

EURIPIDES' WOMEN

An Enquiry into 'The Most Tragic Poet's' Portrayal of Women in Classical Athens

By Dennis LaRue

EURIPIDES' WOMEN

I hereby release this thesis to the public. I understand this and will allow Youngstown State University and other individuals to make copies of this thesis as needed for scholarly research.

An Enquiry into 'The Most Tragic Poet's' Portrayal of Women in Classical Athens

By Dennis LaRue

Signature: Dennis LaRue

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

Approvals:

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

In the

History Department

Saul S. Friedman 12/9/94
Saul S. Friedman, Ph.D. Date
Thesis Advisor

John Sarkissian 12/9/94
John Sarkissian, Ph.D. Date
Second Reader

Lowell J. Satri December 9, 1994
Lowell J. Satri, Ph.D. Date
Committee Member

Peter J. Kasvinsky 12/19/94
Peter J. Kasvinsky, Ph.D. Date
Department Chair

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

December 1994

EURIPIDES' WOMEN

An Enquiry into 'The Most Tragic Poet's' Portrayal of Women in Classical Athens

By Dennis LaRue 4-10-4

I hereby release this thesis to the public. I understand this thesis will be housed at the Circulation Desk of the Maag Library and will be available for public access. I also authorize Youngstown State University and other individuals to make copies of this thesis as needed for scholarly research.

Signature: Dennis LaRue

Approvals:

Saul S. Friedman
Saul S. Friedman, Ph.D.
Thesis Adviser

12-9-94
Date

John Sarkissian
John Sarkissian, Ph.D.
Second Reader

12/9/94
Date

Lowell J. Satre
Lowell J. Satre, Ph.D.
Committee Member

December 9, 1994
Date

Peter J. Kasvinsky
Peter J. Kasvinsky, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

12/19/94
Date

Abrax

More than any other ancient playwright, Euripides questioned the social order of his civilization. Through his works, he

asked his audience to consider how they dealt with full political,

social and economic classes — the 20,000 citizens, all

males — the lesser workers, the old women, children, the

elderly, slaves andmetics (resident aliens). The population of

Athens at its peak was 415,000. The overwhelming majority of his

surviving plays focus on the lesser workers. -- *Thucydides*

champion women, slaves andmetics per se, he does portray them as

noble or heroic, as ordinary or unremarkable, as venal or base,

as intelligent or short-sighted, as the men with whom they

interact. He was the first to do so.

By setting his plays some 400 to 1,000 years before the fifth century B.C.E. -- most of Euripides' surviving plays are

set in the time of the Trojan War and its aftermath -- he

avoided calling directly into question the legitimacy of the

Athenian empire and the Athenian polis' prosecution of the

Peloponnesian War. Along the way he challenged his fellow

citizens to consider how they treated their mothers, wives,

sisters and daughters. These women (and to a lesser degree

Abstract

More than any other ancient playwright, Euripides questioned the social order of his civilization. Through his works, he asked his audiences to consider how those with full political, social and economic rights -- i.e., the 30,000 citizens, all males -- treat the lesser members, to wit, women, children, the elderly, slaves and metics (resident aliens). The population of Athens at its peak was 415,000. The overwhelming majority of his surviving plays focus on the lesser members. While he does not champion women, slaves and metics *per se*, he does portray them as noble or heroic, as ordinary or unremarkable, as venal or base, as intelligent or short-sighted, as the men with whom they interact. He was the first to do so.

By setting his plays some 800 to 1,000 years before the fifth century B.C.E. -- most of Euripides' surviving plays are set in the time of the Trojan War and its aftermath -- he avoided calling directly into question the legitimacy of the Athenian empire and the Athenian polis' prosecution of the Peloponnesian War. Along the way he challenged his fellow citizens to consider how they treated their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. These women (and to a lesser degree

slaves and metics) are not ciphers without feelings, he says. They have the same feelings and needs as the men who run the polis. To credit Euripides with pacifism or championing the oppressed is to incorrectly read late twentieth century United States values and attitudes into his plays. Leaving aside for the moment his unchallenged literary genius, Euripides' social genius lies in his recognition that the lesser members of his polis are exactly the same as those who have placed them in a subordinate position. Through his plays he urges those in charge to re-examine the values of their polis that maintain the inferiority of the lesser members. I have attempted to demonstrate in this paper how Euripides subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, called the social order into question.

Euripides as Champion of the Oppressed	162
Bibliography	172

Chronology

All dates unless Common Era

Table of Contents

485/4 Euripides is born in Salamis.

480 Greeks defeat Persians at Salamis. One tradition has

482-32 Philosopher Anaxagoras teaches in Athens. Pericles and

441 Euripides wins first place at Dionysian festival. The title and play are lost to us.

438 Alcestis has premier in Athens. The Parthenon is dedicated to Pallas Athena.

431 Medea is performed in Athens. The Peloponnesian War begins.

430(7) The Children of Heracles has its premier.

429 Sophocles' Oedipus the King performed at Dionysian theater. Pericles dies. Nicias becomes leader of aristocratic party, Cleon of the democratic party.

ca. 428 Hippolytus is performed for the first time.

427 Aristophanes wins his first victory at Dionysian festival. Plato is born.

Abstract i

Table of Contents iii

Chronology 1

A Brief Life of Euripides 3

Dionysian Theater 20

The Plays 28

**"Men's Blame and Abuse of Women Is Vain"
(But Men Held Women in Low Esteem Regardless) 123**

"Slavery's Odious Yoke" 145

Euripides as Champion of the Oppressed 162

Bibliography 172

Chronology

All dates Before Common Era

- 485/4 Euripides is born in Phyla, Attica.
Aeschylus wins his first victory in the Dionysian festival.
- 480 Greeks defeat Persians at Salamis. One tradition has Euripides born on date of battle.
- 470 Socrates is born.
- 468 Sophocles wins first place at Dionysian festival.
- 462/1 Democratic party, under Pericles and Ephialtes, wins control of Athenian government.
- 461 Ephialtes assassinated, Pericles becomes leading citizen of Athens.
- 462-32 Philosopher Anaxagoras teaches in Athens. Pericles and Euripides are among his pupils.
- 455 *The Peliades*, Euripides' first play, performed at Dionysian festival. It is awarded third prize.
- 441 Euripides wins first place at Dionysian festival. The title and play are lost to us.
- 438 *Alcestis* has premier in Athens.
The Parthenon is dedicated to Pallas Athena.
- 431 *Medea* is performed in Athens.
The Peloponnesian War begins.
- 430(?) *The Children of Heracles* has its premier.
- 429 Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* performed at Dionysian theater.
Pericles dies. Nicias becomes leader of aristocratic party, Cleon of the democratic party.
- ca. 428 *Hippolytus* is performed for the first time.
- 427 Aristophanes wins his first victory at Dionysian festival.
Plato is born.

- 425(?) Premier of *Hecuba*.
Aristophanes' *Archarnians* is performed at Lenaeon festival.
- ca. 421 Euripides writes *The Suppliant Women*, produces *Heracles* and *Cyclops* for Athenian audiences.
- 416 Athenians attack Melos and put all inhabitants to the sword.
- 415 *The Trojan Women* has its premier in Athens.
- ca. 414 *Iphigenia in Tauris* performed.
- 413 *Ion* is performed in Athens.
- ca. 413 Both Euripides' *Electra* and Sophocles' *Electra* are performed, the latter's at the Dionysian festival.
- 412 *Helen* is performed in Athens.
- 411 Aristophanes' *The Thesmophoriazousae* is performed in Athens.
Aristocrats seize control of Athens, abolish democracy.
- 410 *The Phoenician Women* is performed in Athens.
Democracy is restored in Athens.
- 408 *Orestes* is performed.
- 407 Euripides travels to Pella, capital of Macedonia, accepting King Archelaus' invitation to join his court.
- 406 Euripides dies in Pella.
- ca. 406 Sophocles dies in Athens.
- 405 *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *The Bacchae* have premiers in Athens.
Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, which features Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus in underworld, is performed in Athens.
- 401 Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* has premier at Dionysian theater.

¹F.L. Lucas, *Euripides and His Influence* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1963), 3; Gilbert Murray, *Euripides and His Age* (London: Williams and Norwiche, 1913, revised 1914), 32; and Mary R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore, Maryland, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 92.

A Brief Life of Euripides

Information on Euripides's life is scanty and must be weighed carefully considering the discoloration and distortion of tradition. Modern classical scholars are like the archeologist who, having given some order to the bones he excavated, finds he has an incomplete skeleton. Based on his knowledge of anatomy, the archeologist makes inferences about not only the missing bones but the build and musculature of the creature he's uncovered. In a similar manner, classical scholars must rely upon tradition, Euripides' 17 (or 19) surviving plays -- he is credited with writing 92 -- and what his contemporaries, not always the most objective observers, wrote about him.

Euripides was born in Athens, according to tradition, the exact day that battle of Salamis was fought in 480 B.C.E.¹ A variant of that tradition has him born on the island of Salamis

¹F.L. Lucas, *Euripides and His Influence* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1963), 3; Gilbert Murray, *Euripides and His Age* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913, revised 1914), 22; and Mary R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore, Maryland, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 92.

in the year of the battle.² (Unless otherwise specified, all dates are Before Common Era.) Anne Pippin Burnett says he was born c. 485 in Phyla, Attica.³ Justina Gregory puts his date of birth at 484⁴ as does Gilbert Murray.⁵ All we can be reasonably certain of is that he was born between 485 and 480 to parents of the upper or middle class ("of good family")⁶ who intended him to be an athlete.

Euripides' parents were Mnesarchus or Mnesarchides⁷ and Cleito and he was, according to Philochorus, "of very high birth."⁸ If we accept his birth at 485/4, we can infer that his parents took him with them as they fled Athens in 480 as the

²Siegfried Melchinger, *Euripides* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.) 1973, 7,8. Interestingly, Melchinger believes Euripides was born in "(?) 484," p. 1.

³Euripides, *Ion* [A Translation with Commentary by Anne Pippin Burnett] (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970), xvii.

⁴Justina Gregory, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), 10.

⁵Murray, *ibid.*, "we have another date given in a very ancient chronicle called the *Parian Marble*, which was found in the island of Paros in the seventeenth century and was composed in the year 264 B.C., and since we cannot find any reason why this year should be invented, and since the *Marble* is the oldest witness now extant, we . . ." should accept it. Lucas prefers the tradition but concedes, "the *Parian Marble* however dates his birth 485-4, perhaps correctly." Lucas, *op. cit.*, 179.

⁶Burnett, *ibid.*

⁷Murray (*op. cit.*, 35) says names such as that of Euripides' father "often have alternate forms."

⁸Quoted in Murray, *op. cit.*, 35.

Persians approached. He was about eight when the Athenians rebuilt their city, destroyed by the Persians. Later, because he was a member of one of Athens' ranking families, he qualified in his adolescence to be a cupbearer to a guild of religious dancers. He also carried a lit torch in the annual nocturnal procession that escorted the Apollo of Cape Zoster from the cape to Delos.⁹ Burnett writes Euripides (also) "held a lay priesthood in the cult of Zeus at his birthplace."¹⁰ Murray thinks Euripides was 17 or so when he saw *Seven Against Thebes* "and was much influenced by it."¹¹ The next year, 466, he became an *ephebus* ("youth") and was given a shield and spear to begin the required military service -- here guard duty along the frontiers of Attica -- required of his polis. Full military service began at age 20. Lucas says it is unclear whether Euripides performed military or naval service.¹² As he reached adulthood, Euripides was still undecided as to his career. Tradition, supported by records of his winning prizes in Athens and Eleusis, says he was a good athlete. His

⁹Lefkowitz, *Lives*, op. cit., 91.

⁹Murray, op. cit., 36-37, Lefkowitz, *Lives*, op. cit., 92, Lefkowitz says Euripides acting as a torchbearer in these rites to Apollo is one of two incidents "unique" in his *Vita* written in antiquity.

¹⁰Burnett, op. cit., xvii.

¹¹Murray, op. cit., 43. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959, 1969, pp. 290-297. Hereafter referred to as "*Aulis*

¹²Lucas, op. cit., 4.

father, based on a prophecy that Euripides would enjoy athletic success, encouraged his athletic efforts. The *vita* written in antiquity notes that an oracle predicted he would enjoy considerable success in his adulthood but was unclear as in which field those successes would lie. His father thought Euripides would enjoy success as an athlete and so had him train to develop his physical abilities.¹³ But his successes were not as many as the prophecies foretold "so that bitter personal experience may lie behind the bitter aphorism in one of his plays, that "of all the million plagues of Hellas there is none worse than the race of athletes."¹⁴ It may be coincidental that Euripides was harsh on soothsayers and prophets in his plays: a not untypical line, here assigned Agamemnon in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, is, "How arrogant they are! The whole race of prophets -- a curse upon this earth." To which Menelaos (anticipating General Philip Sheridan's comment about American Indians -- "The only good Indian is a dead Indian." -- by 2,400 years) responds, "They're of no value to man, or whatever, especially when alive."¹⁵

¹³Lefkowitz, *Lives*, op. cit., 91.

¹⁴Lucas, op. cit., 4. Lucas cites (p. 179) a fragment from a lost play of Euripides, "Fragment 282, in A. Nauck's *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Leipzig, 1889."

¹⁵Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, translated by and with an introduction by Charles R. Walker, lines 520 to 522 in David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, editors, *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume IV (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959, 1969), pp. 290-387. Hereafter referred to as "*Aulis* followed by the line number(s)."

In his *Iphigenia at Tauris*, Euripides also bitterly condemns oracles and those who seek portents of the future in their dreams when he has Orestes declaim:

Dreams, lies, lies, dreams -- nothing but emptiness!
 Even the Gods, with all Their name for wisdom,
 Have only dreams and lies to lose their course,
 Blinded, confused, and ignorant as we.
 The wisest men follow their own direction
 And listen to no prophet guiding them,
 None but the fools believe in oracles,
 Forsaking their own judgment. Those who know,
 Know that such men come to grief.¹⁶

And in *Electra*, Electra's farmer-husband remarks, "... Apollo's oracles are strong, though human prophecy is best ignored."¹⁷

In *Helen*, Euripides zings prophets and seers when he has a servant remark:

. . . I do now see
 how full of lies, how rotten the whole business
 of prophecy is. There was never any sense
 in watching sacrificial flames and listening
 to the cries of birds -- in fact the very notion
 that birds can help men is ridiculous.
 . . . Prophecy was invented
 as bait for gullible man, but no one ever
 got rich without hard work by studying magic.
 The best prophets are care and common sense.¹⁸

¹⁶Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, lines 570-75, translated by Witten Bynner, in Grene and Lattimore, *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume III, op. cit.

¹⁷Euripides, *Electra*, translated by Emily Townsend Vermeule, lines 399-400 in Grene and Lattimore, *Euripides: The Complete Tragedies*, Volume IV, op. cit., p. 414. Subsequent references will be "*Electra* followed by the line number(s)."

¹⁸Euripides, *Helen*, translated by James Michie and Colin Leach, lines 806-11, 819-22. (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 49.

While none of his paintings survive, tradition says he tried his hand at being an artist¹⁹ -- "He is also said to have had some success as a painter . . ." ²⁰ -- and while enjoying this success, was not satisfied with his efforts. We can only speculate what led him to try writing plays. That the intellectual ferment and vigor of Athens of this period had its impact on Euripides is certain -- men like Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Archelaus and Prodicus were major influences on him²¹ -- and he certainly attended Aeschylus' plays. He presented his first trilogy in 455, the year Aeschylus died. Euripides' first play to be performed at the Dionysian festival, *The Peliades* (which does not survive), won third prize. It was the first of 22 times he was chosen to compete in the Athenian Dionysia.²² He won only three more victories (including *Hippolytos* in 428), one posthumously (*The Bacchae*). "The conclusion is that Euripides was only moderately successful in his own lifetime, though famous and influential after his death."²³ As Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr. observe:

Though Euripides' plays were not well received during his

¹⁹Lefkowitz, *Lives*, op. cit., 94.

²⁰Melchinger, op. cit., 12.

²¹Lucas, op. cit., 4, and Burnett, op. cit., xvi.

²²Gregory, op. cit., 188.

²³David Green and Richmond Lattimore, editors, *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume III, *Euripides* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959, 1969), from Lattimore's "General Introduction," v.

life, it is evident that after his death, during the fourth century B.C. and later, he was by far the most popular of the three tragedians. This fact is attested to by the number of indisputable plays of Euripides which have been preserved, seventeen tragedies and one satyr-play.²⁴

By comparison, only seven plays each of Aeschylus and Sophocles survive.

While recognized for his ability as a poet and playwright, Euripides was not a frequent winner. It would not be until 441 that he won first prize for at the festival for a play both whose script and title are lost to us.

His first surviving play, *Alcestis*, "was a bold departure from traditional dramaturgy."²⁵ Erich Segal points out the innovation was not simply that he presented *Alcestis* in place of a satyr play at the end of his trilogy. "Besides, on this same occasion Euripides presented *Telephus*, which according to Aristophanes, was even more 'scandalous.'"²⁶ *Alcestis*, a woman, was presented as noble as any male hero.

Classical theater historian Margaret Bieber writes:

Theater (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1939), 51.

²⁴Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr., editors, *The Complete Greek Drama* (New York, Random House, 1938), xxxi.

²⁵Erich Segal, editor, *Euripides: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 2.

²⁶Segal, *ibid.*

Euripides changed the form of the drama by altering the beginning and the end. The prologue no longer gives the opening of the action, but deals with preceding events, often in a single speech by a god; the conclusion brings the much decried *deus ex machina*, the god who cuts the knot. Both these changes were the result of Euripides' fundamental innovations. He could not, however, do away with certain fixed and established features of the heroic saga, and hence was obliged, by means of the prologue, to indicate the alterations to his audience, and at the end by supernatural intervention, to bring into harmony with tradition the action which had run along different lines. This artistic device was adopted by Sophokles in his old age from Euripides.²⁷

The oldest source of his biography is a "quite ancient document called *Life and Race of Euripides*. It is anonymous and shapeless."²⁸ Probably derived from someone called Satyrus²⁹ of the Peripatetic (Aristotelean) school who wrote in the third century, the account is incomplete, heavily annotated and "corrected."³⁰ As Gregory observes, "These caricatures [of Euripides], accepted at face value and pieced out with motifs from Euripidean drama, gave rise to the Euripides of the biographical tradition: a morose solitary disappointed in his private life and unpopular with his fellow citizens."³¹ Mary R.

²⁷Margaret Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1939), 51.

²⁸Murray, *op. cit.*, 23.

²⁹Lefkowitz, *Lives*, *op. cit.*, p. 99, observes, "Quotations are introduced [by Satyrus] as evidence without qualification or concern about their province."

³⁰Murray, *ibid.*

³¹Gregory, *op. cit.*, 8-9.

Lefkowitz is correct in writing, "Close analysis . . . shows that virtually all the information in the *Vita* derives from comedy or Euripides' own dramas; that anecdotes endow the poet with both heroic capabilities and degrading weaknesses; and that over time these weaknesses gradually receive more emphasis in order to make the poet's achievement more comprehensible and accessible."³²

The concept of biography as we know it is fairly recent and so modern scholars would face the normal obstacles in trying to piece together Euripides' life. However, the problem is compounded since

Euripides was, more than any other figure in ancient history, a constant butt for attacks of comedy. And we find, oddly enough, that most of the anecdotes about Euripides in Satyrus are simply the jokes of comedy treated as fact.³³

Which means that separating myth/joke from fact may be close to impossible. Because of his championship of the oppressed in Athenian society, primarily women, Euripides' detractors questioned his masculinity -- saying that he was henpecked, for example. Oates and O'Neill are more direct:

Also because Euripides has been unflinching in the delineation of his female characters, the biographers concluded that this could never have happened, had he not had some bitter personal experience with women. Hence tradition has preserved apocryphal stories about his unhappy

³²Lefkowitz, *Lives*, op. cit., 88.

³³Murray, op. cit., 24-25.

marital life.³⁴ Murray opines that Socrates' influence on Euripides, despite their shared skepticism. The memories of Euripides that did survive to Satyrus were, at best, the reminiscences of old men who heard their fathers talk about meeting or seeing Euripides in his old age. These include that he had a long white beard, that he had several moles on his face³⁵ and that he was a loner who disliked having visitors. Modern scholars seem more confident in the accounts that Euripides lived by himself on Salamis in a cave. He seems to have lived his last years in Athens with a small circle of intimates. "Mnesilochus, his wife's father -- or, perhaps, another Mnesilochus of the same family -- was a close friend. So was his servant or secretary, Cephisophon."³⁶ Burnett, however, believes Cephisophon was more than a servant or secretary; she believes Cephisophon wrote the music to Euripides' lyrics.³⁷

While Euripides and Socrates were contemporaries, they were, at most, acquaintances. The only plays Socrates attended, says

³⁴Oates and O'Neill, op. cit., xxx.

³⁵Lefkowitz, *Lives*, op. cit., 97, observes: Because many of the anecdotes [about Euripides' life] derive from comedy, the poet often appears ludicrous and undignified. He is ugly with moles on his face, unpleasant ([Vita] 28); he is set upon by women (100-2); he is sexually inadequate (92-6)."

³⁶Murray, op. cit., 29.

³⁷"In musical composition, he was assisted by a certain Cephisophon; this collaboration was probably a common practice." Burnett, op. cit., xvii.

tradition, were those Euripides wrote.³⁸ Murray opines that Socrates' influence on Euripides, despite their shared skepticism, "is not very conspicuous."³⁹ Murray gives little weight to a verse from an unnamed ancient comedy, "Socrates piles the faggots for Euripides' fire." A generous remark is attributed to Socrates, "that he would be willing to walk the five miles from Athens to Piraeus to witness a play by Euripides in the theater where his plays were then being performed."⁴⁰

However, Euripides' friends included intellectuals of whom the populace was suspicious including Protagoras, author of *On the Gods*, which he read aloud in Euripides' house, and

Anaxagoras, Protagoras' master. Euripides "was considered a bookish poet," Murray writes.⁴¹ He had his own library, apparently something unusual in his day, "he was a philosopher, he read to himself."⁴²

Euripides was suspect because of the company he kept -- intellectuals -- which included his friendship with the musician Timotheus, a young Ionian composer, accused of "corrupt[ing] the

³⁸Lucas, op. cit., 40, and Murray, op. cit., 29. Their sources were Aelian, *Var. Hist.*, II, 13, and Diogenes Laertes, II, 18.

³⁹Murray, op. cit., 56.

⁴⁰Melchinger, op. cit., 25

⁴¹Murray, op. cit., 103.

⁴²Murray, *ibid.*

music of the day by his florid style and bold inventions."⁴³

Other information about Euripides comes in bits and pieces. He served on an embassy to Syracuse (but we are ignorant of its date) he wrote "a public elegy in 413 for the Athenian soldiers fallen in Sicily."⁴⁴ All sources include the apocryphal tale that a number of Athenians taken prisoners of war in the Sicilian campaign and sent to the mines as slaves⁴⁵ won their freedom by reciting his choruses, their captors being warm admirers of Euripides.⁴⁶ Those who made it back to Athens made it a point "whenever they encountered the playwright . . . [to]

⁴³Murray, op. cit., 30.

⁴⁴Burnett, op. cit., xvii.

⁴⁵Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, p. 488, describes the hardships suffered by the prisoners:

"Those who were in the stone quarries were treated badly by the Syracusans at first. There were many of them, and they were crowded together in a narrow pit, where, since there was no roof over their heads, they suffered first from the heat of the sun and the closeness of the air; and then, in contrast, came the cold autumnal nights, and the change in temperature brought disease among them. Lack of space made it necessary for them to do everything on the same spot; and besides, there were bodies all heaped together on top of one another of those who had died from their wounds or from the change of temperature or other such causes, so the smell was insupportable. At the same time they suffered from hunger and thirst. During the eight months the daily allowance for each man was half a pint of water and a pint of corn. In fact they suffered everything which one could imagine might be suffered by men imprisoned in such a place. . . ." One can speculate on the treatment experienced by the Athenian prisoners of war to the slaves in the silver mines at Laurium.

⁴⁶Burnett, op. cit., xvii; Murray, op. cit., 170; Lucas, op. cit., 44; Melchinger, op. cit., 36; Segal, op. cit., 11. The source of all is Plutarch's life of Nicias, 29.

warmly thank him 'with love in their hearts.'⁴⁷

Lucas, citing Plutarch, adds that Euripides' verses from *Erechtheus* (unfortunately lost) praising peace "helped to bring the Athenian people to make the peace of Nicias."⁴⁸ His poetry saved his city even after his death, according to Plutarch's biography of Lysander.

Two years later (404) the city fell and Plutarch [Lysander, 15] tells, [sic] the proposal that her people should be sold as slaves and Athens made an abomination of desolation, a grazing ground for sheep, was only defeated by a sudden storm of pity that swept the gathered [Spartan] leaders, as they heard a man of Phocis singing the opening chorus of the *Electra*:

*O Agamemnon's child
I am come, Electra, to thy homestead in the wild.*⁴⁹

Murray says Euripides all through his life was occupied with the study of revenge⁵⁰ which seems to be reflected in the plays that survive. Orestes and Electra kill their mother to avenge her murdering their father, Alkmene wants revenge in *The Children of Herakles*, Hecuba seeks revenge in the play named for her.

Late in life he was the defendant in a lawsuit brought

⁴⁷Segal, *ibid.*

⁴⁸Lucas, *op. cit.*, 35.

⁴⁹Lucas, *op. cit.*, 44.

⁵⁰Murray, *op. cit.*, 163.

against him by one Hygiainon who said that Euripides being richer than he should perform a liturgy (i.e., incur the cost of a public service) instead of him. The records of the trial are lost, and we don't know whether Euripides succeeded in his defense. All that survives is a report of Hygiainon trying to prejudice the jury against Euripides by quoting a line from *Hippolytus* which he said Euripides defended perjury, "My tongue swore, my mind is unsworn."⁵¹ Euripides married at least twice. Long after his death, would-be biographers "charged that his second wife deceived him with a handsome young slave who was his secretary."⁵² They based their accusation on his *Hippolytus*, says Melchinger, saying that Euripides based Phaedra's attraction for Hippolytus on his own experience. Lefkowitz concurs that no evidence exists of Euripides' wife being unfaithful to him. It is based solely on his having written *Hippolytus*.⁵³

It is therefore fruitless to speculate on why Euripides left. We also know that he had children by his first wife because it certainly was not because the public -- or his wife -- rejected him. His 'exile' to Macedonia is far more enigmatic than Ovid's to the Black Sea. For one thing we can be sure that the Roman poet did not go voluntarily."

⁵¹Moses Hadas, editor, *Greek Drama: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1965, 1982), *Hippolytus*, translated by Hadas and J. McLean, 237. Future citations of the plays in *Greek Drama* (which contains "Medea," "Hippolytus" and "The Trojan Women") will be: *Greek Drama*, "Name of the Play," page number.

⁵²Melchinger, op. cit., 20. Egypt, she notes.

⁵³Lefkowitz, *Lives*, op. cit., 89.

one of his three sons⁵⁴ is credited with the posthumous production of *The Bacchae* and *Iphigenia in Aulis* in Athens. Because of the corrupt endings of both, there is speculation that Euripides had not finished the latter and that his son completed its composition. Euripides did produce *The Bacchae* for the Macedonian court at Pella. What prompted Euripides to leave Attica and go into exile at Pella is unclear and in dispute. Indeed, it is not certain that he did leave Athens for Pella, writes Lefkowitz. She points out that "unusual references" to Macedonia in his last two plays are the basis of the belief he accepted the invitation to live and compose in the Macedonian court. This makes as much sense as the assertion in Aristophanes was born in Egypt because of his reference to the Nile River, she states.⁵⁵

Erich Segal flatly asserts:

It is therefore fruitless to speculate on why Euripides left Athens in the last years of his life. Whatever the reason, it certainly was not because the public -- or his wife -- rejected him. His 'exile' to Macedonia is far more enigmatic than Ovid's to the Black Sea. For one thing we can be sure that the Roman poet did not go voluntarily.⁵⁶

In his later years, Euripides "appears to have preferred a life

⁵⁴Burnett, op. cit., xvii.

⁵⁵Lefkowitz, *Lives*, op. cit., 103. Heliodorus had Aristophanes born in Naucratis, Egypt, she notes.

⁵⁶Segal, *Euripides*, op. cit., 12.

of some seclusion, surrounded by his household."⁵⁷ In 408/7, in his late 70s,⁵⁸ he left Athens and headed north, according to tradition. He first stayed at Magnesia in Thessaly where he was accorded many honors and then travelled to the Macedonian court where King Archelaus welcomed him. Besides writing and producing a play in Archelaus' honor,⁵⁹ he produced his *The Bacchae*. Also at the court in Pella (near where Saloniki stands today) were the painter Zeuxis; the composer Timotheus; Agathon, a playwright younger than Euripides who had competed against him; and possibly Thucydides, all invited by Archelaus.⁶⁰

The 18 months or so of his life apparently were happy. He enjoyed the respect and honors of the Pella court and if he felt homesick for Athens or his cave at Salamis, it "does not betray itself in a single line of either [*The Bacchae* or *Iphigenia in Aulis*.]"⁶¹ Because of the horrible death of Pentheus in *The*

⁵⁷Burnett, op. cit., xvii.

⁵⁸Lucas, op. cit., 39, says he was 72. Melchinger, op. cit., 34, says he was 77, which better corresponds with the assumption he was born in 484.

⁵⁹Melchinger, op. cit., 34-35, writes, "Euripides showed his gratitude [for the Macedonian king's hospitality] by making a mythical ancestor of Archelaus the hero of a drama, now lost."

⁶⁰Melchinger, op. cit., 34.

⁶¹Melchinger, op. cit., 35. I accept Melchinger in the absence of evidence to the contrary. However, Melchinger uses the same methodology -- play analysis -- to divine Euripides' last years for which modern scholars fault the author(s) of the *vita*.

Bacchae,⁶² tradition has Euripides being torn to death by a pack of hunting dogs. There is no reason to believe that Euripides died of anything other than the infirmities of age.

Euripides' contribution to theater, in Bieber's evaluation, is that he changed theater forever. He took the tragic form within which he had to work and gave it a new structure, ensuring that it would be the dominant form of theater. Among his innovations were taking the chorus and transforming it into "a sympathetic, passive spectator."⁶³ She asserts:

[Tragedy] would never have attained its significance for the world's history, literature and civilization had not this philosopher among the poets entirely altered it once again. . . . With Euripides, the living growth of Attic tragedy came to an end. It was bound to do so, for Euripides had destroyed the religious meaning of tragedy without being able to cast off the fetters of the cult.⁶⁴

⁶²Pentheus, while surreptitiously watching a women-only religious festival dedicated to Dionysus, slips from his perch and is attacked by the women, led by his mother, Agave. In their religious ecstasy, the women tear him limb from limb and his mother unknowingly walks home with his head.

⁶³Bieber, op. cit., 54.

⁶⁴Bieber, op. cit., 50, 63.

Dionysian Theater

The ruins remain¹ and we marvel at the acoustics and the

¹The theater goer who watched the plays of the Greek dramatists and comedy writers, write Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr., editors, *The Complete Greek Drama: All the Extant Tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the Comedies of Aristophanes and Menander, in a Variety of Translations* (in two volumes) (New York: Random House, 1938), p. xvi, would be seated in "the *theatron*, or *koilon*, a semicircular curved bank of seats, resembling in some respects the closed end of a horseshoe stadium." The playgoer would ascend or descend the steps (*klimakes*) to get to his seat in his section (*kerkis*). Along the way he walked in a level aisle (*diazoma*) dividing the lower and upper levels of the theater. If he were an ordinary citizen, he would sit in the upper division, the lower -- what today we would call the orchestra section -- reserved for the many dignitaries. The Dionysian theater could seat 17,000, Oates and O'Neill report. "The seating in the theater was egalitarian," says Josiah Ober, "as it was in the Assembly and in the people's courts." (Ober and Barry Strauss, "Drama, Political Rhetoric and the Discourse of Athenian Democracy," in John J. Winkler Jr. and Froma I. Zeitlin, editors, *Nothing to Do With Dionysus? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 238.)

Immediately below him, the playgoer would see a circular orchestra or "dancing place." In its center stood an altar which was used as part of the playwright's scenery. Euripides most likely used it to depict the human sacrifice in *Children of Heracles* and when his son posthumously produced *Iphigenia at Aulis* it seems likely the altar was used to show Agamemnon leading his daughter to her death. To the left and right of the *theatron* are the *paradoi* used by the audiences to enter and exit and by the cast -- actors and chorus -- to make their entrances and exits as well.

Behind the orchestra lay the *skene* or structure used to store scenery. Originally a wooden structure, it was replaced by a stone building for by the time Euripides presented his plays the tragic form had been defined. "In most plays the *skene* represents the facade of a house, palace or temple," Oates and O'Neill write. The evidence is unclear, they continue, how the audience was supposed to know what structure the walls of the *skene* represented, saying only various devices -- possibly portable painted panels -- were developed during the *theatron's*

design of the Greek theaters. We cannot, however, be sure who comprised the audiences besides citizens. We can only speculate whether Euripides and other playwrights expected women to watch his dramas. "We are not even certain that women were present at the theater festivals in honor of the god Dionysus to see these plays (although there is some evidence on both sides, it seems more likely that some women did so);² and no female voice has

history to indicate palace or temple walls. The *skene* also had three doors which the cast used to make entrances and exits and inside which they changed costumes and masks.

The *proskenion* or *logeion*, where much of the plays' action occurs, was a level platform a single step up from the orchestra, Oates and O'Neill say, and the actors often moved from one setting to the other to advance the action of the play. On both sides of the *proskenion* were the *paraskenia*, each a projecting wing.

In discussing Euripides, one would be remiss not to mention the machine or *deus ex machina* used so often at the conclusion of plays for deities to appear and resolve matters. The machine is a derrick or crane on wheels at whose top sits the actor portraying the deity. Hence the origin of the Latin *deus ex machina*, literally "god from the machine."

One last note: Since the plays were staged in the open air and in daylight, it was a challenge for authors to write scenes meant to be staged inside a building. This is why most of the action takes place outdoors. In an effort to surmount this obstacle, when a play needed to have a scene set inside a house or temple or hovel, the playwright/producer employed an *eccyclema*, a platform on wheels rolled out of the *skene*, write Oates and O'Neill, and this represented a scene taking place inside a house, hovel, palace, temple, or tent.

²Roger Just in *Women in Athenian Law and Life* (London and New York: Routledge Classical Studies, 1989, 1991), pp. 109-10, writes, "The related question of whether or not Athenian women attended the theater is a vexed one. On intuitive grounds one cannot help feeling that many of the comedies would have been infinitely more funny if the audience had been mixed while [A.E.] Haigh in his class work *The Attic Theater* reiterates the conventional belief that 'undoubtedly Athenian women were kept in a state of almost oriental seclusion' (1907: 324), he also comes close to proving they were allowed to attend the theater."

Eva Cantarella in *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, translated by Maureen B.

survived to give us a hint of a woman's perspective in her own words."³ We are on fairly solid ground in thinking ". . .

citizens probably made up the bulk of the dramatic [sic] audience, non citizens attended in some numbers."⁴

Those who watched the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and the other classical Greek playwrights understood the myths which they portrayed, alluded to, or modified for their own dramatic purposes.⁵ They also understood that the plays they watched were intended to instruct the younger people on the history, traditions and values of the polis and reinforce these same lessons in the older people.⁶ Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr. observe:

For the Athenian of the fifth century B.C., poetry was not alone something which would give him insights into life, but it was likewise an integral and meaningful part of his life.

Fant (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, 1987), p. 46, citing V. Ehrenberg (*The People of Aristophanes*, 1951), asserts, "Nor does it appear they were allowed to attend the theater."

³Elaine Fantham, Helene Peet Foley, Natalie Boymel Kampen, Sarah B. Pomeroy, and H. Alan Shapiro, *Women in the Classical World* (New York: The Oxford University Press, 1994), 70.

⁴Josiah Ober and Barry Strauss, "Drama, Political Rhetoric, and the Discourse of Athenian Democracy," in Winkler and Zeitlin, op. cit., 239.

⁵Whitney and O'Neill Jr., op. cit., xiv.

⁶John J. Winkler, "The Ephebes' Song: *Tragoidia* and *Polis*" in Winkler and Zeitlin, op. cit., 43. ". . . the events and characters portrayed in tragedy are meant to be contemplated as lessons by young citizens (or better, by the entire polis from the vantage point of the young citizen) . . ."

In the absence of libraries and books "published" in large numbers, the individual came in contact with "literature," that is, almost exclusively poetry, through oral presentations of the epic, lyric, or dramatic forms. He spent long hours hearing this poetry, for on no other theory can we explain how plays, replete with choral odes of intricate metrical structure and brilliant imagery, could have been so widely popular.⁷

And the theater was very popular. "The spectators apparently were always in a holiday mood, but on the whole maintained good order, though they felt themselves free to express their approval or disapproval by clapping, shouting, hissing and kicking their heels against the benches."⁸ That they took most seriously the quality of the actors' performances is shown by reports of their hurling fruit and vegetables at actors whose performances failed to measure up. In fact, one actor was nearly stoned to death by an upset audience.⁹

It was as much a social and political event as it was a literary happening. The state underwrote the productions and "theater attendance was . . . closely linked to citizenship," write John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin.¹⁰ Each deme paid the price of admission to the Dionysian festival for its citizens.

What is more, the audience sat in the open-air theater just

⁷Oates and O'Neill, op. cit., xiv.

⁸Oates and O'Neill, op. cit., xviii.

⁹Ibid. Oates and O'Neill cite "G. Norwood *Greek Tragedy* (Boston, 1920) pp. 80-83."

¹⁰Winkler and Zeitlin, op. cit., 4.

below the Akropolis in wedge-shaped sections designated for each of the political tribes, just as they did for other city meetings. The audience was overwhelmingly male and, except for tourists and visiting dignitaries, was composed of the same few thousands of active citizens to be seen at any important public meeting, plus those who had traveled from their farms to the city for the five-day holiday known as the Great (or City) Dionysia.¹¹

Today travel agencies offer theater packages to London, New York and Toronto, Canada for which participants may expect to attend as many as nine shows over the course of a week -- one each weeknight and a matinee and evening performance on weekends. Those who attended the Dionysian festival were made of hardier stuff and the actors who performed in them were stamina personified.

The audience watched three tragedies and a satyr-play each day for three successive days. On other days of the same festival they watched five comedies and twenty choral hymns (diathrambs) to Dionysos.¹²

The actors -- originally two and later three recited or sang all the roles -- performed in all four plays on their day to perform during the festival. They not only had to change their masks and costumes, they not only had to memorize the lines to four plays, they had to deliver them so their dialogue could be

¹¹Winkler and Zeitlin, op. cit., 4. Oates and O'Neill (op. cit., xviii-xix) report that during the Peloponnesian War, the length of the festival was reduced from six days to five, probably as an economy measure, and the number of comedies offered from five to three.

¹²Winkler and Zeitlin, op. cit., 4.

heard through their masks. ". . . the actors were almost continuously speaking and moving through four elaborate performances (three tragedies and one satyr-play), starting early in the morning and lasting much of the day."¹³ The chorus members had more grueling roles since they had to sing and dance through the same performances.

Comparing Classical Athenian theater to modern day entertainment is comparing apples to oranges. However, the comparison offered by Winkler and Zeitlin on the significance of the plays offered there helps the modern reader gain some perspective:

Even to come close to the authentic experience . . . of attending a "play" in ancient Athens, we would have to imagine that Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Sam Shephard had each written three serious plays and a farce for a one-time performance on a national holiday -- say the Fourth of July -- in honor of some hero-god, perhaps a cross between George Washington and Johnny Appleseed, and that these were preceded by a parade of congressional representatives and cabinet secretaries and federal judges and governors and mayors, and that the plays were performed after ceremonies honoring the war dead, and our national allies, that the bishops and generals and mothers superior had prominent places in the front rows, and that the choruses who sang and danced were composed (so Winkler argues) of West Point cadets, dressed sometimes as old veterans, sometimes as servants or refugees or prisoners of war, occasionally (but only rarely) as young men.¹⁴

Oddone Longo buttresses Winkler's attempt to give a flavor

¹³Winkler and Zeitlin, op. cit., 5.

¹⁴Winkler and Zeitlin, op. cit., 5.

of what it was like to attend the Dionysian festival:

This place, which was the scene of the collective festival, provided a proper home not only for the dramatic contest but also for other celebrations, which were no less strictly tied to the civic system: at the City Dionysia, honors voted to systems and to foreigners were proclaimed in the theater; the tribute from Athens' allies was exhibited in the theater; the orphans of war who had been raised at the city's expense were paraded through the theater in full panoply in the year they reached their majority. These rituals were understood to be celebrations of the polis and of its ideology, and they constituted the immediate framework of the plays.¹⁵

In his *Poetics*,¹⁶ Aristotle set forth what the audiences who watched and heard tragedy expected in terms of character, plot and action. First, character:

Concerning character, there are four things at which the poet should aim. (1) The foremost is that it should be cogent. . . . his words and actions make evident his intentions. . . . But [cogency of character] depends on the role of the agent. A woman and a slave, too, may be [portrayed] cogently, [but in a different manner]; for perhaps a woman is inferior to a man, whereas a slave is of no account at all. (2) The character should fit the agent; for [a man] may be [portrayed as] manly in character but it is not fitting to portray a woman as manly or shrewd. (3) The character should be similar [to those we find in life]. . . . (4) The character should be consistent; and even if the character is portrayed as inconsistent, it should nevertheless be portrayed as consistently inconsistent.¹⁷

¹⁵Odone Longo, "The Theater of the Polis," [originally published in *Dionisio*, 1978] in Winkler and Zeitlin, op. cit., 16.

¹⁶Aristotle, *Poetics* (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1990). Translated with commentaries and glossary by Hippocrates G. Apostle, Elizabeth Dobbs, and Morris A. Parslow. Subsequent references will be "*Poetics*."

¹⁷*Poetics*, p. 17, 1454a, lines 16-28. The emphasis and brackets are the translator's. The ellipses are mine.

Aristotle faults Euripides' portrayal of Iphigenia in *Iphigenia at Aulis* saying, "Iphigenia the suppliant in no way resembles her later self."¹⁸

Concerning plot, Aristotle takes Euripides (and others) to task for over-reliance on the *deus ex machina*. "This device should be used [if at all] for events outside the drama," Aristotle wrote, ". . . as in the *Medea*."¹⁹ The plot should be resolved, he asserted, from developments in the plot itself, not from outside or divine intervention: "Again, there should be nothing unreasonable in the events . . ."²⁰

This, then, is the environment in which and for which Euripides and the other playwrights composed their tragedies.

¹⁸*Poetics*, 1454a, lines 32-33 p. 17.

¹⁹*Poetics*, 1454b, lines 1,3; p. 17.

²⁰*Poetics*, 1454b, line 8. p. 17.

The Plays

As indicated, 19 plays attributed to Euripides survive. Most either revolve around women or heavily involve them. Euripides assigned well over half the choruses in his extant plays to women. Moreover, in several of his play, he casts women as slaves although when slaves are prominently featured, they invariably are noblewomen, either prisoners of war or prizes of war because their husbands, fathers or sons fought for ther losing side.

While all of Euripides' plays are important -- none is unimportant -- those more germane to this thesis have been gone into in considerably more detail. *Alcestis* demonstrates the nobility of which Euripides thought women capable. In *Andromache*, the title character and Hermione, her chief antagonist, display the unwilling acceptance of the double standard Athenian women allowed their husbands when it came to extramarital sex. *Medea* and *Hecuba* portray the intelligence, cunning and capacity for vengeance Athenians believed only men like Odysseus capable of. *Makaria* in *The Children of Herakles* (*Herakleidae*) exhibits a nobility, a sense of self-sacrifice, for the good of the polis men could only admire and respect. The same is true to a lesser

extent of Iphigenia in *Iphigenia at Aulis*. And she is the equal of her brother Orestes and his *xenos* (guest-friend), Pylades in plotting and conspiracy in *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*. In *Electra* and *Orestes*, Electra has more strength of character -- if character can be defined as the capacity for evil, than her brother, Orestes. Regardless, no matter how misguided we may think her, Electra strives to restore the honor of her family, an important value, for the Greek *oikos*. And *Hippolytos* and *Ion* deal with the issue of legitimacy. Before 451/0, a man could claim Athenian citizenship solely through descent on his father's side. After that date, he had to have been able to prove that both his parents were Athenians. In *Hippolytos*, the issue of woman's sexual desire is examined. In *The Suppliant Women*, the mothers and wives of *Seven Against Thebes* seek to uphold civic virtue and honor the dead by burying them properly; they would disobey the illegal order that the dead be left to rot.

Murray writes, "The *Knossos* has come down to us in a very peculiar condition and it is often considered spurious. We know, however, that Euripides wrote a *Knossos*, and tradition says that he was 'very young' when he wrote it. Murray, op. cit., 71.

"In 438 Euripides also wrote *The Cretan Women*, Alcock in *Peophs and Palaeography*. Alcock, notes Murray (op. cit., 72) was written in place of an earlier play to conclude the quartet.

"G. Zuntz, in *The Political Plays of Euripides*, treats the dating of this play and *The Suppliant Women* at some length (pp. 81-88 and 89-94 respectively). After weighing the arguments, he sets 438 as the date of the first presentation of *The Heraklidae*.

"G. Zuntz, in *The Political Plays of Euripides* (page 87), writes "The weight of evidence would favor a date . . . about 435 rather than 438 B.C. and 436 rather than 438." In the end, though, he accepts arguments for its first presentation at 424 (page 93).

Chronology¹ of Surviving Plays of Euripides

? 455 - 441	<i>Rhesus</i> ²
438	<i>Alcestis</i> ³
431 - 405	<i>Medea</i>
? 429 - 405	<i>Herakleidai (The Children of Heracles)</i> ⁴
428	<i>Hippolytus</i>
? 426	<i>Andromache</i>
? 425	<i>Hecuba</i>
? 425	<i>Cyclops</i>
? 423	<i>The Suppliants/The Suppliant Women</i> ⁵
? 420	<i>Heracles</i>
415	<i>Troiadae (The Trojan Women)</i>

¹David Grene and Richmond Lattimore editors, *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume IV, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 612-616. The editors use question marks to indicate disagreement among scholars about the accuracy of the dates their research provides.

²Murray writes, "The *Rhesus* has come down to us in a very peculiar condition and it is often considered spurious. We know, however, that Euripides wrote a *Rhesus*, and tradition says that he was 'very young' when he wrote it. Murray, op. cit., 71.

³In 438 Euripides also wrote *The Cretan Women*, *Alcmaeon in Psophis* and *Telephus*. *Alcestis*, notes Murray (op. cit., 72) was written in place of a satyr play to conclude the quartet.

⁴G. Zuntz, in *The Political Plays of Euripides*, treats the dating of this play and *The Suppliant Women* at some length (pp. 81-88 and 88-94 respectively). After weighing the arguments, he sets 430 at the date of the first presentation of *The Heraklidae*.

⁵G. Zuntz, in *The Political Plays of Euripides* (page 57), writes "The metrical evidence would favor a date . . . about 425 rather than 420 B.C. and 420 rather than 416." In the end, though, he accepts arguments for its first presentation at 424 (page 93).

- ? 414 *Iphigenia in Tauris*
 413 *Electra*
 412 *Helen/Helena*⁶
 ? 412 *Ion*
 ? 410 *The Phoenician Women/Phoenissae*, also known as *The Tyrian Women*.⁷
 408 *Orestes*
 406 - 405 *The Bacchae*
 406 - 405 *Iphigenia in Aulis*

The god of healing, Apollo, out of gratitude for the hospitality of Admetos, king of Thessaly, has persuaded Thanatos (Death) to allow Admetos to exchange his scheduled time to die with whomever he can persuade to trade theirs. Apollo does so to preserve Admetos' house. Knowing he is fated to die quite soon, Admetos approaches many people including his parents. All refuse except his wife, Alcestis. Admetos provisionally accepts her offer, thinking he can find someone else before Death takes her.

But he can't. Before she dies, Alcestis makes Admetos promise that he will not remarry. Overcome by grief and the realization that he shouldn't have solicited his wife, Admetos readily agrees and swears that he will remain chaste until he dies. As he and his household enter mourning, Admetos' guest-friend,

⁶Zuntz, op. cit., p. 58, notes that *Helen* and *Orestes* "might . . . have been written five or ten years before the established date of their first performance[s]." He dismisses this "assumption which unhinges the whole Euripidean chronology and is intrinsically improbable in view of the poet's great productivity."

⁷"It is the longest Greek tragedy in existence, and covers the greatest stretch of story," Murray (op. cit., 148) observes. It "seems like an attempt to run the matter of a whole trilogy into one play."

Alcestis

The god of healing, Apollo, out of gratitude for the hospitality of Admetos, king of Thessaly, has persuaded Thanatos (Death) to allow Admetos to exchange his scheduled time to die with whomever he can persuade to trade theirs. Apollo does so to preserve Admetos' house. Knowing he is fated to die quite soon, Admetos approaches many people including his parents. All refuse except his wife, Alcestis. Admetos provisionally accepts her offer, thinking he can find someone else before Death takes her.

But he can't. Before she dies, Alcestis makes Admetos promise that he will not remarry. Overcome by grief and the realization that he shouldn't have solicited his wife, Admetos readily agrees and adds that he will remain chaste until he dies. As he and his household enter mourning, Admetos' guest-friend, Herakles, visits. Herakles, in a jovial and boastful mood, is unaware of Alcestis' death or the circumstances surrounding it. He accepts Admetos' generous hospitality and drinks a considerable amount of wine. Despite his inebriation, Herakles discovers (after much obfuscation from Admetos) he has visited a house in mourning and reproaches his host for not telling him.

stricken with remorse, Herakles quickly become sober. Because of his wish to set things right and repay his friend for his most gracious generosity, Herakles absents himself and visits the nether world. He wrestles Death²⁴ and brings Alcestis, concealed in a veil, back to Admetos' palace. With Alcestis concealed, Heracles teases Admetos, trying to persuade him to break his promise to her. Alcestis watches what is going on but cannot speak (for three days).²⁵

As the play concludes, Admetos expresses his gratitude to Herakles ("Stay with us Herakles. My house is yours."²⁶) who leaves for Argos to perform another of his 12 labors. Admetos "proclaim[s] a feast of thanks and praise. . . . From this day forth we must remake our lives, and make them better than they were before. Happiness is mine and now I know it."²⁷

In *Alcestis*, Euripides shows a woman is capable of great love, a love not wholly deserved by her husband, and his heroine,

²⁴Euripides, *Alcestis*, lines 1462, 1468. William Arrowsmith, translator (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 93. Subsequent references will read, "*Alcestis*, followed by the line numbers."

²⁵*Alcestis*, lines 1469-70.

²⁶*Alcestis*, 1475.

²⁷*Alcestis*, 1483, 1486-87.

agrees to die in his stead. His nobility, her self sacrifice is presented often and repeatedly in the dialogue: As the play opens, Apollo (as chorus) informs the audience that Death has told Admetos that his appointed hour has arrived and of the escape clause he has arranged. Apollo relates:

... everyone refused [to take Admetos' place] all but one: his wife, Alcestis. Only she would volunteer to leave the sweet light of the sun and take his place below.

She is dying now.²⁸

And Death reminds Apollo that Alcestis gave "her solemn word to take Admetos' place."²⁹

The leader of the chorus tells the audience:

If bravery and love deserve the light,
no woman on this earth,
oh Alcestis,
ever less deserved to die!

Chorus, speaking individually:

-- How could Admetos bury such a wife
with no friends or mourners by?
-- Surely he could not do it
-- Not a woman like this. . . .
-- Not Alcestis! . . .

Chorus Leader:

I pity you Admetos. How, without Alcestis,
can you live at all In dying and living both:
incomparably a queen. For courage and love
Alcestis has no rival among all women
on this earth.

²⁸Alcestis, 30-33.

²⁹Alcestis, 58.

Maid:

Alcestis, give for your Rival?

What would the woman be who could rival or surpass Alcestis? What woman ever loved a man so much? Loved him more than herself? So much more she gave her life to let him live? In love she has no equal?³⁰

Although Alcestis has agreed to take Admetos' place, she is concerned about what will happen to their children

and prayed, "Bright goddess who guards my home . . . I pray you, protect my children and be good to them. Give my little boy a loving wife And give my girl a kind and gentle husband. . . ." ³¹

Alcestis, says the maid, threw herself on her marriage bed and sobbed, recalling how she gave herself to Admetos on their wedding night and knowing that in all likelihood Admetos will make love to another woman on that same bed.

Maid:

I am young, Admetos, but I have given you my youth -- the good years. Then the servants came crowding around, mourning. No one there, not even the meanest, was forgotten. Graciously, simply. She gave her hand to each and said goodbye.³²

Later, the Chorus addresses Admetos:

-- I pity you Admetos. How, without Alcestis, can you live at all?

. . . .

³⁰Alcestis, 123-24, 142-44, 210-17.

³¹Alcestis, 226, 228-230.

³²Alcestis, 259-60.

-- Not for love,
but for something more than love,
Alcestis dies for you today,
oh Admetos!

· · ·
O land of Pherai³³ mourn
and let the wounded Earth cry sorrow;
no nobler woman ever lived . . .³⁴

Although Admetos has made his bargain with Death, he regrets his reprieve, beginning to appreciate the price he has paid. The chorus leader remarks:

· · · And now I see
the torment of this house: the bravest of women
dying, and a king in agony. As long as he lives,
his life will taste of death,
all he will have is hell.³⁵

When Admetos enters their bedroom, Alcestis reminds him of what she is doing and notes that had he died:

· · · As your widow
I might have married any man in Thessaly
and lived with him and ruled this royal house.
· · · I am young, Admetos,
but I have given you my youth -- the good years,
the happy years. All the others have failed you.
· · · Now Admetos, I want your promise.
do not take a second wife and make her mistress here
where she may do our children harm because they're mine,
and she is jealous.

Oh promise me, Admetos, promise me.
Swear no woman will ever enter
through that door again.³⁶

³³Pherai is a town in Thessaly southeast of the Pelasgian plain and the chief city of Admetos' kingdom.

³⁴Alcestis, 302, 309-10, 315-16.

³⁵Alcestis, 319-24.

³⁶Alcestis, 377-381, 397, 405-07.

Admetos, choked with emotion, readily promises his wife he will not have sex with another woman, let alone remarry,³⁷ and the chorus leader says, "I will vouch for Admetos. He is a noble man. He will keep his promise."³⁸ Admetos has, Gregory observes, "deprive[d] himself now and for all future time of the sexual pleasure that was, for the Greeks, synonymous with life itself."³⁹

And with that, Alcestis dies. A grief-stricken Admetos states:

I shall never bury anyone I loved so much, not anyone who loved me more. Only she would take my place in death, and she shall have from me the honor she deserves.⁴⁰

The chorus sings its praises of Alcestis:

. . . You died for love.
For a love as yours, I would give my very life!

Leader:

Unselfish love like hers is rare. So rare that I would want her at my side, alive. I would love

³⁷Gregory, op. cit., 34, writes, "Although Alcestis had asked Admetos not to remarry, she had not intended to rule out all sexual gratification, for she was able to imagine another woman 'surely no more virtuous, but perhaps more fortunate,' occupying her place. (181-82)"

³⁸Alcestis, 425.

³⁹Gregory, op. cit., 34.

⁴⁰Alcestis, 526-27.

her always.⁴¹

At the wake, Admetos' parents pay their respects. Pheres, Admetos' father, who had refused to die in his son's place (as did Admetos' mother), has only the highest praise for his late daughter-in-law, "And by her bravery in death, she has been a credit -- no, a glory -- to her sex."⁴²

Admetos is bitter that neither of his parents would die in his stead and reproaches them. Pheres won't have any of it:

. . . As for fighting boy, you fought all right.

You fought like hell to live -- life at any price! -- beyond your destined time. You *murdered* her.

And you dare talk about *my* cowardice -- you, who let a woman outdo you in bravery, let her give her life to keep her gigolo alive?

That was no mistake.

The mistake would have been dying for you.

. . .
She wasn't shabby, was she? No she was *brave*.
Brave enough -- stupid enough -- to die for you.⁴³

Admetos resents his parents' chastising him but it is a resentment compounded by this awareness that they are right:

As for me [Admetos tells the chorus]

I should not be alive. I should be dead.

The life I have is not worth living. I know it now.

Too late

[line left intentionally blank]

⁴¹Alcestis, 564-66.

⁴²Alcestis, 740.

⁴³Alcestis, 848-53, 870-71, 900-01.

How can I bear to go on living in this house?"

And I have enemies. Behind my back
 they'll point me out, whispering, "Look there,
 look at Admetos
 the man who was afraid of death
 the coward who let his wife go down to Hades
 in his place. Do you call *that* a man?
 What kind of man would curse his father and mother?
 Because he was afraid of dying?
 Who but a coward?"⁴⁴

So in this play, all characters reflect real people, not
 larger-than-life representations of virtues and faults.

Admittedly Alcestis is presented as a bit too-good-to-be-true but
 what husband or wife deeply in love with his or her spouse
 wouldn't lay down his life so the other could live? Alcestis'
 sacrifice rings true as does her request that Admetos not
 remarry. Moreover, her request is not that he remain chaste --
 she and Admetos enjoyed a good sexual relationship and she
 wouldn't deny him -- her concern is that Admetos' second wife not
 be an evil stepmother who would advance the interests of her
 children by Admetos at the expense of Alcestis' son and daughter.

Admetos' mother, whose appearance is brief, understandably
 is unwilling to exchange her remaining lifespan even for her son,
 the reigning king. Pheres speaks for her, but like her husband,
 she sees no reason to die before her time for her son.

In *Alcestis* Euripides proposes that women as well as men can

⁴⁴*Alcestis*, 1194-97, 1214-22.

claim arete, "a word essentially reserved to men,"⁴⁵ Arrowsmith writes in his introduction. Euripides "stresses moral courage as against conventional aristocratic virtue and clearly includes women among its rightful claimants."⁴⁶ Women were held in low esteem and Alcestis' value (status) in society, although a king's wife, was considerably less than his. By the end of the play, however, no one can deny that Alcestis is the worthier person -- despite Admetos' admission of his shortcomings, redeeming himself and his promise to "remake our lives."

⁴⁵Alcestis, p. 5. Arrowsmith notes, "In range and suggestions, arete is badly cramped by the prim English word 'virtue.' Originally, arete designated something like Latin virtus, i.e., 'manliness' or 'physical prowess.' Later it became the (quite untranslatable) term indicating the chief aristocratic virtues . . . [including] 'excellence in moral courage' -- that is, the qualities exhibited by an 'excellent' man. . . ."

⁴⁶Arrowsmith in Alcestis, ibid.

Medea

Medea is a tale of great love, a love as great as Alcestis', little different in character, turned to absolute hatred and a grisly revenge. It is the tale of what happened to Jason, one of the greatest Greek heroes, after he returned to Greece with the golden fleece from Colchis. Medea, a sorceress without whose help Jason could not have obtained the fleece -- she kills her brother and abandons her father in aiding the argonauts' escape -- marries Jason in Corinth where they settle and have at least two children. She is a popular woman in her adopted city and enjoys the respect and status that went with being Jason's wife.

In *Medea*, Euripides powerfully conveys what it meant to be a woman cast aside for no reason other than her husband has grown tired of her -- or that her husband has decided that he can arrange a marriage more advantageous to him. Because she is a sorceress, Medea has recourse denied "ordinary" women. But Euripides leaves no doubt that scorned and cast-off women would identify with Medea. Euripides challenges the relative ease with which men can put away their wives, for while women could -- and did -- divorce their husbands, it was not as easy for them. Jason, very much an aristocratic hero who used shrewdness and strength to obtain the golden fleece, comes across as conniving and weak-willed -- anything but heroic. No arete here. Just as

men can be, Medea is capable of heinous acts or cruelty. To a woman, Euripides has assigned cunning, a sense of purpose, a will to prevail, a harsh courage and a high intelligence. Odysseus had all these qualities. And, as we shall see in *Hecuba*, he is little different in character.

As the play begins, "Jason has betrayed his own children and my mistress [Medea]," the Nurse tells the audience in setting the scene, "to sleep beside a royal bride, the daughter of Creon who rules this land [Corinth] . . ."47 Jason prepares to visit Medea to inform her that she must take their sons and go into exile. He comes across as a smarmy opportunist -- anything but a hero -- who would prefer Medea leave quietly so he can enjoy his new status as a prince of the city and Creon's heir apparent. Medea is not about to leave quietly although she gives every indication to Jason, Creon and his daughter that she will acquiesce. She presents herself to them as someone who is weak and has no choice but to smile as they figuratively pummel her.

Medea, Euripides second oldest surviving play, tells more than any of other his other works what it meant to be a woman. Medea is complex. In this play, Euripides magnifies the lowly status accorded women by making this woman an alien as well. In reading the dialogue, one should be careful to separate Medea's sense of betrayal from her comments on her status as a woman and

⁴⁷Greek Drama, *Medea*, p. 190.

an alien.

As she leaves her palace, she addresses the women of Corinth, and remarks that she is "An alien, to be sure," adding that such a person "should adapt himself to the citizens with whom he lives,"⁴⁸ something she says she tried to do. However:

The man who was everything to me, well he knows it, has turned out to be the basest of men. **Of all creatures that think and feel, we women are the unhappiest species.** [emphasis added] In the first place we must pay a great dowry to a husband who will be the tyrant of our bodies (that's a further aggravation of the evil); and there's another fearful hazard: whether we shall get a good man or bad. For separations bring disgrace on the women and it is not possible to renounce one's husband. Then, landed among strange habits and regulations unheard of in her own home, a woman needs second sight to know how best to handle her bedmate. And if we manage this well and have a husband who does not find the yoke of intercourse too galling, ours is a life to be envied. Otherwise, one is better dead. When the man wearies of the company of his wife, he goes outdoors and relieves the disgust of his heart having recourse to some friends or the companions of his own age, but we women have only one person to turn to.

They say that we have a safe life at home, whereas men must go to war. Nonsense! I had rather fight three battles than bear one child. . . .

Woman in most respects is a timid creature, with no heart for strife and aghast at the sight of steel; but wronged in love, there is no heart more murderous than hers.⁴⁹

Bleak as her life is, Medea resolves anew to have her revenge:

⁴⁸Medea, p. 194.

⁴⁹Medea, pp. 194-95.

But enough! Medea, use all your wiles; plot and devise. Onward to the dreadful moment. Now is the test of courage. Do you see how you are being treated? It is not right that the seed of Sisyphus and Aeson should gloat over you, the daughter of a noble sire and descendant of the Sun. But you realize that. **Moreover, by our mere nature we women are hapless for good, but adept at contriving all manner of wickedness.** [emphasis added]⁵⁰

The chorus takes issue with Medea's assessment of woman's nature:

. . . The world and morality are turned upside down. The hearts of men are treacherous; the sanctions of Heaven are undermined. The voice of time will change, and our glory will ring down through the ages. Womankind will be honored. No longer will ill-sounding report attach to our sex.

The strains of ancient minstrelry will cease, that hymned our faithlessness. . . . History has much to tell about the relations of men with women. . . .⁵¹

Later, Jason returns and, in a justification straight from today's headlines, blames the victim. He tells Medea she has only herself to blame for the situation in which she finds herself. He believes his own lies and thinks Medea should be grateful for his opportunism. And Euripides assigns Jason a thought that crops up in several other of his plays. Why do men need women other than to continue their line? The world would be much simpler and a much better place without women:

You women have actually come to believe that, lucky in love, you are lucky in all things, but let some mischance befall that love, and you think the best of all possible worlds a most loathsome place. There ought to have been some other way for men to beget their children, dispensing with the

⁵⁰Medea, p. 198.

⁵¹Medea, p. 198-99.

assistance of women. Then there would be no trouble in the world.⁵²

Euripides buys none of that and offers his opinion through the leader of the chorus:

Jason, you arrange your arguments very skillfully. And yet, in my opinion, like it or not, you have acted unjustly in betraying your wife.⁵³

Medea joins in the rebuke, and Jason responds as best he can by asserting that both he and Medea are in the wrong, Medea "[b]ecause you heaped foul curses on the king,"⁵⁴ as if his betrayal and her curses were equal. Because he recognizes the emptiness of his defense, he breaks off the conversation by saying further discussion is pointless, "heaven be my witness that I am willing to render every assistance to you and the children. But you do not like what is good for you."⁵⁵

Given so little time to seek a new haven, Medea is desperate. Aegeus, king of Athens, just happens to be in Corinth and Medea approaches him for sanctuary. He is visiting Corinth -- he has just come from the oracle at Phoebus -- because he and his wife are unable to become parents. Aegeus is not unwilling to provide a new home for Medea.

⁵²Medea, p. 202.

⁵³Medea, p. 202.

⁵⁴Medea, p. 203.

⁵⁵Ibid. p. 211.

Having resolved to wreak her vengeance, the retribution of the weak, Medea coolly effects her plan, lulling Jason, his bride and Creon into thinking she has accepted their wishes and will travel to Athens. When Jason visits her again later that day, she gives every indication of resignation: "Women are frail things and naturally apt to cry." She asks Jason to use his influence to persuade his new father-in-law to allow her children to remain in Corinth. Jason accedes and Medea then asks that he ask his bride to endorse the request to allow the children to remain.

The remainder of the play has Jason's new bride don her robe and diadem -- wedding gifts from Medea -- the "poisoned" robe causing the woman to burn to death. As Medea prepares to murder her children, she justifies her actions to herself:

I shall not leave my children for my enemies to insult. In any case they must die. And if they die, I shall slay them, I who gave them birth. . . . My misery overwhelms me. O I do realize how terrible is the crime I am about, but passion overrules my resolutions, passion that causes most of the misery in the world.⁵⁶

His second wife dead, Jason hastens to Medea's house, hoping to save his children from her sword. He is too late and as he looks upward, he sees Medea with the corpses of their children in a chariot drawn by winged dragons. Jason can only rail at her:

⁵⁶Medea, p. 213.

You abominable thing! You most loathsome woman, to the gods and me and all mankind. . . . My curses on you! At last I have come to my senses, the senses I lost when I brought you from your barbarian home and country to Greece There is a fiend in you, whom the gods have launched against me. In your own home, you had already slain your brother when you came aboard the *Argo*. . . . Then you married me and bore me children whom you have now destroyed because I left your bed. **No Greek woman would ever have done such a deed.** [emphasis added] Yet I saw fit to marry you rather than a woman of Greece, a wife to hate me and destroy me, not a woman at all, but a tigress, with a disposition more savage than Tuscan Scylla. . . .⁵⁷

The tables turned, Medea says she sees no need to offer "an elaborate rebuttal"⁵⁸ justifying her actions.

JASON: You too are suffering. You have your share of the sorrow.

MEDEA: True, but it's worth the grief, since you cannot scoff.

JASON: O children, what a wicked mother you got!

MEDEA: O children, your father's sins have caused your death.

JASON: Yet it was not *my* hand that slew them.

MEDEA: No, it was your lust, and your new marriage.

JASON: Because your love was scorned, you actually thought it right to murder.

MEDEA: Do you think a woman considers that a small injury?

JASON: Good women do. But you are wholly vicious.⁵⁹

In assessing *Medea*, Roger Just sees Euripides' development of its heroine as one of the female sex, the passionate sex whose

⁵⁷*Medea*, pp. 218-19.

⁵⁸*Ibid.* op. cit., 275.

⁵⁹*Medea*, pp. 219-20.

presence threatens the underpinnings of civilized society if they are not controlled and "as beings who bring into its midst those dangerous forces antipathetic to its order."⁶⁰ Concludes Just, "Euripides would give the passion of women their due; but the message remains that with women and the passions one is still playing with fire."⁶¹

Herakleia

Two years after Euripides produced *Medea*, he presented *The Children of Herakles*. In stark contrast to *Medea*, Makaria, Herakles' daughter, is everything *Medea* is not. Even Alkmena, Herakles' mother, cannot approach *Medea* in villainy.

Taylor and Brooks say it

is an extraordinary play. . . . It is at once rapid, fabulous, noble and common to the point of comedy. It pursues concepts of deep moral grandeur and perplexity in the environment and often the language of the marketplace, the barracks and the courts. It ends with a denouement of astonishing physical and ethical brutality.

The climate of Athens in the years when the play was produced was an increasingly volatile mixture of bravado, sophistry, rage, and horror at the progress of a vicious conflict [the Peloponnesian War]. . . .

It is one of the shortest plays in the existing Greek repertoire, running for about an hour and fifteen minutes, but it contains enough incident for two or three plays of normal length."

⁶⁰Just, op. cit., 275. Taylor and Robert A. Brooks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 3, 6-7. Subsequent references will be indicated by the line number(s).

⁶¹Just, op. cit., 276.

Herakleidai

Two years after Euripides produced *Medea*, he presented *The Children of Herakles*. In stark contrast to *Medea*, Makaria, Herakles' daughter, is everything *Medea* is not. Even Alkmene, Herakles' mother, cannot approach *Medea* in villainy.

Taylor and Brooks say it

is an extraordinary play. . . . It is at once rapid, fabulous, noble and common to the point of comedy. It pursues concepts of deep moral grandeur and perplexity in the environment and often the language of the marketplace, the barracks and the courts. It ends with a denouement of astonishing physical and ethical brutality. . . .

The climate of Athens in the years when the play was produced was an increasingly volatile mixture of bravado, sophistry, rage, and horror at the progress of a vicious conflict [the Peloponnesian War]. . . .

It is one of the shortest plays in the existing Greek repertoire, running for about an hour and fifteen minutes, but it contains enough incident for two or three plays of normal length.⁶²

⁶²Euripides, *The Children of Herakles* Translated and with an introduction by Henry Taylor and Robert A. Brooks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 3, 6-7. Subsequent references will be *Herakleidai* followed by the line number(s).

With the young sons of Herakles⁶³ at his side, Iolaos⁶⁴, their guardian and Herakles' cousin, stands before the temple to Zeus at Marathon. Herakles' mother, Alkmene, is inside with her granddaughters. Iolaos, an old man in frail health, tells Alkmene how Eurystheus continues to hunt Herakles' sons down. He has barely finished his account when Kopreus, Eurystheus' herald, bursts forth and seizes the boys, trying to drag them from the temple altar. He knocks Iolaos down when Iolaos tries to stop himself to the Argives in place of Herakles' sons. The leader of him.

To obtain guidance on how to proceed, Demophon, king of Athens, visits and returns from an oracle which instructs him that a virgin must be sacrificed to assure Athenian success on the battlefield. He refuses to ask one of his subjects to yield his daughter for such a sacrifice. Iolaos, to no avail, offers

⁶³Herakles, son of Alkmene by Zeus, was the expected heir to the throne of Argos and Mykenai since his mother was of the house of Argos and Mykenai. Hera (goddess of childbirth), however, jealous of Zeus's many liaisons, sought revenge by delaying Herakles' birth and hastening that of Eurystheus, his cousin. So instead of becoming king, Herakles became Eurystheus' subject. Eurystheus imposed on Herakles the famous 12 labors to keep him far away and reduce the threat he posed to the legitimacy of his rule. In legend, Herakles died in agony on a pyre in Trachis. Despite Herakles' death, Eurystheus considered his children an equal threat and sought to eliminate them. They fled from him and wandered in exile, seeking refuge with whoever would accept them.

⁶⁴Iolaos identifies himself as "Squire and companion of Herakles" in *Herakleidai*, line 90.

to try to buy off Eurystheus. Makaria⁶⁵ emerges from the temple and offers herself as the sacrifice. She insists on being the victim. Her self-sacrifice proves successful as Eurystheus is captured and later put to death in violation of Athenian law.

IOLAOS:

Yes, provided other things go well.

MAKARIA:

Then you needn't fear the Argives any more.

I'll be your sacrifice. Unforced, of my own free will.

Knowing that he will be killed, Iolaos offers to surrender himself to the Argives in place of Herakles' sons. The leader of the chorus rejects it out of hand. The city would be shamed if it accepted it, he says.⁶⁶ Demophon fears the consequences regardless of which course of action he takes. At this point, Makaria, a girl of about 15, appears:

Strangers, please don't think my coming out is brashness. I ask your pardon. I know that women are honored most for silence, for knowing and keeping their proper place at home.

. . .
I'm not head of this family, I know that.
Still, I should be here. I love my brothers.
I'm here for them. . . .

IOLAOS: Daughter, of all the children of Herakles, it's you I've always admired the most. And how right I was.

. . .
The oracles demand a living human sacrifice, not a bull, no sheep, but a girl, a virgin

⁶⁵Peter Burian finds that "Makaria herself appears entirely without introduction, so we can only infer that she is Heracles' daughter, and are never told her name." Peter Burian, "Euripides' 'Heraclididae': An Interpretation," *Classical Philology*, LXXII, No. 1 (January 1977), 9. Taylor and Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 13, note, "Makaria is not called by her name (it is known only through the list of characters and other sources of the legend), . . ."

⁶⁶Herakleidai, 478-81. 554-557.

of noble birth must be sacrificed to Persephone
 in order to save this city and ourselves. There's no
 other way,
 no way out. . . .

MAKARIA: Then our lives depend
 upon this sacrifice?

IOLAOS: Yes, provided other things go well.

MAKARIA: Then you needn't fear the Argives any more.
 I'll be your sacrifice. Unforced, of my own free will.
 I'll volunteer my life.

[stopping Iolaos's protest] The people of Athens have
 risked their lives for us.

So how can we, who imposed burdens on them
 shrink from dying when by our dying we give them
 life? What could we say in our defense?

Not a word. . . .

What could I say for shame when people ask me
 why I come to them with suppliant branches, imploring
 their help,
 but show a coward's love of life? They'd drive me out,
 saying, "Cowards get no sanctuary here.

And suppose my brothers die, leaving me
 alive, alone, what hope of happiness would I have?
 Many men have sacrificed family and friends
 to their own happiness. I couldn't do it.

Who would want a wife without family or friends?

What man would want my children? Better, far better,
 to die

than live so empty a life. It might suit
 another woman, but it will not do for me.

I am my father's daughter.

I am ready.

Take me to the place of sacrifice,
 wreath my head with garlands, perform your rite.

Then go fight. Fight and win. Of my own free will,
 unforced I give my life. Tell the world

I'm dying for my brothers, I'm dying for myself.

It's not life, not *my* life, that matters.

And knowing that, I've found a better thing
 than life itself, by bravely leaving it.

LEADER: What can I say to such noble words --
 this girl's offer to die for her brothers?
No man could speak so well or act so bravely. [emphasis
 added]⁶⁷

⁶⁷Herakleidai, 517-524, 534-557.

Moved as he is by Makaria's offer, Iolaos suggests "a fairer solution,"⁶⁸ that all of Herakles' daughter draw lots to see which shall be sacrificed. Makaria responds:

I refuse to let my death depend on chance.
It has no grace of freedom. Not another word.
If you accept my offer, if you stand ready
to make use of me, I am ready, of my own free will,
unforced, to give my brothers the gift of my life.

IOLAOS: Dearest child.

Your earlier words were unsurpassable,
but these words surpass them. In bravery,
in generosity, you outdo even yourself. I cannot order
you to die, I can't prevent it. But by dying
you save your brothers' lives.

MAKARIA: You speak wisely.
Don't fear my death will taint you. I die of my own free
will.

But go with me, Iolaos. Be there to hold me
when I die, cover my body with my dress.
My father was Herakles, but I'm still afraid. I need you
there
beside me, Iolaos, when I face the knife.

IOLAOS: I couldn't bear it, standing beside you, watching you die.

MAKARIA: Then ask the king to see to it
that I die with women around me, not men. [emphasis added]

DEMOPHON: Granted. I pity you. It would be disgrace and shame
for me to refuse you these last honors
so clearly required by your generosity, your bravery,
and what is right. I have never seen,
never, a woman of greater courage. . . .

IOLAOS: Generous, courageous girl, you are the noblest
woman I have ever known. [emphasis added] Living and
dying,
you will have our reverence and honor, always. . . .⁶⁹

⁶⁸Herakleidai, 561.

⁶⁹Herakleidai, 566-89, 615-17.

After Makaria submits to the knife, Iolaos mourns and in the lines Euripides assigns him, Iolaos remarks:

- Even as she dies, this girl discovers deathless honor and glory giving her life for her brothers, for us all.
- The glory she leaves behind her will shine forever, as noble actions outshine the darkest pain.
- What she does today is worthy of her birth, **worthy of her father Herakles. . . . [emphasis added]**⁷⁰

Meanwhile, Alkmene, unaware of Makaria's sacrifice, confuses a servant of Hyllos, Herakles' eldest son, with someone who threatens her grandchildren's safety. "I'm a weak old woman, stranger, but I warn you, / touch these children, you'll have to kill me first" ⁷¹ She is no less frail than Iolaos and receives the audience's sympathy. Iolaos assures her that her grandchildren are secure before he determines he will join the Athenian army. "Only a coward would stay here, safe behind walls, while others do our fighting for us," he tells himself. To Alkmene he says, "War is man's work. You mind the young. . . . The Athenians will protect you. Don't be afraid."⁷²

He prays to the gods to give him the strength of his youth so he can successfully confront Eurystheus.⁷³ And the gods grant

⁷⁰Herakleidae, 644-48.

⁷¹Herakleidae, 676-77.

⁷²Herakleidae, 736-38.

⁷³Herakleidae, 766-71.

him the miracle he asks. After the battle, a messenger reports the decisive victory to Alkmene, "We have beaten our enemies, their armor is our trophy."⁷⁴ It is at this time Alkmene learns that Makaria was sacrificed:

. . . and the priests, knowing that battle was inevitable, swiftly sacrificed the victims and drew the human blood whose shedding made our victory certain . . .⁷⁵

and that Iolaos has taken Eurystheus prisoner.⁷⁶

Taylor and Brooks believe "that Euripides invented this incident"⁷⁷ or turn of events. According to legend, Iolaos and Hyllos killed Eurystheus in battle.

Alkmene is outraged that Eurystheus has been taken prisoner:

But why did Iolaos spare Eurystheus' life?
What was his real purpose?

Answer me.

It makes no sense to take your enemy
and not take your revenge.⁷⁸

The leader of the chorus praises the gods for giving Athens

⁷⁴Herakleidae, 803.

⁷⁵Herakleidae, 839-41.

⁷⁶Herakleidae, 890-93. In making the report, the messenger editorializes, "Call no man happy until he dies" which brings to mind the apocryphal account in Herodotus of Solon's similar advice to Croesus, king of Lydia.

⁷⁷Herakleidae, p. 15.

⁷⁸Herakleidae, 910-13.

victory, saying that such a victory was won because Athens allied herself with justice. The full chorus adds:

They say Athena once appeared
and rescued Herakles. And now
in turn, this Athens of the goddess
has saved the sons of Herakles
and mastered a man who chose not justice but violence.
May such passionate ambition never be mine.⁷⁹

The man "who chose not justice but violence" is brought in chains before Alkmene who is told she may gloat over his disgrace.⁸⁰ She snarls:

You're my slave now, I am the master.
... Was any outrage too much for you, monster?
... -- but I can't count out
all your atrocities.
And even that wasn't enough.
You hounded me, you hounded these poor children
all over Hellas. . . .
And now you'll die as you deserve -- a slave's death,
and still come out ahead. You ought to die not once,
but over and over. I want to see you die
one death for every wrong and cruelty you committed.⁸¹

What has occurred here is that Euripides has had Eurystheus trade places with Alkmene. "She is the agent of unbridled violence; he is the intended victim under the protection of the same Athenian state."⁸² Eurytheus, who has been the most menacing source of violence in this play (Kopreus is only his

⁷⁹Herakleidae, 946-51.

⁸⁰Herakleidae, 963-66.

⁸¹Herakleidae, 970, 974, 977-80, 984-87.

⁸²Herakleidae, p. 16.

goon), is suddenly a suppliant under Athens' aegis and Alkmene, in her fury and quest for vengeance, inadvertantly becomes a source of menace to Athens -- or at least the descendants of Athenian characters.

A servant informs her that Athenian law prohibits executing prisoners of war, the wisdom of which Alkmene challenges:

Won't allow it?
 Since when is it wrong to kill your enemies?
 Eurystheus deserves death. He has no right to live.

If that is so, the servant responds, Iolaos should not have taken Eurystheus alive and that no Athenian will execute him, that the polis would condemn anyone who did so.⁸³ Alkmene has only contempt for *aidos*⁸⁴ despite her words and is not to be denied.

She asserts:
 I love this city, who says I don't?
 But now that this man has fallen into my hands, Herakles' no power on earth can take him from me.
 Call me what you like, call me cruel, say I'm more arrogant than a woman ought to be -- but this man *must* die, and I will do it.⁸⁵

⁸³Herakleidai, 992 - 1002.

⁸⁴Sense of restraint from viciousness and impulse to decency which has its roots in the opinions and expectations of the surrounding community, which often goes under the untranslatable Greek term *aidos*.

⁸⁵Herakleidai, 1003-08.

Eurystheus, who has been silent to this point, joins in the conversation and says he won't "beg you for my life"⁸⁶ and asserts that he had no choice but to pursue Herakles' sons because Hera forced him into the "feud."

So,

since I didn't die on the field of battle,
 where I wanted to die, how do matters stand?
 By all Greek law, a prisoner's person is sacred.
 My death defiles my killer, it becomes a curse.
 That was why Athens, wisely, spared me, believing
 in respect for heaven, not mindless revenge.
 You have my answer, woman. Count on it,
 if you kill me, I'll take my revenge on you --
 the noble vengeance of the dead.
 This is how it stands with me: I have no wish to die:
 and no great passion to go on living.⁸⁷

The chorus leader reiterates that Alkmene should respect Athenian law as she seeks a loophole. Eurystheus dares Alkmene to kill him while praising Athens for sparing his life. Let him remain a prisoner until he dies, Eurystheus tells Athens, and bury his corpse "before Athena's shrine at Pallene . . . [and in death] I will keep this city safe, forever. . . ."⁸⁸ Herakles' descendants will forget that Athens protected and preserved his sons, Eurystheus prophesies, but his spirit will protect Athens when they invade.

Alkmene twists his words and says that Eurystheus' immediate

⁸⁶Herakleidai, 1012.

⁸⁷Herakleidai, 1036-1047.

⁸⁸Herakleidai, 1065, 1067.

death will assure Athens' safety. If he's killed immediately, his spirit can begin its mission while he remains a threat as long as he remains alive inside the city. Athens washes its hands of Eurystheus -- "By our actions here, /our kings are innocent"⁸⁹ -- and hands him over to Alkmene.

The goddess of love, Aphrodite, asserts her power over all of humanity and declares she will bring down Hippolytus, a pious young man devoted to Artemis, chaste goddess of the hunt. Hippolytus, the illegitimate son of Theseus and an Amazon, believes himself immune to womankind and would ignore the sex. Because the Greeks did not value chastity except in their citizen women, Hippolytus must become a devotee of Artemis -- there is no male divinity he can serve in a like manner. Some of his dialogue is misogyny at its most eloquent -- assuming praise of bigotry can be eloquent. Aphrodite uses Phaedra, Theseus' wife and Hippolytus' stepmother, as her instrument of destruction to ruin Hippolytus by causing her to fall in love with her stepson. Phaedra is distraught at her sexual attraction to Hippolytus and confides her feelings in a (slave) nurse. Rather than act on her feelings, Phaedra determines to die by starving herself.

⁸⁹Artemis tells Theseus that Hippolytus was "the man I loved most among all mortals." *Greek Drama, Hippolytus*, p. 253.

⁹⁰"As Hippolytus lays dying, Artemis says of Aphrodite, "She was aggrieved for the womanship she missed: she hated you for your chastity." -- *Hippolytus*, p. 254.

⁹¹Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), p. 5.

⁹²Herakleidae, 1089-90.

Hippolytos

The goddess of love, Aphrodite, asserts her power over all of humanity and declares she will bring down Hippolytos, a prissy young man devoted to Artemis,¹ chaste goddess of the hunt. Hippolytos, the illegitimate son of Theseus and an Amazon, believes himself immune to womankind and would ignore the sex.² Because the Greeks did not value chastity except in their citizen women, Hippolytos must become a devotee of Artemis -- there is no male divinity he can serve in a like manner.³ Some of his dialogue is misogyny at its most eloquent -- assuming praise of bigotry can be eloquent. Aphrodite uses Phaedra, Theseus' wife and Hippolytos' stepmother, as her instrument of destruction to ruin Hippolytos by causing her to fall in love with her stepson. Phaedra is distraught at her sexual attraction to Hippolytos and confides her feelings in a (slave) nurse. Rather than act on her feelings, Phaedra determines to die by starving herself.

¹Artemis tells Theseus that Hippolytus was "the man I loved most among all mortals." *Greek Drama, Hippolytus*, p. 253.

²As Hippolytus lays dying, Artemis says of Aphrodite, "She was aggrieved for the worship she missed; she hated you for your chastity." -- *Hippolytus*, p. 254.

³Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 5.

Concerned for her mistress' health, the devoted nurse approaches Hippolytos to determine if he might also be attracted to Phaedra. She is none too subtle and Hippolytos, horrified at the thought of sex,⁴ is even more offended and insulted at the thought of the nurse as a would-be procurer of incest: "So you, sorry wretch, come to me to procure incest in my father's bed."⁵ Her secret revealed, Phaedra hangs herself but first leaves behind a note accusing Hippolytos of having made advances toward her.

Theseus, absent from the play to this point -- he has been away on a trip -- returns to find his wife dead and the note she left. He finds it credible and, through Poseidon, puts a curse on Hippolytos (and later berates him upon meeting him). The gods, offended by Hippolytos' disrespect for his father, cause him to die in a terrible accident -- he is trampled to death by his horses as he rides into exile. Artemis appears *deus ex machina* to absolve Hippolytos and promises that one day she will return the favor to Aphrodite by ruining one of her adherents.

⁴Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit. 5, observes: Hippolytus was a devotee of Artemis, not only because of his mother's influence but especially because chastity was not found among male divinities. For the Greeks, chastity was a virtue only in women. Thus a youth like Hippolytus, who valued chastity [in himself as well as in women], was forced to worship this quality in a female divinity."

⁵Hippolytus, p. 238.

"*Hippolytus*," writes G.M.A. Grube, "is perhaps the greatest of all the extant plays. Its structure is quite unusually excellent; every part of it, prologos, choral odes and exodos blend into an almost perfect unity; the gods are intimately bound with the human drama and significant throughout."⁶

Phaedra is a different kind of heroine from Euripides' other women. She has all the frailties of her sex with few of its strengths and she represents the woman with a huge sexual appetite that Greek men believed their women had. Roger Just believes Phaedra incapable of controlling her feelings for Hippolytos despite her extraordinary efforts to keep her lust in check. She "is driven to the point of madness by love for Hippolytos," he writes. "Phaedra's susceptibility to eros and the plot she contrives conform to the stereotype of feminine character and action"⁷ held by most Greek men. "Hippolytus is an appealing young man," asserts Moses Hadas, "but objectionable in his priggishness. . . . He himself labored under the stigma of illegitimacy, which in the Athens of Euripides' day, imposed certain disabilities on a man."⁸ (Hippolytos was the son of Theseus and an Amazon. He could not be his father's heir because of his illegitimacy.) So the excerpts from the dialogue reflect

⁶G.M.A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1941), 177.

⁷Roger Just, op. cit., 237.

⁸*Greek Drama*, op. cit., 222.

the all too common shortcomings of both men and women uncertain and/or confused about their sexual feelings. They also reflect the conventional wisdom about women which Euripides holds up for examination such as Phaedra's comment, "Besides, I realized full well that I was that object of universal detestation, a Woman."⁹ Euripides also seems to include more than the usual bromides in the dialogue of this play such as, ". . . it takes absence to make your heart grow fonder," ". . . there is no rest for the weary," "Man is made to mourn," "O Misery, man's daily bread!" and "According to success do we gain a reputation for judgment."¹⁰

The nurse tells Phaedra, trying to comfort her, as she starves herself into a coma: "Good people fall in love with evil -- despite their good intentions."¹¹ To which Phaedra responds in part:

. . . I thought it the best plan -- none will gainsay me -- to die. . . . To own the passion, I knew, would be no less disgraceful than if I gratified it. Besides, I realized full well I was that object of universal detestation, a Woman. A foul curse on the woman who first committed adultery with strange men! It was from noble families that this evil first started, and when shameful things seem to be approved by the fashionable, then the common people will surely think them correct. Those women who talk chastity, but secretly have their disreputable affairs, I hate. . . .

There you have my reason for killing myself: the desire to spare my husband and my children that shame. Free in

⁹Hippolytus, p. 233.

¹⁰Hippolytus, p. 228, p. 228, p. 228, p. 232, p. 239.

¹¹Hippolytus, p. 232.

fact and free in speech may they live and flourish in illustrious Athens, glorious in their mother! . . .¹²

To die for love is foolish, the nurse responds, not knowing whom Phaedra loves. (She knows it's not Theseus but is ignorant at this point that it's Hippolytus.) Better to make a life with someone you love than remain in a loveless marriage, the nurse advises:

. . . Will you throw your life away because of love? Little will it profit those who are or will ever be in love with others if they have to die for it. You cannot withstand Cypris [another name for Aphrodite] if she rushes upon you full tilt. . . .

Will you not yield? Your father ought to have begotten you by special arrangement, or with different gods for masters, if you will not acquiesce in the present dispensation. How many men, and very sensible men too, do you think look the other way when their wives are unfaithful? How many fathers, do you think, play pander to their own amorous sons? The wise men of the world hold this principle: Don't notice what you don't like. . . .

Have the courage to love: a god has willed it. Some remedy for this affliction will turn up. **Believe me, men would be slow making discoveries if we women did not contrive devices.** [emphasis added]¹³

Though she would like to accept her nurse's rationalization, Phaedra replies that "eloquence should promote virtue."¹⁴ The nurse is not to be rebuffed so easily and chides Phaedra on her easy virtue:

¹²Hippolytus, p. 233. Also see note to line 671 in Ion for a fuller discussion of this phrase, "Free in fact and free in speech . . ."

¹³Hippolytus, 234-35.

¹⁴Hippolytus, p. 235.

... With all speed we must determine the *man's* feelings. He must be told the blunt truth about you. If you had not got your affairs into this tangle, if you had been a really good woman, I should never have urged you to this course, merely to gratify your lust. But now the struggle is to save your life, and there's no disgrace in that.¹⁵

Despite her admonition not to approach Hippolytos, the nurse disobeys Phaedra and informs him of Phaedra's feelings. Hippolytos is outraged and creates a scene. Phaedra, outside in the courtyard, hears the commotion and goes to the door to listen inside:

I am ruined. Stand at the door here [she tells the chorus leader] and listen to the brawl going on indoors.

The horse-loving Amazon's son, Hippolytus, is shouting. He is saying dreadful things to my maid.

... He is calling her a pander of sin, a betrayer of her master's bed.

LEADER: O Misery! You are betrayed, my dear. How can I counsel you? Your secret is out; you are utterly ruined. . . . Betrayed by your friends.¹⁶

The nurse tries to control the damage she has done, reminding Hippolytos that she approached him in confidence and he swore to honor that confidence. The nature of the information she provided releases him from his oath, Hippolytos answers: "My tongue swore, my mind is unsworn."¹⁷ Would he cause a death in his own family? the nurse asks. "No unjust person can be 'my

¹⁵Hippolytus, p. 235.

¹⁶Hippolytus, p. 237.

¹⁷Hippolytus, p. 237.

own.'," he spits back.¹⁸

NURSE: Be charitable. To err is human, child.

HIPPOLYTOS: Zeus! Why did you let women settle in this world of light, a curse and a snare to men? If you wished to propagate the human race you should have arranged it without women. Men might have deposited in your temples gold or iron or a weight of copper to purchase offspring, each to the value of the price he paid, and so lived in free houses, relieved of womankind. Here is proof that woman is a great nuisance. The father who begot her and brought her up pays a great dowry to get her out of his house and be rid of the plague. The man who receives the poisonous weed into his home rejoices and adds beautiful decorations to the useless ornament and tricks her out in gowns -- poor fool, frittering away the family property. He is under constraint: if his in-laws are good people he must keep his cheerless bed; if his spouse is agreeable but her relatives useless, the evil he must accept oppresses the good. **Happiest is he who has a cipher for a wife,** [emphasis added] a useless simpleton to sit at home. A clever woman I hate; may there never be in my house a woman more intellectual than a woman ought to be. Mischief is hatched by Cypris in clever women; the helpless kind is kept from misconduct by the shortness of her wit. No maids should be allowed near a wife; beasts that can bite but cannot talk should be their only company in the house so they could neither address anyone or receive speech in return. As it is, vile women weave their vile schemes within, and the maids carry word outdoors. . . .

Let people say I am always harping on the same theme. Still I shall never tire of hating women. For that matter, they never tire of wickedness.

. . .¹⁹

After listening to Hippolytos' tirade, Phaedra realizes (not that she had doubt before) that she is lost. She will commit suicide since death will cleanse her of some, if not all,

¹⁸Hippolytus, p. 237.

¹⁹Hippolytus, p. 238-39.

dishonor. She is extremely angry with her maid ("Vilest of vile women, ruin of your friends, what have you done to me! . . .²⁰) and, repelled by Hippolytos' hatred, she resolves to even the score:

But I need a new scheme[, she tells the nurse]. That man's heart is whetted with rage: he will blame me to Theseus for your mistakes.²¹

Her scheme is writing a letter to Theseus accusing Hippolytos of trying to rape her for which she, in her shame and horror, felt compelled to hang herself.²²

Theseus arrives home to learn his household has just found his wife's corpse, that she committed suicide. He orders his servants to take him to her room "that I may see the bitter spectacle of my wife, who by her death has ruined me." And, after reading the note she left behind, he reacts, "You have forsaken me, forsaken me, O dearest and best of women whom the light of the sun and the starry radiance of night behold!"²³

²⁰Hippolytus, p. 239.

²¹Hippolytus, p. 239.

²²The chorus intones, ". . . The royal lady no longer lives. She is caught in the swinging noose." Hippolytus, p. 241.

²³Hippolytus, p. 241, p. 242.

Andromache

*Andromache*²⁴ was first produced between 430 and 424 and may have been inspired by a Spartan atrocity in the early years of the Peloponnesian War. If so, John Frederick Nims believes it was the massacre of the Platean prisoners in 427.²⁵ One of the earliest commentators who annotated the play wrote that *Andromache* was not performed in Athens. Nims thinks it was presented as part of an anti-Spartan propaganda campaign in either Argos or Epirus.

All critics agree it is not one of Euripides' better efforts and that its shortcomings make it somewhat difficult to understand. Moreover seems to be a considerable gap in the play which could account for the discontinuity. Regardless, part of its significance lies in the fact that Euripides held the sexual double standard up to scrutiny. Observes Pomeroy, "He is the first author we know of to look at this topic from both the woman's and the man's point of view. Many husbands are

²⁴Euripides, *Andromache* translated by John Frederick Nims and with an introduction by the translator in *Euripides, The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume III, op. cit., pp. 556-605. Subsequent references will be "*Andromache* followed by the line number(s)."

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 556.

adulterous."²⁶ Greek men feared their wives would be if they gave rein to their supposed passions. As indicated in the dialogue in the summary below ("O dearest Hector, for your sake I even . . ."), Andromache accepts her late husband's adultery but the dialogue is less than persuasive to late 20th century American ears.

At the play's opening, Andromache, as Hector's widow, is a prize of war whom Neoptolemus has claimed as his concubine. A fellow woman slave approaches her to commiserate and offer what support she can. Andromache is wary of her, suspecting she might be a spy for Hermione, Neoptolemus' wife. Even so, Andromache asks her to carry a message seeking help or a rescue outside the estate. The fellow slave says it could be difficult to leave the grounds. "Don't tell me you're no bag of tricks. A woman!"²⁷ (emphasis added) Andromache responds.

Slightly shamed, the woman agrees to carry out Andromache's message, explaining, "What's my life that I should care/ What happens now? A slave's life, and a woman's."²⁸ (emphasis added) Later Hermione approaches Andromache -- and (one hears echoes of Jason in *Medea*) to pour scorn on her:

²⁶Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 110.

²⁷*Andromache*, 85.

²⁸*Andromache*, 89-90.

You! You common slave! You soldier's winnings!
 You plan to usurp this house evicting me!
 Your drugs have made me unlovely to my husband;
 Withered my womb and left it good for nothing.
 This is the sort of thing you Asian women
 Have tricky wits for. . . .

You're in Greece now.
 Of the very man who killed your husband, breeding
 A butcher's children. Well, **that's foreigners for you.**
Father and daughter intimate, mother and son,
Sister and brother -- murder clears the way
In a family squabble. Anything goes. No law.
 [emphasis added]
 Don't try those methods here. . . .²⁹

Andromache returns Hermione's insults with her own sarcasm and enquires why she thinks she (Andromache) would want to bear Neoptolemus children, "slaves every one, like millstones dragging after me?"³⁰ Andromache even brings up the subject of sexual desire and here Euripides reflects the conventional wisdom his contemporaries held about the libidos of men and women. Of women's sexual desires, Andromache opines, "Disgraceful! Well, we women are infected/ With a worse disease than men, but try to conceal it."³¹ However, she endorses the double standard, recalling:

O dearest Hector, for your sake I even
 Welcomed your loves, when Cypris sent you fumbling.
 I was wet nurse to your bastards many a time
 Only to make your life easier.
 And for such conduct he approved and loved me.³²

²⁹Andromache, 155-60, 169-77.

³⁰Andromache, 200.

³¹Andromache, 220-21.

³²Andromache, 222-26.

and suggests Hermione could learn from her example when she was a member of Troy's royal family. Angered, Hermione trades insults with Andromache.

HERMIONE: ... Love's all in all to women.

ANDROMACHE: And should be: virtuous love. The other's foul.

HERMIONE: Here we don't live by your outlandish standards.

ANDROMACHE: Shameful is shameful everywhere, Greece or not Greece.

HERMIONE: We've a deep thinker here. Not long to live, though.³³

After further sparring, Hermione leaves Andromache who thinks to herself:

My one hope now! Some god found antidotes
 Against all poisonous snakes, but -- wonder of wonders! --
 Against a menace worse than fire or vipers
 No vaccine yet: **I mean these vicious women.**
Who knows the trouble we cause the human race! [emphasis
 added]³⁴

Shortly afterward, Menelaos, with Andromache's son in tow, approaches her. If she fails to leave Neoptolemus' property, he says, he will kill her son because of the injury she did his daughter. Andromache berates him for threatening a woman so helpless:

You, for the mewlings of your darling daughter
 Come snorting so importantly up in arms
 Against a woman already down, in bondage.
 Troy's story had no role for the likes of you!
 People that seem so glorious are all show;

³³Andromache, 241-45.

³⁴Andromache, 269-73.

Underneath they're like anyone else.
Unless they have money, of course. Oh money's something!³⁵

Then she taunts him by asking who would marry Hermione after Menelaos killed her. After all, Andromache asserts, Neoptolemus would divorce Hermione if Menelaos killed her. And Hermione's new husband would be just as craven as his wife. Andromache points out, "And just because we women are prone to evil,/ What's to be gained perverting man to match? [sic]"³⁶

The chorus steps in at this point to advise Andromache, "That's quite enough from a female dealing with men./ I'd say your righteousness had gone the limit."³⁷ So Menelaos gets the last word and observes, "All other woes a woman bears are minor/ But lose her husband! Might as well be dead. . . ."³⁸

Andromache knows she is in a trap from which there is no escape, that she's lost regardless of which alternative she chooses. She surrenders to Menelaos "to mangle, murder, bind, hang by the neck."³⁹ And he orders his escort to seize and bind her. "I'll teach you, slave,/ To attempt assault and battery on

³⁵Andromache, 327-32.

³⁶Andromache, 353-54.

³⁷Andromache, 364-65.

³⁸Andromache, 371-72.

³⁹Andromache, 412.

your betters."⁴⁰ Too late Andromache realizes that Menelaos intends that both she and her son will die and curses Menelaos's treachery. He feigns indifference and tells Andromache that her son's fate is up to Hermione.

Andromache states she is not afraid to die: "I died before/ When my poor town in Phrygia was stricken . . ." and taunts Menelaos as a "Fine figure of a hero now. You threaten/ Death to a woman. Strike. . . ." But Menelaos is not ready to kill Andromache and her son yet. He binds her hands tightly together as she and her son prepare themselves for death.

Nonetheless, Menelaos relents and with a braggadocio dares anyone to stop him from untying Andromache's bonds. He exits leaving Andromache and her son alone with Peleus. He comforts her and admonishes, "Let's have no womanish tremors any more."⁴²

Meanwhile, back inside the house, Hermione is upset by the day's events but more for the embarrassment than for the evil she wanted done. She went so far as to twice attempt suicide. Says a nurse (slave):

The queen in the house there, poor Hermione,
Left in the lurch by her father, and knowing now

⁴⁰Andromache, 433-34.

⁴¹Andromache, 454-55, 458-59.

⁴²Andromache, 757.

What a heinous thing it was to attempt the murder
 Of Andromache and the youngster, wants to die --
 Afraid of her husband, afraid she'll be ordered out
 Of the house for what she did (think of the scandal!)
 Or killed for threatening lives not hers to take.
 Her bodyguard barely managed to restrain her
 From knotting the rope on her neck, then barely, managed
 To wrestle the sword from her hand in the nick of time.
 It's clear now she acted badly, badly;
 She's all remorse. . . .⁴³

Hermione feels compelled to ask the nurse, "Should I supplicate?

What shrine's for me/ **Should I fall like a slave at a slave's
 knee? . . .**"⁴⁴ [emphasis added] She'll escape her predicament,
 the nurse assures her: "Your husband won't repudiate your
 marriage/ Like this, **on the mere complaint of a foreigner.**"⁴⁵
 [emphasis added]

The chorus announces Orestes' arrival at Neoptolemus' house.

He was in the area and thought he'd stop by and see how his
 cousin Hermione is, he explains. -- only grief."

ORESTES: You have no children -- so no trouble that way.
 What else goes wrong for a woman -- except her
 marriage?

HERMIONE: What else indeed? You've put your finger on it.

ORESTES: You mean your husband loves another woman?

HERMIONE: He's sleeping with Hector's wife, that battle trophy.

ORESTES: One man; two loves. No good ever comes of that.

HERMIONE: That's how it was. I acted in self-defense.

⁴³Andromache, 804-15.

⁴⁴Andromache, 858-59. 825-30, 828-46, 852-53.

⁴⁵Andromache, 869-70.

ORESTES: Scheming against your rival, as women do?

HERMIONE: I wanted to see her dead, her and her bastard! . . .⁴⁶

Orestes allows that Hermione has excellent reason to fear what her husband could do should he learn of Menelaos' actions.

Hermione agrees:

his . . . He's within his rights to kill me.

What's there to say? . . .

All Phthia hates me. If my husband comes

Home from Apollo's oracle while I'm here

He'll kill me on foul charges. Or I'll be a slave

In the bastard-blooming chambers I was queen of.

"How did you fall so low?" someone may marvel.

Visits of poisonous women were my downfall. . . .

Oh why, oh why

Did I spy on my husband, having all I wanted?

Money more than enough. Control of the household.

The children I'd have had fully legitimate,

Hers illegitimate, half-slaves to mine.

Oh never, never -- I can't say this too often --

Should a man with any sense, having taken a wife,

Let other women come and buzz around her.

What are they but teachers of delinquency? . . .

For not one wholesome thing has ever come

From gadabout female callers -- only grief.⁴⁷

The chorus takes Hermione to task for taking liberties in talking about her own sex but says her feelings are understandable. "But women should," advises the chorus, "Paint womanly vices in more flattering colors."⁴⁸

⁴⁶Andromache, 904-12.

⁴⁷Andromache, 920-21, 925-30, 938-46, 952-53.

⁴⁸Andromache, 955-56.

Orestes offers to take Hermione away and shelter her, should she wish to go with him. She accepts and observes, "About my marriage, it's not for me to decide. This whole affair is in my father's hands. . . ." ⁴⁹ Orestes explains that his primary reason for visiting her house is to set an ambush to kill her husband for his role in the effort to kill Orestes for killing his mother, Clytemnestra.

Peleus reappears to enquire about Hermione and learns that she has left with Orestes because she fears her husband and possible exile. Peleus asks, "On account of her cutthroat tactics toward the boy?" The chorus answers, "Exactly. And in terror of the slave woman." What reason did Orestes have for removing Hermione, Peleus asks, "meaning to marry her?" ⁵⁰

"Meaning that and worse than that," the chorus responds, "to kill your grandson." ⁵¹ Peleus is concerned whether Neoptolemus will have a chance to defend himself in a fair fight when a messenger arrives to announce that his grandson has died in an ambush at the oracle of Delphi. Following the messenger is a troop carrying Neoptolemus' body. Peleus can only lament, "Marriage, O Marriage, you ruined this house of mine."

⁴⁹ *Andromache*, 987-88.

⁵⁰ *Andromache*, 1058-59, 1062.

⁵¹ *Andromache*, 1063.

The goddess Thetis appears *deus ex machina* to announce that Andromache will go to Molossia and marry Helenus, that her son by Neoptolemus will be the progenitor of the kings of Molossia, and that she, Thetis, will transform Peleus into a "divinity forever."⁵²

*Hecuba*⁵³ is a tale of an embittered woman severely wronged who achieves a bloody revenge. The embittered woman is Hecuba, widow of Prius, king of Troy, just after the city has fallen and the survivors have either been put to the sword or enslaved. *Hecuba* is the first of Euripides' "war plays"⁵⁴ and the horrors and despair of being on the losing side are brought home to the audience. Arrowsmith assesses the play "as a moving and powerful one, a taut, bitter little tragedy between those who hold power and those who suffer it."⁵⁵ It is that -- and much more.

The play consists of two separate but loosely connected events: the discovery of the corpse of Polydorus, youngest son of Prius and Hecuba who was sent to Thracian King Polymester for protection while Troy was under siege, and the ritual sacrifice

⁵³Euripides, *Hecuba* translated and with an introduction by William Arrowsmith in: David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, editors, *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies* Volume III (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1959, 1969), pp. 488-554. Subsequent references to the introduction will be "Arrowsmith, op. cit., p. --" while references to the play will be "*Hecuba*, followed by the line numbers."

⁵⁴Oates and O'Neill op. cit., I, 695.

⁵²*Andromache*, 1255. ll., 489.

Hecuba

*Hecuba*⁵³ is a tale of an embittered woman severely wronged who achieves a bloody revenge. The embittered woman is Hecuba, widow of Priam, king of Troy, just after the city has fallen and the survivors have either been put to the sword or enslaved.

Hecuba is the first of Euripides' "war plays"⁵⁴ and the horrors and despair of being on the losing side are brought home to the audience. Arrowsmith assesses the play "as a moving and powerful one, a taut, bitter little tragedy between those who hold power and those who suffer it."⁵⁵ It is that -- and much more.

The play consists of two separate but loosely connected events: the discovery of the corpse of Polydorus, youngest son of Priam and Hecuba who was sent to Thracian king Polymestor for protection while Troy was under siege, and the ritual sacrifice

⁵³Euripides, *Hecuba* translated and with an introduction by William Arrowsmith in: David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, editors, *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies* Volume III (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1959, 1969), pp. 488-554. Subsequent references to the introduction will be "Arrowsmith, op. cit., p. --" while references to the play will be "*Hecuba*, followed by the line numbers."

⁵⁴Oates and O'Neill op. cit., I, 805.

⁵⁵Arrowsmith, op. cit., 489.

of Polyxena, daughter of Priam and Hecuba, on the grave of Achilles. Everything Hecuba has lived for has turned to ashes. She is a slave (of Agamemnon, no less) and all her family is either dead or enslaved. Despite her efforts, Hecuba can only accept the sacrifice of Polyxena. However, she can plot and does execute her revenge against Polymestor by killing him. She sends him a letter saying she needs his cooperation to recover Trojan buried treasure and instructing him to bring his young sons with him. He does and she achieves her revenge.

The women in this play, as the excerpted dialogue shows, display many of the strengths and weaknesses that men possess and the high intelligence, cunning and articulateness Hecuba puts to use in luring Polymestor and avenging Polydorus' death is surely the equal of Odysseus. In *Hecuba*, Euripides has Odysseus recall that he successfully entered Troy on an espionage mission and escaped only because of Hecuba's pity for him.

Her husband slain and her daughter humiliated, Hecuba collapses and bemoans her fate, ". . . I live but live a slave, forced to a foreign land. . . ." ⁵⁶ Hecuba is more concerned about the manner in which Polyxena died. Talthybius admits he "was crying when your daughter died" ⁵⁷ because of the nobility and serenity of her death which he describes in great detail.

⁵⁶*Hecuba*, 480-81.

⁵⁷*Hecuba*, 519.

After the Trojan women leave to fetch Polyxena's body for burial, Hecuba learns another piece of crushing news -- that the corpse of Polydorus has washed ashore. His mutilated body, wrapped in a shroud, is brought to her.⁵⁸ Hecuba realizes that the man to whom she and Priam entrusted their youngest son has murdered him ("Murdered by a friend? Killed for gold?" Coryphaeus asks in wonder.⁵⁹) and cast his body into the sea.

As the Trojan women grieve over this latest blow to Hecuba, Agamemnon approaches them to learn why they have not recovered Polyxena. He sees the corpse of Polydorus and asks why it's there. Hecuba asks herself:

O gods, what shall I do?

Throw myself

at his knees and beg for mercy or hold my tongue

and suffer in silence?⁶⁰

Recognizing she has nothing to lose, she beseeches Agamemnon to help her. At first he thinks she is asking for her freedom which he would quickly give her: "Your freedom is yours for the asking."⁶¹

⁵⁸Hecuba, 679.

⁵⁹Hecuba, 713.

⁶⁰Hecuba, 736-38.

⁶¹Hecuba, 754-55.

"No, not freedom. Revenge," she answers. "Only give me revenge and I'll gladly stay a slave the rest of my life."⁶²

Agamemnon still doesn't understand and Hecuba, falling to her knees, explains.

AGAMEMNON: I pity you, Hecuba. Your suffering has no end.

HECUBA: I died long ago. Nothing can touch me now.

AGAMEMNON: What woman on this earth was ever cursed like this?

Agamemnon is bewildered as the powerless Hecuba threatens him.

How can she possibly achieve revenge with his at best passive support? The he turns incredulous as she states her court -- all

women -- will work with her. Agamemnon is incredulous, "But

women? Women overpower men?"⁶³

Women individually may be weak, says Hecuba, but collectively they can act with strength and

cunning makes us strong. . . .

Women killed

Aegyptus' sons. Women emptied Lemnos

of its males: we murdered every one. And so

it shall be here. . . .⁶⁴

The women succeed in luring Polymestor into the tent where they blind him and slay his sons. Polymestor reels from the tent and Hecuba tells Coryphaeus:

⁶²Hecuba, 755-57.

⁶³Hecuba, 881-82.

⁶⁴Hecuba, 883, 886-87.

Watch him as he stumbles and staggers out of the tent, stone-blind. See the bodies of his sons, **killed by my women and me.** [emphasis added] His debt is paid and I have my revenge. . . .⁶⁵

Polymestor's yells that **"Women have killed my sons** [emphasis added] . . ."⁶⁶ bring Agamemnon to the tent to learn what has happened. He informs the Greek king he was lured into the tent and attacked.

. . . I fought to free my arms. but they swamped me and I went down beneath a flood of women, . . . they crowned their hideous work with worse outrage, the most inhuman brutal crime of all. They lifted their brooches and stabbed these bleeding eyes through and through! . . .

This is my reward, Agamemnon, for my efforts in disposing of your enemies. What I suffer now I suffer for you. One more word. On behalf of all those dead who learned their hatred of women long ago, for those who hate them now, for those unborn who shall hate them yet, I now declare my firm conviction: neither earth nor ocean produces a creature as savage and monstrous as woman. This is my experience. I know it to be true.⁶⁷

Coryphaeus advises Polymestor not to presume that all women are alike, not to lump them all together. And Hecuba pleads the justice of her actions, noting greed and opportunism motivated Polymestor, not what he told Agamemnon. The Greek king convicts the Thracian king:

⁶⁵Hecuba, 1050-53.

⁶⁶Hecuba, 1095.

⁶⁷Hecuba, 1167-83.

I find you guilty of murder as charged.
 You murdered your ward, killed him in cold blood,
 and not, as you assert, for the Greeks or me,
 but out of simple greed . . .
 You committed a brutal crime; therefore accept
 the consequences of your act.⁶⁸

Polymestor can reply only, "Oh gods, condemned. Defeated by a woman, by a slave!" [emphasis added]⁶⁹

The Suppliant Women is based on the myth of what happened in the immediate aftermath of the war between Oedipus' sons, Eteocles and Polynices, upon the death of their father. The women are the mothers of the men of Seven Against Thebes who are forbidden to perform funeral rites and bury their sons whose corpses remain outside the city walls. The corpses lie there in violation of Greek law and religion, so bitter are the Thebans. Eteocles and Polynices had claimed the kingship of Thebes and led armies against each other, one seeking the crown, the other trying to keep it. But it was Creon who succeeded to the throne after the brothers killed each other on the field of battle. Being more "concerned with the sufferings war brings to civilians," Euripides was indifferent to the brothers' claims or the merits of their dispute.

⁶⁸Euripides, *The Suppliant Women*, translated and with an introduction by Frank William Jones in David Crane and Richmond Lattimore, editors, *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume IV (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 132-3. Subsequent references will be "Suppliants," followed by line numbers.

⁶⁸Hecuba, 1243-45, 1251-52.

⁶⁹Hecuba, 1251-52. n *Suppliants* introduction, 132.

*The Suppliant Women*¹

The Suppliant Women is based on the myth of what happened in the immediate aftermath of the war between Oedipus' sons, Eteocles and Polynices, upon the death of their father. The women are the mothers of the men of *Seven Against Thebes* who are forbidden to perform funeral rites and bury their sons whose corpses remain outside the city walls. The corpses lie there in violation of Greek law and religion, so bitter are the Thebans. Eteocles and Polynices had claimed the kingship of Thebes and led armies against each other, one seeking the crown, the other trying to keep it. But it was Creon who succeeded to the throne after the brothers killed each other on the field of battle. Being more "concerned with the sufferings war brings to civilians,"² Euripides was indifferent to the brothers' claims or the merits of their dispute.

¹Euripides, *The Suppliant Women*, translated and with an introduction by Frank William Jones in David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, editors, *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume IV (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959, 1969), pp. 132-84. Subsequent references will be "Suppliants," followed by the line number(s)."

²Jones, op. cit, in *Suppliants* introduction, 132.

The women of the play assume a weak posture but possess an inner strength and nobility most of the men lack, especially Adrastus, lord of Argos. Even Theseus is not enthusiastic about confronting Creon. Because the women are unified and have a unity of purpose, they feel all the more frustrated by the men's stalling and equivocation. This play has little action; it's more a staged discussion that relates the suffering that war brings to the soldiers' families. At the end, after Adrastus and Theseus have resolved matters as best they can, Athena appears *deus ex machina*.

The women come across as piteous and deserving of the audience's sympathy. But none is really developed as was Medea, Hecuba in *Hecuba* or Helen in *Helen*. So when Evadne, widow of Capaneus (one of the *Seven Against Thebes*) throws herself onto the funeral pyre to join her husband, the scene has all the more impact. While women make up the chorus, the men have the majority of the lines. After all, it's the men who must discuss what to allow the women. When a woman is assigned a line, she usually comes across as two-dimensional. Nonetheless, the women, in their own way, are portrayed as being as intelligent as the men (if not more so) and certainly nobler.

¹Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, translated by Moses Hadas and J. McLean in *Greek Drama*, op. cit., pp. 257-97. Subsequent references will be "Trojan Women" followed by the page number(s).

²*Greek Drama*, op. cit., 256.

The Trojan Women

*The Trojan Women*³ was inspired by the Athenian massacre of Melos in 416 during which the Athenian soldiers put all of Melos' men to the sword and enslaved its women and children. It was an atrocity on a scale rare in classical Greece and all the more horrifying because Melos, wishing to remain neutral in the war between Athenian- and Spartan-led forces, had refused Athens' demand that she side with her. Hadas remarks, "It is an index of Athenian liberalism that such a play could be presented, under state auspices, at such a time [415]."⁴

As the play opens, the widows, daughters and young sons of the men who fell defending Troy stand before its smoldering walls, unsure what will happen to them in slavery, unsure whether they will be allowed to live. The group includes Hecuba, Cassandra, Andromache, Helen and Astynax. Polyxena, Poseidon narrates in the opening scene, has already been sacrificed on Achilles' grave. As the play progresses, the Greeks inflict wanton cruelty upon wanton cruelty, driving them further into

³Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, translated by Moses Hadas and J. McLean in *Greek Drama*, op. cit., pp. 257-87. Subsequent references will be "*Trojan Women* followed by the page number(s)."

⁴*Greek Drama*, op. cit., 256.

despair and toward insanity. They have no hope and no reason to hope.

Euripides acutely portrays the helplessness and lack of control women have over their own lives. They are given no opportunity to display whatever intelligence, shrewdness or cunning they may possess, so constricted are their circumstances. They can only seek mercy, a scarce commodity in the victors' camp. And their situation compels them to pretend things are not as they are in their efforts to preserve their sanity, if not their sense of decency. So we see Hecuba becoming a procuress for her own daughter, pretending not to, while the daughter, Cassandra, would believe that she will become Agamemnon's bride, not his concubine.

In a question that reflects men's belief about women's emotional volatility, Poseidon asks, "Why do you jump like this from mood to mood and rush to excesses of hate and love?"⁵ Because of the insult she received from Ajax when he violently abducted Cassandra, one of her priestesses, from a temple devoted to her, Athena tells him. Further, the Greeks took steps neither to punish Ajax nor encourage him to atone. Poseidon agrees to make the Greeks' voyage home stormy and dangerous.

⁴Trojan Women, p. 260.

⁵Trojan Women, p. 260.

⁶Trojan Women, p. 259.

Hecuba, who has been lying on the ground, rises and begins to speak, bemoaning her situation:

. . . Alas! I weep. And why may I not weep in misery? My country is lost, my children, my husband. . . .

What a sorry bed on which I lay my sorry, weary limbs, lying stretched on my back, in a hard, hard couch! Oh, my head, my temples, my sides! . . .

O prows of ships, to the horrid call of the trumpet and the loud scream of the fifes you came on swift oars over the purple brine, across the safe seas of Hellas to sacred Ilium, and in bay of Troy (alas) you dropped your cable ropes, produce of Egypt. You came to fetch Menelaus' loathsome wife, that affront to Castor, that scandal of Eurotas. It is she who murdered the father of fifty sons and grounded me on these sorry shoals of disaster.

Ah me! Here I sit, a sorry seat, beside the tents of Agamemnon. They carry me off to slavery, an old woman like me, my poor head laid bare by sorrow's cutting edge. . . .⁶

The chorus leader asks Hecuba why she is lamenting so loudly, because "shuddering fear grips the hearts of the Trojan women within, who are bemoaning their slavery."⁷ Hecuba says she knows nothing but expects the worst as the Greeks strike their tents and prepare to sail home. She wonders:

Alas! alas! Whose wretched slave shall I be? Where, where on earth shall this old woman toil, useless as a drone, poor counterpart of a corpse, a feeble, ghastly ornament? To be posted to watch at the door, to become a children's nurse -- I who in Troy was paid the honors of a queen!⁸

⁶*Trojan Women*, p. 260.

⁷*Trojan Women*, P. 260.

⁸*Trojan Women*, p. 261.

The chorus also wonders how and where they'll end up:

. . . I shall have worse sorrows, forced to lie in the bed of Greeks --

My curse on the night when that is my fate. . . .
 May I come to Theseus' land, the glorious, the blessed.
 Never, never, I pray, to the swirling Eurotas, the cursed
 abode of Helen, there to look upon Menelaus as my master,
 the sacker of Troy. . . .⁹

They discuss other lands throughout the Mediterranean as possible future homes from Phoenicia to Sicily.

Talthybius, the Greek herald, enters to inform Hecuba whose slaves she and her fellows will be and that Polyxena has been slain. Cassandra is to be Agamemnon's concubine, Andromache has been claimed by Achilles' son and Odysseus has claimed Hecuba. These choices add insult to the injury they already feel.

Cassandra's virginity was bestowed on her by the gods, Hecuba protests. But, "[i]sn't it a great thing to get a king for a lover?" Talthybius asks sardonically. Andromache is Hector's widow, Hecuba notes. Achilles' son "took her also, a special gift," the herald continues in a sardonic vein. As to her own fate, Hecuba shrieks:

Ah! Hecuba, smash your shaven head, tear your two cheeks with your nails. Ah, me! An abominable treacherous scoundrel I have got for a master, an enemy of justice, a lawless beast, whose double tongue twists everything up and down, who turns every friendship to hate, who -- O women of

Troy, wail for me. I go to my doom, ruin and misery are

⁹Trojan Women, 261.

mine. The unluckiest lot has fallen to me.¹⁰

Following Hecuba's lament over the fate of her daughter Cassandra, a wagon carrying Andromache and her son by Hector, Astynax, crosses the stage on its way to the Greek ships. Andromache clutches the boy to her breast and exchanges cries of woe with Hecuba: "Away we are led like stolen cattle, I and my son! Nobility enslaved! O the heavy change!"¹¹

And later, "She [Polyxena] died as she died. And yet in death she was luckier than I who live."

Hecuba is desperate for reason to be optimistic: "Death and life are not the same, my child. Death is nothingness; in life there is hope."¹²

And Andromache wants to encourage that hope:

Lady, mother of Polyxena, listen to my words of comfort; let me breathe gladness into your heart. The dead, I say, are as if they had not been born. It is better to die than to live in pain; the dead have no sorrows to hurt them . . . I aimed at fame, and the more I won, the more I had to lose. In Hector's house I toiled to master all the accomplishments of a virtuous wife. In the first place I kept to the house and had no longing for those places where her mere presence is enough to earn a woman who does not stay home an evil name, whether she is that sort of woman or not. I did not admit inside my doors the smart talk of women. I had my native wit to teach me virtue; I needed no more. My tongue was still and my countenance serene in my

¹⁰Trojan Women, p. 263.

¹¹Trojan Women, p. 271.

¹²Trojan Women, p. 271.

husband's presence. I knew when to insist with my husband and when to allow him to overrule me.

This was the reputation that reached the Achaean host and ruined me. For when I was captured, the son of Achilles wanted to make me his wife. I shall slave in the house of my husband's murderers. . . . However, they say a single night abates a woman's aversion to a man's bed. But I abominate the woman who marries again and forgets her first husband in the arms of her second. . . .

In you, dear Hector, I had all the husband I wanted: wise, noble, wealthy, brave, a great man. You got me virgin from my father's house; you were the first to enter my innocent bed. And now you are dead, and I am being shipped captive to the yoke of slavery in Greece. . . .¹³

Andromache condemns the Greeks for their vengeance, ". . . O you Greeks, un-Greek are the tortures you devise. Why are you killing this innocent child?" before surrendering Astynax to Talthylbius: "There! Take him, take him away, hurl him to his death, if that is your will. Feast on his flesh. . . ." ¹⁴ The Greeks felt compelled to kill Astynax to insure he would not grow up and seek revenge for the injuries done his family and city.

At play's end, those who remain watch the fire consume Troy and its citadel collapse. The Trojan women utter lament after lament. Hecuba's last lines are, "Ah! My trembling limbs, lead me on my path. On with you, poor limbs, to lifelong slavery." And the chorus has this final refrain, " Ah hapless city! But still -- forward feet, to the waiting ships of the Achaeans."¹⁵

¹³Trojan Women, pp. 271-72.

¹⁴Trojan Women, p. 274.

¹⁵Trojan Women, p. 287.

*Iphigenia in Tauris*¹⁶
(*Iphigenia Among the Taurians*)

Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra and whom people believe her father sacrificed to Artemis at Aulis,¹⁷ did not die on the altar. Instead, because of her purity and nobility, she miraculously was saved from death and transported to Tauris, "this abode of savage men ruled by their uncouth king."¹⁸ There Iphigenia has remained some 10 to 15 years as a priestess who sends lost sailors to their deaths as sacrifices. She dreams of her brother, Orestes, coming to rescue her but when he does arrive, she of course does not recognize him and he, of course, believes her dead. With Orestes is his best friend, Pylades.

Iphigenia is presented as an intelligent, noble and patriotic/homesick young woman and her dialogue reflects these attributes. Except for her being physically not as strong as

¹⁶Euripides, *Iphigenia In Tauris* (*Iphigenia Among the Taurians*), translated by Witter Bynner in *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume III, op. cit., pp. 345-409. Introduction by Richmond Lattimore, pp. 340-43. Subsequent references will be "*Tauris* followed by the line number(s)."

¹⁷In legend and in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter so the Achaeans could secure a favorable wind to sail to Troy. They were stalled at Aulis, unable to proceed, for lack of a breeze.

¹⁸*Tauris*, 30-31.

Orestes because of their respective sexes, they are equal.

Her opening speech explains how she escaped death:

People believe
 That I was sacrificed by my own father
 To Artemis, in the great pursuit of Helen,
 upon an altar near the bay of Aulis . . .

When I had come
 To Aulis, they laid hands on me. The flame
 was lit. The blow would have been struck -- I saw
 The knife. But Artemis deceived their eyes
 With a deer to bleed for me and stole me through
 The azure sky. And then she set me down
 Here in this town of Tauris, this abode
 Of savage men ruled by an uncouth king,
 Thoas, a horseman headlong as the wind,
 Who stationed me as High Priestess in Her temple,
 And still I serve Her on Her festal days
 Service may seem a holy word. But far
 From holy are these orders I am bound
 To obey, never to question: Her command that
 I must serve to Her the lives of foreigners.
 It was a custom long before I came,
 An ancient cruel custom. Can She hear me?
 My hands prepare the victims. Other hands,
 There in the inner temple, spill the blood . . .

[She recalls her dream]
 The dream was of Orestes and his end [at Tauris].
 Where are the women from Greece the King appointed
 To live with me and help me here in the temple?
 I wonder where they are. I need their help.¹⁹

She returns inside the temple as Orestes and Pylades, his
 best friend, arrive. Orestes explains to Pylades they are in
 Tauris to secure, regardless of means, a statue of Artemis "and
 bring it/ Home to the holy land of Attica."²⁰ If they are

¹⁹Tauris, 5-8, 25-41, 55, 63-65.

²⁰Tauris, 89-90.

caught, he warns, "it will be certain death,/ Your death as well as mine."²¹ Pylades assures Orestes he is up to the challenge.

Iphigenia learns that two Greeks have landed in Tauris but is loathe to collaborate in sacrificing them. She realizes she cannot resist, not if she wishes to remain alive. After ordering that her fellow countrymen be brought to her, she reflects:

Poor heart of mine, which always hitherto
Has been compassionate, tender toward strangers,
And even yesterday felt a quick pang
At thought of Greeks who might be lost in Tauris,
A crushing dream has changed you overnight.
For since Orestes is no more alive,
No, where my heart was, there is only stone.
Strangers who come today, no matter who,
Will find me a woman beyond tears.

Unhappiness, O friends, can harden us
Toward other sorrow harsher than our own.

. . .
I had saved all my kisses and embraces
For the man I was to marry.

. . .
And what does Artemis ask of me here? --
She who forbids approach by any man
Whose hand is stained with bloodshed or with touch
Of childbirth or burial, finds him
Unclean and bans him. . . .²²

As Orestes and Pylades are brought to Iphigenia, she orders their bonds be loosened. Believing herself bound to lead the worship of Artemis by sacrificing the pair, she has the altar prepared for their death. Addressing the Greeks, she wonders about their parentage and families they may have left behind. Orestes, his

²¹Tauris, 100-01.

²²Tauris, 344-54, 375-76, 380-84.

identity obviously unknown to his sister, asks why she should feel concern for them. He is prepared to die, he says.

A herdsman who captured the pair had informed Iphigenia that one of the pair is named Pylades. So the priestess asks more questions, hoping to learn something about what happened in Greece (and to Troy) since she was transported to Tauris. Here Euripides milks the moment, having Orestes play cat and mouse by evading his sister's questions, especially about his identity.

Orestes informs her that Troy has fallen and Menelaos took Helen back with him to Sparta. Iphigenia's responds, "How I hate/ The name of Helen! How all Hellas hates it!" Orestes is coy in replying, "I have my own reasons for hating it,"²³ before continuing to update his sister on what he knows about the fates of the players in the war against Troy. Achilles, whom Iphigenia was summoned to marry at Aulis, has died at Troy, she is told. Agamemnon and Clytemnestra are dead, Orestes reports, the king at the hands of the queen and the queen at the hands of her son.

IPHIGENIA: Why?

ORESTES: To punish her for murdering his father.

IPHIGENIA: I pity him.

ORESTES: As well you may, since no god pities him.²⁴

²³Tauris, 524-25.

²⁴Tauris, 556-59.

What happened to Iphigenia, the priestess asks. She's dead, Orestes answers. Her father could kill her? Iphigenia states. Orestes opines, "It was a wicked war for a wicked woman,/And all the waste that has come from it is wicked."²⁵ And what of Orestes, Iphigenia enquires, "He too is dead in Argos!"²⁶

She doesn't execute the strangers whom the Taurians capture, Iphigenia explains, she only ritually marks them for death. Orestes wishes his sister -- meaning Electra -- could tend his body after death. Iphigenia tells him that she, a native of Argos, will tend him as best she can in his sister's stead.

After Iphigenia leaves, Orestes relates his strange discussion with the priestess to Pylades and wonders what it all means. Help him figure it out, he asks. When Iphigenia returns, he reminds her of her earlier promise that Pylades "be allowed to leave this deathly place" with her letter. If Orestes promises Pylades will deliver the letter, Iphigenia promises she will persuade the king of Tauris to free him.

Upon learning the true identity of each other and that they were mistaken in thinking each other dead, Iphigenia and Orestes make plans to escape. Iphigenia offers, "There are no weapons

²⁵Tauris, 565-66.

²⁶Tauris, 568.

possible, but wits . . ."27 Later she tells Orestes that if one must die, that person should be she:

. . . If we succeed, what happiness for me!
 But even if I fail, you need not fail.
**My life is but little. I would gladly die
 To earn your safety and your reaching home.
 If a man dies, a house, a name, is lost.
 But if a woman die, what does it matter?** [emphasis added]²⁸

Orestes has an immediate answer:

It mattered when my mother died! [emphasis added] If now
 You were also to die because of me -- !
 Whatever happens, we shall share one fate,
 Alive in Greece, or here together dead. . . .²⁹

He calls on Artemis to help them and tells his sisters of his belief that the gods are guiding them.

Iphigenia agrees:

Iphigenia suggests a ploy that will save Orestes' life and may allow them to leave with the blessing of the Taurians. She proposes to "make use of your misfortune." Orestes doesn't know what she's talking about but observes, "**Women have a way of changing ill to good.** [emphasis added]"³⁰ Iphigenia says she'll denounce Orestes as a matricide. Orestes still sees no advantage until she explains "as one unworthy to be sacrificed."³¹

²⁷Tauris, 879.

²⁸Tauris, 1003-06.

²⁹Tauris, 1007-1010.

³⁰Tauris, 1030, 1031.

³¹Tauris, 1035.

The only way he can be made ritually clean, she tells him she'll tell the Taurians, is "by deep/Sea-water . . . off from the shore."³² And because Pylades is with him, he too is defiled and must be made ritually pure, Iphigenia states.

"Yes, but our mission, you forget the statue --/ The reason for our coming here,"³³ Orestes says. Since he was caught trying to steal the statue, it too is defiled and must be made ritually clean -- also by deep-sea water, she reasons. Orestes is still uneasy and suggests that if their plan is to succeed, Iphigenia must appeal to the women who serve her in the temple for their cooperation: "Women know women. Make your plea to them."³⁴

Iphigenia agrees:

. . . A woman knows how much her weakness needs
The sympathy and help of other women,
Their understanding and their loyalty.³⁵

They enroll Iphigenia's maidens and persuade Thoas, the Taurian king, to send them on a ship out to sea to have Orestes, Pylades and the statue of Artemis purified. Before sending them out, the king congratulates her on her discovery that Orestes is

³²Tauris, 1038-39.

³³Tauris, 1040-41,

³⁴Tauris, 1054.

³⁵Tauris, 1059-60.

polluted and on her plans to remedy the matter: "You are a Greek, quick-witted, a true Greek."³⁶ He is also pleased that she withstood the Greeks' blandishments to sway her to their side.

On board ship, the maidens surreptitiously help Orestes and Pylades loosen the ropes that bind them and they wait for the moment to overpower the soldiers sent as guards. Thoas accompanies them. As the guards are overpowered, a soldier tells the maidens, "O treacherous women, you're deceiving me,/ You're in the plot yourselves! . . ."³⁷

Orestes, seeking Electra in his return to Argos, finds her in a novel but does not immediately recognize her. Travelling with him is his best friend, Pylades. After Orestes and Electra become aware of each other's identity, Orestes asks his sister to help him avenge their father's death. She agrees and helps plan

³⁶Tauris, 1180.
³⁷Tauris, 1299-1300.

Electra

Electra,¹ another daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, has been all but abandoned by her mother following her third marriage. (Agamemnon was Clytemnestra's second husband.) Her new husband, Aegisthus, abetted her in the murder of Agamemnon, a homicide Clytemnestra feels justified since Agamemnon deceived her into sending Iphigenia to Aulis to be sacrificed. Aegisthus also made a "gift" of Electra to a poor dirt farmer, making her his wife, to humiliate her. In turn, the young woman has remained a virgin and her husband honors her chastity. The couple barely eke out a living. Meanwhile, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus live lavishly on the booty the Achaeans brought back from Troy.

Orestes, seeking Electra in his return to Argos, finds her in a hovel but does not immediately recognize her. Travelling with him is his best friend, Pylades. After Orestes and Electra become aware of each other's identity, Orestes asks his sister to help him avenge their father's death. She agrees and helps plan

¹Euripides, *Electra* translated and with an introduction by Emily Townsend Vermeule, in Grene and Lattimore's *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume IV, op. cit., pp. 397-454. Subsequent references will be "*Electra* followed by the line number(s)." Her introduction runs pp. 390-94.

the revenge. In the play the notorious Helen appears -- she is, after all, Clytemnestra's sister.

At the play's conclusion, Orestes and Electra slay their mother and her husband in gruesome scenes. As punishment, the gods, who appear *ex machina*, banish them forever from Argos. The only mitigating circumstance in their favor is that they were lured into matricide by another god.

After Orestes arrives at Electra's home, they banter a while before they discover who the other is. Orestes says he is carrying a message for Electra from her brother which causes her to become more candid in her speech. She explains she lives where she does because "I married, stranger -- a wedding much like death." She also informs him that she is still a virgin. Orestes asks, "A vow of chastity? or he finds you unattractive?" Electra explains, "He finds it attractive not to insult my royal blood."²

Her husband fears Orestes, the "messenger" from Orestes asks. Yes, but "he is also decent by nature,"³ Electra responds. And how did Clytemnestra take the news of Electra's wedding, Orestes asks. "Women save all their love for lovers, not for

²Electra, 256-57.

³Electra, 261.

children,"⁴ (emphasis added) she answers. And Aegisthus is ignorant of her virginity, Electra says.

Orestes sounds Electra out on her willingness to help him take his revenge. "Tell him I would gladly die in Mother's blood,"⁵ Electra states. Her brothers asks her to impart whatever intelligence she knows about Argos so he can plan that revenge. "Uneducated men are pitiless," he explains, "But we who are educated pity much. And we pay/ a high price for being intelligent. Wisdom hurts."⁶

Electra chastises her husband for having invited Orestes and Pylades inside since she has nothing to offer them. But he tells her "... if they are the gentlemen they seem,/ will they not treat the small as gently as the great?" The wife is not mollified, "Small is the word for you. . . ."⁷ and orders him to find a way to escape the social embarrassment she thinks they're in. The farmer acquiesces, muttering, "A woman when she has to/ can always find some food to set a decent table. . . ."⁸

⁴Electra, 265.

⁵Electra, 281.

⁶Electra, 294-96.

⁷Electra, 406-07.

⁸Electra, 422-23.

Later, Electra and Orestes plan their mother's murder with Electra volunteering, "I will be the one to plan my mother's death."⁹ She will tell her mother she has given birth and invite her to see her grandson, Electra decides. The old man will be the messenger to tell Clytemnestra the news and that her daughter is kept in bed after delivering a son. "She will come, of course, when she hears about the birth,"¹⁰ Electra assures them.

The play proceeds and Orestes kills Aegisthus¹¹ by stealth when the king is preparing to sacrifice a bull and his bodyguard has laid down their spears. After Orestes identifies himself and why he had slain Aegisthus, the bodyguard allows him to escape.

Then Orestes and Electra review their plans to kill Clytemnestra and the former seems to lose some of his nerve.

ORESTES: What -- what is our plan now toward Mother? Do we kill?

ELECTRA: Don't tell me pity catches you at the sight of her.

ORESTES: O god!

How can I kill her when she brought me up and bore me?

ELECTRA: Kill her just the way she killed my father. And yours.

ORESTES: He [Phoebus] said to kill my mother, whom I must not kill.

ELECTRA: Nothing will hurt you. You are only avenging father.

ORESTES: As a matricide, I must stand trial. I was clean before.

⁹Electra, 647.

¹⁰Electra, 656.

¹¹Electra, 762-64.

ELECTRA: Not clean before the gods, if you neglect your father.¹²

Electra continues to try to steel her brother:

You may not play the coward now and fall to weakness. Go in. I will bait her a trap as she once baited one which sprang at Aegisthus' touch and killed her lawful husband.¹³

Unaware of Aegisthus's death, Clytemnestra arrives and her word indicate the severe discomfort when she sees the hovel her daughter is living in. Electra oozes sarcasm:

Then may not I, whom am a slave and also tossed far from my father's home to live in misery, may I not, Mother, hold your most distinguished hand.¹⁴

The slaves will assist her, Electra needn't stir herself, her mother replies. Why not, Electra shoots back and accuses her mother of getting rid of her. Clytemnestra tells Electra she is not in full possession of the facts; if she were, she wouldn't make such accusations:

. . . When a woman gets an evil reputation, she finds a bitter twist to her words. This is my case now, not a pretty one. And yet if you have something truly to hate, you ought to learn the facts first; then hate is more decent. But not in the dark.¹⁵

¹²Electra, 967-76.

¹³Electra, 982-84.

¹⁴Electra, 1004-06.

¹⁵Electra, 1013-17.

whereupon Clytemnestra relates how Agamemnon's death was justified because he lied to her by asking that she send Iphigenia -- Electra's sister -- to Aulis to marry Achilles. All along he intended to sacrifice her so the Achaeans could sail to Troy, she continues, and allow Menelaos to recover the adulteress Helen:

Oh, women are fools for sex, deny it I shall not. Since this is in our nature, when our husbands choose to despise the bed they have, a woman is quite willing to imitate her man and find another friend. But then the dirty gossip puts us in the spotlight; the guilty ones, the men, are never blamed at all. If Menelaos had been raped from home on the sly, should I have had to kill Orestes so my sister's husband could be rescued? You think your father would have borne it? He would have killed me. Then why was it fair for him to kill what belonged to me and not be killed? I killed. I turned and walked the only path still open, straight to his enemies. Would any of his friends have helped me in the task of murder I had to do?

Speak if you have need or reason. Fight me free; demonstrate how your father died without full justice.¹⁶

The chorus rebukes Clytemnestra:

Justice is in your words but justice can be ugly. A wife should give way to her husband in all things if her mind is sound; if she refuses to see this truth she cannot enter fully counted in my thought.¹⁷

Electra rejects her mother's pleading and suggests that she's insane:

¹⁶Electra, 1035-50.

¹⁷Electra, 1051-54.

Then I speak -- and here is the keynote of my song.
 Mother who bore me, how I wish your mind were healthy. . . .

You, long before your daughter came near sacrifice,
 the very hour your husband marched away from home
 were setting your brown curls by the bronze mirror's light.
 Now any woman who works on her beauty when her man
 is gone from home indicts herself as a whore.
 She has no decent cause to show her painted face
 outside the door unless she wants to look for trouble.

. . .
 You needed Agamemnon never to come [home] again.

. . .
 Next. If, as you say, our father killed your daughter,
 did I do any harm to you, or did my brother?
 When you killed your husband, why did you not bestow
 the ancestral home on us, but took to bed the gold
 which never belonged to you to buy a lover? . . .¹⁸

Clytemnestra can only lament "how miserably" her plans
 failed to work and concede "perhaps I drove my hate too hard
 against my husband."¹⁹

Finally they get around to discussing the son Electra
 reported she delivered. Again Electra reproaches her mother,
 this time for allowing her to be alone when she gave birth. The
 "grandmother" expresses surprise that no one was present to help
 her. Electra responds, "No one is willing to make friends with
 poverty."²⁰ To atone for her absence, Clytemnestra offers to
 make the proper sacrifices to the gods as the law requires.

¹⁸Electra, 1060-61, 1069-75, 1079, 1086-90.

¹⁹Electra, 1109, 1110.

²⁰Electra, 1130.

Electra seem mollified and invites her mother inside her house:

Enter our poor house. And, Mother, take good care the smoky walls put no dark stain upon your robes. Pay sacrifice to heaven as you ought to pay.²¹

Once inside, Orestes kills her and as Clytemnestra enters the ambush, she cries out:

O children -- O my god -- do not kill your mother -- no.

CHORUS: Do you hear her cries trapped in the walls?

CLYTEMNESTRA: O, O, I am hurt --

CHORUS: I am also hurt to hear you in your children's hands. Justice is given down by god soon or late; you suffer terribly now, you acted terribly then against god and love.²²

Orestes, Pylades and Electra emerge from the house and the door open to reveal the corpses of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra lying together. Electra tells Orestes:

Weep greatly for me my brother, I am guilty.
A girl flaming in hurt I marched against
the mother who bore me.

. . .
O weep for me. Where am I now? What dance --
what wedding may I come to? What man will take
me bride to his bed?²³

²¹Electra, 1139-41.

²²Electra, 1165-70.

²³Electra, 1182-83, 1199-1200.

Orestes relates how he killed their mother and Electra rejoins, "I urged you on, I urged you on, / I touched the sword beside your hand." To which the chorus adds, "Working a terrible pain and ruin."²⁴

Helen's story strikes the reader as quite similar to Iphigenia among the Taurians. The virtuous and admirable heroine is miraculously transported to safety in a foreign land unbeknownst to the Greeks: Scythia in Iphigenia's case and Egypt in Helen's. The faithful Helen of this play couldn't be more unlike the adulteress Helen in *The Trojan Women*, the Helen most of us know. This Helen is intensely loyal to Menelaos, intelligent, noble, patriotic -- not at all self-centered or vain.

The legend that Helen was not taken to Troy, that it was her image or ghost, is first found in the work of a mid-sixth century poet, Stesichorus.²⁵ Herodotus suggested Helen was not in Troy at all but in Egypt and that the Greeks thought the Trojans lying when they denied Helen was inside their walls.²⁶ By Euripides'

²⁴Euripides, *Helen*, translated by James Michie and Colin Leach and with introductions by Leach and William Arrowsmith (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1981). Subsequent references will be "Helen" followed by the line number(s).

²⁵Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 18.

²⁶In his *The History*, translated by David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), Herodotus, Book 2, 112-20 (pp. 177-81) writes, "When I asked the Egyptian priests, they told me that what happened to Helen was this: Alexander [Paris] carried her to Egypt and set sail for his own country:

²⁴*Electra*, 1224-25, 1226.

Helen

*Helen*²⁵ may strike the reader as quite similar to *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*. The virtuous and admirable heroine is miraculously transported to safety in a foreign land unbeknownst to the Greeks: Scythia in *Iphigenia's* case and Egypt in *Helen's*. The faithful Helen of this play couldn't be more unlike the adulteress Helen in *The Trojan Women*, the Helen most of us know. This Helen is intensely loyal to Menelaos, intelligent, noble, patriotic -- not at all self-centered or vain.

The legend that Helen was not taken to Troy, that it was her image or ghost, is first found in the work of a mid-sixth century poet, Stesichorus.²⁶ Herodotus suggested Helen was not in Troy at all but in Egypt and that the Greeks thought the Trojans lying when they denied Helen was inside their walls.²⁷ By Euripides'

²⁵Euripides, *Helen*, translated by James Michie and Colin Leach and with introductions by Leach and William Arrowsmith (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1981). Subsequent references will be "*Helen* followed by the line number(s)."

²⁶Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 18.

²⁷In his *The History*, translated by David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), Herodotus, Book 2, 112-20 (pp. 177-81) writes, "When I asked the Egyptian priests, they told me that what happened to Helen was this: Alexander [Paris] carried off Helen from Sparta and set sail for his own country;

time, Greek historians (including Herodotus and Thucydides²⁸) "found it incredible that men would fight a protracted war over a woman -- even if she were the most beautiful woman in the world"²⁹ so low was the regard in which women were held.

As the play opens, Helen is in Egypt -- it was her image that Paris abducted and took to Troy and for which a thousand ships were launched. The gods transported the real Helen to Egypt where she waits for her husband to rescue her and take her back to Sparta. Unfortunately for her, Theoklymenos, king of Egypt, is struck by her beauty and woos her. Since his father, Proteus, has recently died, Theoklymenos has a free hand to pursue Helen. With the help of the Theoklymenos' sister, Theonoe, Helen stalls him. Theonoe is another woman in whom there is much to admire.

When Menelaos does get to Egypt, he arrives as a shipwrecked

when he got into the Aegean, wrecking winds forced him out of his course into the Egyptian sea; and after that, as the winds did not let up, he came into Egypt and, in Egypt, to what is now called the Canobic Mouth of the Nile and into the Saltpans. . . . Now the servants of Alexander . . . deserted their master and sat as suppliants to the god." The priest at that shrine refused to allow Paris to take Helen with him back to Troy, insisting that she remain there. . . . "In these verses [from *The Iliad*] it is plain that Homer knew of Alexander's wandering to Egypt; for Syria is the neighboring kingdom to Egypt, and to the Phoenicians, to whom Sidon belongs, live in Syria."

²⁸See Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, I, 9 (pp. 77-81) on the reasons men go to war, here Sparta being urged by a Corinthian embassy to take arms against the Athenians.

²⁹Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 17.

sailor and Helen must use her intelligence and cunning to escape in a manner similar to the ruse of Iphigenia, Orestes and Pylades.

Helen begins to inform Menelaos of Theoklymenos' interest in her but he stops her to ask how successfully she's foiled him. "Then learn," she says, "my body's been kept chaste for you."³⁰ Menelaos is stunned to learn that he can't simply tell Theoklymenos that he's Helen's husband and ask the king of Egypt to help them sail home. Should he do that, "You'd be nearer to your grave than to my bed,"³¹ Helen warns. She encourages him to escape by himself and not to be ashamed doing so.

Menelaos refuses to leave her behind -- especially "when I sacked Troy for your sake." Helen insists: "Better than my love should cause your death."³² She will die before she agrees to become Theoklymenos's wife, she assures Menelaos. And her husband says he'll kill her and then himself if they can't leave Egypt.

Theonoe assures Menelaos of her willingness to help him and his wife. She will do so because it's the right thing to do:

³⁰Helen, 860.

³¹Helen, 868.

³²Helen, 871, 872.

By nature and vocation I love piety;
 I cherish myself, and I would never sully
 my father's name or do my brother a favor
 at the cost of my own dishonor. In my heart
 there's a great shrine of Justice. . . .
 For all the world, the dead as well as the living,
 agrees that good and evil are rewarded.
 The dead may not have minds like ours,
 but having mixed with immortal ether
 they have immortal consciousness.³³

Having enlisted Theonoe, Menelaos and Helen begin to plan their escape with Helen stating, "Listen -- a woman can plan wisely too. [emphasis added]/ Will you let me, as a ruse, report you dead?" Menelaos agrees and later credits her with "Another good idea."³⁴

From here, the plot is similar to *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*, only the names are different. Helen reports Menelaos recently dead and agrees to marry Theoklymenos. Before she can do so, however, she must prepare a memorial at sea to her late husband because he drowned. Although suspicious, the king of Egypt succumbs to Helen's pleas and beauty, allowing her to take a contingent of Greeks on board a Phoenician vessel to perform the ceremonies. They sail out to the horizon -- for the rituals must be performed in deep sea, of course -- where the Greeks overpower their Egyptian escorts. With the headstart, the Egyptian navy has no chance of overtaking the Greeks and they sail for home.

³³Helen, 1072-76, 1087-91.

³⁴Helen, 1125-26, 1143.

The Phoenician Women
(*Phoenissae*)

In *The Phoenician Women*,¹ Euripides uses the myth of a fated fall, that of the house of Laios (which includes Oedipus, Eteokles and Polyneikes), and transforms it into a tale of self-destruction through Eteokles' and Polyneikes' monomaniacal pursuit of power -- they kill each other -- for their own selfish ends. The setting is Thebes. Polyneikes returns to claim his year of rule -- they had agreed to alternate years -- from Eteokles. Eteokles, however, has discovered he enjoys power so much he will renege on their agreement. Their mother, Jokasta, attempts to make peace between her sons by Oedipus but they are deaf to her pleas.

The chorus comprises Phoenician women -- they're from an island of Phoenicia, not the Asian land bordering the Mediterranean Sea -- who support Jokasta's and Antigone's efforts to prevent bloodshed. The women come off as far more enlightened

¹Euripides, *The Phoenician Women* Translated and with an introduction by Peter Burrian and Brian Swann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). Subsequent references will be "Phoenissae followed by the line number(s)." References to the introduction will be "Burrian and Swann, op. cit., followed by the page number(s)."

and more noble than the men except for Menoikeus, Kreon's son, who accepts being a sacrificial victim (as did Makaria and Iphigenia) for the good of the polis.

Orestes takes up where *Electra* leaves off. *Orestes* and *Electra*, who conceal themselves inside Agamemnon's palace, slew their father, Clytemnestra, six days earlier and they await the judgment to be passed by the Argive assembly. Upon landing, Menelaos, just returned with Helen after a seven-year voyage from Troy, learns of the murder and seeks *Orestes* to learn his justification. The Helen in this play, unlike her characterization in *Helos*, is the woman who appeared in *The Trojan Women*.

In *Orestes*, no one comes across as noble or admirable. Helen is vain, shallow and self-centered. *Electra* is stronger than her brother but hardly worthy of admiration. Oliver Stone's movie, *Natural Born Killers*, may have been inspired by Euripides' treatment of the survivors of the Trojan War and their relatives. The plot is convoluted and somewhat difficult to follow.

¹Euripides, *Orestes*. Translated and with an introduction by William Arrowsmith. In *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume IV, op. cit., pp. 181-288. Subsequent references to the play will be "*Orestes* followed by the line number(s)," to the introduction as "Arrowsmith, op. cit., followed by the page number(s)."

Orestes

*Orestes*² takes up where *Electra* leaves off. Orestes and Electra, who conceal themselves inside Agamemnon's palace, slew their mother, Clytemnestra, six days earlier and they await the judgment to be passed by the Argive assembly. Upon landing, Menelaos, just returned with Helen after a seven-year voyage from Troy, learns of the murder and seeks Orestes to learn his justification. The Helen in this play, unlike her characterization in *Helen*, is the woman who appeared in *The Trojan Women*.

In *Orestes*, no one comes across as noble or admirable. Helen is vain, shallow and self-centered. Electra is stronger than her brother but hardly worthy of admiration. Oliver Stone's movie, *Natural Born Killers*, may have been inspired by Euripides' treatment of the survivors of the Trojan War and their relatives. The plot is jumbled and somewhat difficult to follow.

²Euripides, *Orestes* Translated and with an introduction by William Arrowsmith in *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume IV, op. cit., pp. 186-288. Subsequent references to the play will be "*Orestes* followed by the line number(s)," to the introduction as "Arrowsmith, op. cit., followed by the page number(s)."

William Arrowsmith writes the play is wholly the product of Euripides' imagination: it has no basis in Greek myth. In this play, "Orestes is revealed as [mentally] sick, brutal, cowardly and weak, redeemed only by his tenderness for the stronger sister and friend who dominate him and push him on to murder."³

Agamemnon, commander-in-chief of the Greek armies preparing to attack Troy, is stalled in the harbor of Aulis; his ships unable to leave for total want of wind. His troops become restless and he finally realizes that the gods are denying him the winds needed to reach Troy. A seer tells him that if he sacrifices his eldest daughter, Iphigenia, he will secure favorable winds and defeat Troy. On pretext of having arranged Iphigenia's marriage to Achilles, Agamemnon bids his wife, Clytemnestra, to send Iphigenia to the camp. Upon arriving with her daughter to what she thinks will be a joyous occasion, Clytemnestra learns the bitter truth and Iphigenia, initially, is not a willing victim.

Her sense of patriotism and love for her father, however, persuade her in fairly short order to willingly and voluntarily be slaughtered by him for the good of the Greek forces. She is as noble as Marius in *The Phoenician Women* and nearly as selfless (and somewhat more realistic) than Makaris in *The Children of Heracles*. The sea in this play centering on Iphigenia's sacrifice are anything but calm. Euripides presents them as petty politicians motivated more by ambition, self-

³Arrowsmith, op. cit., 187.

Iphigenia at Aulis

Agamemnon, commander-in-chief of the Greek armies preparing to attack Troy, is stalled in the harbor of Aulis, his ships unable to leave for total want of wind. His troops become restless and he finally realizes that the gods are denying him the winds needed to reach Ilium. A seer tells him that if he sacrifices his eldest daughter, Iphigenia, he will secure favorable winds and defeat Troy. On pretext of having arranged Iphigenia's marriage to Achilles, Agamemnon bids his wife, Clytemnestra, to send Iphigenia to the camp. Upon arriving with her daughter to what she thinks will be a joyous occasion, Clytemnestra learns the bitter truth and Iphigenia, initially, is not a willing victim.

Her sense of patriotism and love for her father, however, persuade her in fairly short order to willingly and voluntarily be slaughtered by him for the good of the Greek forces. She is as noble as Menoikus in *The Phoenician Women* and nearly as selfless (and somewhat more realistic) than Makaria in *The Children of Herakles*. The men in this play centering on Iphigenia's sacrifice are anything but noble. Euripides presents them as petty politicians motivated more by ambition, self-

interest and hopes of plunder than as patriots. Clytemnestra comes off only a little better than the men with the focus on her anger at her husband and her supplications that, hope against hope, he will change his mind. She has a measure of tragic stature and wins a degree of sympathy from the audience in her unspoken assumption that her daughter's life is not worth the return of her sister Helen. And Helen, although she doesn't appear in the play, is frequently mentioned and a source of loathing and revulsion.

The text of *Iphigenia at Aulis*,¹ writes Charles R. Walker, "is unusually corrupt, and there is by no means agreement among scholars as to what should be attributed to Euripides and what to later interpolators."² We are not certain whether Euripides had finished the play before he died -- scholars believe he wrote it in Pella, Macedonia -- and it may have been finished by his youngest son, Euripides. The ending -- a happy one, for Iphigenia is rescued in the nick of time -- is "spurious,"³ Walker says. Regardless, the ending, happy or otherwise, is secondary to Euripides' purpose for writing the play: to demonstrate how

¹Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis* Translated by and with an introduction by Charles R. Walker in *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume IV, op. cit., pp. 290-387. Subsequent references will be "Aulis followed by the line number(s)." References to the introduction will be "Walker, op. cit., followed by the page number(s)."

²Walker, op. cit., 291.

³Walker, op. cit., 292.

national policy, when set by petty politicians promoting their own narrow interests, undermines the national good. Recall that this was written and produced in the waning days of the Peloponnesian War when Athens' defeat was all but inevitable.

... out of wine and revelry, assures his son so he can finish an arrogant and not-so-bright young ruler, Pentheus, who has insulted his and his cult. The god persuades the young man to dress as a woman so together they can be voyeurs to a women-only religious rite on a mountain side dedicated to the god. During the nocturnal ceremonies, the young man slips from a tree, his hiding place. The women worshippers -- The Bacchae -- immediately spot him and, in their ecstasy, tear his limb from limb with his mother, Agave, severing her son's head. (She thinks she's decapitated a lion.) The next day the mother learns what she's done and is horrified. She and her family question Dionysus' right to exact so harsh a punishment but Dionysus replies that the death was approved by Zeus long ago and that no punishment is too severe for insulting a deity.

"Euripides, *The Bacchae*, translated by with a commentary by Geoffrey S. Kirk (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970). Subsequent references will be "Bacchae followed by the line number(s)." References to Kirk's commentary will be "Kirk, op. cit., followed by the page number(s)."

The Bacchae

Dionysus, god of wine and revelry, assumes human form so he can punish an arrogant and not-so-bright young ruler, Pentheus, who has insulted him and his cult. The god persuades the young man to dress as a woman so together they can be voyeurs to a women-only religious rite on a mountain side dedicated to the god. During the nocturnal ceremonies, the young man slips from a tree, his hiding place. The women worshippers -- *The Bacchae*⁴ -- immediately spot him and, in their ecstasy, tear him limb from limb with his mother, Agaue, severing her son's head. (She thinks she's decapitated a lion.) The next day the mother learns what she's done and is horrified. She and her family question Dionysus' right to exact so harsh a punishment but Dionysus replies that the death was approved by Zeus long ago and that no punishment is too severe for insulting a deity.

⁴Euripides, *The Bacchae*, Translated by with a commentary by Geoffrey S. Kirk (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970). Subsequent references will be "*Bacchae* followed by the line number(s)." References to Kirk's commentary will be "Kirk, op. cit., followed by the page number(s)." 90.

Athenian women were expected to remain respectable and to provide no cause for gossip. To this end they were segregated from men, expected to keep to themselves and, when they ventured outside their homes, not speak casually to men unrelated to them either by blood or marriage. The one area where they could enjoy recognition was in religious rites.⁵

Dionysus was another important deity in the lives of the women of classical Athens. Women may have attended theatrical festivals in his honor . . . [T]he evidence for historical maenadism (maenadic rituals performed by actual women and recorded in inscriptions, rather than represented in art and literature) does not begin before the fourth century B.C.E. . . . The Lenaia was a festival of Dionysus in which women were especially prominent; the name is derived from *lenai*, a synonym for maenad, the god's female devotee.⁶

As suggested in this play (and others) and from evidence from art on pottery, the various Dionysan festivals provided women with "release from ordinary life and its cares."⁷ Dancing to music provided from flutes and drums gave such worship a particularly festive air:

⁵Elaine Fantham, Helene Peet Foley, Natalie Boymel Kampen, Sarah B. Pomeroy, and H. Alan Shapiro, *Women in the Classical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 83. "Despite the attempt to regulate women's public activity and reputation, women in classical Athens legitimately appeared in public contexts when they engaged in ritual activities. Women's participation in civic cults and their role as religious officials often represented a significant opportunity to contribute, at least symbolically, to the welfare of the city-state as a whole."

⁶Fantham, Foley, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 87.

⁷Fantham, Foley, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 90.

[W]e can understand some of its special appeal to the relatively confined and secluded women of Athens. In poetry and vases female worshippers wear fawnskins, wreath their hair with ivy leaves and snakes, and carry a thrysus, a branch topped with ivy leaves. . . . [T]he actual worship of Dionysus by Attic women was more subdued [than as Euripides set forth in *The Bacchae*.]⁸

For this is what I wish with a woman (prostituta) as one's wife keeps — to have children by her and to introduce the same to the members of the clan (parentes) and of the state, and to betroth the daughters to husbands as one's own, mistresses (hetairai) we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines (poukai) for the daily care of our persons, but wives (gynaikes) to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households.

— Pseudo-Demosthenes¹

The ancient world was a man's world. To be a woman,

contrary to Eve C. Veyne's allegations in *The Rise of the*

and "The Wife in Greek Literature" (Lattimore) and quoted in Wozan in the *Classical World*, edited by Elaine Fantham, Elaine Fant Foley, Natalie Hayzel Kuper, Karen E. Passaro, and D. Alan Shapiro (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 95.

Cynthia B. Patterson, author of "Marriage and the Married Woman in Athenian Law," in Sarah B. Pomeroy, editor, *Wozan's History and Ancient History* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 48-72, reports the concubine or pallas was usually a "slave or [of] foreign origin" (p. 58). No Athenian man could act as her protector and give her in marriage to another Athenian man no matter how desirable that citizen might find her. Even if she attained her freedom, she assumed the status of a metic and could not bear legitimate offspring to a citizen nor could she legally "live together with" such a man.

¹Demosthenes, "Against Neaira," LIX, 122, in *Private Orations 1-117*, in Wozan, LIX, with an Italian Translation by G. Murray (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1939),⁸Fantham, Foley, et al., op. cit., 90.

**'Men's Blame and Abuse of Women Is Vain'¹
(But Men Held Women in Low Esteem Regardless)**

For this is what living with a woman [*synoikein*] as one's wife means -- to have children by her and to introduce the sons to the members of the clan [*phratry*] and of the deme, and to betroth the daughters to husbands as one's own. Mistresses [*Hetairai*] we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines [*pallakai*]² for the daily care of our persons, but wives [*gynaikes*] to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households.

-- Pseudo-Demosthenes³

The ancient world was a man's world. To be a woman, contrary to Eva C. Keuls' allegations in *The Reign of the*

¹This line is from Euripides' *Melanippe* and quoted in *Women in the Classical World*, edited by Elaine Fantham, Helene Peet Foley, Natalie Boymel Kampen, Sarah B. Pomeroy, and H. Alan Shapiro (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 95.

²Cynthia B. Patterson, author of "Marriage and the Married Woman in Athenian Law," in Sarah B. Pomeroy, editor, *Women's History and Ancient History* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 48-72, reports the concubine or *pallake* was usually a "slave or [of] foreign origin" (p. 58). No Athenian man could act as her protector and give her in marriage to another Athenian man no matter how desirable that citizen might find her. Even if she attained her freedom, she assumed the status of a metic and could not bear legitimate offspring to a citizen nor could she legally "live together with" such a man.

³Demosthenes, "Against Neaera," LIX, 122, in *Private Orations L-LVIII, in Nearam, LIX, with an English Translation* by A.T. Murray, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1939, 1956, pp. 445, 447.

Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens,⁴ was not necessarily to be oppressed. Regardless, a woman was identified by her relationship to a man or a group of men.⁵ Male human beings held sway in public and over their households and they expected the women with whom they had relationships -- wives, mistresses and concubines -- to be subordinate to them.

As Bernard Knox observed in 1985:

Only in recent years have scholars been awakened to the fact that the Greek polis, especially Athens (though perhaps Athens stands out because it is the one we know most about), was an exclusive men's club in which woman had no political rights except those exercised through a male relative.⁶

Thus to be a woman in fifth- and fourth-century Greece was difficult. For the women of fifth and fourth-century Athens it

⁴Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), reviewed by Bernard Knox in his essay "Invisible Woman" in *Essays Ancient & Modern* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 110-15. Keul's book begins: "In the case of a society dominated by men who sequestered their wives and daughters, denigrate the female role in reproduction, erect monuments to male genitalia, have sex with the sons of their peers, sponsor public whorehouses, create a mythology of rape, and engage in rampant saber-rattling, it is not inappropriate to refer to a reign of the phallus. Classical Athens was such a society."

⁵Just, *op. cit.*, 28, notes, ". . . there was no taboo on publicly referring to a woman by name. The names of respectable mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of Athenian citizens do occur; nevertheless, the normal practice was to refer to someone as so-and-so's mother, wife, sister, or daughter, and we know the names of remarkably few of the many women mentioned in law-court proceedings."

⁶Bernard Knox, *Essays Ancient & Modern* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 110.

was even more difficult. As Roger Just writes:

Women in Athens possessed no active political rights. They could neither speak nor vote in the *ekklesia*, the citizen assembly, nor could they attend its meetings. Further they were unable to hold any administrative or executive position within the secular organization of the state (including that of juror in the popular courts).⁷ In the Greek sense of the word, they were not citizens . . .⁸

Of all women in ancient Greece, they seemed to be held in the least esteem and kept in the most subordinate⁹ position. By comparison, the women of Sparta were "freer and better trained physically, [but] they still had only one function, that of producing sons for the city."¹⁰ So to be a woman in Euripides' Athens was -- certainly by late twentieth century U.S. standards -- often little better than being chattel, no matter how well some (and perhaps many) were treated.

In legal and economic matters, Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant state, "Athenian women are mentioned only in transactions about their dowries; outside Athens women apparently had more

⁷They were, however, able to present evidence in trials by offering a deposition delivered by her *kyrios* (see below), Just (p. 34) has found.

⁸Just, op. cit., 13. He later notes, p. 21, "The feminine form of 'citizen', i.e., *politiss*, does occur, but in general when it was necessary to distinguish the mother, or wife, or daughter of an Athenian citizen from other women (as it often was), then the somewhat odd term *aste* (city-woman) was used."

⁹Just, op. cit., 105. "In law Athenian women were most certainly **subordinate** [emphasis added] to men."

¹⁰Cantarella, op. cit., 21.

control over their property."¹¹ They cite Isaeus who wrote, ". . . the law expressly forbids children and women from being able to make a contract [about anything worth] more than a bushel of barley."¹² Today's advocates of diversity who apply their standards to the behavior and attitudes of the men who governed the ancient Greek *poleis* are appalled at Greek women's inferior status. The *polis* "was very much a man's club; even in its most advanced form, Athenian democracy, it relegated its women to silence and anonymity. . . . for all practical purposes, women (which for them [the Greeks] were war, politics, litigation, and competitive athletics), women played no part whatsoever."¹³ Or, as Sarah B. Pomeroy observes, ". . . heroic Greek society demanded that all mature women be married, and destined all young women for that end."¹⁴

A respectable Athenian woman lived a very sheltered life although not always a happy one. Procne, wife of Tereus in Sophocles' play of the same name, laments:

¹¹Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, editors, *Women's Life in Greece & Rome: A Source Book in Translation* (Baltimore Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 57. Subsequent references to original sources cited in this book will be cited as "Lefkowitz and Fant, op. cit., author, page number."

¹²Lefkowitz and Fant, op. cit., Isaeus, 10, 10, p. 38. Lefkowitz's translation with her brackets in citation.

¹³Bernard Knox, *The Oldest Dead White European Males (and Other Reflections on the Classics)* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 12, 26.

¹⁴Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 18.

But now outside my father's house, I am nothing, yes often have I looked on women's nature in this regard, that we are nothing. Young women, in my opinion, have the sweetest existence known to mortals in their fathers' homes, for their innocence always keeps children safe and happy. But when we reach puberty and can understand, we are thrust out and sold away from our ancestral gods and from our parents. Some go to strange men's homes, others to foreigners', some to joyless houses, some to hostile. And all this once the first night has yoked us to our husband, we are forced to praise and say that all is well.¹⁵

And Athenian women were supposed to be segregated, secluded and protected.¹⁶ To what degree is a matter of debate. But there's no question that they lacked the freedom to come and go that Athenian men enjoyed. Houses (domiciles) -- at least of the more well-to-do -- had women's quarters/apartments called *gynaikon*¹⁷ where women were expected to remain apart from men. But as Just observes, "[T]here is a significant body of evidence which will not square with a picture of rigorous physical confinement."¹⁸ Only in extremely well-to-do households could such segregation be enforced.¹⁹ In *Women in the Classical World*, the authors write:

¹⁵Lefkowitz and Fant, op. cit., citing Sophocles' *Tereus*, 17.

¹⁶Cantarella, op. cit., 46. "Closed off in the internal part of the house to which the men did not have access, the married woman had no chance to meet persons other than members of the household. In Athens, men even did the shopping."

¹⁷Just, op. cit., 106. Fantham, Foley, et al., op. cit., 103, write, ". . . these quarters are not always easy to locate in archeological remains."

¹⁸Just, op. cit., 106.

¹⁹Fantham, Foley, et al., op. cit., 106.

The life of respectable women (the wives and female relatives of citizens, and very probably resident aliens as well) within the household was secluded, primarily to protect their role as producers of legitimate heirs; it was less secluded, however, than popular ideals might have allowed. . . . Child care was of course a main preoccupation of the women's quarters of an Athenian house. . . .²⁰

Outside their houses, certainly, they were expected to not have social intercourse with men unrelated to them.²¹ "Only courtesans went to parties with men, opened the front door themselves, or spoke to passersby in the street. . . . This anonymity protected [citizen] women from contact with men who were not family members . . ." ²²

Aristotle codified what Athenian society believed the natural order should be when he wrote:

Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind. . . .

The freeman rules over the slave after another manner from that in which the male rules over the female, or the man over the child . . . For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has but it is immature. . . . Clearly,

²⁰Fantham, Foley, et. al., op. cit., 102, 104.

²¹Cantarella, op. cit., 46, cites a client of Lysias (*Simon* 6) as saying, "My sisters and nieces have been so well brought up that they are embarrassed in the presence of a men who is not a member of the family." This is undoubtedly hyperbole but it underscores the point that well-brought-up women were not supposed to mix freely among men. Just cites this passage in his book, *Women in Athenian Law and Life*, op. cit., p. 123, and asks, "But does this passage also mean that the speaker's sister and nieces were permanently locked up in the women's quarters?" and answers, "I think not."

²²Fantham, Foley, et al., op. cit., 80.

then, moral virtue belongs to all of them; but the temperance of a man and of a woman, or the courage and justice of a man and of a woman, are not, as Socrates maintained, the same; the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying, . . . as the poet [Sophocles in *Ajax*, line 293] says of women "**Silence is a woman's glory,**" [emphasis added] but this is not equally the glory of a man.²³

In *The Republic*, Plato also asserts the natural superiority of men over women, at least as far as physical strength is concerned, when he asks:

Can you deny that a woman is by nature very different from a man? -- Of course not. . . .

Do you know of any occupation practised by mankind in which the male sex is not superior to the female in all those respects? Or shall we pursue the argument at length by mentioning weaving, baking cakes, cooking vegetables, tasks in which the female sex certainly seems to distinguish itself, and in which it is most laughable of all for women to be inferior to men? . . .

Therefore there is no pursuit connected with city management which belongs to [a] woman because she is a woman, or to a man because he is a man, but various natures are scattered in the same way among both kinds of persons. Woman by nature shares all pursuits, and so does man, but in all of them woman is a physically weaker creature than man. -- Certainly. . . .

We are not legislating against nature or indulging in mere wishful thinking *since the law we established is in accord with nature.* [emphasis added.] It is rather the contrary present practice which is against nature as it seems. . . .²⁴

The irony is, as Knox remarks, while "Athenian democracy allowed

²³Aristotle, *Politics* Book I, Chapter 5, lines 1254b 12-13; Chapter 13, 1260a, lines 9-14, 20-24, 29-31. (New York: The Modern Library [Random House], 1943, translated by Benjamin Jowett), 59-60, 64, 77.

²⁴Plato, *The Republic*, 455c; 455d,e; 456 b. in G.M.A. Grube, translator, *Plato's Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974), 117, 118.

women no scope for public or political activity, Attic tragedy has given us a wealth of impressive female figures -- Antigone, Electra, Medea, Hecuba, Clytemnestra . . ."25

To which Roger Just observes:

The tragic heroines of Greek drama, the divine and semi-divine, or monstrous figures of Greek mythology, may be at some considerable remove from a portrayal of the fifth- or fourth-century Athenian wife, but they are not at all distanced from the conception of female nature expressed through those laws and conventions which sought to regulate women's lives. If women were by nature wild, uncontrolled, passionate, irrational, then society had to subject them to the authority of the male. . . [In tragedy] women are presented not as they were but as [male] society imagined they might be.²⁶

Another irony is that Athens' patron deity -- Athena, is female. One might assume that a city whose patron goddess is female -- and an intelligent female (the goddess of wisdom) at that -- would esteem women. Not so. Athena is the "archetype of a masculine woman who finds success in what essentially a man's world by denying her own femininity and sexuality."²⁷ She is often depicted holding a spear and shield with an armored helmet pushed back on her head. Moreover, she is chaste -- a virgin -- born not of woman but from the head of Zeus. When men and women have differences in the myths involving her, she takes the man's side of the man. For example, in *The Odyssey*, she sides with

²⁵Knox, *Oldest Dead*, op. cit., 20.

²⁶Just, op. cit., 215-16.

²⁷Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 4.

Odysseus against his devoted, loyal and virtuous wife, ". . . even hinting that she [Athena] is suspicious of the motives of the virtuous Penelope."²⁸

While little esteemed, the worth of an Athenian woman seemed to increase, albeit indirectly, when Perikles proposed in 451/0 that for a man to be a citizen, he had to be able to claim their descent from both an Athenian father and an Athenian mother. His proposal was adopted, which led to lawsuits including that containing the partial oration given by pseudo-Demosthenes cited at the opening of this section. Before Perikles' law, descent from the father was sufficient.

Having stated all of the above, Athenian women still exerted considerable influence in their *polis* -- those who choose to do so simply had to be circumspect in how they exercised it. Just has uncovered "enough indications to be certain that some women at least were aware of public issues."²⁹ And it would be an unusual society indeed in which at least some husbands did not discuss public affairs with their wives and daughters in the privacy of their homes. Thus the suggestion that Athenian women were on a par with metics and slaves is carrying things a bit far. While there was a greater gap between an Athenian citizen and a male metic and or male slave than between an Athenian woman

²⁸Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 5.

²⁹Just, op., cit., 21.

and a female metic or female slave, Athenian women enjoyed greater status and prestige than metics and slaves regardless of sex.³⁰

The Athenian ideal had women interacting only with those men related to them by blood or marriage and, as noted above, their primary function was to ensure that the male line of their families continued. Thus, matters of dowry, marriage (including fertility and household management) and divorce were of paramount concern to Athenian men. A woman, Athenian men believed, was incapable of wise action or thought unless a man oversaw her. Could they have anticipated the musical "Hello, Dolly!" Athenian men would have agreed with Horace Vandergelder when he described the ideal female as "that dainty woman, that fragile woman, that hostess, that mistress, that wife" in need of a male protector. Such a male protector, in Athens was a *kyrios*³¹ and under Athenian law a woman enjoyed the protection of a *kyrios* her entire life.³² Usually it was first her father and then her husband. However, if her father died before she married, her brother or uncle assumed that position. If she became a widow,

³⁰Just, op. cit., 23.

³¹Just, op. cit., 26, 27, writes, "As an adjective, 'kyrios' means literally 'having power or authority over', 'capable', 'authorized', 'official'; as a substantive, it means 'master', 'controller', 'possessor' . . . [T]he role of a *kyrios* entailed more than the supervision of women. The term *kyrios*, [sic] denoted the head of the household, an *oikos*, which comprised women, male minors, and property (including slaves)."

³²Just, op. cit., 26; Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 62.

her grown son most likely became her protector. If she were divorced or her husband died before she bore him a son, her father resumed his role as her *kyrios*.³³ So obviously a woman had little -- and usually no -- voice in whom her husband would be.

Athenian men took their roles as *kyrioi* seriously and believed in protecting³⁴ and guarding the women in their *oikoi*. Skeptics may question whether they put the well-being of their *oikoi* or women first but the fact remains women were protected. "Respect and loyalty were central to Athenian morality,"³⁵ Just writes. Court records show the system was imperfect because in some cases a woman sought another *kyrios* to sue her nominal *kyrios* for dereliction of duty. When Demosthenes came of legal age, he sued his mother's *kyrios* for not taking sufficient care to safeguard her interests (and his).

Every Athenian girl grew up expecting to be married -- indeed, one of her father's primary responsibilities as her *kyrios* was to ensure her marriage -- and for a woman, being a

³³Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 63.

³⁴Just, op. cit., 26.

³⁵Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 63.

³⁶Just, op. cit., 32.

wife and mother was to be fulfilled.³⁶ "Responsible fathers in Classical Athens did not raise [sic] female babies unless they saw a proper marriage for them at maturity."³⁷ This responsibility entailed preserving wealth and ensuring and reinforcing friendships and alliances more than trying to arrange a happy marriage, however one wishes to define "happy marriage." Consequently, Athenians often married their relatives. Pomeroy has found:

Marriage to relatives was especially attractive especially among the wealthier families of democratic Athens, when inroads were constantly made against the fortunes of the wealthy: such marriages provided a way of consolidating the resources of the family, facilitated agreement between parties who knew and trusted each other, gave relatives preferential access to brides, and forestalled enforcement of the law of the epiklerate.³⁸

Cynthia B. Patterson believes that the legal aspect of an Athenian marriage dominated all other aspects, that it was first and foremost a contract.³⁹ It was the woman's responsibility to administer her husband's household and bear him legitimate

³⁶Just, *op. cit.*, 40; Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, *op. cit.*, 62. Pomeroy subsequently writes (p. 64), "The birth of a child, especially a son, was considered a fulfillment of the goal of the marriage." Fantham, Foley, *et al.*, p. 69, write, "Every respectable woman in classical Athens (ca. 480-323 B.C.E.) became a wife if she could; not to marry as Medea argues, provided no real alternative."

³⁷Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, *op. cit.*, 62.

³⁸Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, *op. cit.*, 64.

³⁹Cynthia B. Patterson, "Marriage and the Married Woman in Athenian Law," in Sarah B. Pomeroy, editor, *Women's History and Ancient History* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 48-72.

offspring. It was the man's responsibility to protect his wife and use the dowry she brought with her for her benefit. That was the theory. It was also Athenian legal theory that a woman "received the dowry in lieu of sharing the family inheritance."⁴⁰ In practice the husband exercised his judgment -- it's doubtful he would consult his wife -- as to how it would be used to sustain her. "The only legal obligation that the groom acquired toward the wife upon receipt of the dowry was her maintenance, for which he was responsible as long as he held it. During the marriage this 'obligation' cannot have meant very much since it was the normal duty of a man to feed his wife and all the other members of his household. . . ."⁴¹ In no way did she have legal ownership or control since a dowry exceeded the value of a medimnus of barley. Moreover, should her husband fall in arrears on his debts, his creditors could seize the dowry, supposedly for her support, to satisfy their claims.⁴²

The dowried wife could dominate the economic life of a family. Among the upper classes in Athens, dowries ranged in size from 10 to 50 minae.⁴³ For the women included in this social set, their dowries were more money than they were ever likely to control, says David Schaps, "and it was able to serve them in

⁴⁰Cantarella, op. cit., 47.

⁴¹David M. Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 75.

⁴²Schaps, op. cit., 75.

⁴³Schaps, op. cit., 74.

ways that their personal possessions could not."⁴⁴ Among the families in the lesser economic strata, dowries were 20 minae or less and "[i]t is conceivable that the dowry disappeared entirely in the lowest citizen classes; there are certainly dowerless women in the orators. . ."⁴⁵ He cautions against assuming that the richer a father, the larger a dowry he would provide his daughter.⁴⁶ The poor "must have been difficult to get a bridegroom if they had no money to offer, and it was a matter of pride to offer a much as they could, or more."⁴⁷ The dowry, he concludes, "in Athens, was a necessity"⁴⁸ whose provision caused considerable concern among the less well-off. "It was considered a deed of piety to provide dowries for poor relatives. . ."⁴⁹

Schaps observes, "[T]here is no evidence I know of to indicate that women were ever likely to manage their own dowries as they managed household expenses. . . . [However,] a well-dowered wife could dominate the economic life of a family."⁵⁰ The first (but not primary) purpose of a dowry was to attract a

⁴⁴Schaps, op. cit., 74.

⁴⁵Schaps, op. cit., 77-78.

⁴⁶Schaps, op. cit., 78. "The evidence we have on the subject is meager, but it does not support such an assumption [that the richer the father, the better dowered his daughter]."

⁴⁷Schaps, op. cit., 79.

⁴⁸Schaps, *ibid.*

⁴⁹Schaps, *ibid.*

⁵⁰Schaps, *ibid.*, 76.

suitable husband for a woman. While not convinced that women were as secluded as the ideal would have it, Schaps points out how difficult it would be for a woman to meet men and engage in what most Americans would consider a normal courtship. Certainly it would be next to impossible for a young man and a young woman to meet, fall in love and marry based on mutual attraction. So a dowry acted, to be bald about it, as a lure:

A woman without a dowry was in danger of being unmarried all her life . . . A large dowry, on the other hand, might attract an otherwise unattainable husband. . . . [T]here can be little doubt that there was a tendency for wealthy men to receive large dowries.⁵¹

Pomeroy finds:

A woman's dowry was to remain intact throughout her lifetime and to be used for her support; neither her father, nor her guardian, nor her husband, nor the woman herself could legally dispose of it. Upon marriage the dowry passed from the guardianship of the father to that of the groom. The groom could use the principal but was required to maintain his wife from the income of her dowry, compounded at 18 percent annually. Upon divorce, the husband was required to return the dowry to his ex-wife's guardian, or pay interest at 18 percent. Thus her support would continue to be provided for, and, with her dowry intact, she would be eligible for remarriage. A widow, especially if she had increased her property through inheritance from her late husband, would also be an attractive candidate for remarriage.⁵²

About the wedding (*gamos*) itself, Just writes, ". . .

weddings and funerals provided two frequent occasions at which

⁵¹Schaps, op. cit., 75.

⁵²Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 63.

women were prominent."⁵³ (Until Athens outlawed the practice, many women supplemented their income as professional mourners.) Women fetched water from a spring for the women to take her bridal bath as evidenced by many vase paintings, Just found.⁵⁴ Her female friends and/or relatives helped the bride apply cosmetics and "at the sacrifice and feast given by the bride's *kyrios* the bride was attended by her female friends and seated by the *nympheutria*, a women whose task it was to guide her through the marriage ceremony."⁵⁵ Afterward, at night, the veiled bride, escorted by friends and relatives (of both sexes), was taken in a wagon or chariot to the groom's house where the wedding took place.⁵⁶ Her entourage sang wedding songs along the way and the bride's mother carried a special wedding torch although vase paintings show others carried torches as well.⁵⁷ Guests brought wedding gifts with them. The procession was an integral part of the ceremony because "court cases often cite this moment as proof of a wife's legitimacy."⁵⁸ The bride was supposed to be 15 or so

⁵³Just, op. cit., 110. Hipponax of Ephesus (c. 6th century), a satirist, engaged in hyperbole when he wrote, "The two best days of a woman's life are when someone marries her and when he carries her dead body to the grave." Cited in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, editors, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*, op. cit., 16.

⁵⁴Just, *ibid.*, 111.

⁵⁵Just, *ibid.*

⁵⁶Fantham, Foley, et al., op. cit., 98.

⁵⁷Just, op. cit., and Fantham, Foley, et. al., op. cit., 98.

⁵⁸Fantham, Foley, et. al., op. cit., 98.

at the time of her wedding while the groom was expected to wait until he was 30. Vase scenes depicting the newlyweds together after the ceremony "are rare."⁵⁹ While a woman left her family's *oikos* and joined her husband's upon her wedding, her admission into her husband's could be undone until she bore him their first child: "Only when she gave her husband a child," says Cantarella, "did a woman enter irreversibly into the new *oikos*."⁶⁰

While becoming a wife and mother was the prescribed ideal and considered the natural goal of an Athenian woman, "[d]ivorce was easily attainable, either by mutual consent or through action on behalf of one of the spouses, and there was no stigma attached."⁶¹ It took more effort for a woman to secure a divorce than a man.⁶² The husband simply sent his wife from his house, effectively expelling her from his *oikos*, returning her to her original *oikos*. A woman, however, needed the intercession of her

⁵⁹Fantham, Foley, et al., op. cit., 103.

⁶⁰Cantarella, op. cit., 47.

⁶¹Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 64.

⁶²Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., reports (pp. 64-65), "There are only three cases known from the Classical period where an Athenian divorce proceeded from the wife's side. Two are from the fourth century, and were negotiated exclusively among men. The third case is remarkable in that a woman attempted to obtain a divorce on her own initiative." In *Women in the Classical World*, Fantham, Foley et al. write (p. 70), "Although divorce was easy to obtain, Athenian women . . . were legally and financially protected in such cases."

father or, if he had died, her brother.⁶³

Athenian law required a man to divorce his wife if he found her guilty of adultery and any woman so accused (and naturally found guilty) "was forbidden to wear jewelry and participate in public religious activities."⁶⁴ It was a rare husband, however, who prosecuted his wife for adultery both because of the embarrassment of having married such a woman and, more important, putting doubt on the legitimacy of one's offspring.⁶⁵ Cantarella puts it a bit more strongly:

The punishment of the unfaithful wife was repudiation, accompanied by restitution to the husband of the *eedna*, the price he paid to his wife's guardian, a tangible sign of the woman's new status (socially determined according to the value of the *eedna*), and the signal of the husband's power over her.⁶⁶

Interestingly, according to Cantarella, should a husband catch his wife in the act of adultery, he could not claim justifiable homicide and kill them in the passion of the moment. The man so caught could be publicly humiliated in one of several ways which included: "*paratimolos*, shaving of the pubic hair (which was a female practice and thus disgraceful for a man), or

⁶³Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 64.

⁶⁴Fantham, Foley, et al., op. cit., 114.

⁶⁵Fantham, Foley, et al., *ibid.*

⁶⁶Cantarella, op. cit., 30.

rhaphanidosis, being sodomized with a radish."⁶⁷ On the other hand, a man could claim justifiable homicide if he caught another man having sex -- Just uses the term "adultery" -- with his *pallake* (a class of prostitute, see below). A *pallake* could be a household slave a man kept to use sexually and "kept for the bearing of free children."⁶⁸

Female prostitutes were accorded slave status although there were some instances of pimps rescuing free-born women exposed to infanticide and rearing them to become *pallakai*.⁶⁹ While Athens did not outlaw prostitution (*porne*), the women who earned their living as prostitutes suffered strong social disapproval. "The law of the city concerned itself with prostitutes for only two reasons: to set a ceiling on their prices and to collect a tax on their income,"⁷⁰ writes Eva Cantarella. Pomeroy suggests such regulation resulted in part because "Prostitutes were notoriously mercenary. They were the only women in Athens who exercised

⁶⁷Cantarella, op. cit., 41.

⁶⁸Just, op. cit., 53.

⁶⁹Cantarella, op. cit., p. 44, writes, "In Greece, the custom was to put the infant into a crockery pot (called *chutra*, whence the verb *chutrizen*, "to put into a pot") and abandon it on a roadside usually not far from home. The exposure of infants in Greece had the socially, and thus politically, useful function of regulating the number of the members of groups and, above all, regulating the ratio between the sexes in such a way that there would not be an excess of women who would remain unmarried."

⁷⁰Cantarella, op. cit., 50.

control over considerable amounts of money."⁷¹ And as a segment of the population with money, they were an obvious source of tax revenues. Just agrees that they lived outside respectability but disagrees on the nature of their being beyond the pale:

Women . . . had to be placed permanently on one side or the other of the divide that separated the ordered life of the polis from the uncontrolled world of sensuality and the passions. Either women were the chaste wives, mothers, daughters and sisters of the citizenry, or else they were creatures of pleasure. The logic of this 'double standard' is quite clear. By their very nature women belonged as a whole to the disordered and irrational side of life. Their integration into society was, as it were, artificial -- the result of the subjugation and domestication by men. Left to themselves, women would be both ignorant and incapable of conforming to society's demands.⁷²

Athenian men, married or single, had no hesitations about availing themselves of prostitutes' services and, regardless of how hurt they may have felt, the wives of married men could offer no legal objection.⁷³ Married men could also avail themselves of the sexual favors of the female slaves in their households -- as indicated in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Andromache* -- with their wives having no legal recourse.⁷⁴ Because men usually did not marry

⁷¹Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 91.

⁷²Just, op. cit., 215.

⁷³Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 90.

⁷⁴Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 90, writes, "We hear little about the objections of their wives, although Euphilatus' wife bantered her husband about his intimacy with their slave."

Fantham, Foley et al., op. cit., p. 113, write, "The husband was free to enter the women's quarters and have sexual relations with his wife and slaves."

There were a few notable exceptions, one of the best known

before age 30, if they wished to engage in heterosexual activity, they had no choice but to visit prostitutes.⁷⁵ The irony is, despite Cantarella's assertion about the opprobrium accorded women who sold their sexual favors to sustain themselves, that "The lives of Athenian prostitutes, both at work in the company of male clients and at home among themselves, are best documented by the hundreds of red-figure vase paintings from the late sixth century to the late fifth."⁷⁶ Moreover, the state built and maintained brothels to make itself an attractive port of call for foreign sailors.⁷⁷ Prostitutes had to register as such so the state could regulate them, their prices, and tax their earnings. Although many prostitutes were accorded slave status if they weren't slaves outright, a prostitute could buy her freedom by saving her earnings or from securing a loan from one of the *eranoi*. The membership of some comprised past clients and the woman would repay her loan from the proceeds as a free prostitute.⁷⁸

being Alcibiades' flagrant disrespect for his wife, Hipparete. As Pomeroy in *Goddesses*, *ibid.* writes, "[W]hen Alcibiades flaunted his freedom to consort with prostitutes by bringing them into his house, his wife walked out and attempted to get a divorce. . . . When Alcibiades died in exile and dishonor, a faithful courtesan, Timandra, took care of his funeral."

⁷⁵Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, *op. cit.*, 91.

⁷⁶Fantham, Peet, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 116.

⁷⁷Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, *op. cit.*, 88.

⁷⁸Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, *op. cit.*, 89.

A man who wanted more than just sex from a prostitute purchased the services of a *hetaira*, literally "[female] companion."⁷⁹ The *hetairai* were "at the top of the social scale of these professional sexual entertainers, . . . well-trained and possessed artistic talents. . ." ⁸⁰ Just notes that prostitutes in this class "formed the only relatively independent class of women to be found in Athens."⁸¹

Only five genuine slave societies have existed in history: two in the Old World, classical Greece and Rome; and three, including the United States, in the New World. Because slavery and its aftermath are so much a part of us in the United States, we moderns have a very distorted perception of what slavery was like in ancient Greece.

"Classical society was, of course, a slave society" but its structure was "unfamiliar to Europeans and Americans of the last two centuries." The ancient world accepted slavery as part of the natural order and few questioned it, let alone advocated or

⁷⁹This line is taken from Euripides' *Andromache*, line 110, "There is no need to wear slavery's odious yoke."

⁸⁰Cantarella, op. cit., 50. Fantham, Foley, et al., op. cit., 116, translate *hetairai* as "female companions."

⁸¹Fantham, Foley, et al., op. cit., 116. "The Elements of Freedom in Ancient Greece," *The Sociological Review*, 11, (1963) p. 1.

⁸¹Just, op. cit., 52.

Slavery's Odious Yoke¹

"This is what it means
to be a slave: to be abused and bear it,
compelled by violence to suffer wrong."

-- Coryphaeus
in *Hecuba*

Only five genuine slave societies have existed in history: two in the Old World, classical Greece and Rome; and three, including the United States, in the New World.² Because slavery and its aftermath are so much a part of us in the United States, we moderns have a very distorted perception of what slavery was like in ancient Greece.

"Greek society was, of course, a slave society" but its structure was "unfamiliar to Europeans and Americans of the last two centuries."³ The ancient world accepted slavery as part of the natural order and few questioned it, let alone advocated or

¹This line is taken from Euripides' *Andromache*, line 110, "There invited to wear slavery's odious yoke."

²M.I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York, The Viking Press, 1980), 9. Brazil and the Caribbean Basin, especially in the West Indies, were the other two.

³William Linn Westermann, "Slavery and the Elements of Freedom in Ancient Greece," *The Sociological Review*, II, (1909) p. 1.

worked for its abolition.⁴ It was such a part of ancient Greek society that "[t]he Greek language had an astonishing range of vocabulary for slaves, unparalleled in my knowledge," writes M.I. Finley.⁵ They were cheap⁶ and easy to obtain. They could be purchased for relatively little or, if an employer needed only seasonal labor, rented.⁷ "Slaves were, moreover, employed by persons of relatively humble means"⁸ and used for almost every sort of labor from agriculture to mining to comprising Athens' police force, a body of 300 Scythian archers "armed and with powers of arresting the free."⁹ Finley asserts:

⁴Westermann, op. cit., 16, writes, "Ancient society does not appear to me to have been particularly self-conscious about its slaves. Certainly it was never hysterical, not even emotionally excited about the slave institution. . . . No moral horror of the institution appears such as developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the west." And M.I. Finley writes, "How completely the Greeks always took slavery for granted as one of the facts of human existence is abundantly evident to anyone who has read their literature." -- M.I. Finley, "Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labor?" *Historia*, 8, (1959), p. 145, in the collection he edited, *Slavery in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, England: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1960).

⁵Finley, "Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labour?" in a collection he edited, *Slavery in Classical Antiquity: Views and Controversies* (Cambridge, England: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1960), p. 146 [54]. He presented his paper in 1958.

⁶Just how cheap and how little they were valued can be seen in Odysseus's rhetorical question in *Hecuba*, lines 135-36, "asking what one slave was worth/ when laid in the balance/with the honor of Achilles."

⁷A.H.M. Jones, "Slavery in the Ancient World," *The Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 9, (1956), p. 189, citing Xenophon, *Vect*, iv., 14-15, and p. 191.

⁸Jones, op. cit., 185.

⁹Westermann, op. cit., 7.

In the domestic field, finally, we can take it as a rule that any free man who could possibly afford one, owned a slave attendant who accompanied him when he walked abroad in the town or when he travelled (including his military service) and also a slave women for the household chores. . . . I strongly believe that many owned slaves even when they could not afford them.¹⁰

The number of slaves in the ancient world, including ancient Greece, can only be guessed; "there are no trustworthy figures for the number of slaves. It is possible, however, to make a rough estimate for Athens in the latter part of the fourth century. . . ." ¹¹ A.H.M. Jones asserts there were 21,000 Athenian citizens -- i.e., adult males -- and that metics numbered 10,000. "This implies a total adult free population of both sexes of 60,000 or more, and a total free population of at least twice that figure."¹² Based on grain consumption,¹³ he calculates, "The maximum possible number of slaves who could have been maintained is . . . about 20,000, or one slave for every three adult free persons."¹⁴ About half were employed in household domestic service and of these 5,000 were servant girls, Jones has found. The other 10,000 worked in agriculture or

¹⁰Finley, "Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labor?" op. cit., 150.

¹¹Jones, op. cit., 187.

¹²Ibid.

¹³"We also know the amount of corn [grain] grown in and imported into Attica, and the annual consumption which was considered normal for a man." Jones, *ibid.*

¹⁴Ibid.

industry and far more in industry than in agriculture because "[w]e hear little of agricultural slavery."¹⁵ The vast majority of industrial slaves worked the silver mines at Laurium.¹⁶ In the fifth century, the number of both free men and slaves was greater than in the fourth, Jones asserts, because of the toll taken by the prosecution of the Peloponnesian War. In combatting the forces under Spartan King Agis in 413, Thucydides writes:

The Athenians therefore suffered great losses. They were deprived of the whole of their country; **more than 20,000 slaves, the majority of whom were skilled workmen, had deserted** [emphasis added], and all sheep and farm animals were lost.¹⁷

Finley offers a higher estimate of the slave population than Jones and Westermann. He thinks the "total of slaves [in all Greece] reached 80-100,000 [sic] in peak periods in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C." and offers Thucydides who wrote:

There were many slaves in Chios -- more in fact, than in any other city except Sparta; they were also, because of their number, punished particularly severely when they did wrong¹⁸

to draw his conclusion on that 80,000 to 100,000 slave population figure.¹⁹

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Jones, op. cit., 188.

¹⁷Thucydides, op. cit., 448.

¹⁸Thucydides, op. cit., 509.

¹⁹Finley, "Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labor?" op. cit., 150-51.

Unlike slaveholders in the United States, the Greeks who owned slaves used in industry often allowed them to "work independently, collecting from them a fixed rent"²⁰ and let them retain whatever they earned above this rent. From this surplus slaves could save funds to buy their freedom -- or spend their money on whatever they chose.

The dominant form of Greek polis slavery was "non-*praedial*", meaning that it was not agricultural slavery of either the plantation or ranch-type. Its foremost characteristic was its extensive use in the handicrafts.²¹ And if slavery in the United States was called the "peculiar institution," Greek slavery was also marked by peculiarities, William Linn Westermann observes. The government of a polis, especially in Athens, bought slaves and trained them to run much of its bureaucracy and provide various municipal services including police protection.

The slave in Athens, then, is [legally] a man, and possessed of all the characteristics inherent in a man as such. He has none of the privileges, rights, and immunities of the citizens and in this he is exactly like the foreigner or metic. He has no legal personality, for this is a peculiarity of the citizen. Hence the foreigner, in becoming a slave, lost nothing, but merely came under the physical control of a master. . . . Since the slave has no legal rights, the force of the master can be used in any way the latter desires, unless some other specific factor prevents. Thus it is a mistake to insist too strongly on the analogy between the slave and the beast: while the

²⁰Jones, *op. cit.*, 188.

²¹Westermann, *op. cit.*, 3.

relations of master and slave were practically those of master and property, still this does not necessarily imply any similarity between the slave and other forms of property, a fact of which the average Greek never lost sight. . . . It must be kept in mind that there is little difference in theory between the free foreigner and the slave; the only real difference is that the one is in point of fact under the physical control of a master.²²

Except in time of war -- and then, only when there was no alternative -- slaves did not fight in behalf of a polis. As Truesdale S. Brown observes, "The slave had one great advantage over a free worker: he was not subject to military conscription."²³ Even so, they accompanied warriors during campaigns as carriers of armor and weapons, but they stood on the sidelines while a battle was fought. If a polis was in particularly desperate straits, its government promised slaves their freedom after a battle if they were willing to take up arms and risk death for the polis.²⁴ The feeling was that slaves inherently would be ineffective soldiers -- oarsmen in triremes in time of war when survival was at stake²⁵ -- and that they wouldn't fight because they had no stake in the polis. As Pylades rhetorically asks Orestes in *Orestes*: "What are slaves

²²Robert Schlaifer, "Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 47 (1936), p. 182.

²³Truesdale S. Brown, *Ancient Greece* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1965), 13.

²⁴Brown, *op. cit.*, 13.

²⁵Truesdale S. Brown, *op. cit.*, 13, denies that slaves were used as oarsmen in triremes as a regular practice. "Contrary to a popular notion, slaves were not used to row the Athenian triremes. . . ."

worth in a fight with men/ who were born free?"²⁶

Another peculiarity was benefit clubs called *eranoi*. An *eranos* was "a social institution peculiar to the Greeks alone in antiquity, although it followed them in their emigration into other lands."²⁷ One type of *eranos* functioned somewhat akin to a modern credit union, i.e., it lent money to slaves which they could use to purchase their freedom. It existed in the Athens of Euripides as evidenced by at least 14 surviving silver bowls which emancipated slaves bought and dedicated to their freedom. Such people were not considered completely free until they had repaid their loans.

Interestingly, a person could be a fractional slave, i.e.

The person enslaved might well be one-quarter free, or three-quarters free, depending on the personal inviolability and the options of activity and movement which might actually be granted him. . . . There was an astonishing fluidity of status in both directions, from slavery to freedom as from freedom to slavery. This [sic] it is which, in large measure, explains the absence of slave revolts in Greece in the classical period. Why should an enslaved person revolt if thereby he merely gains that which he might easily obtain by the simple process of borrowing money for his emancipation and repaying that money?²⁸

²⁶Euripides, *Orestes* Translated by William Arrowsmith in Grene and Lattimore, editors, *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume IV, op. cit., lines 1115-16, p. 255.

²⁷Westermann, op. cit., 7.

²⁸Westermann, op. cit., 15.

Slavery was such an integral part of Greek life that when it came under examination, most ancient authors defended it and theorized the possibility some people were better off being slaves because it was their nature to be a slave. Plato and Aristotle are, perhaps, the two best known. If, as La Rochefoucauld observed, hypocrisy is the tribute vice pays to virtue, then Greeks were agreed that fellow citizens should not be slaves inside their respective poleis. Thus, Athenians saw nothing in the least wrong with barbarians serving them as slaves and were not at all uneasy if a Corinthian, say, served them as a slave. ". . . [O]pposition to the enslavement of Greeks is a product of the theory of natural slavery [see below] and not of the theory of the injustice of all slavery."²⁹

Few descriptions of what relations were like between masters and slaves have survived, if indeed, they were written, outside of the *Iliad*³⁰ and the *Odyssey* and Euripides' plays.³¹ Robert

²⁹Schlaifer, op. cit., 188.

³⁰Pomeroy in *Goddesses*, op. cit., 25-26, observes that Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon "over a valuable slave woman" caused Achilles to withdraw from participating in combat at Troy and "provided the theme to the *Iliad*." In lesser matters that Homer relates in *The Iliad*, "a skilled slave woman" was offered as "a prize in a footrace honoring Patroclus, and Eurymedousa was selected by the Phaeacians as a special trophy for King Alcinous [*Iliad*, 1.113-15; 23, 263; 23, 703-704-05]. In the sense of conquest, an extra measure was accrued to a warrior who possessed a slave who was once the wife or daughter of a man of high status. Thus, after the fall of Troy, the women of the Trojan royal family were allotted as special prizes to the heroes of the Greek army." Euripides reflects this in his treatment of captured women in *The Trojan Women*, *Hecuba* and *Andromache*.

Schlaifer finds that the Hellenic belief in their own superiority and corresponding inferiority of barbarians did not arise until the Greeks repelled the Persians in 490 and again in 480:

This struggle, in which almost all the Greeks participated as a nation and which resulted in the complete defeat of almost all known foreign peoples, headed by a king hitherto believed invincible, caused a great surge in national pride. . . . [A]s clashes with the Great King became less frequent, a new factor, consciousness of superiority in the arts and sciences, kept national pride alive. Their very language was felt by the Greeks to be superior. [In *Birds*, 199] Aristophanes uses [*barbaros*] to mean 'incapable of speech.'³²

In the fifth and fourth centuries, then, Greeks adopted the attitude that they, by virtue of being Greeks, possessed a superior culture that non-Greeks were incapable of learning or adopting. Isocrates went so far as to suggest that non-Greeks were by their natures fit only for slavery (theory of natural slavery) and thus it was the Greeks' obligation to make them their slaves.³³ They based this in part on their observations of "barbarian" culture, ascribing to non-Greeks a willingness to readily submit to absolute monarchy, a state which the Greeks called *douleia*, one of their words for slavery.

³¹Schlaifer, op. cit., 165.

³²Schlaifer, op. cit., 166. Aristophanes has Hoopoe tell a companion, "O they're not mere barbarians as they were/Before I came. I've taught them language now." from *Birds*, lines 198-200, 414 B.C.E. Aristophanes, *Five Comedies of Aristophanes* translated by Benjamin Bickley Rogers (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955), p. 12.

³³Schlaifer, op. cit., 167.

Even Euripides was not immune to this thinking as reflected in the concluding speech of one of his heroines, Iphigenia, as she submits to being a human sacrifice at Aulis:

It is
 A right thing that Greeks rule barbarians,
 Not barbarians Greeks.

It is right,
 And why? They are bondsmen and slaves, and we,
 Mother, are Greeks and free.³⁴

In *The Republic*, Plato offers this exchange:

Well then. There are rulers and people in other cities as well as in this one? -- There are.
 And they call each other fellow citizens. -- Of course.
 Besides the word fellow-citizens, what do the people call the rulers in other cities?
 In many they call them masters, but in democracies they call them by this very name, rulers. [archon]

And what do the rulers call the people? -- Providers of food and wages.
 What do the rulers call the people in other cities? --
Slaves. [emphasis added]
 And what do the rulers call each other? -- Fellow rulers.³⁵

In *Suppliant Women*, Euripides offers this exchange outside the gates of Athens between Theseus and a herald from Thebes:

³⁴Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis* Translated by Charles R. Walker, lines 1399-1403. In Grene and Lattimore, editors, *Euripides, The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume IV, op. cit., p. 371.

³⁵Plato, *The Republic*, 463a, 463b. translated by G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974, 1980), 124.

HERALD: What man is master in this land? To whom
Must I give the word I bring . . .

THESEUS: One moment, stranger.
Your start was wrong, seeking a master here.
This city is free, and ruled by no one man.
The people reign, in annual succession.
They do not yield the power to the rich;
The poor man has an equal share in it.

HERALD: That one point gives the better of the game
To me. The town I come from is controlled
By one man, not a mob. . . .

THESEUS: . . . Nothing
Is worse for a city than an absolute ruler. . . .³⁶

And in *Helen*, Euripides has Helen describe herself in Egypt as:

here, among savages, cut off from friends,
a slave among slaves, for in barbarian countries
all men in effect are slaves except for one.³⁷

In *The Phoenician Women*, the poet went so far as to assert that a
Greek in a barbarian was compelled "to violate your [his]
nature./ You have to live a slave's life to survive."³⁸

³⁶Euripides, *The Suppliant Women*, lines 399-400, 403-11, 428-29, translated by Frank William Jones in David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, editors, *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume IV (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959, 1969), 153.

³⁷Euripides, *Helen*, lines 291-93, translated by James Michie and Colin Leach (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1981).

³⁸Euripides, *The Phoenician Women* Translated by Peter Burian and Brian Swann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), lines 433-34, p. 34.

Plato merely refined what Aeschylus wrote first in his *Persians* and which Herodotus repeated about barbarian cultures being *douloi*. General acceptance of this attitude is reflected in characters in Euripides' *Helen* and *Iphigenia at Aulis* although he himself "refuses to admit its justice."³⁹ In his *Medea*, Euripides assigns to Jason a dialogue on how fortunate Medea was that he rescued her from barbarian Colchis and brought her back to Corinth.⁴⁰ Jason's words ring hollow -- and are meant to -- but his sentiments were shared by the majority of Euripides' audiences.

Outside of prisoners of war, piracy and kidnapping were the most common supplies of slaves. Simply travelling in a foreign land with inadequate protection provided unscrupulous slave traders with the opportunity to seize a person.⁴¹ The most common reason for being enslaved apart from war, piracy or kidnapping was inability to repay debt. "In most [Greek] states the mere fact that a debt was unpaid was itself sufficient reason for enslavement. . ."⁴² until Solon outlawed the practice. Metics could be enslaved for failure to pay their taxes although this was rare.⁴³

³⁹Schlaifer, op. cit., 167.

⁴⁰*Greek Drama, Medea*, p. 201.

⁴¹Schlaifer, op. cit., 176.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 178-79.

Because they were not citizens, slaves did not have the rights of citizens⁴⁴ which included the ability to bring suit against someone who wronged or injured him. No "political right [was] violated when he was physically attacked,"⁴⁵ regardless of whom assaulted him or why.⁴⁶ He had to persuade his master or hire a citizen to sue another citizen if he felt injured; if another slave wronged him, he would secure a citizen-representative to sue the owner of the offending slave. "[I]n this he was no different from the foreigner or metic, both of whom had to transact business through a representative."⁴⁷ Moreover, the slave's owner had no obligation to bring suit in his slave's behalf.⁴⁸ If a slave was sued in his own name and lost the suit, the penalty for losing the suit was a whipping.⁴⁹

⁴⁴Euripides suggests in *Ion* (lines 854-56) there is no significant difference between a slave and a free man. Says an old man, former tutor to the Erechtheids, "The only shameful thing about a slave/ is the name he bears; a slave is no whit worse/ than any of the free if he be brave at heart."

⁴⁵Ibid., 180-81.

⁴⁶Euripides reflects the impunity with which free men could abuse slaves in *Electra* (lines 220, 223-24 and 227) in his exchange between Orestes and Electra when the pair do not know the identity of the other early in the play.

⁴⁷Ibid., 179.

⁴⁸Ibid., 180.

⁴⁹Ibid., 179.

If a slave were murdered, his owner was legally compelled to seek redress from the person who killed his slave because Athens lacked a public prosecutor.⁵⁰

Nor was this principle violated in the least in the case of one who murdered his own slave. Since it was inevitable that occasions should arise when the killing of a slave was necessary, the state took no action in such a case, but the underlying idea of responsibility is the same; here, however, the individual is left to his own conscience.⁵¹

Torture of slaves, of course, occurred from time to time. If it believed its interests were involved, the state could either torture a slave to coerce information or demand that his or her owner perform the torture.⁵² "[S]ince it could subject any foreigner to the same treatment, this is merely an additional illustration of the fact that the bases of the legal positions of the slave and the foreigner were the same."⁵³

Because "[s]lavery . . . was not usually permanent,"⁵⁴ the Athenian slave had more "rights" than the slaves in most other

⁵⁰In *Hecuba* (lines 292-93), as Hecuba pleads with Odysseus to intervene and reverse the assembly's decision that will take her daughter's life, she says, "Read them your law of murder. Tell/ them how it applies to slave and free without distinction."

⁵¹Ibid. 180.

⁵²Torture was employed, explains Schlaifer, "because it was thought to be the surest method of attaining the truth." Schlaifer, op. cit., 182.

⁵³Ibid., 181.

⁵⁴Brown, op. cit., 13.

poleis. He could acquire and hold more property -- property his master could not claim by virtue of owning the slave -- than in other Greek states and if his master lacked an heir, he had a right of inheritance to his estate.⁵⁵ Unlike the ante bellum South where slave marriages were unrecognized (husbands and wives could be and were separated when one was sold and that was a *de facto* divorce), slaves had family rights. No restrictions were placed on slave marriages. If a slave man and a slave woman wished to marry, their masters' consent was not required even if they had separate masters. And although rare, a slave man could marry a free woman. In short, "[t]he sanctity of this slave family is recognized."⁵⁶ The slave family, Schlaifer found, was "a full legal entity with regular marriage"⁵⁷ much like free families. It differed in that the legal protections accorded a slave family were scanty. However, fathers were heads of their households, sons took their fathers' places upon their fathers' deaths and daughters were considered a part of a man's family until they married and joined their husbands' families.

Using slavery as a metaphor, Euripides and others, including Plutarch and Menander, warned men against becoming subject to the control wielded by wives who brought huge dowries to their marriages. For a man less well-to-do than his betrothed to think

⁵⁵Schlaifer, op. cit., 183.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

he would attain financial security by acquiring her dowry was unwise, they wrote. Euripides noted, "Even though free, he is a slave of his marriage bed, having sold his body for his dowry."⁵⁸ Euripides and others were not advising against marrying for money per se but cautioning that should a man marry a much richer woman, he had to be concerned that she might seek to divorce him. If he had spent her dowry, he would be unable to return the principal to his estranged wife's *kyrios* and find himself in economic, legal and social difficulties. Even if the man were not concerned about his wife seeking a divorce, David Schaps observes, "the wife who contributed more than her husband [to the family treasury] had a good claim to be considered the senior partner."⁵⁹ Moreover, such a man who failed to support his wife in the style dictated by her dowry "might find himself the object of considerable scorn."⁶⁰

That slavery was accepted and, for the most part, nowhere nearly as brutal as in the New World did not make slavery any easier on those who fell under its yoke. "By Solon's time slavery had come to be looked upon as a fate worse than death"⁶¹ and while Solon might have abolished the enslaving of Athenians

⁵⁸Schaps, op. cit., 76. The fragment of Euripides Schaps cites is number 775 Nauck (=lines 158-9 in his *Phaethon*).

⁵⁹Schaps, *ibid.*

⁶⁰Schaps., op. cit., 77.

⁶¹Schlaifer, op. cit., 185.

by other Athenians, any number of offenses punishable by enslavement became punishable by death instead. Indeed, death was preferable to slavery, the nobility thought. In *Hecuba*, Euripides underscores this belief by having Polyxena, Hecuba's daughter, say, "It is that name of slave, so ugly, so strange, that makes me want to die."⁶² By Plato's time, the souls of the citizens of his *Republic* were "so sensitive that if anyone brings up a word about slavery, they become angry and cannot endure it. And you know that in the end they would take no notice of the laws written or unwritten, in order that there should be no master over them."⁶³

The irony is that:

Many writers protested against slavery as it was, without having the least doubt of the justice of the institution if properly applied. Euripides is one of the few who proclaim the slave is very often better than his master, implying in such cases that slavery is the height of injustice. Since good and able children were often born of slavish parents, all hereditary slavery is probably to be condemned. But most certainly Euripides believed that there existed some whose nature was fit for slavery; thus his divergencies from such a conservative as Aristotle are only the rejection of the inferiority of barbarians as a class and the refusal to believe in even a strong tendency for slavishness to be hereditary.⁶⁴

⁶²Euripides, *Hecuba*, lines 358-59, translated by William Arrowsmith.

⁶³Plato, op. cit., 563d, p. 211.

⁶⁴Schlaifer, op. cit., 199-200. Athens.

Euripides as Champion of the Oppressed

In this time of political correctness, it is no small irony that one of the oldest dead white European males,¹ Euripides, is largely unknown. To most college freshmen studying world history, he is little more than one in a series of names to be learned so they can pass a world civilization² exam before forgetting him, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Pericles, Thucydides, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and other ancient Greeks. Euripides' depiction of women, bastards, those seeking political asylum, metics³ and slaves could not help but result in fifth-century Athens pausing to examine its attitudes toward those who were not Athenian citizens. And 2,500 years later, his depiction of the oppressed is just as relevant.

¹I am indebted to Bernard Knox, author of *The Oldest Dead White European Males And Other Reflections on the Classics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), for this phrase. While Knox didn't coin it, I have borrowed his using it as the title of his book on Classical Greece.

²College freshmen take world civilization instead of western civilization.

³Metics were resident aliens in Athens.

Did Euripides champion women, oppose slavery,⁴ and call into question the Greeks' smugness at their perceived sense of superiority over barbarians? Yes and no. Richmond Lattimore writes:

The sense of defeat and disappointment is constantly there in Euripides. It makes him bring to the fore those who were weak or oppressed, the despised and misunderstood: women, children, slaves, captives, strangers, barbarians. Women as chief characters outnumber men, and most of his choruses are female. It is not that he is "for" them or "against" them; he merely tries to present action from their point of view, and they fascinate him. So do children, but here his realism fails: obviously he knew little about them. His servants are true to life, while his heroes who deliver the oppressed are wooden.⁵

In presenting action from their point of view, however, one cannot help but become clothed in the rags of the oppressed and ponder (no matter how briefly) what it must be like to be a woman, a slave, a captive, an alien in Athenian society.

More important, Euripides demonstrated that regardless of sex, condition of servitude, and (what today we would call) national origin, people are far more alike than they are

⁴"Slavery has always been one of the subjects that haunted Euripides. We do not happen to find in our remains of his works any definitive announcement that slavery is 'contrary to nature,' as was held by most Greek philosophers of the succeeding century. . . . But it is clear that Euripides hated it." Murray, op. cit., 137-38.

⁵David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, editors, *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume III, *Euripides*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959, 1969), vi. From Lattimore's "General Introduction."

different. This was a radical concept to most Athenian citizens who believed themselves superior to not just the barbarians but other Greek poleis as well. It is no coincidence that Pericles' funeral oration is as much self-congratulation on the superiority of the Athenian citizen as it is a tribute to the Athenian soldiers who died for their country:

. . . so I shall say nothing about the warlike deeds by which we acquired our power or the battles in which our fathers gallantly resisted our enemies, Greek or foreign. What I want to do is discuss the spirit in which we faced our trials and also our constitution and the way of life which has made us great. . . . believing that this kind of speech is not inappropriate to the present occasion, and that this whole assembly, of citizens and foreigners, may listen to it with advantage.

Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbours. It is more the case of our being a model to others, than our imitating anyone else.

Then the greatness of our city brings it about that all the good things from all over the world flow into us, so that to us it seems just as natural to enjoy foreign goods as well as our own local products.

Then there is a great difference between us and our opponents [the Spartans and their allies] . . . Again, in questions of general good feeling there is a great contrast between us and most other people. . . .

Taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece, and I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the rightful owner of his own person, and do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional versatility. . . . Athens, alone of the states we know, comes to her testing time in a greatness that surpasses what was imagined of her. In her case, and in her case alone, no invading enemy is ashamed at being defeated, and no subject can complain of being governed by people unfit for their responsibilities. . . . Future ages will wonder at us, as the present ages wonders at us now.

. . .

Murray, *ibid.*

Murray, *ibid.*

This, then, is the kind of city for which these men, who could not bear the thought of losing her, nobly fought and nobly died. . . .⁶

Where classicists such as Gilbert Murray say, "To us, he seems an aggressive champion of women; more aggressive and certainly far more appreciative than Plato,"⁷ they are right as far as they go. British suffragettes recited passages from *Medea* at their rallies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸ More recently Katherine Hepburn and other leading American actresses as well as Vanessa Redgrave performed *Trojan Women* in New York City's Central Park to protest United States involvement in Vietnam. But Euripides' words in behalf of women, no matter how eloquent, involve more than oppressed women reciting noble words.

Where Murray wrote in 1913, "[T]he "present age is the first, or almost the first, to treat its heroines in fiction as real human beings,"⁹ he observed that Euripides' "tragic heroines are almost always treated with greater interest and insight than his heroes."¹⁰ Where Euripides broke through, what made him such a seemingly eloquent advocate, was in how he portrayed

⁶Thucydides, op. cit., 117-20.

⁷Murray, op. cit., 32.

⁸Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 108.

⁹Murray, *ibid.*

¹⁰Murray, *ibid.*

women. He "was a realist, and made drama real because he made it true to life as he saw it. He saw it very acutely from every side, omitting none."¹¹ In character and intelligence, Euripides' women are not inferior to men and, Euripides seems to say, men should treat them as equals. Accordingly, he gave the women in his plays them the same strengths and weaknesses of character as men, the same emotions, the same foibles, the same concerns, the same desires, the same intelligence, the same cunning, the same vanity, the same viciousness and capacity for murder, the same ignorance and stupidity. "[H]e blends the good and the bad so that his characters are for the most part wholly neither one nor the other," observes Grube.¹² Even so, as Roger Just observes, it "is the tragedy of Euripides' women that they are continually forced to live out the very role[s] in which male prejudice cast them."¹³

Pomeroy accepts most of the above argument but has reservations. Euripides casts several "self-sacrificing heroines who win praise from the traditionally minded," she writes. "But it seems to me the playwright does not totally approve of them. . . . Euripides structures these plays [*Children of Herakles*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Suppliant Women*, *Helen*, *Trojan Women*] so as

¹¹Grube, op. cit., 7.

¹²Grube, op. cit., 8.

¹³Just, op. cit., 197.

to leave us doubtful whether the men for whom these women sacrificed themselves were worth it.¹⁴

There are exceptions Euripides portraying his women as men in a skin of a different shape. One is Makaria, Herakles' daughter. She is altruism personified (I can't think of a single male portrayed as goodness and light personified) in the *Herakleidae* [*Children of Herakles*]. Her pure nobility is offset by the baseness of Alkmene, Herakles' mother. Indeed, Makaria's character is such, write Henry Taylor and Robert A. Brooks, that "her appearance makes her a kind of apparition."¹⁵ Another exception is Iphigenia in *Iphigenia in Aulis* where Iphigenia, Agamemnon's daughter, accepts her death as a sacrificial offering so the Greeks can get the wind needed to take them to Troy. Yet another exception is Polyxena in *Hecuba*. As Hecuba's daughter, Polyxena is almost as admirable as Makaria in accepting her death. William Arrowsmith describes her as "almost too noble to be true."¹⁶ Polyxena tells Hecuba:

¹⁴Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, op. cit., 109, 110.

¹⁵Euripides, *The Children of Herakles* Translated and with an introduction by Henry Taylor and Robert A. Brooks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 13.

¹⁶William Arrowsmith, "Introduction to *Hecuba*," in Grene and Lattimore, editors, *Euripides*, op. cit., 492.

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.¹⁷

At the end of the play, Hecuba, achieves the satisfaction of the weak, revenge: a cunning murder of two innocent boys whose father has killed her innocent son, Polydorus. According to legend, Hecuba was transformed into a bitch before drowning at sea on the way back to Greece as one of Agamemnon's prizes of war.

In *Trojan Women*, the most unhappy fate of the widows and daughters of the Trojan royal family -- Hecuba, Polyxena, Cassandra and Andromache is opposed by the woman damned for bringing on their sorrow, Helen. Says Poseidon, setting the scene at the opening of the play:

. . . If anyone wants to see an unhappy woman, here is Hecuba, prostrate before the entrance [to Troy] weeping many tears for many miseries. Her daughter Polyxena has been slain at the tomb of Achilles, bravely dying, hapless, girl. Priam is gone and the children, all but the virgin

¹⁷Euripides, *Hecuba*, lines 204 - 215. translated by William Arrowsmith. From Grene and Lattimore, *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume III, op. cit., 503.

Cassandra, whom Lord Apollo has given over to prophetic frenzy. And now Agamemnon, religion and reverence forgot, forces her to be his concubine.¹⁸

Later, as the women bemoan their fate, Andromache tells Hecuba:

[Troy] destroyed by the illwill of the gods, from that hour when your infant son escaped death, the son who for a wicked woman [Helen] destroyed the towers of Troy. Before the temple of Pallas the bloody bodies of our dead are exposed for the vultures to harry. The end has come and the yoke of slavery for Troy.¹⁹

Even Helen's husband, Menelaus, has little sympathy for Helen.

He tells Hecuba:

. . . Now I am come to take away the Woman of Sparta -- I hate to say the name of my wife, my wife that was. . . They that fought this weary war to get her have given her to me to kill -- or, if I do not choose to kill her, to have her taken back to the land of Argos. For my part I have decided to postpone her fate while I am in Troy and to take her back on my ship to the land of Greece and *then* hand her over to the vengeance of those whose friends have died at Ilium; they will kill her.

Well then, my men, enter the tents and fetch her here. Drag her by her cursed hair. . . .²⁰

In *Electra*, Euripides contrasts the virtue of Electra with the baseness of Clytemnestra. Compare Electra's speech, describing herself to Orestes (her brother who has not identified himself to her) at the opening of the play with her later condemnation of her mother, Clytemnestra.

¹⁸Greek Drama, *Trojan Women*, 258.

¹⁹Greek Drama, *Trojan Woman*, p. 270.

²⁰Greek Drama, *Trojan Women*, p. 276.

I am not forced, I chose this slavery²¹ myself
 to illuminate Aegisthus' [Clytemnestra's husband] for the
 gods . . .
 For my own mother, she, Tyndareus' deadly daughter,
 has thrown me out like dirt from the house, to her husband's
 joy
 and while she breeds new children in Aegisthus' bed
 has made me and Orestes aliens to her love.²²

Then I speak -- and here is the keynote of my song.
 Mother who bore me, how I wish your mind were healthy.
 You, long before your husband came near sacrifice
 [Agamemnon had sacrificed his and Clytemnestra's daughter
 Iphigenia so the Argives could obtain a wind to sail for
 Troy]
 the very hour your husband marched away from home
 were setting your brown curls by the bronze mirror's light.
 Now any woman who works on her beauty when her man
 is gone from home indicts herself as a whore.
 She has no cause to show her painted face outside the door
 unless she wants to look for trouble. . . .
 You needed Agamemnon never to come [home] again. . . .
 Next, if as you say, our father killed your daughter,
 did I do any harm to you, or did my brother?
 When you killed your husband, why did you not bestow
 the ancestral home on us, but took to bed the gold
 which never belonged to you to buy a lover?²³

Nor all plays have such stark contrasts, a woman of noble
 character balanced by a woman of baser character. In *Alcestis*,
 the woman is the nobler character, by far, and the male lead
 portrayed in a less than heroic light. The woman's sense of
 duty, of self-sacrifice, is easy to appreciate but difficult for
 the modern mind to accept while the male lead's opportunism is

²¹Living in poverty with a farmer whom she has married in
 name only. Electra remains a virgin.

²²Euripides, *Electra*, lines 57, 60 - 67. Translated by
 Emily Townsend Vermeule, from *The Complete Greek Tragedies*,
 Volume III, op. cit.

²³*Electra*, lines 1060-61, 1069-75, 1079, 1086-90.

readily understandable.

To recap, Euripides did not think women inferior to men or better or nobler than men. He broke ground by portraying women as the same as men -- no better, no worse -- by giving them personalities and placing them in situations where they behaved as one would expect men to react given despair, hopelessness and futility. In so doing, he at the very least caused his audiences, composed mostly of men, to -- at the very least -- reconsider their treatment of their wives, daughters, mistresses and slaves.

Euripides, *Alceste* Translated by William Arrowsmith (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

----, *The Bacchae* [*The Bacchae of Euripides*] Translated by Donald Sutherland and with a critical essay by the translator (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1968).

----, *The Children of Heracles* Translated by Henry Taylor and Robert A. Brooks (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1981).

----, *Helen* Translated by James Michie and David Leach (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1981).

----, *Iphigeneia* [A Translation with Commentary by Anne Giffin Burnett] (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970).

----, *The Phoenician Women* Translated by Peter Burian and Brian Swann (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1981).

Greene, David, and Lattimore, Richmond, editors, *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volumes III and IV (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958). [source of *The Suppliant Women*, *Dracontes*, *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, *Medea*, *Andromache* and *Electra*]

Wicks, Moses, editor, *Greek Drama* (New York: Bantam Books, 1965, 1982). [contains *Medea*, *Hippolytus* and *The Trojan Women* as well as Aristophanes' *The Frogs*]

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

- Aristophanes, *Five Comedies* (includes *Birds* produced in 414) translated by Benjamin Bickley Rogers (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955).
- Aristotle, *Politics* (New York: Random House, 1943) Benjamin Jowett, translator.
- , *Poetics* [*Aristotle's Poetics*] Translated with commentaries by Hippocrates G. Apostle, Elizabeth A. Dobbs and Morris A. Parslow (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1990).
- Demosthenes, *Private Orations L-LVIII in Nearing LIX, with an English Translation by A.T. Murray* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1939, 1956).
- Euripides, *Alcestis* Translated by William Arrowsmith (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1974).
- , *The Bacchae* [*The Bacchae of Euripides*] Translated by Donald Sutherland and with a critical essay by the translator (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1968).
- , *The Children of Herakles* Translated by Henry Taylor and Robert A. Brooks (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- , *Helen* Translated by James Michie and Colin Leach (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- , *Ion* [A Translation with Commentary by Anne Pippin Burnett] (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970).
- , *The Phoenician Women* Translated by Peter Burian and Brian Swann (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- Greene, David, and Lattimore, Richmond, editors, *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies, Volumes III and IV* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958). [source of *The Suppliant Women, Orestes, Iphigenia in Aulis, Iphigenia in Tauris, Hecuba, Andromache and Electra*]
- Hadas, Moses, editor, *Greek Drama* (New York: Bantam Books, 1965, 1982). [contains *Medea, Hippolytus* and *The Trojan Women* as well as Aristophanes' *The Frogs*]

- Herodotus, *The History* translated by David Grene (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- Oates, Whitney J., and O'Neill, Jr. Eugene, editors, *The Complete Greek Drama: All the Extant Tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the Comedies of Aristophanes and Menander, in a Variety of Translations* (in two volumes) (New York: Random House, 1938).
- Plato, *The Republic*. G.M.A. Grube, translator, *Plato's Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974).
- Strauss, Leo, *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse: An Interpretation of the Oeconomicus* with a new literal translation by Carnes Lord (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970).
- Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1954, 1968), Rex Warner translator.

Secondary Sources:

- Bieber, Margaret, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1939).
- Brown, Truesdale S., *Ancient Greece* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1965).
- Burian, Peter, "Euripides' 'Heraclidae': An Interpretation" *Classical Philology* LXXII, No. 1 (January 1977), pp. 1-21.
- Cantarella, Eva, *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, translated by Maureen B. Fant and with an introduction by Mary R. Lefkowitz (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, 1987).
- Conacher, D.J., *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme and Structure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967).
- Fantham, Elaine; Foley, Helene Peet; Kampen, Natalie Boymel; Pomeroy, Sarah B.; and Shapiro, H. Alan, *Women in the Classical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- Finley, M.I., *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: The Viking Press, 1980).

- , editor, *Slavery in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, England: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd, 1960).
- Gregory, Justina, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1991).
- Grube, G.M.A., *The Drama of Euripides* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1941).
- Just, Roger, *Women In Athenian Law and Life* (London: Routledge Classical Studies, 1989, 1991).
- Knox, Bernard, *The Oldest Dead White European Males and Other Reflections on the Classics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993).
- , *Essays, Ancient & Modern* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
- Lefkowitz, Mary R., *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).
- , and Maureen B. Fant, editors, *Women's Life in Greece & Rome: A Source Book in Translation* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
- Lucas, F.L. *Euripides and His Influence* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc. 1963).
- Melchinger, Siegfried, *Euripides* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1973).
- Pomeroy, Sarah B., *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975).
- , editor, *Women's History and Ancient History* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
- Pucci, Pietro, *The Violence of Pity in Euripides' Medea* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980).
- Schapps, David, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 1979).
- Segal, Charles, *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow: Art, Gender, and Commemoration in Alcestis, Hippolytus, and Hecuba* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993).
- Wiedemann, Thomas, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

Wilson, John R., editor, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Euripides' Alcestis: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

Winkler, John J., and Froma I. Zeitlin, editors, *Nothing to Do with Dionysus? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

Zuntz, G., *The Political Plays of Euripides* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1963). [corrected edition]