the waist, exposing her naked breasts,
bare and lovely like a sculptured goddess.
Then she sank, kneeling on the ground, and spoke
her most heroic words:
"Strike, captain.
Here is my breast. Will you stab me there?
Or in the neck? Here is my throat, bared
for your blow." (541-66)

William Arrowsmith's interpretation of this is that

> Opposite him [Polymestor], as virtuous as he is corrupt, stands Polyxena, almost too noble to be true. But Euripides' point is surely that it is only extreme youth and extreme innocence which can afford the illusion of total commitment. Like so many of Euripides' self-sacrificing young heroes, her death, futile in itself, exposes, by the quality of its commitment, the dense ambiguity of the moral atmosphere for those who cannot die. (6)

But her commitment is not an illusion, and Polyxena is no mindless lamb facing slaughter. What Euripides permits (and what Aeschylus denied Iphigenia) is the ultimate enactment of moral agency, moral agency for its own sake even in the face of certain death:

> Euripides prefers generally to grant the *parthenos* the courage and free choice that, in the untragic conditions of real life, were denied to the young Greek girl by society. Courage and decision were also the hallmarks of Macaria's character, together with the repeated affirmation of liberty. (Loraux 45)

It could be said that these girls do little more than commit suicide rather than endure a sorrowful fate. As Loraux concludes:

> Thus sacrifice, suicide, and noble death exist side by side and overlap. But when one is dealing with a tragedy of Euripides, who would expect one

> unambiguous reading? The confusion of genres, institutions, and languages is very typical of Euripides in practice, whatever his "intentions" may have been—whether he was being ironical or not, whether he did or did not mean to expose to the judgment of the spectators those armies of men who find their salvation in the blood of virgins. (47)

Polyxena's case is even worse, for her murder is sanctioned for the lust of a corpse.

Section Eight: The Villains of Euripides—Hecuba and Medea

> Women! This coin that 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. . . .
> I hate a clever woman. . . . (*Hippolytus* 615-19, 640)

Hecuba and Medea would probably meet Hippolytus' standard of clever, despised women. But nothing is ever that simple with Euripides.

Hecuba is my favorite tragedy, not because of the moral dilemmas it raises in the characters' minds, but for the ones it does not. Power, not moral luck, is the impetus for the plot, and this has drastic implications for the notion of *hamartia* in the play. Specifically, Hecuba's action is performed neither unknowingly nor unwillingly (*Poetics*, ch. 14); there is no ignorance on her part, just a series of heinous acts of victimization against her family which lead to her vicious act of retaliation. Unfortunately, the play lacks almost every characteristic that Aristotle admires in a tragedy, and many critics would agree with him. William Arrowsmith remarks in the introduction to his translation that "the *Hecuba*, if it is not a great play, is at least a moving and a powerful one, a taut, bitter little tragedy of the interrelationships between those who hold power and those who suffer it" (3). But there is nothing little about the injustices that constitute the play. It is a tragedy not of fate, but of political will, not of moral luck, but of powerlessness.

Consider Odysseus's advice to Hecuba concerning the sacrifice of her daughter Polyxena:

> *Odysseus:*
> You understand your position? You must not attempt
> to hold your daughter here by force, nor,
> I might add, presume to match your strength with mine.
> Remember your weakness and accept this tragic loss
> as best you can.

Nothing you do or say
can change the facts. Under the circumstances,
the logical course is resignation. (225-29)

And despite his callousness, Odysseus is right: there is absolutely nothing Hecuba can do to save her daughter. The choice is not hers, and resistance is futile. That he advises her to be logical is telling, though, for it is obviously an inappropriate reaction for a mother facing the murder of her daughter. Odysseus, too, pleads necessity, claiming that he cannot go back on his promise, that a hero like Achilles deserves the honor, and that no man will fight again if this precedent is set dishonoring a dead hero. But Hecuba immediately questions even this "political necessity" (261), praying, "O gods, spare me the sight / of this thankless breed, these politicians / who cringe for favors from a screaming mob / and do not care what harm they do. . . " (255-59). There is not even the recognition of a dilemma on the Greek leaders' parts, and there is no sign of either civic or divine justice:

Talthybius:
O Zeus, what can I say?
That you look on man
and care?
Or do we, holding that the gods exist,
deceive ourselves with unsubstantial dreams
and lies, while random careless chance and change
alone control the world? (487-91)

When the body of her young son is discovered washed on the shore, Hecuba decides to act, but requires a promise of non-interference from Agamemnon, who is reluctant:

. . . This is my dilemma. The army
thinks of Polymestor as its friend,
this boy as its enemy. You love your son,
but what do your affections matter to the Greeks?
Put yourself in my position. Believe me,
Hecuba, I'd like to come instantly to your defense.
But if the army mutters, then I must be slow. (857-64)

Once again, a man with power is not facing an *oikos/polis* dilemma, but a personal and political risk. If any of the men had fulfilled their moral duty, had embraced their contingency and acted, Hecuba's revenge might not have happened. But she grasps the opportunity Agamemnon gives her to take her revenge against her son's killer, an opportunity granted on the assumption of her passivity and powerlessness:

Agamemnon: How?

Poison? Or do you think that shaking hand
could lift a sword and kill? Who would help you?
On whom could you count?
Hecuba: Remember: there are women
hidden in these tents.
Agamemnon: You mean our prisoners?
Hecuba: They will help me get revenge.
Agamemnon: But *women*?
Women overpower men? (876-86)

What follows is her revenge: Polymestor's two sons are murdered and he is blinded. For her deed, Hecuba's loss of humanity by the murder of the innocent children, she is transformed, "changed to a dog, a bitch with blazing eyes" (1265). But at the moment she plots her revenge we witnessed the death of her soul in any case; the transformation had already happened, not because of her deed, but because of her suffering: it was the cause, not the result, of her act. In the terms of the *Poetics*, the tragic act of the hero(ine) does not lead to reversal; the circumstances surrounding the reversal spawn the hero(ine)'s blameworthy act.

A tragedy like Hecuba's highlights the importance of reevaluating Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle's disregard for the situation of women leads to a focus on personal *hamartia* as the causal impetus for the action of a tragedy, which restricts our ability to evaluate plays where the magnitude of the suffering is felt by innocent women. Had Aristotle seen this as a problem, an alternative for personal *hamartia* might have been sought. I propose that moral agency in a broader sense is more useful, incorporating both an awareness of the types of contingency open to the characters (as we saw with the virgins in the previous section) and of the moral conflicts facing all the characters and the consequences of failing to acknowledge them. For instance, Odysseus and Agamemnon refuse to acknowledge their own ability to change the course of Hecuba's fate: none of her suffering was fated or necessary in a strict sense of the term. Euripides then focuses on Hecuba's suffering, highlighting not the cause of the tragic reversal, but the consequences. Blaming Hecuba becomes too easy, and the audience would be myopic to ignore the circumstances that lead to her anger. It is also unfortunate that anger is not acknowledged in the *Poetics* as an emotion crucial to the plot,[57] for Hecuba's inability to control her anger

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[57] In a seminar on Aristotle's *Poetics* in the fall of 1995, Dr. Richard Bosley suggested anger is an emotion as inherent to tragedy as fear and pity. The ensuing debate continued for the remainder of the course, with no consensus ever being reached.

leads to the excess—the murder of the innocent children—which signals her loss of humanity.

The case is not as clear with Medea. That Aristotle did not think highly of this tragedy, either, is clear, though, for the deed is not done "to good effect" when it is "done with full knowledge and understanding, as the old poets used to arrange it, and in the way that Euripides too made Medea kill her children" (*Poetics*, ch. 14). Medea's sense of justice is simplistic:

> *Medea:*
> 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. (807-10)

But Medea's rage at Jason for marrying the daughter of the king of Corinth to establish a political alliance overwhelms her until revenge is her only goal:

> *Chorus:* But can you have the heart to kill your flesh and blood?
> *Medea:* Yes, for this is the best way to wound my husband.
> *Chorus:* And you, too. Of women you will be most unhappy.
> *Medea:* So it must be. No compromise is possible. (816-19)

But Aristotle is wrong about the status of Medea's *hamartia*, for, like Agamemnon, she is in error by convincing herself that her act is necessary. No amount of suffering justifies the murder of innocents and Medea's excessive actions surpass the scales of virtues related to both the *oikos* and the *polis*. What we learn about the women who commit these acts is not that they are "female intruders," for the men are not neglecting the family for the sake of the state; rather, the instability of the power dynamic established by restricting women to the home triggers such monstrous injustices that the pendulum of injury and revenge begins swinging uncontrollably.[58]

That Jason, like Hippolytus, curses the necessity of women for reproduction is intriguing, and, indeed, Medea's femaleness is at the fore throughout the tragedy. Jason declares:

> There is no Greek woman who would have dared such deeds,
> Out of all those whom I passed over and chose you
> To marry instead, a bitter destructive match,
> A monster, not a woman, having a nature
> Wilder than that of Scylla in the Tuscan Sea. (1339-43)

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[58] Electra fits this pattern in a way that Orestes does not, simply because he has a chance to influence the situation and even to thrive in exile, while her seclusion destroys her.

Like Hecuba, she is "female, barbarian, animal" (duBois 205), everything the Aristotelian hero in the *Politics* and the *Poetics* is not. But Medea and Hecuba are no heroes.[59] Then again, that is a status that not a single woman has managed to achieve to Aristotelian standards, so perhaps it is time to re-examine those standards.

Medea, herself, blames both Jason (as the person with the power to help or hurt her) and her Otherness (as foreigner and female) for her suffering. In a famous speech lamenting the role of women, Medea describes her status as a woman in a foreign land:

> 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.
> She arrives among new modes of behavior and manners,
> And needs prophetic power, unless she has learned at home,
> How best to manage him who shares the bed with her. . . .
> [We] are forced to keep our eyes on one alone.
> . . . I would very much rather stand
> Three times in the front of battle than bear one child.
> . . . I am deserted, a refugee, thought nothing of
> By my husband—something he won in a foreign land.
> I have no mother or brother, nor any relation
> With whom I can take refuge in this sea of woe.
> . . . [A] woman is defenseless, dreads the sight of cold
> Steel. . . . (231-65)

As usual, though, Euripides' meaning is ambiguous. Medea has described the plight of many women, but not herself. She is correct that Jason has harmed her, but she is neither helpless nor afraid of harming others: "when once [a woman] is wronged in the matter of love, / No other soul can hold so many thoughts of blood" (265-66). Medea claims she is

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[59] In reference to the title of this section, I do not believe Hecuba and Medea are the real villains of the plays, either. That honor belongs to the men who use, misjudge, and abuse them until they sacrifice their humanity for the sake of revenge. As duBois remarks, "Euripides sets up Medea [and, I would argue, Hecuba] as one side of the polarizing dichotomy, the bestial, barbaric, womanly side, and then refuses to valorize the human, Greek, male at its expense. . . [and thus] Euripides tests, decenters, deconstructs all the categories of difference which contended Thales with his existence" (211).

responding as an injured, innocent woman, but in fact her anger and her actions belie this. Euripides does not let her status as victim excuse her from the role of moral agent. Both the nurse and chorus recommend moderation, not to Medea as a woman, but in general terms. For instance, after Medea curses her children and exclaims, "Let the whole house crash" (114), the nurse replies:

> Great people's tempers are terrible, always
> Having their own way, seldom checked,
> Dangerous they shift from mood to mood.
> How much better to have been accustomed
> To live on equal terms with one's neighbors.
> *I* would like to be safe and grow old in a
> Humble way. What is moderate sounds best,
> Also in practice *is* best for everyone. (119-27)

Once again, anger is described as a pivotal emotion and the characters' inability to find the mean becomes central to the impending tragic act.

Section Nine: Comedy

In the second chapter of his *Poetics*, Aristotle declares that this "very distinction [between men's characters] also separates tragedy from comedy; the latter tends to represent men worse than present humanity, the former better." Without judging whether or not this is true for men, I suggest that it is certainly not true of women. The women of (New) comedy are good women.[60]

Unfortunately, very little has been written on the female characters, despite the fact that women are the title characters of many New Comedies. Madeleine Mary Henry has completed a rare treat, a fascinating and thorough study of the *hetaira* in *Menander's Courtesans and the Greek Comic Tradition.* She briefly discusses Old Comedy, where prostitutes are mentioned in order to discredit their lovers, to serve as metaphors for food or animals, and to act as "the personifications of cheap and decadent versifying and degraded subject-matter" (29). Not surprisingly, they rarely speak. Their roles expand, however, with New Comedy and the plays of Menander.

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[60] I will reveal my own prejudice and ignore Old Comedy. Suffice it so say that I think E. F. M. Benecke had a point when he wrote, "The earlier plays of Aristophanes contain few allusions to women, and throughout his works it may be doubted whether he ever introduced a female character on the stage except with the ultimate intention of leading up to some form of indecency" (129).

The Arbitration is one of the hetaira-plays for which most of the courtesan's speech survives. Habrotonon is a young slave prostitute who tries to establish the identity of a baby, hoping that he is a citizen, although the child is currently believed a slave:

> *Habrotonon:* Poor little baby. It's so cute.
> *Onesimus:* And this ring was with it. (*Looking around and dropping his voice to a whisper)* It's Charisius'!
> *Habrotonon:* Oh, how could you! When there's a chance this child may actually be your master's son, are you going to stand by and see him brought up in slavery? (116)

Habrotonon conceives a plan to establish the baby's citizenship, and hopes that she will win her freedom as a reward; this mixture of altruism and self-hope make her a lovely change from the martyr or monster of the tragedies:

> She not only plans to find both parents discreetly and efficiently but also executes the plan successfully. Menander characterizes Habrotonon with customary sensitivity. Her speech and dealings with other characters show that she is uniquely honest and forthright in contrast to the others' prejudices about her, and she has a winning personality unparalleled in ancient comedy. (Henry 57)

Menander gives Habrotonon individuality rather than stereotypicality, throughout.

Although we do not get to know the title character of *The Woman of Samos* as well as Habrotonon, Chrysis is also a sympathetic character. Unfortunately, her importance to the play is often ignored. Many interpretations focus on the relationship between the father and son in the play, or study the adoptive relationship, or look at "guilt as a barrier to communication" (Henry 61).[61] Chrysis, however, is central to the plot. A woman with womanly virtues, she maintains her secret about the identity of Moschion's baby until the parents are safely wed, even though the secret threatens her own safety: "The hetaira has been evicted, her lover paints her a grim picture of starvation, yet she does not reveal the baby's identity" (Henry 65).

Henry observes that Chrysis speaks only 29 of the 737 lines in the Oxford text of the play (68), but even more startling is the fact that the baby's mother does not speak at all. The object of Moschion's desire, the victim of the "comic" event of the play—her rape—Plangon serves as the material around which a comedy is built, material without form. It is more telling, then, that Chrysis's voice is so seldomly heard, and when it is, her purpose is to maintain her silence. In this, Henry feels that Chrysis behaves better than

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[61] Henry provides references for each of these cases.

the other characters do, and better than they expect of her (70), but fails to comment on the fact that her act is actually that of martyrdom and her goodness involves, yet again, the threat of self-sacrifice. What is becoming increasingly clear, then, is that, in times of moral crisis, women's alternatives tend to be limited to silence and sacrifice, including silence as sacrifice.

She Who Was Shorn is about a citizen foundling who learns her identity with the obvious advantage that she can now marry. "For most of the play, however, the other characters believe that she is a hetaira and treat her and interpret her actions accordingly" (Henry 73). What is interesting about this is that it highlights the fate of the women in all of the plays. What they do and how they are treated always has more to do with their role as women than in what they say or do, if they are permitted to speak at all. This is especially true of the *hetaira*, though, the ultimate abject personage. Glykera undergoes an amazing metamorphosis in the play—from "a citizen by birth, to foundling, concubine, *de facto* wife, imagined *hetaira*, to citizen once again" (Henry 76)—even though she does not change at all; a woman's identity has less to do with her character than how she is perceived. The comic scenario of this play is as unhumorous as the rapes of the previous two plays discussed, for Glykera is humiliated—shorn—for permitting a kiss from a man that she alone knows to be her brother. Eager to protect his identity, Glykera remains silent about their relationship, knowing that her brother is fortunate in his wealthy adoptive family. Her silence leads her lover to believe her a fickle and faithless woman, and her brother to believe she is lustful for accepting his kiss and taking refuge in his mother's house. Menander forces his male characters to amend both their views and their behavior when Glykera finds her and her twin's father, restoring a long-lost family.

Habrotonon reunites a family, Chrysis makes a marriage possible between Moschion and Plangon, and Glykera establishes her citizenship: "Though not members of the oikos and traditionally despised as destroyers of its resources and stability, they bring it unity" (Henry 110). Instrumental to the plot, these women facilitate its resolution. Menander takes the abject figure of the prostitute and shows her to be worthy of the respect due to a virtuous woman. But what is most important is how little the woman's happiness or unhappiness rests on her own actions as compared to the perceptions of others. Aristotle's emphasis on action and plot in the *Poetics* might apply aptly to men, people with individual freedom and with the means to win or lose glory, but has little consequence for those without such liberty.

Section Ten: Summary

One opposition that is highlighted in classical drama is that of agency versus passivity. While a man faced with a moral choice is free to choose, a good woman becomes paralyzed by her role. The actions available to her, while maintaining her status as a "good woman," involve not acting at all, like Ismene, remaining silent, like Glykera, or committing suicide, like Jocasta. None of these are good actions, which probably explains why "woman" is used so often as an insult in the plays. If the woman tries to make a choice that would have been open to a male counterpart, she is again insulted, this time being called a "man" (unlike "woman," which is an insult whether directed at men or women, "man" is only insulting to women). Thus it is that the women who are truly good, like the courtesans in the comedies, still have insignificant or difficult lives, and the women who choose to act are anomalous and cursed with difficult lives.

The female characters of classical drama are fascinating: some are brave or loyal, others are aggressive, and some are simply pitiful. It is impossible for us to know what the playwrights were trying to achieve when they created these women, but the number of powerful, thoughtful women in the plays, the number of speeches which bemoan a woman's lot, and the very ambiguity of many of the female character's choices and actions force us to confront the question of the treatment of women and the prevailing attitudes toward them. Whether or not Euripides, for instance, was a feminist is irrelevant to the fact that his plays bring the mistreatment and suffering of women to the fore.

Chapter Five: Conflict and Harmony

> Many extant Greek tragedies revolve around the questions of human choice and action that provide the raw material of ethics. Hence tragedy frequently dramatises particular cases of the kind of problem that moral philosophy attempts to solve, and in doing so may help to shed light on such issues by placing them in a new perspective. It offers us a concrete, particular and urgent enactment of a crisis, encouraging us to identify with the subjective viewpoint of particular figures, without preventing us from judging them. (Mary Whitlock Blundell 7)

If the virtues of men and women are to be divided into those of state versus the home, it is impossible for me to see how harmony can be achieved. First, the state is composed of the homes and the homes are elements of the state, and, second, any balance struck between (supposed) opposites is precarious, indeed. Rather, "Helene Foley in 1981 drew attention to the inadequacy of interpreting ancient tragedy in accordance with a concept of *oikos* and *polis* as equivalent either to nature and culture or private and public, and proposed a reading overall in which *oikos* and *polis* 'are mutually defining institutions; order in one sphere is inextricably related to order in the other'" (Katz 36). Rather than trying to read tragedy as promoting the mutual exclusivity of home versus state, then, we could read it as portraying the disastrous consequences of such a view, promoting, instead, a model of complementarity.

Let us take one final look at the moral conflicts of the tragedies. A moral conflict arises and one of the characters makes a decision by emphasizing certain aspects of the problem and its consequences and disregarding others: according to the traditional binary logic, the male appears to act within and for the political realm,[62] the female within and for the home. On the Aristotelian model of the mean, as put forth in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, an agent's choice can tend toward excess or defect, away from the ethical mean, causing injury to others. If these others choose to respond (like Deianira) or retaliate (like Clytemnestra), which is generally the case in tragedies, under the justice of the *talio*, the ethical pendulum is set into motion.[63] The avenger often adds "an element of retribution" (Blundell 30) in addition to simple reciprocation, and the pendulum swings even further from the mean with each act of retaliation. For example, Clytemnestra feels justified in

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[62] As we noted earlier, things are rarely this simple in the tragedies. The characters often act for selfish or strategic reasons, rather than simply on behalf of the state or home.

[63] Dr. Bosley shared an honor student's (Larissa Katz) paper on the theory of reversion with me, which I found extremely useful. She compares the Aristotelian account of reversion with the Daoist notion that "where one of a pair of complements exists, the other, rather than being negated, is bound to exist as well."

slaying Cassandra with Agamemnon in return for the slaying of Iphigenia. What is interesting is that the original crime is generally defended as an act on behalf of the state or the family, but revenge serves neither the *polis* nor the *oikos:* no family and no state can ever be restored by the *talio.* What is required is obviously for the moral agents to aim at and stop at the mean, not beyond it. But what sort of agent is best suited for this and how can this be achieved?

In the section concerning Clytemnestra, we considered Michael Shaw's belief that the *Oresteia* embodies the need for a male/female union, where a balance is achieved between state and home. I argue that this type of balance is both illusory and inherently unstable. It is illusory because there is always the concomitant belief that the state is prior to the *oikos*, and the husband the head of the household. It is unstable because many decisions do not fall exclusively within the public or private realm—this distinction itself should be subject to questioning. Thus, when a man tries to act in the public interest, certain ethical continua will come into play, while the wife considers different continua. By ignoring the interests of the opposing realm, the agent will ultimately infringe on the best interests of the opposing member of the couple. A state action which appears to fall within the mean could, in fact, be defective or excessive when all considerations are brought into the picture. Even if the couple confers about all major decisions, their limited perspectives and understanding of the opposing party's virtues and concerns will lead not to consensus, but the need for one party to have the ultimate decision-making power, with that party's concerns taking priority.

It is easy to see how this arrangement would lead not to mutuality, but to suspicion, dissension, and harm. It is little wonder that Euripides' Orestes attaches Clytemnestra's crime to all of womankind:

> But if you sanction this murder of husbands by wives,
> you might as well go kill yourselves right now
> or accept the domination of your women. (935-37)

Being the member of the union who has the ability to act in the political realm, the husband will inevitably perform an action that creates unease or harm in the *oikos* (because this was never his concern), and Shaw's pattern of the female intruder will be set into motion. More likely, though, the man's exclusive concern with the political realm will lead to self-interested acts, rather than state-interested, and the woman's wrath will be incurred in this way as well. A spiraling cycle of revenge will be set into motion, until some kind of balance is restored. But this balance can never be a truly equal partnership because of the reasons considered above: one side must hold the ultimate authority, and since the husband is associated with the powerful political sphere, the solution will be—as Athena

determined—a hierarchy, namely, patriarchy. Unless the binary pattern itself is dismantled, a hierarchy is the only solution.

Another threat to the balance of polarities is the risk of trespass. For instance, Creon was moved more by his fear of being bested by a woman than by being disobeyed. The demarcation of the boundaries of the male versus female realm is constructed, not real, and thus subject to violation. In tragedy, we have seen the polarities both blur and move to the extremes. As Page duBois observes,

> Difference was exaggerated, categories blurred. . . . Euripides saw the irrational, the bestial, the barbaric, within the city and within the Greek hero himself. . . . The tragedian reveals with clarity and with horror the inadequacy of the old logic of polarity. It is the project of the philosophers of the fourth century to discard that logic, to redefine differences, to replace the series of analogies which defined the *polis* with a new logic, one of hierarchy, in which the once excluded others, female, barbarian, and animal, are set in relation to one another in terms of relative deprivation and estrangement from *logos*. (212)

Woman is no longer Other, but Less-Than: the deformed male.

Ultimately, the tragedies show us what happens when difference and dichotomies are drawn to the extremes: man/woman, state/family, power/powerlessness, action/passivity. But if difference means opposition and if opposition breeds conflict, we might be tempted to follow Plato and simply abolish it, creating a republic where men and women are treated equally, where the state and the family are the same entity, where everyone is expected to act on behalf of the republic. But, without diverging into a critique of the *Republic*, we can note that Plato was also forced to abolish certain sides of some dichotomies, where passion, for instance, is replaced by reason, where tragedy is replaced by useful moralizing lies. It is here that Martha Nussbaum picks up Plato's notion of the "ancient quarrel between the philosophers and the poets" (*Love's Knowledge* 15). In *The Fragility of Goodness*, "Nussbaum feminizes Aristotle as one whose choices of imagery are symptomatic of a view that the 'best' human being is androgynous or 'incorporates elements of both maleness and femaleness' (p. 20)" (Straus 293).

There are, however, problems with the notion of the androgen,[64] and as such I cannot regard the androgynous couple—described so carefully by Xenophon as the pairing

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64 One of the main problems is that it can be used as a tool to maintain the subordination of women. As Sandra Bem, one of the major proponents of androgyny in the 1970s, later admitted, "androgyny has been used throughout the history of Western culture as a vision of how the 'perfect *man*'. . . could be created" (123). Since the more positive attributes of the binaries are primarily associated with the masculine, the androgen tends to be "manly"

of opposites into a unified whole—as the ultimate moral agent, nor the androgynous individual, trying to strike this balance internally, as such either. Rather, I believe it is necessary to take Aristotle's tertiary ethical system of defect, mean, and excess,[65] seriously. If we permit logical binaries and associated laws such as the law of noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle to frame our ethical outlook, every decision might be seen as a choice between two paths and mutually exclusive ways of choosing: logically or intuitively (but not both), objectively or compassionately (but not both), for example.

A more interesting model, then, involves looking at the particularities of the ethical situation and focusing on complements rather than opposites. In a recent paper, Richard Bosley considers the flexibility of the theory of the Mean and whether it has width and depth. The latter of these two features is essential to the ethical questions of Greek tragedy, asking whether "there is only a single continuum along which the Mean is to be located, or rather whether there is an area in which two or more continua meet. . . . If there are two or more continua which occupy the subject-range of a Mean, they would, at least within the scope of the Mean, be harmonious and mutually suppportive" (Bosley 40). The example which Aristotle considers involves courage: "it is a mean with regard to fear and confidence" (*Nicomachean Ethics* III.6.1115a5). A brave man "will fear even the things that are not beyond human strength, he will fear them as he ought and as reason directs,

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with a gesture towards expressing "feminine" emotions and compassion. A related problem with androgyny lies in "the evenhanded treatment of masculinity and femininity. Although both men and men's activities have been the locus of cultural value in almost all times and places, the concept of androgyny by itself does nothing to point this inequality out. Nor does it make women and women's activities *more* valued or men and men's activities *less* valued" (Bem 123). Bem's final concern with the androgen is that "the very concept of androgyny reproduces—and thereby reifies—the very gender polarization that it seeks to undercut. It does this by assuming masculinity and femininity to be conceptual givens, if not set personality structures; by emphasizing the complementarity of masculinity and femininity, which, in turn, implies the naturalness of heterosexuality; and by focusing attention on the male-female distinction itself rather than on, say, the class or power distinction" (124).

Aristotle actually provides a more useful model than androgyny, one that does not fall into the essentialist trap. He suggests trying to determine our partialities, and compensating accordingly:

> But we must consider the things towards which we ourselves also are easily carried away; for some of us tend to one thing, some to another; and this will be easily recognizable from the pleasure and the pain we feel. We must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error, as people do in straightening sticks that are bent. (*Nicomachean Ethics* II.9.1109b2-7)

65 "The concepts of sameness and otherness do not motivate a teleology. They are not the instruments which guide an inquiry into means and ends. This job falls essentially to the triad of concepts deficiency, sufficiency, and excess" (Bosley 40).

and he will face them for the sake of what is noble" (III.7.1115b12-14). Courage, then, involves a proportion of fear and confidence; it cannot be achieved if one of the two conditions exists in excess or defect. To apply this model more generally, ethical questions rarely involve a single continuum, but require a balance of different concerns. When a character fails to find the right proportion, he or she fails to find the Mean. When relevant pairs are seen as oppositional and conflictual rather than complementary and supportive, the ethical pendulum begins swinging on its tumultuous course.

The analogy between being courageous and finding the mean in the face of different concerns should not be carried too far, however. There is a difference between balancing continua to perfect the mean and trying to balance all the relevant features of an ethical question to find the best solution. Specifically, I firmly believe that the most dramatically interesting ethical questions are the ones that cannot be solved by finding the correct proportions and balance,[66] not the cases where there "is at most a single correct answer, and the competing candidate makes no further claim once the choice is made" (Nussbaum, *Fragility* 30). The most tragic problems are those "which cannot be resolved without remainder, . . . so that the rejected horn of the dilemma legitimately can, without want of logic, exert a continuing claim upon an agent even once it has been rejected" (Ridley 235). If we truly believe that the soldiers will all die if Iphigenia lives, Agamemnon is facing such a dilemma.[67] He cannot possibly do the right thing, and he must choose.

The solution seems to lie in the Nussbaumian interpretation of Aristotelian ethics as presented in *Love's Knowledge.* Nussbaum contends that the ethical starting place for a moral agent is the Aristotelian question: "how should a human being live?" (24). And her response is that an agent must recognize five ethically relevant features of human life.
1) Noncommensurability of the Valuable Things: Unlike Plato's notion of the Good, a ruler against which one could measure the alternative that would be best, Aristotle[68] and Nussbaum believe "there is not only no single metric along which the claims of different good things can be meaningfully considered, there is not even a small plurality of such measures" (36). Nussbaum argues that Aristotle held that it is far more rational, efficacious, and worthy to accept the qualitative differences and face the inherent dilemma of choosing:

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66 That is, the cases that involve genuine moral conflicts are more compelling than the ones that involve socially-constructed conflicts (conflicts arising from perceived rather than truly mutually exclusive alternatives).
67 I will return to this topic below.
68 See the *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6.

> To value each separate constituent of the good life for what it is in itself entails, then, recognizing its distinctness and separateness from each of the other constituents, each being an irreplaceable part of a composite whole. (60)

For instance, generosity cannot be replaced by courage.

1a) Pervasiveness of Conflicting Attachments and Obligations: Nussbaum declares that the "choice between two qualitatively different actions or commitments, when on account of circumstances one cannot pursue both, is or can be tragic" (37). Despite Nussbaum's assertion that this aspect is central to Aristotle's ethics, and while it is most relevant to tragedy, it is barely covered in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle mentions two examples of such dilemmas in his discussion of "voluntary" and "involuntary" actions. One example involves throwing goods overboard during a storm in order to prevent a capsize, hardly a moving moral dilemma. The other is more interesting:

> But with regard to the things that are done from fear of greater evils or for some noble object (e.g. if a tyrant were to order one to do something base, having one's parents and children in his power, and if one did the action they were to be saved, but otherwise would be put to death), it may be debated whether such actions are involuntary or voluntary. (III.1.1110a4-7)

It is telling, however, that Aristotle gives no aid in solving such moral dilemmas, but merely mentions that they are inevitably linked to regret (1110a30). This aspect is also not covered in the *Poetics*, despite the importance of moral dilemmas in the tragedies.

In such a case, all that can be asked of the agent is to do his or her best to try to determine the lesser evil, and to exhibit regret for the evil that is done (which Agamemnon completely fails to do). Aristotle writes,

> For such actions men are sometimes even praised, when they endure something base or painful in return for great and noble objects gained; in the opposite case they are blamed, since to endure the greatest indignities for no noble end or for a trifling end is the mark of an inferior person. On such actions praise indeed is not bestowed, but forgiveness is, when one does what he ought not under pressure which overstrains human nature and which no one could withstand. But some acts, perhaps, we cannot be forced to do, but ought rather to face death after the most fearful sufferings. (*Nicomachean Ethics* III.1.1110a20-27)

Perhaps, sometimes, the best an agent can hope for is forgiveness. And that is truly tragic.

2) The Priority of Perceptions/Particulars:

> But up to what point and to what extent a man must deviate before he becomes blameworthy it is not easy to determine by reasoning, any more than anything else that is perceived by the senses; such things depend on particular facts, and the decision rests with perception. (II.9.1109b20-23)

Perception, for Nussbaum, is "the ability to discern, acutely and responsively, the salient features of one's particular situation" (37). Giving priority to the particular[69] allows the moral agent to consider three factors that go unrecognized under general principles that are fixed in advance: "New and unanticipated features," the "Context-embeddedness of relevant features," and the "Ethical relevance of particular persons and relationships" (38-9). This last point is indebted to the ancient notion of *haecceity* or thisness, that a moral agent must take the very identity of the people involved into account. That Agamemnon kills his own daughter, and not another's, is not an irrelevant factor in his decision. A moral agent must learn to perceive what particulars are relevant to the choice, and perception itself is a value-laden activity. Nussbaum feels the ideal is embodied by a phrase in the preface to Henry James' *The Princess Casamassima*: being "finely aware and richly responsible" (135). The moral agent strives to recognize the particulars of the decision and takes responsibility for the decision that is made, rejecting Agamemnon's yoke of necessity.

3) Ethical value of the emotions and the imagination. Moral agents acknowledge the cognitive content of our emotions as "discriminating responses closely connected with beliefs about how things are and what is important" (41). Emotions are not important simply because they are connected to belief, then, but because they are connected to beliefs "about what is valuable and important" (293). For example, both Clytemnestra and Medea are correct in believing they have been significantly wronged; their anger is not only justified, but they would appear irrational if they did not feel it.

Judgment is thus required to determine not only what actions fall within the mean, but what passions, as well: the character of moral excellence "is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and in actions" (II.9.1109a22-23). Hence, while emotion and reason are often treated as exclusive and oppositional, a more Aristotelian reading would be that the mean is perfected when they are balanced, not opposed (much like courage being the balance between fear and confidence). This also helps explain our sense that a person's feelings can be defective or excessive, clouding the agent's judgment. In tragedy, especially, anger tends to go to excess, becoming a blind rage that leaves the character reckless and heedless of consequences, "for acts due to anger are thought to be less than

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[69] See the *Nicomachean Ethics* II.7, II.9, VI.5, VI.7-8.

any other objects of choice" (III.2.1111b19). But it is only with the notion of complementarity between the passions and reason (not control or strife) that moderation can truly be understood.

4) Ethical relevance of uncontrolled happenings: This point reinforces the notion that chance matters, and that a good person can be harmed: "The ability of . . . texts to give insight depend[s] on this power to display such uncontrolled events as if they matter to the characters, and to make them matter to the reader" (43). Oedipus's downfall is inextricably linked to chance encounters, but this does not remove the ethical dimension of the tragedy.

5) "Possibility as constitutive of our lives" (Kalin 138). Contingency does not always work against us, but means that there are possibilities that we can actualize, alternative situations that we can imagine and accomplish. As in ancient times, when moral philosophers focused upon *de re* rather than purely logical modalities, many postmodern thinkers are bringing the world back into their discussion of modality. While some thinkers, like David Lewis, insist on focusing on the logical nature of possibility, viewing it as quantification over possible worlds (Lewis 5), others are embracing possibility as the real opportunity it is for us to improve our world. As Zygmunt Bauman recognizes,

> we can transfer contingency from the vocabulary of dashed hopes [in the way good people can be hurt through no fault of their own] into that of opportunity, from the language of domination into that of emancipation. [Agnes] Heller writes:
>
> > An individual has transformed his or her contingency into his or her destiny if this person has arrived at the consciousness of having made the *best* out of his or her practically infinite possibilities. A society has transformed its contingency into its destiny if the members of this society arrive at the awareness that they would prefer to live at no other place and at no other time than the here and now. (Bauman 13)

I am convinced that contingency is the central feature not just of tragedy but of ethics. Moral agents have choices, often difficult ones involving conflicting obligations, but the best that these agents can do is to be "finely aware"—not permitting hierarchical or binary thinking to determine their priorities, placing family before state or state before family, but struggling to recognize all the particularities of the situation—and "richly responsible"—blaming neither fate nor circumstance, but recognizing their limitations and their possibilities, and taking responsibility for the consequences.

If we read tragedy as having universal characters who behave as types, male or female, king or slave, then it is possible to accept that tragedy teaches that knowing one's

place and working within the established order is the key to maintaining harmony. But if we permit ourselves to see the characters as particulars and their situations as unique, we might decide that tragedy, indeed literature, is not teaching us a moral lesson at all, but encourages us to treasure our human role as moral agents, whether one is a king like Oedipus or slave like Hecuba.

Although I believe Nussbaum's reading of Aristotelian ethics is compatible with his ethical system, it is difficult to reconcile the doctrine of the mean, the recognition of complementary in place of conflict, and the priority of the particular with his overall misogyny. In the ethical works lies the seed that could have led to a *Poetics* without prejudice, a *Politics* that did not justify slavery or the subordination of women, and perhaps even a rethinking of the metaphysical and scientific treatises, providing a more holistic or integrated and less hierarchical approach to the world.

Conclusion

Martha Nussbaum argues that literature, including ancient Greek drama, teaches us ethical lessons that can never be captured by philosophical texts, capturing the five aspects of ethical life outlined above, and I believe she is undoubtedly right. I would add that tragedy forces us to question our most fundamental assumptions about metaphysical, political, and ethical truths. Although one would be hard-pressed to find a philosopher today who advocates the division of the metaphysical and physical realms into polar oppositions, the remnants of this division are still profoundly influential both in our art[70] and in daily lives. By and large, men still control the political realm, and women are often victimized by this division of power. And serious ethical choices—difficult choices that involve a moral conflict of some sort—are, by necessity, still decided on the basis of the agent's ethical priorities.

What this study has taught us is, as Nussbaum claims, the need to be "finely aware and richly responsible." There can be no predetermined categories defining an agent's province of concerns, because all such divisions are arbitrary and there can be repercussions in areas that one chose to disregard. Aristotle recognized that finding the mean would be no easy task:

> For in everything it is no easy task to find the middle, e.g. to find the middle of a circle is not for everyone but for him who knows; so, too, anyone can get angry—that is easy—or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right aim, and in the right way, *that* is not for everyone, nor is it easy; that is why goodness is both rare and laudable and noble. *(Nicomachean Ethics* II.9.1109a24-29)

Aristotle also recognizes that individuals have tendencies toward certain extremes and need to compensate for this propensity:

> But we must consider the things towards which we ourselves also are easily carried away; for some of us tend to one thing, some to another; and this will be recognizable from the pleasure and the pain we feel. We must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error, as people do in straightening sticks that are bent. (II.9.1109b1-7)

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[70] In film and literature, women serve mostly as catalysts for the hero's action, the victims of rape, violence, or murder, crimes which incite the hero to seek revenge.

Aristotle acknowledges the difficulty of hitting the mean, concluding that "such things depend on particular facts, and the decision rests with perception" (II.9.1109b23)—the evidence from the tragedies would support this conclusion.

Tragedies demand more from the doctrine of the mean than Aristotle acknowledges, however. Throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle refers to finding the mean on a single continuum. Simple decisions might fall under this description, but not the moral conflicts of the tragedies. Many conflicting claims and ethical dimensions interplay within a single serious ethical choice. Just as Aristotle neglects the importance of moral conflict to the plot of tragedies in the *Poetics* and neglects the issue in the *Ethics*, his description of how to find the mean cannot encompass real moral conflicts: they simply cannot be diagrammed on a single continuum. What is needed is a more integrated perspective, a multidimensional representation of the dilemma, where some continua cross and intersect, and others fail to meet.[71] The moral agent calculates priorities, considers the particulars, compensates for tendencies to exceed the intermediate on the relevant continua, and then makes the choice. This will not make it any easier "to abide by our decisions" (III.1.1110a30) when certain dimensions have to be sacrificed, but at least the sacrifice will not always be determined against the interests of the silenced, the powerless, the personal, the female.

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[71] If this description seems complicated and difficult to follow, this confirms Nussbaum's view that literature, including tragedy, often represents ethical points better than philosophical prose.

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Appendix: Plays Cited

N.B. Aristotle's dates are 384-322 B.C.E., and the *Poetics* was compiled sometime between the 360s and the 320s B.C.E., probably as lecture notes.

I. Aeschylus: ca. 513/512 - 456/455 B.C.E.

1. Agamemnon: 458 B.C.E.

Characters[72]

Clytemnestra

Agamemnon

Cassandra: Trojan princess and prophetess, now Agamemnon's slave-mistress

Aegisthus: Agamemnon's cousin, Clytemnestra's lover

Chorus of Argive elders

Plot Summary

When Agamemnon returns victorious from the siege at Troy, Clytemnestra pretends to welcome him, but is in fact planning to kill him to avenge his sarifice of their daughter Iphigenia. She convinces him to tread on a path of crimson tapestries (an honor reserved for gods) into their home. Cassandra, who remains in the chariot, foresees Clytemnestra's treachery, before entering the house herself. The chorus hears Agamemnon cry out and then sees the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra, with Clytemnestra standing over them. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus now rule Argos.

2. The Libation Bearers: 458 B.C.E.

Characters

Orestes: Son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

Pylades: Orestes' friend

Electra: Orestes' sister

Chorus of foreign serving-women

Clytemnestra: Queen of Argos

Aegisthus: King of Argos

Plot Summary

Several years have passed since Agamemnon's murder. Electra awaits Orestes' return, and when he does, they conspire to avenge their father. Orestes poses as a merchant bringing news of Orestes' death to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Pylades and Orestes kill Aegisthus, but Orestes hesitates before killing his mother. But Orestes proceeds and then displays the bodies, admitting his actions and declaring them just. He flees at the sight of the Furies

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[72] I am only listing the characters who are relevant to the thesis.

bodies, admitting his actions and declaring them just. He flees at the sight of the Furies who are pursuing him for the crime of matricide.

3. The Eumenides (The Furies): 458 B.C.E.

Characters

Apollo
Ghost of Clytemnestra
Orestes
Athena
Chorus of Furies
Chorus of women of Athens
[Jury][73]

Plot Summary

Orestes has been cleared by Apollo but is still pursued by the Furies. Orestes travels to Athens where his trial is held, judged by a jury of men with Athena holding the casting vote. The Furies demand justice for his act of matricide, and Apollo speaks in Orestes' defence. The jury's vote is even, and Athena decides in Orestes' favor. The Furies, who represent the Old Laws, are enraged and threaten to poison the land, but Athena offers them a home in Athens as the Eumenides, where they will be worshipped and serve as protectors of the city and guardians of the old ways.

II. Euripides: ca. 485/480 - 407/406 B.C.E

1. Alcestis: ca. 438 B.C.E. (The earliest extant work of Euripides.)

Characters

Apollo
Death
Chorus of citizens of Pherae
Alcestis
Admetus of Pherae: Alcestis' husband, King of Thessaly
Heracles

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[73] Square brackets indicate a silent part.

Plot Summary

Apollo arranges to spare Admetus from his appointed death by having Death take someone else in his place. Only his wife, Alcestis, is willing to die for him. Alcestis dies, leaving her family grief-stricken. Heracles arrives, travel-weary, at the house. Not wanting Heracles to feel obliged to leave, Admetus tells him only that a woman of the house has died, not that he has lost Alcestis. Upset by Heracles' drunken behavior, a servant informs him that Alcestis has died. He goes out and returns with a woman whom he claims he has won in some games and asks Admetus to keep her for him. When Admetus finally agrees, he is shocked to learn that the woman is his wife, whom Heracles has freed from Death in a struggle beside her tomb.

2. ***Hecuba:*** ca. 425-424 B.C.E.

Characters

Hecuba
Chorus of captive Trojan women
Polyxena: Hecuba's daughter
Odysseus
Talthybius: Messenger for the Achaean army
Agamemnon
Polymestor: King of Thracian Chersonese
Polymestor's sons

Plot Summary

Hecuba learns that the ghost of Achilles has demanded the sacrifice of Polyxena. Odysseus refuses to comply with Hecuba's pleas to save her daughter, and Polyxena is killed. Just before Hecuba buries the body, her handmaid arrives with the corpse of her son Polydorus which had been found on the shore. Hecuba realizes that he was murdered by Polymestor, her husband's friend, to whom Polydorus had been sent, with gold, for protection. Agamemnon refuses to avenge the death on Hecuba's behalf, for political reasons, but agrees to allow her to seek her own revenge. Polymestor and his sons come to her tent, and Hecuba and her women kill the children and blind him. Polymestor demands justice, but Agamemnon rules that he has been justly punished for murder. Polymestor then prophesizes Hecuba's transformation into the bitch of Cynossema, as well as the murder of Cassandra and Agamemnon by Clytemnestra.

3. ***The Heracleidae:*** ca. 430 B.C.E.

Characters

Iolaus: An old man, friend of Heracles
Chorus of old men of Marathon

Demophon: Theseus' son, King of Athens
Macaria: Heracles' daughter
Alcmene: Heracles' mother
Eurystheus: King of Argos and Mycenae

Plot Summary

Upon Heracles' death, Eurystheus has condemned Heracles' children to death in Argos and has been pursuing them and their guardian, Iolaus. He has them expelled, by threat of war, from each land they enter. They eventually reach Athens, where Demophon agrees to protect the refugees. As the Argive army approaches, Demophon's oracles reveal that a young lady of "repectable descent" must be sacrificed, and Demophon refuses to ask for such a sacrifice from his own people. Macaria volunteers to die, and the Argive army is defeated. Eurystheus is brought in chains to Alcmene, and she demands his death.

*4. **Iphigenia in Aulis:*** ca. 405 B.C.E.

Characters

Agamemnon
Old Man: Agamemnon's slave, loyal to Clytemnestra
Chorus of women of Chalcis
Menelaus: Agamemnon's brother, Helen's husband
Clytemnestra: Agamemnon's wife
Iphigenia: Agamemnon and Clytemnestra's daughter
Achilles

Plot Summary

After the Greek army destined to attack Troy is assembled in Aulis, a dead calm strands the ships. The prophet Calchas declares that the only way for the expedition to proceed is for Iphigenia to be sacrificed to Artemis. Agamemnon sends a letter to his wife to trick her into sending Iphigenia to Aulis, claiming that their daughter is to be married to Achilles. Clytemnestra and Iphigenia happily arrive, still believing they are there for a wedding. Clytemnestra approaches Achilles but is shocked to learn that he knows nothing about the supposed marriage. An old slave informs the pair of Agamemnon's real reason for summoning his daughter, and both are enraged. Iphigenia pleads with her father to spare her, but as the army approaches to take her by force, with only her mother and Achilles to defend her, she declares her willingness to be sacrificed and is led to the altar.

*5. **The Medea:*** 431 B.C.E.

Characters

Medea: Princess of Colchis
Jason: Medea's husband

Medea's two children
Creon: King of Corinth
Aegeus: King of Athens
Nurse
Tutor to Medea's children
Chorus of Corinthian women

Plot Summary

Jason marries Creon's daughter, making a strong political alliance in Corinth, and deserting Medea and their children. Fearing Medea's wrath, Creon banishes her and her children, giving her one day to leave the country. Medea extracts an oath from her visiting friend Aegeus that if she arrives safely in Athens, he will protect her and never force her into exile. Medea then sends for Jason and asks him to allow the children to remain with him and to permit them to bring gifts of supplication to his new wife. Jason consents, and Medea sends them with the gifts, a dress and diadem. The children return, having pleased the princess; but the gifts are poisoned, and when the princess dons them, she is burned to death. Her grieving father embraces her, and he, too, is poisoned and dies. Medea then kills her own children, believing this to be the best way to wound Jason. She escapes his wrath in a chariot drawn by dragons.

*6. **The Suppliant Women:*** ca. 420-415 B.C.E.

Characters

Aethra: Theseus' mother
Theseus: King of Athens
Adrastus: King of Argos
Evadne: Capaneus' widow
Iphis: Evadne's father
Athena
Chorus of mothers of the Seven against Thebes

Plot Summary

A play about the sufferings brought on by war, the scene which is relevant to this thesis involves Evadne's leap into her husband's funeral pyre.

*7. **The Trojan Women:*** 415 B.C.E.

Characters

Poseidon
Athena
Hecuba
Talthybius: Messenger for the Achaean army

Cassandra: Hecuba's daughter, a cursed prophetess
Andromache: Wife of Hector (Hecuba's son)
Astyanax: Hector and Andromache's son
Menelaus
Helen
Chorus of Trojan women

Plot Summary

The play takes place just after the fall of Troy, on the day the Argive ships will leave the destroyed city, carrying the enslaved Trojan women with them. Talthybius informs Hecuba that Cassandra has been chosen by Agamemnon to be his mistress and that Polxena has been "given a guardianship [over] Achilles' tomb." Andromache has been given to the son of Achilles and Hecuba to Odysseus. Talthybius returns to take Astyanax from Andromache, for the Greeks (at Odysseus' bidding) have demanded his death: the baby is thus thrown from the battlements of Troy. When Menelaus enters, Hecuba begs him to kill Helen. Menelaus permits Helen to speak in her own defence and Hecuba to speak against her. He decides to bring Helen back to Argos with him, to kill her there. Hecuba is left to bury her grandson's body, then is dragged to Odysseus' departing ship.

III. Menander: ca. 342-291 B.C.E.

1. The Woman of Samos (Samia): (early)

Characters

Demeas: A wealthy elderly citizen of Athens
Chrysis: The woman of Samos, Demeas' courtesan
Moschion: Demeas' adopted son
Niceratus: Demeas' poor citizen neighbor
[Plangon: Niceratus' daughter]

Plot summary

As the play opens, we learn that Chrysis is pregnant with Demeas' child. Before he leaves on an extended business trip with Niceratus, Demeas instructs Chrysis to abandon the baby when it is born. Soon after his father's departure, Moschion rapes Plangon during an Adonis Day celebration. Both women give birth at about the same time, and although Chrysis obediently abandons her own child, she agrees to nurse Plangon's son and pretend it is her own in order to protect Moschion, the baby, and especially Plangon. Fortunately, upon Demeas and Niceratus' return, we learn that they have arranged to marry Moschion and Plangon. Although Demeas forgives Chrysis for disobeying him, believing that Plangon's son is Chyrsis', he becomes enraged when he overhears that the child is

Moschion's, thinking that Chrysis and Moschion have betrayed him. Chrysis is thrown out with the child, but eventually the truth about the baby's identity is revealed. Demeas takes Chrysis back into his home, and Moschion marries Plangon.

2. The Arbitration (Entripontes): (mature)

Characters

Onesimus: Charisius' slave

Habrotonon: A courtesan-slave, hired by Charisius

Pamphila: Charisius' wife

Charisius: A wealthy young citizen

Plot Summary

Pamphila is raped at a festival, and although she cannot see her attacker in the darkness, she manages to remove his ring. Four months later, she marries Charisius, who is unaware she has been raped and is now pregnant. Charisius goes away on an extended trip, and in order to protect her marriage, Pamphila abandons the baby with some birth tokens, including the ring. Unfortunately, Onesimus informs Charisius about the baby. Rather than divorce Pamphila, which would lead to ridicule for himself, Charisius decides to give Pamphila grounds for divorcing him: he moves into his neighbor's home, throws expensive drunken parties, and hires Habrotonon as his courtesan. Meanwhile, a goatherd has found the child and gives it to another slave, whose wife has recently lost a new baby. Habrotonon and Onesimus learn that the baby has been found with Charisius' ring. Onesimus knows that Charisius lost it at the Festival of Artemis, and Habrotonon, who was there, knows that a woman was raped, but does not know the woman's identity. In order to determine if Charisius was the rapist, Habrotonon confronts him with the baby (pretending he is hers) and the ring. Charisius acknowledges the act and takes her and the baby into his house. Habrotonon recognizes Pamphila as the woman who was raped, and, returning the child, she tells her that Charisius is the father, and then informs Charisius that Pamphila is the mother. The couple is reconciled, and Charisius frees Habrotonon.

3. She Who Was Shorn (Perikeiromene): (mature)

Characters

Polemon: A young, wealthy army officer

Glykera: Polemon's courtesan

Moschion: Adopted son of Myrrhina, a playboy

Pataecus: Polemon's elderly citizen friend

[Myrrhina: Moschion's adoptive mother]

Plot Summary

Glykera and Moschion are twins discovered as babies by a poor old woman. The old woman gives Moschion to Myrrhina, a wealthy, childless woman, but raises Glykera as her own daughter. Before she dies, she tells Glykera that she was a foundling and that Moschion is her brother, and gives the girl the clothes she was found in, before giving Glykera to Polemon, Myrrhina's neighbor. Glykera keeps this information a secret in order to protect her brother's prospects. Unfortunately, the night that Polemon returns from a campaign, Moschion sees Glykera, and, desiring her, he kisses her; she does not resist, knowing it is her brother. Polemon witnesses Glykera embracing Moschion and cuts off her hair before running, upset and ashamed, to the home of his friend, Pataecus. Glykera takes refuge in Myrrhina's home, and the men interpret this as her choosing Moschion as her lover. Polemon, drunk, assembles a group of slaves and plans to attack Myrrhina's home, but Pataecus speaks to Myrrhina and convinces Polemon to call off the battle. Polemon begs Pataecus to speak to Glykera and convince her to return to him. She refuses Pataecus, saying Polemon treated her worse than a slave, while her birth tokens show her to be of a good family. Pataecus recognizes the birth tokens as his wife's possessions and reveals that he must be Glykera's father, who had exposed his twin children upon the loss of his wife and fortune. Moschion, who has also learned that he is a foundling, recognizes Glykera's tokens as similar to his own, and the family is reunited. Glykera decides to forgive Polemon, and, now that she is a citizen, they marry.

IV. Sophocles: ca. 495-405 B.C.E.

1. Ajax: ca. 442 or 441 B.C.E.

Characters

Athena
Odysseus
Ajax
Chorus of Salaminian Soldiers
Tecmessa: Ajax's wife
Messenger
Teucer: Ajax's brother
Menelaus
Agamemnon

Plot Summary

Enraged that Achilles' armor has been given to Odysseus instead of himself, Ajax plans to attack the heads of the Greek army. Athena tricks Ajax into believing that the captured livestock is the Greek army and fills him with a mad lust for slaughter. When he regains his sanity, Ajax becomes aware of his shameful act, and, concealing his intentions from his family, he leaves the camp in order to kill himself. Learning that Ajax has deceived them, Tecmessa and the chorus rush to find him, and Tecmessa discovers the body. Menelaus and Agamemnon refuse to allow Teucer to bury the body of their enemy, but Odysseus intercedes, claiming that forbidding the burial of a valiant man harms not Ajax, but the laws of the gods, and the burial proceeds.

2. ***The Women of Trachis:*** (date unknown, possibly 420s B.C.E.)

Characters

Deianira: Heracles' wife
Nurse
Hyllus: Heracles and Deianira's son
Chorus: Women of Trachis, Deianira's friends
Messenger
Lichas: Heracles' herald
[Captive Women of Oechalia, including Iole]
Old Man
Heracles

Plot Summary

Deianira eagerly awaits Heracles' homecoming and is thrilled to learn from Lichas that Heracles is safe and returning home. She welcomes a group of women captured by Heracles into her home, but she is heartbroken to learn that Heracles sacked Oechalia for love of Iole (when her father refused to give her to him) and has brought her home as his mistress. Rather than harm Iole, Deianira resorts to a love potion in order to win back her husband's love. The potion was taken from the wound of a lustful centaur, Nessus, mortally injured by Heracles for assaulting Deianira: Nessus claimed the potion would charm Heracles into loving her alone. Deiaira has dipped a robe into the potion and sent it to her husband. She quickly begins to regret her act, however, and fears that the centaur may have deceived her, which, of course, he has, for the poisonous robe slowly and tortuously consumes Heracles' flesh. Hyllus curses his mother for her plot, and she leaves the stage in silence. Hyllus learns about Nessus' deception, but is too late to save his mother, who has stabbed and killed herself. Hyllus risks his father's wrath and informs his suffering father of Deianira's death and her lack of malice. Heracles demands a

promise from Hyllus, which the boy pledges to fulfill, but he is horrified to learn that Heracles wants Hyllus to burn him alive and marry Iole (so that no other man will ever "have her"), Iole being the person whom Hyllus blames for the tragedy. Hyllus loyally declares that he will obey his father's wishes.

3. ***Oedipus the King:*** ca. 426 B.C.E.

Characters

Oedipus: King of Thebes

Jocasta: Oedipus' wife

Creon: Jocasta's brother

Teiresias: The blind prophet

A priest

A Herdsman

A chorus of old Theban men

Plot Summary

In his attempts to learn the cause of the blight in Thebes, Oedipus learns that he must discover the identity of the man who murdered the previous king, Laius. In the course of this famous play, Oedipus learns that he is the killer and that his wife is also his mother. He discovers Jocasta's body (for she has hanged herself upon learning the truth) and blinds himself with her brooch. He is banished from Thebes, removing the pollution from the land.

4. ***Antigone:*** 441 B.C.E.

Characters

Antigone

Ismene: Antigone's sister

Chorus of Theban elders

Creon: King of Thebes, Antigone's uncle

A guard

Haemon: Creon's son, Antigone's betrothed

Teiresias

Messenger

Eurydice: Creon's wife

Plot Summary

Another well-known play, it opens with Antigone informing Ismene that Creon has decided to give their brother Eteocles an honorable burial while ordering that Polyneices, who had attacked Thebes, be left unburied. The punishment for disobeying the edict is death. Ismene refuses to aid Antigone, who buries their brother by herself. The guards uncover

the corpse and capture Antigone as she again attempts to bury it. Ismene and Haemon fail to convince Creon to be merciful, and he orders that Antigone be buried alive in a hollow cave. Teiresias warns Creon that he has angered the gods, and Creon yields, rushing first to bury Polyneices' body, then, hearing Haemon cry out, hurrying to Antigone's cave. There he finds Antigone hanged and Haemon embracing her before stabbing himself. Upon hearing the news, Eurydice stabs herself, cursing Creon before she dies.