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Euripidean Men Revisited
Four Case Studies

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Declaration

I, Dimitra Kokkini, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signature:

Abstract

While Euripides' women have attracted a great deal of attention in recent decades, it is now half a century since the last substantial monograph devoted to his male characters. The present thesis examines representations of manliness and male behaviour in Euripidean tragedy. It aims to revisit Euripidean men as characters in their own right, not simply as foils to powerful women, and in relation with ideals of manliness as expressed and experienced in fifth-century Athens. The Introduction is divided thematically into two parts. The first part deals with the emergence of Gender and Men's Studies from the same theoretical thinking that shaped Feminist thought, and demonstrates how their rhetoric and ideas can be used in literary criticism. The second part uses the idea of masculinity as a cultural construct and focuses on the concept of "ideal masculinity" as promoted in ancient Greek sources.

Four case studies constitute the four main chapters of the thesis, each one of them placing emphasis on different aspects of masculinity and male identity. Chapter 1 focuses on Herakles in *Herakles*, and deals with questions regarding his relation with femininity, gender balance of roles within the *oikos*, male domesticity and the existence of multiple definitions of manly courage. The second case study is Admetos; Chapter 2 demonstrates that in *Alkestis* courage is not necessarily synonymous with the male sex, while other positive elements of male identity such as propriety and hospitality are given prominence as equally important and praiseworthy. Chapter 3 focuses on Hippolytos and explores the implications of a narrow and distorted understanding of positive qualities such as *sophrosyne* and piety, which can place a man at odds with his familial and public role. Finally, Chapter 4 uses Jason in *Medeia* to highlight the ramifications of a failure to fulfill the male obligations to his *oikos* and its members.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations of Greek authors and works are mainly these used in *OCD*³ where possible; otherwise I have used those in *LSJ*. In addition, I have used the following abbreviations.

<i>IG II²</i>	Kirchner, I. (ed.) (1935) <i>Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis Anno Posteriore, edition minor v. 2 and 3, pars III, fasc. I</i> (Berlin)
Kn.	Kannicht, R. (ed.) (2004) <i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta [TrGF], v. 5, Euripides</i> (Göttingen)
Littré	Littré, É. (1962) <i>Oeuvres Complètes d' Hippocrate, tome 8</i> (Amsterdam)
L-P	Lobel, E. and Page, D. L. (1955) <i>Poetarum Lesbionum Fragmenta</i> (Oxford)
<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell, H. G. and Scott, R. (1996 ⁹) <i>A Greek-English Lexicon, With a Revised Supplement</i> (Oxford)
Nauck	Nauck, A. (1964) <i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> (Hildesheim)
<i>OCD</i> ³	Hornblower, S. and Spawforth, A. (eds.) (2003 ³) <i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> (Oxford)
<i>OF</i>	Kern, O. (ed.) (1922) <i>Orphicorum Fragmenta</i> (Berolini)
<i>P. Antinoop.</i>	Roberts, C. H. (ed.) (1950) <i>The Antinoopolis Papyri, Part I</i> (London)
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum, v. 9</i> (1944)
West	West, M. L. (1971/1972) <i>Iambi et Elegi Graeci, v. 1 and 2</i> (Oxford)

Notes

All Greek texts have been copied from Oxford Classical Text (OCT); where OCT was not available, I have used Budé and Teubner.

Greek names and literary works are directly transliterated in most cases. However, I have used the Roman spelling for authors, toponyms and some literary heroes (like Jason and Achilles) since it is more familiar.

INTRODUCTION

Why Men in Euripides?

The purpose of the present thesis is to examine the diverse manifestations of manliness in the plays of Euripides and the ways in which Euripides uses these different models to explore aspects of masculinity. There is nothing inherently new in focusing on men and masculinity in the reading of literature. The centrality of the male perspective in everyday life as well as literary criticism can be seen from antiquity until as late as the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Besides, for much of antiquity and the greater part of the history of the modern world most works of literature were written by, and for, men. It was only after the rise of feminism in the 1960s, when the focus shifted dramatically from men to women, bringing to the fore the female experience, that a new chapter opened in the way scholars approach men in literary works. Gender Studies and Men's Studies are a direct product of this shift: the need to view masculinity through a different prism surfaced in response to the emergence of feminism, as the issues raised by the feminists in relation to women were re-applied to describe the male experience as well as the interaction between the two genders.

Euripides created some of the most powerful female characters in ancient Greek tragedy, which understandably have tended to form the focus of scholarly analysis; his men in contrast have attracted far less attention. It is my purpose here to view Euripides' men not as simple foils for extraordinary female presences (like Medea or Phaidra), but as characters in their own right, and more importantly to bring to the fore the male

experience as presented within the tragedies and in relation with masculine roles and ideals as expressed and experienced in fifth-century Athens.

The only extended study focusing exclusively on Euripides' men is *The Male Characters of Euripides* by E. M. Blaiklock, published in 1952. After over half a century, it is time to revisit the subject. The aim of Blaiklock's book, according to the author himself, is to "examine Euripides' portraiture of men".¹ The reason for his choice to speak of men, already hinted in the subtitle of the book, "A Study in Realism", is explicitly stated by Blaiklock in the introduction: "[Euripides'] realism appears at its sharpest in his treatment of male characters. That, as is generally agreed, was because, for all his reputation, Euripides' description of women was not without its romantic elements".² Elsewhere he states that "it is fairly obvious that Euripides' male characters are more general and recognisable human types, and their examination will amply illustrate the main thesis. This, briefly stated, is that Euripides' main interest was in character and not in plot".³ Apart from some obvious criticisms from reviewers shortly after its publication in the early 1950s (such as the fact that it is impossible to speak of men without referring to women, or that the claim of realistic representation of recognisable social types in fifth-century Athens can easily be negated when thinking of Ion or Hippolytos etc.), the overall reception of the book was, deservedly, positive; the shift of focus to the male characters was a long-needed addition to the study of Euripides and in that respect Blaiklock's book was undeniably a groundbreaking work.⁴

The main problem for the reader in the twenty-first century is that the book was written prior to the radical changes that took place in the last

¹ Blaiklock 1952: xv.

² Blaiklock 1952: xv.

³ Blaiklock 1952: xv.

⁴ For reviews of Blaiklock see Strohm 1953: 135-137; Grube 1953: 183; Martin 1953: 149-151; Smith 1953: 183-185; Garzya 1954: 270-271; Murphy 1954: 319-323; Lucas 1954: 108-110; Griffith 1954: 198; Smethurst 1954: 35-36.

half century in gender politics, which in turn resulted in large changes in all areas of the humanities and social sciences, especially in literary criticism. Blaiklock treats maleness as a given. It becomes synonymous with biological sex and as a consequence the author has no need to offer a definition of masculinity. The book does not deal with questions such as 'what is a man?', 'what does it mean to be a man?' or 'how can one define masculinity?' which would emerge much later in reaction to issues raised by feminism. Though Blaiklock includes in his analysis all the major male characters in the seventeen tragedies by Euripides (excluding *Rhesus* as spurious), the construction of the male identity for each of these characters is tacitly treated as transparent. Since it is taken for granted that maleness is equated with physical sex, he focuses rather on character and on connections between the protagonists and fifth-century Athenian men.⁵ There are references to male behavioural patterns, but these are made in a non-systematic way and without making use of any theoretical background, understandably for an analysis which is both pre-feminism and pre-gender.

It is the profound change in perceptions resulting from gender theory in particular that calls for a reconsideration of maleness in Euripides. Recent developments in psychology, sociology and criticism have complicated views of masculinity and, as will be shown later, we can no longer speak of one single masculine identity, but rather of different masculine identities often co-existing within the same individual. Modern scholarship in a number of fields has recognised the need to interrogate texts in ways that take account of the inherent tensions in masculinity caused by multiple and often contradictory identities. Masculinity becomes multi-dimensional and at the same time is under interrogation in the sense that maleness is neither a straightforward concept, as it was for classical scholars

⁵ The idea of literary characters as reflecting 'real' men and women has been challenged extensively by Gender Studies, as will be shown in the Introduction.

at the time Blaiklock was writing, nor an uncomplicated or even single experience. The recognition of the complex nature of masculinity has unquestionably had an impact on research into many different disciplines, and – inevitably – has also impacted on research into ancient society, including literary criticism. Though the impact has been limited to date, interest is visibly growing, with the production of studies dealing with different aspects of the male identity in classical antiquity.⁶

From feminism to gender studies

In the current study of male characters and masculinity in Euripides I intend to use the insights which have emerged from gender studies in the last few decades. It will therefore be useful to the reader if I offer a short overview of recent developments in research on men and masculinity and on ways in which the study of gender in general and masculinity in particular has affected literary criticism of various genres from various periods, before moving to the literature of the fifth century and the formulation of ideal masculinity in fifth-century Athenian standards.

Paradoxically, to address the issue of men we have to start with women. Feminism in the context of the movement for the liberation of women in the latter part of the twentieth century placed a new emphasis on the female experience and applied the female perspective to many aspects of social life. Feminist theoretical thinking made much of the sex/gender division to show that no human is genetically predisposed to behave in the way social norms define masculine and feminine roles. Simone de Beauvoir's famous declaration in *The Second Sex* that someone is not born but is *made* a

⁶ See for instance Roisman 2005; Foxhall and Salmon 1998(a) and 1998(b); Fisher 1992; Rademaker 2005; Cairns 1993; McDonnell 2006 on Roman manliness and the meaning of *virtus*; Nortwick 2008 on different aspects of fifth-century masculinity, etc.; also Vasilakis 2009 on masculinity in Hellenistic times.

woman recognises a clear tension between biological sex and social sexual roles imposed on women (and consequently men) by culture and social conventions.⁷ Kimmel and Aronson note: “masculinities refers to the social roles, behaviours, and meanings prescribed for men in any given society at any one time. As such, the term emphasises gender, not biological sex, and the diversity of identities among different groups of men... ‘Sex’ refers to the biological apparatus, the male and the female – our chromosomal, chemical, anatomical organisation. ‘Gender’ refers to the meanings that are attached to those differences within a culture. ‘Sex’ is male and female; ‘gender’ is masculinity and femininity – what it means to be a man or a woman... Sex is biological; gender is socially constructed”.⁸ This, however, does not mean that gender is a fixed identity: “we are constantly ‘doing’ gender, performing the activities and exhibiting the traits that are prescribed for us... We create and re-create our gendered identities within the contexts of our interactions with others and within the institutions we inhabit”.⁹ On the above distinction, sex is related to physical characteristics, whereas gender is a product of cultural construction, depending on social norms of every specific period of time and is affected by the interaction with the social environment. The sex/gender distinction has been further complicated in some modern studies, which reject the idea that sex is related to biology, and that the differences between men and women are therefore inescapable in terms of physiology. Thus for instance Butler argues that both sex and gender

⁷ See de Beauvoir 1953: 295, “one is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between, male and eunuch, which is described as feminine”.

⁸ Kimmel and Aronson 2004: 503. See also e.g. Gaunt 1995: 10 etc.

⁹ Kimmel and Aronson 2004: 506-507.

identities are cultural constructs and not natural categories, underlying the influence of culture and the performativity of gender.¹⁰

Although feminism's main goal was to project and establish gender equality and the importance of women, it also created a whole new set of ideas that influenced theoretical approaches, bringing to the fore concepts such as gender, the sex/gender division, masculinity, femininity; above all it highlighted the importance of gender as a decisive factor in the construction of identity in social life and in literature. Whitehead and Barrett note that "feminism was the single most powerful political discourse of the twentieth century, shaping up to have an even greater impact in the twenty-first...One of the direct consequences of feminist thinking and action has been to expose and highlight the power, position, and practices of men...Feminism is political inasmuch as it is about seeking change towards what Bob Connell describes as 'gender justice'. In pursuit of this aim, feminism puts men and masculinities in a critical spotlight, in the process centering on the practices of men in ways many men would prefer it not to, not least because there may well be costs to them as a result".¹¹ By subjecting the male to criticism, feminism not only made a cogent case about the rights of women and the need for re-evaluating their social place, it also underlined the need to re-

¹⁰ Butler 1990: 25, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results". See also Morris 1995 about the theory of gender performativity and its effect in Anthropological research. For Thomas Laquer (1990), the shift to the "two-sex model" of biological difference is fairly recent; from antiquity until the Enlightenment people perceived men and women on the basis of the "one-sex" model, according to which the difference between them was more of degree rather than kind ("sex before the seventeenth century...was still a sociological and not an ontological category", p. 8). This is certainly not true for antiquity, and Laquer himself seems to acknowledge that, by noting that already in Aristotle we find traces of the "two-sex body".

¹¹ Whitehead and Barrett 2001: 3.

evaluate both male behaviour in general and socially accepted concepts about gender roles.¹²

The reaction eventually, and in retrospect inevitably, was the creation of Men's Studies, which arose from the realisation that there was need to apply to men the same level of scrutiny which feminism applied to women. An obvious argument against Men's Studies might be that there is no need to create such a field, as in the pre-feminist era men's perspective was at the centre of scholarship.¹³ But Men's Studies' was not meant to have an antithetical relationship with feminism, or to take a step backwards negating the achievements of feminism and leading to pre-feminist androcentricism. Men's Studies, being rooted in feminist thought, is closely connected with the latter and they influence each other in the understanding of the interactions between masculinity and femininity.

The rapid development in Men's Studies in the recent past can be demonstrated with some simple but revealing figures. In his 1985 bibliography entitled *Men's Studies*, E. R. August listed 591 titles, but they came from all periods and included primary texts as well as studies. The titles range from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to twentieth-century examinations of a number of issues related to the male experience both personal and social.¹⁴ The references to ancient epic, Shakespeare or the nineteenth-century

¹² See Connell 2000: 3, "The new feminism of the 1970s not only gave voice to women's concerns, it challenged all assumptions about the gender system and raised a series of problems about men".

¹³ However, as Harry Brod (1987: 264) observes, "the new men's studies is not simply a repetition of traditionally male-biased scholarship. Like Women's Studies, it too attempts to emasculate patriarchal ideology's masquerade as knowledge". And later on (1987: 266) "politically, men's studies is rooted in the profeminist men's movement, roughly analogous to women's studies' being rooted in the feminist women's movement".

¹⁴ August 1985. He divides the books into categories as follows: biographies about males, anthologies, men's awareness (men's liberation, consciousness raising modern), autobiographies/biographies/memoirs, men's rights, divorce and custody, war and peace, men's issues and topics (health, cancer, crime and violence, prison), women and men, masculinity (gender role and sex role), psychology, homosexuality, men in families, single

Russian novel among others, all texts that have been subject of scholarly analysis for many years, show that these were now being researched from a different perspective, through the filter of gender identities and gender relations. The wide range of topics covered in the bibliography reveals the wide range of areas in a man's life where gender is an important factor. More importantly though, the large number of books written specifically about the male experience included within August's bibliography shows that, already in the mid-1980s, almost two decades after the rise of feminism, Men's Studies was already an established theoretical field (with the beginnings of social masculinity going back to the 1950s).¹⁵

In contrast, the 1990s alone saw over 500 research publications and two specialist journals on masculinity, along with a number of websites, and the interest continues to grow in the 2000s as well.¹⁶ The University of Bradford has introduced a research unit called "Men and Masculinities" and in May 2008 a major conference took place at Birkbeck College in the University of London, exploring the importance of masculinity as a historical category, including papers on images of masculinity ranging from antiquity to modern times. The most important outcome of the conference was the need emphasised by a number of contributors to speak of masculinities in the plural, an idea already brought to the fore by earlier researchers, in order to underline the fact that masculinity is anything but monolithic. Kimmel and Aronson stress the importance of the plural: "[it] recognises the dramatic variation in how different groups define masculinity, even in the same society at the same time, as well as individual differences".¹⁷ This becomes

men, male midlife transition, literature before 1900 and (mainly American) after 1900, images, minorities, religion, humour.

¹⁵ On the last point see Whitehead and Barrett 2001: 15.

¹⁶ Whitehead and Barrett 2001: 1.

¹⁷ Kimmel and Aronson 2004: 503. See also Flood et al. 2007: 390-393; Clatterbaugh 1998: 24-25, who speaks of the dangers of using either masculinity or masculinities, as both terms are

even more clear when one considers that, there are in fact at least four different disciplines (following Kimmel and Aronson's analysis) currently involved in understanding masculinity (and, more broadly speaking, gender): anthropology (comparing perceptions of masculinity in different cultures), history (showing the mutation of the concept of masculinity in a specific culture through time), developmental psychology (showing how perceptions of masculinity change according to one's experiences and the way one expresses social identity) and sociology (exploring the role of race, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality and region in shaping gender identity).¹⁸ To these one could also add literary and cultural studies. The depictions of masculinity in art and literature reflect contemporary ideas of the society in which they are composed (whether their purpose is to promote, contest, adjust or satirise current ideas).

The terms and debates of gender studies demonstrate a wider connection with other theoretical approaches, to which gender theory is closely related and from which it derives. Structuralism, for instance, focuses on form rather than social or historical context; thus one could say that since male and female are mutually defined rather than fixed transhistorical categories, structuralism is very closely connected to the idea of anxiety/ambiguity in gender identity. Though Marxist theory touches very little on gender, there is awareness that gender is a construct and that it is directly related to society and social expectations.¹⁹ Post-structuralism has played a major role in the development of gender theory: the recognition that reality cannot be empirically certified by language, since both signifier and signified are cultural constructs, has considerable relevance for the

loaded and fairly ambiguous and might cause confusion in a – then – new discipline such as Men's Studies.

¹⁸ Kimmel and Aronson 2004: 503-504. Certainly, Kimmel and Aronson's list of disciplines is quite reductive and one could arguably include many more disciplines in addition to the four major ones they choose to refer to.

¹⁹ On Marxist theory and gender see e.g. Hearn 1991.

nature of the discourse of masculinity. Hence (following Derrida's language of *différance*, of meaning deferred), one might think of masculinity as a concept or construct, whose expression is constantly sought but also constantly deferred. Masculinity – like reality – is not something fixed, but something one is striving to shape and articulate by a variety of means.²⁰ Psychoanalysis too has contributed to gender theory. Both Freud and Jung “accepted an inherent mixture of masculinity and femininity within each human psyche”, and Freud recognised the existence of bisexuality in every human being.²¹ And gender theory was developed by psychoanalysts revising Freudian theory (i.e. Lacan and Kristeva). The present study makes no direct use of psychoanalysis, and indeed on occasion I express reservations about its use in literary contexts, since my analysis focuses more on gender as a social construct rather than a psychological process. It is not about the internal construction of the psyche, but about the cultural construction of expectations; but it draws indirectly on the idea of gender boundaries as permeable rather than rigid.

As the brief survey of tributaries to and developments in gender studies makes clear, in order to define masculinity, we need to take into consideration many different aspects which all play a part in shaping masculine identity. It also brings to fore one of the major issues arising in gender studies and a crucially important question: to what extent if at all are gender roles universal? Some constants of course do exist, like the anxiety of living up to masculine standards, which is recurrent from antiquity to modernity. At the same time, however, masculinity is culturally and socially specific and reflects the demands, expectations and values of a given

²⁰ It would be an exaggeration to describe gender as being something completely unstable, since, as we are about to see, it is firmly allied to biological/social points. There is, nevertheless, a degree of instability, something one is always aspiring towards, not something one possesses.

²¹ Gilmore 1997: 191-192. On gender and psychoanalysis see Cranny-Francis et al. 2003: 50-54.

society.²² Masculinity is constantly being acted, tested and proven; it is (arguably) to be defined more as a process and an aspiration rather than a settled state and it requires an effort for someone to live up to the standards of ideal male behavior; these standards in turn are constantly contested and redefined depending on social and cultural circumstances.

A recognition that there is more than one masculinity, in the sense that there are conflicting definitions of maleness, explains the inherent tensions within the male, which create anxiety about the individual's male identity. In the late 1990s, the term 'Crisis in Masculinity' emerged, signifying the difficulties encountered by men in an effort to find a stable and unchangeable definition to define their masculinity: "The perception of a crisis in masculinity depends on the stability of a concept of masculinity, and it has now become increasingly difficult to find that stability".²³ But the truth is that there never was a time when masculinity was not considered to be in crisis, even if the term and its theoretical background had not yet evolved. The term is of course culturally specific and reflects a specific moment in the evolution of modern western society, but the anxiety can already be seen in Homeric epic, in the reproach of Hektor against Paris, when the latter spends more time in the female quarters instead of fighting, passing on to the inner conflict of Shakespearean heroes and the anxiety over the identity of men in modern theatre. The realisation that the male role was always a field for anxiety, consideration and re-evaluation has increasingly impacted on

²² On gender and masculinity as social and cultural constructs see Flood et al. 2007: 390-394, 553-554; Tolson 2004: 69; Reynaud 2004: 136; Moore 1994; Connell 1994: 29; Connell 1995: 68, 69, 71, 82; Gilmore 1997: 186-187; Walters 1993: 20, who speaks of "social gender"; Mangan 2003: 6, 8, 13 on gender as social performance; Mosse 1996: 15; Smith 2000: 2 on the role of culture in the construction of Shakespearean masculinity; also Stehle 2009: 58 on gender in lyric poetry.

²³ Flood et al. 2007: 91. The conference "Troubling Men – Identities, diversities and practices" at the University of Bradford in April 2007 mirrors the recent problematisation over the multiple identities a man is faced with.

literary criticism in a number of fields. This forms the subject of my next section.

Gender theory and literature

As already mentioned, gender is not a transhistorical concept, but rather it is firmly attached to and constantly redefined by social and cultural norms and expectations. In what follows I give a few selective examples of research on the literature of other cultures and periods. The readings are naturally historically specific and refer to specific social and cultural circumstances. My reason for including them is twofold: first, to show how contemporary scholarship engages with the role of gender in different genres and second to point out that, despite the fact that we can speak of masculinities only within specific cultures, the tendency to scrutinise male roles and behaviours, whether consciously or not, exists in every society regardless of historical circumstances. Within the examples one can see recurrent themes (although always related to particular social and cultural factors), such as the perception of masculinity as something aimed for, the anxiety of men when failing to abide by social constructions of the male identity and the confusion about gender roles caused by cross-dressing and imitation of behavioural patterns of the opposite sex.

Gaunt's view for instance in *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* is that, "a genre cannot be *fully* understood without a consideration of gender...Gender and genre are likely to interact, both synchronically and diachronically, in a meaningful way"; for some of the genres he talks about (*the chanson de geste*, romance, the *canso*, hagiography and the *fabliaux*) gender is absolutely essential for their understanding, for some others not so much,

but even then he finds that it cannot be completely ignored.²⁴ On this reading, male and female roles are constantly contested and re-negotiated in medieval literature, especially since each genre projects a different masculine model which “competes with other models as a means of mediating medieval culture’s sex/gender system and each, of course, has to negotiate its relation to femininity, which like masculinity is constructed differently in different genres”.²⁵ And he concludes: “gender as a theoretical idea is firmly lodged in the political unconscious of medieval culture in that a desire to negotiate and to renegotiate what masculinity and femininity are underscores many texts”.²⁶ Gaunt’s analysis illustrates the uncertainty (noted in the previous section) concerning the image of ideal masculinity. The inability of medieval genres to adopt a common masculine model attests the fluidity of the boundaries between male and female behavioural patterns; the heroes in those narratives often find themselves sliding into behavioural patterns that might be considered ‘female’ by a different genre. The book brings to the fore the importance of gender in approaching and understanding medieval literature, and promotes the idea of gender as a cultural construct.

Shakespeare’s men have likewise been the subject of scholarly analysis, including two monographs focusing specifically on masculinity in his work: Smith’s *Shakespeare and masculinity* and Wells’ *Shakespeare on Masculinity*.²⁷ Wells links heroism in Shakespeare exclusively with men:

²⁴ Gaunt 1995: 16-17.

²⁵ Gaunt 1995: 287.

²⁶ Gaunt 1995: 288.

²⁷ There are also several of other studies on Shakespearean drama, focusing on other aspects of gender performativity, patriarchal values, gender and sexuality, feminist critique etc. See e.g. McLuskie 2001, a feminist reading focusing on patriarchal values; Howard and Rackin 2001: 93, 96, 98 on maleness as performance in relation to rape and military action; Traub 2001: 145 on transvestism in *Twelfth Night* and gender as “prosthetic”; Cook 1995 on language and its relation to gender difference; Traub 1995 on language as a means of expressing male anxieties towards female power etc.

“there are, of course, heroines in the plays, and some of them die tragically. But they are not heroic in the sense in which Henry V or Macbeth or Coriolanus are heroic, or in which it sometimes seems that Hamlet would like to be heroic. For the Renaissance the heroic ideal is essentially masculine...Though women may occasionally display heroic qualities, they are exceptions that prove the rule”.²⁸ For Renaissance critics then, heroic poetry provides the ultimate paradigm of manly virtue, although they often, as in the case of Sir Philip Sidney, overlook the violent and excessive side of heroism, failing to see that the epic hero “combines steadfast piety with a savage and vindictive brutality”.²⁹ Shakespearean heroes display these same qualities, but there is an important difference: “the conflicting feelings generated by this paradox are arguably more intense in his tragedies than in any other body of drama...The fact that Shakespeare emphasises the heroic stature of his male protagonists and the awe they inspire does not necessarily mean that he accepts heroic conventions uncritically”.³⁰ And he expresses his skepticism by picturing the inner conflict of his heroes on stage. It is, however, indicative that the adjective masculine (masculinity as a term is more recent, being first used in the mid-eighteenth century), in Shakespeare’s time was “often used to signify martial or heroic qualities”.³¹ Wells’ book very usefully shows the connection (following social convention) made in the Renaissance between heroism and biological men, a connection that stems from antiquity; this defines heroism as a purely male quality and considers female heroic behaviour as a paradox.³²

Anxiety about masculinity is the theme of Smith’s book. Masculinity, unlike femininity, is not taken for granted and is not linked to biology: it

²⁸ Wells 2000: 1-2.

²⁹ Wells 2000: 2.

³⁰ Wells 2000: 3.

³¹ Wells 2000: 7.

³² See below the discussion on *andrea* p. 31ff. and references in the cases studies.

needs to be attained and it is a matter of performance.³³ The madness of King Lear signifies loss “not just [of] his self-control but his masculinity...Lear’s loss of reason in the subsequent action can be seen, then, as the triumph of this female passion within, a loss of both masculine authority and masculine identity”.³⁴ Male identity is problematised in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, and Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet* will point out the unmanly nature of Romeo’s despair after he finds out about his banishment. Many Shakespearean heroines dress up like men and this “serves to remind audiences that masculinity is a matter of appearances”.³⁵ This ambiguity leaves male protagonists “caught up in an endless, hopeless situation. They must keep *talking* about anxiety in a futile attempt to *contain* anxiety. In particular, they must keep talking about their anxieties about women. Narcissism, melancholy, and anxiety fail to exhaust, however, the variety of emotional responses to the existential challenge ‘Be a man’ or the variety of stratagems Shakespeare and his contemporaries devised to meet that challenge”.³⁶ The problem is not only finding one’s male identity, it is also defining oneself against the female representing the opposite of masculinity, the ‘Other’.³⁷

My final example is Vorlicky on male to male interaction in American drama. We are now in the sphere of modern theatre in a multicultural society. The focus is on men only, which creates different dynamics within the plays, but also with the spectators, who of course belong to both sexes.³⁸ Male identities of different sorts surface, where distance must be created from women or homosexual men: both groups represent the Other and need to be subordinated.³⁹ Patriarchal values are projected and

³³ Smith 2000: 2, 4.

³⁴ Smith 2000: 1-2.

³⁵ Smith 2000: 4.

³⁶ Smith 2000: 5.

³⁷ See Smith 2000: 132.

³⁸ Vorlicky 1995: 3.

³⁹ Vorlicky 1995: 15.

reinforced: “what we see and hear at this stage of the plays is an articulated *awareness* of their individual and collective power – political, economic, domestic, and sexual – as men within American culture. The male characters are fully aligned with the patriarchal ethos that creates this power, conscious of its rules and of its role in constructing their public image. Inevitably and pointedly, their power at this level is over women, the Other”.⁴⁰ This sounds strikingly similar to the ideas projected in ancient drama, where the traditional male perspective is very much present throughout and within the internal world of the plays.

This is only a very small sample of recent research on masculinity in literature. But it should suffice to demonstrate the different ways in which literature – and related criticism from diverse theoretical perspectives – engages with gender, sometimes to reinforce traditional gender roles, at others to deconstruct or to explore. Whatever the perspective, gender is ever-present, within the texts, on or beneath the surface, and needs to be taken into consideration, if the critic is to do justice both to the text itself and to the complex relationship between the text and its context.

Defining ideal masculinity in ancient Greece

At this point, the question ‘why is Classics a good ‘case study’ for a treatment on masculinity?’ would be a valid one. The answer is quite simple: we are dealing with a male-centered, patriarchal society, with seemingly clear ideas concerning gender roles. This is the reason why Classics has been a major focus for modern gender theory; gender studies in its infancy made extensive use of Sappho and then moved to the broader issues of gender before turning to masculinity. It is not without importance that Foucault

⁴⁰ Vorlicky 1995: 16.

begins his treatment of the *History of Sexuality* with the Greeks, nor that Halperin, for instance, uses the Greeks as a starting point for understanding modern sexuality.⁴¹ It is an awareness on behalf of the theoreticians that classical literature can offer the basis for valuable insights about gender and masculinity.

As was noted above, one important insight derived from modern gender studies is the recognition that maleness is not a given but a culturally determined phenomenon. Again as noted above, modern scholarship draws a distinction between biological sex and gender. Though recent work suggests that the borderline between sex and gender has perhaps been drawn too firmly, the rough working distinction that sex is a biological constant and gender is a socially constructed combination of awareness, perception, ideology and expectation is valid. Hence the importance of viewing men in terms of male values and responsibilities in relation to their historical, social and cultural context.

When speaking of male roles in ancient Greece, or in any other culture, we are automatically looking at the subject from two different perspectives: the first one is how men perceive themselves and their masculine role and the second is what others seem to expect from them. By others I mean other men looking at their peers, women looking at men, but also society as a whole looking at individuals. The questions emerging then are obvious and closely related to debates emerging in gender theory: can we speak of a male stereotype against which literature was 'read'? How self-conscious were men of their male image? What were society's expectations from men, including the audience's expectations from male characters depicted in the theatre? And consequently, can we speak about literary

⁴¹ Foucault 1987; Halperin 1990.

characters as representing 'real' people? What is the relation between text and social reality?

The aim of this part of the Introduction is to illustrate what constitutes the norms of masculinity/masculinities in Ancient Greece (at least as commonly perceived) and address questions of difference between the male and the 'other' – whether the 'other' is a female, slave or barbarian – as well as how issues of audience perception and masculine self-consciousness affect these differences. I shall focus on key aspects of the value system that constitute the basis of the masculine identity. Though modern theoretical thinking has made us more aware of the discourse concerning the sex/gender division, in practice people tend to equate biology with socially acceptable roles and demands for the masculine and the feminine. The same is true of the Greeks, who perceived the gender limitations imposed by society (exactly because it is natural for humans to live in a society) largely identifying sex (i.e. physical sex) with gender, as rooted in nature.⁴² Thus one's physical sex is the defining factor of one's gendered identity: men are expected to act in a particular way simply because they are born men. In this cultural context then 'male' is defined as 'the opposite of female' and defining normative masculine behavior means defining what male should not be: not a woman, not a slave and not a barbarian.

It should be noted that the Greek perceptions of manliness and gender differentiation are not only visible in attitudes expressed. They are also deeply embedded in language.⁴³ As I shall show later, the Greek language is heavily gender-oriented.⁴⁴ For instance, it is almost impossible to talk about courage without using gender-specific terms such as *andreia*. Even words that can be applied to both sexes are used in different ways

⁴² On gender restrictions perceived as natural see Schaps 1998: 186.

⁴³ Cf. Goldhill 1984 on the importance and use of language in the *Oresteia*.

⁴⁴ See p. 55.

registering perceptions of gender differences. It looks as if one cannot even talk about women and men without using stereotypes which come to the fore through the ways language is used.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, despite the seemingly straightforward definitions of masculinity (and femininity) ingrained in culture, biology and language, maleness was nevertheless a contested area. It was already the subject of anxiety in Homeric times, and more prominently in the fifth century.⁴⁶ My main interest is classical Athens, as this is the context within which tragedy is composed. Nevertheless, some aspects of the value system are extensive both in time and in space, and it is necessary to refer briefly to other periods and sources, especially Homer. In epic we find the first definition of what it means to be a man, and there is a remarkable continuity with perceptions of manliness in the fifth century, as we shall see below.

Concepts like heroism and courage, *aidos*, *sophrosyne* and self-control (all of which will be dealt with in detail below), already present and highly valued in Homer, are crucial elements of the fifth-century moral system. At the same time there is also a clear motion away from individual achievement in the battlefield and into qualities necessary to the citizen of a democratic *polis*, a transition that can already be traced in a smaller scale in epic.⁴⁷ What is more striking, though, is the sense we get that now people reflect more and more about masculinity and a man's place in society. The latter part of the fifth century is an era when all values are potentially subject to

⁴⁵ My interest here is primarily the way in which syntax and vocabulary show innate sexual prejudice. There are a number of studies looking at language, although from a different perspective, using socio-linguistics in order to demonstrate how it is used by the two sexes. See for instance Willi: 2003; McClure: 1999a; Chong-Gossard: 2008 etc. To enter this in detail would go beyond the scope of the present thesis, but it will come up intermittently in my chapters.

⁴⁶ See Roisman 2005 on representations of masculinity in Greek oratory.

⁴⁷ Graziosi and Haubold 2003: 75, "much of the tension between men's individual achievement and their need for collaborative effort, which scholars have so often detected in fifth-century responses to Homeric epic, is built into the language of epic itself".

contestation: the Sophistic movement expressed this change most eloquently.⁴⁸

Gender roles are part of that contestation and we can detect a concern about the boundaries of masculinity and femininity. The image of 'ideal' masculinity does not remain unaffected by the tendency to reconsider values and practices. On the contrary, behind the seemingly clear-cut distinction between male and female and the projected straightforward theories of what it means to be a man, we can see that the character of masculinity is far from clear. This lack of clarity is partly due to social changes visible from the latter half of the fifth century, obviously mostly political, although traditional values come under scrutiny as well. Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, the orators all seem preoccupied with manly virtues and definitions of masculinity. But the fact that they feel there is actual need to stress key elements of manliness and to urge men to behave accordingly shows that in practice it is not easy for a man to live up to these expectations. Roisman stresses that a man was trapped between different duties and very often would find himself expressing contradictory behaviours, according to the situation and the audience.⁴⁹ Masculinity, he adds, was full of contradictions and the boundaries between acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour were not clear, even though the Athenians never doubted their importance.⁵⁰ In reality, men often struggled to keep a balance between the conflicting requirements imposed on them by society and to avoid behavioural patterns that could be deemed feminine (or barbaric/slavish). In fact, this anxiety over masculinity is not a product of the fifth century. Although it was brought to the fore more clearly in classical times, the character of masculinity has never been as clear as collective

⁴⁸ For a detailed analysis of the sophistic movement see Guthrie 1971 *passim*; Kerferd 1981 *passim*; Bett 1989; Wallace 1998 etc. Cf. also Dover's commentary of *Ar. Nub.* (1968: xxxvii).

⁴⁹ Roisman 2005: 213-214.

⁵⁰ Roisman 2005: 213-214.

ideology would have it.⁵¹ As already said above, the concept of ‘crisis in masculinity’ (in the simple sense of a realisation of the difficulty of following contradictory demands) is already present in Homer and it persists in all periods of ancient Greek literature as a result of the constant reshaping of the ideal masculine image.

In the following sections I will be dealing with key concepts constructing male identity. My purpose is twofold: first to demonstrate, through the definition of elements like courage, self-control, shame, what it really means to be a man for ancient Greek authors; but most importantly, to illustrate the field of play for the anxiety concerning the social demands on men and the boundaries of gender roles.

***Andreia*: manly virtue**

Philosophical texts attempted to define the concept of *andreia* and the fact that they engage in long analyses on the subject shows both its centrality in the value system and the difficulty in deciding what really constitutes ideal male behaviour in war and in peace. Aristotle’s definition of *andreia* in the *Eudemian Ethics* (1228a26-b4) is “the attribute of a man whose actions demonstrate a reasoned and moderate negotiation between ‘boldness’ (*θράσος*) and ‘fear’ (*φόβος*)”.⁵² For Plato’s Socrates *andreia* is “an innate and immutable disposition” (*Resp.* 430b-c) and cannot be inherited (cf. *Lach.*).⁵³ Furthermore, *andreia* belongs to a martial context: in *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle draws a link between ‘real manliness’ and epic (e.g. 1116b28-

⁵¹ Cf. Winkler 1990: 4, “it appears that much of men’s talk about women *and about themselves* was a calculated bluff”; 1990: 45, “the cultural images of right and wrong manhood...are at times loose-fitting hand-me-downs that do not reveal the shape of individual behaviour”.

⁵² Bassi 2003: 52-53.

⁵³ Bassi 2003: 50.

30), so when *andreia* is used to characterise political behaviour, its meaning as ‘true manliness’ is automatically belittled.⁵⁴

The link between men and courage is evident. Courage in ancient Greek mentality is a clearly male quality and a key element in the construction of one’s masculine identity. Men and courage are linked firstly – and more obviously – in terms of language: man (*ἄνθρωπος*) and courage (*ἀνδρεία*) derive from the same root, thus underlining the conviction that courage is supposed to be by definition a male virtue and encapsulating the gender bias in the Greek value system. Hobbs rightly notes that, “it seems unlikely that an author could ascribe *andreia* to a female without being conscious of the word’s root meaning, and arguably impossible that he could write of female *andreia* without making some kind of statement, whether intentional or not, on the proper connection between the virtues and gender”.⁵⁵ In Plato (*Ti.* 90e-91a), Timaios links courage to gender and sex; thus a man who displays no *andreia*, when reincarnated he will be classified among women, i.e. the opposite of the manly class.⁵⁶ This idea is so deeply rooted in ancient Greek mentality that the combination of women and courage is regarded both as linguistically paradoxical and as extremely rare. Clearly, identifying *andreia* with biological men is not a given, but attributing manly qualities to biological women is not unproblematic either.⁵⁷ *Antigone* provides evidence on the matter: a woman takes over a task that does not suit her female nature and Ismene takes pains to remind her sister of this (61ff.). Euripides’ *Electra* wishes for a man *andreios* like her epic hero father,

⁵⁴ Bassi 2003: 54.

⁵⁵ Hobbs 2000: 70-71.

⁵⁶ Winkler 1990: 47. See Pl. *Ti.* (90e-91a), τῶν γενομένων ἀνδρῶν ὅσοι δειλοὶ καὶ τὸν βίον ἀδίκως διήλθον, κατὰ λόγον τὸν εἰκότα γυναικες μετεφύοντο ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ γενέσει.

⁵⁷ In Herodotus and Thucydides courage and women can co-exist, but it is unusual and the peculiarity is pointed out. See e.g. the way Herodotus opposes *andreia* to femininity (1.17.1) and his comments on Artemisia’s actions (7.99). See also Thucydides’ account about the Corcyrean women in 3.74.

and Orestes' attack is anything but manly (Eur. *El.* 844-847).⁵⁸ In Aristophanes it is used for the sake of parody (e.g. *Lys.* 549; *Eq.* 1372; *Nu.* 353, 673-80; *Ran.* 491 etc.) and "refers to the *absence* of manliness as an 'authentic' virtue embodied in the physical, i.e. martial, deeds of 'real' men".⁵⁹

The obvious place for a man to display courage is the battlefield, invariably a male field of action (the presence of a woman is both extremely rare and is considered to be anomalous). For Aristotle *andreia* belongs only to men, because they sacrifice themselves in war by choice for the sake of the community (*Eth. Nic.* 1115a34-b6; although Aristotle does not specifically distinguish between men and women in this passage, it is nevertheless clear that he is speaking about men, for the obvious reason that it is only men that go to war).⁶⁰ Bravery as choice is supported in opposition to women, who go into labour without having a choice.⁶¹ As Cartledge says: "[war] was by definition exclusively the business of men [as of course it explicitly was in Homer]. [In fact] war was seen as a field for the display precisely of *andreia*, that is, virility or manliness in general, and specifically the peculiar masculine cardinal virtue of martial courage and pugnacity".⁶²

The idea that manliness and courage are synonymous is clearly seen in epic, which sets the basis of the concept. The exhortation 'be men' is found ten times in the *Iliad* (5.529-532, 6.112, 8.174, 11.287, 15.487, 15.561, 15.661, 15.734, 16.270, 17.185) and it is used as the equivalent for 'be brave' in battle.⁶³ It is worth noting that there is no exhortation 'be a man' in the

⁵⁸ Cf. Wheeler 2003: 379, 383, 388 on Soph. *El.* and gender transgression.

⁵⁹ Bassi 2003: 46; cf. *Lys.* 548, where Lysistrata, together with the other women, is called *τηθῶν ἀνδρειοτάτη καὶ μητριδίων ἀκαληφῶν*; the effect is ironical and highly contradictory in linguistic terms.

⁶⁰ Aristotle says that women and men cannot be good in the same way (*Pol.* 1260a21, 1277b20-23; *Eth. Nic.* 1158b17-18; *Poet.* 1454a22-23).

⁶¹ Hobbs 2000: 70.

⁶² Cartledge 1998: 54.

⁶³ See Bassi 2003: 33-34, where she notes that in the first eight cases, courage is combined with *alke*, referring to bodily and not internal qualities. She adds (2003: 35) that, in the *Odyssey* (10.301, 341), a man stops being a man because he no longer has the physical

singular: it is always found in the plural, indicating both that the natural context of manliness is war, and that they have to think collectively, as parts of a group aiming at a common cause.⁶⁴

The epic concept of *andreia* maintains its importance during the fifth century. Claims of manly virtue with allusions to Homer can be found in fifth-century sources, revealing a sense of continuity in the way the identity of the courageous man is constructed.⁶⁵ At the same time, the notion seems to be evolving and the comparison between the Homeric hero and the fifth-century citizen warrior discloses this change. While in the *Iliad* we have the aristocratic hero fighting against his enemies, in the fifth century things have changed and *andreia*, as Sluiter and Rosen say, “functions ideally as a delicate balance between personal and social concerns: in war the hoplite who displays *andreia* will still achieve a conspicuous level of personal *kleos*...but this *kleos* comes into being because his acts of *andreia* were part of a common goal”.⁶⁶ The citizen of the *polis* has to take the multitude into account more than the Homeric hero had to. This does not mean that the warrior in Homer is unremittingly selfish. On the contrary, duty to the community is explicitly stressed (e.g. Sarpedon in *Il.* 12.310ff.), and so is the common goal; what changes is the degree to which these are stressed in the fifth-century democratic society, where Achilles’ withdrawal would have been criticised far more harshly.⁶⁷

appearance of a man (although the reality is that Odysseus’ comrades did not only change their physical appearance, they were turned into animals altogether).

⁶⁴ As Graziosi and Haubold put it (2003: 68), “in every case, the context is war: a group of men are told to take courage, be ashamed of each other, and keep together in mutual support”.

⁶⁵ See Bassi 2003: 32-49, where she argues that the first extant use of the term is found in *Sept.* 52-53, where *andreia* is surrounded by Homeric terms.

⁶⁶ Sluiter and Rosen 2003: 14.

⁶⁷ Cf. the threat to stone Achilles in Aesch. *Myrmidons* fr. 132c. Michelakis (2002: 25-26) compares the threat with the historical practice of ostracism as a measure of dealing with dangerous individuals within a civic context; “Aeschylus problematises the relation between individual and society through the power and limitations of cultural practices to regulate

In a world where there were no standing armies, it was the citizens' (and metics') duty to defend their city against enemies.⁶⁸ Thus courage is demonstrated in areas that matter for the survival of the state, i.e. in the public domain which is incontestably male-dominated. Considering the fact that a Greek *polis* appears to have been at war on average for two out of three years, the connection between maleness and performance in battle is inevitable.⁶⁹ Moreover, for most of the period under discussion, war was endemic in Greece and took place between individual *poleis* whose protection depended mainly on citizen militias.

Greek hoplite warfare was based on men standing next to each other in line and not breaking their formation.⁷⁰ Failure to do so could lead to chaos and cause the battle to be lost. As will be shown later in the chapters on Herakles and Admetos, the sources praise those who stay in formation and accuse those who do not of cowardice, but the constant references to failure only reveal the fact that this kind of behaviour was more frequent than the texts would admit, and these references tacitly recognise this reality. The definition of cowardly behaviour can be problematic. As will be shown later, in epic we find the warriors trembling out of fear (e.g. *Il.* 3.33-37) and there is no differentiation in this respect between heroes and others (e.g. *Il.* 11.345), because fear is linked to war and is god-sent (*Il.* 14.522).⁷¹ In contrast,

violence and to assure social cohesion. Aeschylus rewrites the *Iliad* and its protagonist for the audience of early fifth-century Athens. Aeschylus' Achilles is as much a hero of the Homeric past as an aristocrat of the Athenian present, both an example and a problem, a hero and a villain" (2002: 56).

⁶⁸ Thomas 2000: 56; van Wees 2000: 85. Thus warfare became a matter affecting directly individuals – as was the fact a man's financial status played a crucial part in military service. Only those who could afford heavy armour would serve as hoplites (Carey 2000: 13, 40), thus placing the responsibility of warfare on the financial means of individual citizens.

⁶⁹ van Wees 2004: 253n.10, "Connor 1988, 3-8 and Shipley 1993, 18-23, point out that our sources probably give an exaggerated impression of the omnipresence of war: if classical Athens was at war two out of every three years between 490 and 336 BC, as Garland calculated (1975, 15), it was hardly typical".

⁷⁰ See van Wees 2000: 101, 2004: 195; Bowden 1993: 53; Hanson 1989: 157.

⁷¹ Loraux 1995: 75-77.

in the more constrained environment of the fifth century we see that the focus is firmly on the positive aspect of courage and the Athenians try to avoid any reference to fear in a military context.⁷²

Harming enemies: masculinity and revenge

Men at war find themselves fighting against the enemies of the *polis* to whom it is their duty to cause as much harm as possible. The idea is extended in peace as well: it is a man's fundamental responsibility to harm his enemies and help his friends.⁷³ Meno says (Pl. *Men.* 71e), *εἰ βούλει ἀνδρὸς ἀρετὴν, ῥάδιον, ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς ἀρετὴ, ἱκανὸν εἶναι τὰ τῆς πόλεως πράττειν, καὶ πράττοντα τοὺς μὲν φίλους εὖ ποεῖν, τοὺς δ' ἐχθροὺς κακῶς.* Mary Blundell has looked at the different ways of expressing this concept.⁷⁴ She shows that there was a widespread belief that helping friends was not only imperative, but also an admirable virtue (except for *Men.* 71e, also in Isoc. 1.26; Xen. *Mem.* 2.6.35; Arist. *Rh.* 1363a19-21, 33f.; cf. *Rh.* 1399b36f.); failure to benefit friends destroys friendship and is condemned heavily (e.g. Arist. *Pol.* 1328a1-16). Examples in tragedy point to the importance of the concept and people are constantly called to abide by their obligation: Medea for instance will accuse Jason of violation of the terms of friendship (*Med.* 229, 470-472).

On the other hand, Blundell observes that the ancient Greeks had realised the human tendency to feel jealousy about an enemy's success and joy when he falls (*Rh.* 1370b-1371a; *Il.* 13.413-16, 17.38-40, 538-542; Thuc. 7.68,

⁷² Loraux 1995: 87, "the Athenians wish to hear of nothing but courage, and fear, this undesirable word, has disappeared from the official phraseology of war (at most they accept its appearance when their ancestors faced exceptional adversaries, in mythical times when Theseus made a sacrifice to Phobos to attract him to his camp against the Amazons, the daughters of Ares)".

⁷³ See Fisher 1976: 6. See also Blundell 1989: 39, 63, 92 on the different words for enemy (*polemios*, *echthros*, *dysmenes*, etc).

⁷⁴ Blundell 1989: 27-29, 38.

etc.). This is, however, more than a passive Schadenfreude. In cases where one has suffered personal harm, revenge is expected and praised by others (*Od.* 24.433-6; *Rh.* 1367a20-23; *Eth. Nic.* 1132b21-1133a5; *Dem.* 59.12).⁷⁵ Archilochos' poems (frs. 172, 196a etc.) against Lykambes and his daughter Neoboule are a clear example of a revenge text.⁷⁶ The harm Archilochos causes (or seeks to cause) to his enemy is clearly consistent with the generally accepted practice of harming one's enemy – and taking pleasure in the revenge.

It is important, however, to understand that the duty to seek revenge is firmly conditioned by context. In a recent treatment Cohen presents us with a highly competitive society: a man's world consisted of rivals, and people who either admired or respected him, or people whom he himself admired or respected (*Rh.* 1379b).⁷⁷ A man had to defend his honour and engage in rivalry towards those who are in the same status as they are. Cohen argues also that in such societies taking revenge is the only way of preventing others from harming someone. Though there is some truth in this picture, I believe that Cohen exaggerates the role of violence and ignores the countervailing imperatives. This is a society where limits are placed on individual behaviour and where peaceful dispute resolution is praised.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Blundell 1989: 55.

⁷⁶ According to our sources, Archilochos was offended by the fact that he was not allowed to marry Neoboule despite Lykambes' official promise. Thus he attacks both of them making Lykambes a *gelos* in the city, which, according to Archilochos, should lead him to commit suicide. Although it is not clear that a real Lykambes actually committed suicide, the poem shows that it might have been a common reaction in cases of shame (see Gerber 1997: 52-54). Whether or not this poem is autobiographical is contested (cf. Slings' (1990: 23-28) treatment of the poet's "I" in Archilochos), but irrespective of the actual facts the story serves to confirm the importance of revenge.

⁷⁷ Cohen 1995: 62-67. Cf. Winkler 1990: 47 on Aeschin. 2.150-151 and zero-sum competition, "the cultural understanding of competition was not simply that winners gained rewards and honour, but that losers were stigmatised with shame and penalties in proportionate amounts, or, to put it another way, winners won at the direct expense of losers".

⁷⁸ See Herman 2006: 184-194; also Fisher's (1992: 493-500) conclusions on the duty of the city to protect the honour of the individual through legal procedures against other people's *hybris*.

When away from the battlefield, any attempt to exercise force against someone much weaker is characterised as “bullying cowardice” (cf. Eur. *El.* 326-31).⁷⁹ A man should control himself and be able to discern when the situation calls for action and when he is supposed to restrain himself. In Demosthenes’ *Against Medeias* for instance, we see that at least theoretically, there should be a conscious choice taking place, which demands self-control and the quest for retaliation in court rather than in person.⁸⁰ As well as the more assertive values manly virtue was also linked to “discipline, self-control, intelligence, foresight, endurance...hard work [and] *philotimia*...courage often translated into prioritising public over private interests” (e.g. Lys. 2.11-14, 10.27; Isoc. 6.1).⁸¹ Even in Homer, where personal honour is stressed more and where Achilles is allowed to leave the other Greeks without help because his self-esteem was insulted, we do not see the level of raw competition invoked by Cohen for democratic Athens. In fact, Patroklos and the other Greeks constantly appeal to Achilles’ compassion as well as trying to make him feel shame for abandoning the common cause (e.g. *Il.* 16.21ff.).

In Aristotle’s view, though revenge is considered to be human and expected up to a point, it is not necessarily part of *andreia* as a general quality, and courage in particular. His references to anger in *Eth. Nic.* 1116b23-1117a9 reveal that he believes anger and revenge offer pleasure, but do not make a man courageous.⁸² If a man seeks too much honour he is

⁷⁹ Dover 1974: 169.

⁸⁰ Roisman 2003: 141. Also Fisher 1992: 495, “those who engaged deeply in the political life were indeed said constantly, from Homer to Aristotle, to see honour as their primary goal, and to sacrifice other goals, and even risk their lives, to achieve it; but virtually all Greeks surely shared the ideal, and felt its associated emotions, if not all to the same extent” (*Il.* 12.310-328; *Resp.* 9.581c-d; *Eth. Nic.* 1095b14-30; *Pol.* 1266b40-1267a2, 1315a14-31).

⁸¹ Roisman 2003: 128.

⁸² See Konstan 2001: 135, “courage, unlike anger or confidence, in Aristotle’s view, is not an emotion, and does not involve attendant pain or pleasure in its definition. It may certainly be a basis for action, however, in accord with reason and an assessment of what is good or noble” (*Eth. Nic.* 1117a5-9).

blamed, but he is also sometimes praised as being “manly and a lover of the noble’ (ἀνδρώδης καὶ φιλόκαλος [Eth. Nic. 1125b8-25]); no explanation is given, but presumably ‘manly’ here indicates a masculine ability to stand up for oneself and defend one’s honour, which in turn depends on one’s sense of the *kalon*”.⁸³ Similarly a man showing excessive anger in some circumstances is “manly and fitted to command” (Eth. Nic. 1126b1-2), whereas in others he is blamed for the same reason, because he will not be able to defend himself and his *philoï* against an insult (Eth. Nic. 1126a3-9). How can then one choose what the acceptable behaviour is? And how can one be sure about the limits between the two? As is clear from the way it is presented here, the expectations from a man are often contradictory and far from straightforward. Mary Blundell has noted the problematic nature of the concept, since very often fifth-century Athenian men would find themselves in situations with conflicting loyalties; managing obligations towards family, friends and city might prove a very difficult circle to square.⁸⁴

Aidos and sophrosyne

Courageous behaviour both on and off the battlefield is expected of and praised in men; yet the fifth-century mentality is very much aware of the fact that there is need for balance between assertiveness and restraint in order to limit reckless behaviour and avoid excess. Moderation is admired as a key element in a man’s character; it is accomplished through the workings of *sophrosyne* and *aidos* within the man, two notions that are often subsumed under *andreia*, providing limitations to impulsive and hyperbolic heroic acts.

These notions are very much present in epic and occupy a central position in the construction of the male character, a centrality which survives

⁸³ Hobbs 2000: 39.

⁸⁴ Blundell 1989: 273.

in the fifth century, though there are slight changes in definition. Since Homeric society was highly competitive, it is easy to focus on the competitive aspect and overlook the fact that *sophrosyne* is compatible with the image of the fierce and fearless warrior. Adkins' analysis in *Merit and Responsibility* famously puts the stress on competitiveness and on success.⁸⁵ He argues that society does not accept failure and that trying alone is not appreciated unless accompanied by success.⁸⁶ *Sophrosyne* clearly has no place in the description of the *agathos* in such a culture. But defending one's honour and living up to the standards that Homeric society has put in front of a man cannot be achieved without possessing *sophrosyne*. In the *Odyssey*, Penelope (for her loyalty), Odysseus (for his self-restraint) and Telemachos (for his respect for older people) are all models of *sophrosyne*.⁸⁷ Strictly speaking, *sophrosyne* is "a 'sound' state of mind, responsibility for one's self-interest and quiet/submissive respect of young men versus their elders, and of servants versus their masters".⁸⁸

Rademaker offers a definition of *sophrosyne*'s different uses: "The distinction between 'soundness of mind', 'prudence' and the more conspicuously moral uses of the word...is not a clear-cut distinction between 'non-moral' and 'moral' uses of the word: rather, one should say that when *sophrosyne* translates as 'soundness of mind', the focus is *primarily* on a person's state of mind, and only *indirectly* on his behaviour versus others. When *sophrosyne* translates as 'prudence', the focus is primarily on a person's responsibility for his self-interest, rather than on his obligations with regard

⁸⁵ Long 1970: 121 commenting on Adkins 1960: 35.

⁸⁶ Thus, Hektor's reply in *Il.* 17.170-182 that, although he failed to save Sarpedon's body at least he tried, is rejected by Adkins because he does not recognise any value in trying: "in war, the failure of one man may well contribute to the failure of his friends: a failure which, in the Homeric world, must result either in slavery or annihilation. Success is so imperative that only results have any value: intentions are unimportant" (Adkins 1960: 35; see also Long 1970: 124).

⁸⁷ Rademaker 2005: 40-41.

⁸⁸ Rademaker 2005: 74; see also North 1966: 3.

to others”.⁸⁹ The different definitions are due to the different manifestations of *sophrosyne* in a man’s life. For instance, Aristotle’s *sophrosyne* is the control of bodily pleasures (*Rh.* 1366b13-15; *Eth. Nic.* 1118a1-3). The Autourgos’ *sophrosyne* in Eur. *El.* (253-262) consists not only in his self-restraint, but also in the awareness of the consequences he will face if he treats Elektra differently.⁹⁰ Thucydides (1.84) argues that the Corinthians by being cautious show ‘sensible *sophrosyne*’, which prevents them from committing *hybris* (*hybris* referring here to dangerous political acts, but most generally seems to refer to excessive and offensive behaviour).⁹¹

Closely associated with *sophrosyne* is *enkrateia*. It differs in that it refers to self-mastery of desires and pleasures only (*Eth. Nic.* 1118b–1119a; 1150a–1152a), in contrast to the more general *sophrosyne* (e.g. *Grg.* 491c-492a).⁹² As Foucault says, “*enkrateia* can be regarded as a prerequisite of *sophrosyne*, as the form of effort and control that the individual must apply to himself in order to become moderate (*sophron*)”.⁹³ *Enkrateia* is not gender specific: it is not “a trait belonging specifically to the man or the woman, but...a virtue common to both sexes, like memory and diligence...In married life...be it the husband or the wife, the better one has the larger share of this

⁸⁹ Rademaker 2005: 9-10.

⁹⁰ Dover 1974: 225.

⁹¹ There is a lengthy debate about the definition of *hybris* in Athenian society. Fisher (1976: 42; 1992 ch. 3) uses Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1129b19-24; *Rh.* 1378b23ff.; also *Dem.* 21.71-76; *Lysias* 1.2) to argue that “*hybris* is an offence against honour or status, for example, treating a person (or, more rarely, a sacred being or object) without the honour and respect due to him, or attempting gratuitously to dishonour and shame him”. Cairns (1996: 6-7) rightly disagrees with Fisher and points out that for Aristotle it is “not the nature of the act or the effect on the honour of the patient which makes an act hybriatic, but the motive; and that motive is a *prohairesis*, a particular choice of a developed character”.

⁹² See North 1966: 201-202, “[Aristotle] is careful to correct the current view that *sophrosyne* itself [in *Eth. Nic.*] is abstinence from pleasure. The *sophron* person enjoys pleasure in moderation; he merely avoids the wrong pleasures and any pleasure in excess (1119a11-20, 1153a27-35). Book III concludes with a reminder that *sophrosyne* renders the appetitive element obedient to reason and describes the *sophron* man as having an appetite for what he may rightly desire, in the right way, and at the right time (ὠν δεῖ καὶ ὡς δεῖ καὶ ὄτε [1119b17])”.

⁹³ Foucault 1987: 65.

virtue" (Xen. *Oec.* 7.27).⁹⁴ Of course, Xenophon's treatment is idealised and presents a concept of marriage that seems more balanced than real marriages of the same period; but its idealisation has its roots in the shared value system.⁹⁵

Despite its applicability to both sexes, the way *enkrateia* is manifested in men and women is different. While women are expected to be faithful to their husbands, the same thing does not hold for men; there is no law preventing them from having extra-marital sex. The importance of *enkrateia* relates in the classical period to the *polis*. A man who is capable of restraining himself is a good citizen who knows how to control his impulses and thus, eventually, benefit the city. Although men were not required to remain faithful to their wives, when they chose to do so this was praised as a sign of self-control and virtue (Arist. *Pol.* 1335b39-42).⁹⁶ As Foucault says, "the 'faithful' husband (*pistos*) was not the one who linked the state of marriage to the renunciation of all sexual pleasure enjoyed with someone else; it was the husband who steadfastly maintained the privileges to which the wife was entitled by marriage": this is the way Medea (*Med.* 465ff.) and Creusa (*Ion* 836ff.) understand their husbands' betrayal.⁹⁷

Self-control could manifest itself in every aspect of a man's life. Xenophon in his *Memorabilia* (1.3.14-15) praises Socrates for having mastered his impulses towards drink, food and bodily pleasures. What is at issue here is the importance of moderation: none of these are to be avoided and it is not abstinence that is projected, but rather the ability to enjoy some pleasures without giving in to immoderation and creating desires beyond actual

⁹⁴ Foucault 1987: 160.

⁹⁵ Cf. Pomeroy 1994: 51, "although in some aspects of the position of the wife, the treatment of slaves and the importance accorded to education, the household attributed to Ischomachos is more an idealistic, albeit attainable, vision than a description of reality, other historical sources indicate that it is normative in many respects [in terms of economic structure]".

⁹⁶ See also pp. 175-176, 189.

⁹⁷ Foucault 1987: 163-164.

needs.⁹⁸ Plato in the *Republic* has already made the guardians control *potoi*, *aphrodisia* and *edodai* in order to achieve *sophrosyne* (3.389d-e) and thus to be responsible for controlling the desires of the many (4.431c-d). In fact, a man able to control his impulses in peacetime is more likely to manifest the same qualities where it matters most, in armoured conflict where the safety of the city is at stake. Of course, *sophrosyne* is the quality of the free man: resistance to fear and desires is a sign of *sophrosyne* contrary to the enslavement these things impose. Since people do not choose slaves to be their leaders, they should not choose someone who is enslaved to passions (*Xen. Mem.* 1.5.1).⁹⁹ Clearly, then, control over one's desires had a clear political dimension, which was much more explicit in the ancient than in the modern world. The connection of *sophrosyne* with a man's presence within the *polis* is a clear indication that sexual scrutiny was mainly concerned with the ramifications of sexual misconduct in a civic context.

There is, however, more to self-control than resistance to pleasure. Emotion too is a potential source of weakness. This is an area where we can see a development in Greek standards of propriety. The attitude towards fear is the most obvious way for a hero to display self-control. There is no shame in feeling panic (e.g. *Il.* 7.215-218), but it is inexcusable "to turn and run before a single opponent – though Achilles will overwhelm Hektor's moral resistance, and so outdo even Aias here" (book 22): Hektor will famously scold Paris for his unmanly retreat (*Il.* 3.39-57).¹⁰⁰ Attitudes to crying, and excessive emotional outbursts in general, fall under the same category of exercising self-control according to manly standards, although it seems that again the division between manly and unmanly expressions of emotion is not clear-cut and appears to change as years pass. The first part of

⁹⁸ Foucault 1987: 56-57.

⁹⁹ Foucault 1987: 61.

¹⁰⁰ van Wees 1998: 11-16.

van Wees' article focuses on crying in epic and reveals that heroes cry far too often for fifth-century and modern standards (e.g. *Il.* 8.245, 9.14-16, 17.648, 17.695-700, 22.33-4, 23.385-387; *Od.* 9.294-295, 12.234).¹⁰¹ Although he finds no indication that crying is considered unmanly, when someone expresses self-control and manages to restrain his tears, he is very much admired (*Il.* 7.426-8; *Od.* 11.526-30, 19.209-11). What is interesting in this study is that van Wees discerns a gender difference when it comes to grieving in rituals: although men appear more prone to crying than women, when it comes to formal lamentation, women are expected to be more demonstrative. It is indicative, says van Wees, that at Patroklos' funeral men lament only because there are no free women in the Achaians' camp (*Il.* 18.338-342, 19.282-302). He concludes that only in formal circumstances women appear to cry more; in all other cases there is no distinct differentiation between the two genders.

Van Wees traces a shift, probably starting in the sixth century: men are supposed to remain calm and hide their grief in every occasion (*Hel.* 947-953; *IA* 446-453), whereas women take the role of the most emotional sex.¹⁰² Herakles prides himself that it was the only time he cried (*HF* 1354-1357; *Trach.* 1071-1075), while in the *Iliad* he would have cried without being ashamed of it (8.364). In general, when men in tragedy cry, they simultaneously question the propriety of the action (*Hel.* 947-953, 991-992). Lamenting is stigmatised as a female behaviour and is also associated with people of lower classes, who have less self-control.¹⁰³ Plato's attitude is the most absolute, characterising crying as completely effeminate behaviour (*Pl. Ap.* 35a-c; also *Resp.* 10.605c-e; *Phd.* 117c5-e4). Van Wees concludes that the ideal would be not to suppress completely one's feelings, but to achieve a balance between lamenting and self-control. The stigma attached to

¹⁰¹ Kirk 1990: 262.

¹⁰² van Wees 1998: 16-19, 42-43. Also Dover 1974: 167-168.

¹⁰³ See Dover 1974: 101. Also *Andr.* 93-95; *Hel.* 991f.; *Or.* 1022; *Med.* 928; *Trach.* 1071-1075; *IA* 446-450; *Resp.* 3.387c-d, 3.387e-388a.

unrestrained lamentation prevents men from showing excess, because they are ashamed to be seen by others behaving in a way that is not considered manly. Of course what really constitutes excess is subjective and uncertain.

Bacchylides' fifth Ode clearly expresses these ambiguities surrounding male emotion by presenting male fear and despair. Herakles is the heroic model already for Homeric heroes; so Bacchylides' use of Herakles in this Ode is always appropriate to epinician poetry as he is "the archetypal *athletes* because of his performance of labours (*athloi*)".¹⁰⁴ Yet Bacchylides presents Herakles crying and he draws attention to the fact by saying that this was the first time this has ever happened (5.153-164). More than that, earlier in the same ode he will have Meleager say *οὔ τοι δέοζ* (5.84) to Herakles, creating an ironic image where "the mightiest of heroes, is scared (like Odysseus in *Od.* 11.43) and has to be reassured by the dead Meleager's shadow".¹⁰⁵ Meleager, in turn, will admit in 5.153 that he himself cried when he realised that he was going to die. Picturing Herakles, the archetypal hero, giving in to his grief does not diminish the hero. It is of great interest, however, that Bacchylides chooses to show an incident in the hero's life that reveals a different, more sensitive and more human representation of the stereotypical heroic figure of Herakles than we are used to seeing in epinician. Bacchylides will also make Kroisos despair in 3.30-42, when faced with his own death. In the ode, we have his wife and daughters lamenting his fate when they see him about to go on top of the pyre. His invocation to Apollo is a cry of despair, and he laments because of the loss of the gods' favour, his wealth and finally his life (3.51-52). Men are expected to be strong and these texts reinforce this image by pointing to the unusualness of the situation. Yet, in recognising deviation they demonstrate an awareness that

¹⁰⁴ Gerber 1997: 244n.5. Pindar is using him also in *Ol.* 6.67-70, 2.3-4, 10.28ff., etc. See also pp. 63, 69.

¹⁰⁵ Maehler 2004: 103.

the stereotypes are a rigid ideological superimposition on a more complex reality.

Self-control is manifested not only in exceptional circumstances such as the battlefield or in lamentation. It is more generally connected with qualities manifested in peace and within the *polis*, but again the boundaries between acceptable manly and blameworthy unmanly behaviour seem to blur. Because there is never any objective measure of moderation, this becomes a matter for individual and collective evaluation.¹⁰⁶

At the opposite end of the behavioural scale from *sophrosyne* is the concept of *hybris*. For instance it was generally believed that certain groups are more prone to *hybris* than others: young people, because they are immature and impulsive, and wealthy people, because they are used to live in luxury (Lys. 24.15-18).¹⁰⁷ This is the reason why the poor can be regarded as more useful to the community, especially in wartime, because they had to restrain themselves (Ar. *Plut.* 559ff; Eur. *Phoen.* 597; Xen. *Mem.* 2.7.7-8).¹⁰⁸ Solon focuses on self-restraint and *sophrosyne* for the sake of the city. In 4 (West) he points out the danger that threatens the city if the citizens care only for their own profit and ignore their duty towards the city. In line 8 he draws attention to *hybris*, which is a danger impending when a man has too much wealth.¹⁰⁹ And this is the reason why he defends his choices proudly. In 32, 33 and 34 (West) he prides himself on not taking advantage of his position in order to make illegal profit for himself or for any of his friends.

Since *sophrosyne* in general and self-control in particular are so closely related to a man's public life, despite the fact that they very often refer to personal qualities, failure to comply with the social standards can be

¹⁰⁶ The observations on the notion of limit in my discussion of revenge are also relevant to the question of self-control, see p. 36ff.

¹⁰⁷ Fisher 1992: 96-97.

¹⁰⁸ Dover 1974: 111-112; Cartledge 1998: 61.

¹⁰⁹ This can be connected to the idea that luxury makes a man soft and effeminate, which becomes prominent in fifth- and fourth-century literature.

a cause of shame to the individual. In a world where a man is on constant display, he is the recipient of the public gaze (not an erotic/exploitative gaze as in the case of women but an evaluative gaze).¹¹⁰ As such he needs to be able to show courage and master his impulses, for which a major incentive is not only the wish to abide within social demands, but also a sense of shame towards others and an urge to gain honours within a civic context.

Honour in Homer is closely related to *aidos* (shame), which means that honour has a social aspect; it also relates to conscience, but only “if conscience is understood as that which encodes the standards and values of the individual”.¹¹¹ Williams calls Homeric society a ‘shame culture’ and argues that “the basic experience connected with shame is that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition. It is straightforwardly connected with nakedness, particularly in sexual connections...The reaction is to cover oneself or to hide, and people naturally take steps to avoid the situations that call for it...The avoidance of shame in these cases...serves as a motive: you anticipate how you will feel if someone sees you” (e.g. *Od.* 6.221-2, 6.66, 8.86, 18.184).¹¹² Williams correctly points out that being exposed is not the sole reason for shame, otherwise no one would have had a character; moreover, being exposed before someone whose opinion carries a moral weight matters more because their criticism would be true.¹¹³ At the same time however, *aidos* does not refer only to the self; it also means that a man ought to be sensitive to other people’s *time* as well (e.g. *Il.* 23.626-650, 23.587-595; *Od.* 8.396).¹¹⁴ As Long says: “the *agathos* must act and if he is sensitive to *aidos*, with its sanction *nemesis*, he will conform to

¹¹⁰ For Athenian culture as performance culture see Goldhill 1999 *passim*.

¹¹¹ Cairns 1993: 140, 146.

¹¹² Williams 1993: 78.

¹¹³ Williams 1993: 81-82. On guilt being closely related to shame see the chapter on Admetos.

¹¹⁴ Long 1970: 137, 139; Williams 1993: 80.

a standard of appropriateness in his relations with other men that steers clear of excess as well as deficiency".¹¹⁵

Aidos survives as a major motivator in the sources during the fifth and fourth centuries.¹¹⁶ Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* (1384a15-20) considers cowardice and unmanliness to be causes of shame. Euripides uses it both in the Homeric sense of "reluctance to flee" (e.g. *Hel.* 805) and in a non-martial context of respect for public opinion (e.g. *Alc.* 642-728). Whether it refers to the desire to do the right thing or to the consequences of failing to do so, it becomes clear that *aidos* is achieved through education and civilisation (Eur. *Supp.* 909-917; *Hec.* 599-602; *Heracl.* 458-460; *HF* 299-301).

Public and private

A great part of a man's life was spent in war or in public participation in the affairs of the *polis*, and this has been the main focus of my discussion so far. But these were not the only areas of the male life. The other main focus of a man's activity was his relation to the *oikos*. The idea that men and women had very distinct roles, and that private and public spheres were clearly differentiated, though it is not without substance, does not seem to be true, at least in the stark form in which our ancient sources present it. The observance of modern patriarchal societies reveals that in fact the roles of the sexes often overlap, but this is a common secret and people admit it only in

¹¹⁵ Long 1970: 139. Graziosi and Haubold 2003: 60-61, believe that in the epic, negative masculinity is expressed when someone fails to live up to proper relations among men: in the *Iliad* it is failure to cooperate in battle, in the *Odyssey* failure has moved away from the battlefield and we have the suitors' attempt to gain another man's wife and their lack of restraint instead (this does not mean of course that the behaviour of the suitors would have been acceptable in the world of the *Iliad*. Paris' decision to steal another man's wife is not considered unproblematic). Their focus is only on men, ignoring relations towards women, but even so their principle that people exist in a society and they are defined in a great extent by their interaction is right.

¹¹⁶ On what follows see Cairns 1993: 214, 264-269, 275, 342.

circumstances where the audience is ready to accept it.¹¹⁷ Moreover, “there is a good deal to indicate that the prestige of an individual, both male and female, relied heavily upon the *oikos*”.¹¹⁸ Males have duties both within and without the house and these are characterised by complementarity: the adult man is supposed to control his *oikos* as well as assist in the *polis*.

The *oikos* (including the property, the family, the slaves, the ancestors, the tombs and the cults) is the basis of the *polis*.¹¹⁹ It is a man’s duty to protect and preserve his *oikos*. The continuance and protection of the patriline and the *oikos* is a fundamental obligation of every adult male (Dem. 57.70, Isae. 2.18, Aeschin. 1.28):¹²⁰ this explains the exigency of getting married and producing legitimate heirs imposed on men. The law of 451/450 indicating that only men whose parents were both Athenians could be considered citizens, as well as the character of marriage as a financial transaction (*Oec.* 7.11ff.; *Lys.* 19.12-13) show that marriage’s primary aim was to produce legitimate heirs and citizens of the *polis*. The link between *oikos* and *polis*, between public and private, shows the connection between a man’s duties towards family and state which depend on one another; but they can also create conflict within the male, as these duties could on occasion be in conflict with each other.

The focus of the sources falls mainly on the connection between the *oikos* and the *polis* and the texts promote the idea of a man as an enforcer of authority within the house. There are hardly any references to the affective dimension of paternity; all we can get are some glimpses, such as the scene of Hektor and Andromache in Book 6, Kreon’s lamentation for Glauke’s death in *Medeia* (1205-1215) or the domestic images in *Herakles*, where the constant absence of the father only reinforces the rarity of such scenes. The

¹¹⁷ Winkler 1990: 159, also quoting Clark 1983 and Herzfeld 1986 on modern societies.

¹¹⁸ Cox 1998: 215.

¹¹⁹ Fisher 1976: 5-7.

¹²⁰ For the *oikos* see Fisher 1976: 5-11; Foucault 1987: 143-149; 1986: 72; Pomeroy 1997: 25.

Odyssey is unusual in depicting the father as a model of loving kindness to a larger extent and it underlines further the silence of the other texts.

The 'Other'

Nothing can be defined solely in terms of itself; Greek culture in particular was characterised by binary oppositions: free versus slave, adult man versus boy, man versus woman etc.¹²¹ Being part of one category automatically excludes membership of the opposite category. Stating what someone is not, i.e. defining someone as non-slave, non-woman, non-barbarian etc., means for the Greek that someone is a man, because maleness and the former categories are thought to be mutually exclusive. Thus women, slaves, barbarians stand opposite the normative male as the 'Other'. But these groups are important not only for the definition of maleness. More than that, they were a constant presence in the life of the male, and the boundaries between them and the latter were constantly being reinforced, explicitly and implicitly, in the rights, behavioural patterns and social expectations of each group.

The idea of the superiority of the Greek over the barbarian is difficult to trace before the fifth century. In epic all heroes are praised in the same way, whether Greeks or Trojans (e.g. *Il.* 10.47-52).¹²² But in tragedy the references show a clear distinction. Almost all the surviving plays contain references to barbarians and the sense of difference predominates.¹²³ The negative image of the barbarian, whether in character, culture or political structures, is pervasive in tragedy: Aeschylus' *Persians* presents us with a

¹²¹ Cf. Mangan 2003: 11, "the history of gender construction is, as often as not, a matter of marking off the 'other'".

¹²² Hall 1989: 19, 29, 32.

¹²³ Vidal-Naquet (1997: 112, 119), notes that this is an attempt to express the 'Other', but, as Hall (1989: 1-2) points out, it is also a response to the Persian invasion in the early fifth century.

contrast between the Greek love of freedom and oriental despotism and slavishness; the play also attributes inclination to grief to the Persians' *habrosyne*.¹²⁴ Flattery and indulgence in luxury are elsewhere rejected as barbarian and the opposite of Greek manhood (Aesch. *Ag.* 918-922; same ideas in Eur. *Or.* 1113; *Bacch.* 144-150).¹²⁵ Sophocles condemns human sacrifices as 'barbaric', although tragedy is full of sacrifices performed by Greeks (Iphigeneia, Polyxena, Erechtheus' daughter, Menoikeus).¹²⁶ Euripides takes a slightly different stand sometimes: although he accuses barbarians of savagery (*agriotes*) and inclination to luxury (*habrotes*), he creates also the image of the 'noble barbarian' as opposed to the 'barbaric Greek' offering an ironic comment on the norm (*Tro.*, *Andr.*, *Hec.*).¹²⁷ All these are ways of exploring and even contesting Greek values by assimilation to or dissimulation from 'barbarian' practices.

Effeminacy caused by luxury is the main 'accusation' made by the Greeks against eastern barbarians, not only in tragedy, but also historiography, oratory and philosophy; and all other negative characteristics of the barbarian are related to or derive from their inclination to *tryphe* and a lack of self-control similar to the one attributed to women (see below).¹²⁸ The difference between Greeks and barbarians is deep and apparently enforced by nature as much as by differing mentalities (cf. Pausanias' comments on the Persian way of living in *Hdt.* 9.82 as evidence of Greek stereotypes). Even Herodotus (who acknowledges both courage and

¹²⁴ Hall 1989: 83, 100.

¹²⁵ Hall 1989: 206.

¹²⁶ Hall 1989: 147 and see Soph. *Andromeda* fr. 126.2-3.

¹²⁷ Hall 1989: 126, 222-223.

¹²⁸ Except for effeminacy and inclination to luxury, the characteristics of the barbarian include stupidity (*Hdt.* 1.60), ignorance of law (*Hdt.* 7.104; Eur. *Or.* 494-495, etc.), passivity, subordination to despotic rule, disorder, lack of proper sensibilities, cruelty, lustfulness (though not on the whole sexual deviance), and deviousness (Tuplin 1999: 49-61). Plato (*Resp.* 4.427e, 4.444b) juxtaposes the Greek virtues of *sophia* or *xynesis*, *andreia*, *sophrosyne* (which measures passions and leads to *mesotes*) and *dikaiosyne* to the barbaric *amathia*, *deilia*, *akolasia* and *adikia* (Hall 1989: 122).

honour in his Persians and is for this deemed as *philobarbaros* in Plutarch's *De Herodoti Malignitate* 857a) on occasion slips into this way of thinking, as with the comments on maleness and courage when describing the first Persian attack at Thermopylai (Hdt. 7.209-212). This idea of Greek moral superiority (Isoc. 15.293; cf. Dem. 23.135-138, 45.30) was intensified after the defeat of Xerxes, which was thought to be a triumph against an enemy whose abilities were impaired by their life of luxury.¹²⁹ Such ideas explain where Aristotle's theory of the 'natural slave' (*Pol.* 1256a-b) comes from: almost all slaves were barbarians, coming from monarchic and thus servile societies.

Women, slaves and barbarians (as well as children) were somehow assimilated in terms of lack of rationality. This does not mean that women were put in the same position as barbarians; rather, it offers a convenient explanation concerning the Greeks' right to rule over them: eastern barbarians could be considered effeminate and thus Greek men should govern them.¹³⁰ Freedom, one of the most important values, was – inevitably in a patriarchal culture – combined with gender and it was important to make sure it was clear that Greeks were superior to barbarians.¹³¹

In theory, the distinction between men and women seems fairly straightforward. For the Greeks, male and female are mutually defining groups with clearly defined duties, responsibilities and function in public and private life. But at the same time (as seen earlier) there are significant conceptual overlaps. Words like *aidos* and *sophrosyne*, denoting virtues central to the construction of the male character, are used for women as well.

¹²⁹ Dover 1974: 83-85. It is important, however, to bear in mind that on this as on other major issues there is more than one strand to Greek thinking. Nevertheless, there are references which talk about common ideas in Greeks and barbarians (Dem. 43.22; Isae. 2.24; Isoc. 18.27) and others indicating that the barbarian society was thought to be like a primitive Greek society (Thuc. 1.6; *Pol.* 1268b-1269a.; *Resp.* 452c; Dover 1974: 268).

¹³⁰ van Wees 1998: 44-45. Sourvinou-Inwood (1995: 111-118) notes that women were equal to men only in public practice of religion; in all other cases, including religious practice within the house, women were entirely subordinated and obedient to men.

¹³¹ Tuplin 1999: 72; Cartledge 1998: 56.

There is, however, a very clear sense of dissimilarity between male and female shame, self-control, etc., showing that the practical application of the words is usually distinct.

For women, *aidos* translates into modesty in general and sexual shame, following the popular fear of a woman's sexuality. In Homer it translated merely into faithfulness and it was expected to make her behave in the proper manner.¹³² It is "applied to women who observe the degree of chastity and humility proper to respectable dependants of citizens" (Lys. 1.14-16, 3.6; Dem. 59.86, 111 etc.).¹³³ In Homer, female *arete* (contrary to the male one) is traced in "beauty, skill in weaving and housekeeping, chastity, and faithfulness"; a woman therefore should possess quiet virtues and she could be censured for actions, which were considered normal for men.¹³⁴ So the main purpose of virtue and *sophrosyne* for women was to make them act according to the rules men had set out for them.¹³⁵

Reeder notes: "a woman exhibiting *aidos* and *sophrosyne* would be modest, submissive, passive and virtuous. Moreover, she would not speak".¹³⁶ It is worth noting here that submissiveness and passivity for women is manifested most prominently in language. And this includes forms as well as meanings. So, although the same concepts, such as *sophrosyne* and *aidos*, are used for both men and women, for the latter they refer to passive qualities, whereas for men they are connected with action. Passivity and submissiveness are exclusively female characteristics.

Authors take great pain to point out how fundamentally different a man was from a woman, and this insistence on natural differences suggests

¹³² Cairns 1993: 121.

¹³³ Fisher 1976: 42.

¹³⁴ Adkins 1960: 36-37; see e.g. *Od.* 24.193; cf. 11.384.

¹³⁵ Foucault 1987: 146.

¹³⁶ Reeder 1995: 123.

male anxiety concerning female nature.¹³⁷ Some of the characteristics attributed to women are:¹³⁸ physical and intellectual weakness (Eur. *Hel.* 1684-1687; Eur. *Supp.* 294), lack of foresight and control of their emotions of the moment (Ar. *Lys.* 1-4, 13-15 etc.), inclination to superstition (Aesch. *Ag.* 274-277, 483-487), lack of courage (Eur. *Hel.* 807-808, 1687; Eur. *Or.* 786-789), use of trickery (Eur. *Med.*) and of course passivity (which was natural for a woman, but very much condemned in a man¹³⁹). Women are also accused of laziness and of always staying indoors, and therefore their domestic activities could not be called *ponos* (reserved only for manly deeds).¹⁴⁰ In this line of thought, their only chance for heroism is through sacrifice (*IA* 1376-1390),¹⁴¹ since they are linguistically, and according to civic ideology, excluded from displaying real courage, the manly virtue.¹⁴² We are of course here dealing with stereotypes. Deviations are recognised in our sources here as in every other area in which social ideals were constructed. These qualities are proclivities, not absolutes. But they are important pointers to ways in

¹³⁷ Fisher 1976: 12-13; Easterling 1987: 16.

¹³⁸ Dover 1974: 99-100.

¹³⁹ Foucault 1987: 216.

¹⁴⁰ Loraux 1995: 46. Female invisibility in public (meaning not so much that women did not appear in public, but that they behaved properly when outside the house) and seclusion as much as possible of mainly women of noble families (seclusion of women belonging to lower classes was more difficult due to practical reasons). See *Pol.* 1300a4-7, 1323a3-6; *Dem.* 57.30ff.; *Blundell S.* 1995: 136-138; Dover 1974: 98) are connected to *aidos* and *sophrosyne* (see *Pol.* 1260a30; *Soph. Aj.* 293; *Thuc.* 2.45; *Lys.* 1.6-7; *Isae.* 3.3-14 (esp. 12-14); *Reeder* 1995: 123-124. See also the discussion on the level of seclusion in *Kitto* 1951: 219 rejected by *Goldhill* 1986: 108-110; *Shaw* 1975: 256n.4 rejected by *Easterling* 1987: 16). It was a way of ensuring the proper behaviour for women since it reflected on the reputation of the men responsible for their education (*Oec.* 3.11, 7.22), ensuring legitimacy and restricting female sensuality (see *Lys.* 3.6; *Eur. Or.* 108; Dover 1974: 98). Evidence shows that there was a female social network and they would move outside the house, without this meaning they were actually associating with men (*Blundell* 1995: 137, "female friendships, unlike their male equivalents, were formed and conducted within the home"; cf. *Lys.* 1.14; *Dem.* 55.23-24; *Theophr. Char.* 10). Association with men was possible only in religious occasions or funerals of family members (*Lys.* 1.8; *Dem.* 59.21, 73ff.; *Thuc.* 6.56; *Fisher* 1976: 11; *Blundell* 1995: 137).

¹⁴¹ *Reeder* 1995: 330.

¹⁴² See above pp. 31-35. Cf. *Pelling* 1997: 225-226 on approaching and interpreting civic ideology as 'statement', 'command' and 'question'.

which Greeks perceived gender and therefore important for any attempt to address the Greek view of what it means to be a man.

“Greek masculinity”: the elusive ideal

The examination of the sources reveals multiple dimensions to the depictions of masculinity by different authors in an attempt to define ideal masculinity. Literature makes use of stereotypes and according to genre or context reproduces, supports or subverts norms. But even when our texts promote an ideal, we discern elements of doubt and ambiguity. The archaic definition of a man was that he should be a doer of deeds and a speaker of words (*Il.* 9.443; *Hdt.* 3.4.1; *Xen. Ages.* 10.1), but this is not all that someone needs in order to be a man. Masculinity is not a birthright, it is something that men must labour for and achieve. The strict boundaries created by Plato and Aristotle, in describing the (expected) normal male behaviour, reveal the anxiety about male identity. The norm also wants females to be the Other and through the female forms of language people de-gender and demote others, since quite often the active form is used for the male and the passive for the female (e.g. *aphrodisiazein* and *afrodisiasthenai*, *Arist. Hist. An.* 518a29; 518b10; 581a22; 637a25).¹⁴³ But we see men being more threatened by the feminine inside them than by women.

The female, despite being the opposite sex, does not necessarily only represent an ‘Other’ external and alien to the male. The female can exist inside the male, threatening his masculinity.¹⁴⁴ Male life is basically a struggle to maintain masculinity¹⁴⁵ and the hoplite represents the masculine

¹⁴³ Foucault 1987: 46.

¹⁴⁴ Winkler 1990: 50.

¹⁴⁵ A concept which recurs in later literature, e.g. Shakespeare (Smith 2000).

norm (it can even be seen in drama, Eur. *Med.* 250-251, *Vesp.* 1060-2).¹⁴⁶ The *kinaidos* stands at the opposite side, contrasting the 'manly male' with the 'womanly male'.¹⁴⁷ We see therefore that gender can exist within gender and the clear-cut distinction between male and female becomes more elusive. And this brings us back to the idea expressed in the first part of the Introduction, the notion of multi-dimensional masculinity.

Men seem to be aware of the difficulty of living up to masculine standards. The degree of self-consciousness regarding a man's masculinity reveals itself in constant references to the differences with other groups and questioning of what constitutes 'masculine' behaviour. There is no reason to suppose that the theatre audience was immune to these concerns.

What emerges from all this is that ideology and reality of gender diverge. The orators and other normative texts stress what a man should be like, but at the same time, their work acknowledges that men did not act according to the standards. In other words, being aware of the ideology does not necessarily mean that they put it in practice. Rather, the need to reinforce the ideology indicates that deviation is always a real and present possibility.

A note on method

The substantial developments in theoretical ways of approaching gender with which I began have implications for the scale and focus of a study of gender in Greek tragedy. As already mentioned, Blaiklock's study includes all the main male characters in the Euripidean corpus. A comprehensive treatment such as Blaiklock's is no longer feasible. Accordingly, I use a case study approach, for two main reasons. First, because the complexity of the issues and the size of the existing bibliography

¹⁴⁶ Winkler 1990: 50.

¹⁴⁷ Winkler 1990: 50; Cartledge 1998: 62.

renders the treatment of all the men who appear in Euripidean tragedy impossible for a piece of work of limited length such as the present thesis. And second, and most important, because the case study approach enables one to look at the characters at length and in depth. Each case study was chosen to function as a model of a different male type, ranging from the ultimate virile hero to the selfish and inadequate ex-husband and father, as a basis to explore different strands of the complex demands on and perceptions of the male in Greek society. They are all examined on the basis of socially defined and acceptable masculine behavioural patterns both in the private and in the public sphere and their interactions within these spheres with other males but also with females.

My first case study is Herakles in Euripides' *Herakles*. The first Chapter focuses on the ambiguities and contradictions characterising one of the most complex heroes of ancient Greek myth. The play poses questions concerning masculinity and masculine identity, bringing to the fore elements such as the relation of its protagonists with the feminine, masculine and feminine balance of roles within the *oikos* and male domesticity. Moreover, a number of debates on courage (both within the battlefield and in a civic environment) reveal that there is no single definition of manly courage, which can be manifested in more than one way.

The next case study will be Admetos in the *Alkestis*. It creates a sharp contrast with the previous case study in the sense that Admetos is not a hero in the Heraclean mode and is certainly not presented as one. In *Herakles* the focus is on a hero larger than life; here it is quite the opposite. Admetos is an everyday man and his attitude towards death is easily identifiable for the audience. Prominence is given to courage as a non-gendered quality and also on the way a man responds to different kinds of relationships with his parents, his children, his wife and his friends. Herakles' presence (a traditionally pictured Herakles) leaves Admetos

lacking in the comparison between the two as far as bravery and physical strength is concerned. The comparison with his wife shows him equally lacking, underlying the fact that being a man does not necessarily mean being ready to face death. Nevertheless, Admetos represents another kind of masculinity, focusing not on heroic achievements but on more ordinary issues such as hospitality and propriety towards one's friends and emotional attachment to one's spouse, which despite an element of hyperbole are also admirable. Admetos reflects the complexities of masculine identity and, this complexity (being neither unambiguously admirable nor blameworthy) makes it difficult for us to come up with a balanced view of him. Through Admetos I hope to show that there is more than one way of defining manly behaviour and that a more nuanced and realistic picture can be created by focusing on a different aspect of masculinity.

The third Chapter is dedicated to the *Hippolytos*. Ancient authors often speak of the need for moderation in everything, including manly virtues. The examination of Hippolytos is intended to show how a man who possesses one of the most highly valued masculine qualities, self-control, is destroyed because of his excessive attachment to it. Continenence is often used to separate men from the more emotional and less self-controlled women. Hippolytos prides himself on his exaggerated and deviant *sophrosyne*. The play is also interested in sexuality, both male and female; this reveals yet another important aspect of how men relate to the opposite sex, alongside Herakles' domesticity and Admetos' marital devotion to his dead wife. In this chapter my intention is to examine how the excess of a masculine quality can lead to the same, if not worse, consequences as lack of it.

The final Chapter's main theme is the betrayal of male duty within the context of the *oikos* and its members; my case study will be Jason in the *Medeia*. His choice to abandon Medeia for a more profitable marriage seen against normative Greek behaviour is not deemed unusual. Yet, his complete

failure to provide for his children, the total abandonment of his *oikos* and the passivity of his behaviour create a thoroughly inadequate character. His masculinity comes under scrutiny and comparison with the strong domestic elements of Herakles and Admetos and their devotion (each in his own way) to the *oikos* further underlines his inadequacies.

HERAKLES

Herakles seems to be the most appropriate place to start an investigation into masculinity in Euripides. Its protagonist is the ultimate hero of Greek myth, the son of Zeus, a man with super-human strength, unquestionably courageous, whose *andreia* set the standard against which even subsequent generations of heroes measured themselves.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, the play itself offers the fullest and most extreme exploration of masculinity in Euripides, addressing a number of issues connected with male identity, such as public presence, war, protecting one's family, aggression versus gentleness, as well as male and female gender roles. Yet on available evidence Herakles' appearances in tragedy are surprisingly limited considering his status as the archetypal hero and the wide diffusion of his cult: our sources collectively show that there were about fourteen tragedies devoted to him and his children. In the extant plays he appears, apart from the *Herakles*, only in three other tragedies: Sophocles' *Trachiniai* and *Philoktetes* and Euripides' *Alkestis*. With the exception of *Herakles*, the extant tragedies mainly depict him as the larger than life man of action, beast-slayer and great civiliser, a presentation consistent with his image in myth, iconography and popular tradition (despite the fact that this image is not unambiguously positive).¹⁴⁹

In *Prometheus Bound* the image created through the words of Prometheus conforms to the idea of the benefactor; Prometheus predicts that Herakles is destined to free him – and thus take over the former's role as protector of the human race (771-775).¹⁵⁰ The *Prometheus Unbound*, as far as

¹⁴⁸ Cf. e.g. *Il.* 18.117-119.

¹⁴⁹ The negative aspects of this image will recur repeatedly in the chapter, especially in the section "Manhood and revenge" (p. 80f.).

¹⁵⁰ There seems to be a similar prophecy made by the Chorus in *Prometheus Unbound* frs. 195-201 (Nauck).

we can see, continued this presentation of the superhuman figure. Sophocles' portrait of the hero in the two surviving tragedies is equally consistent with the larger than life hero we meet in the Prometheus trilogy. In *Philoktetes* he is already dead and deified, appearing as a *deus ex machina* at the end of the play urging Philoktetes to help the Greeks sack Troy (1409-1444). His human incarnation is in the past. His friendship with Philoktetes is important for his decisive intervention to persuade the latter to join the campaign against Troy; but so too is his authority as the legendary hero who has already sacked Troy in the past using his bow (as alluded in τὸ δεύτερον γὰρ τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἀπὸ τῆν χρεῶν / τόξοις ἀλῶναι, *Phil.* 1439-1440).¹⁵¹ The events leading to his death are presented in the *Trachiniai*. There he remains immutably mortal; but the sense of the larger than life figure is very much present through the descriptions of his superhuman achievements. Sophocles' portrait of Herakles focuses on the hero known from the myth who stretches the limits of human physical potential. But in the *Trachiniai*, unlike Euripides' *Herakles*, he remains (in terms of physical location and interpersonal dynamics), at best divorced from the *oikos*. His relations with his family, such as they are, are in one way or another highly problematic, be it the brutality with which he deals with his son, or the fact that he never comes into contact with Deianeira, thus never sharing with her the same dramatic or domestic space, despite the fact that she is clearly devoted to him.

This brief account brings to surface the potential problems in the treatment of Herakles in tragedy. His unique nature and ambiguities were harder to contain within the scope of a genre whose protagonists were recognisably human, not comic book 'super-heroes'. Herakles' inimitability

¹⁵¹ There is, as Galinsky (1972: 52-53) notes, an underlying presence of Herakles throughout the entire play and the transmittance of the bow in the end symbolises the transmittance of Herakles' value through Philoktetes to Neoptolemos.

places him in a separate category from the rest of mankind, even from other superlative heroes such as Theseus or Achilles, and his scattered appearances reveal the reservations of tragic authors when faced with a figure of such amplitude and ambiguity.¹⁵²

Comedy and satyr drama find it easier to accommodate the element of excess in Herakles, presenting him as a larger than life character of extremes, this time exaggerated for the sake of ridicule and laughter. Herakles' excess in everything offered a vast amount of material suitable for ridicule to satyr drama, whose purpose was the humorous handling of traditional myths.¹⁵³ It is worth noting that even in the *Alkestis*, which occupied the place of the satyr play in the tetralogy, Herakles makes an appearance and elements such as his insatiable appetite, which would later be used to a great extent in Attic comedy and which created a recognisable and very characteristic type, are used to a similar effect. Aristophanes makes use of Herakles often as simply a means of extracting easy laughter from the audience (*Pax* 741; *Vesp.* 60; *Av.* 1574-1578, 1639-1645).¹⁵⁴ His gluttony and lack of intellect, deriving from his great physical power which he overall preferred instead of making use of his intelligence, become valuable comical material and can very easily make the audience laugh. Euripides' portrayal of Herakles in *Herakles* to some extent resembles satyr play and comedy, in the sense that he too focuses on the excesses of his hero, although he makes a quite different use of them, which leads to tragic results.

In creating Herakles' character Euripides chooses to follow the tradition of the man of toil, civiliser and protector of the weak, in accordance with epic and lyric poetry. But the portrait of the hero is purged of some of

¹⁵² Cf. Mills 1997: 138, "as a god and a saviour figure, Herakles cannot be tragic because the gods themselves are not tragic"; Silk 1985: 1-6.

¹⁵³ Galinsky 1972: 81-82. Also, Silk 1985: 4.

¹⁵⁴ His appearances in Aristophanic comedy are sporadic, but they are consistent with the comic stereotype.

the negative features, which marked the earlier tradition. The allusions to occasional hybriatic behaviour, which we find in Homer, and the ambiguities, which Pindar acknowledges in his character, are not voiced in the *Herakles*.¹⁵⁵ But in addition, Euripides gives his hero a degree of emotional complexity anticipated (in extant sources, as already seen) only in the famous portrayal by Bacchylides, whose Herakles cries on hearing Meleager's fate (5.156-158), motivated by grief for the death of a great warrior.¹⁵⁶

The aim of this chapter is to examine how Herakles' character evolves as the play progresses from the figure of the Saviour to the human in need of support. Here masculinity is a foil as much as it is a theme. Through different aspects of his character as a heroic figure, a saviour, a family man, the son of a god, he finally appears at the end as a mere human in need of friends and demonstrating his vulnerability. Relations with the family, the gods and friends emerge as themes in the play, as well as notions like heroism, *arete*, revenge and friendship, creating a multi-dimensional portrait of the archetypal heroic figure of ancient literature. All the above will be examined through the prism of the association with gender stereotypes, as expressions of masculinity, but also in relation with the feminine element apparent both in the interaction with his wife and inherently in his own character.

Herakles and femininity

The association of Herakles with the feminine, whether this signifies his relation with women or the feminine elements inherent in his character is

¹⁵⁵ See Silk 1985: 7. Nieto (1993: 77n.4) notes two famous exceptions, but both problematic in their interpretation (*Isthm.* 4.55-60; *Ol.* 9.29-40). On the problems of the mythical paradigm in *Ol.* 9 see also Molyneux 1972.

¹⁵⁶ See Introduction p. 45.

highly problematic. Several scholars have approached the matter, with Nicole Loraux's 1990 article "Herakles: The Super-male and The Feminine" the best known.¹⁵⁷ Loraux's main argument is that Herakles' life is affected by his relations with different women, but, more importantly, also by contradictions inherent in every aspect of his existence. Her approach is right in some important particulars; she defines Herakles as a figure characterised by duality: civilised/bestial, serious/burlesque, sane/insane, saviour/destroyer, free/slave, divine/human, hero of *ponos*/man inclined to luxury and — what interests me most here — virile/feminine.¹⁵⁸

The central feature in representations of Herakles in art and literature is his superhuman power (with all the positive and negative ramifications both for him and the people around him), creating an image of extreme masculinity. But on the other side of Herakles' mythical tradition lie the stories about transvestism of the hero, which give a different aspect to his relation with the feminine. In the famous story where he serves Queen Omphale for a year dressed in a *krokotos*, a traditionally female dress usually worn by women, effeminate men, or people participating in Dionysiac feasts, the feminine associations are too obvious to miss.¹⁵⁹ The feminisation in this myth creates a puzzling paradox in relation to his status as the ideal of maleness. But Lindheim and Loraux argue plausibly that cross-dressing can be interpreted as an effort to bring his life back to balance, as a mechanism of constraining his excessive masculinity, and therefore integral to his story.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Loraux 1990: 21-52. See also for instance Bonnet 1996; Lindheim 1998 on Prop. 4.9; Cawthorn 2008: 79-111, who focuses on the feminisation of Herakles' body etc.

¹⁵⁸ Loraux 1990: 24.

¹⁵⁹ The Greek sources speak of slavery, whereas later Roman accounts make references to cross-dressing. Cf. *Ag.* 1040-1041; *Trach.* 248-257; *Plut. Thes.* 6.5; *Apollod. Bibl.* 1.9; *Paus.* 1.35.8; *Ov. Her.* 9.53-118; *Prop.* 4.9.47-50; Zeitlin 1996: 92-93. On the meaning of the *krokotos* see Stanford 1958: 75 on *HF* 46-47.

¹⁶⁰ Lindheim 1998: 44-45, "the ephemeral nature of 'real' gender identity" apparent in *Prop.* 4.9, where Herakles is both a masculine force and a cross-dresser, comes to surface. Also Loraux 1990: 38-39, who in addition argues that "the *peplos* of Herakles is at once a revelation of weakness hidden in strength and a chance for strength to circumscribe the

Cross-dressing is not exclusive to Herakles. He shares it with his half-brother Dionysos as well as with the goddess Athena, who both move often between masculine and feminine.¹⁶¹ In Aristophanes' *Frogs* Dionysos also wears a *krokotos*. The female associations created here are further underlined by the fact that Dionysos uses as a disguise the lion skin and club which are always used in connection with Herakles. Elements of the imagery of the ultimate masculine hero are sharply contrasted with a female dress and a god, who is often associated with effeminacy and oriental practices (cf. Eur. *Bacch.*), but they also create a link between the ultimate masculine hero and an oriental god of ambivalent status.

Cross-gendering is also a feature shared by Herakles with his patron goddess, Athena. Athena and Herakles from different directions take us to the boundaries of gender. Herakles stands for exaggerated masculinity; as for Athena, the closer we move to the fifth century, the more her image seems to lose in femininity.¹⁶² Athena is closely linked with Herakles and his association with the *peplos*, both because she was the one who gave it to him, but also because the *peplos* is traditionally associated with the cult of Athena, since every year the young girls in Athens would offer the goddess a new

feminine contained within it". The problem with Loraux's interpretation of the use of the *peplos* is that she approaches the term as referring only to female clothing, whereas the evidence shows that the use of the term by the authors is not gender-specific. Euripides himself uses the term in the *Herakles* interchangeably for both genders (e.g. 124, 520 etc.), so Loraux's argument in connection with the *peplos* cannot really stand. However, she is right in her approach concerning the need for balance in the life of Herakles. On the meaning of the *peplos* see Llewellyn-Jones 2005: 51-65.

¹⁶¹ He also shares it with that other great hero, Achilles, although the story of his cross-dressing does not have the same implications concerning constant gender transgression as in the cases of Dionysos and Athena (see e.g. Ov. *Met.* 13.162-170; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.13.8; Stat. *Achil.* 1.318-337; also Heslin 2005 on Achilles' transvestism in the *Achilleid*, especially Ch. 5).

¹⁶² See Keuls 1985: 35-38, on the evolvment of the image of the goddess from Homer to the fifth century: "by the mid-fifth century, the image of Athena was stripped of any vestige of femininity...The Athena Parthenos (the Virgin) was, as a late Roman author put it, a 'virago', a sexless man-woman who can defend her position in a male world, but only at the expense of her sexual role".

peplos during the *Panathenaia*.¹⁶³ This relationship has been the object of a recent and suggestive study by Deacy.¹⁶⁴ Their strong connection is obvious from several vase paintings and in most cases there is an element of gender crossover, in that Athena appears in the masculine, more active role, whereas Herakles appears more passive. There are, nevertheless, cases where Athena takes over the feminine role, leaving the active part to him. Deacy notes on this easiness of changing roles: “this...exemplifies the capacity of both Herakles and Athena to move between the extremes of gendered characteristics. Herakles is the most excessively masculine of mythic figures, but with feminine potential that is displayed in a striking manner in his interactions with the goddess”.¹⁶⁵ Athena’s case is also unique due to the way she was born as well as her status as a warrior goddess. Hesiod informs us that she sprang from the head of Zeus (*Theog.* 924) and Aeschylus has Apollo using this as an argument in favour of Orestes, stressing the importance of the father (*Eum.* 663-666). Direct evidence for her cross-dressing can be found in the *Iliad*, in a description where she explicitly takes off her feminine dress and puts on armour suitable for a warrior before she goes into battle, creating a strong masculine image.¹⁶⁶

This persistent juxtaposition of masculine and feminine makes Herakles an ideal figure for an author to explore the limits and ambiguities

¹⁶³ The *peplos* was apparently given to him by Athena as a gift after he finished his labours: ἀπό γὰρ τῶν πολέμων τραπέντος αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἀνέσεις τε καὶ πανηγύρεις, ἔτι δ’ ἑορτὰς καὶ ἀγῶνας, ἐτίμησαν αὐτὸν δωρεαῖς οἰκείαις ἕκαστος τῶν θεῶν, Ἀθηνᾶ μὲν πέπλω, Ἥφαιστος δὲ ῥοπάλω καὶ θώρακι (Diod. Sic. 4.14.3). See Llewellyn-Jones 2005: 60, where he rightly points out that the offer of the *peplos* by Athena symbolises the transgression of Herakles from a life of fighting into a more civilised environment where his lion-skin no longer fits (and not a symbol of femininity as Loraux would have it).

¹⁶⁴ Deacy 2005.

¹⁶⁵ Deacy 2005: 45.

¹⁶⁶ αὐτὰρ Ἀθηναίη, κόρη Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο, / πέπλον μὲν κατέχευεν ἑάνον πατρός ἐπ’ οὔδει, / ποικίλον, ὃν ῥ’ αὐτὴ ποιήσατο καὶ κάμε χερσίν / ἢ δὲ χιτῶν’ ἐνδύσα Διὸς νεφεληγερέταο / τεύχεσιν ἐς πόλεμον θωρήσσετο δακρυόεντα. / ἀμφὶ δ’ ἄρ’ ὤμοισιν βάλετ’ αἰγίδα / θυσσανόεσαν / δεινήν...κρατὶ δ’ ἐπ’ ἀμφίφαλον κυνέην θέτο τετραφάληρον / χρυσεῖην, ἑκατὸν πολίων πρυλέεσσ’ ἀραρυῖαν (Il. 5.733-747).

of masculinity. Dramatic authors make use of the ambivalence embedded in myth in order to explore aspects of gender differentiation. Though the distinction between male and female was firmly embedded in social, civic and domestic life, and the binary opposition male versus female is always projected in literary texts, authors appear very aware of the fluidity of gender construction.¹⁶⁷ Sophocles depicts it in the *Trachiniae*, where an aggressively masculine Herakles becomes a useful tool for juxtaposing male and female, physical strength and physical weakness, emotional strength and emotional weakness. The wandering hero proves as vulnerable to sexual desire as his passive and domesticated wife. His insistent desire to control makes him display astonishing inhumanity towards his wife and son; yet he cries and begs for death like a woman (*νῦν δ' ἐκ τοιούτου θῆλυς ἤρρημαι τάλας*, *Trach.* 1075) and points out that despite the fact that he fought with all kinds of beasts, he was destined to die by the hand of a woman (a paradox stressed by tautology – *θῆλυς οὔσα κούκ ἀνδρὸς φύσιν*, *Trach.* 1062).¹⁶⁸ Euripides exploits the ambiguity to good effect by the attention he pays to Herakles' relationship with his wife and moreover by exploiting his excessive masculinity within the confines of the domestic sphere.

Herakles and Megara: gender roles within the house

In *Herakles*, the fluidity in gender roles is reflected in the complementary roles of the masculine and the feminine. Traditionally, the outside is associated with the Greek male as is the inside for the female (Xen.

¹⁶⁷ Lindheim 1998: 45, "the very problematisation, the very questioning, of gender takes place in the ancient texts themselves...Ancient authors themselves raised the spectre that gender identity might not be fixed and monolithic, but rather more fluid and in the process of constant construction".

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Zeitlin 1996: 350, "at those moments when the male finds himself in a condition of weakness, he too becomes acutely aware that he has a body. Then, at the limits of pain, is when he perceives himself to be most like a woman".

Oec. 7.30-31). This approach, however, is not practical in the play; nor indeed is it applicable to Greek life in general, at least in the simplistic terms in which we encounter it in civic ideology. Megara's activity inside and outside – and on behalf of – the house while her husband was away is not merely a literary construct, but corresponds to a significant reality largely unacknowledged in ancient sources, namely the place of women in a society where men were often away for a long time fighting, women who were in charge of managing the house. Xenophon in *Oikonomikos* (3.10ff.) speaks of the importance of the husband introducing and educating his wife in keeping the finances of the *oikos* and allowing her to participate actively in the management of the house. Foxhall, using evidence from Aeschines' speech against Demosthenes, argues persuasively that "in a society where it was the norm for older men to marry younger women, households left in the charge of a female head may not have been unusual, as Aeschines insinuates...The wife is truly 'the trusty guardian of things inside' (Dem. 57.122), with all that that implies".¹⁶⁹ While Herakles is away, it falls on Megara to be the protector of the family. Michelini rightly speaks of "a complementary relation of absence and presence between husband and wife".¹⁷⁰ Since Herakles stays away for so long, Megara has to come out of the house to substitute for him during his absence; after his return, one should expect that she would have returned into her normal place into the house and become invisible to the outside world.¹⁷¹

In his turn, when Herakles returns home from his toils, he enters the house holding his wife and children as their protector (622-636), duplicating Megara's gesture earlier in the play as she led the children into the house.¹⁷² The difference between his previous activity, which was centered exclusively

¹⁶⁹ Foxhall 1989: 36-37.

¹⁷⁰ Michelini 1987: 246.

¹⁷¹ Michelini 1987: 246.

¹⁷² Michelini 1987: 253.

outside the house and this action is noticeable. His gesture, however (appearing to be at odds with the stereotype presented by Xenophon), is caused by the strong antitheses characterising Herakles' life; Megara took care of the house during his very long absence, taking over tasks that would normally have been performed by Herakles and when he returned he took over a strong domestic role initiated mainly by his wish to protect his children.¹⁷³

The echoes and role exchanges between male and female do not stop there. They are also expressed in behaviour patterns. Lines 1354-1357 allude to what Megara said earlier in line 536 concerning the tendency of women to cry more often than men.¹⁷⁴ Now Herakles cries out of grief and incredulity. Interestingly, though heroes cry in Greek epic, there are no descriptions of Herakles crying other than in Bacchylidean Ode 5.156-158 where it is stressed that never before did the great Herakles shed a tear (*Ἀμφιπρύωνος παῖδα μούνον δὴ τότε / τέγξαι βλέφαρον, ταλαπενθέος / πότμον οἰκτίροντα φωτός*).¹⁷⁵

This lamentation is used explicitly to open up the issue of male and female behaviour. Theseus accuses him of being womanish for lamenting more than he is supposed to (*εἴ σ' ὄψεται τις θῆλυν ὄντ' οὐκ αἰνέσει, 1412*).¹⁷⁶ Theseus has already tried to restore him to his former self, pointing out that Herakles' current self-pity does not fit his previous career as a saviour of humanity and the most brave of men (1250-1252). Theseus adopts a more traditional approach, according to which a man needs to be in control of his feelings and not to show excessive grief. However, like all the other

¹⁷³ On the domestic aspects of his character see section "The domesticated hero" p. 71.

¹⁷⁴ See van Wees 1998: 10-53, where he shows how the beliefs concerning crying and lamenting changed from Homer to the fifth century and as a result the female sex came to be considered the most emotional of the two. See also Introduction p. 44.

¹⁷⁵ See above p. 63 and Introduction p. 45.

¹⁷⁶ In the *Trachiniai* Herakles himself compares his crying to a girl's and asks for pity from Hyllos (1070-1072).

antithetical forces inside Herakles, the boundaries between male and female behaviour are not clear. This confusion and contestation of roles raises, with particular force, the question of *andreia*, of what it truly means to be a man.¹⁷⁷ Herakles laments and is explicitly criticised for behaving like a woman. Yet he manages to find strength and survive. This does not mean that at the moment of his weakness he stopped being *andreios*; rather, this momentary transgression from male to female behaviours and vice versa reveals the fluidity of the boundaries of male and female patterns. Ideology and rhetoric stress an (unrealistic) difference between masculine and feminine, but literature is at liberty to recognise the permeability of the superficially firm boundaries established by public discourse and to reveal the resemblance, which coexists with difference.

The proximity of experience and conduct between husband and wife is reinforced by two mirror images, one from the beginning of the play and one from the end. At the opening there is Amphitryon and Megara, at the end there is Amphitryon and Herakles. At the beginning of the play, Megara argues in favour of committing suicide and gives in to death out of despair. Only the appearance of Herakles changes her mind and rekindles hope. In the last part of the play Herakles follows the same line of reasoning as his wife, offering argumentation in favour of committing suicide and rejecting Amphitryon's words. Herakles' debate is more extensive than that of his wife, not only because as the main character he is the focus of dramatic interest, but also because his situation is more extreme and because, unlike her, he is in a position to determine the question of his own survival. The threat against Megara is external, whereas Herakles' reason for dying comes from his own acts. Their mirroring reactions establish the link between husband and wife and the image brings male and female closer to create a

¹⁷⁷ For the convergence between biological sex and gender roles rooted in the etymology of *andreia* see Introduction p. 32.

sense of parallels between genders, without, however, undermining Herakles' masculinity.¹⁷⁸

The domesticated hero

In domesticating Herakles Euripides presents him from a perspective which is without parallel in extant Greek literature. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, from epic down to Aristophanes, all authors present an extreme figure, whether through heroic achievements or labours or, in the case of comedy, excessive appetite, but always in a context outside the domestic sphere. The association of the male with outdoors in Greek thinking becomes even more prominent in the case of Herakles, who spent his entire life away from home, often beyond the boundaries of the known or even lived world, fighting against all kinds of superhuman threats in isolation. Sophocles' portrait in the *Trachiniai* is certainly consistent with this image and his distance from the domestic sphere is both physical and emotional. Euripides, however, brings him into the house and presents him visibly interacting with his wife and children.

The domestic aspect of the traditional hero, although seemingly unusual in relation to Heracles, has its origin in epic. In the famous scene in Book 6 of the *Iliad*, Homer does not hesitate to take Hektor away from the battlefield in order to embrace his wife and pick up and kiss his son (6.390ff.). Hektor takes time out of war and searches for his family, presenting a very tender image which could describe the relationship of any man with his family. This small scene adds a totally different aspect to the portrayal of the hero as a fierce warrior. Domesticity completes Hektor's image. Yet the awkwardness in the presence of the warrior within the

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Loraux 1990: 48, "the feminine element is part of the ambivalence of virile strength, and...it serves in many ways to amplify that strength".

domestic sphere is made explicit within the epic (cf. *Il.* 321-341, where Hektor scolds Paris for sitting in the palace with the women, away from the battlefield). Hektor goes to battle in order to protect his people and his family, and yet when he returns to his son the boy is afraid of his father's appearance (especially of his helmet adorned with horse-hair).¹⁷⁹ Hektor goes out to kill in order to protect his son, but when he tries to transfer himself into the domestic sphere he finds that he does not exactly fit in an environment away from the battlefield. The fact that Astyanax is scared reveals a conflict between the roles of the warrior and the father. The scene brings to surface the question of a man's, especially a warrior's, place within the house and in particular his place after his external job (in this case the war) is done. The same question arises in relation to Herakles' situation when he returns to his family after he completes his labours: what exactly will a hero's place in a peaceful environment and within the house be?

Despite the awkwardness of the domestic role of the hero, however, his importance for his family is brought out emphatically when the latter is faced with his death. After Hektor is killed, we first see the reaction of the other Trojans, which is immediately overshadowed by the despair of Andromache, who laments for being left without protection, and the grief of his parents who have lost their first-born and protector of the city and the family (*Il.* 22.405ff., 22.461ff.). Andromache's lamentation refers to their marriage and their relationship, enhancing the domestic image of the hero as seen earlier in Book 6. Moreover, Priam's supplication to Achilles is not the supplication of a king, but of a father pleading to retrieve his son's body in order to give him a proper burial (*Il.* 24.486-506).

¹⁷⁹ Ὡς εἰπὼν οὗ παιδὸς ὀρέξατο φαίδιμος Ἔκτωρ / ἄψ δ' ὁ πάϊς πρὸς κόλπον ἐϋζώνοιο
τιθήνης / ἐκλίνθη ἰάχων, πατρὸς φίλου ὄψιν ἀτυχθεῖς, / ταρβήσας χαλκόν τε ἰδὲ λόφον
ἵπποχαίτην, / δεινὸν ἀπ' ἀκροτάτης κόρυθος νεύοντα νοήσας (*Il.* 6.466-70).

Hektor's domesticity complements the image of the mighty warrior by adding to it a more human aspect. But arguably the most famous model of the domestic hero is Odysseus. The entire *Odyssey* is the narration of his struggle to return to his home and retrieve his rightful place in his palace next to his wife, who is given prominence in the opening of the poem in preparation for their unification at the end. After Odysseus reaches Ithaca we see him acting within the boundaries of his house trying to save what is left from his *oikos*, be it his belongings, his wife and of course his son, whom the suitors are plotting to kill and thus deprive Odysseus' *oikos* of its legitimate heir.

In Sophocles' *Trachiniai* we also see Herakles in association with his wife and son, but the difference is striking. First of all, Herakles himself is absent for most of the play and enters the stage for the last 300 verses, thus all the information we have about him comes from other people's references to him and his actions. More interestingly though, when he does appear on stage it is again outside the house (971f.) and when he feels death approaching him, instead of asking to be taken inside the house in order to die there, he chooses to be taken into the wild (1193-1202), where he already spent most of his life. The distance from any domestic association is underlined also by the fact that he is never presented talking to or even seeing his wife. Moreover, his already problematic relationship with his son worsens as the end approaches, with the outrageous and unfeeling demand that Hyllos marries Iole, the cause of their disaster (1220-1251).¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ There may be more in Herakles' behaviour than the single-dimensional brutality attributed to him. Researchers see his request as selfish and inconsiderate; they also see it as a necessary development in terms of myth (since Hyllos and Iole were believed to be the ancestors of the Herakleidae) and – more importantly – as a necessity for the survival of Herakles' lineage. Hyllos takes his father's place as the protector of the *oikos*, makes the transition to adult life and ensures the preservation of the *oikos* by entering into a physical relationship with his father's mistress. See Easterling 1982: 11, 225 on lines 1225-1226; Rodighiero 2004: 240; Levett 2004: 68-70, 91-93. Nevertheless, seen in purely domestic terms his behaviour remains cruel.

Where Sophocles divorces the hero physically and/or emotionally from his *oikos*, Euripides uses his Herakles to take the model of the domestic hero as this appears in Homer to a whole new level. Domesticity becomes central, whereas other aspects of the representation of the hero which might conflict with this image such as the erotic Herakles and the capturing of women as part of his extreme masculinity (seen explicitly in the *Trachiniai*, but also iconography, Aristophanes, Apollodorus etc.) are totally absent from the *Herakles*.¹⁸¹ All the weight falls on domesticity. The motif of the caring, 'maternal' father is introduced with Amphitryon, who from the beginning appears very close to his son: he is in charge of taking care of his children for as long as their father is away, he defends his son against Lykos' attack of Herakles' courage and in the last part of the play he takes care of his son as the latter is realising the extent of the disaster he has caused. The character of Amphitryon creates a stronger link between Herakles and his sons in the play, as three generations appear on stage showing the patriline passing from father to son to grandsons.

Though they share the element of domesticity, Herakles is more than a Hektor: Hektor fights battles against human enemies who threaten his city and his family. But Herakles fights with monsters and alone. The monster-slaying is emphasised in the play, as is the fact that he is the man who defeats Hades in the Underworld (an incident treated by the other characters as a journey to death). The location of his exploits in a world teeming with monsters, his achievement of the seemingly impossible, combined with his status as a wanderer, make it difficult to confine him within the narrow domestic space of the *oikos*. This explains why Herakles is the hero that had never been domesticated in previous accounts. It was an

¹⁸¹ This aspect of the hero creates an interesting paradox. In his labours he displays phenomenal self-control and remarkable endurance, and yet when these relax he displays a large and indiscriminate sexual appetite and an impressive readiness to satisfy it. This kind of excess, however, has no place in Euripides.

act of great boldness on Euripides' part to oppose the tradition and place him in a domestic environment.

Bearing all this in mind, the question now becomes what can one do when domesticating someone so extraordinarily unique and isolated as Herakles and what are the ramifications of bringing him so firmly into a civilised context. In *Herakles*, all the characters agree in creating an image of Herakles as a loving father and a caring family-man. Megara is obviously happy with her marriage (63-68) and there is nothing remotely resembling the behaviour of Herakles as a husband in the *Trachiniai*. She gives a description of family happiness where the children look for Herakles and every time they hear the door believe it is him and wait for him to come in (74-79). Apparently, the only problem for Megara is the fact that he is absent for so long.¹⁸² Though it has been claimed that Megara's murder is indicative of Herakles' "unsuitability" as a husband, I see no evidence to support this case.¹⁸³ The killing has no basis in any subjective aspect of their relationship; the narrative offers enough evidence to show that Megara was happy with him. Rather, the fact that he murders his wife arises from the objective fact that she belongs to his *oikos*: it is an irony of the play that this domesticated hero destroys not only his offspring, but also his spouse, thus destroying his chance of reviving his *oikos*. The claim that Herakles is unfit to be a husband seems more appropriate for the relationship between Herakles and Deianeira as seen in the *Trachiniai*, which is revealed to be problematic already from the beginning of the play (27ff.).

In marked contrast to the line taken above, Pike claims that Herakles' absence and his nature was the cause of his family's perilous

¹⁸² As Pike (1977: 75) rightly argues.

¹⁸³ Contrary to Pike's belief (1977: 83) that Megara's murder is the indication of the fact that Herakles is not really suitable to be anyone's husband, as in the case of Deianeira he is always absent and unfaithful, and in the case of Megara he decides to come home after a long absence and the result is bloodshed and the destruction of his family.

situation.¹⁸⁴ However, though the play makes clear that Lykos exploits Herakles' absence to attack his family, neither Megara nor Amphitryon ever utter a word of blame against him for being away (nor indeed does Lykos). On the contrary, in their references to him there is only affection, admiration and hope that he would defend them against their enemies. Herakles performed all his deeds away from home and, when he tries to use the same heroic model to take care of his family, he finds out that it cannot work in the domestic sphere.¹⁸⁵

Herakles' entrance corroborates Megara's words and confirms the image his family has created for the audience before his entrance. They receive him with relief and he responds with reassurances that he will take care of them and they have nothing more to fear (622ff.). He is confident he will manage to save them because he trusts his strength and he is convinced that protecting them will not be different than his other labours. In fact, he has already renounced them a few lines earlier, in 574-582, where he declares that they are of no importance if he does not manage to save the children who were going to be put to death because their father is who he is. This duty towards his family is the most important and the Chorus agrees with his decision: *δίκαια τοὺς τεκόντας ὠφελεῖν τέκνα / πατέρα τε πρέσβυν τήν τε κοινωνὸν γάμων* (583-584). The image is very human: Herakles might be a mighty hero, but at this moment he is nothing more than a father trying to take care of his children. His status as a hero is of no importance here. Herakles places himself on the same level as all other mortals; his declaration *πάντα τὰνθρώπων ἴσα / φιλοῦσι παῖδας οἳ τ' ἀμείνονες βροτῶν / οἳ τ' οὐδὲν ὄντες· χρήμασιν δὲ διάφοροι / ἔχουσιν, οἳ δ' οὐ πᾶν δὲ φιλότεκνον γένος*

¹⁸⁴ Pike (1977: 83) believes that, even though Euripides creates a favourable portrait of Herakles in relation to his family, he could not ignore the fact that his long absence put his family in danger proving how, because of his nature, Herakles cannot avoid causing misery to his family.

¹⁸⁵ See Sleight and Wolff 2001: 13, "Herakles himself is represented movingly as father and husband, then both roles are destroyed".

(633-636) shows that in a situation like this he is not different from any other man. The domestic aspect reaches its climax when Herakles moves inside the house with the children and Megara clinging to his clothes (622ff.).¹⁸⁶

This gesture is indicative of the trust they have in his power to protect them, partly alluding to the traditional image of Herakles as a Saviour.¹⁸⁷ More importantly, however, their expectations of him have pronounced gender connotations. Herakles is not just the saviour hero; he is also the *kyrios* of the household, whose male duty is to take care of the family's well-being. Before his appearance, Megara was fearless and determined to protect her honour. After Herakles' entrance, a sharp contrast is created with her previous behaviour.¹⁸⁸ From a woman who is ready to commit suicide along with her children, so that she will save them all from the accusation of cowardice, the moment she perceives Herakles approaching she adopts her traditional role again. Hope returns and she places the destiny of herself and her children in her husband's hands. Now that she is no longer charged with the protection of the *oikos*, she allows herself to express her fear (*τρόμον*, 627) of Lykos and lets Herakles take over the task prescribed for him as a man. Herakles compares his wife and children with tow boats (*ἐφορκίδαας*, 631) and himself with a ship (*ναῦς*, 632), who will drag them and lead them into a safe place. The image underlines

¹⁸⁶ Micheline 1987: 253.

¹⁸⁷ The opening scene takes place in front of the altar of Zeus Saviour alluding to the quality of the hero as a Saviour. If Herakles were to return or had been there in the first place, he would be able to save his family from his misfortunes, a conviction that both Amphitryon and Megara share. The invocation to Herakles in 490-496 further adds to the Saviour image, most clearly expressed after his return through Megara's declaration in 521-522: *ἐπεὶ Διὸς / σωτήρος ὑμῖν οὐδέν ἐσθ' ὄδ' ὕστερος*.

¹⁸⁸ Bond (1981: 221) says that Megara turns into a "conventional timid wife". The term can be accepted only in the sense that Megara returns to her traditional female role after taking over the role of her absent husband.

the Saviour motif which will be concluded with Lykos' murder, giving way to the change taking place in the last part of the play.¹⁸⁹

Herakles is very closely connected with the children, through the abovementioned image of the maternal father, especially in the scene where they seek protection from him by clinging to his clothes and he promises to protect them. The prominence given to the children and their relationship with their father is further emphasised by the way they are individualised in Megara's speech (460-489), where she distinguishes each one of them according to the plans Herakles had for their future and their inheritance.¹⁹⁰ In 131-134 the Chorus point out how much the children resemble Herakles physically; they are parts of Herakles and they are to serve for the continuance of his *oikos*. The social importance of producing offspring for the *oikos* is summarised in MacDowell's observation, who touches on another aspect of private family life and male roles within the household, namely the *kyrios* responsibility for presiding over the *oikos'* religious observances: "it was thought deplorable for an *oikos* to become extinct; though the property and the surviving female dependants could be taken over by another *oikos*, the religious observances of the *oikos* would be neglected if it had no heir".¹⁹¹ The social – both public and private – implications of an *oikos* going extinct were far too important to be overlooked and Athenian law appears to have recognised this importance.¹⁹²

Thus Herakles' action of killing his children involves the destruction of the future of his bloodline. In this respect he fails in one of the most fundamental obligations of the adult male.¹⁹³ It is highly ironic that he came

¹⁸⁹ This image by the end of the tragedy will be tragically inverted using the same word *ἐφολκίδες* (1424), with Herakles taking over the part of the children and Theseus the part of Herakles as the Saviour. See below p. 104.

¹⁹⁰ Michelini 1987: 252.

¹⁹¹ MacDowell 1978: 85.

¹⁹² See MacDowell 1978: 84-85.

¹⁹³ Cf. earlier the words of Amphitryon in 316-318.

back in order to protect his *oikos* and ended up destroying it himself. There is a very obvious parallel with Medeia; her motivation was in part the protection of her family against the imminent destruction her husband's new wedding would cause. The final scene of *Medeia* resembles very much that of *Herakles*, in the sense that Jason, like Herakles, enters the scene and gradually realises that his children have been killed and that he is therefore deprived of any kind of future; his *oikos* is doomed to disappear after his death. Unlike Medeia, Herakles never intends any harm to any member of his family and his actions are only a result of madness, never a premeditated action. Unlike Jason, for Herakles the hope for resurrection is not lost and the last scene proves this to him through the words of Theseus.

As was observed above, it was a bold stroke to absorb Herakles – of all the Greek heroes – into a conventional family setting. The traditional and untraditional aspects could easily have clashed. However, the image of a domestic Herakles in Euripides' play does not create an impression of incompatibility between Herakles' previous heroic status and a domestic role.¹⁹⁴ Euripides does not negate his heroic past and his labours. He simply shifts the focus from Herakles the Pan-Hellenic hero to Herakles the family-man, shedding light on an aspect of the hero neglected in the past, but which is nevertheless part of his persona. As Michelini says, Herakles is exceptional for his deeds, but he is more exceptional when he decides to leave them aside and take care of his family, making this the most important task (574-582).¹⁹⁵ He is not less of a hero (and certainly no less of a man) for that; he is simply provided with a human background which brings him closer to the everyday man.

¹⁹⁴ Unlike Foley (1985: 175-192), who finds the image quite disappointing compared to his other two aspects, the epinician and the violent/criminal; in her words "an ordinary Herakles is in some sense no Herakles at all".

¹⁹⁵ Michelini 1987: 254.

Manhood and revenge

Despite his unusually pronounced domestic role, Herakles' reactions are characterised by a violence of an ambivalent nature. It is indicative that his reaction when he hears that his family is in danger is purely physical: he will attack the house of the new king, he will kill him and he will throw his head to the dogs and on top of that he will punish all the Thebans who helped him (565-573). The contrast with Amphytrion in 595-598, where he advises caution, against Herakles' urge for immediate actions, is sharp.¹⁹⁶

In real life, revenge is never deprived of its problematic nature in Greek thought.¹⁹⁷ The need for retaliation was considered understandable, but at the same time restraint and the pursuit of redress through legal means instead of physical retaliation were also praised. Thus Hornblower notes: "...the Athenian code prescribed that *upon being provoked, offended, or injured a citizen should not retaliate, but should exercise self-restraint, avoid violence, reconsider, or renegotiate the case; in brief, compromise*" [Hornblower's italics].¹⁹⁸ The degree of compromise required of a reasonable man is debatable;¹⁹⁹ it is clear, however, that retribution gets replaced by a more civilised way of solving differences.²⁰⁰ On the other hand, the older standards of retaliation

¹⁹⁶ This urge for immediate action is a dominant element of his character and can be seen also in the *Alkestis* where, once he hears what has happened, he immediately takes over action and storms out to save Alkestis.

¹⁹⁷ See Introduction p. 36f.

¹⁹⁸ Herman 1994: 107, offering examples in Dem. 54.5-6, Lys. 3.9, Dem. 21, Isae. 9.19-20, Lys. 1. He also notes (1994: 102, 105) that Athenians did not carry weapons in the city (as Thucydides says in 1.5-6) and that Thucydides also stresses the anarchy that occurred in Corcyra when, during the apostasy, the opposing sides used daggers to strike their enemies (3.70).

¹⁹⁹ See Harris (1997: 366), who nevertheless admits that the Athenians were supposed to prefer lawsuits over vendettas.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Herman 2000: 9, "in my view, few societies in history have succeeded so nearly as did the Athenians in suppressing the spirit of vengeance and retaliation; few have managed, like the Athenians, to turn conciliation, compromise, and the foregoing of the *point d'honneur* into

apparently coexisted with the more civilised standards surfacing in late fifth and early fourth centuries;²⁰¹ Aristotle for instance in *Eth. Nic.* 1125b8-25 praises the man who defends his honour against insults, as long as he avoids excess either way. And yet historical examples such as the Mytilenean debate, where the Athenians initially decided to allow violence to overflow over the innocent demonstrates the catastrophic results of excessive violence.²⁰²

There is a vital difference between striking first against someone and using violence to respond to an insult made by someone else. Herakles here is clearly provoked and it is only natural to attack Lykos in order to save his family. Lykos has threatened to kill them and it is Herakles' manly duty to protect them as a father, a son and a husband, and to take revenge for their misfortune. He is faced with his duty towards family, a principle highly valued in a man, which often finds expression in epic and tragedy, the most well known example being the case of Orestes. Moreover, Herakles' sense of *arete* requires that he take revenge for the insult against his family.

Pursuing revenge, though not exclusively male, is an essential part of the masculine identity in tragedy. Certainly, women appear to have a significant role to play when it comes to avenging the death of a kin (Elektra for the death of Agamemnon, Klytaimnestra for the death of Iphigeneia) or any other kind of unprovoked attack against them (Medeia).²⁰³ There is,

an ideal that was not only universally respected but allowed actively to mould social life, and few have contrived to reduce the volume of violence occurring within them to the extent achieved by the Athenians". Phillips on the contrary, in his recent book (2004), sees lawcourts as a way of pursuing revenge instead of containing it and places Draco's law on homicide in the centre of Athenian civic identity. The evidence he uses, however, is not sufficient to support his claim and his treatment is at times selective.

²⁰¹ Herman 1994: 109.

²⁰² Of course it was not ultimately carried out, but Thucydides notes that they did carry it out with Torone and Skione (Thuc. 4.110ff., 4.120ff).

²⁰³ See Foley (2001: 162-163), who finds parallels of women avengers in modern traditional societies of rural Greece and Corsica. Women are to participate in a vendetta and in cases of

however, a substantial difference between the two sexes: women become avengers only when there is no male around (Klytaimnestra is the most famous exception making her transgressive behaviour all the more poignant).²⁰⁴ Thus Electra, for instance, is planning her revenge against her mother, but leaves the physical deed to Orestes, when he returns. In all other cases the cultural expectation is that revenge needs to be conducted by men. Women's right to retaliate may be recognised, but failure to do so is merely attributed to their lack of physical strength. For men, however, revenge is not only a right; it is a duty, whose neglect causes contempt.²⁰⁵

The *Odyssey* serves as the obvious example of this line of thought. The narrative never presents any doubt about the rightfulness of Odysseus' revenge against the men that were repeatedly destroying his wealth and plotting to kill his son. Nor does it invite us to question the legitimacy of his actions. In fact, the repetition of the suitors' offences implies that Odysseus needed to react and defend his *oikos*, not because revenge is always justified, but because he was faced with a constant threat. Even in this case though, there was awareness that the killing would create a new sequence of revenge, which could lead to civil war (23.363ff., 24.473f.) and this is the point where Zeus' intervention is needed to stop the bloodshed from becoming eternal (24.478-486). Burnett points out correctly that Odysseus' revenge was not only a matter of his *oikos*' survival; it is also necessary to make explicit that the insult was unprovoked, the revenge was just and was not supposed to cause retaliation from the families of the dead suitors.²⁰⁶

In Eur. *Elektra*, Aigisthos is presented as a welcoming host and Orestes tricks him and kills him as he was about to perform a sacrifice. Again

no other male member of the household left, they are allowed to choose to stay unwedded and take over the masculine role of the avenger and protector of the family.

²⁰⁴ Foley 2001: 163.

²⁰⁵ Foley 2001: 162-163.

²⁰⁶ Burnett 1998: 36, 40-41.

there is no doubt of Orestes' just revenge on the man who killed his father and deprived him of his house and throne. But the way the killing takes place, although in all dramatic treatments of Aigisthos' death he is taken by surprise (e.g. *Cho.* 837-854; *Soph. El.* 1466ff.) and tricked into the palace,²⁰⁷ creates a disturbing image because of the specific context of the sacrifice. Like Aigisthos, Lykos is a usurper and tyrant.²⁰⁸ The way the narrative presents both of them, taking over power with unjust means and being aware of their unjust actions (*Eur. El.* 831-833; cf. *Soph. El.* 1466-1469) shows that they deserve the revenge conducted by the offended party, namely Orestes or Herakles, who are trying to avenge their family and re-establish themselves in their rightful position.²⁰⁹

In the present case, the rightness of the act is complicated by an element of excess. Though Herakles' revenge is justified in principle, his account of the way he plans to do it has disturbing aspects. The threat of the decapitation (567-568) brings to mind the encouragement of Orestes to Electra to abuse Aigisthos' head in *Eur. El.* (890-899), but also the fierceness of Achilles concerning Hektor's body (e.g. *Il.* 18.334-342, 23.20-23, 23.182-183, 24.39-45; Scamander in 21.218-221 and Zeus in 24.113-116 condemn his actions) and the association of the abuse of the enemy with barbarian practices (*IT* 72-76). Though his motivation in the threat against his family offers some justification, his threat of using excessive violence has alarming connotations, bringing to mind elements from the villains against which Herakles himself tried to save the world.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ See Cropp 1988: 154 on *Eur. El.* 774-858.

²⁰⁸ Aéliou (1983: 70) distinguishes the two situations of revenge in that, in the case of Herakles there is no divine order (by Apollo or any other god), he is not faced with matricide and we never see him opposite Lykos' body.

²⁰⁹ *Amphitryon* (727-734) supports the rightfulness of the revenge as he tricks Lykos into the house: *προσδόκα δὲ δρῶν κακῶς / κακόν τι πράξειν...εἴμι δ', ὡς ἴδω νεκρὸν / πίπτοντ'· ἔχει γὰρ ἡδονὰς θνήσκων ἀνὴρ / ἐχθρὸς τίνων τε τῶν δεδραμένων δίκην.*

²¹⁰ Papadopoulou 2001: 120.

It is important not to overstate the alienating impact of the brutality of the planned revenge. Herakles' opponent is deserving (cf. Odysseus and the suitors) and the dramatist manages to make the spectator complicit in the sense that Lykos has to be punished; yet from the moment Herakles engages himself in the process of taking revenge, the boundaries between good and bad become blurred and it is not quite clear to what point his reaction is revenge and where it starts to cross the line towards aggression.²¹¹ Herakles' positive presentation as saviour and man provoked is opposed to the clear-cut cynical violence of Lykos at first, but from the moment Herakles' revenge starts, in a disquieting way he starts to resemble Lykos, to the point where, in an act of tragic irony, he ends up doing to his family what Lykos had planned to do: this is what Papadopoulou calls the "mimetic character of revenge", where the avenger ends up duplicating the wrongdoer.²¹²

Herakles' madness starts as he is performing a sacrifice in 922ff., but it manifests itself more clearly when he starts pretending that he is on his way to Mycenae (952ff.) in order to kill Eurystheus. He then turns against his wife and children, believing that he is attacking Eurystheus' family (970). This is the point where it becomes more explicit that the use of his strength can become malevolent. Violence and murder were part of his life during the performance of his labours, which creates an interesting contradiction: Herakles' strength brought him his fame and he was worshipped as a civiliser and a protector of humans from ferocious creatures. Yet here he is the one who is bringing wildness into a civilised context and causing fatal damage.²¹³ The Messenger speech uses words like ὄρνις (974) and νεοσσός (982) and later θῦμ' ὡς ἐπισφάξων (995) to characterise the children and their killing, and assimilate them to animals, creating a parallel with hunting,

²¹¹ Papadopoulou 2001: 116.

²¹² Papadopoulou 2004: 259-264. On the mimetic character of Hekabe's revenge in *Hec.* see Papadopoulou 2005: 36. Also Porter 1987: 106.

²¹³ Papadopoulou 2005: 30.

enhanced by the bow and arrows Herakles uses to kill them. These weapons used in the past in the outside and away from the domestic environment when facing ferocious mythical creatures in obscure places are now brought inside his house and turned against his children. Herakles himself resembles a beast by the way he looks at his sons (ὁ δ' ἀγριωπὸν ὄμμα Γοργόνοσ στρέφων, 990) and he even kills one of them by smashing his head with his club as if attacking a wild animal (992-994). It is as if he fits more into the wild where he can fight with beasts than in a civilised context whose consolidation he has helped with his labours. The bestial element is part of his imagery, reflected in iconography in his portrayal wearing a lion skin. The image is supported by words such as ἐξημερῶσαι (20), whose meaning 'to tame' is in contrast with καλλίνικος (582) and εὐγενής (50) and creates a very vivid image of bestiality.²¹⁴ Up to the point of madness, the contrast with the *Trachiniai* was sharp. In Sophocles, Herakles' bestiality is a dominant element of his character contrasted with the civilised environment of his house. This bestial element was a major drawback for the dramatisation of Herakles. Sophocles solved the problem by simply placing the hero away from home and keeping him outside the house physically on his return; he never had to deal with the movement of Herakles into a civilised environment. In contrast Euripides boldly placed this hero into a civilised familial environment. In the process to some extent he mitigates his bestiality. But the bestiality remains and soon the madness brings it to the surface and his human characteristics are lost.²¹⁵

So violence is indeed part of his nature and determines the whole course of his life, and its excess brings him often to the verge of

²¹⁴ Galinsky 1972: 58-59.

²¹⁵ Gregory 1991: 138. There is a similar image in the *Iliad* (24.39-43), where Achilles is not in his right senses and is compared to a lion. Cf. also the image of Phoenix feeding Achilles in the mouth like a small beast, which alludes directly to the connection of the hero with wild elements (9.485-89).

destruction.²¹⁶ Killing is not strange to him, as can be seen from the description of his labours in the first stasimon and his reaction when he hears what Lykos was planning to do to his family.²¹⁷ Nevertheless this is a beneficial kind of violence, which he always used against dangerous opponents and beasts. In the description of his labours there are no instances of his attacking innocent victims. The infanticide is a clear proof that physical force is very hard to contain and capable of turning in an instant from benevolent to malevolent. His actions raise questions about the nature of revenge, which is conducted using violence and is impossible to restrain once it has started, while its results are often ambiguous.

This inherent violence becomes the point, from which his destruction derives; “physical violence is a way of life to him”, so it automatically becomes his weak spot.²¹⁸ Since the benevolent and the malevolent side of violence are so easily fused into each other, it becomes very easy for Herakles to consider that his actions are perfectly normal at the time of his madness.²¹⁹

Herakles himself is aware that violence has sealed his nature from the moment of his birth (1258-1262) and the culmination of a life of violent deeds is the murder of his children, which he calls *λοίσθιον πόνον*, the last and most important of his labours (1279).²²⁰ Yet after the *ponos*, the god-given sleep (here by Athena) does not bring the happiness it usually brings to the mortals who have toiled; on the contrary he is *πολυμοχθότερος πολυπλαγκτότερός τε θνατῶν* (1197).²²¹ Herakles wakes up and has absolutely no recollection of what has happened (1089ff.), like Agave in the *Bacchai* after the murder of her son: they both come to realise gradually what

²¹⁶ Loraux 1990: 24-25.

²¹⁷ See Barlow 1996: 167; Fitzgerald 1991: 91-92; cf. Kitto 2002: 237.

²¹⁸ Barlow 1996: 10.

²¹⁹ Barlow 1996: 10-11, “because of his way of life he is vulnerable”.

²²⁰ Hamilton 1985: 23; Barlow 1996: 5.

²²¹ Willink 1988: 88.

they have done, aided by Amphitryon and Kreon respectively.²²² Herakles' reaction to the result of his violence is again violence, this time against himself, deciding he wants to commit suicide;²²³ he is momentarily giving way to his grief and resolving that terminating his life is the only solution.

The courage of the bowman

Herakles is characterised by a constant problematisation of the nature of courage as part of the definition of masculinity. The issue of *andreia*, of what manly courage really means, arises as an underlying theme in three debates throughout the play. I would like to focus first on the debate between Amphitryon and Lykos, which takes place before the entrance of Herakles. Lykos attacks Herakles' *andreia* by questioning the courage of the bowman, compared to the hoplite. The debate occupies 100 verses (151-251).

A close look shows that these speeches highlight important elements of the characters but also, in a broader sense, the important themes of the play in general.²²⁴ The exchange between Amphitryon and Lykos, which at first glance seems to be an abstract and at best distracting discussion about archers and spearmen, is in fact more firmly attached to the presentation of Herakles' character than it may seem. Lykos' attack brings to the fore the isolation of the archer as opposed to the interdependence between the hoplite and his comrades.²²⁵ By inserting the debate about the bow before

²²² Papadopoulou 2005: 68, 70. Devereux (1970: 37, 41) calls these scenes "psychotherapy scenes".

²²³ Gregory 1991: 141; Barlow 1996: 13.

²²⁴ As Conacher (1981: 10-11) notes, "even some of the most abstract and 'philosophic' speeches which Euripides appears to 'put in the mouths' of his characters are often more relevant to a fuller understanding of those characters and to their part in the dramatic action than this critic [Gould 1978: 53] would have us believe".

²²⁵ See Anderson 1993: 35, "in hoplite battle the front-rank fighters of the 'cutting edge,' carried forward by the mass behind them, would have had little opportunity for feints and

Herakles' appearance on stage and associating him with the bow, Euripides stresses the hero's isolation as a major element of his characterisation. At the same time he raises broader questions about the nature of manly courage. The traditional hoplite way of fighting is undoubtedly courageous; but this need not mean that it expresses the sole standard for courage. From the way the archer is treated in the debate it becomes clear that his function is equally important in the battlefield, and the fact that there is no physical contact between the opponents does not necessarily mean that he lacks courage; it is simply a different kind of courage.

The bow and arrows are part of the traditional imagery of Herakles and are closely connected to the labours and his role as a civiliser. However, the emphasis placed on Herakles' use of the bow was not inevitable; he was equally associated with the club, which, had Euripides chosen to emphasise it, would by associating Herakles with close combat have reduced the dissimilarity between Herakles and those who fight face to face. But Euripides chose to ignore it and focus instead on the bow, which allowed him to bring to the fore more emphatically issues he wishes to stress in the play. The value of the bow as a masculine weapon, however, is often doubted and degraded in Greek culture, mainly because of its social connotations, namely the class difference between archers and hoplites.²²⁶ The hoplites were more than a military force. There were pronounced social aspects related to the financial means one needed to possess in order to serve as a hoplite. In a citizen militia, only men whose property was of around 2,000 drachmas, i.e. only those citizens who could afford to buy their own equipment could do it.²²⁷ On the other hand, archers as well as the other

withdrawals, which would in any case have opened gaps in the line. Their duty was to hold their position until they conquered or died".

²²⁶ Bond 1981: 109.

²²⁷ Except for the shield and spear provided by the state (Ridley 1979: 519). Ober gives a number of 7-8,000 people as opposed to the wealthier and therefore more privileged class of

light-armed troops belonged to the lower socio-economic strata, which means that the debate here does not only focus on heroism, but it has also socio-political connotations. The hoplites enjoyed higher status both because of ancestry and financial means. As Hanson rightly notes, “a clear notion arose that hoplite fighting was properly in the beginning the monopoly of the land-owning classes, who alone could afford arms, owned property and enjoyed full voting privileges – and whose hard work, rural conservatism, and local pride had made the *polis* great”.²²⁸ This respect continues under the democracy as well.

In addition to the socio-political aspect, hoplites were characterised by a strong sense of discipline, which kept the phalanx united when in the battlefield. They were supposed to form a body, keeping close to the man next to them, but not too close so that they would not prevent him from fighting; leaving the phalanx in order to retreat or to attack an enemy individually could prove destructive for the entire unit.²²⁹ In that sense, then, men made a shield wall, composed of individuals forming a unit and functioning as one body; a hole in the shield wall would mean danger for the entire unit. Thus individuality for the hoplite would mean putting in danger not only his life but also the lives of his comrades. Having that in mind, courage, self-restraint and *sophrosyne*, all masculine virtues par excellence, were conspicuously demonstrated in the way the hoplite phalanx functioned, which explains the value that was attributed to it.

The importance of the spearman is stressed in different sources and often in opposition with the use of the bow, which in the fifth century became closely related with the Persians, as can be seen in the distinction

horsemen, who, despite the equalitarian policy of the Athenian democracy, had the choice not to join the hoplites (1989: 129, 204). On the financial qualifications of the hoplites see also Ridley 1979: 510, 519-21, who in addition speaks about the *thetes*, the light-armed troops, who lacked many privileges including the right of becoming hoplites.

²²⁸ Hanson 2000: 219.

²²⁹ See Ridley 1979: 530; Lazenby 1993: 95; Dem. 3.17; Thuc. 4.126.5; Hdt. 9.71.3.

made by Aeschylus between τόξου ῥῦμα for the Persians and λόγχης ἰσχύς for the Greeks (*Pers.* 147-149).²³⁰ The contempt to which the archer might be exposed is apparent already in the *Iliad*. Diomedes (*Il.* 11.369-395) laughs at the wound caused by Paris' arrow and compares his strength with that of a woman or a child, thus degrading the status of the Bowman compared to the spearman.²³¹ The dependency of the archer is reflected in the description of Teukros in the *Iliad* protecting himself behind Aias' shield and coming out only to shoot his arrows, being compared to a child seeking protection from his mother.²³² Herodotus' battle narratives also emphasise the superiority of the hoplite phalanx. Thus for instance, he speaks of the successful advance of the Greek hoplites at Marathon in 490 BC (*Hdt.* 6.112) and Plataia in 479 BC (*Hdt.* 9.72) against the Persian force, who made use of missile weapons and cavalry, but who were not able to penetrate the hoplite phalanx with their arrows.²³³ Sophocles' Menelaos, in his angry exchange with Teukros concerning the burial of Aias (*Aj.* 1093-1162), associates the archer with pride (ὁ τοξότης ἔοικεν οὐ μικρὸν φρονεῖν, 1120) and accuses him of not being able to conduct a proper battle holding a shield (μέγ' ἄν κομπάσειας, ἀσπίδ' εἰ λάβοις, 1122). Teukros, however, defends his skill (οὐ γὰρ βάνανσον τὴν τέχνην ἐκτησάμην, 1121) and argues that the archer can indeed stand and fight against a spearman, or even succeed (κἂν ψιλὸς ἀρκέσαιμι σοί γ'

²³⁰ Bond 1981: 109.

²³¹ τοξότα, λωπητήρ, κέρα ἀγλαέ, παρθενοπίπα, / εἰ μὲν δὴ ἀντίβιον σὺν τεύχεσι πειρηθείης, / οὐκ ἄν τοι χραίσμησι βιὸς καὶ ταρφέες ἰοί / νῦν δέ μ' ἐπιγράψας ταρσὸν ποδὸς εὔχεαι αὐτως. / οὐκ ἀλέγω, ὡς εἶ με γυνὴ βάλοι ἢ πάϊς ἄφρων / κωφὸν γὰρ βέλος ἀνδρὸς ἀνάκιδος οὐτιδανοῖο (*Il.* 11.385-390).

²³² Τεῦκρος δ' εἵνατος ἦλθε, παλίντονα τόξα τιταίνων, / στή δ' ἄρ' ὑπ' Αἴαντος σάκει Τελαμωνιάδαο. / ἔνθ' Αἴας μὲν ὑπεξέφερον σάκος· αὐτὰρ ὃ γ' ἦρως / παπτήνας, ἐπεὶ ἄρ τιν' οἴστεύσας ἐν ὀμίλῳ / βεβλήκοι, ὁ μὲν αὐθι πεσὼν ἀπὸ θυμὸν ὄλεσεν, / αὐτὰρ ὁ αὐτίς ἰὼν πάϊς ὡς ὑπὸ μητέρα δύσκειν / εἰς Αἴανθ'· ὁ δέ μιν σάκει κρύπτασκε φαεινῶ (*Il.* 8.266-272).

²³³ See Anderson 1993: 21. The Greeks, however, saw the usefulness of missile weapons and cavalry in the fifth century and they started using horsemen and archers in a large scale (see Everson 2004: 130, 169).

ὠπλισμένω, 1124).²³⁴ Finally, the fact that the Skythian police in Athens were called *toxotai*, accentuated the divide between archer and hoplite and further undermined the status of the archer, an effect underlined in passages such as the choral complaint in the parabasis of *Acharnians* (707): ἄνδρα πρεσβύτην ὑπ' ἀνδρὸς τοξότου κυκώμενον, where the word archer is used as an insult in order to defame the target (in that case the policemen, 693ff.).²³⁵ The association of the orient with the bow at first meant simply differences in fighting between Greeks and non-Greeks; the use of the bow, however, soon came to have a derogatory meaning because of its association with the luxurious way of living of the barbarians.²³⁶ This negative stereotyping of the oriental way of life meant that by the late fifth century the orient could be made synonymous with cowardice and even effeminacy, an idea underlying the creation of characters like the Phrygian slave in *Orestes*.

The prominence given to the hoplite expressed here by Lykos finds an echo in the context of the *epitaphios logos*, where we find the reaction of the democratic city to the status of the hoplite.²³⁷ In Lysias' funeral oration for instance (2.38ff.) or in Pl. *Leg.* (4.707b-d) the emphasis of the praise falls on the hoplites rather than the navy.²³⁸ But the most notable case is arguably Perikles' funeral oration in Thuc. 2, where he attributes the praise to the hoplite force of Athens and deliberately leaves the navy unmentioned.²³⁹ In

²³⁴ See below p. 93-94 about the value of the bowman as seen in the *Odyssey*.

²³⁵ It is also worth bearing in mind that the archers were public slaves, thus the association is even more demeaning (cf. Schol. *Lys.* 184, Σκύθας γὰρ καὶ τοξότας ἐκάλουν τοὺς δημοσίους ὑπηρέτας ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχαίας χρήσεως).

²³⁶ See Introduction p. 50-52.

²³⁷ Loraux 2006 *passim*.

²³⁸ Isoc. (21.115-116) says: “τὴν μὲν κατὰ γῆν ἡγεμονίαν ὑπ' εὐταξίας καὶ σωφροσύνης καὶ πειθαρχίας καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν τοιοῦτων μελετωμένην, τὴν δὲ κατὰ θάλατταν δύναμιν οὐκ ἐκ τούτων αὐξανομένην, ἀλλ' ἐκ τε τῶν τεχνῶν τῶν περὶ τὰς ναῦς καὶ τῶν ἐλαύνειν αὐτὰς δυναμένων καὶ τῶν τὰ σφέτερα μὲν αὐτῶν ἀπολωλεκτότων, ἐκ δὲ τῶν ἀλλοτριῶν πορίζεσθαι τὸν βίον εἰθισμένων”.

²³⁹ On the matter Loraux (1986: 212) notes “we are not told whether it was by land or by sea that the goods of the entire world came to Athens [Thuc. 2.38.2], and the fleet, evoked once only in a passage on land warfare [2.39.3], seems to have no autonomy. In short, the man of

addition to the praise, the funeral oration reveals the sense of responsibility of the city for the dead hoplite, whose funeral is conducted by the state, and whose orphans are to be educated by the state as well (Thuc. 2.34, 2.46 etc.). It becomes clear that even for the democratic *polis*, and even for a naval power like Athens, the hoplite was the ideal of manly courage, so that there was little room left for any group to be praised other than the hoplites, because with their organisation in tribes rather than individuals, and because they fought on land, they were the ideal incarnation of the democratic city and the autochthony the Athenians prided themselves on possessing.²⁴⁰

At the same time in Thucydides' narrative we find incidents, where the presence or absence of light-armed troops modifies drastically the outcome of the battle. Demosthenes' failure in Akarnania in 426 BC, where the Athenian army was defeated by the lightly-armed, and thus faster and more flexible, Akarnanian troops, is a telling example.²⁴¹ Elsewhere (4.32ff.), the defeat of the Spartans in Sphakteria is clearly ascribed to the archers and the light-armed troops of the Athenian army, who managed to cause considerable harm to the Spartan hoplites, while the latter found it impossible to pursue the Athenians due to the heavy armour, which made their quick movement on rough ground impossible.²⁴² The importance of the archers gets clearer a few lines later (4.76ff.), where the lack of regular light-armed troops in the army of the Athenians is underlined in the narrative of the Spartan victory at Delium.²⁴³ The presence of the debate in Euripides'

insular strategy who at other times was quite capable of exalting the maritime experience of the Athenians [Thuc. 1.142], forgets in the epitaphios whatever is not related to hoplitic warfare..."

²⁴⁰ See Loraux 2006: 267-268, 349.

²⁴¹ Thuc. 3.94-98; see also Hornblower 1991: 513 on 97.2 and cf. 361 on 2.79.

²⁴² τοὺς δὲ ψιλούς, ἧ μάλιστα αὐτοῖς ἐπιθέοντες προσκείοντο, ἔτρεπον, καὶ οἱ ὑποστρέφοντες ἠμύνοντο, ἄνθρωποι κούφως τε ἐσκευασμένοι καὶ προλαμβάνοντες ῥαδίως τῆς φυγῆς χωρίων τε χαλεπότητι καὶ ὑπὸ τῆς πρὶν ἐρημίας τραχέων ὄντων, ἐν οἷς οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι οὐκ ἐδύνατο διώκειν ὄπλα ἔχοντες (Thuc. 4.33).

²⁴³ ψιλοὶ δὲ ἐκ παρασκευῆς μὲν ὀπλισμένοι οὔτε τότε παρήσαν οὔτε ἐγένοντο τῇ πόλει οἵπερ δὲ ξυνεσέβαλον ὄντες πολλαπλάσιοι τῶν ἐναντίων, ἄοπλοι τε πολλοὶ ἠκολούθησαν,

play shows that there was a certain amount of interest in the potential value of archers in the wake of recent successes in the use of light-armed troops against hoplites, and that this interest was quite diffused and thus considered worthy of being included in the play.²⁴⁴

In terms of the dominant civic ideology Lykos' attack against Herakles' courage seems understandable. He enters the scene arrogantly reassured by his belief that Herakles is not coming back and by his awareness that the fate of the suppliants lies in his hands (140). From this superior position he attacks Herakles' courage in a debate with Amphitryon about whether a bowman is a true warrior. According to him, Herakles, a bowman, is not a true warrior, since he does not get involved in the battle, but rather fights from a distance avoiding physical contact and ready to flee when he feels danger (157-164).

At first sight Lykos' point of view is not without force. His argument, however, leaves out the alternative point of view seen in Thucydides and already discernable in epic. The most important example of the brave archer is Odysseus, who owes his reputation for bravery to his skill as a bowman (*Od.* 8.215-225; 11.488-491; 21.1-41 and *passim*). Moreover, we know that Achilles meets death from an arrow and Troy cannot be sacked without the bow of Herakles wielded by Philoktetes (*Soph. Phil.*). All this offers an alternative to Lykos' reasoning and makes the argument of Amphitryon's defense plausible. His focus is mainly on safety and prudence: the bowman causes the maximum harm to the enemy with minimum personal loss, he does not count on other men, who might be proven

ἄτε πανστρατιᾶς ξένων τῶν παρόντων καὶ ἀστῶν γενομένης, καὶ ὡς τὸ πρῶτον ὤρμησαν ἐπ' οἴκου, οὐ παρεγένοντο ὅτι μὴ ὀλίγοι (Thuc. 4.94).

²⁴⁴ Despite the fact that Bond (1981: xxxii) rejects as "rhetoric flourish" any link of the debate with Sphakteria and Delium in specific.

cowards and he does not rely on fortune to be saved, nor does he foolishly put his and the group's life in danger (190-204).²⁴⁵

At the same time the image of Herakles mainly as a bowman does not lack ambivalence. Lykos accuses him of never being on a battlefield (159-160) and argues that his reputation relies only in fights with beasts, which he managed to capture with trickery (151-156). Despite the exaggeration and distortion in this account, Herakles is differentiated from the conventional model of the hero who fights pitched battles.²⁴⁶ Herakles had always been an isolated figure, fighting his battles alone armed with his bow and club. His fame resulted from the civilising role he alone performed. And although associations can be found between him and Odysseus, the truth is that for Odysseus the use of the bow is not synonymous with isolation, whereas for Herakles it is associated with fighting in the wild with beasts away from a civilised context. Thus Herakles' status is ambivalent, and he cannot be

²⁴⁵ However, important information is omitted to help Amphitryon's argument rhetorically. The spearman does not stay defenseless after throwing his spear (193-194). First, because a hoplite would usually throw his spear as an ultimate gesture before fleeing, but normally in battle he used it as a thrusting weapon (Anderson 1993: 20); second, after throwing the spear, he still had his sword to defend himself (Ridley 1979: 527); and third, because throwing-spears were rarely used already from late seventh century, giving way to thrusting-spears and swords (van Wees 2000: 155). My point here is that Amphitryon is as ready as Lykos to resort to rhetorical devices and selectivity to prove his point, even going as far as seemingly dismissing hoplite warfare by arguing that one cannot trust the other men in ranks for one's safety; each offers a reductive argument. It has been argued that fifth-century society was highly individualistic and therefore the audience would easily accept the dismissal of the spearman in favour of the archer (see e.g. Galinsky 1972: 60, who argues that it would be anachronistic to depend on the comrades in a time of individualism and that the Homeric image of Herakles as belonging to a previous era becomes contemporary again. So, according to him, the audience would have had no problem in dismissing the spearman in favour of the archer. However, the outcome of the debate is not as straightforward as Galinsky would have it). I find this opinion quite exaggerated; no doubt the role of the individual was stressed, but so was the importance of the *polis* and the collaboration of the citizens for the common cause. Moreover, in the reality of the hoplite battle with its very specific form, excessive individualism would be a suicidal and unrealistic choice, which would harm both the individuals and the city. On the contrary, the self-sufficient aristocrat alludes to the image of the epic heroes and to this image Herakles' life and achievements seem to resemble more (Gregory 1991: 130).

²⁴⁶ Michelini 1987: 242-244.

thought to embody either epic heroism or the heroism of the *polis*,²⁴⁷ although the individual way of fighting is reminiscent of the older Homeric individual valour.

The debate ultimately does not invite a decision as to which of the two is right in general terms; rather, it allows equal importance to spearmen and bowmen, while acknowledging the limitations of both.²⁴⁸ In purely formal terms, the argument of the person who is about to be proven wrong, is always placed first both in tragic and comic *agones*.²⁴⁹ In this scene, Lykos is the first to speak, which creates the sense that his argument is to be negated by the following speech of Amphitryon, especially since Lykos is a villain of almost melodramatic proportions. Certainly, in this particular instance Amphitryon is right, since there is an absurdity in the argument that Herakles of all heroes lacks courage. However, Lykos' arguments in favour of the value of the hoplite have obvious merit. Despite Lykos' attempt, Herakles' masculinity is not undermined, because Amphitryon's argument successfully demonstrates that the Bowman displays both *andreia* and *sophrosyne*, two of the highest qualities of a man, and that he benefits the common cause as much as the hoplite. So the debate ultimately is indecisive.

²⁴⁷ Mirto 1997: 119n.23.

²⁴⁸ See Foley 1985: 173, "the play does not deny that Herakles' heroism is in some sense anachronistic in the world of the hoplite, as Lykos has argued, but finds an appropriate place for it in a new context".

²⁴⁹ According to Lloyd's (1992: 10-11) analysis, strictly speaking the scene does not qualify as an *agon* in the level of form. He (1992: 2) defines the *agon* as "a pair of opposing set speeches of substantial, and about equal length. Other elements are often present, such as angry dialogue after the speeches, or a judgment speech by a third party, but the opposition of two set speeches is central to the form". The differences in the format of this scene (no introductory dialogue, no angry dialogue and most importantly, defense of someone who is not present) with the *agon* led Lloyd (1992: 10-11) to classify it to what he calls "*epideixis*" scenes: "in this type of scene, one character makes a long speech in response to some provocative behaviour or proposal. The tone of the proceedings might or might not be contentious, but what all these scenes share is that they lack the balance of speeches which is so characteristic of the *agon* [e.g. *Ion* 510-675; *HF* 1255-1310]." However, despite the differences in form, this scene functions like an *agon* in the sense that we have two people expressing opposing points of view through extended balanced speech and it is perhaps unwise to focus too narrowly on purely formal features.

It raises, but leaves hanging unresolved, questions about the nature of courage: spearmen and archers stand for collective and individual courage respectively, and the strategy of not giving prominence to either of them underlines the fact that courage cannot be determined by one single standard. In placing this seemingly irrelevant scene in the play Euripides through the juxtaposition of the two positions alerts the audience to the fact that courage comes in many forms, which may appear mutually contradictory but are nevertheless equally important. In this respect it resembles the other debates in the play, which likewise reflect the difficulty of establishing a single definition or yardstick.

The courage to stay alive

Manly courage is the theme of the other two debates of the play, but the focus is now more specifically on the issue of suicide. The first debate precedes the debate of Amphitryon with Lykos and therefore, like the latter, takes place when Herakles is absent. Before his return, Megara and Amphitryon find themselves in a situation where their fate is completely in the hands of Lykos and they are facing an imminent death by order of the new ruler. Their reactions to it are different, however: Megara believes that they should accept their fate and die willingly in order to spare themselves the embarrassment of begging for their lives, whereas Amphitryon is still hoping something might change (80-106). Apart from the obvious associations with courage, their debate raises questions on the nature of *arete* both as a gendered and a gender-free quality through references to the *arete* of Amphitryon and Megara as well as that of Herakles (as defined by his wife and his own actions later on in the play).

Megara's approach is in accordance with traditional heroism and the importance placed on honour. It follows the command that one should not make oneself ridiculous in front of one's enemies (284-286) and that choosing death in a situation like this is in accordance with Amphytryon's *δόκησις...εὐκλεῆς δορός* (288-289) and with their status as wife and children of Herakles (290-292).²⁵⁰ Megara is not suicidal as some have argued.²⁵¹ Her insistence in not delaying death is derived from a kind of realism. She has seen all her good fortune stripped away from her, her father's family dead and her own family deprived of everything after the (apparent) death of her husband (69). At this point of the play Herakles' return is not at all certain and they are completely at the mercy of Lykos, without hope of any kind of help from anyone else (*οὐτ' ἐν φίλοισιν ἐλπίδες σωτηρίας / ἔτ' εἰσὶν ἡμῖν*, 84-85). So it is not that she does not believe in hope, but that she believes in hope only up to a certain (realistic) point (92), after which one would be foolish not to accept one's fate (*τῷ δ' ἀναγκαίῳ τρόπῳ / ὅς ἀντιτείνει σκαιὸν ἡγοῦμαι βροτῶν*, 282-283) and refuse to die in a noble manner. She has already pointed out the honour of being Herakles' wife in 67-68: *κἄμ' ἔδωκε παιδὶ σῶ, / ἐπίσημον εὐνήν Ἡρακλεῖ συνοικίσας*. So according to her perception of honour, his nobility (292-294) requires them to commit suicide in order to save themselves from the humiliation of dying a cowardly death.²⁵² Megara's *arete* is undoubtedly traditional, and arguably more closely aligned with Sophocles' Aias.

Amphytryon's reply reveals a more pragmatic approach to courage (as opposed to the more straightforwardly traditional one of Megara). His emphasis is not so much on helping friends/harming enemies, but his

²⁵⁰ Mirto 1997: 104n.11; Gregory 1991: 126.

²⁵¹ E.g. Yoshitake 1994: 137.

²⁵² Cf. Gregory 1991: 123-124, "*eugeneia* was one of the proudest badges of the aristocrat", incorporating a number of qualities like "inherited privilege, high standards of individual accomplishment, a sense of *noblesse oblige*, a transcendent concern for *eukleia* (honour and reputation), and, above all, the possession of innate excellence of character".

argument is more about changeability. His conviction is that hope is more important than pride.²⁵³ He first declares that he enjoys life (90-91) in a way similar to Admetos' father in the *Alkestis* (710) and he believes that true bravery is to maintain hope instead of passively accepting one's fate: οὔτοϛ δ' ἀνήρ ἄριστοϛ ὅστιϛ ἐλπίζιν / πέποιθεν αἰεὶ τὸ δ' ἀπορεῖν ἀνδρὸϛ κακοῦ (105-106). More than enjoying life, however, he feels strongly that he needs to protect his son's children (316-318; we have here an underlying theme of the preservation of the patriline which will be further developed in a later section). What initiates his argument is not a cowardly fear of death, but hope for change and a sense of responsibility to his absent son. He yields to their fate only because he concludes that it is in fact impossible to save the children and that Herakles is not coming back after all (316-326).

As in the debate about the bow earlier, the present debate brings to the surface questions about the nature of courage and cowardice. In traditional terms, fighting bravely and dying bravely is valued.²⁵⁴ Fighting to the last was also praiseworthy. But one could argue that it is more courageous to be able to put up with misery and to face difficulties with hope and decisiveness and that accepting one's fate and giving up is cowardice. So what emerges again is that there is not one single notion of courage and that more than one, and often contrasting, behaviour can be considered as courageous.

Chalk sees the *arete* Amphitryon displays as a whole new kind, but I am not convinced that we are in fact dealing with a separate *arete*.²⁵⁵ We do not have here a complete revision of values (as we see later with Theseus who argues that *eukleia* can be regained). Rather, Amphitryon, like Megara,

²⁵³ Archaic morality when faced with hope expressed negative reactions, but things in the fifth century were starting to get different, allowing Aeschylus to put his Prometheus stressing hope's importance for human life in *PV*.

²⁵⁴ Cf. e.g. *Il.* 3.30ff.

²⁵⁵ Chalk 1962: 12; cf. Wilamowitz (1894: 127), who speaks of a 'Dorian' *arete* in the beginning of the play, which Euripides places there only to destroy afterwards.

argues in traditional terms; he focuses on success and winning in a manner consistent with a competitive value system. But unlike Megara, he is less concerned with external perceptions and focuses on inner quality.

The issue of suicide reemerges after the killing. Herakles' first reaction to the tragedy after regaining sanity is to commit suicide, in accordance with Megara's earlier argument. His stance at this point resembles the shame of Aias in Sophocles' play on realising what he has done. In fact, Aias and Herakles' situations are similar: they both go mad and attack innocent victims. Only, Herakles' actions are far more terrible, because, despite his intentions, Aias ends up attacking animals, whereas Herakles' insanity turns tragically against his own kin.²⁵⁶

When gaining sanity again, Aias' reaction is in accordance with traditional *arete* and justified in terms of honour.²⁵⁷ He is ashamed of what he has done and his honour required him to die a courageous death because living in shame (*ἄτιμος*, *Aj.* 440) and being laughed at (*ἐπαγγελῶσιν*, *Aj.* 454) is not an option.²⁵⁸ Aias chooses suicide because he could not have chosen anything else. His morality is too inflexible and too tied to the heroic *arete* of an older system of values and he cannot adjust to an evolved, more flexible way of thinking; for him this would be a false morality.²⁵⁹ Herakles' divergence from Aias starts with his reaction to the shame he feels. When he realises what he has done he sits on the side and covers his head because he

²⁵⁶ According to Gregory (1991: 133), Aias' approach to matters is similar to Herakles' as he too believes words to have little value compared to actions, without this meaning that they are dim-witted. She continues, "if such men are peculiarly vulnerable to madness, it is not because they are mentally deficient, but rather because, by virtue of their physical strength, they are invulnerable to attack from any other direction". Her argument does not prove that men like Herakles and Aias are vulnerable to mental attacks; nevertheless the fact remains that since they are almost untouchable in physical terms, it is easier for their enemies to plan a mental attack.

²⁵⁷ On Aias' motivation in terms of honour see Walcot 1986: 149. On the preservation of Homeric code in Aias' decision see Furley 1986: 106.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Megara's words in 284-286 and also Athena's words in *Aj.* 79, *οὐκ οὖν γέλως ἤδιστος εἰς ἐχθροῦς γελᾶν*; on how rewarding it is to laugh at an enemy's misfortune.

²⁵⁹ Barlow 1981: 113-115.

is too ashamed to look at other people's eyes (1160-1162). This theme emerges again a little later when he argues in favour of committing suicide because no one would look at him (1279-1302). So honour is a major issue for Herakles at first, but he soon moves deeper than that and he is more concerned about how he can survive knowing that he is the murderer of his own family.²⁶⁰

The question that arises is the same as in the earlier debate: is it more courageous for Herakles to commit suicide (like Aias) or to survive and hope, even with the burden of the knowledge of his actions? But Euripides then goes on to give Theseus an argument, according to which choosing to die becomes a sign of cowardice rather than bravery. Theseus makes a promise that Herakles will be honoured in Athens (1324-1335); so since survival involves no dishonour, suicide would have been based only on unhappiness, and this choice would have appeared cowardly.²⁶¹

What really changes his mind is the accusation of *deilia*.²⁶² He does not wish to be remembered posthumously as a coward (1347-1348) after having gained reputation as Greece's greatest hero and thus having become a model of *andreia*. So he places his decision in the context of the warrior: if a man cannot endure misfortunes, he cannot endure death in battle either (1347-1351). When viewed in this way, enduring misfortune then becomes more commendable than dying out of shame. This new approach reveals a shift from older beliefs and creates a distance from the more traditional morality of Aias.²⁶³ As his father did earlier on, Herakles uses traditional

²⁶⁰ Barlow 1981: 116. The guilt is reminiscent of Orestes' in *Cho.* 1010ff. (and cf. the hint of doubt in Soph. *El.* 1426-1425, τὰν δόμοισιν μὲν / καλῶς, Ἀπόλλων εἰ καλῶς ἐθέσπισεν), although in his case the matricide was planned and the madness was a result of his actions, while in Herakles' case the madness comes before and there is no reference to the Erinyes because Athena stopped him in time before he committed patricide (1073-1078).

²⁶¹ See Yoshitake 1994: 144, 151.

²⁶² See Bond 1981: 401; Barlow 1996: 181, on lines 1340-1385.

²⁶³ de Romilly 2003: 290-293; Assaël 2001: 179-181. Mills (1997: 152) argues that this could signify a comment on the fact that "it may be that suicide was not generally commended in

notions to revise traditional definitions of manliness, in this case by presenting the possibility of honour retained or regained.

Herakles' decision shows, then, that "what changes is not his innate *arete* but his perspective".²⁶⁴ He does not reject his old self; he only adjusts himself to the new situation and his decision to hold on to his weapons after the murder is in accordance with this realisation. This gesture is surprising at first: these are the very weapons that he used to kill his family. But the weapons are a symbol of his heroic status: many of his toils were performed using these weapons.²⁶⁵ Leaving them behind would have meant that he rejected his past life and his former deeds. The murder of the children with the same weapons used for saving people showed how violence is double-sided and can be used for good as well as evil.²⁶⁶ Their use will now change (1376-1385) and he will be using them only for self-defensive purposes, but also as well as reminders of his misfortunes. Herakles is now brought to a human level, where he is no longer the super-human protector of humanity, but resembles more closely other mortals who are in need of support and friendship when in misfortune.²⁶⁷

We are thus reminded of what we have already seen in the bow debate; there is more than one definition of courage and Herakles' decision to stay alive is equally bold as committing suicide out of shame. His survival does not degrade his masculinity; it rather shows that he is now a different

democratic Athens, and was rather viewed as the act of an individualistic hero, incompatible with a more collective mentality. Responding to misfortune by committing suicide is essentially an anti-social, inflexible response to the unexpectedness of human events". Furley (1986: 102-103) takes things a bit too far by interpreting the new morality of Herakles as "implied criticism of archaic morality".

²⁶⁴ Barlow 1981: 117; also Bond 1981: xxiii.

²⁶⁵ Michelini 1987: 266; Dunn 1996: 123.

²⁶⁶ Chalk 1962: 16.

²⁶⁷ See Dunn (1996: 125-126) who argues that Herakles' present situation offers him great freedom to reinvent himself and choose a new identity; the only limitation is that he can never reach the level of grandeur he had reached in the past (on this point see also Burnett 1971: 180).

kind of man from what he was in the beginning of the play, but a man nevertheless. And he could not undergo this change without the help of a friend.

Self-reliance and the importance of friendship

The notion of friendship is extremely gender specific; the standards of a good friend derive directly from friendships between men. Sources do not provide references of the ideal female friendship, although there is evidence that women were able to maintain a network of friends.²⁶⁸ Friendship among women does not exist as a theme in tragedy; Medeia uses the term *philos* to denote the obligations of Jason towards his family and not to friendly bonds between them. *Philia* in the sense of friendly bonds and the notion of benefiting friends and harming enemies refers to the relationship between two adult free men who find themselves in a relation of giving and taking.

Herakles rules out suicide with the aid of Theseus, in a scene where the importance of friendship and reliance on other people is central. Though Theseus definitely plays a part in helping Herakles take the decision to live, the decision is Herakles' own.²⁶⁹ He concludes that it is possible for him to go on living (*ἐγκαρτερήσω βίωτον*, 1351) and Theseus is simply helping him to take the decision; he does not make him accept it passively. Self-reliance is often praised in texts (see e.g. the positive portrait of the poor but self-sufficient Autourgos in Eur. *El.* or Aristotle's ideas that it is somehow

²⁶⁸ Blundell 1995: 137. See Introduction p. 54n.140.

²⁶⁹ See Yunis 1988: 139-40. Mills (1997: 144-145) argues that "although the decision he makes to live on is impelled by fear of being called a coward (l. 1348), it is Theseus' persistent persuasion that has brought him to what is, in effect, a return to his former courage, if in strained circumstances". Although the image of Theseus the Saviour is in accordance with Athenian mythology, I think Mills' claim over-accentuates Herakles' passivity and his dependence on Theseus.

undignified to be dependant e.g. *Eth. Nic.* 1124b9, 1125a11, 1177a27ff.). The contrast of the lone hero with the man who is in need of others is contrasted to the man in need of friends, and Herakles' self-reliance is challenged by finally accepting Theseus' help at the end of the play. Individualism is abandoned in favour of companionship.

Theseus comes like a *deus ex machina*, in order to help Herakles' family.²⁷⁰ When he finds out that he is too late, he offers to help his friend by giving him shelter in his own city (1163-1177, 1322-1339).²⁷¹ Not long ago, Theseus was in the same state of helplessness that Herakles is now in, and needed the latter's help in order to escape (1415-1416). In this scene the roles are reversed: Herakles cannot even move unless supported by Theseus (1395-1398). The image of Herakles the Saviour (from the beginning of the play) is strikingly changed to a man in need of friends when in distress.²⁷² A similarly striking reversal takes place in the *Trachiniai*. At the beginning of the play he is the traditional mighty hero who travels to faraway lands, fights and kills beasts and barbarians. From the moment of Herakles' entrance at the end of the tragedy (or even before that, when Hyllos narrates what happened when Herakles put on the garment in 749f.) the image of the mighty warrior changes completely. His suffering turns him into a wretched human being very much as in *Herakles*, only in this case he is lamenting not about something he did, but about something done to him. Sophocles has him begging the people around him to take pity on him and asking for help

²⁷⁰ Theseus' intervention and the subsequent move to Athens are not attested elsewhere. Moreover, Euripides' version conflicts with the tradition of Herakles' death on the pyre on Mount Oeta and his deification, so in all probability it must have been Euripides' invention (see Mills 1997: 134-135).

²⁷¹ Dunn (1996: 119, 122) says Theseus' appearance is deprived of authority because he comes in as a private citizen repaying his friend a favour and not as the ruler of Athens. It does not really matter here whether he has formal authority or not, what matters is that he comes in help of his friend and that he offers his support.

²⁷² Cf. Swift 2010: 122, who has shown how this image is reinforced through using epinician imagery, thus representing Herakles as a victorious athlete in the three stasima of the play.

in order to die (1013-1014, 1031-1042, 1070-1074). The contradiction between his previous image and the present one is pointed out by Herakles himself, when in 1089-1106 he refers to his previous exploits and the strength of his arms as opposed to his present destruction. Both in *Herakles* and in *Trachiniai* Herakles in the moment of his misfortune changes from super-human to human in need of support by other humans. The similarity stops before the end of the tragedy, since in the *Trachiniai* Herakles is deified whereas in *Herakles* he goes on living like a human being. Manly friendship helped him to stay alive and his last words allude to this: ὅστις δὲ πλοῦτον ἢ σθένος μᾶλλον φίλων / ἀγαθῶν πεπᾶσθαι βούλεται κακῶς φρονεῖ (1425-1426). The word ἐφορκίδες in 1424 echoes the verse 631: he now leaves the stage in a dependant state reminiscent of that of his children in the first part of the play. There is certainly an element of passivity in the sense that Herakles has put himself in the hands of another person. But he has not become completely passive.²⁷³ Rather, he is under Theseus' protection at this point. Herakles' passivity is only temporary until he manages to recover, just as Theseus did earlier. Gender stereotypes demand physical and emotional strength in men, in addition to *autarkeia*, but they do not rule out the possibility of finding oneself in need and accepting help from other people in the same way that a man is expected to offer help to a friend in distress. Herakles' masculinity is not degraded by his acceptance of help, just as Theseus' masculinity was not degraded in the past by his having asked for help.

²⁷³ Sleight and Wolff (2001: 7) argue that at the end Herakles returns to the status of the Saviour, this time acting as a Saviour for himself. His decision to live will be discussed later on, but with reference to this point of view, I think that he is not acting as a Saviour in the traditional way because the threat he faces is not external but derives from his own actions: he has destroyed his life by murdering his family and he is about to commit suicide. He needs to decide whether he can live with what he did or not and this separates him from the people he used to save; he is not anxious to be saved, on the contrary he is very keen in punishing himself.

Herakles' weakness should not be perceived as a negative comment on his masculinity. In *Herakles* strength and weakness appear to cross gender boundaries. Megara displays strength in the first part of the play although being physically a woman. Herakles is completely destroyed in the last part of the play and is ready to give in to his pain. But in his misery, he finds the strength to survive and this decision changes the standards of traditional definitions of weakness and strength.

The way in which Herakles' self-sufficiency is severely challenged in the last scene again reminds us of the hero of Sophocles' *Aias*. Aias stresses his isolation with the repetition of the word *μόνος* (e.g. 467) in relation to other men and to the gods, from whom his distance is obvious throughout the play (cf. 589f.).²⁷⁴ The isolation motif is reinforced by his reflection on friends turning into enemies and vice versa in 678-682: *ἐγὼ δ', ἐπίσταμαι γὰρ ἀρτίως ὅτι / ὁ τ' ἐχθρὸς ἡμῖν ἐς τοσόνδ' ἐχθαρτέος, / ὡς καὶ φιλήσων αὐθις, ἐς τε τὸν φίλον / τοσαῦθ' ὑπουργῶν ὠφελεῖν βουλήσομαι, / ὡς αἰὲν οὐ μενοῦντα*. His idea of needing no one, however, will be changed in the last scene of the play, where Odysseus prevents Agamemnon from leaving Aias' corpse unburied and thus dishonouring him. Aias is not saved from suicide like Herakles, but his honour is ultimately saved by someone else who was moreover his enemy, namely Odysseus (1332ff.). Herakles survives and thus is given the opportunity to change his attitude, unlike Aias, who dies without changing his way of thinking. The image of the isolated bowman in the beginning of the tragedy is replaced by the recognition of the need for other people and the creation of a new image for Herakles. In (only) this sense Lykos could be said paradoxically to have the last word.

Theseus' gesture is an expression of manly *philia*, but with *philia* as with courage this play is concerned to stretch traditional definitions.

²⁷⁴ Garvie 1998: 158-159, 179.

Friendship (like enmity) in epic and tragedy often has a competitive dimension, in that it involves trying to surpass the gift or the help of a friend with a larger offer in valuables or moral and physical support. In Homer the rules of gift exchange demand that one should exceed the offer of a friend (e.g. the famous scene between Diomedes and Glaukos in *Il.* 6.234-236).²⁷⁵ The link with masculine standards that require men to distinguish themselves from their comrades in battle although they are fighting for the common goal is projected in the attitude towards the standards of friendship. There is a symbiotic tension between friendship and competitiveness, which commands that a good friend should be the one who helps his friends, but at the same time tries to outdo them in benefiting. Friendship is a reciprocal value: it is not enough to simply offer help; more importantly, a man must offer more than he has received and through benefiting he projects his ability to surpass the others.²⁷⁶

Theseus departs from the epic model of competitive male friendship and takes *philia* to a different level where it is no longer measured in comparative and quantitative terms. In the case of Theseus and Herakles, this reciprocation is limited to the offering of help to a friend who has helped the other in the past and is in need, without any attempt to surpass Herakles' earlier help to Theseus. Nowhere in Theseus' words is there a hint that he is trying to outdo what Herakles did for him. Besides, this would be practically impossible since Herakles' physical strength is incomparable and he has managed to save Theseus from death (619). There is nothing larger than this, and it is obvious from Theseus' words that his purpose is not to compete

²⁷⁵ For competitiveness in classical society see Adkins 1960 and Introduction p. 40. For the obligations between friends and the competitive aspect that characterised the ancient society creating a status of reciprocation in the relationships between men see Blundell 1989 *passim*. Blundell's analysis shows that friends were repaying offerings made by friends in an attempt at personal preservation and survival in society, and that failure to help a friend was equal to treating him as an enemy.

²⁷⁶ Belfiore 1993-1994: 116.

with Herakles in offering help. On the contrary, Theseus simply says *κἀγὼ χάριν σοι τῆς ἐμῆς σωτηρίας / τήνδ' ἀντιδώσω νῦν γὰρ εἶ χρεῖος φίλων* (1336-1337). The narrative suggests that he is aware of the fact that he offers Herakles what lies within his potential and it is more important that he hastened to his help when he was in need. Here competitiveness is replaced by the rhetoric of unselfish friendship without waiting for repayment. The ultimate proof of his selflessness is the total disregard of the dangers of pollution.²⁷⁷ Herakles killed his children, and so according to traditional belief he is definitely capable of contaminating those who set eyes on him or touch him and he is aware of it.²⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Theseus seems not to care about this and continuously urges Herakles first to unveil his head (in which Amphitryon agrees as well, 1202-1205); and then he does not hesitate to touch him, and even wipes the blood on his garments (1399-1400).²⁷⁹ Euripides subverts traditional values such as the contamination resulting from contact with a murderer in order to underline the importance of friendship. The subversion is easily misread as a sophistic attempt to redefine traditional notions of piety; and certainly it is at home in the corpus of a playwright, who is profoundly influenced both in ideas and expression by contemporary intellectual developments.²⁸⁰ This, however, is to miss the more important narrative function of this remarkable gesture, which offers a

²⁷⁷ On pollution by spilt blood see Parker 1983: 4, 104, 110-111, 113; also MacDowell 1978: 110, 120. For the killing of Lykos Herakles will not be prosecuted and he can seek purification only if he wants to, because it was a justified homicide (Parker 1983: 114).

²⁷⁸ It is important to note that Herakles does not cover his head until Theseus appears, which means that he was not afraid of polluting his father (1160-1162). Parker (1983: 318) comments on this: "the polluted man's world is...divided between an inside circle that shares his stigma and society at large that fears and rejects it...Before his father, Herakles simply laments his fate; his intense feeling of exposure and shame begins when Theseus arrives".

²⁷⁹ The same motif appears in *IT*, where Pylades attends Orestes and supports him physically when the Erinyes attack him, despite the fact that Orestes is not yet purified from the matricide (310-314).

²⁸⁰ Cf. Papadopoulou 2005: 164, who calls Theseus' gesture "enlightened". On Euripidean drama and the Sophists see e.g. Conacher 1998.

means of articulating selfless friendship in its most generous and most extreme form.

Isolation vs. interdependence: Lykos and Herakles

The effect of the Herakles' move from isolation to interdependence is achieved with the help of Theseus, but accentuated by the presence of the illegitimate ruler Lykos in the first part of the play. Euripides creates models by contrast and invites us to look at Herakles in opposition with Lykos. Lykos is portrayed as the perpetual outsider. He is seen as an isolated figure; but his isolation is of a different kind from that of Herakles. He is located outside formal social and political structures: Lykos' father is dead (*ἤν πάρος Δίρκης τις εὐνήτωρ Λύκος, 27*), he is a foreigner (*Καδμειῶς οὐκ ὤν, ἀλλ' ἀπ' Εὐβοίας μολών, 32*) and there is no reference to any kind of family, which might avenge his death after Herakles has killed him. The contrast with Herakles, the strongly domesticated hero whose activity in the tragedy revolves round his family and his relationship with them, is sharp. Although Herakles moves in isolation outside his home, he nevertheless is defined through the relationship with his family, whereas Lykos is defined by the very lack of that kind of relation, which invites the audience to view them as totally contrasted figures.

The opposition between the motif of the hero achieving good, expressed by Herakles, or of the selfless friend finding expression in Theseus on the one hand, and the opportunistic and abusive character of the usurper on the other, is emphasised even before any of the three appear on stage, through the descriptions of the other characters. Lykos and Herakles are utterly opposed in terms of presentation and characterisation. More importantly, Lykos functions as a model of negative masculinity in a context

where masculinity as part of heroic status is an underlying theme throughout the entire play.

Lykos is Euripides' invention, as he is not found in any other source. The dramatist seems to have created the character to offer the complete opposite of Herakles and thus, through the contrast between the two, to underline the positive character of Herakles.²⁸¹ Lykos is an unambiguously wicked character without redeeming features,²⁸² who without provocation decides to take advantage of the absence of Herakles. The talk about manly courage in the debate with Amphitryon is in complete contrast with his own actions: he accuses Herakles of being a coward for not having participated in a battle, but his decisions do not reveal courage either. After killing the legitimate rulers of the land he seized power and went on to exterminate the possible future threats to his illegitimate power. These threats are embodied in an old man, a woman and three small children, whom Lykos attacks only because he is reassured by the absence of the only person who could stand against him, namely the adult male responsible for the protection of the family. Manly courage is usually displayed in a battle against a male opponent of equal strength. On the contrary Lykos attacks people who are weaker than him, abusing the power he had over them as the ruler of the city, a title that he has gained illegitimately. This antithesis is accentuated by the use of traditional martial terms of manliness which, ironically, also come up in Lykos' accusation speech against Herakles (146-164), followed by his admission that he is aware of the illegitimacy of his ruling (166-169).

Because of the illegitimacy of his rule he is right from the beginning associated with disease and *stasis* (καὶ κτανῶν ἄρχει χθονός, / στάσει νοσοῦσαν τήνδ' ἐπεσπεσῶν πόλιν, 33-34), in contrast with Herakles the

²⁸¹ See Papadopoulou 2004: 261.

²⁸² Typical of Euripides' theatre as Kitto 2002 shows in his chapter "New Tragedy: Euripides' Melodramas".

Saviour as seen in the first part of the play.²⁸³ His association with *stasis* inevitably carries strong negative connotations for a fifth-century audience. The character of Lykos is an incarnation of all the negative undertones the word drags with it, which contribute to turning him into an image of negative authority acquired by illegitimate means, causing *nosos* to the city.

The contrast between the two characters is further underlined by their reactions when faced with their victims living and dead. Lykos possesses no pity for his victims nor any respect for the asylum granted traditionally to suppliants nor fear of any punishment the gods may inflict on him for that.²⁸⁴ He threatens to drag the suppliants away from the altar in order to kill them and is not afraid of anything (ἡμεῖς <δ>, ἐπειδὴ σοὶ τόδ' ἔστ' ἐνθύμιον, / οἱ δειμάτων ἔξωθεν ἐκπορεύσομεν / σὺν μητρὶ παῖδας. δεῦρ' ἔπεσθε, πρόσπολοι, / ὡς ἂν σχολὴν λεύσσωμεν ἄσμενοι πόνων, 722-725). Herakles on the other hand is ashamed to enter a temple after the awful deeds he has committed (εἰς ποῖον ἱερὸν...εἴμ';, 1283-1284). Although they are both aware of what they have done, Lykos of the illegitimacy of his ruling and Herakles of the dreadfulness of killing his family, only Herakles seems concerned with the consequences, whereas after expressing this awareness Lykos is concerned simply with securing his power by

²⁸³ Fear of *stasis* as a major threat for the well-being of the polis is found both in drama and historiography (cf. Kreon in *Ant.*; Hdt. 8.3; Thuc. 1.2). Arguably the best example of *stasis* lies in the narration of the Corcyrean revolt in Thuc. 3.82ff.

²⁸⁴ Mikalson 1991: 75. Mikalson (1991: 72-74) also gives a general description of the conventions of the supplication: "One was obliged to respect the asylum and ensure the personal safety of the suppliant, but there is no evidence that one was required – by religious or other constraints – to grant whatever requests a suppliant in a sanctuary might make...Religious considerations come into play only in maintenance of the rights of asylum and in protecting the personal safety of the suppliant. It is, however, virtually a convention of Greek tragedy (and literature in general) that such supplications by individuals having asylum are just and proper, and also that they are, or should be, granted...The violation or attempted violation of asylum is an act of violence, violence directed against the gods themselves. It dishonours the gods, is hybriatic, and causes pollution...The ultimate sacrilege was to slay in the sanctuary a suppliant who had gained asylum...The deity at whose altar the suppliants sit is the primary protector...[e.g. Zeus Soter in *HF*]...But in addition to the specific god whose sanctuary is violated, other deities – or better, 'the gods' in general – are concerned".

eliminating the family of the legitimate ruler of the city (*οἶδα γὰρ κατακτανῶν / Κρέοντα πατέρα τῆσδε καὶ θρόνους ἔχων. / οὐκ οὖν τραφέντων τῶνδε τιμωρὸς ἐμοὶ / χρήζω λιπέσθαι, τῶν δεδραμένων δίκην*, 166-169). It is not my intention to suggest that killing one's own family and killing strangers bears the same gravity (cf. attitudes towards spilling kindred blood in drama for instance); my point here is Lykos' callousness and complete disregard for the consequences of his illegitimacy.²⁸⁵

The contrast with Herakles does not consist solely in the conflict between the two characters, but expands to the association with the opposing forces within Herakles' character. The benevolent and malevolent sides of physical power are paralleled with the equally antithetical relation between the two sides of ruling power. Lykos' excess denotes the negative aspect of this power and, by extent, of violence and revenge. In a similar way, Herakles' madness reveals the negative aspect of violence through loss of control. Both Lykos and Herakles possess power that is not bad in principle, and yet through a different process (the first willingly, the latter unwillingly) they end up causing catastrophic results for the people involved, including themselves.

Herakles' heroism as seen through the narration of his labours in the first stasimon is faced with the illegitimacy and the negative masculinity of Lykos, and from the moment of his arrival the contrast comes explicitly to the fore and conflict between the characters seems inevitable. Lykos is necessary, not only because his brutality creates the dramatic need for the return of Herakles and his revenge (though it does not technically motivate his return in causal terms, since Herakles becomes aware of the threat to his

²⁸⁵ See Mills 1997: 131-132 on Lykos' behaviour being described by Amphitryon as *amathia* (172), "moral ignorance" ["perversity", "lack of culture", "boorishness" in LSJ]: "Lykos is a prime example of unjust behaviour and *amathia* and on a human plane, he behaves as Hera does on a divine level". Wilamowitz (1894: 118-119) calls him a "parvenu" and even believes that a naïf audience might laugh at his manners and lack of education.

family only after his return, 533ff.), but also because it raises important themes like the nature of manly courage and functions as a symbol for the inevitability of punishment that follows excess.

The role of the gods

Lykos maintains his status of isolation throughout the entire play and he is utterly destroyed. In complete contrast, the play makes clear that Herakles survives because he acknowledges the need for interdependence and accepts help from his friend. The importance of friendship and the realisation that one cannot survive by oneself in the world, not even if one is the archetypal hero like Herakles, become a central issue in a play. It is apparent that what matters most are the relationships between humans and their willingness to help one another overcome the difficulties of living in a largely hostile world.

If, then, man is in the centre, how are we to understand the role of the gods, especially in a play where divine causation of events is explicitly referred to from the beginning and whose protagonist is traditionally strongly connected with the divine throughout his entire life?²⁸⁶ Gods seem to be there only to remind us of the harshness of lived experience in a world, which is defined by them, but in which men need to learn how to survive by relying on other men and not on the unstable and often even hostile divine forces.

In tradition, Herakles is depicted as a deified hero and this image is reproduced by Euripides through the saviour motif as it appears at the

²⁸⁶ I will not engage here with the issue of divinity and atheism in Euripides because it is not within the scopes of the treatment of masculinity. For impiety in Euripides' plays see Lefkowitz 1989.

beginning of the *Herakles*.²⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Euripides very soon switches the focus from the hero-god to the hero-man and places special emphasis on his human aspect, without making any references to the deification. Thus the hero-god of Herodotus is replaced by “a human being stricken by the gods and his destiny”.²⁸⁸

This declaration explains why the play seems not to be interested in the gods, although we are explicitly told that Herakles’ suffering is their doing and references to Zeus are constantly made. At the beginning of the play, for instance, we see the suppliants sitting close to the altar of Zeus Saviour;²⁸⁹ Herakles’ divine parentage is stressed in the first line and repeatedly throughout the play (e.g. 1, 339-340, 696 etc.). And yet Zeus seems disturbingly uninterested in protecting his son against his misfortunes in the play. Thinking in human terms, his mortal father Amphitryon finds this indifference incomprehensible (339-347). The last time Zeus’ providence was visible for Herakles was when he returned from Hades; it is withdrawn when madness strikes him and is not seen again during the course of the play.²⁹⁰

Amphitryon’s puzzlement is understandable, but also reveals the naiveté of man when faced with the incomprehensibility and unpredictability of the divine. Hoping for divine help is a human trait, but it has been proven by many other instances in tragedy that it almost never

²⁸⁷ Herakles’ divine parentage is an undisputed part of the tradition. As for his death, we find allusions to his deification as early as Homer (*Od.* 11.601-626; cf. Hes. *Theog.* 950-955). The unique place he occupies in Greek cult can be seen in Hdt. 2.44, who reports that he was worshipped both as a god and as a hero. Excluding *HF*, in tragedy he is either a *deus ex machina* (*Soph. Phil.*), a dying hero (with allusions to a subsequent deification as the culmination of his life as a mighty hero in the *Trach.*) or he appears as an initially recognisable comic persona swiftly changing into the equally familiar image of the saviour (*Alc.*). See also p. 60-63.

²⁸⁸ Aéliou 1983: 358-359.

²⁸⁹ Ironically, this was built by Herakles, whose own function as a Saviour is underlined in the first part of the play marking a very close connection with his divine father.

²⁹⁰ Conacher 1967: 84-85.

comes. Hippolytos is left to die, and so is Antigone; Medeia manages to escape unpunished after committing a horrible crime despite Jason's hopes for divine punishment (Med. 1388-1389). Moreover, gods display anthropomorphic characteristics such as anger (cf. *Bacch.*) and react in vindictive ways: Herakles' madness comes for no other reason than the wrath of Hera. The scene between Iris and Lyssa deprives Herakles from all liability for killing his family, but at the same time shows that man has no way of shielding himself against unpredictable attacks from a higher force.

However, as the play progresses the stress increasingly falls on the human reaction to the divine in the sense that man cannot control the world he lives in, but he can choose how to live in it. The duality of the human and the divine existing in him seems to finally get to an end as Herakles chooses his mortal father out of the two (1264-1265), since it was Amphitryon who displayed true paternal concern.²⁹¹ Euripides brings his hero to a human level, making him decide to maintain a distance from the divine, which bears great responsibility for his downfall; moreover, he makes no mention of his deification (unlike the Sophoclean Herakles) but stresses the human life he will have in Athens.

Herakles' choice seems justified both because of Zeus' failure to offer help after Herakles has murdered his family, but also because, ultimately, the only person who is going to come to his aid will be another man, Theseus. Theseus enters as a *homo ex machina* after the gods have abandoned Herakles and shows him that even though the gods have withdrawn, men are willing to offer friendship and support.²⁹² It is a clear indication of what the Chorus has already said in the second stasimon: *εἰ δὲ θεοῖς ἦν ξύνεσις / καὶ σοφία κατ' ἄνδρας* [everyone would get what they deserved]...*νῦν δ' οὐδεὶς ὄρος ἐκ θεῶν / χρηστοῖς οὐδὲ κακοῖς σαφής, / ἀλλ'*

²⁹¹ Michelini 1987: 256. Cf. Gregory 1991: 129.

²⁹² Cf. Kitto 2002: 248.

είλισσόμενός τις αἰ- / ὦν πλοῦτον μόνον αὔξει (655-672). Herakles himself later argues the same thing in the famous passage where he questions the truth of the myths told about gods' nature and behaviour (1340-1346).

Greeks were very much aware that a human being needs gods to survive in the world. So Herakles' words do not mean rejection of the divine as a whole – besides, rejecting the gods would render his existence impossible;²⁹³ rather, they show rejection of the values human beings applied to them, values which are very reminiscent of human morality. In the beginning of the play the supplication scene shows how much humans hope for divine protection, a hope which seems to be at odds with the reality as Amphitryon's explicit complaint against Zeus (339ff.) as well as Herakles' appearance as the Saviour in the first half of the play shows: despite being a mortal, he is the only hope of the suppliants. Herakles' monologue verbalises the idea that has been apparent since the beginning of the play, namely that "human virtues may be irrelevant in a divine context".²⁹⁴ Gods, although frequently associated with a distributive system of justice, in their own dealings they do not abide by human factors.

Euripides here stresses the irrationality of the world men are forced to live with, which brings to the fore the isolation of the human when faced with this irrationality. If gods were really as Herakles described them in 1340-1346, then Zeus would have never slept with Alkmene and therefore Herakles' descent from Zeus would have been a fiction. On the contrary, he never doubts that Zeus is truly his father (1263 and Chorus 804, although the latter has previously expressed doubt in 352-354 which is later abandoned) nor that Hera is the cause of his destruction (*πάντες ἐξολώλαμεν / Ἥρας*

²⁹³ Michelini 1987: 275.

²⁹⁴ Michelini 1987: 268.

μιᾶ πληγέντες ἄθλιοι τύχη, 1392-1393).²⁹⁵ Thus, far from denying their existence, *Herakles* underlines how the gods are not always just and that men have to learn to survive in a world, where the reactions of the divine are neither just nor predictable, as can be seen from the failure of Lyssa to stop a destruction that seemed unreasonable and unjust (847-874).²⁹⁶ A strong parallel appears here with Aeschylus' *PV*, where Hephaistos right from the prologue shows how reluctant he is to participate in the punishment that Zeus has decided for Prometheus, even though he is aware that Prometheus has defied the will of Zeus and in this context his punishment is justified.

Herakles' fate is reminiscent of the fate of two other tragic heroes, Aias in Sophocles' *Aias* and Prometheus in Aeschylus' *PV*. There is, however, one significant difference with both of them. Aias is afflicted with madness like Herakles, but unlike him, his guilt is explicit. He committed blasphemy (Athena speaks of his arrogance in *Aj.* 127ff.) and as a punishment the gods sent him madness, because of which, when he recovers, he commits suicide. Prometheus is also guilty and this is made clear right from the prologue of the play (τὸ σὸν γὰρ ἄνθος, παντέχνου πυρὸς σέλας, / θνητοῖσι κλέψας ὠπασεν τοιαῦδέ τοι / ἄμαρτίας σφε δεῖ θεοῖς δοῦναι δίκην / ὡς ἂν διδαχθῆ τὴν Διὸς τυραννίδα / στέργειν, φιλανθρώπου δὲ παύεσθαι τρόπον, 8-11). In addition to that, he admits his sin, so there is no questioning from his side

²⁹⁵ As Kitto (2002: 247) says "if the co-paternity of Zeus is dramatically real, the hatred of Hera is mythologically inevitable. Herakles is of more than mortal birth, as also he is of more than ordinary genius and achievement...the genius derives, dramatically, from Zeus; it follows almost automatically that Hera must wish to destroy it".

²⁹⁶ See Lawrence 1998: 143. On the point of the lack of justice on behalf of the gods, Mikalson (1991) argues that the gods of Homer, Pindar and Aeschylus were as Theseus describes them, but there is no indication whether they were still worshipped in the fifth century in the same way as in the past. It is wrong, Mikalson (1991: 227) says, to mistake "the myths and anthropomorphic gods of literature for the beliefs and deities of practised religion". If Mikalson is right, then Herakles is expressing a skepticism concerning the traditional gods which was probably shared with the audience as well (although his point of view does not offer a plausible explanation of why Herakles questions the stories about the gods but not his divine descent nor Hera's hatred against him).

concerning the reasons for his punishment, contrary to Herakles, who is trying to understand the reasons.²⁹⁷

The reason for his destruction is not easy to grasp and from the text it becomes clear that the gods are very much involved in Herakles' insanity. We have a very explicit scene where Iris and Lyssa appear on stage and announce their intention to inflict madness on Herakles because this is Hera's wish (830-832), which is reminiscent of the opening of *PV*, where Kratos and Hephaistos in a similar manner explain their intention of enforcing on Prometheus Zeus' punishment. But the question is not so much who sent the madness, but for what reason.

It has been argued that Herakles' madness is his punishment for transgressing the boundaries of his nature and displaying hybriatic behaviour by being superior to the other people in terms of divine descent and physical strength.²⁹⁸ Some speak of the extremes characterising Herakles' life and how, according to the Greek way of thinking, the downfall would be inevitable after reaching the ultimate happiness.²⁹⁹ This, however, does not offer any satisfactory explanation for Herakles' destruction. We can find no causation within Herakles' motives; there is nothing within the play to suggest that he did anything other than protect his family.

The same applies to the view of Emma Griffiths, who made an attempt to explain Herakles' punishment by attributing Hera's wrath to the

²⁹⁷ Aéliou 1983: 360. Moreover, in the end Prometheus is reconciled with Zeus, whereas Herakles accepts his misfortunes and chooses to fight back realising, however, his human limits (362-363).

²⁹⁸ Burnett 1971: 177-179; Bond 1981: xxv-xxvi; Michelini 1987: 239.

²⁹⁹ Silk 1985: 17; Bollack 1974: 46-47. The same explanation has been given for his madness: see Conacher 1967: 89; Barlow 1996: 160 on lines 822-873; Bond 1981: 285; Foley 1985: 161, 200, who believes that since Euripides chose to inflict the epic tradition of madness on a character with no hybriatic behaviour in the particular play, "madness must be in some sense integral to a character, not simply imposed on it from without". Silk (1985: 17) and Bollack (1974: 46-47) rightly point to the contradictions of Herakles' nature as the cause for his destruction, since his ambiguous status has placed him in an ambivalent position, where the balance unavoidably is lost at some point. Also see Griffiths 2006: 81-90.

fact that Herakles, with his gesture of bringing Kerberos back from Hades, transgressed the boundaries between life and death.³⁰⁰ So, Griffiths says, Hera uses Kerberos as an excuse in order to attack Herakles for who he is. Her argument connecting the punishment with Kerberos is ingenious but finds no support in the text, since none of the characters ever makes a connection between the wrath and Kerberos – not even Iris and Lyssa.

Apparently those who see *hybris* in Herakles in this play believe in Herakles' responsibility for his situation. But judging from words of the play it is hard to argue that he is a man who is punished because he crossed the boundaries. One cannot overlook the fact that he had the potential to be hybristic, since he was born with extreme physical power; nevertheless there is nowhere an indication that he used it in a negative manner. In the *Iliad* he is different, hybristic and arrogant and descending into madness does not seem out of place. But in *Herakles* all he tried to do was to save his family. Any references to transgressive behaviour are carefully omitted by Euripides. He is closer to Oedipus in *OT*, in the sense that they both commit crimes unintentionally and for that they are destined to be destroyed. We are compelled to accept that Hera was angry at him before he started using his power; otherwise there is no explanation for the snakes she sent to kill him when he was still a baby (1263-1268).

It is hard to find a morally based reason for Herakles' madness and consequent killings in this particular play. Iris' words ἢ θεοὶ μὲν οὐδαμοῦ, / τὰ θνητὰ δ' ἔσται μέγαρα, μὴ δόντος δίκην (841-842) are extremely obscure and find no echo elsewhere in the play, which might allow us to construct a coherent explanation as to why Herakles should be punished. These words seem to echo Kratos' words in *PV*, where he explains that Prometheus must

³⁰⁰ Griffiths 2002. In the same article she speaks of the strong link between Herakles and his children and the prominence given to them in the play through symbolisms such as the frequent use of the number three.

δοῦναι δίκην (9) for his sins, which are nevertheless clarified already in the previous verses. Unless it can be proven that there is some lacuna in *Herakles* explaining why Herakles had to be punished, there is no subjective guilt for Herakles, in the same way as there was no subjective guilt for the misfortunes of Oedipus in Sophocles' *OT*.³⁰¹

Only if we go back to the older notion of the jealous god as presented in epic can we understand the motivation behind Hera's attack.³⁰² Divine anger is the reason for many scholars, who consider the madness as having nothing to do with some psychological reason, but simply deriving from the gods and especially Hera, whose wrath is taken for granted by the characters.³⁰³ Herakles embodies the struggle of man to survive against the irrationality of the divinity and the vulnerability of man faced with this irrationality. Achilles in *Il.* 24 uses a parable to express the vulnerability of human beings against the unstable will of the divine. If a man is lucky, he will get equal share of happiness and misery, if he is unlucky, he will get only misery; but no one can ever get only happiness.³⁰⁴ This includes even

³⁰¹ See Yunis 1988: 151, 170-171. Barlow (1996: 15) adds to this point that like Oedipus in *OC* Herakles "has gone through unimagined desolation and shame in spite of his innocence...But unlike Sophocles, Euripides presents a psychological vision of madness: its physical symptoms, its roots in previous violence, its tendency to delusion, its elation and superhuman energies, its exhaustion and subsequent despair".

³⁰² Clay 1983: 181-182. Aélion (1983: 360) is right to say that Euripides does not give a satisfactory explanation for Herakles' madness.

³⁰³ Bond 1981: xxiv, who also says that "Hera's hostility is a *datum* which goes back to *Il.* 18.119 [ἀλλὰ ἐ μοῖρα δάμασσε καὶ ἀργαλέος χόλος Ἥρης]". Also, Aélion 1983: 238-239, 353; Chalk 1962: 15. Porter (1987: 101) refers generally to a "daemonic force which strikes at the centre of the play", which is symbolic "of all the unknown and unknowable forces which compel Herakles and men to suffer tragically and without cause or sense." Gregory (1991: 136) takes Hera's wrath for granted as well and notes that Herakles' only fault is that he managed to avoid it and consequently his fate; she moreover argues that the fact that Zeus allows his son to suffer shows that "first Zeus-and-Necessity and then Fortune-and-Hera take charge of Herakles...the hero's divine champions and adversaries are not at odds with one another, as the mortals imagine, but rather take turns in shaping his life" (1991: 137).

³⁰⁴ *δοιοὶ γὰρ τε πίθοι κατακείαται ἐν Διὸς οὐδὲι / δῶρων οἶα δίδωσι κακῶν, ἔτερος δὲ ἑάων: / ᾧ μὲν κ' ἀμμείξας δῶη Ζεὺς τερπικέραννος, / ἄλλοτε μὲν τε κακῶ ὅ γε κύρεται, ἄλλοτε δ' ἐσθλῶ: / ᾧ δε κε τῶν λυγρῶν δῶη, λωβητὸν ἔθηκε, / καὶ ἐ κακῇ βούβρωστις ἐπὶ χθόνα δῖαν ἐλαύνει, / φοιτᾷ δ' οὔτε θεοῖσι τετιμῆνος οὔτε βροτοῖσιν, *Il.* 24.527-533.*

Herakles, the mightiest of men. His failure to protect himself against the goddess' attack reveals how vulnerable masculinity is. One would have expected the extreme possession of masculine strength would mean that survival was guaranteed, but after Herakles' failure the limits of masculine power are questioned in the same way as the power of intelligence is questioned in *OT*. Physical strength and intelligence are both projected as masculine characteristics, but in both cases they do not help the heroes to overcome their destiny: this exposes the weakness deriving from the limited power these characteristics are proven to have, when faced with the irrationality of divine attacks.

It is very important that Herakles, the ultimate masculine hero, the son of Zeus and the model of courage and physical strength for every man is also faced with the same irrationality as mere mortal men and he is equally incapable of defending himself against it unless assisted by another man. The way gods appear in the play only stress the importance of collectivity and human collaboration over the isolation, which characterised the life of Herakles up to that point. Instead of a prologue spoken by a god announcing the outcome of the play, we get *Amphitryon*; again at the end, where we would have expected a *deus ex machina*, the solution comes from Theseus, who succeeds in repaying the favour to his friend, whilst the gods have failed to give him what they owed him although they have benefited from his strength as well.³⁰⁵ Iris and Lyssa appear strangely enough in the middle of the play in order to carry out Hera's will and then they disappear again leaving humans to carry out the rest of the play.³⁰⁶ Theseus' appearance at the end of the play can be paralleled with Herakles' appearance in the first part. In both cases, we would have expected a god to come in assistance of the suffering humans.

³⁰⁵ E.g. the battle with the Giants (179). Conacher 1967: 86.

³⁰⁶ See Barlow 1996: 7.

The supplication scene ends in Herakles' appearance after all hope has vanished, whereas Herakles' downfall is stopped with the aid of Theseus again at a point where all hope is gone and divine help does not appear. It is thus shown that help from mortals, as opposed to gods, is more consistent and generous and that the play chooses to project secular over religious salvation as more efficient and more trustworthy.³⁰⁷ Herakles becomes an ordinary man in the end, stripped of divine connections, but not of his heroic status. From now on he will not do anything as important as his previous achievements, but at least he has hope.

Conclusion

Herakles is not just about being a man; it is also about being human. Nevertheless, the choice of a male central figure is not made accidentally. Euripides could have chosen to talk about women, as he did in the *Trojan Women* where the emphasis is on how the female survives in a hostile world. The difference is that women are already aware of their powerlessness, being at the mercy both of men and gods. What they can hope for is surrogate revenge, while the men in the play, as well as the audience, are constantly reminded of the limitations imposed on these women because of their feeble female status. But the stress here is on the way the male survives in such a world and in a society demanding so much of him. Social demands and conflicting duties are a source of anxiety for men, as already seen in the Introduction, and the burden of this is even greater for a figure like Herakles, on whom everyone depends. There is a tendency in tragedy to choose extremes and Herakles is indeed a hyperbolic embodiment of the difficulties created by the competing demands on a man. Unlike Admetos (who is

³⁰⁷ See Gregory 1991: 148.

presented as closer to the ordinary man, see following chapter) Herakles is in many respects far removed from the ordinary Athenian: his toils, his strength, remarkable courage, and of course his journey to the Underworld, take the burden of male responsibilities to a whole new level. This extraordinary status makes his shift from independence to interdependence all the more significant, stressing the difficulties of living in a hostile world and the need of others in order for anyone to survive, even if one is the ultimate hero.

ADMETOS

In this section I will be dealing mainly with the character of Admetos as presented in the *Alkestis*. The contrast with the previous case study is obvious; we move from the archetypal heroic achiever to a character whose courage is not treated as a given, but instead has been questioned and doubted, both within the play and in subsequent scholarship. The questionable claim of Admetos to manliness is increased by the fact that Herakles himself appears in this play inviting comparisons with the protagonist. I will be exploring the different themes dramatised in the play, such as courage, family relations between husband and wife and parents and children, spousal love, duty towards the members of one's family and of course friendship, all through the prism of masculinity and male virtues. I am particularly interested in the way Admetos responds to the different responsibilities he is faced with as an adult male and the expectations the other characters have from him (as a husband, a father, a son and a friend), as well as in his reactions towards death and how these relate to masculine standards of the time.

The genre question

Before moving on to the main discussion, some clarification is needed of the genre classification of the *Alkestis*, since its generic status is a matter of debate and this has implications for any reading. It is noteworthy, for instance, that in the *Alkestis* the resolution is not given by a *deus ex machina* as in most Euripidean plays, but by the plot itself; Alkestis would not have been saved had it not been for Admetos' offer of *xenia* to Herakles

(although arguably Herakles functions structurally as a *deus ex machina* in the manner of his intervention). The *Alkestis* is not an ordinary play.

The uniqueness of its position as last of the four plays presented at the festival (a position normally occupied by a satyr play) is reflected in the difficulties we face in placing it within the boundaries of a particular genre. The play reveals common elements with tragedy, comedy and satyr play, being the only play of its kind that has survived. The undoubtedly happy ending with its element of escapism does not necessarily place a question over its generic status, but given the additional fact of its presentation in a position where we expect a satyr play, it is legitimate to ask if this is really tragedy. Later, the happy ending became a feature of the escape tragedies (*IT, Andromeda, Hel.*), but the combination with allegory (in the personification of Death, see below) and the fact that the ending is managed by abrupt and almost magical interventions (a human being wrestling Death and not a *deus ex machina*) gives the play a fairytale quality that raises questions concerning its genre. Besides, the escape tragedies belong to a much later period of Euripides' art, whereas the *Alkestis* is the oldest of his extant tragedies and the only extant play that we know to have been performed in the place of the satyr drama. This prevents us from placing it in the same category as the others – although one might say that it contains, in a more primitive form, the elements that later will be the basis of tragic-comedy.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ We cannot be sure that each tetralogy necessarily contained a satyr play, nor how a fourth play, such as *Alkestis*, that was not satyric was called (Mastronarde 1999-2000: 35; Parker 2007: xx). Marshall (2000: 229-238) believes that the *Alkestis* was a product of the Athenian law of 440/39-437/6 forbidding *komoidein* and that Euripides "took a piece of legislation affecting dramatic competition at face value, and undermined its authority on the stage;" he also argues that the form was not repeated because the law changed the year following *Alkestis'* performance and there was no more need for pro-satyric drama. This is a rather farfetched approach which does not take into consideration Euripides' experimentation with the genre; besides, the law appears to have referred to the parody of contemporary people and situations, whereas satyr plays always had a mythical theme.

At a purely formal level, the audience would not have had any difficulty in classifying the play as a tragedy, most prominently because of the absence of a satyr chorus, the most distinguishable element of the satyr play. Tragedy was distinguishable by its form, as well as by its themes and characters and all of these characteristics are clearly visible in the *Alkestis*. There is no question that in terms of form it is fundamentally aligned with tragedy, while nothing in its content is inherently alien to tragedy. It is more plausible to see Euripides as experimenting with the boundaries of genre, inserting satyric, comic and even folktale elements – like the personage of Death – without affecting its deeper tragic quality.³⁰⁹

Given its position and its lighter tone, it would be easy to classify the play as a comedy, or a satyr-drama. However, it would be unwise to lay too much emphasis on the ‘comic’ at the expense of the ‘tragic’.³¹⁰ The exaggerations, abrupt plot changes and non sequiturs that are found in contemporary comedy, or the tendency to parody well-known myths in satyr play are not to be found in the *Alkestis*. And although Herakles’ drunken scene is arguably reminiscent of the Herakles of comedy and satyr-play, a close comparison with analogous scenes from the *Kyklops* (e.g. 409-436, 503-589) show they belong to two different genres.³¹¹ As for the other characteristic elements of the satyr play (as outlined by Sutton and Seaford), namely trickery, resurrection, the presence of Herakles, violent ogres,

³⁰⁹ The personification of Death, for instance, is closer to the way Comedy uses personification; cf. Newiger 1957, which looks at the way Comedy creates dramatic characters from abstract ideas and the use of comic symbolism and allegory in figures such as Penia, Ploutos etc. On the similarities of the *Alkestis* with folktale see Lesky 1925.

³¹⁰ Castellani (1979: 494-496) believes that the play is actually two plays, with the first part being a tragedy and the second part a comedy, but the latter is rather a mixture of the two genres than pure comedy. Conacher (1967: 336) sees it as a development of satyr-play (whose affinities with tragedy imply a common ancestor of the two genres according to Mastronarde 1999-2000: 34-36) rather than a predecessor of New Comedy as *Hel.* or *Ion* arguably are.

³¹¹ See Parker 2007: xxi for details, who finds that the scene belongs rather “to a continuing dialogue with comedy traceable in Euripides’ plays”. Also Burnett 1971: 31.

athletic contest, heroic eating and drinking, happy endings etc., Sutton has shown convincingly that despite some similarities there is a clear difference between *Alkestis* and satyr play, especially in the nature of any humorous effects; in the *Alkestis* it is more of a 'risus sardonius' as Sutton calls it, instead of the laughter caused by ridiculing known myths in satyr plays.³¹²

Its unusual generic status particularly explains its lighter tone in relation to other tragedies; this, however, does not prevent the poet from treating issues of real significance in human life, such as courage, duty, family in all their importance. The focus on serious issues of continuing contemporary relevance through the medium of myth accords with what Easterling calls "heroic vagueness": "the fact that political, legal, and social issues are dealt with in language carefully integrated into the heroic setting enables problematic questions to be addressed without overt divisiveness and thus to be open from the start to different interpretations. What it does *not* mean is that hard questions are avoided or made comfortable because expressed in these glamorous and dignified terms".³¹³ However, the generic mixture raises with particular insistence the issue of how one should perceive the way Euripides chose to present the story. The question whether Euripides' approach is ironical or not has been the centre of a long-lasting debate among the scholars. Some, like Conacher or Smith, believe that the poet uses Admetos' lamentation as a way of commenting on his inadequacy and his failure to react appropriately to his wife's death and the circumstances that led to it. Others, like Goldfarb and Burnett, are in favour of a non-ironic reading and believe that the treatment of the character by

³¹² On the characteristics of satyr-play see Sutton 1980: 137-159 *passim*; Seaford 1984: 31-39. Certainly, humour is not inherently alien to tragedy, especially Euripidean tragedy (as for instance the dark humour of the teasing of the escaped slave by Orestes in *Or.* 1506-1536, the entrance of the ageing bacchants Kadmos and Teiresias in *Bacch.* 178-209, the intertextual teasing of Aesch. *Cho.* 167-245 in *El.* 507-544 etc.).

³¹³ Easterling 1997: 25; cf. Pelling 1997: 215.

Euripides shows “Admetos achieving a new self-awareness and thereby meriting the restoration of Alkestis”.³¹⁴

I believe the truth lies somewhere between the two readings. The play focuses selectively on some issues, sidelining others. For instance, the question of the rightness or otherwise of Admetos’ acceptance of Alkestis’ sacrifice – which in real life would be considered of critical importance – is addressed only in the mouth of Pheres, whereas it attracts no comment from the other characters. Instead, Euripides explores the consequences of Admetos’ choice for himself and his *oikos*, and his reaction when faced with the reality of his wife’s death.³¹⁵ It is hard to argue that the treatment of Admetos throughout the play is ironic, if by that term we mean ‘thoroughgoingly subversive’; certainly there are ironic elements, as in other plays of Euripides, but overall the treatment of the character does not suggest that Euripides’ intention was simply to undermine Admetos and present him as unworthy of the restoration of his wife. This I hope to show in the following sections.

The issue of Admetos’ cowardice

Admetos’ reluctance to die inevitably creates questions concerning his courage and consequently his manliness. There is no evidence in any presentation of Admetos’ myth showing him experiencing any kind of hesitation in accepting Apollo’s offer to escape death. Euripides’ treatment of the myth is no exception. Unlike *Herakles*, for instance, where Euripides underlines the hero’s hesitation when faced with the possibility of death (1146-1152), here he does not suggest at any point that Admetos debated whether to accept or not. The impression of many modern discussions that

³¹⁴ Goldfarb 1992: 111; Burnett 1965.

³¹⁵ Cf. Lloyd 1985: 126.

Admetos behaves in an unmanly way is not simply a product of cultural misreading. For reasons I state below, connected both with myth and with civic ideology, it is likely that the same impression would have presented itself to an Athenian audience.

As already pointed out in the Introduction, little seems to have changed from the Archaic to the Classical period concerning desirable manly attitudes towards death.³¹⁶ The Homeric hero is supposed to face death bravely and never show reluctance before throwing himself into battle;³¹⁷ failure to do so results in resentment from the other warriors and a bad reputation. Being afraid when faced with death is acceptable (e.g. *Il.* 7.216-218), but if a man should turn and run, his manliness is compromised (cf. 5.532 *φευγόντων δ' οὔτ' ἄρ κλέος ὄρνυται οὔτε τις ἀλκή*; Hektor's deliberations *Il.* 22.99-130). A few years after the production of the *Alkestis* Thucydides in Perikles' funeral oration would praise the dead of the first year of the Peloponnesian war and console the survivors, on the grounds that he was sure that they would feel envy for not having fallen in battle; they could never reach the bravery of the dead.³¹⁸ His words are indicative of the mentality of a whole society, which asks from its male members that they defy death and sacrifice themselves for the sake of the city.

This of course was good at the level of theory and served a useful function in building civic ideology, but in the world of experience there was also the reality of defeat and retreat, which means that some troops would

³¹⁶ See Introduction pp. 31-36, the discussion on *andreia*.

³¹⁷ Cf. *Il.* 5.529 and see Introduction p. 33.

³¹⁸ Thuc. 2.44.1: τὸ δ' εὐτυχές, οἱ ἂν τῆς εὐπρεπεστάτης λάχωσιν, ὥσπερ οἱ δε μὲν νῦν, τελευτήης, ὑμεῖς δὲ λύπησ, καὶ οἷς ἐνευδαιμονῆσαι τε ὁ βίος ὁμοίως καὶ ἐντελευτήσῃ ξυνεμετρήθη. Cf. Lys. 2.79-81: ὥστε προσήκει τούτους εὐδαιμονεστάτους ἡγεῖσθαι, οἵτινες ὑπὲρ μεγίστων καὶ καλλίστων κινδυνεύσαντες οὕτως τὸν βίον ἐτελεύτησαν, οὐκ ἐπιτρέψαντες περὶ αὐτῶν τῇ τύχῃ οὐδ' ἀναμείναντες τὸν αὐτόματον θάνατον, ἀλλ' ἐκλεξάμενοι τὸν κάλλιστον. καὶ γὰρ τοὶ ἀγήρατοι μὲν αὐτῶν αἱ μνήμαι, ζηλωταὶ δὲ ὑπὸ πάντων ἀνθρώπων αἱ τιμαί· οἱ πενθοῦνται μὲν διὰ τὴν φύσιν ὡς θνητοί, ὑμνοῦνται δὲ ὡς ἀθάνατοι διὰ τὴν ἀρετήν.

unavoidably return alive and that not everyone would seek death on the battlefield when the opponents were clearly winning.³¹⁹ Krentz's research on casualties of hoplite warfare concluded that even when they were winning, Greeks avoided pursuing the enemy for long, partly because they hesitated to kill fellow Greeks, but also because they were afraid of reversal.³²⁰ Moreover, the confusion on the battlefield due to the nature of hoplite warfare as well as the shape of the hoplite armour (which prevented the soldiers from hearing or seeing most of what was happening unless it happened in front of them) could lead to panic and often unauthorised retreat.³²¹ As M. R. Christ aptly notes, "while the *epitaphioi* emphatically assert that the war dead did not succumb to cowardice, their repeated acknowledgement of this as a real and plausible alternative to courage suggests that, outside the ideal world of the *epitaphioi*, citizen-soldiers might well fall short in courage".³²² In real life men fear death and seek to avoid it. The Athenians were certainly aware of that, despite the fact that public ideology chose to suppress it, and so is Euripides, who acknowledges that reality and explores it in this play.

It is not my intention to argue that Admetos' experience can be linked directly with the experience of the hoplite in the battlefield. The nature of the threat and the contexts are too different for that. My concern here is rather to underline the values of the system in order to define the cultural context against which his behaviour is going to be evaluated by a Greek audience. One could in fact argue that, in some respects, Admetos is in an even tougher position than the hoplite, since he is facing certain death – in fact, a lonely and mundane death within the domestic sphere – whereas for

³¹⁹ Cf. the awareness of this possibility in Tyrtaios 10, 11, 12 (West).

³²⁰ See Krentz 1985: 20.

³²¹ See Hanson 1989: 96-104; Christ 2006: 103. Cf. *Pax* 240-241, 1177-1178.; *Ach.* 349-351; *Bacch.* 303-305.

³²² Christ 2006: 126.

the hoplite there is the possibility of survival or a glorious death. But that position is never argued in the play, and against the contemporary ideals of manly courage Admetos is found wanting.

The prominence given to manly courage by public ideology underscores unambiguously the relation of courage with gender, which is one of the central concerns of the play. Inevitably, Admetos' avoidance of death will be judged not only against masculine standards, but also against his wife's exceptional gesture of accepting a death he was unwilling to face. Admetos' action after Apollo's offer was to go round his *philoï*, asking them to exchange their lives for his (πάντας δ' ἐλέγξας καὶ διεξεληθῶν φίλους, 15), until he finally finds Alkestis, who agrees to die willingly.³²³ He is reluctant to die, whereas Alkestis is not. Twice in the play he is saved by others, at the beginning by his wife, and at the end by Herakles. Instead of proving himself capable of action according to the demands of normative masculinity he stands and watches his wife die, and after her death he decides to withdraw to his grief at the same point where Herakles departs to find and fight Death in order to save Alkestis; so Conacher's argument that the introduction of Herakles is necessary because Admetos would not have been capable of decisive action, although harsh, seems quite plausible.³²⁴ The comparison with either of them finds Admetos lacking in levels of courage and initiative. And if Herakles is the great hero who is able to fight and defeat Death, and therefore outdoing him is impossible for Admetos, the

³²³ I am not sure if by *philoï* here is meant both his friends and the members of his family, or only the latter; the fact is, however, that when later Alkestis (290) and Admetos himself (338, 614ff.) accuse the people that refused to die for him, they refer only to his parents and no one else. Nevertheless, a close examination of lines 15-16 of the prologue (πάντας δ' ἐλέγξας καὶ διεξεληθῶν φίλους, / πατέρα γεραιάν θ' ἢ σφ' ἔτικτε μητέρα) shows that line 16 does not explain line 15, but the father and mother are added to the other *philoï* he has asked for help. I think the focus on his parents only derives from the fact that one would have expected them to die for their son, whereas his friends were not faced with the same moral dilemma, as they were not as close to him as his own parents.

³²⁴ Conacher 1988: 35.

same cannot be said of Alkestis, who is only a woman with no special status or abilities other than her bravery.

The intervention of Alkestis and the inevitable contrast with her husband invites the audience to reconsider the relationship between courage and gender. Civic ideology is very specific when it comes to women and bravery. In Thucydides it is obvious that women are not supposed to wish for a glorious death in the same way as men (2.45.2). Aristotle's views on courage in relation to the two sexes shows clearly that, for him, *andreia gyne* is not just a linguistic paradox, but it is also practically impossible because of the difference in the nature of men and women.³²⁵ As is often with cultural norms, the rule is reinforced by exceptions. Herodotus' *andreia gyne*, Artemisia (Hdt. 7.99), is also treated as a paradox, though the way she is praised indicates that Herodotus is impressed by her courage and ultimately accepts that bravery is not only a male prerogative. Artemisia is used by Herodotus as an example, but through this example one can draw a larger cultural conclusion that women and bravery are treated, at least in theory, as mutually exclusive.

Alkestis' bravery creates a paradox in which she turns out to be more courageous than her husband. Alkestis' situation is even more remarkable for the seeming contradiction between her motives, which derive exclusively from the domestic sphere (according to her own words), and the vocabulary used by her, and others referring to her, alluding to a heroic, and thus male, set of values.³²⁶ As Rabinowitz says, in the context of the Funeral Oration, Alkestis' sacrifice both contrasts with and reinforces the (Athenian) heroic ideal.³²⁷ Alkestis states that her incentive was mainly the protection of her children, and through them her husband's *oikos*, underlining her role as a

³²⁵ Arist. *Pol.* 1277b20-22: ὡςπερ ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς ἑτέρα σωφροσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία (δόξαι γὰρ ἂν εἶναι δειλὸς ἀνὴρ, εἰ οὕτως ἀνδρεῖος εἶη ὡςπερ γυνὴ ἀνδρεία); cf. 1260a20-24.

³²⁶ Cf. Goumaridou 1998: 32-34.

³²⁷ Rabinowitz 1999: 98-99.

mother and a wife. At the same time, however, she will be called *ariste* on more than one occasion (83, 151, 152, 241, 324, 742, 899), an epithet used for the Homeric warrior.³²⁸ Homeric allusions are also found in the phrase *τάφρος κοίλη* (898) used by Admetos referring to her grave and to her lamentation, that bears affinities with the lamentation of Patroklos and Hektor in *Il.* 23.65-107, 24.797 together with the undying *kleos* she will win (cf. *Il.* 7.84-91).

The presentation of Alkestis as heroic, as belying gender expectations and exceeding gender limitations, makes Admetos' reluctance to die look even less heroic. Alkestis, indeed, by being willing to sacrifice her life for the sake of her husband and children, takes over Admetos' traditional role as the protector of the well-being of the *oikos*.³²⁹ This exchange of gender roles creates a new balance in their relationship, which undermines the generally accepted gender stereotypes for courage; "the difference of value between Alkestis' self-sacrifice and Admetos' gesture of hospitality gives even greater contrast to the gender roles in the house".³³⁰ Euripides shows that courage is not invariably and inevitably gendered, and that a woman can surpass a man in bravery and display remarkable courage.

The 'heroic' treatment of Alkestis' courage contrasts with a significant silence which emphasises the enormous gulf between Admetos and the heroes of epic. In his case there are no references to any kind of achievements on the battlefield; all we hear about him throughout the play is his kindness and his great sense of hospitality, which will later serve him and bring his wife back to him. He wishes he were like Orpheus (357-362),

³²⁸ The heroic aspects are rightly underlined by Arrowsmith 1974: 25-27.

³²⁹ Cf. Megara in Herakles chapter pp. 67-71.

³³⁰ Segal 1993: 82.

but the comparison only stresses more the fact that he is not.³³¹ There is no tendency toward idealisation of Admetos, who has little in common with the more warlike Greek heroes. He is not presented as an achiever or warrior in the epic mould, like Herakles or Aias; instead, we have an ordinary man, who had a good marriage and is faced with a choice that could save his life.³³²

However, despite his obvious inferiority not only to more warlike heroes but also to his wife, classifying Admetos as a simple coward (as Pheres does later on) would be simplistic. The play distances its main figure from idealised masculinity, but it certainly does not present him simply as a contemptible figure. First of all, it is essential to realise that Euripides is very careful to create in Admetos a character which, in a very large degree, invites the audience's sympathy, mainly through the male Chorus, who is sympathetic towards Admetos from the beginning and throughout the play.³³³ The fact that they are men certainly influences their perspective to an extent; but this is precisely the reason for the choice of a male Chorus. One of the critical choices for a tragedian is the age and gender of the Chorus, since this affects both its perspective and its relationship with the main characters. And this in turn has profound implications for the relationship between the audience and the characters, since one of the key roles of the tragic Chorus is to guide the audience toward certain reactions by definitely omitting some

³³¹ Interestingly, Plato in the *Symposium* 179d-e uses the same comparison, stressing how Orpheus not only failed to die for his wife, but he moreover was disgracefully killed by women. See also Scully 1986: 142.

³³² The question that arises naturally is why Admetos accepted Apollo's offer in the first place. Arrowsmith's (1974: 13) explanation for it is arrogance; he says that since Admetos was a king with Apollo for a slave, Herakles as a friend and Alkestis willing to die for him, it was normal to think that he could escape death. It is difficult to believe that arrogance was the cause of his reluctance to die, because we are given no indications of arrogant behaviour on the part of Admetos elsewhere in the play.

³³³ Siropoulos (2001: 13) notes that sympathy for the main characters is important for a play exploring themes such as death and separation for a couple.

issues and focusing on others.³³⁴ Their focus is on the present not the past: during the Parodos (77-135) the Chorus mourn for Alkestis' death, but they make no reference to its cause, namely Admetos' reluctance to die. Since one of the recurrent roles of the Greek tragic Chorus is to narrate the past, this silence is significant. On the contrary, they concentrate on the way Admetos is going to give his wife a proper lamentation and a burial suitable to the *ariste* of women. More importantly, they never express any doubt that Alkestis should die in the place of her husband in the first place; they only pray to Apollo to send a miracle so that both husband and wife will be saved from their misery.

In fact, despite the title *Alkestis*, the play is mainly focused on the emotions and experiences of Admetos, not those of his wife. The monologue of the Maidservant, who speaks about Alkestis' actions and feelings earlier, when she found out she was going to die, is all we hear about the female experience. The first stasimon will bring us back to the male perspective, which will remain the focus for the rest of the play.³³⁵ Segal rightly says that "by shifting the focus...from her experience in the house to Admetos and then to Herakles, Euripides moves from female to male emotions in the face of death".³³⁶ Even at the moment of Alkestis' death, the pity of the Chorus does not fall on the young queen who dies unjustly, but on Admetos for losing such a good wife, proving that the Chorus think in the same way as the two spouses do concerning the need for Admetos to stay alive. Indeed, the situation is explained and accepted from the beginning of the play and at no point is there any kind of questioning about Alkestis' sacrifice, either from her or from her husband.³³⁷ By presenting the situation in such a way,

³³⁴ See Parker 2007: xxiii; Easterling 1996: 177; Burton 1980: 3.

³³⁵ See Luschnig 1995: 39.

³³⁶ Segal 1993: 70.

³³⁷ Despite the fact that it was Alkestis' own will to die for her husband, she nevertheless goes through the same reactions as other sacrificial women in tragedy such as Iphigeneia,

Euripides avoids giving answers to questions such as what Admetos' reaction was when his wife offered her life to save his. All we get is Admetos' and Alkestis' reaction towards her imminent death.³³⁸

After the death the focus remains the same; the emphasis is on the experience of the male. Again, Euripides treats the past selectively and the focus falls on the present, i.e. on Admetos being faced with the reality of Alkestis' death and fully understanding its consequences. But as well as grief there is an additional element, shame/guilt: in lines 954-961 he finally returns to his father's accusation (see below) and responsibility for Alkestis' death, and it is obvious that he is very concerned with his reputation among the citizens (*Ἴδοῦ τὸν αἰσχροῶς ζῶνθ', ὃς οὐκ ἔτλη θανεῖν / ἀλλ' ἦν ἔγημεν ἀντιδοῦς ἀψυχία / πέφευγεν Αἰδην*, 955-957). The voices of his potential accusers serve as objectification of his own sense of guilt for his wife's death, accompanied by a sense of shame when faced with his fellow citizens. The last question in particular carries much significance for the way he, as well as the audience, perceive him (despite the inner realisation that they too could have acted in the same way). To use Cairns' and Williams' terminology, Admetos here feels a combination of shame and guilt, two notions that sometimes overlap, so that it is often hard to discern a boundary between the two.³³⁹ Guilt is caused by one's individual conscience, whereas shame "is

Makaria and Polyxena. There is, however, an important difference. She laments for her youth just as they do, but they also lament because they die before they experience marriage and motherhood. Alkestis has already experienced that, which makes her sacrifice even more meaningful: "this suggests that the right way to see her position is that she dies heroically to save her husband...but that this sacrifice can be carried through at the cost of abandoning what she most prizes" (Dyson 1988: 15; see also Lloyd 1985: 121).

³³⁸ There is a question here of when the promise was actually made. Some sources of Admetos' myth place Apollo's offer on the first night of their marriage (see Rabinowitz 1993: 69). Euripides does not specify the time of the offer, but it seems that it was known to everyone for a significant amount of time before her dying day (see lines 158-159 and 524), though not necessarily from the first day of their marriage. Euripides, however, is extremely vague on this matter, which means he did not consider it relevant to the themes he wishes to explore in the play (see Dale 1954: xvii).

³³⁹ Cairns 1993; Williams 1993.

caused by fear of external sanctions, specifically the disapproval of others".³⁴⁰ There comes a point where guilt stops being directly connected to the victim and refers to some abstract law, and thus approaches more to the feeling of shame.³⁴¹ This seems to be the case in the *Alkestis*: "this is not to say that Admetos is not also sensitive to the charge of having failed his wife, simply that in this passage his self-pity brings his concern for his own reputation for manliness to the forefront".³⁴² The accusation is placed in the mouths of others, and he takes pains to point out that accusations of cowardice would be made by his enemies only (*ἐρεῖ δὲ μ' ὅστις ἐχθρὸς ὧν κυρεῖ τάδε*, 954) and so presumably not by everyone; but the fact that he recognises himself as open to the attack is indicative of discomfort with his actions. It is difficult to escape the irony of a man representing as misfortunes events which he has chosen. But there is more here than irony; the emphases of the play do not suggest that his emotions are simply to be dismissed. At the same time, his specific choice of the word *apsychia* and more importantly the question he himself raises concerning his manliness (*καίτ' ἀνήρ εἶναι δοκεῖ*; 957) suggest that Admetos himself is concerned about the implications of the decision he made to live. So on a certain level these words must be taken as expressing this concern (and not only remorse or guilt as Conacher thinks),³⁴³ especially when combined with his declaration *ἄρτι μανθάνω* (940) referring to the loss of Alkestis.

Only after Alkestis is gone do the audience and Admetos himself realise that perhaps Alkestis' sacrifice was too much of a price to pay for Admetos' survival. From the realisation of the consequences of Alkestis' death for Admetos emerges a theme recurrent in tragedy, late knowledge. The much discussed phrase *ἄρτι μανθάνω* (itself a recurrent motif in

³⁴⁰ Cairns 1993: 15.

³⁴¹ Williams 1993: 222-223.

³⁴² Cairns 1993: 270.

³⁴³ Conacher 1967: 337.

tragedy) shows that finally Admetos has realised that staying alive at any cost can sometimes be harder than accepting one's fate and dying. The Maidservant has already predicted it in line 145, *οὐπω τόδ' οἶδε δεσπότης, πρὶν ἄν πάθῃ*.³⁴⁴ Admetos now finds out what it means to save one's life at the cost of everything that made a man's life worth living: he has lost his wife and gained an empty life. He accepted Apollo's offer because he was keen to stay alive; but now it is obvious that he had not thought it through. Alkestis died so that he could live, and now he finds out that he cannot live without her and would rather be dead than enduring her loss. Admetos realises how people's lives are linked: he lives only because Alkestis dies and then he understands that it is not worth living without her.³⁴⁵ *Ananke* characterises the whole of Admetos' life like every other man's, as the Chorus stress in 965.³⁴⁶ Even Herakles, who is beyond human, is still ruled by Necessity and cannot escape his destiny (cf. 501-502, *εἰ χρὴ με παισὶν οἷς Ἄρης ἐγείνατο / μάχην συνάψαι*).³⁴⁷ Admetos has to yield to it and accept that his wife is dead in the same way he must accept his fate at the end of the play and, having proven his fidelity to Alkestis, he needs to accept the veiled girl and fulfill Apollo's prophecy.³⁴⁸

Although the circumstances of Alkestis' death and revival are highly unrealistic, the play addresses very real questions connected with life and death. The whole situation with which Admetos and Alkestis are faced

³⁴⁴ Segal (1993: 55) compares Admetos with Achilles when he finds out about Patroklos' death: "from shock and possibly suicidal grief...to rage, violent 'acting out', eventual relinquishment of the body for the funeral and some measure of reconciliation or acceptance when he ransoms Hektor's body".

³⁴⁵ Arrowsmith 1974: 11. Also see Blaiklock 1952: 5; Beye 1959: 115; Foley 1992: 140; Hose 2008: 48. Hartigan 1991: 32 sees *ἄρτι μανθάνω* not as a realisation of the full implications of Apollo's offer, but as an indication that "whatever gain he had hoped to attain by avoiding death has turned out to be a loss (960-961). Admetos...holds both an egocentric and a profit-driven view of life".

³⁴⁶ Gregory 1979: 268.

³⁴⁷ See Arrowsmith 1974: 15.

³⁴⁸ See Arrowsmith 1974: 22; Gregory 1979: 268.

brings to the fore the issue of what a life is worth and what makes life worthwhile. Euripides never makes Admetos declare the reasons why he should stay alive. But it becomes clear that Admetos, Alkestis and the Chorus (as well as the gods and Herakles, since apparently they consider him worthy of staying alive and getting rewarded by getting his wife back) all share the conviction that he should not be allowed to die. In contrast, Alkestis explicitly gives her reasons for sacrificing herself for her husband (280ff.). The fact that it was her initiative has made some argue that she dies because a man's life was more important than a woman's.³⁴⁹ At the level of civic ideology this may well be true. But the play does not encourage an unconditional belief that a woman is expendable for the sake of a man. The reasons that led her to her decision are explained by her in the deathbed scene, and nowhere does she ever speak of prominence given to Admetos' life over hers because of their sexes. The phrase *ἐγὼ σε πρεσβεύουσα κἀντὶ τῆς ἐμῆς / ψυχῆς καταστήσασα φῶς τόδ' εἰσορᾶν* (282-283) reveals some sense of hierarchy and recognition on her part of female subordination to the male as part of a value system based on gender prejudice. Dying, however, is not part of her spousal duties; she is prioritising him, but she is also making explicit that she is not obligated to give her life for him. Admetos never refers to her sacrifice as such and Alkestis very explicitly declares that she knew she did not have to do it, but it was her free decision (*θνήσκω παρόν μοι μὴ θανεῖν, ὑπὲρ σέθεν*, 284). Moreover, she does not die because she is not important; simply in the present circumstances Alkestis considers

³⁴⁹ Cf. e.g. Arrowsmith (1974: 14), who argues that the audience would find her sacrifice normal and natural; Vellacott (1975: 101) says that Alkestis follows a generally acceptable behaviour towards her husband, though rarely exercised by other women; Sicking (1998: 57-59) believes that social norms give precedence to the man over the wife and also argues that accepting the privileges of the "favoured position" of the man in fifth-century society puts Admetos' bravery in question, until he starts questioning those privileges and gains insight and some sympathy. Luschnig (1995: 8), however, makes the valid point that "the emotional and social chaos her sacrifice causes strongly suggests that it is not to be seen as a cultural norm. Alkestis has gone beyond the limits". Cf. Hose 2008: 40.

Admetos more important for the survival of the *oikos* and the protection of the children – which in the end will be proven not to be enough, as I intend to show in the section about Spousal Love.

Admetos, by trying to avoid death, moves contrary to all gender stereotypes and thus reveals that in fact courage is not necessarily synonymous with the male sex. Men apparently are not by definition the courageous creatures who are always willing to die for their loved ones, which civic ideology supposes, and the play appears to accept that reality. In the *Alkestis* there is a stark inversion of traditional roles of the sexes in relation to courage, proving that after all bravery is not gendered. Alkestis displays more courage than Admetos and Pheres, the head of the *oikos* and an aged man respectively, and proves that in terms of courage she is better than both of them despite her physical sex. But in the case of Admetos, Euripides' sympathetic treatment shows that the play is not trying to present a simplistic account of the failure of a cowardly character (nor for that matter is it trying to suggest that all women are brave, because Admetos' mother was not, any more than his father), but rather to show that in the real world it is not as easy to be brave as it might seem in theory. For an ordinary man such as Admetos the option of staying alive instead of dying is a relief and it is only natural to choose life over death. His failure is that he chose life without calculating the cost and that he did not have the courage to prevent his wife from sacrificing herself for his sake. This is not noble; but it is human.³⁵⁰

Clearly, Admetos is not a hero in the Homeric sense. As Rabinowitz harshly notes, "Admetos' masculinity is in doubt throughout the play: he is no traditional hero. He cannot even rescue his own heroine. He is indebted

³⁵⁰ On Admetos' 'mythological confusions', i.e. his subsequent failures to live up to traditional heroic standards, see Luschnig 1992.

to Apollo for his bride in the first place, and to Herakles in the second".³⁵¹ Euripides has created a character that is much closer to the ordinary man sitting in the audience, and although it is impossible to admire him for what he has done, on another level we know that it would be very possible for any of us, in a similar situation, to choose life over death whatever the cost. As Luschnig says, "Admetos is not the right kind of person to test the boundaries of human existence. He is the right kind of person to be happy".³⁵² It is clear that his activity as a man is characterised by a strong domestic aspect, which allows us to think of him functioning in the house with his wife and children, and which also manifests itself when it comes to showing friendship and hospitality.

Father and son

However, Admetos is not the only measure of manhood in the play. Pheres' entrance is the beginning of a very intense scene between the two men from which neither of them emerges as a model of ideal masculinity. In fact, this is the scene where their masculinity is put into question most, through their efforts to deny responsibility for Alkestis' death and their accusing each another of the same failures.

It is very hard to decide which one of the two characters is the winner of the *agon*, because they both have valid points in their arguments. The issue of the relative moral positions is further complicated by an important structural detail: Euripides gives the second place in the *agon* to Pheres. If Pheres had simply given his reasons for refusing to die without prompting, then it might have been easier to condemn him out of hand. But Euripides makes him speak second, a place usually given to the winner of

³⁵¹ Rabinowitz 1993: 79.

³⁵² Luschnig 1995: 81.

the *agon*, which invites the audience to hesitate before dismissing his argument.³⁵³ A formal tendency is not of course a rule. The second position does not mean that he is right, and he remains a singularly unattractive character. But the absence of a decisive rejoinder creates a debate which does not allow us to discern one single winner.

The intensity of the scene is accentuated further by the fact that this is not a conflict between any two men, but two men who are moreover father and son, i.e. linked with a blood tie and representing two different male generations of the same *oikos*. The relationship between father and son is always problematic, especially since the son is expected at some point to become the dominant male figure of the *oikos* himself, without, however, failing to maintain his status of obedience and respect to his father.³⁵⁴ Tragedy and comedy often mirror this situation by presenting conflicts between fathers and sons, as well as the implications involved which are social, emotional and gender related. Hippolytos, Haimon, Hyllos and even Prometheus all find themselves involved in arguments with their fathers, and all relevant scenes reflect the inner clash these characters experience between the respect due to the father figure, and their sense that they should defend their own actions even if this means crossing their fathers. In the case of Strepsiades in *Clouds* the hyperbole of the situation simply articulates more vividly a conflict that was inevitable.

The blood tie between the two men brings to the fore Admetos' central point in the dismissal of his father and his reason for refusing his father's offerings to Alkestis' tomb (629ff.). There is a sharp antithesis between Pheres' refusal to save his son and Alkestis' sacrifice, despite her status as *othneios*, a word that comes up again and again in relation to

³⁵³ See Michelini 1987: 328. Cf. the discussion of the *agon* in *Herakles* p. 87ff..

³⁵⁴ See Strauss 1993: 71-72; see also 100-104.

Alkestis.³⁵⁵ Pheres and his wife, Admetos' mother and father, refused to die for their own son, whereas Alkestis, a stranger to the bloodline of the *oikos*, was more than willing to do it.³⁵⁶ With her action, she proves that devotion has nothing to do with blood and that non-blood *philoï* can often be closer to someone than blood relatives.³⁵⁷ Admetos ends up being benefited more by his wife and Herakles, both strangers to his bloodline, than by his own parents.³⁵⁸

By contrast, Pheres looks at the relationship between father and son as a kind of contract between two parties (675ff.). This approach serves as the basis of his reasoning, according to which neither he nor his wife had any duty to die instead of their son, in the same way Alkestis did not have to die either. If examined from a purely legalistic point of view, his argument is correct and Pheres is aware of it: parents give life to their children, but there is no custom saying that they should sacrifice their lives for them (681-684). Nevertheless, Pheres' legalistic approach does not take into consideration the fact that, although there is no legal compulsion, in situations such as this a sense of morality prevails and often dictates people's decisions.

The horror of burying a child is a widespread *topos* in classical Greek literature. Recognition of the despair of the parents is found in Thucydides' Funeral Oration, where Perikles declares that he feels how inconsolable the parents of the dead warriors should be (2.44ff.). In tragedy, the death of a child, especially a male child, is lamented as the end of one's *oikos* and it is always pointed out how inconsolable a parent feels when left with no

³⁵⁵ Alkestis is referred to as *othneios* in the first scene with Herakles (532-533) and again later (646, 810). This is the only occurrence of the word in extant tragedy (Smith 1960: 135). Conacher (1988: 177 on lines 532-533) notes that it is a strange word to be used for someone's wife because it implies non-kin; Alkestis is not a blood-relative, so technically Admetos is not lying.

³⁵⁶ See Conacher 1988: 177 on lines 532-533; also Rabinowitz 1993: 73.

³⁵⁷ Cf. Pylades in Eur. *IT* and *Or.*; Isoc. 19.3.33.

³⁵⁸ See Scodel 1979: 61.

heirs.³⁵⁹ The socio-political purpose of marriage was procreation. The importance given to the need of continuity of the patriline, as well as producing more citizens for the well-being of the city in the context of the *epitaphios logos*, explains the sidelining of older people, especially if they are not able to have children any more. In this context, Pheres' decision sounds all the more reprehensible:³⁶⁰ "in a society where the life of an old man who has lost his son in battle can be called 'useless', the Alkestis story...must have symbolised a hierarchy of values in which the love between husband and wife is not so much a value in itself as a means to ensure the continuity of one's *genos* and citizenry...It is from this perspective that Alkestis and Admetos disapprove of Pheres' behaviour".³⁶¹ The parents of the dead commemorated by Thucydides could not have done anything to save them. Pheres and his wife, on the contrary, were presented with the opportunity to save their son's life and were aware of the fact that once Admetos was dead Pheres' *oikos* would have been left with no heir (662-664). And yet they decided to let Admetos die. Pheres certainly did not have any legal obligation, but in terms of morality it is unlikely that an audience would have sympathy for a father who put his own life higher than his son's. His moral failure is accentuated by the failure to meet the same masculine standards as his son: with his refusal to die for his son he fails in his obligation as a man to protect his loved ones.

Admetos' fury leads him to an unforgivable, for ancient Greek morality, dismissal of his father, followed by a refusal to take care of him when he is older, and ultimately bury him (*τοιγὰρ φυτεύων παῖδας οὐκέτ' ἂν φθάνοις, / οἱ γηροβοσκήσουσι καὶ θανόντα σε / περιστελοῦσι καὶ προθήσονται νεκρὸν. / οὐ γὰρ σ' ἔγωγε τῆδ' ἐμῆ θάψω χερί, 662-665*).

³⁵⁹ Cf. Jason in *Med.* 1326, Kreon in *Ant.* 1261ff. etc.

³⁶⁰ Cf. Thuc. 2.43.

³⁶¹ Sicking 1998: 51.

Athenian law stated clearly that aged parents had the right to *therapeia*, i.e. to be cared by their sons, who were also responsible for the burial and for performing memorial rites for them.³⁶² Sons who failed to do so were subject to prosecution for "*kakosis goneon*".³⁶³ The law gave the right to the son to refuse *therapeia* only when "his father had failed to teach him a trade or craft, or had prostituted him, or his birth was not legitimate; for in these cases his father was at fault";³⁶⁴ but clearly this was not the case for Admetos and Pheres. The Chorus, otherwise sympathetic towards Admetos, sense the gravity of his statement and try to stop him from uttering these threats against his father (673-674). The purpose of having children was to secure the patriline and ultimately to receive a proper burial at their hands. Admetos, by denying his father this privilege, renders him childless. At the same time, ironically, the estrangement with his parents and especially his father creates a sense of fragmentation of the *oikos*, whose unity Alkestis' sacrifice was intended to preserve.³⁶⁵

Collard tries, correctly to some extent, to find an excuse for Admetos' behaviour by attributing the way Admetos is presented in the debate to his grief for the loss of his wife: thus, the purpose of the *agon* is, according to him, "to reveal Admetos' helpless and angry disillusion after his wife's death".³⁶⁶ Admetos' anger against his father could have been understandable in straightforward moral terms, but for the fact that he is accusing his father of the same thing he himself did. He was as reluctant as his father to die, and so he tried to stay alive in any way possible, leaving

³⁶² Strauss 1993: 65; Arrowsmith 1974: 112. Cf. Pl. *Leg.* 9.930e-932d; Isae. 2.18, 36-37; Dem. 57.70; Xen. *Mem.* 2.2.13; *Eum.* 269-275.

³⁶³ MacDowell 1978: 92. Cf. Lys. 13.91; Aeschin. 1.28; Dem. 24.103-104.

³⁶⁴ MacDowell 1978: 92. Cf. Aeschin. 1.13; Plut. *Sol.* 22.

³⁶⁵ See Seaford 1990: 166, on similarities between *Alkestis* and *Antigone* concerning the husband's alienation from his paternal *oikos*.

³⁶⁶ Collard 1975: 62.

Alkestis to die in his place.³⁶⁷ And if we want to be strict about it, Admetos' guilt for Alkestis' death is greater than his father's, because at least the latter simply refused to die in the place of someone else, which means it was not his burden to bear in the first place, whereas Admetos tried to avoid his own destiny by finding someone else to die for him. The irony of the situation is obvious. Pheres' caustic words σοφῶς δ' ἐφηῦρες ὥστε μὴ θανεῖν ποτε, / εἰ τὴν παροῦσαν κατθανεῖν πείσεις ἀεὶ / γυναιχ' ὑπὲρ σοῦ (699-701) and later μνήστεινε πολλάς, ὡς θανῶσι πλείονες (720) bring to surface not only this irony of the situation, but also the question of gender roles and relationships. Admetos has proven worse than Alkestis, a woman and more importantly his own wife, which means he has failed to meet male standards and to protect the members of his own household. Instead he turns for help to his elderly parents and his wife, who is ultimately proven stronger than him, as Pheres points out (γυναικός, ὦ κάκισθ', ἠσσημένος, 697). The contrast with *Herakles* is sharp. There, the adult young male was the only hope for salvation for the elderly father, the wife and the children; here, Admetos not only fails to do his duty, but moreover he asks for help from the very people he was supposed to protect. The problem is that, as with Admetos' criticism of Pheres, Pheres' argument would have been more plausible if he was not accusing him of something he himself did; thus neither of them can function as a reliable moral source. Pheres was bested by a woman too, and moreover a woman who was a stranger to the *oikos*. His failure in moral terms is as great as his son's, and it is a failure both as a man and as a father; he loves life more than his offspring and he displays a shameless attachment to life (703-704, 721) in a social context where men are expected to face death with bravery.

³⁶⁷ Luschnig (1995: 68) takes this a little further by arguing that the scene of the agon reveals where Admetos gets his principles and his way of thinking, but the play does not promote the idea that they are as alike as Luschnig is trying to suggest. Cf. ideas about inherited characteristics from fathers to sons, in e.g. *Il.* 4.160-163 and see p. 185n.481.

The difference between Admetos and Pheres is that the latter, as a more cynical figure, is aware of their similarity and lines 701-704 prove it: *καίτ' ὄνειδίσεις φίλοις / τοῖς μὴ θέλουσι δρᾶν τάδ', αὐτὸς ὦν κακός; / σίγα νόμιζε δ', εἰ σὺ τὴν σαντοῦ φιλεῖς / ψυχὴν, φιλεῖν ἅπαντας*. Admetos is not entitled to accuse his father, but he seems not to realise that he is guilty of the same reluctance to die as him.³⁶⁸ Pheres on the contrary, is clearly aware of their similarity.

Nevertheless, there are two elements in favour of Admetos, who seems to be treated by Euripides in a slightly better manner than Pheres, which soften the force of the disturbingly true accusations of Pheres (*σημεῖα τῆς σῆς, ὦ κάκιστ', ἀψυχίας*, 717). This would have been a good opportunity for Euripides to complicate further or erode our feelings of sympathy for Admetos in the same way he does for Medeia or Phaidra when they start putting their plans into effect. But Euripides chooses for Admetos' interlocutor a man who has refused to give his life to save his son and is arguably one of the most dislikable characters Euripides ever created. Long before his entry, Euripides has Alkestis, the most suitable of the protagonists to act as a moral authority and the only undoubtedly and completely admirable character, criticise his refusal in her dying speech (*καίτοι σ' ὁ φύσας χῆ τεκοῦσα προύδοσαν, / καλῶς μὲν αὐτοῖς κατθανεῖν ἤκον βίου, / καλῶς δὲ σῶσαι παῖδα κεύκλεῶς θανεῖν*, 290-292) so that the audience are already prejudiced against him. He thus undermines the moral authority of Pheres before his entry and through that he manages to present Admetos as the more sympathetic of the two, while not removing entirely the problem caused by Admetos' behaviour.³⁶⁹ The verb *prodidonai* will be echoed shortly after by Admetos to characterise his parents' decision (*οὐ μὴν ἐρεῖς γέ μ' ὡς*

³⁶⁸ See Lloyd 1992: 40.

³⁶⁹ Establishing moral authority of the source was an important concept in ancient ideas of persuasion. See Buxton (1982: 17) who notes that the success of a case depends on the ability of the witnesses to establish credibility in front of the jury.

ἀτιμάζοντα σὸν / γῆρας θανεῖν προύδωκας, ὅστις αἰδόφρων / πρὸς σ' ἦ
 μάλιστα, 658-660). The sense of betrayal that *prodidonai* shows stresses the
 condemnation of their action by Alkestis, especially if one combines it with
 her own use of the verb, as reported by the Maidservant in 180-181: she dies
 because she did not wish to betray her marital bed and her husband
 (προδοῦναι γὰρ σ' ὀκνοῦσα καὶ πόσιν / θνήσκω).³⁷⁰

The second element is that Admetos, despite his failure in meeting
 traditional masculine standards, has a sense of *aidos* and is worried about his
 reputation among the citizens (955-957), whereas Pheres dismissively
 declares that he does not care about his fame once he is dead (κακῶς ἀκούειν
 οὐ μέλει θανόντι μοι, 726). His words are shocking for an audience raised
 with the Homeric ideal of good posthumous reputation as being the ultimate
 goal for all Greeks.³⁷¹ With this declaration Pheres displays, according to
 ancient Greek masculine standards, lack of *arete*.³⁷² The Homeric warrior's
 incentive for being brave in battle was the *kleos aphthiton*, *kleos* his *arete*
 would win him (see *Il.* 9.413, where Achilles prefers undying fame over his
nostos; also e.g. *Il.* 5.3 *kleos esthlon*; 7.91 etc.).³⁷³ Athenian funeral rhetoric
 refers to *arete* and *kleos* in a similar way; memorialisation of dead warriors
 means stressing the deeds that won them a reputation that survives them
 and that will be passed on to their descendants and the whole city (cf. Thuc.

³⁷⁰ For the use of the verb *prodidonai* by Admetos in reference to Alkestis see below in the
 section about spousal love p. 162f. See also Scully 1986: 140-141, who interprets Admetos'
 reaction to Alkestis' death and use of *prodidonai* as pure selfishness and a tendency to
 measure things only in terms of their direct impact to himself.

³⁷¹ Conacher 1988: 184 on line 726.

³⁷² See Arrowsmith 1974: 113.

³⁷³ There has been some discussion of the combination of the noun and the adjective in the
 phrase *kleos aphthiton* in *Il.* 9.413 (see e.g. Nagy 1981, Volk 2002), but this is not significant for
 the present study and certainly does not change the fact that posthumous fame is highly
 valued in the Homeric society (see Nagy 1979: 174-210 *passim*).

2.41ff.; Lys. 2.66ff.; Pl. *Menex.* 246a-247c, 249b; Dem. 60.32-37; Hyp. 6.42).³⁷⁴ Pheres' dismissal of *kleos* creates a distance between him and the audience's perception of the importance of posthumous fame.

The dispute is structured like a trial; Admetos has the part of the prosecutor, while Pheres defends himself by indicating that they are ultimately guilty of the same fault. In the angry dialogue that follows their opening monologues they both reach their lowest point in terms of morality. The audience finds them equally lacking in courage and neither of them can function as a moral exemplar. As Arrowsmith observes, ultimately the absent Alkestis emerges as the real winner of the *agon* since both Pheres' and Admetos' *arete* is undermined.³⁷⁵ But the fact that even here Admetos is shown as possessing some redeeming features indicates that the play does not look for heroes and villains; it is characterised by a cool realism which renders Admetos a mixture of good and bad qualities instead of an ideal or a villain.

Herakles' "other" masculinity

The setting-off to save a young bride who has offered herself to Death to save her husband has a strong folktale element, but strangely in this case it is not the groom who departs to save her and fight Death, but the groom's friend.³⁷⁶ Here Euripides breaks the character of the groom in two parts, giving the active part of fighting to Herakles. Segal argues that in this way "Euripides introduces an ironical view of Admetos that enables him to question some of the traditional gender divisions involved in death and

³⁷⁴ Cf. Thuc. 2.41ff.; Lys. 2.66ff.; Pl. *Menex.* 246a-247c, 249b; Dem. 60.32-37; also Loraux 2006: 279-330 on the *topoi* of the funeral oration as a genre and *passim* on the function and influence of the genre on the formation of Athenian civic ideology.

³⁷⁵ Arrowsmith 1974: 14.

³⁷⁶ See Lesky 1925.

dying".³⁷⁷ However, for reasons which will become clear, Herakles is not the unambiguous ideal Segal imagines.

The figure of Herakles stands as the exact opposite masculine image to that of Admetos. His presence in a pro-satyrical play seems only natural.³⁷⁸ Euripides creates a traditional Herakles as known from the myth and comedy, with characteristics such as great physical strength and bravery, but also gluttony and a strong inclination towards self-indulgence, without this meaning that he is a buffoon like in comedy.³⁷⁹ Unlike Admetos, who is praised for being *hosios* (10) and for his sense of propriety towards friends and guests, but who is never associated with fighting and killing in the battlefield, Herakles represents here a more traditional masculine model. He is always away from home, engaged in labours against bestial or superhuman opponents. His wrestling match with Death becomes the latest of his successful encounters with the seemingly invincible. This is a gesture which alludes not only to the traditional martial qualities of heroes like Achilles, but also (through the fact that his contest takes the form of a wrestling match) to the role of Herakles in the epinician and the praise of the athletic ideal as found in Pindar.

Pindar speaks of the athlete as someone who "combines daring, hard work and cunning...[e.g. *Isthm.* 4.43-54]," very much the qualities that Herakles displays in the *Alkestis*.³⁸⁰ Moreover, the athlete should always seek to overcome all obstacles (e.g. *Isthm.* 4.53) and his victory will prove him superior to the others; Herakles' superiority in terms of enterprise, strength and courage cannot be doubted after the fight with Death.³⁸¹ As well as the

³⁷⁷ Segal 1993: 54.

³⁷⁸ Conacher 1988: 35.

³⁷⁹ On the last point see Galinsky 1972: 72.

³⁸⁰ Bowra 1964: 173.

³⁸¹ Bowra 1964: 181-2. Pindar often compares the Games with war (e.g. *Pyth.* 2.1-6; *Isthm.* 5.1-6) and sees them "as parts of a single whole, which calls for very much the same qualities, presents the same challenges, and ends in like results" (Bowra 1964: 184).

epinician connections, his victory carries strong Homeric allusions since, in overcoming death, Herakles achieves in literal terms the metaphorical goal of the epic hero.³⁸²

Nevertheless, the image of the great toiler is not clear-cut, but is rather combined with the buffoonishness of the comic Herakles to create a mixed tonal effect. His drunken scene, for instance, with the monologue praising the joys of life is suggestive of the victorious celebrations of the athlete, but at the same time it has a slightly ridiculous quality stemming from the comical elements of his character and the fact that he is drunk.³⁸³ He incarnates masculinity in its extreme form, which may even look ridiculous sometimes, but his positive qualities predominate: his sense of shame when he realises what his host has done for him transform him completely into the mythical Herakles setting off to protect the weak and honour his friend.

The interaction between Admetos and Pheres showed them both at their worst. In the scene with Admetos and Herakles, however, the effect created by the interaction between the two male figures is entirely different. The antithesis of Herakles' extreme masculinity with the ordinary Admetos is sharp, but at the same time, as their characters are juxtaposed, they also complement one another.³⁸⁴ Instead of one single masculine model, Euripides fragments masculinity and places different aspects in different males. Thus,

³⁸² There was, however, another, less favourable view of the character of the athlete, dismissing their achievements because, unlike warriors, they do not offer any real service to the city. According to this (minority) view, athletics is a form of self-indulgence. On Pindar's implicit recognition of the criticism see Bowra 1964: 184-185. On Eur. *Autolykos* (fr. 282) see Miller 2004: 182-183; cf. Xenophanes of Colophon fr. 2, from whom Euripides is said to have taken the idea, Leshner 1992: 55, 59-61). Finley and Plecet (1976: 121) classify Euripides' reaction as part of a "minority of aristocrat and intellectuals who disliked the massive entry of lower-class athletes into the victor lists. It does not appear in Pindar only because he was writing before the new development was really visible". Euripides also draws on elements of this alternative view of the athlete, but in a more subdued form.

³⁸³ See Garner 1988: 69; see *Ol.* 1.96-101; *Isthm.* 7.40-43 on victorious celebrations.

³⁸⁴ Cf. the relationship between Aias and Odysseus in Soph. *Aj.*, where Aias represents the old heroic code and finds it impossible to compromise, whereas Odysseus is the new order with a more flexible sense of morality (cf. Knox 1961: 25, 28; Zanker 1992: 25; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 71).

on the one hand we have the family man with a strong sense of friendship; and on the other hand, the hero-athlete, courageous and willing to engage himself in perilous tasks, but also with a sense of propriety and duty towards friends.

By inserting the ultimate virile hero opposite his everyday man, Euripides accentuates the complementarity of the two kinds of masculinity without inviting us to opt for one of them. The play could easily have favoured Herakles' active masculinity, reducing Admetos to a highly unsympathetic and even unmanly individual by underlining his inability to become a Herakles. But Herakles is not brought in to suggest Admetos' inferiority as a man. The presence of Herakles is used to underline the impossibility of the situation Admetos is faced with. His achievement, resulting from his superhuman strength and reinforced by the comical treatment of the character, highlights the impossibility of dealing with such an issue in the real world. The rescue scene features typical fairy-tale elements, such as the wrestling with Death and Alkestis' return from the dead. The lack of realism of the task underlines the fact that in real life a physical and moral force such as Herakles cannot exist. Thus, situations like the one the play presents can be resolved only in the sphere of fairy-tale by a demi-god with unconventional powers.³⁸⁵

Friends and *xenoi*

There is more to being a man than courage; guest-friendship, or *xenia*, is another major theme of the play as well as a recurrent motif that characterises Admetos' relationships with men outside his *oikos*, i.e. Apollo and Herakles. Key words such as *φίλος* (42, 1008, 1011, 1095 etc.), *ἑταῖρος*

³⁸⁵ See Conacher (1967: 339) who notes that the solution given is unreal because situations such as Admetos' are impossible.

(776), ξένος (554, 559 etc.) come up frequently to indicate male bonds. Reciprocation caused by *xenia* opens and closes the play, creating a sort of ring composition: in the beginning there is Apollo repaying Admetos, at the end there is Herakles doing the same thing. The connection of Admetos with issues of friendship and loyalty extends beyond the *Alkestis*; a popular fifth-century drinking song entitled *Αδμήτου λόγος* underlines these qualities, using his story as “an *exemplum* of the kind of friendship possible among the noble”.³⁸⁶

The Prologue, spoken by Apollo, sets the basis for the characterisation of Admetos as a hospitable man and sets the tone for the positive attitude towards him as deriving from this quality of his. The god refers to him as *hosios*; indeed, he uses the word both for himself and for Admetos: *όσιου γάρ ανδρὸς ὀσιος ὦν ἐτύγχανον* (10). Apparently, Admetos displayed such admirable behaviour towards the god that the latter has decided to act as his protector. So, the first thing we learn about Admetos before anything else is that he is a pious man who knows how to receive people in his house and treat them with respect. And although lines such as *πάντας δ' ἐλέγξας καὶ διεξελεθὼν φίλους...οὐχ ἦῤυρε πλὴν γυναικὸς ὅστις ἦθελε / θανῶν πρὸ κείνου μηκέτ' εἰσορᾶν φᾶος* (15-18) make clear from the beginning his reluctance to accept his fate, since he did everything possible to find someone to die for him, the sense of a man with a strong feeling of the virtues of *xenia* and of benefiting friends is also there.

These will come to surface more explicitly during the first entrance of Herakles on stage (476-477). Shockingly for the audience and the Chorus, who have witnessed the highly emotional scene of Alkestis' death a few lines earlier, Admetos does everything in his power to persuade his guest to

³⁸⁶ Scodel 1979: 62. Bowra (1961: 377) dates it before the *Alkestis* and believes the song is not related to the story of the play, since “once the later story had taken a hold, it would have been difficult to attribute such sentiment to him”.

remain in his palace for as long as he is in Pherai. Not only does he accept a guest while the house is still in mourning, which according to Herakles himself is *αἰσχρόν* (542), but he moreover tricks his guest into believing that the deceased is not Alkestis but a foreigner (*ὀθνεῖος*, 532-533). The inappropriateness of the gesture is pointed out by the (otherwise sympathetic) Chorus, who criticise him with words such as *τολμᾶς ξενοδοκεῖν* and *τί μωρὸς εἶ;* (552) for accepting Herakles. Herakles himself, when he realises what Admetos has done, is deeply ashamed and departs to repay Admetos' kindness immediately (*δεῖ γάρ με σῶσαι τὴν θανοῦσαν ἀρτίως / γυναιῖκα καὶ τόνδ' αὖθις ἰδρῦσαι δόμον / Ἄλκηστιν, Ἀδμήτῳ θ' ὑπουργῆσαι χάριν*, 840-842).

The question is how we are to evaluate Admetos for accepting a *xenos* only a few lines after declaring the whole country in mourning for twelve months, and more importantly after banning festive gatherings with music (425-431). The last part is forgotten from the moment he takes in Herakles as his guest, providing him with food, drink and music for his entertainment (546-548), which later makes the manservant complain of such disrespectful behaviour by Herakles in a house of mourning (747-772).

The scene draws on the powerful unwritten laws concerning male-to-male relations which ultimately serve as an explanation for Admetos' decision to accept a guest on the day of his wife's funeral. In Homer guest-friendship is the basis of society and maintaining guest-host relationships define an individual's moral status.³⁸⁷ The importance of the bonds of *xenia* is especially stressed in the *Odyssey*, but also in the *Iliad* (6.212ff.), in the famous scene between Diomedes and Glaukos who refuse to fight because their families were linked with guest-friendship. Creating a network of *xenoi* was a matter of survival for a man who might find himself in a foreign and often

³⁸⁷ Schein 1988: 192.

hostile country.³⁸⁸ Knowing that there is someone in whose house one could find refuge and hospitality made traveling easier; this explains the prominence given to creating such bonds in a number of sources. From the moment the bond was established, a mutual obligation was created for both parties and failure to meet the requirements when the occasion arose would be shameful and morally unforgivable. It is indicative that in Homer Zeus *Xeinios* is the protector of the law between guest and host, and offences against a stranger are a direct offence against the *time* of Zeus, who will punish the wrongdoers.³⁸⁹ Pindar, following the Homeric ideal, links justice with the rights of strangers (cf. e.g. *Isthm.* 9.5-6; *Ol.* 2.6).³⁹⁰ The importance of *xenia* is not, however, simply a reminiscence of Homer's world; in Greek thought a *xenos* was always something sacred.³⁹¹ The Chorus in *Eumenides* stress that their punitive actions turn against anyone who maltreats a guest, a parent or a god (269-275).³⁹² And *xenia* remained a relationship of pivotal importance in the classical world. Thus Admetos' insistence on honouring the laws of *xenia* is more than a simple obligation between friends; it is projected as an important indicator of a person's morality and an inescapable obligation, as can be deduced from the *Odyssey*, where "being a guest or a host in the correct way is an important virtue which defines one's social and moral status and, on the level of the plot, leads to salvation or destruction".³⁹³

³⁸⁸ Rabinowitz 1999: 101.

³⁸⁹ Lloyd-Jones 1971: 5.

³⁹⁰ Lloyd-Jones 1971: 50.

³⁹¹ On *xenia* in the *Odyssey* as a self-seeking relationship see Scott 1982: 6-8. See Thompson 1938: 272 on 269-272, "the sanctity attached to the rights of hospitality belongs to the period when the exchange of presents, exemplified in the Homeric poems and apparently derived from the tribal institution known as potlatch...was growing, under the protection of religion, into trade". On the presence and importance of the establishment of *xenia* in *Philoktetes* see Belfiore 1994. See also Xen. *Anabasis* 3.1.4, where it becomes clear that *xenia* plays across state boundaries.

³⁹² On the importance of hospitality and its violation in the *Oresteia* see Roth 1993.

³⁹³ Schein 1988: 192.

Admetos' actions show not only that he is very much aware of the requirements of the *xenia* relationship for male-to-male bonding, but also that he fully understands the necessity of maintaining it intact not only for his guest but also for himself: "*αἰδεσθείς* in v. 857 signifies a fundamental social excellence in Admetos that is recognised even by the servant (*ἠδεῖτο*, v. 823), who disapproves of his actions".³⁹⁴ By accepting Herakles he is repaying the hospitality the former has shown in the past: *αὐτὸς δ' ἀρίστου τοῦδε τυγχάνω ξένου, / ὅταν ποτ' Ἄργουσι διψίαν ἔλθω χθόνα* (559-560). At the same time, the hospitality he will offer to Herakles will ensure that in the future Herakles will do the same for him again. For his part, Herakles has every right to be demanding from the servants (773-778) because he has offered the same kind of hospitality to Admetos when he visited Argos on more than one occasion.³⁹⁵

Xenia functions within the male honour/shame culture.³⁹⁶ To Admetos' personal gain from honouring the laws of *xenia* should be added the concern of maintaining the good reputation of one's *oikos*. Admetos is the king and therefore his house is the model *oikos* for the whole of Pherai; its fame is inherited from his ancestors and it is his responsibility to keep it intact for future male generations. His reputation among the citizens as it emerges from Apollo's words in the prologue would lead the audience to expect from him nothing less than honouring the name of the *oikos* whose head he is, and never turning away a guest asking for *xenia* (*τὰμὰ δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται / μέλαθρ' ἀπωθεῖν οὐδ' ἀτιμάζειν ξένους*, 566-567). Admetos' previous failure in acting as a protector of the members of his *oikos* is now replaced with a strong connection with what the *oikos* represents; at the same time, he meets the fundamental masculine obligation of benefiting his

³⁹⁴ Schein 1988: 193.

³⁹⁵ See Burnett 1971: 38-39.

³⁹⁶ Cf. Segal 1993: 73, who notes that Admetos' admittance of Herakles is in accordance with a male shame culture.

friends, after his previous failure to do so in the case of Alkestis. It has been argued that, by accepting Herakles in a house polluted with Death, Admetos is being careless concerning the well-being of his guests, but the text does not offer any support on the matter; on the contrary, the people who could comment on it (the Nurse, the Servant, the Chorus, or even Pheres) remain silent. It is important to remember that this is not life, but fiction, and that it is imperative in terms of dramaturgy for Herakles to enter the house, allowing for the disregard of real practice.³⁹⁷

Are we to take the unhesitating decision of Admetos to admit his guest as betrayal of his promise to Alkestis, and as giving prominence to male-to-male over male-to-female relations? Or is he rather faced with a conflict between a duty towards his dead wife and a duty towards his guest, symbolising the moral conflicts that Athenian adult males were likely to face on a regular basis?³⁹⁸ Segal, who favours the first position, notes the obligation of Admetos to his *xenos* and the movement of the orientation of the house from inwards to outwards, since the focus is on male relations, whereas mourning for a dead wife seems less important.³⁹⁹ But this does not seem plausible because of the emphasis placed on his promise to his wife before she dies. Rather than operating on the simplistic principle of gender priority, it is more fruitful to consider Admetos' behaviour in terms of the complex and often conflicting responsibilities of the adult male. The

³⁹⁷ Siropoulos (2001: 14) offers a more logic-driven explanation of Admetos' behaviour, which is more concerned with reality than the fictional world of the play, by arguing a) that Admetos cannot be blamed for accepting a guest in a house polluted by death because in 545-550 he takes care to keep Herakles away from the mourning and closes the doors, and b) that Herakles is neither an ordinary man nor a god like Apollo, who is afraid of being polluted by the sight of death; he is the hero who is going to face Death in a fight and defeat him, and there is no reference to him getting polluted. His first point has some substance; the second point offers an argument on which the text is silent.

³⁹⁸ See Arrowsmith 1974: 18; also Segal 1993: 54, "the introduction of Herakles creates still another set of conflicts: namely between the duty to mourn and the obligation to receive outsiders under the traditional ties of *xenia*, guest-friendship, between aristocratic males of different cities".

³⁹⁹ Segal 1993: 78-81.

deathbed scene and the scene with Herakles happen in too close proximity for the change in his promise to be missed, and the response of the Chorus, which has declared they are going to make sure that Admetos will honour his promise (*πρὸ τούτου γὰρ λέγειν οὐχ ἄζομαι / δράσει τάδ', εἴπερ μὴ φρενῶν ἀμαρτάνει*, 326-327), underlines his shock. The Chorus will change their minds as soon as Admetos explains his motives and praise his way of thinking with a choral song which starts by calling his house *πολύξεινος* (569ff.).

The gap between Admetos' promise and his actions is firmly grounded in the Greek distinction between indoors and outdoors. Male to male relations are more visible, whereas female to male relations are confined to the domestic sphere and come to surface only when Alkestis is about to die.⁴⁰⁰ The relationship between the spouses is placed at the centre of the domestic world; consequently, the promise Admetos gave relates to things that are within his power such as not getting married again or not hosting feasts in his palace. However, there is also the outdoor world to which Admetos is bound and which is characterised by bonds established among men and consequent obligations. Admetos cannot withdraw from that world and this becomes explicit in the scene with Herakles. As Smith rightly argues, the difference between indoors and outdoors relates not only to the fact that Herakles and the Chorus represent the external whereas the grief for Alkestis represents the internal, but also extends to the way Admetos perceives his house, both as an institution and as home.⁴⁰¹ The bonds of friendship and *xenia* require him to provide proper entertainment for his guest. Nevertheless, there is no reference to Admetos participating in the feast.⁴⁰² The Manservant in 747-772 will complain of Herakles' shameful

⁴⁰⁰ Segal 1993: 83.

⁴⁰¹ Smith 1960: 136.

⁴⁰² See Lloyd 1985: 127.

behaviour but he never speaks of Admetos feasting with his guest. The deliberate silence alludes to his promise in 343 and indicates that, although he accepted a *xenos* and provided him with entertainment, he continues to grieve. His abstinence from Herakles' feasting reduces the uneasiness we feel when he welcomes Herakles into the house, while leaving the conflict of duties to the fore.

Admetos' decision to offer hospitality is therefore understandable, at least in principle. He finds himself trapped between two obligations, one due to his dead wife and the other one to his *xenos* and tries to meet them both by placing them in separate places within his house.⁴⁰³ As Goldfarb notes, "there is a complementary relationship between *philia* [i.e. the relationship between members of the same social unit] and *xenia* [i.e. the relationship between social units] in obligations, respectively, with one's home and outside one's home and city. *Philia* and *xenia* thus constitute different aspects of the same relationship".⁴⁰⁴ The prominence given to *philia* in the *Alkestis* offers Euripides the opportunity to reflect the tensions between the different kinds of *philia*: "he challenges his audiences of 438 (and readers of all eras) to retain or to achieve a clear moral vision in the midst of conflicting manifestations of *philia* in the world of the play. These manifestations are of three major kinds: traditional, heroic guest-friendship; the relationship between parents and children; that between husband and wife. By exploring different motives for these 'friendships', the reciprocal obligations present in each of them, and the types of affections they produce, Euripides raises the problem of their respective worth".⁴⁰⁵ Male relationships

⁴⁰³ See Nielsen (1976: 97-98) who points out that precedence is given to a friend over a wife: "Admetos acts as though the ritual of hospitality and bereavements can somehow coexist just because they are performed in separate compartments (543ff.). The paradox of this really eludes Admetos, who is struggling to find some purchase of reputation by adhering to the spirit, not the letter, of his 'laws'".

⁴⁰⁴ Goldfarb 1992: 120.

⁴⁰⁵ Schein 1988: 190-191.

are multidimensional, far more so, arguably, than women's, and thus the conflict within and for the male is both more visible and more frequent. A man lives in a complicated world where he is required to honour obligations that often bring him into conflict with his own self. Dealing with these obligations is hard and not always successful.

There is nevertheless an element of hyperbole in the way Admetos perceives his obligation to his guest, converting a relative duty into an absolute duty. The hyperbole will perhaps have been less marked for an ancient audience which recognised the inviolability of *xenia* than to us. But the element of hyperbole remains. This does not, however, invalidate his gesture of hospitality. It has been argued that he humiliates his friend with his excessive hospitality and places him in the position of excessive repayment of the hospitality.⁴⁰⁶ It has further been argued that in the last scene Herakles takes revenge for that "humiliation" by making Admetos fail as a widower and a host.⁴⁰⁷ There is no evidence to support the contention that Herakles was offended; quite the contrary, Herakles' reaction to the news of Alkestis' death reveals his urge to repay Admetos' *charis* (δεῖ γὰρ με σῶσαι τὴν θανοῦσαν ἀρτίως / γυναιῖκα καὶ τόνδ' αὖθις ἰδρῦσαι δόμον / Ἄλκηστιν, Ἀδμήτω θ' ὑπουργῆσαι χάριν, 840-842). As Schein points out, "in their [the Chorus'] eyes, as those of Herakles, Admetos' practice of guest-friendship toward mortals in the same sort of service to the divine as his previous reception of Apollo, and should gain him profit in the same way. Thus, there is in Admetos' (and all) guest-friendship, a combination of selflessness and selfishness...which makes it an effective instrument of both individual advantage and social solidarity".⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Micheline 1987: 327.

⁴⁰⁷ Micheline 1987: 328.

⁴⁰⁸ Schein 1988: 193.

Galinsky rightly notes that Admetos takes the Homeric ideal of hospitality to the extreme.⁴⁰⁹ Here especially one should bear in mind the generic position of the play as pro-satyrical, which could explain the elements of hyperbole and folktale in the behaviour both of Admetos and of Herakles. This affinity perhaps allows Euripides to create starker, more simplistic effects in the second half of the play (which is far less realistic than most tragedies). But this does not ultimately affect the ethical issues. In the real world the offer of *xenia* in the particular circumstances would seem bizarre, but the complex generic status of the play allows the deployment of a hyperbolic example of the recognition of obligation. It is also relevant that Admetos' hyperbole echoes an equally hyperbolic demonstration of Alkestis' devotion to her husband. She is a hyperbolic good wife who shows no signs of hesitation when faced with her death in the deathbed scene, and he is a hyperbolic good host. This provokes the ultimate hyperbolic act of reciprocity in the rescue of his dead wife by his *xenos*.

The hyperbole in Admetos' hospitality towards Herakles offers an explanation why both the latter and Apollo earlier felt the urge to reciprocate with an excessive *charis*. The parallelism between the beginning and the end of the play pointed out at the beginning of this section becomes clear in the last scene. In the past, Admetos honoured his manly duty as a host and was proven a *hosios* man (10) in his offer of hospitality to Apollo. Following the rules of male-to-male hospitality, Apollo repays his *xenia* with a gift worthy of his power as a god, and defends him against Death, prophesying that Admetos will live and will moreover be rewarded with his wife in the end. The last scene is in essence a repetition of the same situation: Admetos responds to his duty as a host once more and accepts Herakles, treats him with exceptional generosity and as a reward he gets repaid with an equally

⁴⁰⁹ Galinsky 1972: 68-69.

exceptional gift. His qualities as a host and his kindness led his guests to reciprocate. In the case of Apollo, he was awarded his life; in the case of Herakles, he got back his dead wife. The Chorus parallel his virtue with his wife's (*ὦ τλήμον, οἶασις οἶος ἂν ἀμαρτάνεις*, 144); Herakles calls him the most hospitable of Greeks (*τίς τοῦδε μᾶλλον Θεσσαλῶν φιλόξενοσ, / τίς Ἑλλάδ' οἰκῶν*; 858-859) and just before he exits he speaks again of Admetos' virtue of hospitality, urging him to continue treating his guests in the same way (*καὶ δίκαιος ἂν / τὸ λοιπόν, Ἄδμητ', εὐσέβει περὶ ξένουσ, 1147-1148*). Of course, in purely technical terms, Admetos' offer of hospitality is essential for the course of the drama and is ultimately useful both for him and for Alkestis. Admetos' grand gesture of honouring the laws of guest-friendship in the specific circumstances will allow Apollo's prophecy to be fulfilled and Euripides to end the tragedy the way he has announced in the prologue.⁴¹⁰

I do not wish to argue for what Conacher calls a "naïve interpretation of the *Alkestis* as a simple morality play of the 'reward of virtue'".⁴¹¹ The play is more complex than that, and this is why Euripides inserts the *agon* with Pheres and brings to surface his failure to live up to masculine standards of manly courage. But while Admetos has failed in one manly virtue, courage, he has another one in abundance. The way he treats his guests and his friends has rendered him worthy, in the eyes of those who benefit from his generosity, of good fortune, and explains why he is worthy of getting his wife back at the end. The god's favour might seem excessive for a man who has failed to face death bravely, but only if one overlooks the value of friendship and hospitality in a society where survival is based on these virtues to a large extent. In addition, both in epic and in tragedy it is plausible for a god to respond to one particular aspect of a man, as in the cases of Artemis and Hippolytos in *Hippolytos*, Odysseus and Athena in

⁴¹⁰ See Luschnig 1995: 61; Goldfarb 1992: 125.

⁴¹¹ Conacher 1988: 42.

Homer etc. Moreover, one should bear in mind that in Greek society cooperation (and not just competition as Adkins would have it) as a virtue was highly praised.⁴¹² Tragedy in general recognises the value of cooperative virtues such as friendship and hospitality, and contrasts them with the competitive values. Pylades, the loyal supporter of Orestes, is an obvious example of this; another is Odysseus in *Aias*, who recognises the limitations of a heroism which isolates, and of the need for mutual support both in life and in death, and *Herakles*, where the lone heroism of the protagonist is contrasted with cooperation, and need for others is stressed at the end of the play. Admetos is not a brave man, but he is a good host and that is recognised and praised by the divine.

Spousal love

Up till now, my focus has been mainly on male-to-male relations, both inside and outside the *oikos* (father and son, guest and host). In this section I would like to deal with another kind of relationship that a man was to develop in his lifetime, which was directed towards the female and which was, ideally, strictly confined within the walls of the household. The movement from the outside to the inside is most obvious in Admetos' interaction with his wife. We are not dealing with the *polis* anymore; now the centre of the activities of the adult male becomes the *oikos*. The idea of the ordinary man is further reinforced by the prominence given by the play to the relation of love to gender and the role of love within the marriage. This section will examine the way in which the emotional attachment between

⁴¹² Adkins 1960. On the importance of cooperation see e.g. Dover 1974: 82; Williams 1993: 81, where he argues against mistakenly assuming that "Homeric shame has as its object only the competitive successes or failures of the individual".

Admetos and Alkestis is articulated, especially the way Admetos as a man and a husband expresses his feelings towards his wife.

Admetos and Alkestis share a highly emotional scene in the second episode, when Alkestis is brought on stage on her deathbed and eventually dies after a long lamentation both in lyric and in prose, in which her husband and ultimately her son join her. I will be returning to the importance of the boy's participation as part of the domestic portrait later; at the moment I would like to focus on the encounter of the two spouses and examine the relation of their reactions to masculine and feminine standards of the time.

Both Admetos and Alkestis speak to each other in terms of duty and propriety. She stresses her role as a mother and her responsibilities towards her children and he promises to do as she asks (i.e. not to remarry) out of respect for a good wife who has served his *oikos* well. To the modern reader their encounter and the absence of explicit declarations of mutual love seem strangely lacking in emotion. But this practice is not exclusive to this particular play.

Ancient sources hardly make any explicit reference to spousal emotions, and when they do, it is not in the modern sense of emotional attachment as a necessary element of a marriage. This could be simply due to the fact that only a few texts referring to everyday life have survived.⁴¹³ Besides, what we have from ancient sources is not descriptions of private life but rather public views on how private life should be.⁴¹⁴ This, however, is unlikely to be the whole answer, since even in more 'literary' treatments the emphasis tends to be on the institutional dimension of marriage; affection

⁴¹³ See Lefkowitz 1983: 37, who points out that if that was not the case, our idea on the matter might have been completely different. Her opinion is further supported by the fragment of a lost comedy (*P. Antinoop.* 15, probably Menander), which is apparently the only instance in Greek literature "where the three words *eros*, *philia*, *agape* recur at such short intervals, in each case referring to love between a man and a woman, and indeed between a husband and a wife" (line 15, Barns and Lloyd-Jones 1964: 28).

⁴¹⁴ See Just 1989: 126.

tends to figure between the lines, implicit rather than explicit. So it is no surprise that in the case of couples such as Odysseus and Penelope or Hektor and Andromache, both serving as symbols of ideal marriages in ancient literature, the words "I love you" are never heard between the spouses. Extra-marital relationships were quite different. In the case of homosexual love, emotions and physical attraction seemed to have played a central role. As far as relations with women other than wives are concerned, the evidence from fourth-century comedy, which makes much of the attachment to prostitutes, and of oratory, which describes fights over *hetairai* (cf. Lys. 3.43; Dem. 54.14), shows that men were apparently at liberty to demonstrate physical and even emotional attraction to a *hetaira* or *pallake*, as in the case of Perikles and Aspasia or Alkibiades and Timandra, but were not required to do so in the case of their own wives. The same motif is repeated in the *Alkestis*. As Burnett notes, "nothing that she [Alkestis] does has any reference to romantic love, for this concept is unknown to her. She is ruled by *philia* (279), the feeling proper among friends and members of the same family".⁴¹⁵

Burnett articulates what is already obvious from the sources: there is a significant lack in language in reference to how a husband expresses his devotion to his wife and vice versa. This gap is very much related to issues of gender, and more specifically to the feelings a man is allowed to express for a woman within the boundaries of appropriate masculine behaviour. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that our sources for ancient Greece present marriage as a fundamentally financial agreement between the husband and his father in law, with procreation as the ultimate goal. The bride was only an object of exchange between her old and her new *kyrios* rather than an object of affection. In cultural circumstances such as this the creation of any kind of emotional link between the couple was neither a

⁴¹⁵ Burnett 1971: 35. On *Alkestis'* *philia* see also Burnett 1965: 244-246; Rabinowitz 1999: 100.

requirement nor an objective, and consequently there was no need for the development of the appropriate vocabulary to describe marital love. Words like love, or *eros*, are not usually used to describe the connection between husband and wife. Rather, the ideal of marital relationship is described in terms of mutual understanding and harmony, as expressed with the use of the word *homofroneonte* in the *Odyssey* (6.183).⁴¹⁶

Interestingly, Plato does use the term *eros* in the *Symposium* 179b-d, to describe Alkestis' motive for sacrificing her life for her husband and he praises her for that.⁴¹⁷ It is possible – although of course uncertain, since both Sophocles and Phrynichus wrote plays with this title – that this is Plato's response to Euripides' presentation of the relationship of Admetos and Alkestis, which means that he, and thus his audience, were able to discern something more than duty in the particular circumstances. The suspicion that he has Euripides in mind is strengthened by the fact that he uses *eros* immediately afterwards when referring to the relationship of Achilles and Patroklos, which explicitly comes from a probable tragic source (Aesch. *Myrmidones*, see *Symp.* 179d). Certainly, we cannot be sure that he was referring to Euripides' version, although it does seem likely. If so, the passage confirms that the relatively restricted terminology in this semantic field led people to use the same word for a whole range of emotional and sexual relationships.

Absence of explicit references to love in the sources does not mean absence of any kind of devotion among spouses. Authors manage to overcome the obstacle of language and allow their characters to express their personal emotions through their actions and without appearing at odds with

⁴¹⁶ *Od.* 6.182-184, οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρεῖσσον καὶ ἄρειον, / ἢ ὄθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχητον / ἀνὴρ ἠδὲ γυνή.

⁴¹⁷ *Pl. Symp.* 179b-c, τούτου δὲ καὶ ἡ Πελίου θυγάτηρ Ἀλκηστις ἰκανὴν μαρτυρίαν παρέχεται ὑπὲρ τοῦδε τοῦ λόγου εἰς τοὺς Ἑλληνας, ἐθελήσασα μόνη ὑπὲρ τοῦ αὐτῆς ἀνδρός ἀποθανεῖν, ὄντων αὐτῷ πατρός τε καὶ μητρός, οὓς ἐκείνη τοσοῦτον ὑπερεβάλετο τῇ φιλίᾳ διὰ τὸν ἔρωτα.

the limitations posed by their gender. So, for instance, Odysseus chooses Penelope over immortality and marriage with a goddess in the *Odyssey* (5.203-224), and Penelope resists the suitors' marriage proposals for twenty years for the sake of Odysseus. Hektor and Andromache's bond, pictured for the first time in book 6 of the *Iliad*, reappears frequently in tragedy, even though their relationship is always spoken of in terms of exercising traditional gender roles within the household. In 22.466-474 of the *Iliad* she will collapse when she sees Hektor dead, even though her lamentation does not focus on emotions but rather on the destroyed *oikos* and their orphaned son. And there is also the famous passage in *Andr.* 224-225 where, shockingly to the modern reader, she says how she used to nurse Hektor's illegitimate children as proof of her devotion to him.

Depictions and inscriptions from tombstones (several of them dated to the fourth century BC) give a similar image focusing on domesticity and serving as evidence of how this culture used to express married love in real life. Losing a young wife occurred often due to the difficulties of childbirth, so widowed men must have been as common as widowed women who had lost their husbands in war.⁴¹⁸ Robin Osborne notes that from the mid-fifth century BC there is a change in funerary monuments and women start to appear more often. This might be a result of a number of reasons, but what is important for this study is his observation that the focus of the inscriptions is not on the achievements of the deceased (like in the case of dead warriors) but on the loss of the life lived.⁴¹⁹ The commemoration of women is prominent in societies where family is important and it serves in representing the general social role of women rather than mere individuals;

⁴¹⁸ Pomeroy 1975: 68; 1997: 27.

⁴¹⁹ Osborne 1996: 234. Commemorating inscriptions for women focus on qualities such as being a good wife or her *sophrosyne*, with no reference to romantic love (see *IG II²* 11162, 11907, 12254, 12067 etc; cf. also Semonides of Amorgos fr. 7 on the virtues of a woman). On gender-based praise regarding female qualities and commemorating women see Tsagalis 2008: 178-180, 192.

and since the inscriptions give prominence to the *oikos*, women's value for its proper function is recognised and commemorated in a public way.⁴²⁰ The tombstones reflect this situation and thus project family unity, presenting the figures often clasping hands.⁴²¹ The epigraphic material points to an emotional attachment to women traceable in oratory. On more than one occasion in the orators we can discern emotional dependence on women which seems to agree with the evidence commemorating women, and proves that although "women were consigned to the background of events and to the private world of each citizen's *oikos*, this is not to say that the male Athenian necessarily considered the world of his *oikos* and his women to have been irrelevant to his own happiness and emotional fulfillment".⁴²²

Given the centrality of the family and the *oikos* in formal commemoration, it is not surprising that Admetos and Alkestis also focus their lament on the *oikos* and on their qualities as husband and wife rather than man and woman.⁴²³ As Segal says, "the *Alkestis* dramatises some of the tensions in the system [of the aristocratic *oikos*], especially those between the centripetal and centrifugal aspects of the household. To the wife belongs the self-enclosing, centripetal aspect of the house, its self-sufficiency and inward-looking direction"; the husband is responsible for the outward-looking face, the *kleos*.⁴²⁴ At the same time their arguments, although seemingly endorsing popular beliefs of gender stereotypes where the man is the essence of the

⁴²⁰ See Osborne 1996: 236-7; Sourvinou-Inwood 1995: 329; Just 1989: 132-134; Strömberg 2003: 34-35. Artists on white-ground *lekythoi* show preference for domestic scenes and present men and women together rather than women alone; the presence of the latter "establishes the *oikos* as the appropriate context of the figures", but more importantly, "figuring women in this role could only reinforce gender stereotyping" (Osborne 1996: 241). Moreover, although women worked for the well-being of the *oikos*, it was not only female territory since a strong *oikos* was important especially for politically ambitious men (Blok 2001: 101).

⁴²¹ See Robertson 1975: 380; Shapiro 1991: 656.

⁴²² Just 1989: 130; Dem. 50.60-3; 59.1, 12.

⁴²³ "Of Alkestis' love for Admetos as a person the words used do not speak or hardly at all...Admetos too, when lamenting his loss, does so from the perspective of a loving husband rather than of his loving wife" (Sicking 1998: 54).

⁴²⁴ Segal 1993: 84.

oikos and the woman is expendable, in fact show a different balance between the genders in the house. This, as already seen in the previous paragraph, is hardly an innovative thought by Euripides.

To underline the connection with the *oikos*, Admetos stresses that the grief will be shared by himself and the children together (*οἰκτρὰν φίλοισιν, ἐκ δὲ τῶν μάλιστα' ἐμοὶ / καὶ παισίν, οἷς δὴ πένθος ἐν κοινῷ τόδε*, 264-265; *ὥστ' ἐγὼ / καὶ σφῶ βαρεία συμφορᾶ πεπλήγμεθα*, 404-405), creating a unit of her closer loved ones who will feel her loss the most. The appearance of the children in the deathbed serves not only as a dramatic effect, but also stresses the theme of the value of the female by pointing out the impact of Alkestis' death on the whole family. Euripides makes her son sing a lamentation over Alkestis' body, reinforcing the fact that Alkestis' death will affect her children the most (393-415).⁴²⁵ Admetos could always find another wife, but to her children, especially to the girl as Alkestis herself points out (313-319), the mother is irreplaceable.⁴²⁶ Hence the strange use of the word *ὀρφανιεῖς* (276) by Admetos to refer to his children after losing their mother. The linguistic and conceptual paradox here is easily lost on the modern reader. But in ancient Greece a child was considered an orphan only when his father was dead, even if the mother was still alive; the unusual usage reinforces in a striking way the fundamental importance of the mother.

Alkestis' reasons for choosing to die in Admetos' stead places him in the centre of the *oikos* and makes the latter's existence impossible without his presence. Yet Admetos' despair shows a reversal of this conviction. Apparently, Alkestis will be missed for her domestic role and her importance in the household, which competes with the importance of Admetos. The wife's importance for the *oikos* extends beyond the production of legitimate heirs for the continuation of the husband's patriline. Her loss

⁴²⁵ On the appearance of children on stage and its meaning see Dyson 1988.

⁴²⁶ Dyson (1988: 16) points out that the family is more vulnerable if one child is female.

will affect both the household and the husband: the lamentation of her son for losing his mother, the grief of the slaves for losing their mistress and the references to her being a good wife all add to a domestic portrait. She died so that the *oikos* would not be destroyed, but it turns out that without her the *oikos* is losing a vital member.

However, in Alkestis' case the gap will be felt in more dimensions than her domestic role, as Admetos' emotional response to her death reveals. The image of the marital bed will appear in both Admetos' and Alkestis' words, creating a parallel between male and female reactions. For Alkestis, the sight of the bed will make her burst into tears (for the first time since hearing her dying day has come) as she reminisces on the day of her marriage (177-182). There is a parallel scene in *Tro.* 745-748, where Andromache remembers her wedding night and her union with Hektor (cf. also *Tro.* 673-676). Admetos will have a similar moment when he remembers their wedding; Alkestis too speaks of their marital bed (915-921).⁴²⁷ For both the bed symbolises their union with the other and carries an emotional weight which helps them show what they cannot articulate.⁴²⁸

The vocabulary Admetos uses, especially the word *phile* (351, 991-992), shows profound emotional attachment to his wife. Her loss makes the sight of the house unbearable for Admetos: it serves as a reminder of her (912-914) and in fact without her presence it seems lifeless and empty (941-950): her absence makes the house look empty and Admetos feel lost.⁴²⁹ On this point, Alkestis appears more perceptive than her husband: she, unlike Admetos, can picture what her life would be like without Admetos and she

⁴²⁷ See Segal 1993: 61.

⁴²⁸ See *Od.* 23.174ff., 289ff. and the central position of the bed for the relationship between Odysseus and Penelope. Cf. the frequency of the bed motif in *Med.* noted by Sanders 2009: 162-164.

⁴²⁹ Luschnig 1995: 71.

refuses to experience that.⁴³⁰ On the contrary, Admetos will realise too late (*ἄρτι μανθάνω*, see above) and only after she is gone and he is faced with an empty house. For the same reason he will refuse the woman Herakles is offering to him in the final scene, because her figure is too similar to Alkestis' and this would render her existence in the palace intolerable (1061-1069); "after his wife's death, Admetos begins to notice things about this space quite clearly from her perspective".⁴³¹ And this is the moment where he will finally give in to his emotions by bursting into tears (1064), as his wife did earlier.

Admetos' lamentation for Alkestis seems like a natural reaction to the death of a beloved wife and mother. However, are his language and gestures appropriate to male expressions of grief in formal lamentation?

According to ancient Greek popular belief, women find it hard to contain their emotions and are easily driven by their passions. It is indicative that when Solon changed the law for conducting funerals, he forbade women not directly connected with the deceased to attend the ritual and also ordered that women were not to stand next to the coffin. Instead, they were to stand behind men.⁴³² The ultimate purpose was to prevent rich men from showing off their wealth, but it is indicative that female lamentation was thought to be a means of showing off as well as excessive enough that had to be contained. Male endurance was generally opposed to *gunaikeion penthos*, which means that men had a different, more contained way of expressing

⁴³⁰ Luschnig 1990: 24.

⁴³¹ Luschnig 1995: 13-14.

⁴³² See Plut. *Sol.* 21.4-7: ἐπέστησε δὲ καὶ ταῖς ἐξόδοις τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ τοῖς πένθεισι καὶ ταῖς ἑορταῖς νόμον ἀπείργοντα τὸ ἄτακτον καὶ ἀκόλαστον...ἀμυχᾶς δὲ κοπτομένων καὶ τὸ θρηνεῖν πεποιημένα καὶ τὸ κωκύειν ἄλλον ἐν ταφαῖς ἐτέρων ἀφεῖλεν...ὧν τὰ πλεῖστα καὶ τοῖς ἡμετέροις νόμοις ἀπηγόρευται πρόσκειται δὲ τοῖς ἡμετέροις ζημιούσθαι τοὺς τὰ τοιαῦτα ποιῶντας ὑπὸ τῶν γυναικονόμων, ὡς ἀνάνδρσι καὶ γυναικῶδεσι τοῖς περὶ τὰ πένθη πάθεισι καὶ ἀμαρτήμασιν ἐνεχομένους. Also Pl. *Phd.* 117d-e and *Resp.* 603e-604e, cf. 387e-388d.

their grief.⁴³³ Alexiou's research on lamentation and funerary ritual shows a clear division between male and female official roles.⁴³⁴ The job of women members of the family and/or professional mourners was mainly to lament for the dead by crying out loud (and thus the appropriate vocabulary of *threnos*, *goos*, *kommos* referring to the female part of the lamentation). Men, on the other hand, were expected to react far less emotionally and articulate rather than physically show their grief; hence the *epitaphios logos* became the way of lamentation for the men and replaced the lamentation at the wake as a way of honouring the dead. The differences of expression between the two sexes allude to the general ancient Greek conviction that female speech is qualitatively different from male speech, and thus having different ways of expressing grief seems only natural.⁴³⁵ Evidence for this lies in the final scene of the play, where the shift back to the norm (see below) is, among other things, signified by the shift from the female *threnos* genre to a more masculine epinician context.⁴³⁶

Nevertheless, crying as expression of misfortune or grief by men is not totally absent in literature.⁴³⁷ In Homer (e.g. *Il.* 19.338-339, *Od.* 19.115-22) men cry as "a sign of overwhelming catastrophe and as temporary lapse from their manliness...In tragedy, and especially Euripides, male protagonists...weep over heavy misfortunes, their own or others', but the circumstances are usually extreme grief or frustration," e.g. *Trach.* 787-796, *Phil.* 730-805, *Hipp.* 1070-1071 etc.⁴³⁸ Weeping in compassion is acceptable, but strictly limited, and it is noteworthy that most of the male weepers in tragedy are either very young or very old men, such as Peleus in *Andr.*,

⁴³³ Cf. Arch. fr. 13.10; Martin 2001: 67.

⁴³⁴ See Alexiou 1974 *passim*, especially 108; on the same theme see also Loraux 2006: 78-82.

⁴³⁵ See McClure 2001: 4n.5, and 10, where she notes that "Socrates in the *Republic* [398d] explicitly designates lamentation and the musical modes associated with it as a feminine discursive practice inappropriate for men;" also Pl. *Cra.* 418b-c.

⁴³⁶ Segal 1993: 42.

⁴³⁷ See Introduction pp. 44-45 and Herakles chapter pp. 63, 69.

⁴³⁸ Segal 1993: 63-65.

Amphitryon in *HF*, Kadmos in *Bacch.* etc.⁴³⁹ Since lamentation was generally considered to be a female task, tears were often thought to be a sign of effeminacy and weakness (e.g. *Trach.* 1070-1072),⁴⁴⁰ which explains the struggle every hero in tragedy has to go through before giving in to tears (e.g. *Ag.* 202-204; *Ant.* 802-805).⁴⁴¹ Equally important was the extent of the lamentation: "grief...was reasonable in its proper place, or rather, in its proper moment. It is persistent, unrelenting grief that the ancients are unanimous in discouraging".⁴⁴²

Lamentation in Homer and tragedy usually focuses on the way women deal with the loss of a man; when it comes to men, the way of presenting it differs. In extant tragedy, male lamentation is the theme of the first stasimon of *Agamemnon* (355-474), but it is there only to be negated. Even rarer is the presentation of men lamenting wives in tragedy. Ritual lamentation and actors' monodies are usually reserved for women or barbarians, since both groups are characterised by lack of self control; men hardly ever used them since excessive use was considered to turn them effeminate.⁴⁴³ Obvious exceptions are Kreon in *Antigone* (1283ff.) and Herakles in *Herakles* (1138-1152), but they both lament for their wives' death together with their sons', and the weight falls unavoidably on the loss of the latter symbolising the destruction of their *oikos*. Haimon lamenting *Antigone* (*Ant.* 1209-1218) is clearly a unique case; he will go so far as to kill himself out of desperation after his failed attack against his father with a sword. However, he cannot be compared to Admetos mainly because he is so much younger than him and thus more impulsive. The only lamentation that has very close affinity with Admetos' lamentation as far as language is

⁴³⁹ Segal 1993: 65.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. *Herakles* p. 67 and Introduction p. 44f.

⁴⁴¹ Segal 1993: 65-66.

⁴⁴² Konstan 2006: 256.

⁴⁴³ Griffith 2001: 121-122.

concerned, revealing genuine affection towards the dead woman, is Theseus' for Phaidra in *Hippolytos*. It uses the same motifs as Admetos' lamentation: he declares that his wife's death has destroyed him (810), he speaks of it as the ultimate misfortune (830), he wishes to follow her to the grave (836), he speaks of an empty house and orphaned children (847), refers to her as *gynaikon arista* and promises he will never get married again (860-861).⁴⁴⁴ It is nevertheless much shorter and is soon to be overshadowed by the revelation of her plan and the death of Hippolytos.

The clear-cut division of masculine and feminine roles in funerary rituals and the relative silence in the sources concerning the expression of emotions by men in grief, when contrasted with Admetos' extended and highly emotional lamentation, reveal a close connection between his reaction and female duties in mourning. His decision to withdraw from public life and conduct a life of mourning resembles very much the reaction of a widow after the death of her husband.⁴⁴⁵ Once more gender roles are inverted: Alkestis departs on a brave journey leaving him behind, just like warriors left their wives behind. Moreover, she makes him promise that he will take care of the children (375-376), whom she refers to as "hers", and whom she hands over to Admetos in a gesture very reminiscent of adoption.⁴⁴⁶ It is as if a man is leaving for battle and hands over his estate and his children to his wife to look after until his return. Only in this case, it is the other way round. Alkestis actually calls him their mother (although he will not become their mother, he will act more as a substitute),⁴⁴⁷ to show him both that she entrusts them to him, but also to remind him of his promise never to bring a stepmother to them (*σὺ νῦν γενοῦ τοῖσδ' ἀντ' ἐμοῦ μήτηρ τέκνοις*, 377).

⁴⁴⁴ See Paduano 1968: 113-114.

⁴⁴⁵ See Foley 1992: 142; Humphreys 1993: 62.

⁴⁴⁶ Luschnig 1990: 21.

⁴⁴⁷ Luschnig 1995: 47.

Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to take the intensity of Admetos' emotion as simply a sign of effeminacy. In Admetos' case, his emotional reaction is not related to gender, but rather to the relationship he had with his wife and the obligation he feels towards her for dying in his stead. So Admetos' pleading to Alkestis not to abandon him,⁴⁴⁸ and even his move of desperation, when she is about to be put in her grave (895ff.; cf. Euadne in Eur. *Supp.* 1063-1071, Deianeira in *Trach.* 874-946 etc.), to throw himself in with her is probably not just a matter of feminine weakness, but rather shows that male dependency on women is deeper than theoretical approaches such as Aristotle's and the ideological stereotyping of rhetorical and historical texts would suggest.⁴⁴⁹

Alkestis' devotion to Admetos led her to make an extraordinary gesture and to sacrifice her life for him. To his wife's hyperbolic sacrificial gesture Admetos will reciprocate with an extended lamentation and equally exaggerated promises.⁴⁵⁰ This reciprocity appears analogous to manly friendship, borrowing from its vocabulary as a substitute for the lack of terminology for spousal relations. Alkestis has pointed out that he owes her because she has agreed to die in his stead (σύ νῦν μοι τῶνδ' ἀπομνηῆσαι χάρις, 299), which, in a society which accepted the reciprocity of *charis*, was not improper, and she can now ask him for a favour in return, namely to protect the interests of their children by not remarrying.⁴⁵¹ She has already given up her chance of remarrying after his death. In a society where women

⁴⁴⁸ Which resembles efforts such as Iolaos' in Eur. *Heracl.*, or Hekabe's in *Hec.*, or Klytaimnestra's in *IA* 977-1035, 1146-1208 to stop the scheduled sacrifice of a loved one (Burnett 1971: 27).

⁴⁴⁹ Aristotle believes that a woman should love her husband more than he loves her. The man possesses a superior place in the relationship and thus should receive more affection than he gives (*Ethic. Nic.* 1158b11-29).

⁴⁵⁰ Paduano (1968: 67) notes that Admetos' promise needs to be absolute, physically and emotionally, just as Alkestis' gift was.

⁴⁵¹ Rabinowitz (1993: 79) sees in her request the exercise of power on behalf of an outsider to the *oikos* and moreover a woman: "she is once again a liminal figure combining the insider and the outsider".

got married much younger than men, and surviving their husbands was not unusual due to age difference and frequent warfare, the option of remarrying was very realistic. In fact, demographic data shows that remarriage was more common for women than men.⁴⁵² Alkestis was aware of the possibility, as well as of the fact that she did not have to die for him, but she deliberately chose not to do it (*παρόν μοι μὴ θανεῖν, ὑπὲρ σέθεν, / ἀλλ' ἄνδρα τε σχεῖν Θεσσαλῶν ὃν ἤθελον, / καὶ δῶμα ναίειν ὄλβιον τυραννίδι*, 284-286). In real life, her argument regarding the fate of her children as orphans would have come up. One or more guardians would have to be appointed and the children would remain in their father's *oikos*.⁴⁵³ A woman that had sons had most probably the choice either to remain in her dead husband's *oikos* under the protection of her sons, or their guardians if they were underage, or to return to her father's house in order to be remarried.⁴⁵⁴ But most certainly she would not bring her children to her new house, so her fears of her new husband rejecting her children from Admetos cannot stand.

Admetos, acknowledging her gesture, shows no hesitation in promising that he will not remarry after her death as a way of repaying his wife for her sacrifice. However, in the context of reciprocating Admetos will take his sacrifice one step further. Alkestis never says that she wants Admetos not to have a mistress; this would have been unrealistic in a society where marital fidelity was required only for women, whereas extra-marital relationships were not unusual for men – and were not legally barred

⁴⁵² Pomeroy 1997: 120. This can be explained by the fact that women got married at around 14, whereas men got married at 30 and had a life expectancy of 45 years; if the girl survived childbirth she could be a widow when still young and thus remarry (Pomeroy 1975: 64-68). In general, we have a number of references in the orators to both men and women marrying for the second time; the sample shows also a high frequency of childbirth in the second marriage (Thompson 1972).

⁴⁵³ MacDowell 1978: 93.

⁴⁵⁴ Harrison 1968: 38; Just 1989: 74.

either.⁴⁵⁵ After Alkestis was gone and the mourning period was over, Admetos could at least in theory find one, or even several mistresses, and Alkestis is aware of that. However, Admetos refuses to do that. He will try to surpass Alkestis' *charis* by vowing life-long celibacy (in the same way Herakles will try to surpass Admetos' hospitality by reviving his wife at the end of the play). In a social context that does not require an extended mourning period for the loss of a spouse,⁴⁵⁶ he surprisingly declares that she will remain his only wife even after her death (328-331) and that he will not be able to bear the sight of young women, because they will remind him of his dead wife (952-953).

When Admetos finally yields to Herakles and accepts the woman he is offering, it looks as if he is betraying Alkestis. Rabinowitz strongly believes that his decision to accept first Herakles and then the woman he later offers him should indeed be called a betrayal.⁴⁵⁷ For the modern this reading is difficult to resist. Admetos himself uses the verb *προδιδόναι* (1059, 1096), when he refuses to give in to Herakles' pressures to accept the girl. Pylades in *IT* makes the same promise to remain faithful to Elektra (*κασιγνήτης λέχος / οὐκ ἂν προδοίην*, 716, although Admetos' promise is more extended, referring also to the period after Alkestis' death).⁴⁵⁸ Ironically, Admetos receives a woman against both his will and his promise

⁴⁵⁵ See Dem. 59 on evidence for extra-domestic sexual activities. However, it looks like Athenian women exercised some kind of authority over men concerning extra-marital relationships, although men were not compelled to be faithful by law.

⁴⁵⁶ Harrison 1968: 38; cf. Dem. 30.33.

⁴⁵⁷ Rabinowitz 1993: 90; 1999: 101.

⁴⁵⁸ Oranje 1980: 171-172. The same motif of not betraying a dead spouse can be seen in Eur. *Suppl.* in the words of Euadne shortly before she commits suicide in her husband's pyre (*σὲ τὸν θανάοντ' οὐποτ' ἐμᾶ / προδοῦσα ψυχᾶ κατὰ γᾶς*, 1023-1024) and in Eur. *Protesilaos* where Laodameia decides to remain faithful to Protesilaos ([Λαοδ.] *οὐκ ἂν προδοίην καίπερ ἄψυχον φίλον*, 655 Kn.; on the myth of Laodameia and Protesilaos see Lyne 1998: 202; Jouan and van Looy 2000: 567-572). Admetos also uses the verb in the deathbed scene, but in the sense of abandonment because Alkestis dies and leaves him behind (*μὴ προδοῦναι λίσσεται*, 202; *ἔπαιρεσαντὴν, ὦ τάλαινα, μὴ προδῶς*, 250; *μὴ πρὸς <σε> θεῶν τλής με προδοῦναι*, 275).

to Alkestis, only to find out that she is actually his wife and that he has not betrayed his promise.⁴⁵⁹ However, there are three factors, as pointed out by Buxton, that invite the audience not to condemn Admetos: he did not acquiesce readily but resisted Herakles for a long time; in addition, refusing would be like refusing a *charis* from a friend; perhaps most significantly, the audience actually wants him to accept the woman because they know it is Alkestis.⁴⁶⁰ As reader/watcher it is difficult not to conspire in the betrayal, if that is what it is. Smith even argues that technically his yielding does not represent a betrayal because the girl is a foreigner and thus will not be a *νύμφη Θεσσαλίς* (see 330-331, 1094) and Admetos will not be marrying her anyway.⁴⁶¹ However, his resistance to Herakles shows that he regards himself bound to the dead woman until the moment Herakles brings her back.

Admetos' promise not to remarry, his macabre decision to put in his bed his wife's statue,⁴⁶² his determination never to appear in public or accept the woman Herakles has brought him seem to be part of the same hyperbole which recurs throughout the play, as in the case of his offer of hospitality to Herakles. Such hyperbole for the modern reader threatens to undermine the sincerity of Admetos' reactions. But the positive way in which his intratextual audience(s) react to and comment on his behaviour (see above) prevent this from happening, as does the emphasis on the emotional bond

⁴⁵⁹ Halleran (1988: 125-129) argues that Admetos symbolically marries the veiled woman, basing his argument on the fact that he finds strong similarities with betrothal and wedding language and images. However, the play does not go this far and there is no reference to a new marriage for Admetos, symbolic or not.

⁴⁶⁰ Buxton 2003: 184-185.

⁴⁶¹ Smith 1960: 144.

⁴⁶² According to Segal (1993: 45) "Admetos' ritual gesture [i.e. the statue], then, opens up a sequence of parallel myths [Orpheus and Euridice, Protesilaos and Laodameia] that points to the fictionality of the whole situation". Rabinowitz's feminist approach (1993: 81) sees in the statue a wish on behalf of Admetos to console himself and exercise power on it as he never did on Alkestis: "in this way, the stone acts to restore Alkestis but especially to restore Admetos to himself".

between the two spouses. There is intensity in his words that can only be translated as a kind of affection, not necessarily erotic, but certainly more than a legal obligation.⁴⁶³ The exaggeration is arguably due to the unique generic position of the play and its tragic-comic elements, which allow things to be taken to the extreme. Nevertheless, it manages to portray male love towards a wife realistically and at the same time to touch on a theme difficult for tragedy (and comedy), working hard in order to illustrate the reality of marital relations. Tragedy, and especially Euripides, demonstrates an ability to deal with male experience and emotion in a way which manages to take us beyond the limits of ideology. Euripides manages to overcome the restrictions posed by linguistic limitations and social propriety, and finally, through hyperbole and impossible situations, creates a portrait of a happy marriage. And even though there are no declarations of mutual love like in Shakespeare or nineteenth-century romance, there is no doubt that Alkestis' sacrifice and Admetos' emotional lamentation are the closest we can get to expressing love in the specific social circumstances.

Conclusion

The play is iconoclastic and subverts gender roles. It refuses to hierarchise men and women in a traditional way. Nevertheless, it is a striking and paradoxical fact that Euripides chooses, perhaps in accordance with the para-comic ethos of the play, to create an end that brings everything

⁴⁶³ Strangely enough he refuses to take the girl in the house because he does not know where to put her (1049ff.). He creates a dilemma where there should not be one; he lives in a palace and yet he speaks of it like a small Athenian *oikos* with only one room and one bed free, that of his wife. Normally, the girl should go to the female slaves' quarters, but Admetos' does not speak of that possibility. Parker (2007: 260 on lines 1055-1056) notes the element of shock there must have been for the audience for the inappropriateness of Admetos contemplating on whether to keep the girl in Alkestis' room. Pandiri (1974-1975: 52) sees line 1052 as an ironic echo of Cassandra's situation in *Ag.*

back to normative behaviour.⁴⁶⁴ Alkestis has displayed extraordinary courage and Admetos has failed to meet heroic standards in terms of courage: this is hardly a case of presenting gender stereotypes. Nevertheless, as soon as everything is brought back to normal with the help of Herakles and the threat is no longer apparent for Admetos or his family, Alkestis slips into the utterly normal role of the silent wife. We finally return to the male-to-male dynamic as seen at the beginning: there we had Admetos and Apollo; here we have Admetos and Herakles.⁴⁶⁵ Alkestis might possess heroic qualities, but, nevertheless, they amount to what Segal calls “domestic heroism”; she does not transgress gender limits like Klytaimnestra or Antigone, though her devotion to the *oikos* and *kleos* are heroic masculine values.⁴⁶⁶ Any potential unease caused to the audience by this particular heroism is eased by the presence of male fantasies such as the sacrifice for the sake of the husband and the utterly masculine movement of exchange, with the woman being the object.⁴⁶⁷ In the final scene, the audience hears that Herakles fought with Death and won back Alkestis. Alkestis is presented as a prize in a wrestling fight, as an object of exchange between men, in the same way she once was when Admetos won her from her father. Most importantly, she stays silent throughout the whole scene, even when she is unveiled.⁴⁶⁸ The whole scene is reminiscent of the ritual of an ancient Greek wedding and arguably here Alkestis enters her husband’s house as a new bride, behaving in the way every new bride should do. This return to gender stereotypes seems strange, especially after the courage she has displayed, but it is apparently easier to challenge gender roles on her deathbed. Besides,

⁴⁶⁴ The final scene “is a brilliant scene which avoids all the dangers and brings the play to a triumphant close within the conventions” (Kitto 2002: 322).

⁴⁶⁵ Rabinowitz 1993: 90; 1999: 101.

⁴⁶⁶ Segal 1993: 77.

⁴⁶⁷ Segal 1993: 78; also Rabinowitz 1993: 97.

⁴⁶⁸ Complete difference with the recognition scenes in the Elektra plays, where the female is given a very prominent role in the exchange of information. Here the recognition is conducted by Herakles and Admetos, and Alkestis does not get to participate at all.

women in tragedy do not portray real Athenian women. This is not quite life as lived but a dramatic reflection of aspects of life. Subverting gender roles should be seen more as a way “to explore symbolically a broad set of contemporary political, religious and social issues”.⁴⁶⁹ When everything is back to normal, the order is restored and Admetos regains his status as the adult male protector of the *oikos*.

⁴⁶⁹ Foley 1992: 134. Foley (2001: 330) takes things too far, by arguing that “both [*Alc.* and *Hel.*] reassert the norm by demonstrating the disastrous social consequences for men of any challenge to the traditional balance of roles between the sexes”; there is nothing which *Alkestis* does that threatens disaster. Cf. *Lys.*, where, unlike *Eccl.*, there is a comforting reintegration of women into the domestic sphere at the end of the play.

HIPPOLYTOS

Admetos' (and Herakles') strong connection with the *oikos* and its members stands in complete opposition to the distance and isolation from it as seen in *Hippolytos*, especially in relation to the sexual behaviour of the male. The principal focus of this chapter is the status of a man as a sexual being within the context of the family and the *polis*. The *Hippolytos* is the ideal choice of play to explore this theme because of the centrality of the idea of male chastity to its plot. As we shall see, sexuality in Greek society is not simply a matter of individual preference but is located within a nexus of larger relationships, duties and responsibilities. In the modern developed world male and female sexuality and sexual roles are generally viewed as matters of personal preference, but within the Greek context the social aspect of these roles is central. The gulf between ancient and modern perceptions is nowhere clearer than in the psychological readings of sexuality which have been influential in recent studies of the play.

Hippolytos' problematic sexuality: Hippolytos and the analysts

For anyone born into the world after Freud it is difficult to escape the gravitational pull of psychoanalytical readings of human motivation both in real life and in creative literature. This applies in particular to treatments of sexuality. It is hardly surprising that in the latter part of the twentieth century *Hippolytos* appeared to invite a reading in terms of subconscious psychological processes. Although this approach to tragedy is no longer in vogue, it is perhaps still appropriate to begin by addressing the methodological issues raised by the psychoanalytical approach before moving on to examine Hippolytos' behaviour in the context of ancient

Athenian cultural practices, values and expectations. My purpose here will be both to clear away some misconceptions about motivation in the play in preparation for my reading of its exploration of gender issues and to articulate more clearly the difference between modern perceptions of sexuality and those of the Athenians.

One feature shared by psychoanalytical readings of the play is the assumption that Hippolytos' attitude towards sex and his fixation on virginity and purity are to be traced to his unusual relationship with his parents.⁴⁷⁰ For Smoot, Hippolytos is a narcissist and his total rejection of Aphrodite and what she stands for "lies at the heart of his narcissism".⁴⁷¹ Hippolytos both hates and cannot identify with his father, because Theseus raped Hippolytos' mother who, being an Amazon, was supposed to abstain from sex.⁴⁷² Theseus' intense sexuality as known from myth, and as implied in the text through the Chorus' question to Phaedra if her husband has found another woman (320), also creates an unbridgeable gap between father and son.

There is a factual problem with this reading. We do not actually hear Hippolytos or any other character saying that Theseus in fact raped the Amazon. Though Hippolytos' bastard status indicates that they were not married, and knowledge of mythic narrative patterns would lead us to suppose rape, given the flexibility of Greek myth and the existence of competing versions of the impregnation of the Amazon we cannot simply assume a feature on which the text is silent. Euripides' text shows no interest in the circumstances of Theseus' relationship with the Amazon. The wrath against Theseus again is nowhere to be seen in the text.

⁴⁷⁰ Smoot 1976: 40-43; cf. Devereux 1985; Rankin 1974; 76-77. Cf. Griffin 1990: 136-137.

⁴⁷¹ Smoot 1976: 39.

⁴⁷² Rankin 1974: 77; cf. Smoot 1976: 42.

Hippolytos' relationship with his mother is also for psychoanalytical readers a psychologically complex one. For some critics he subconsciously identifies himself with her. For Devereux, Hippolytos' way of life replicates that of his mother; yet his own existence is a reminder of his mother having been sexually active at least once, and this, according to Devereux, makes him resent his mother too despite his subconscious identification with her.⁴⁷³ Alternatively for Smoot "without a male model because of the absence and unsuitability of the natural father, Theseus, the young son came to identify exclusively with his mother; and just as his name suggests, he became the idealised masculine version of his own mother".⁴⁷⁴ The problem with this is that his mother was equally absent from his life.⁴⁷⁵ An obvious way of resolving this problem is to argue for Hippolytos' hatred against both his parents on the grounds that they both abandoned him.⁴⁷⁶ But again the text is silent. Hippolytos never speaks of abandonment in the text; nor does anyone else at any point.

There is inevitably a degree of reductiveness in any attempt to summarise detailed readings based on the application of sophisticated theoretical approaches in this way. But apart from the fact that these readings require us to supplement the words of the Greek with details on

⁴⁷³ Usually, "the bastard's *conscious* resentment is...directed at his father and, by extension, at the male sex. Now...his real resentment is directed at women – at his 'poor unhappy mother' (1082ff.)...All things considered, the moment his mother ceased to be a virgin, she also ceased, *ipso facto*, to be admirable; at best she deserves pity, but nothing more" (Devereux 1985: 42).

⁴⁷⁴ Smoot 1976: 42.

⁴⁷⁵ In point of fact Hippolytos did have a male model in his father's maternal grandfather, who was responsible for his upbringing (*ἀγνοῦ Πιθθέως παιδεύματα*, 11). Devereux (1985: 20) observes: "Hippolytos could, of course, have learned Greek gender masculinity from old Pittheus' behaviour; but he apparently failed to do so"; but the last clause is Devereux's own inference, not Euripides' text.

⁴⁷⁶ Smoot 1976 : 41-42; Devereux (1985 : 38-39) on the other hand, speaks of hatred only against his father and a tendency to idealise his mother's virginity (and consequently feeling sorry for her for no longer possessing it).

which the text is silent,⁴⁷⁷ they also tend, where they do succeed (as they sometimes do) in unearthing suggestive features of the text, to substitute modern for ancient patterns of explanation. Let us take for instance one factor regularly deployed in psychoanalytical readings, the fact that the Amazon way of life is in many senses similar to what Hippolytos has chosen for himself: “in his resulting overestimation of chastity, he identifies with his ‘unhappy mother’, the Amazon”.⁴⁷⁸ Hippolytos’ preference for the company of his male *hetairoi* is an inverse image of the exclusively female Amazon community. He also shares the Amazon connection to nature and the wild.⁴⁷⁹ The suggestion that Hippolytos to some degree replicates his mother’s way of life has much to recommend it.⁴⁸⁰ He also shares with the Amazons an ambiguous gender status: the Amazons’ way of living is ‘masculine’, despite their physical (female) sex. Hippolytos on the other hand, although being a man, displays behavioural patterns that would be more suitable to an adolescent woman, like chastity and segregation from the other sex. But this can – in its Greek context – more obviously be seen as an inherited quality

⁴⁷⁷ There is a further problem with the psychoanalytical approach, explored by Easterling 1990. *Hippolytos* is a work of literature and as such, its characters are fictive. Easterling points to the dangers of treating fictive characters as if they have an extra-dramatic existence. Whatever psychological model is adopted, in interpreting the psychology of fictive characters, the weight must fall on what is said and implied; one cannot supplement the text with conjecture, as though we were dealing with real people with an objective existence outside the text. Euripides’ *Hippolytos* only exists within the confines of the tragedy. It is also important to bear in mind the difference between the stylised approach to character in Greek drama, even in Euripides; it is unwise to treat literature of this sort as though it were identical with more naturalistic traditions such as the modern novel.

⁴⁷⁸ Rankin 1974: 77.

⁴⁷⁹ The description of the untouched meadow (apart from its obvious sexual connotations which will be dealt with later on in detail) is also a direct allusion of the exclusive and distant community the Amazons live in, far from civilisation and, more importantly, far from men.

⁴⁸⁰ There are, nevertheless, important differences: the Amazons were warriors, whereas Hippolytos’ only occupation was hunting. Moreover, caution is needed before we align the Amazons unequivocally with Hippolytos’ total abstention from sex, for there were myths of Amazons engaging in sexual activity for the sake of procreation (Devereux 1985: 26, 36; Dowden 1997 *passim*).

from his mother, since the idea of inherited qualities was well established in ancient Greek thought.⁴⁸¹

The issue of bastardy also needs to be viewed through an ancient and not a modern lens, if we are to make sense of the play in its original context. Until recently bastardy in the developed world carried a social stigma which could have profound emotional effects. The ancient Greek perception is rather different. Having bastard children seems to be common enough in the Homeric world, as seen in the constant references to *nothoi* in the *Iliad*; it was also probably not uncommon in fifth-century Athens, judging from the fact that there was a constant anxiety concerning their status, translated into successive changes in the legislation referring to their rights in inheritance and their position within the *polis*.⁴⁸² In a society which embedded status differentials explicitly in many areas of life, these children were very much aware of their inferior status compared to legitimate children.⁴⁸³ This is reflected in references in the play on how bastards perceive themselves against legitimate children, by the Nurse and Theseus (308, 963). Nevertheless, the focus in the Greek context is not on the emotional but on the practical implications of bastardy, a focus reflected in the play, specifically on the fact that Hippolytos is deprived of certain financial and social privileges, which are anyway of no interest to him, as he takes pain to stress to his father more than once (e.g. 1007ff.). Bastardy is perceived and presented as a socio-economic matter, not an emotional or a

⁴⁸¹ Cf. the references to the similarities between Achilles and Neoptolemos in *Phil.* 3-4, 357-358, 874-875, 1310-1313; Theognis speaking of people possessing inherited excellence, see Cairns 1993: 169-170; also Arist. *Gen. An.* 767a-b on inherited physical characteristics. And of course the idea of inherited guilt appearing constantly in literature, e.g. Solon 13.31-32 (West), *Il.* 4.160-163, Hes. *Op.* 282-285, *Sept.* 636-638, 695-701, 720-726, *Ag.* 1090-1092 etc., *Soph. El.* 504-507, *Ant.* 583-585, *OC* 367-370, *Eur. El.* 699-706, *IT* 186-202, *Or.* 811-818, *Phoen.* 379-381 etc., *Hdt.* 5.70-72; Parker 1983: 191-206; Edmonds 2004: 71-72; Gantz 1982 *passim*; Sewell-Rutter 2007: 15-48.

⁴⁸² 'Bastard children' in the sense of the children born out of wedlock; for the children born to a union between an Athenian and a foreigner see below p. 223ff.

⁴⁸³ On the status of bastards see below p. 223ff.

sexual one; thus the problems of bastardy have more to do with such practical issues rather than suppressed sexual desires and fixation on one or both parents.⁴⁸⁴

I have devoted so much space to psychoanalytical readings of *Hippolytos* not simply as an exercise in critical history (interesting as that is) but because the limitations of this approach usefully highlight key aspects of my own. In placing the focus on the psyche it replicates *Hippolytos*' own inwardness. This approach diverts us from ancient constructions of sexual identity and tacitly imposes the values of a society in which sex is largely a matter of individual preference. The flaw (apart from the need to import material into the text) is that it ignores the cultural context within which the play was received by its first audience. For the Greeks, the *act* of sex was a private matter, in that decency demands concealment, and this figures prominently in inverted form in Greek configuration of the other, but the *role* of sex was a collective and public issue.⁴⁸⁵ As the discussion below will show, individual sexuality is located within a nexus of obligations and relationships and cannot be extracted from that network. An approach which focuses exclusively on *Hippolytos*' internal psychology misses the outward facing dimension of sex and consequently risks narrowing excessively the dynamics of the play.

⁴⁸⁴ Accordingly, inter-generational conflict (not strange in classical Athens, where the duty to parents is defined by law – cf. e.g. Plut. *Sol.* 22.1.4; Isae. 2.18, 36-37; Dem. 57.70; Xen. *Mem.* 2.2.13; Strauss 1993: 65; see also pp. 143-144) is also perceived in socio-economic rather than emotional terms. However, the theme of father-son conflict is not developed in this play; there is no evidence of hostility until Theseus accuses *Hippolytos* for assaulting *Phaidra* (contrary to what Strauss 1993: 167 thinks, arguing in favour of a "history of latent hostility" that manifests itself explicitly at the confrontation scene).

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. e.g. Hdt. 1.8; Hartog 1980: 337 on Hdt. 1.8; Dover 1974: 206.

Athenian attitudes towards male and female sexual activity

I would now like to turn to what the sources have to say concerning the sexual activity of men and women in fifth-century Athens. The Athenian male was presented with a number of outlets for his sexual activity before or even after marriage, at least in theory. Taking into consideration that the normal marrying age for a man was somewhere around thirty years of age and that any kind of contact with respectable unmarried women was not possible due to social restrictions, since the latter would usually only appear in public for religious festivals, funerals and family celebrations of close relatives, it was only natural to assume that an unmarried man would, and was in fact at liberty to, seek sexual satisfaction through different outlets if he so wished.⁴⁸⁶ Besides, sexual activity with prostitutes or *hetairai* was a safe way of preventing men from engaging in contra-normative behaviour and preying on decent women. Moreover, in contrast to the Christian tradition, sexual desire was not considered inherently bad; it was viewed as a normal physiological need and both law and social attitudes allowed men considerable freedom.⁴⁸⁷

The same freedom of action existed with reference to homosexual relationships. Already in his adolescence a man might find himself on the receiving end of homoerotic advances from older men.⁴⁸⁸ This was part of the

⁴⁸⁶ For the appearance of women in public see Dover 1974: 209; Cohen 1992: 136ff. Although Just (1989: 106-125 *passim*, especially 111-114) and Cohen (1992: 136) have rightly noted the normative and rhetorical elements in Athenian presentations of female visibility, with the consequent tendency to overstatement (ancient and modern) on the subject of female seclusion, both ideology and practice appear to have favoured segregation of the sexes and limitation on female accessibility to unrelated males – at least in the upper classes where any extra-domestic task was performed by slaves. See also Introduction p. 54n.140.

⁴⁸⁷ See e.g. Dem. 59.122, τὰς μὲν γὰρ ἑταίρας ἡδονῆς ἔνεκ' ἔχομεν, τὰς δὲ παλλακὰς τῆς καθ' ἡμέραν θεραπείας τοῦ σώματος, τὰς δὲ γυναικὰς τοῦ παιδοποιεῖσθαι γνησιῶς καὶ τῶν ἔνδον φύλακα πιστὴν ἔχειν.

⁴⁸⁸ It is quite possible that our sources over-schematise the nature of homoerotic relationships, but one could not argue that they mislead us altogether, since they are

maturing process of the adolescent and, as Dover argues, “provided a youth, for whom marriage lay some years ahead, with the opportunity for the seduction of a partner on the same social plane as himself, an opportunity of the kind which exists in modern heterosexual societies which neither own slaves nor segregate the sexes”.⁴⁸⁹ Garland argues that the homosexual period could last for some ten years, and that the young man would go through a process during which he would gradually switch from the passive to the active position, from being an *eromenos* to being an *erastes*.⁴⁹⁰ Davidson notes that the expression of interest was almost always initiated by the older man (even when he was older than the *eromenos* only by a couple of years) following a strict hierarchy whose inversion would be deemed unnatural.⁴⁹¹ The distinction between active and passive roles was a crucial one. Halperin notes that the relationship was structured in a way where the positions of superiority and inferiority within the relationship were very clearly distinguished.⁴⁹² Moreover, what is certain is that homosexuality was what Garland calls “an episodic phenomenon”, a situation that was transitory and in no way indicative of a man’s sexual orientation.⁴⁹³ We cannot of course

produced for an audience very familiar with the sexual culture. On chaperoning young boys in order to protect them from these advances see Davidson 2007: 69.

⁴⁸⁹ Dover 1974: 213; Garland 1990: 210, on homosexuality helping the transition from adolescence and adulthood. Also Cohen 1992: 171-202; Hubbard 2003: 2 and *passim*; Halperin 1990: 97 on domination and sexual roles; Davidson 2007: 69-70 notes (citing Aeschines 1.139) that this kind of attention from older men was to be limited to courting and admiring, whereas the *erastes* had to wait for the boy to become more mature in order to have more intimate relations with him – possibly until he was eighteen or nineteen years old.

⁴⁹⁰ Garland 1990: 187.

⁴⁹¹ Davidson 2007: 88.

⁴⁹² Halperin 1990: 47, “so long as the mature male took as his sexual partner a statutory minor, maintained an ‘active’ sexual role vis-à-vis that person, and did not consume his own estate in the process or give any other indication that he was ‘enslaved’ to the sexual pleasure he obtained from contact with his partner, no reproach attached itself to his conduct”; see also Dover 1978: 16, who notes that “the reciprocal desire of partners belonging to the same age-category is virtually unknown in Greek homosexuality”. Also Davidson 2007: 31, noting how the *eromenos* was always at the receiving end of the attention expressed by the *erastes* and he was not to return the attention.

⁴⁹³ Garland 1990: 187.

apply these generalisations to every Athenian male; the duration, or even the “homosexual ‘phase’” itself did not necessarily apply to everyone.⁴⁹⁴ But we are here concerned with agreed models, not universal experience.

This is true of any kind of sexual activity – before or after marriage. The liberty to form extra-marital sexual relations with prostitutes and/or *eromenoi* does not mean that it was necessarily unavoidable. Not to mention that it presupposed a level of financial leisure, since homoerotic pursuit was a rather expensive endeavour, automatically excluding the lower classes.⁴⁹⁵ The number of these experiences varied between individuals and not every man chose to take advantage of it too often (or even at all), especially since too much indulgence in sexual activity was open to censure as indicative of lack of self-control and dangerous for the city,⁴⁹⁶ but also because, although there were no legal restrictions concerning extra-marital sex for men, marital fidelity is encouraged and praised in the sources.⁴⁹⁷

One thing is certain, however: in a civic context, lifelong celibacy was not generally regarded as praiseworthy and certainly never required in a man. In general, absence of restrictions and absence of celibacy as an ideal for men (unlike Christian cultures), as well as the plethora of options concerning extra-marital sex, create a situation in which a man would be unlikely (although it would not be impossible) to reach a marriageable age

⁴⁹⁴ Garland 1990: 187. Cohen 1992: 171-202 has demonstrated how pursuing a young *eromenos* was not devoid of anxiety, creating implications both for the honour and reputation of the *erastes* and that of the *eromenos* (which become evident by the frequency they appear in the sources). See also Davidson 2007: 31, on showing recognition and encouraging someone’s advances was potentially harmful to the boy’s reputation.

⁴⁹⁵ See Dover 1978: 92-93, on the gifts youths are presented with when courted by men on vase depictions. Davidson 2007: 343, 474.

⁴⁹⁶ See e.g. Aeschin. 1.42, Introduction pp. 43 and below, in reference to *sophrosyne* as a male quality.

⁴⁹⁷ Dover 1974: 210; Xen. *Oec.* 1.13, stressing how taking a mistress is bad both for body and soul as well as financially; Isocr. 3.40. Lacey 1968: 166 (using evidence from *Pol.* 1335a; *Lys.* 106 etc.) offers a different point of view by arguing that extra-marital sex could have been a way of maintaining a small family and thus avoiding the exposition of unwanted children. On marital fidelity see also Introduction pp. 42-43.

without having engaged in some sort of sexual activity, however limited that might have been. And it would have been even harder to remain celibate for life. The reason was that even if a male chose to abstain from sex in his youth, procreation within a family context was part of male duty towards the city and the *oikos* and not a matter of personal choice.⁴⁹⁸ In that respect, concerning the need for reproduction, being sexually active was a vital part of the masculine identity.⁴⁹⁹

Virginity on the other hand was clearly projected as a female quality. An unmarried female should be a virgin, while there is no such compulsion in the case of a male. But even then, it was only a temporary status: chastity was zealously safeguarded, and praised, until the day of a girl's marriage, for a number of reasons. First of all, there was the need of a man functioning in a patrilineal society to know beyond doubt that his children are truly his.⁵⁰⁰ An additional reason was that female sexuality was feared and women are often described as more emotional and more susceptible to pleasure in the view of men, including illicit pleasures such as adultery; so the restrictions placed on their sexual activity before and after their wedding can be explained by the need to prevent them from expressing what was thought to be part of their nature (e.g. *Hipp.* 967-970).⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. Hdt. 1.61 referring to Megakles' fury against Peisistratus for preventing the former's daughter from having legitimate children; also Hartog 1980: 337.

⁴⁹⁹ For a detailed discussion on a man's duty towards the *polis* and the *oikos* see below, 'A man's duty towards the *polis*', p. 215f.

⁵⁰⁰ Irwin 2007: 16; Carey 1995: 416. Of course, "female body integrity...is strongly related to heterosexuality, in other words, with sexuality which is used for reproduction"; female homosexual experiences do not seem to concern the male dominated society, so they simply ignore them when referring to virginity (Viitaniemi 1998: 45). Dover (1978: 172) notes only one instance of female homosexuality attested in Classical Attic literature, in Pl. *Symp.* 191e.

⁵⁰¹ Dover 1974: 101; 1978: 67. Despite this conviction about female nature, laws for adultery rule a punishment only for the man involved, creating the sense that a free woman does not consent to extra-marital sex, but rather she is somehow forced into it (see *Lys.* 1.32-33 and Carey 1995: 416-417 on the distinction between rape and adultery; on the impossibility for the woman's consent in the archaic age see Harrison 1968: 34; Ogden 1997: 28; see also Cantarella 2005: 244, noting that "women's consent was not an issue taken into account *per se* by the Athenian legislators").

Sophrosyne and gender, and the untouched meadow of Artemis

Female sexual modesty and chastity were described with the word *sophrosyne*, the same word Hippolytos uses to describe the reasons for his abstinence from sex. As Cairns rightly notes, this does not mean that Hippolytos is “eccentrically effeminate”.⁵⁰² The word was used for men as well, but in the sense of mastery over desires and impulses, and exercise of self-control.⁵⁰³ This is why, despite the considerably larger freedom they had when it came to their sexual activity, too much indulgence in bodily pleasures was criticised as lack of self-control and for that reason, any man displaying it might be perceived as a potential threat to the city.⁵⁰⁴

Sophrosyne is generally used in the sense of sexual modesty for men only in reference to the adolescent man in his relationships with the men aspiring to become his *erastai*: “the Athenians prized in their youth both general modesty of bearing and specific resistance to the advances of *erastai*”.⁵⁰⁵ In many cases, the young man would eventually succumb to the advances of the older man (in the same way the young girl was going to abandon her modesty and become a wife) and in a few years he would become an adult man, leaving this kind of *sophrosyne* behind him. But even if he did not succumb, this would not affect his evolution into an adult male citizen: “whereas a woman insulated from contact with men throughout her youth and encouraged to treat all men alike with mistrust may find it hard to

⁵⁰² Cairns 1997: 55.

⁵⁰³ Cairns 1997: 55; Introduction p. 39f.

⁵⁰⁴ Dover 1974: 179, 207, 210. See also Dover 1978: 23, “the enthusiast was more likely than other people to commit crimes such as rapes and adultery, and more likely to be tempted to acquire money dishonestly as a means to purchased sexual enjoyment; more likely to consume his inheritance on hetairai and prostitutes, instead of preserving it as taxable capital or devoting it to purposes welcome and useful to the community; more likely also to choose pleasure or comfort in circumstances which called for the soldierly virtues of self-sacrifice, endurance and resistance to pain...[because of all these reasons a man could be] vulnerable to attack”. C.f. e.g. Aeschin. 1.42.

⁵⁰⁵ Cairns 1997: 56; Davidson 2007: 31; Ormand 2009: 53-54.

make the transition from the approved role of virgin daughter to the approved roles of bride, housewife and mother, a boy who rejects the advances of erastai will nevertheless turn into an adult male citizen, and his performance of that role will not be impaired by his past chastity".⁵⁰⁶ After the man's transition into the state of an adult, the relation between *sophrosyne* and sexual modesty ceases to exist and the stress falls on self-mastery of impulses in general, including but not exclusively referring to, sexual impulses.

Hippolytos prides himself that all this unique behaviour derives from his *sophrosyne*. He asserts that *sophrosyne* cannot be taught and a man either possesses it or does not (79) – and this, of course, must be seen as a purely masculine quality.⁵⁰⁷ According to his idea, it is this kind of *sophrosyne* that keeps him chaste, supposedly following what Artemis' cult demands, but it is in essence his own selective interpretation of her cult. Even at the moment of his death, he declares that he is the most pure and the most *sophron* of men, as he has done since the beginning of the play (1460). In the same way he is selective with the cult of Artemis (see detailed analysis below), he is equally selective with the meaning of *sophrosyne*. He fails to see that sexual purity is only one of the aspects of *sophrosyne*, but not the only one as he seems to believe. He defines it exclusively as total abstinence from sex and bodily purity, whereas this kind of *sophrosyne* is only a part of the maturing process for both sexes and is expected to give way to sexual activity.⁵⁰⁸ As Cairns notes, Hippolytos' behaviour resembles a female or male adolescent that refuses to mature.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁶ Dover 1978: 89.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. the reaction to the sophists, whose claim that virtue can be taught was in complete antithesis to the pre-existing and elitist idea that qualities are inborn and are simply brought out by education (Guthrie 1971: 66ff.).

⁵⁰⁸ This distorted interpretation of inflexible commitment to the idea of *sophrosyne* is a major factor leading to Hippolytos' destruction; see Gill 1990: 94, also speaking about Phaidra's fixation on her interpretation of *sophrosyne*: "the play is not so shaped as to show how

The intertextual relationship between the untouched meadow in his prayer to Artemis (73-87) and Ibykos' fragment 286 is revealing in this respect. The connection is inescapable and is rightly noted by commentators, but interestingly – and unsurprisingly – the inviolate meadow there appears to be a female experience, thus adding to the peculiarity of Hippolytos' demeanor.⁵¹⁰ The description of the untouched meadow has long been recognised as a symbol of his sexuality. The sense of inviolability created by the language of exclusivity Hippolytos uses when speaking of the meadow not only refers to the sanctity of the meadow belonging to a goddess, but is also a clear reification of his own chastity. As Parker notes, “the inviolable meadow of a god is a fit symbol of the chastity of a virtuous youth, as both are protected by *aidos*”;⁵¹¹ this aspect is crystalised in the word *aidos* found in the centre of Hippolytos' description of the meadow (*Αἰδῶς δὲ ποταμίαισι κηπέυει δρόσοις*, 78). In addition to *aidos*, in the fifteen lines the description of the meadow occupies (73-87), Hippolytos uses seven words and phrases to stress the exclusivity of his relationship with this meadow: *ἀκηράτου λειμῶνος, οὔτε...ἀξιοῖ...οὔτε ἤλθέ πω σίδηρος, ἀκήρατον λειμῶνα, ὅσοις διδακτὸν μηδὲν, τοῖς κακοῖσι δ' οὐ θέμις, χειρὸς εὐσεβοῦς ἄπο, μόνῳ γάρ ἐστι τοῦτ' ἐμοὶ γέρας βροτῶν*. Only those few who are worthy, because they are *eusebeis* and possess *to sophronein* by nature can be allowed to approach it. To the rest of the people the meadow remains unapproachable. In the same

certain types of defective character and attitude naturally generate disastrous consequences for themselves and others. Rather it underlines, through the central action and the recurrent phrase-patterns, the paradoxical and unpredictable way in which these figures' commitment to *sophrosyne* (as they understand this notion) contributes to their mutual destruction”.

⁵⁰⁹ Cairns 1997: 57-58.

⁵¹⁰ See Davies 1991: 284; Campbell 1967: 310-311. Besides, as Swift (2010: 269) rightly point out, his interpretation of the symbolism of the meadow is distorted for an additional reason: “the meadow is virginal, but is not chaste: it represents virginity only insofar as it is about to be lost. Hippolytus, however, envisages his meadow as expressing his closeness to Artemis and his refusal to come to terms with sexual development. The description thus sets up a tension between the traditional model and the way Hippolytus conceptualises his meadow”.

⁵¹¹ Parker 1983: 190.

way Hippolytos regards his chastity as an ideal unrealisable by the ordinary man. His explicit declaration that he has never tasted the gifts of Aphrodite and he never intends to (1002ff.) indicates that not only has he never had a heterosexual experience, but also that he never been in a homoerotic one either. Indeed, homosexuality never becomes an issue in the play, since sexuality is treated solely in relation to heterosexual relations.

Moreover, Hippolytos emphasises the personal and individual aspect of sexuality as his insistence on his uniqueness indicates. But in the social context of his audience, sexuality is not just a personal matter; on the contrary it is closely related to social roles. His abstention viewed against the larger context of the *oikos* is delinquent. His deliberate failure to pass from the stage of the adolescent to that of a man shows that he chooses to abstain from accepting the full rights and responsibilities of an adult male; by rendering himself incapable of expressing his sexuality and consequently fulfilling his duty towards his *oikos*.⁵¹²

Devereux sees him as an adolescent, stuck in a situation one stage before maturity and refusing to grow up. However, this is to ignore the cultural norms underlying his depiction; he is in some respects much closer to a young *parthenos* than an *ephebe*, in other words he is closer to female behavioural patterns than male ones. He is trapped in a situation resembling what Irwin calls with reference to young girls, 'the liminal state of *partheneia*': his status is similar to the state of a Greek *parthenos*, whose body was thought to be unformed before the loss of her virginity and who would gain her status as a complete woman only after childbirth.⁵¹³ At the same time, however, his activities take place in the open, outside the walls of the *oikos*, away from the space of female activity which is traditionally confined within

⁵¹² As mentioned above and see below the section on Hippolytos and the *polis* p. 216f.

⁵¹³ Irwin 2007: 16. The liminality of his status will be further investigated in the section on the man and the *polis* (p. 215f.) in relation to his failure to pass from being an *ephebe* to being an adult male.

the house, and they involve non-female behaviours and objectives. Thus he is physically as well as sexually unable to identify with either male or female behavioural patterns.

Sexual abstinence and cult

Thus far we have treated sexuality as a purely secular issue in terms of individual experience. For Hippolytos, however, abhorrence of sex is inextricably connected with his worship of Artemis. In this section we shall examine the relationship between celibacy and cult.

Abstinence from sex and complete rejection of any kind of engagement in the deeds of Aphrodite is for Hippolytos the ideal way of living for a man like himself who wants to remain pure. In his mind, keeping a safe distance from the female sex and maintaining his chastity places him on a higher level than other people, proves his *sophrosyne* and gains him the privilege of associating (to the extent a mortal can associate with an immortal) with Artemis. To the modern reader, his obsession with chastity does not seem outlandish. Some of the major religions in the world, such as Christianity and Buddhism, project the ascetic ideal as a requirement for those who want to reach the higher levels of communicating with god; male asceticism is part of the religious practices.⁵¹⁴ For fifth-century Athens, however, or even for the heroic era in which the play supposedly takes place, complete abstinence is aberrant for both sexes but, as I intend to show, especially for men, for whom virginity is never a point of anxiety.

⁵¹⁴ Christianity attaches a sense of impurity and shame to sexual activity, with clear restrictions placed on extra-marital sex and sexual behaviour in general (cf. e.g. St Paul *Corinthians* 1.7:9). Especially in the early years of Christianity one can see strong attitudes towards sex and a tendency to rejection which led to the invention of monasticism, a concept unknown to the ancient Greeks. See Foucault 1990: 43; 1985: 14-25; Sissa 2008: 179-181. Besides monasticism, there are in addition a number of chastity movements associated with Christianity or other major religions.

The main reason is that the idea of lifelong chastity for the pious, or even for priests and priestesses, was not part of ancient Greek religion. There were restrictions in place preventing sexual activity from taking place in temples or requiring some sort of purification before entering a temple after having sexual intercourse (both of which seeming to be about ritual cleanliness in order to avoid pollution), or simply asking for a limited period of abstinence before participating in certain religious festivals.⁵¹⁵ Even then, abstinence is not required for everyone participating, but only to those directly involved to the ritual.⁵¹⁶ This does not seem to be linked with morality; rather, because “sex is a private affair...The insulation of sex from the sacred is merely a specialised case of the general principle that sexual activity, like other bodily functions, requires disguise in formal context. The symbolic veil that, by washing, the worshipper sets up between his sexual activity and the gods is an expression of respect, rather like putting on clean clothes before approaching a shrine”.⁵¹⁷ Sometimes we hear of abstinence deriving from the interpretation of oracles and divine signs (e.g. *Med.* 665-681), “but in such cases it is not purification from the taint of sexuality that is desired”.⁵¹⁸ Especially for the abstinence before the Thesmophoria, Parker notes that “everything marks the period of abstinence as abnormal; virgins, who are permanently pure, have no part in the rites”.⁵¹⁹ Certainly, abstinence

⁵¹⁵ Cf. *Lys.* 912-913; Parker 1983: 74-76; Burkert 1985: 98.

⁵¹⁶ For instance, abstinence is attested before the Thesmophoria; it is also required for the women preparing the *archon basileus'* wife for the sacred marriage with Dionysos at the Athenian Anthesteria and for the man performing the sacrifice at the festival of Zeus Polieus on Cos (Parker 1983: 85-86; also Burkert 1985: 237-246 *passim*).

⁵¹⁷ Parker 1983: 76.

⁵¹⁸ Parker 1983: 86.

⁵¹⁹ Parker 1983: 83; Burkert 1985: 242. Although he also notes (1985: 387n.44) that “according to one branch of the tradition, the Lokrian Maidens...remained in the Athena temple at Ilion until their death”.

as a goal in itself as Hippolytos thinks of it is nowhere present as an indication of piety or a requirement for religious practices.⁵²⁰

Dillon notes that priests and priestesses sometimes had to abstain from sex, but this was only for a limited period of time: “a fixed period of chastity was sufficient, when and if required, with the majority of priests and women priests not having to observe such requirements”.⁵²¹ Only the priest of Herakles Misogynes in Phocis had to abstain for a whole year, an unusually long period for ancient Greek cult.⁵²² Especially for women, abstinence was only temporary because of social requirements for their sex; “adult women’s virginity was not prized”,⁵²³ as distinct from their chastity.⁵²⁴ Each cult would have its own requirements, often depending on the status of the deity of the cult (virgin priestesses for virginal deities like Artemis, matrons for matronly goddesses like Demeter), but even then there were many exceptions.⁵²⁵ Turner argues that the similarity between the goddess and the priestess could have had its origin “in a primitive belief that during the performance of religious rites priestesses entered into a state of unity or ‘oneness’ with the deity. The achievement of the state of unity or ‘entheos’ was facilitated by similarities between the deity and the priestess”.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁰ As Burkert says (1987: 108), “sexuality becomes a means for breaking through to some uncommon experience, rather than an end in itself”.

⁵²¹ Dillon 2002: 77.

⁵²² Parker 1983: 84. The restriction apparently refers only to relations with women; see Plut. *Mor.* 403f. *καὶ νομίζεται τὸν ἱερωμένον ἐν τῷ ἐνιαυτῷ γυναικὶ μὴ ὀμιλεῖν.*

⁵²³ Dillon 2002: 106.

⁵²⁴ On remaining a virgin for life see Pomeroy 1997: 171, “life as an unmarried woman was to be avoided [Dem. 45.74; Hyp. 1.13; cf. Isae. 2.7; Lys. 13.45]. Medical texts emphasise the importance of childbearing, and understand the female anatomy as designed expressly for this purpose. Marriage at the time of puberty was essential, for without defloration the menses might remain bottled up inside the body. A woman’s health depended upon having intercourse and producing children at regular intervals. Thus it was necessary to avoid prolonged virginity or widowhood during the childbearing years”. See also King 2002: 89-90; Hippocrates *Peri Parthenion* in Littré.

⁵²⁵ Turner 1983: 174, 176.

⁵²⁶ Turner 1983: 176.

It is important to make clear that in most cases priesthoods were not lifelong appointments. Connelly notes that women typically held office for a short period, such as a year (cf. Pl. *Leg.* 759d), or even just one festival period; in cases where priesthoods were held for life, the priestesses were married and had families.⁵²⁷ This was true for both for male and female priests, who were usually married and who would occasionally go through short periods of abstinence; or they were elderly and for that reason not very sexually active.⁵²⁸ In cases where celibacy was required during office, this did not mean that the priestesses had to be virgins; moreover, these posts were usually occupied by mature or even elderly women past their child-bearing years, who presumably had been married and fulfilled their female duty as appointed by social requirements.⁵²⁹ The example of the Pythia is illuminating in this respect: myth attests that the priestess used to be a young virgin, but this soon changed after a prophetess was raped and the young virgin was replaced by a mature woman over fifty, who from the moment she resumed office had to abstain from sex for the rest of her life, since the post was lifelong.⁵³⁰ Connelly notes that “perpetual chastity seems to have been a more realistic requirement for an elderly servant than for a young woman in her prime”; the same can be seen in Plato and Aristotle who both argue that priests and priestesses should be elderly, recognising that

⁵²⁷ Connelly 2007: 17-18; also Burkert 1985: 96, on the priests not being obliged to live in the temple for the whole course of their office, but rather for small periods of time.

⁵²⁸ Parker 1983: 86-87. For instance, the priest at Eleusis was married, so presumably he only had to abstain for a limited period of time before the mysteries (Parker 1983: 87-88). The priestess of Demeter and the hierophantids at Eleusis were also married, and so was the priestess of Demeter Thesmophoros (Parker 1983: 89).

⁵²⁹ E.g. the priestess of Artemis Hymnia, see Paus. 8.5.12; or the priestess of Artemis at Ekatabana, who only had to abstain while serving the goddess, but did not have to be a virgin (Turner 1983: 206, 210). Also Connelly 2007: 18, who notes that the Vestal virgins in Rome, whose celibacy lasted for thirty years, did not have an equivalent in the Greek world. Parker (1983: 89) speaks of the priestess of Nemesis at Rhamnus who did not have to be a virgin, but had to have “‘finished with sex’ before assuming office” (see *IG II²* 3462).

⁵³⁰ Connelly 2007: 44, 73; Diod. Sic. 16.26.

abstinence might be hard for a younger person.⁵³¹ In general, “many of the highest-ranking priesthoods in Greece were held by married women [e.g. at Eleusis]...Indeed the postmenopausal and widowed women who composed the final age-class of cult service enjoyed enormously active roles”.⁵³²

Young virgins had a variety of roles in cult, but they only served for a limited period of time, like the *kanephoroi*, the basket carriers in religious festivals: the *ergastinai*, the workers who made the peplos of Athena; the *arrhephoroi*, girls of about seven years old who helped out the *ergastinai* with the peplos (after the Panathenaia they lived in the Acropolis for the rest of the year serving the goddess); and the girls responsible for the sacred washing of Athena’s statue.⁵³³ Usually, the young virgins appointed in office “relinquished their roles when the time of marriage came, emphasising that marriage was the role allocated by society to the adolescent woman”.⁵³⁴ Thus, being a *kanephoros* allowed marriageable girls to be seen in public; in the case of the *ergastinai*, their training in wool working could be seen as a training period in adolescence in the same way the ephebes received military training.⁵³⁵

The girls in the service of Artemis at Brauron were very young, between five and ten years old, and the purpose of their office was to prepare themselves for marriage: “the girls were placed under the care of the virgin Artemis, who shepherded them through the dangerous transitional period between childhood and puberty”.⁵³⁶ The same was true for the other

⁵³¹ Connelly 2007: 44; Parker 1983: 87; Pl. *Leg.* 759d; Arist. *Pol.* 1329a27-34.

⁵³² Connelly 2007: 41, 43.

⁵³³ Connelly 2007: 39, 40; Larson 2007: 45; Viitaniemi 1998: 50-54.

⁵³⁴ Dillon 2002: 77.

⁵³⁵ Connelly 2007: 33, 39.

⁵³⁶ Connelly 2007: 32; see also Parker 1983: 92; Viitaniemi 1998: 52; Garland 1990: 190; Sourvinou-Inwood 1991: 75-76, who notes that the ritual must also be related to “the notion of the *parthenos*’ animality...an important aspect of its initiatory function pertains to the ‘domestication’ of the partly wild girl, purging her of animality and thus taming her for marriage...Through her ‘stay with Artemis’ the wild girl was partly domesticated and ready for the marriage which would complete her ‘taming’ – for which, in the circumstances, the

priestesses of Artemis: many were young girls that held office until they got married.⁵³⁷ Parker found only one case in the sources of a “virgin priestess for life”, the priestess of Herakles in Thespiiai who had to remain celibate in memory of the one of the fifty daughters of Thestios who did not consent to have sex with Herakles, and for this he cursed her to remain a virgin forever.⁵³⁸

Requirements for abstinence were even more limited for men. Apart from the short periods of celibacy before important celebrations already mentioned, we only find two instances of prolonged male celibacy. The first is the above-mentioned one-year abstinence of the priest of Herakles Misogynes (a title that stresses the distinctiveness of the cult) and the other is – interestingly – the lifelong abstinence of the priest of Artemis Hymnia in Mantinea.⁵³⁹ The latter post, however, was occupied by a mature man, just as the priestess of Artemis Hymnia was a mature woman, and so abstinence was much more easily achieved. The almost complete absence of this practice reveals clearly Hippolytos’ misguided perception of the religious duties of a pious man; his chastity would not have been considered normal even if he held office as a priest of Artemis, since even in this case complete abstinence was extremely rare, and unattested in Attica.

So despite her own virginal status, Artemis’ cult did not demand chastity from the priests and priestesses.⁵⁴⁰ There is nothing in her cult asking

‘wild marriage’, the pursuit and capture, is an appropriate metaphor...This placing of the pursuit and capture in Artemis’ realm reflects and connotes certain Athenian perceptions of girls and marriage: the girl’s animality, the goddess’ involvement in the transition, and also, through the image of the girl being taken away from the very altar, wrenched from the protection of the goddess, it produces meanings of trauma, the trauma of the removal from a familiar and protective world”.

⁵³⁷ Dillon 2002: 75.

⁵³⁸ Parker 1983: 93; Paus. 9.27.6.

⁵³⁹ Dillon 2002: 75; he also notes that the same lifelong abstinence was exercised by the priestess of the cult.

⁵⁴⁰ With the already noted exception of the priest and priestess of Artemis Hymnia in Mantinea (Dillon 2002: 75).

for the abandonment of sex, or legitimising the choice Hippolytos has made. Moreover, Artemis would receive ceremonial visits to her festival from girls who were about to marry, and she was also the protectress of women during childbirth, an action that presupposes sexual activity and thus makes women unsuitable to become Artemis' companions.⁵⁴¹

Chastity is only one of Artemis' characteristics, but to Hippolytos, whose life is defined by sexual abstinence, it becomes the main characteristic and around it he builds his own version of her cult. The falsity of his perception is further accentuated by the fact that he cannot see that there are common elements shared by Aphrodite and Artemis, both in imagery and in function in cult, such as her role in child-birth, which has obvious connections with Aphrodite.⁵⁴² The two goddesses use similar language in the play.⁵⁴³ Hippolytos himself calls Artemis *ourania*, an epithet traditionally associated with Aphrodite and this "would have registered with the audience as illustrating his unbalanced privileging of Artemis at the expense of Aphrodite that Aphrodite had just spoken of".⁵⁴⁴ Again, his behavior resembles not an adult male, but the status of young virgins serving Artemis, who, however, only held office as an intermediate, transitional phase before marriage and children. In his case, on the other hand, the uncompromising and unconditional rejection of sex indicates that this is a fixed and permanent state.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴¹ On the visits by young brides see e.g. *SEG IX 72.13-16* and Kraemer 2004: 17. On the controversial powers of Artemis see Burkert 1985: 151.

⁵⁴² See Corelis 1976: 52; Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 328.

⁵⁴³ See Dunn 1992: 103.

⁵⁴⁴ Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 327.

⁵⁴⁵ See especially line 87, *τέλος δὲ κάμψαιμι' ὥσπερ ἠρξάμην βίου*.

The goddess and the male hero

It is worth asking if the close relationship with Artemis in some way renders Hippolytos' choice of lifestyle less aberrant. Put simply, does the close association with a female deity remodel in some sense our expectations of male conduct? Does it invite a different construction of masculinity which makes Hippolytos' behaviour, if not normal, then at least within the spectrum of male conduct? His relationship with Artemis is certainly not unique in Greek myth; many great male heroes are described as having formed a special bond with a female deity. An obvious case in point is the relationship between Athena and Odysseus or Athena and Herakles. But in no case do these relationships become exclusive for the hero, and they never prevent other relationships between the hero and his wife/lovers. Rather, these relationships are part of one of the functions of Athena, and Artemis, in ancient Greek cult, that of the *kourotrophic* deity. Both goddesses chose virginity over marriage, which means that they enjoyed a freedom that was unthinkable for a Greek woman.⁵⁴⁶ The difference with the other female deities was that Artemis and Athena did not have lovers, mortal or immortal; instead, they had young men under their protection, but without their relationship having any sexual connotations. In the case of deities such as Artemis or Athena, where physical contact is out of the question because of the virginal status of the goddesses, the relationship with the mortal men is restricted to that between the protectress and the protected. In the case of Artemis, there are a number of cults across Greece, including Attica,

⁵⁴⁶ Pomeroy (1975: 6) argues that Artemis and Athena had in fact many consorts, but the failure to submit to a monogamous relationship "was misinterpreted as virginity by succeeding generations of men who connected loss of virginity only with conventional marriage". Even if Pomeroy's argument is right as far as the beginning of the cult is concerned, references already from epic show that the virginity of Artemis and Athena is undisputable and sexual advances from gods and men are always unsuccessful.

dedicated to the goddess' function as a protectress of young boys and *ephebes*.⁵⁴⁷

Hippolytos' special bond with the goddess is therefore not unparalleled, at least in principle. What is unusual in his case is the intensity with which he experiences this bond and the hyperbole characterising his expression of piety towards Artemis. For the *ephebes*, their dedications to Artemis' cult are just another obligation they need to fulfill to the goddess as part of their process of maturation.⁵⁴⁸ In the case of Odysseus and Herakles, their relationship with the goddess offers support and protection only, but it does not function as an alternative to their sexual activity, despite the fact that their protectress is also a virginal goddess. Myth gives to both heroes wives, and in addition a number of erotic partners: Odysseus' relationships in the *Odyssey* include not just his wife but also Kalypso and Kirke, whereas for Herakles explicit erotic relationships are still more prominent; he is a central figure in comedy, where his insatiable sexual appetite is a recurrent *topos*.⁵⁴⁹ But, for Hippolytos, the relationship with the goddess functions as a substitute for sexual activity, which it reflects in its emotional intensity. He fails to grasp, or he simply refuses to recognise, the diversity of Artemis' cult.⁵⁵⁰ His narrow understanding of what a relationship with Artemis means leads him to choose only one aspect of the goddess and turn it into an absolute requirement. He similarly fails to recognise that this relationship

⁵⁴⁷ Irwin 2007: 15 and see the section on Hippolytos and the *polis* p. 215f. Also Marinatos 2000: 92.

⁵⁴⁸ The existence of *ephebeia* as an organised system of maturation in the fifth century has been doubted (see e.g. Wilamowitz 1893: 193f.), since the words *ephebe* and *ephebeia* appear for the first time in late fourth century. However, Bowie 1993: 50-51 argues plausibly that "there is certain amount of evidence to suggest that we would not be wrong to talk of some kind of *ephebeia* in Aristophanes' time", including some training in hoplite tactics and a ceremony for participation in demes; besides, "*dokimasia* of the youths is datable to the fifth century" (referring to MacDowell 1971: 210 on *Vesp.* 578 and Rhodes 1981: 497-503 on *Ath. Pol.* 42.1-2).

⁵⁴⁹ See above, p. 74.

⁵⁵⁰ See p. 205f. on Hippolytos' piety.

can never have the genuine closeness based on equality which characterises the relationship between two mortals. This will become plain at the end of the play. Despite the special bond between Hippolytos and Artemis, she will not try to save him from destruction, whereas a human companion would have done anything possible to prevent it from happening. Artemis recognises her sister's right to demand what is due to her and declares her powerlessness to stand in her way, projecting it as a rule among gods: *θεοῖσι δ' ὧδ' ἔχει νόμος / οὐδείς ἀπαντᾶν βούλεται προθυμία / τῆ τοῦ θέλοντος, ἀλλ' ἀφιστάμεσθ' ἀεί. / ἐπεί, σάφ' ἴσθι, Ζῆνα μὴ φοβουμένη / οὐκ ἄν ποτ' ἦλθον ἐς τόδ' αἰσχύνης ἐγὼ / ὥστ' ἄνδρα πάντων φίλτατον βροτῶν ἐμοὶ / θανεῖν ἐᾶσαι* (1328-1334). The only thing she can do is try and make things right afterwards and to take revenge for the destruction of her protégé by punishing one of Aphrodite's protégés in return (1416-1422).⁵⁵¹

His bitter outburst against the female sex in 616ff. reveals that his abstinence is related to and parallels his ideas concerning women, which seem to have merged with his interpretation of Artemis' cult. The part of Artemis' mythology where she is presented as the virginal goddess hunting in the wild with her companions offers him the ideal frame to explain his choice of life. The problem is, of course, that in myth all of Artemis' hunting companions are female, who can only remain in her entourage as long as they keep their chastity. The cautionary tale of Kallisto, who succumbed to Zeus and was for that punished fiercely by Artemis' arrows, proves it.⁵⁵² The goddess herself, like her sister Athena, refused marriage and never succumbed to a suitor. And she would punish fiercely those men who dared to see her naked. There are, however, no references to men enjoying this

⁵⁵¹ See Knox 1968: 107, "his privileged association with Artemis made him not a man to be envied but a pitiful victim and all the goddess can do for him is promise to kill another human being to avenge him".

⁵⁵² Devereux 1985: 23. On Kallisto see Burkert 1985: 150-151; Irwin 2007: 15; Apollod. *Libr.* 3.8.2.

degree of intimacy with Artemis; this is a female-only *thiasos* and Hippolytos' case is unique, both in the sense that he defines himself as a follower of Artemis (*σὺ καὶ ξύνειμι*, 85) and that he chooses to remain chaste until he dies (*τέλος δὲ κάμψαιμ' ὥσπερ ἠρξάμην βίου*, 87). This means that if he wants to be part of Artemis' entourage he has to adopt the part of the female, since there is no equivalent male deity.⁵⁵³

It is clear that Hippolytos' abstinence can find explanation neither in cult, nor in mythological precedents, nor in social practice. By renouncing sexual activity, he actually renounces a large part of the male identity. In theory he is at liberty to choose to abstain. But in doing so, he negates a number of features central to maleness: being a man automatically presupposes a number of duties and responsibilities. These are often contradictory, and men struggle to meet them all, but they cannot ignore any of them as this automatically implies that they are losing a part of what it means to be a man.

Piety and masculinity Hippolytos' misguided exclusivity

Hippolytos' first words when he enters the stage are dedicated to Artemis: *ἔπεσθ' ἄδοντες ἔπεσθε / τὰν Διὸς οὐρανίαν / Ἄρτεμιν, ἃ μελόμεσθα* (58-60); this introduction epitomises the way he perceives himself, as a pious follower of the goddess. I have already shown the deviation of his behaviour from official cult practice. I now widen the discussion to address the place of religion more generally in male life. Piety is a quality expected of all human beings, and is therefore in many respects gender-free. This does not mean, however, that it has no gender connotations; it is these connotations which I will explore in what follows. I

⁵⁵³ Pomeroy 1975: 5.

hope to show that Hippolytos' notion of piety, while deviating from ungendered norms, also shows features which make it particularly disturbing when viewed against the socially constructed norms of male attitudes to religion.

The problem with Hippolytos' piety is not only the hyperbole in his devotion for Artemis, but its exclusivity as well. In a polytheistic system like this, favouritism of one god over another one is to some degree inescapable (and this is prominent in civic religion, where each city favours its patron deity more than the rest of the pantheon, like e.g. Athens and Athena).⁵⁵⁴ Nevertheless, civic religion finds a way to favour certain gods without excluding others. At the same time, in a system such as this where multiple gods have diverse roles, it is impossible not to display multiple devotions linked with the different aspects of a man's life, such as birth, procreation, death, war etc. Cautionary myths about people who neglect to give a god what is due to him or her can be found everywhere in ancient Greek literature (for instance in the story about Eris and the judgment of Paris, or the reason for Admetos' fate to die young).⁵⁵⁵ Hippolytos falls into that fault, and despite his constant claims to piety, he commits an unforgivable sin against Aphrodite, which he moreover fails to realise or admit. To all the other characters of the play, except for Artemis, it is clear and is raised as an issue for different reasons. For Aphrodite, it is the reason she will lead him to his destruction, not out of jealousy because he prefers Artemis over her, as she explicitly states (20), but because he purposely refuses to give her what is due to her (21) and calls her *κακίστην δαιμόνων* (13). In the servant's simple perception of the divine, men need to honour each god and selectivity is not

⁵⁵⁴ Garland 1992: 3. On polytheism as an "open system" see Burkert 1985: 176.

⁵⁵⁵ See Dover 1974: 247, "it was possible to offend gods directly and immediately, e.g. by desecration of their sanctuaries, by violation of what were believed to be the divinely ordained rules of their cults and festivals (cf. Ar. *Thesm.* 672ff.), by omitting to perform a customary rite, or by braking a vow. One might offend them also by boasts, threats or insults..."

an option (107, 114-116). In his simplicity he expresses the reason why the Greeks saw the need to worship such contradictory deities, which is no other than the inherent contradictions of human life and the sheer diversity of demands, needs and experiences, projected in such contradicting divine forces as Artemis and Aphrodite.⁵⁵⁶ This is why he tries, albeit unsuccessfully, to ease the damage done by Hippolytos' arrogant words, first by trying to reason with him (88ff.) and then by praying to Aphrodite to forgive him, attributing his dismissive behaviour to youthful arrogance (114-120). Arrogance together with impulsiveness and lack of self-control are often used as an excuse for young men in different sources.⁵⁵⁷ The case of Hippolytos seems particularly ironic, as he prides himself on being a complete opposite of other young men, both for his self-control and his narrow and limited conception of *sophrosyne*;⁵⁵⁸ yet it is demonstrated at the end that the excess of both leads to the same result as the complete lack of these qualities commonly attributed to young men of his age. It is all a result of his one-dimensional perception of things. To him, everything is good or bad, and there are no intermediate stages.⁵⁵⁹ Had he been more flexible in his thinking and given Aphrodite her due, he would have escaped his fate. But the way things stand now, he has to be punished and serve as a reminder that "no one may with impunity refuse the power of Aphrodite, not even the Amazon's child and the worshipper of Artemis".⁵⁶⁰

Hippolytos prides himself on being the most pious of all men. And yet he falls into impiety, by refusing honour to a goddess. The idea of the

⁵⁵⁶ See Garland 1992: 3. Also Hartigan 1991: 40, "the chaste divinity does not represent the totality of human life and thus to worship her alone stunts and limits a mortal's potential".

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Pheidippides in *Nub.*; Dem. 54.14; Eur. *Supp.* 232-7; Thuc. 2.8, 6.12-13; Dover 1974: 102-106.

⁵⁵⁸ Which, as already said, he perceives solely in terms of sexuality, failing to acknowledge the semantic range of the word (see the discussion about *sophrosyne* p. 49f.).

⁵⁵⁹ Mills 2002: 65, "for him it is all or nothing, and in the ambiguity-filled world of the play, human beings cannot make such stark choices and live successfully".

⁵⁶⁰ Zeitlin 1985: 54.

theomachos as seen later in the *Bacchai* appears already in the *Hippolytos*. Pentheus rejects Dionysos as a false god, a foreigner, someone that makes women give in to their passions under the false pretences of piety. Hippolytos' perception of Aphrodite is similar and he makes it explicit from the moment he appears on stage: Aphrodite encourages lust and lack of self-control, therefore she is a base goddess and one that does not deserve the respect of the most pious of men (*κακίστην δαιμόνων*, 13; *οὐδεὶς μ' ἀρέσκει νυκτὶ θαυμαστός θεῶν*, 106). This perception of Aphrodite is extremely selective, ignoring both the pleasure of sex and also the outcome of sexual unions, since this is the only way of reproduction (as Hippolytos himself admits in 616ff.). Like Pentheus, he ends up dead because of a false perception of piety and a failure to recognise the need for a man to give every god his or her due respect.

The most explicit rejection of Hippolytos' narrow exclusivity comes from his father in their *agon* (902ff.). This bitter conflict between father and son resembles the one between Admetos and his father in the *Alkestis*.⁵⁶¹ Theseus states explicitly what the Nurse, the Old Servant and Phaidra merely touch on: in a few lines, he points to the hyperbole of Hippolytos' much-vaunted chastity and piety: *σὺ δὴ θεοῖσιν ὡς περισσὸς ὦν ἀνὴρ / ξύνει; σὺ σώφρων καὶ κακῶν ἀκήρατος;* (949-950). And although he is wrong about the first part, since Hippolytos still remains chaste despite Phaidra's false accusations, the second part correctly targets his piety and deconstructs it. In lines 952-955 Theseus goes still further and mocks him openly, calling his 'religion' Orphism, attributing to Hippolytos the same hypocrisy of which the Orphics were accused.⁵⁶²

⁵⁶¹ Winnington-Ingram 2003: 214 notes the total lack of communication between the two due to their unbridgeable differences in character.

⁵⁶² See Barrett 1964: 342-344 on lines 952-955.

There is much controversy concerning the doctrines of Orphism, a reflection of our ignorance. But as Dodds observed, there are three doctrines we can attribute to the Orphics with some safety, that the body is prison of the soul, the practice of vegetarianism, and the doctrine that inherited sin needs to be washed away with rituals.⁵⁶³ Many Orphic doctrines, including vegetarianism and belief in reincarnation, were shared with the Pythagoreans, and the distinction between the two cults is not clear. Empedokles (fr. 117), who shows some affinities with Orphic texts and sources, explains vegetarianism in the following way: “the beast you kill for food may be the dwelling-place of a human soul or self”, but probably it was connected with the “ancient horror of spilt blood”.⁵⁶⁴ Orphics in order to achieve salvation had to follow what Plato (*Leg.* 782c) calls βίος Ὀρφικός, which consisted in a series of rules, such as abstinence from meat and eggs and burial in linen, and insistence on achieving purity through expiation of guilt, as can be seen in the gold Orphic tablets discovered in tombs.⁵⁶⁵

Certainly, some elements, such as exclusivity (though for very different reasons) and the ascetic ideal are similar to Hippolytos’ way of living: “asceticism appears as an important feature, the result of a mental attitude of contempt for the body, which in Orphic eyes was a mere hindrance to the soul in its search for God”.⁵⁶⁶ Orphism pursued purity and cleanliness of the soul, but of a completely different kind from that which Hippolytos was trying to pursue. Moreover, one of the main doctrines of Orphism was the preservation of life and abstinence from meat.⁵⁶⁷ Clearly Hippolytos, who spends his time in the woods hunting, following the

⁵⁶³ Dodds 1951: 149. See also West 1983: 21-22 on references to Orphism in Pl. *Resp.* 364e-365a, cf. 364b-c, 366a-b; *Cra.* 400c; *Phd.* 62b; cf. Edmonds 2004: 44, 69.

⁵⁶⁴ Dodds 1951: 154; Parker 1983: 143; *OF* 292; Pl. *Leg.* 872c-873e. The fear of spilt blood is clearly seen in the insistence on cleansing rituals for murderers before they are allowed to rejoin society (cf. *IT* 1161-1180, *HF* 1199-1201, 1399 etc.).

⁵⁶⁵ Parker 1983: 300, 302.

⁵⁶⁶ Guthrie 1952: 206.

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. Pl. *Leg.* 782c (although Parker 1983: 299n.93 does not consider it as sufficient proof).

example of Artemis, and who is presented as enjoying a feast with his friends (108-110), and presumably not a vegetarian one, has nothing to do with Orphism.

The biggest difference, however, between him and the Orphics is the attitude of the latter concerning sexual activity. The Orphic theogony and the divine descent Orphics claim from Earth and Ouranos can only be achieved with the sexual union of these two archetypal figures.⁵⁶⁸ Moreover, Orphic cosmogonies speak of generations of gods succeeding one another and “one account specifies reproduction and sexuality as the prime cosmogonic factor...Throughout all the Orphic materials, the theme of sexuality is a recurrent and even constant motif. Indeed, one may say even that sexuality was the theme linking the various items which comprise the matrix that was Orphism”.⁵⁶⁹ Some degree of sexual restraint seems to have been imposed on the followers of Orphism, and Parker notes that “there are hints, suggestive though not conclusive, that Orphism in particular was hostile to sexuality, or at least to the influence of the female upon the male”.⁵⁷⁰ But there is no indication that Orphism promoted complete abstinence. It was Pythagoreanism that adopted the restrictions on sexual activity as expressed by the Orphics and took them to the extreme by turning them into complete abstinence as a requirement for achieving salvation.⁵⁷¹

Despite the many differences between Hippolytos and the Orphics, he shares with them an ascetic ideal which he takes to the extreme. That, and insistence on exclusivity, in his case expressed most explicitly in the passage about the meadow of Artemis. Orphism was not a mainstream cult and Theseus’ anachronistic association of his son with Orphic beliefs and

⁵⁶⁸ On the divine descent see Cosi 2000: 156. For Orphic theogonies see West 1983.

⁵⁶⁹ Alderink 1981: 81, 94.

⁵⁷⁰ Parker 1983: 301.

⁵⁷¹ Dodds 1951: 154-155; Parker 1983: 297.

practices reflects the hyperbolic elitism of his son rather than any real connection with the Orphics.

I return in the following section to Hippolytos' individualism; here I wish to focus on Theseus' accusations from another angle. Anachronistic and inaccurate as it is, Theseus' insult is in one sense illuminating, in highlighting Hippolytos' passionate and exclusive adherence to a religious allegiance which marginalises him from the city. This connection of Hippolytos with a cult that distanced itself from official religion needs to be seen against the background of more general perceptions of marginalised cults in Athens. In their majority, the new cults introduced in the fifth century were associated with women.⁵⁷² There are a number of areas where we can see cultic activity existing on the margins of society, which can excite both ridicule and anxiety, and where our sources tend to stress the connection with the female, such as the maenads, women followers of Pythagoreanism, Sabazios and Adonis, who were all marginalised and often ridiculed.⁵⁷³ The obvious example is Pentheus' contempt for the women in his kingdom following the impostor of the east, as he rudely calls Dionysos. In the case of the Orphic golden tablets, a large number has been found in the graves of women, and it has been suggested that this could be considered as an indication that perhaps the "religious circles from which these tablets came were exclusive to women or were particularly appealing to women marginalised in a male-dominated society".⁵⁷⁴ Participation in these cults might have offered an outlet to women, whose recognised public social role was very restricted. The emotionalism to which women were in general thought to be subject seems to have extended to their relationship with the divine, marginalised or not; a feature neatly encapsulated in the behaviour of Sostratos' mother in

⁵⁷² Cf. Dillon 2002: 2-3. Parker (1996: 198) on the contrary argues that our evidence is not conclusive as to whether women were the main recipients of the new cults.

⁵⁷³ See Dillon 2002: 3.

⁵⁷⁴ Edmonds 2004: 66.

Dyskolos (260-263): μέλλουσα δ' ἡ μήτηρ θεῶν θύειν τινί – / οὐκ οἶδ' ὅτω – ποεῖ δὲ τοῦθ' ὁσημέραι, / περιέρχεται θύουσα τὸν δῆμον κύκλω / ἅπαντ' . This gives the tone for the popular perception of the female character.⁵⁷⁵

In contrast, the way in which our sources represent the relation of men to religion lacks this element of emotionalism. The emphasis is more on civic and family duties and identity. Men perform sacrifices and participate in religious ceremonies; they become priests of almost all deities of the Greek pantheon. The process of initiation of a young Athenian into adulthood included acceptance into one of the phratries, each of which chose a god as a protector.⁵⁷⁶ The divine was present in all expressions of life, but this relationship with the divine was not as intense and certainly not as exclusive as Hippolytos' with Artemis. Thus the words of the servant in front of Aphrodite's statue reveal a strong awareness of propriety towards a god, not the hyperbolic passion characteristic of Hippolytos' worship for Artemis, which seems to resemble more female than male practice.

The emphasis falls more on following prescribed ritual and of course on keeping the aforementioned balance between different aspects of cult and different gods.⁵⁷⁷ Parker, referring to Durkheim, notes that the stress was very much on the social aspect of religion: "even the philosophers (when not thinking theologically) constantly see religious practice as a medium of association not between man and god but between man and

⁵⁷⁵ See Gomme and Sandbach 1973: 178 on Men. *Dys.* 260 and female excessive piety/superstition. Superstition is not specifically gendered, but it must have been more easily accepted as a female characteristic, in accordance with all the other stereotypes about women. See the particular censure it attracts in the case of Nikias in Thuc. 7.50 (and Hornblower 2008: 642-644 on 7.50.3-4), where the use of the word ἄγαν alludes to his excessive piety and attachment to religious practices. On excessive piety and superstition as a negative result see Parker 2005: 123n.31, where he also speaks about the development of the term and the idea of excess in religion in the sources. Cf. also Men. *Theophoroumene*, which appears to be about a woman pretending to be possessed (another female characteristic according to popular ideology; see Padel 1983: 11). Clearly, in the case of Hippolytos there is no reference to superstition, but rather to excessive piety.

⁵⁷⁶ Parker 1996: 104-106.

⁵⁷⁷ On the performative character of religion see Jameson 1999: 322-323.

man".⁵⁷⁸ This is not to argue that the sacred aspect of religion was not deemed important, but rather that the approach to religion placed importance on the social function of religion in civic life rather than on any spiritual, emotional or private aspect.

Hippolytos fails to keep this balance, by rejecting the life of the *polis* altogether.⁵⁷⁹ In a sense, this rejection and his belief that he belongs to a small exclusive group who distance themselves from civic life, and who are worthy of association with Artemis, has much in common with the elitism of the Orphic.⁵⁸⁰ As Edmonds observes, "the Orphic life is a rejection of the ordinary way of living governed by the customs and hierarchies of the polis society in favour of living in accordance with the ideal of the golden age, free from violence and bloodshed".⁵⁸¹ The implications of this doctrine went beyond dietary restrictions; they also excluded the Orphic from certain aspects of the life of the *polis*. It was almost impossible to be an Orphic and be a fully functioning member of the *polis*, since the restrictions on the shedding of blood automatically excluded the Orphic from public sacrifices, which was a major element of civic life. Orphics seem to have welcomed this exclusivity, translated into distance from the *polis*: "the concern with purity was characteristic of the religious movements that arose as a counterculture to the mainstream polis life and religion. The claim to superior status by these marginal groups on the grounds of the purity of their life served to compensate for their unsatisfactory status within the social order".⁵⁸² Though

⁵⁷⁸ Parker 1996: 1-2 referring to Durkheim 1976.

⁵⁷⁹ See following section "A man's duty towards the *polis*" p. 215f.

⁵⁸⁰ On the elitism of the Orphics see Watmough 1934: 60, "at Athens, where society fell into two main classes, οἱ φιλόσοφοι and οἱ πολλοί, 'Orphism' took the form either of vague, ascetic and mystical monotheism on the one hand; or a degraded, quasi-magical charlatany on the other...Though 'Orphism' may have been independent of the political structure, it was clearly not independent of the sociological background of the civic communities".

⁵⁸¹ Edmonds 2004: 44; cf. Pl. *Leg.* 782c.

⁵⁸² Edmonds 2004: 69-70. 'Unsatisfactory' in the sense that their beliefs prevented them from participating in those aspects of the civic life requiring for instance bloodshed, such as public sacrifices, eating meat, or warfare.

all that is said above applies to both sexes, it is the male with his multiplicity of group memberships within the polis, all with cult activity attached to them, who is more visibly affected by allegiance to cult activity which effectively cuts him off from the religion of the polis.

The only character in the play who endorses Hippolytos' exclusivity and selective approach to her cult is Artemis herself. And although the second half of Wildberg's statement that Artemis' appearance at the end of the play "functions like a vindication of Hippolytos, not only of his innocence with regard to Phaidra's accusation, but also of his whole personality and being" implies an unreservedly sympathetic reaction to Hippolytos that cannot be easily accepted, nevertheless the support from a goddess shows that his excessive devotion found some response in the divine sphere.⁵⁸³ This seems appropriate in the world of the gods, which in the context of this play appears to be absolute in the sense that the gods espouse extremes and pursue their will without any restraint or nuance. Yet his behaviour, when measured from a human perspective and in terms of human values, roles and relationships, remains deficient; and that is ultimately what matters, since it is in the human world that people must live. It is indicative that even Artemis, although speaking in the same hyperbolic way as Hippolytos about his purity and his piety (1307-1309), and failing to recognise his hyperbole (*τὸ δ' εὐγενές σε τῶν φρενῶν ἀπώλεσεν*, 1390), will not try to stop Aphrodite from punishing Hippolytos.

The argument here is again not that Hippolytos is in any sense feminised but that at the level of phenomenology his religious deviation is made more extreme, and its practical implications more pronounced, when viewed from the perspective of gender expectations.

⁵⁸³ Wildberg 2000: 248.

A man's duty towards the *polis*

Thus far we have viewed Hippolytos' behaviour either from a purely personal or from a religious perspective. But his religious elitism is part of a larger elitist behaviour which is at odds with the civic and domestic life of the adult male, including marriage and procreation as a civic duty, participation in the democratic assembly and generally acting for the benefit of the city. As Michelini notes, the activities he engages with resemble the young aristocrats in Socrates' circle: "Hippolytos is devoted to the traditional standards and activities, in his case hunting and gymnastics, of the gentleman (*kalos kagathos*). Like them, he is exclusive and snobbish, on both moral and political grounds".⁵⁸⁴

This elitism, part of his rejection of sex and official cult worship, is the elitism of withdrawal. It places him against the rest of society, in the same way that his exclusive allegiance to Artemis places him against normal patterns of piety. The play is highly political in more than one dimension. We get a scene between Hippolytos and Theseus demonstrating close affinities with a democratic trial; and, through Hippolytos' celibacy, problematisation of the function of a man within the *polis*, democratic or otherwise. In the context of the *polis*, sex is more than physical activity; it reflects, confirms and rehearses roles and status. A man is a man not only because of his physical characteristics, but also because he fulfils certain duties imposed on him by society. Politics like war is a performative process in classical Athens; that is, both are defined and constantly reinforced by observed action. Both males and females have duties within the city, but the civic demands on women are far more limited. For men in the democracy, with its emphasis on the active male citizenry, high and constant

⁵⁸⁴ Michelini 1987: 307.

participation is demanded, if he is to perform his function in the state. Halperin rightly stresses the fact that Athenian democracy was more than just a political system; it was also a system of sex and gender. Sexual roles were clearly attributed which created a very specific ideal of masculine behaviour, further accentuated by constructing male identity as the opposite of women, slaves and foreigners: "it is only within these cross-cutting fields of gender, sex, and status that the meaning of citizenship in classical Athens appears in all its ideological complexity".⁵⁸⁵ As Parker says, referring to Theonoe in *Helen*, "withdrawal from the sexual structure of society brings with it withdrawal from the social structure".⁵⁸⁶ Sexuality becomes political, since reproduction is critical for the *polis* and the *oikos*, and thus the male identity is determined by the way a man uses his body sexually. Hippolytos' abstinence automatically questions his manliness on a civic level.⁵⁸⁷

Hippolytos and the *polis*

Hippolytos' distance from civic life is encapsulated in his devotion to hunting in the sole company of his few like-minded companions. Just as he focuses myopically on one attribute of Artemis, her virginity, so he focuses on one single aspect of her cult, her kourotrophic function. Though a strong rural dimension to her cult in Athens is undeniable,⁵⁸⁸ in the Athenian context even the dimension of Artemis to which Hippolytos devotes himself

⁵⁸⁵ Halperin 1990: 104.

⁵⁸⁶ Parker 1983: 93.

⁵⁸⁷ This issue is not affected by Hippolytos' status as a *nothos*. For the play not implicating civic status see below p. 223f.

⁵⁸⁸ For a list of the cults of Artemis around Greece see Hadzisteliou-Price 1978 *passim*. The choice of places outside the city seemed appropriate since the goddess was particularly fond of the wild. This, however, does not mean that her worship was confined to the countryside; apparently, around the sixth century her cult was incorporated in the Athenian religious system, and this (although we cannot be certain) could be the time when the temple of Artemis Brauronia was founded on the Acropolis (Parker 1996: 97). She is, nevertheless, rarely the patron of cities.

is very closely connected with the life of the male within the city. She is for instance the patron of the phratry of the *Demokleidai*; but more importantly, she is connected to the preparation of the *ephebe* to become a citizen and a warrior.⁵⁸⁹ Hippolytos is fixated only on her nursing-upbringing function with regard to young males; he spends his time at the borders of the city hunting, just as the *ephebes* would spend time in the various cults of Artemis at the borders of the city as an essential stage of their maturing process.⁵⁹⁰

The problem with this fixation with hunting goes beyond failure in personal development;⁵⁹¹ it is also a political failure. Though the reality may be different, democratic ideology expected every man to be engaged in the life of the polis.⁵⁹² Hunting, on the other hand, takes place physically outside the walls of the city and is in contrast to structured civic life; it is connected with it only in the sense that it is used as a means for preparation of the *ephebe* for the life of the adult hoplite, being associated with initiation rites of the adolescent male.⁵⁹³ Both in archaic and classical Greek city-state, hunting was a masculine activity, a “sport”, which also had “great educational value, particularly in training young soldiers”, who could later use the cunning and the strength needed in the hunt when confronting the enemy.⁵⁹⁴ The ways of fighting for the *ephebe* and the adult *hoplite* are clearly distinguished: the position of the *ephebe* in battle is at the frontier zone, “the *peripolos*, the one

⁵⁸⁹ There is some doubt whether the *Demokleidai* was indeed a phratry, but this is not relevant to the present study (see Parker 1996: 106). The connection of Artemis with the warrior can be seen explicitly in the spectacular thanksgiving sacrifice of five hundred goats she received in 490 after the battle against the Persians in Marathon (see Marinatos 2000: 97).

⁵⁹⁰ On the nursing function see Hadzisteliou-Price 1978: 2.

⁵⁹¹ See above, the section on Hippolytos’ chastity 191f.

⁵⁹² Although we know that not every man attended the *ekklesia* (see Hansen 1991: 131-132; Carey 2000: 49-50). Cf. Thucydides’ praise of the active Athenian as opposed to the *apragmon* (2.63ff.; 6.18); see also Carter 1986: 100-101.

⁵⁹³ Barringer 1996: 51; see also Pl. *Leg.* 763b, Xen. *Cyn.* 12.1-5.

⁵⁹⁴ Anderson 1985: 29. For the *ephebe* as a “pre-hoplite” see also Vidal-Naquet 1968: 63. On the differences between hoplite and ephebic ways of fighting see Vidal-Naquet 1968: 55-56; 1981: 159-160; cf. Pl. *Leg.* 822dff. In Homer hunting seems to have been a leisure activity, but Homeric heroes “did not deliberately engage in combat with dangerous beasts except in defense of themselves, their fields, or their flocks” (Anderson 1985: 15).

who centres the city without entering it” and his way of fighting is not the hoplite way of open battle, but that of ambush and cunning.⁵⁹⁵ In addition to its ambiguous relationship with masculine patterns of fighting, it is not a full-time occupation for the male citizen, even for a member of the elite, and is certainly not used to define a man’s identity in the way Hippolytos does.⁵⁹⁶ Hippolytos seems to be trapped in a state of liminality in relation to the transition from *ephebe* to adult male citizen, in a way which parallels and replicates his approximation to the state of a *parthenos* in refusing to reach sexual maturity as a male.⁵⁹⁷ Physically he has reached the age of the adult man, but by refusing to advance from the stage of the *ephebe* hunter he remains distant from the life of the *polis*, unable to become a fully-functioning male member.⁵⁹⁸

As Gregory notes, “his preference for Artemis implies a refusal to acknowledge himself as a member of the human community”.⁵⁹⁹ His actions indicate that he wishes to be considered different from other men, to the extent that his words and actions blur the boundaries between divine and human.⁶⁰⁰ This becomes even more prominent when compared to the way Aphrodite is presented. As Kovacs notes, “Aphrodite is made to appear all too human, while Hippolytos approaches the divine”.⁶⁰¹ His enmity to Aphrodite is strange: only a god can be an enemy to another god.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁵ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1981: 175.

⁵⁹⁶ The same applies to mythical heroes. Hippolytos’ devotion to hunting stands in sharp antithesis with every other male hero, for whom hunting was for leisure and not a full time activity. As Devereux (1985: 21) points out, “except for Herakles, Greek myth is generally little concerned with male hunters. Some of the most famous mythical hunters were women” (the most famous example being Atalanta, see Barringer 1996).

⁵⁹⁷ See above p. 194.

⁵⁹⁸ Cf. Mitchell-Boyask 1999: 59-60, “the play shows a breakdown of social ritual where Hippolytos functions as an ‘anti-ephebe’ whose refusal to leave adolescence endangers the city”.

⁵⁹⁹ Gregory 1991: 57.

⁶⁰⁰ See Blomquist 1982: 413.

⁶⁰¹ Kovacs 1987: 32.

⁶⁰² Blomquist 1982: 409.

Hippolytos will approach human society only at the moment of his death, when he is finally able to put himself in the place of his father and feel his grief. He is ultimately able to forgive his father and release him from the blood guilt before he dies, unlike the eternal cycle of revenge that seems to be set in motion in the divine sphere, with Artemis vowing that she is going to kill one of Aphrodite's protégés (1420-1422).⁶⁰³

Hippolytos' isolation, his choice of standing apart from the crowd, choosing the wild instead of civilised society (85-86) and dissociating himself from the civic environment physically as well as emotionally, finds some analogies in the careers of other heroes, who nevertheless indisputably demonstrate masculine virtues. Herakles, for instance, with his way of life, is an extremely isolated figure. Like Hippolytos, he is more at home in the wild and when brought into civilised society he is a stranger, and this often has catastrophic results. In *Herakles*, the strong domestic aspect of the hero only reveals how awkward his presence in the house is, which ultimately proves to be catastrophic.⁶⁰⁴ The same thing happens to Hippolytos: when brought away from the wild, his presence in an environment where he feels a stranger starts a sequence of events that lead to his, as well as Phaidra's, destruction.

However, the main difference between Hippolytos and Herakles is that the latter's isolation is completely devoid of selfishness and that he is considered as the model of masculinity by every other male hero. Herakles' journeys and labours have the ultimate goal of helping other people by demonstrating courage and fearlessness. Hippolytos' isolation, on the other hand, deviates from the model of male behaviour. He is completely self-centered: his anti-civilised behaviour is a personal choice deriving from his

⁶⁰³ West 1970: 40-41. Also Winnington-Ingram 2003: 217, "human beings can at least forgive one another, even if the gods cannot forgive". Cf. Knox 1968: 113-114.

⁶⁰⁴ See Herakles chapter p. 71f.

self-perception as superior in *sophrosyne* compared to the rest of human society. From this point of view, he is closer to the isolation of Sophocles' Aias, the hero who believes he has been wronged because his fellow Greeks failed to acknowledge his superiority over the other heroes. Aias' isolation is equally self-centered, since he chooses to distance himself from a society that he thinks cannot understand him; nevertheless his maleness is indisputable since he is sticking to a heroic code of male honour, despite the fact that his perception of honour belongs to an older era.

The kind of distance Hippolytos has chosen originates from an elitist behaviour which is anti-democratic. In the agon with his father, where Theseus confronts his son and accuses him of raping Phaidra, Hippolytos' ideas, emerging from his monologue-response to his father's accusation, are in contrast with democratic ideals and bear striking similarities to aristocratic points of view.⁶⁰⁵ But his distance is more than merely anti-democratic, for it reveals a general distance from civic practices, making him in effect anti-polis.

Hippolytos is the type of adult male condemned in Thucydides' Funeral Oration (Thuc. 2.40): *μόνοι γὰρ τὸν τε μηδὲν τῶνδε [τῶν πολιτικῶν] μετέχοντα οὐκ ἀπράγμονα, ἀλλ' ἀχρεῖον νομίζομεν.*⁶⁰⁶ According to Dover (referring to Hyp. 4.37) "a good (*chrestos*) citizen is described as a man who cares (*frontizein*) for the city's interests and for the *homonoia*, 'harmony', 'like-

⁶⁰⁵ It has been suggested (Strauss 1993: 170-171) that perhaps Euripides used Alkibiades as a model for Hippolytos' character in the sense that they both display qualities such as fondness for horses and haughtiness, as well as the fact that "they each have certain feminine characteristics that make them ambivalent and abnormal characters in Athenian eyes". But the features described are much too generic, rather than a specific allusion to Alkibiades we should perhaps see a wider similarity with certain Athenian aristocratic youths, who viewed democracy with contempt and withdrew from politics (Strauss 1993: 172). On the language used by Hippolytos see Lloyd 1992: 48, pointing out that "this particular proem formula [e.g. his reference to his audience, i.e. Theseus, as ὄχλος 986, 989] is used nowhere else in Euripides. It seems to be especially appropriate to Hippolytos, who is presented in the play as being aristocratic, withdrawn from politics, and preferring the company of the *oligoi*".

⁶⁰⁶ See Blomquist 1982: 414.

mindedness', of the citizens, to such an extent that he is in all circumstances prepared to subordinate his own advantage *vis-à-vis* other citizens to the advantage of the city *vis-à-vis* other cities".⁶⁰⁷ The subordination of individual good to the collective good, and the group effort this suggests are not to be found in Hippolytos' mentality. Moreover, the phrase *σὺν τοῖς ἀρίστοις εὐτυχεῖν ἀεὶ φίλοις* (1018) reveals that not only does he not wish to have any participation in civic life as he ought to as an adult male citizen, but also that he thinks it is more important to lead a life of leisure and pleasure than work for the benefit of the *polis*.⁶⁰⁸ This attitude is not calculated to win the sympathy of the audience in a society which placed a high value on the role of the active citizen and which, as Christ observes, had "developed a range of mechanisms, administrative and legal, to compel citizens to carry out their duties";⁶⁰⁹ this was also a society which espoused the idea of a reciprocal relationship with the city, from which the citizens, by doing their duty, get something in return.⁶¹⁰ It is as if Hippolytos, by renouncing his duties is also renouncing the benefits he might receive from the city as a male citizen, cutting himself off entirely from civic life.

It is important not to overstate the negatives. Not every element of Hippolytos' defense speech is objectionable. Hippolytos' discomfort in speaking before a crowd (*ἐγὼ δ' ἄκομψος εἰς ὄχλον δοῦναι λόγον, / ἐς ἡλικας δὲ κωλίγους σοφώτερος*, 986-987)⁶¹¹ would not necessarily strike an Athenian audience as unsympathetic. Not every male citizen participating in the assembly was a skilled speaker and no doubt some Athenians in the audience might have felt some sympathy with Hippolytos' statement. In addition, within the quasi-forensic context of the encounter with Theseus

⁶⁰⁷ Dover 1974: 296. Dover spends a good deal analysing the difference between the terms *chresimos* and *chrestos*, but this is of no concern for me here.

⁶⁰⁸ See Blomquist 1982: 414.

⁶⁰⁹ Christ 2006: 10.

⁶¹⁰ Christ 2006: 9-10.

⁶¹¹ Resembling Bdelykleon in Ar. *Vesp.* (Strauss 1993: 139).

(994f.), Hippolytos' admission of inexperience in talking in front of a crowd is recognisable as one of the commonplace statements of a defendant in front of a democratic jury; in the courtroom context at least there appears to be a preference for inexperienced speakers, as this meant they were not litigious.⁶¹²

An Athenian audience might also have warmed to his declaration that he has no ambitions for political power.⁶¹³ He thinks that desire for absolute power is foolish, since power corrupts a man (1013-1015).⁶¹⁴ His rejection of monarchical power reflects a common *topos* in literature. His rejection of the life of the tyrant (*πράσσειν τε γὰρ πάρεστι, κίνδυνός τ' ἀπῶν / κρείσσω δίδωσι τῆς τυραννίδος χάριν*, 1019-1020) is an established cliché which finds a close parallel in Pindar's *μέμφομ' αἴσαν τυραννίδων* (*Pyth.* 11.53) and Archilochos' *μεγάλῃς δ' οὐκ ἔρέω τυραννίδος* (1.19W), both referring to the way of living of the tyrant.⁶¹⁵ Euripides' *Ion* (621-633) expresses similar ideas about the corrupt life of the tyrant. Given the continuing Athenian hostility to and anxiety about tyranny in the classical period, the rejection of tyrannical ambition has some appeal.

But even his rejection of tyranny comes filtered through the prism of his exclusive claim to *sophrosyne* (1013), and combined with an equivalent contempt for the masses, as his next words show: *ἔχει δὲ μοῖραν καὶ τόδ'· οἱ γὰρ ἐν σοφοῖς / φαῦλοι παρ' ὄχλῳ μουσικώτεροι λέγειν* (988-989). So, according to him, the public speakers who are appreciated by the masses are often rejected by those who are wise. And since he belongs to the group of

⁶¹² See Mirhady 2004 on elements of trials in the *Hippolytos*, especially in the *agon* between Theseus and Hippolytos. On similarities between legal trials and dramatic productions see Hall 1995.

⁶¹³ Strauss 1993: 172.

⁶¹⁴ Barrett (1964: 353-354) thinks the lines are spurious, whereas Baron (1976: 64-65) accepts them as genuine. Baron could be right since, from the point of view of characterisation, this contempt for civic ambition seems to be in accordance with the rest of Hippolytos' ideas.

⁶¹⁵ Young 1968: 14-20; cf. *Pyth.* 2.50-54. Young, however, notes that the fragmentary nature of the *topos* does not allow us to grasp its full meaning.

men who feel more comfortable speaking to the few, who presumably are much wiser than the mob, he is by implication intellectually superior and consequently chooses to ignore the masses in order to gain appreciation from the people that, according to him, are more capable of judging. He implicitly rejects the civic institution of the democratic assembly and this is one of the instances where the anti-*polis* elements of his way of thinking come to surface. Once more, he separates himself from common people and places himself among the few and the privileged. His socio-political exclusivity mirrors his sexual exclusivity. At the beginning of the tragedy he was the only one worthy to dedicate the garland to Artemis (84); now he is to speak only to his *helikas* and the wise few, not the ignorant mob. He is as unformed in terms of public life as he is in terms of sexuality. This failure to exist within the polis marks his failure to reach a full civic identity, which again amounts to incompleteness as a man.

Obligations of a bastard son to the *oikos*

In the previous section we were concerned mainly with the male as a figure in the larger society. But since life within the *oikos* was equally significant for the construction of male identity and closely related to civic duties, a discussion of Hippolytos' potential roles would be incomplete without a consideration of his relation to the *oikos*. Theoretically, as a young man as well as the son of a king, Hippolytos is automatically faced with a number of issues concerning his place within the *polis* and his father's *oikos*. Hippolytos rejects any kind of association with women, which of course includes marriage and consequently procreation. Producing offspring was both a civic and a private duty; civic because a man ought to produce new

citizens for the sake of the city;⁶¹⁶ and private because it was a man's filial duty to produce heirs for the *oikos* he has inherited from his father, to save it from extinction. Hippolytos seems to acknowledge the need for a man to have children in principle. At the end of his misogynistic speech, where he condemns the entire female sex as a *κίβδηλον κακόν* (616ff.), he expresses the wish that men were able to buy their children from temples instead of having to depend on women for that.⁶¹⁷ The focus is again on his rejection of the physical act of sex, not the product of this act; presumably, therefore, he would have had children if there were an alternative way. The result, however, is the same, and by his behaviour Hippolytos rejects his duty towards his father's *oikos*.

At this point we must face the complex issue of Hippolytos' bastardy. Attitudes towards bastards concerning rights of citizenship and inheritance differ according to time, location and literary genre. In the case of a literary text such as *Hippolytos*, which was performed in fifth-century Athens, but located in an earlier heroic era, historical issues such as this need to be addressed with great care. The question is then the extent to which Hippolytos is obliged to look after an *oikos* where he most probably will not be an heir. Viewed in the context of classical Athens, by being a bastard, he physically comes from outside the *oikos*. But how close his relationship is with this *oikos* or what his privileges were, if any, is hard to decide, since the rights of illegitimate children inside and outside the household varied over the years. First of all, a distinction has to be made between two different

⁶¹⁶ Cf. MacDowell 1978: 86, "in some ancient states financial or other penalties were imposed on a man who did not marry and have children, but it is not certain that this was ever so in Athens".

⁶¹⁷ His perception of women is in sharp antithesis with his father's relationship with them (see p. 181f. on sexuality) and also Theseus' despair when faced with Phaidra's corpse (806ff.). His emotional reaction, with outcries such as 'I am lost without you' and 'the house is empty, the children are orphaned' etc., reminiscent of Admetos' lamentation for Alkestis, show that to Theseus, women were not merely inanimate statues as Hippolytos thinks of them, but vital members of the *oikos*.

kinds of *nothoi*: the children of two Athenian parents born out of wedlock, and the children of marriages with only one Athenian parent. For the first group, we have references already in Homer. They are children of slave-girls or concubines of the great heroes (*Il.* 4.499, 5.69-71, 6.20-24, 11.101-102, 15.333-334, 16.179-181, 16.737-738) and their position within the household is presented as slightly inferior than that of the legitimate children, sometimes dependent on the good will of the father or his heirs, but certainly not completely excluded (*Od.* 14.199-210).⁶¹⁸ The distinction between *gnesios* and *nothos* is very clear in Homer, and the *nothos* would have an established relationship with his father through the use of the patronym; moreover, a man with no legitimate heirs could adopt his illegitimate son to succeed him in the *oikos*, as Menelaus did with Megapenthes (*Od.* 4.10-14).⁶¹⁹ Overall, their status seems to have been more privileged than in sixth- and fifth-century Athens and they are represented more positively; they can even inherit money and marry high-born women.⁶²⁰

Solon in his effort to protect the *oikos* from external threats reduced the rights of bastard children, trying to cut off the *nothos* from the *oikos*. He established that the *nothos* had no obligations towards the father, could only inherit up to one thousand drachmai and had limited claims on the father's estate (see *Isae.* 6.47), and was excluded from the religious observances of the family.⁶²¹

As we move closer to the fifth century *nothoi* seem to be losing in status and privileges. A firm distinction between the two kinds of *nothoi* later became marked after Perikles' citizenship law of 451/450. According to this

⁶¹⁸ Lacey 1968: 103; Patterson 1998: 90.

⁶¹⁹ Lacey 1968: 103; Patterson 1998: 90.

⁶²⁰ Ogden 1996: 21-23.

⁶²¹ Patterson 1998: 90, who also offers an explanation for Solon's legislation: "in this way, the disruptive effects of bastards' claims, and perhaps of concubines as well, were limited, and the Athenian household focused more closely, morally and economically, on the basic relationships of husband/wife and parent/(legitimate) child". Cf. Lacey 1968: 104, 112; Patterson 1981: 16-17.

law, men born from non-Athenian mothers are automatically bastardised.⁶²² There has been much debate among scholars whether Athenian bastards, specifically those bastards who were of two Athenian parents that were not married, were permitted the title of the Athenian citizen. Some, like MacDowell, argue that a man could be a citizen, even if his two citizen parents are not married, on the grounds that a bastard might not have been allowed to join the father's phratry or *genos*, but he could join his deme.⁶²³ Others like Rhodes reject the idea and argue that bastards were not allowed to become citizens.⁶²⁴ It is difficult to give a definite answer to the question, although MacDowell's explanation seems more plausible, since there is no explicit evidence that a bastard did not have rights to his father's deme, despite not being an official member of the *oikos*.⁶²⁵ Fortunately, it is not important for this study that we arrive at a firm conclusion, since *Hippolytos* is not a historical study of Athens.

⁶²² A possible reason is given by Ogden 1996: 66-67, also quoting Humphreys 1974: 94, "aristocratic culture may have been a particular target of the law. Perikles may have disapproved of their cherished *xene*-marriages not only as undermining the purity of the descent group but also as creating 'sympathies and loyalties which were liable to obstruct national policy both towards Athens' subjects and towards her rivals'". During the Peloponnesian war there were some exceptions to the law, but the law was reestablished in 403 to be revoked much later, probably in the second half of the third century (Ogden 1996: 70-77, 81-82).

⁶²³ MacDowell 1976: 88; 1978: 68; Harrison 1968: 63-65.

⁶²⁴ Rhodes 1978: 92, "I should not wish to deny that on occasion a man with no influential or persistent enemy may have succeeded in registering an illegitimate son, both in his phratry and in his deme; but I am not yet persuaded that bastards were entitled to Athenian citizenship". See also Patterson 1981: 11, "the continuation of the individual *oikos* through legitimate male succession was of prime importance to the phratry and the basic rule was that only a legitimate son was a member of the phratry to which his *oikos* belonged".

⁶²⁵ MacDowell 1976: 88, "but it does not necessarily follow from this that an illegitimate son was excluded from his father's deme, and it was enrolment in the deme which constituted admission to the rights of the Athenian citizen. When a speaker (notably the speaker of Dem. 57), claiming the right to be enrolled in a deme, adduces as evidence the fact that he was enrolled in a phratry, that does not show that admission to a deme required *all* the same birth qualifications as admission to a phratry, but only that the birth qualifications required for admission to a deme (Athenian parentage on both sides) were among those required for admission to a phratry, so that previous admission to a phratry was good evidence that one possessed the qualifications required for admission to a deme".

We therefore need to decide which world we are in. Hippolytos was raised away from his father's house, under the care of his grandfather. His status is an issue for everyone in the play. We are reminded of it through the constant allusions to Hippolytos as the *Ἀμαζόνος τόκος* or *παῖς* (10, 351, 581), as well as the references to the Amazon (307, 1082, 1144) explicit or implicit. He is called the son of Theseus only once (520) and Theseus himself will call him *τέκνον* only after he finds out the truth about Phaidra's letter and Hippolytos is dying (1408, 1410, 1446, 1456). So his relation to the *oikos* is very loose and it is not helped by the distance between father and son. Theseus has legitimate male children from Phaidra who would have been entitled to their father's inheritance by fifth-century law and would have been obliged to have sons.⁶²⁶ Hippolytos, by being born out of wedlock and by having a parent who was not an Athenian citizen (which, according to Perikles' citizenship law automatically made him a non-Athenian), was a bastard in two senses and could not claim the throne; consequently he had no obligations towards the *oikos*.⁶²⁷

Nevertheless, there are three instances in the text where Hippolytos is referred to as a potential heir of Theseus. The first is made by the Nurse, who accuses him of having thoughts more appropriate to a legitimate child although being a bastard, and uses this as an incentive for Phaidra not to commit suicide, in order to protect her children's rights in the lineage (308-309). The second is in a similar tone and is made by Theseus, where he anticipates from Hippolytos the false excuse that Phaidra hated him for being a bastard, since he was thus a threat to her legitimate children, and that it was for this reason Hippolytos raped her (962-963). The last one is

⁶²⁶ On the rights of inheritance for bastard sons see MacDowell 1978: 101; Harrison 1968: 68, 148. They both state that bastards were excluded from inheriting their father's property; the only thing a man could do was leave them in his will some money, the amount of which could not exceed a sum specified by law. Cf. p. 225.

⁶²⁷ Besides, although bastards were not members of the *oikos*, we cannot argue safely that they were forbidden to start a new *oikos*.

made by Hippolytos himself, only to be negated by the ironic tone he uses (*ἢ σὸν οἰκήσειν δόμον / ἔγκληρον εὐνήν προσλαβὼν ἐπήλπισα*; 1010-1011) and the dismissal of any civic ambition, as was noted above. Besides, the fact that he talks of marrying Phaidra after his father's death and thus inheriting his throne and estate through an *epikleros* shows that he is perfectly aware of the fact that he does not have any legal rights on the inheritance, and he could inherit only through the widow of the legitimate ruler of the city. This would not have been the only instance in myth of a man ascending on the throne by marrying the wife of a king; the cases of Klytaimnestra and Aigisthos and Oedipus and Iocaste show that this practice is recurrent in myth, without, however, being ever devoid of ambiguity. The problem of succession is already apparent in the *Odyssey*, where the rights of Telemachos on the throne and the rights of the suitors in succeeding Odysseus after marrying Penelope are not as straightforward as they seem.⁶²⁸ And certainly, Klytaimnestra's and Aigisthos' ascension to the throne of Mycenae is constantly attacked in tragedy as usurpation.

Let us now attempt to answer the question of the world in which *Hippolytos* is situated. It is certainly not fifth-century Athens, where all the restrictions imposed on bastards by the 451/450 decree are still very much in use in 428 when the play is performed. It is rather a 'quasi-Homeric' setting; bastards appear to have had more rights in Homer and *Hippolytos* is presented in some sense as a member of Theseus' *oikos* possessing a more flexible status than fifth-century *nothoi*.

⁶²⁸ Halverson (1986) reflects on the status of the Homeric *basileus*. Odysseus was the first in Ithaca because he was the richest than the other inhabitants of Ithaca, which was what Halverson (1986: 128) calls "a manorial society", not an oligarchy or a monarchy, but a place where power was linked to financial prosperity. Launderville (2003: 70-74) also notes the "low level of institutionalisation" of Homeric kingship and the dynamics of power in Ithaca. The issue is of course much broader than this, but here is not the place to reflect on succession issues in epic.

If we accept, as the play seems to suggest, that Hippolytos is an actual or potential member of Theseus' *oikos*, this has implications for his rights within it and, most importantly, for his responsibilities. The dislocation of the relationship with the *oikos* instigated by Hippolytos' deliberate detachment only accentuates his failure in these exclusively and distinctively male rights and responsibilities, leading to his exclusion from the *polis*.

Exile from the *polis*

Apparently Theseus' relationship with his mortal father was much better than his relationship with his son, whom he readily accuses of having aspirations on his inheritance, failing to realise the difference in character between the two of them; this is something he would have done himself, but not Hippolytos. The punishment for Hippolytos' alleged crime by a furious Theseus is double: a curse calling for his death, and banishment from his land. Theseus utters them both before Hippolytos enters the stage (887-897), but he gives the curse first. This may be due to the fact that this is the first time he is using the wishes Poseidon has granted him and he does not know if it going to work.⁶²⁹ But it could also be interpreted as considering banishment a worse punishment than death, since being a member of the society of one's homeland is an essential part of a man's identity. To Hippolytos' face he only speaks of banishment (973ff.). Hippolytos' emotional estrangement from the *oikos* and the *polis*, the first because he is a bastard, the second because of his voluntary isolation, is now materialised by his being physically removed from his homeland. The banishment is both from Athens and Troezen, excluding Hippolytos not only from his rights in

⁶²⁹ Barrett 1964: 334, on lines 887-889.

Theseus' Athenian kingdom, but more importantly, from the place he perceives as his homeland.

Hippolytos' reaction to the banishment is despair (1051ff.). Even if he is rejecting civic life, even if he appears anti-social and underlines that what matters for him above everything else is his 'relationship' with Artemis, losing his country is the worst disaster that can befall him. He does not, however, speak of distress at losing his *polis*. Descriptions of the condition of exiles in other sources focus on the toils and misfortunes that await the banished away from the native land and how life in a foreign land can never be compared with life at one's homeland, no matter how hospitable the new place is.⁶³⁰ In tragedy, famous male exiles like Oedipus, Orestes or Polyneikes refer to their banishment using the word *phygas*, but also *apopolis* and *aptolis*, two words which, through the second part of the compound, *polis*, put the stress on the exile's alienation from his native city.⁶³¹ The Chorus in *Agamemnon* uses *apopolis* when speaking of banishment as an appropriate punishment for Klytaimnestra's crime: ἀπόπολις δ' ἔση / μῖσος ὄβριμον ἀστοῖς (1410-1411). Not only will she be forced to leave the city, she will also become hated by all the citizens, breaking all bonds between her and her native land.

Contrary to other male tragic exiles, who connect their misfortune primarily with their estrangement from their *polis*, Hippolytos focuses more on the things that the banishment brings with it. Banishment means also estrangement from his friends, and the gravity of the reason for his banishment will prevent him from seeking hospitality in a host's house (1066-1067). He is thus deprived of his homeland and the male guest-friendships developed as a safety net when in a foreign country. In particular his relationship with his friends is underlined from the very beginning of the

⁶³⁰ Roisman 1984: 24; also Alkaios 129, 130, 148, 364 L-P; Theognis 783-788; OC 1354-1359.

⁶³¹ Forsdyke 2005: 11; also OT 1000; OC 207, 1292ff., 1357; IT 80, 511, 929, 942, 1064.

play, where it is stressed that he spends all of his time with them rather than in the city, or with women. In 1001 he points out how he has always been loyal and just to both present and absent friends. Now he is condemned to a life of loneliness and a kind of isolation he has not asked for.

The relation with the *oikos* and the *polis*, unmistakably dislocated throughout the course of the tragedy, is reestablished in the last scene. Hippolytos forgives his father for cursing him and Theseus laments the loss of his son, finally establishing a bond between the two. As far as the *polis* is concerned, Hippolytos has failed in all of his masculine civic duties, except for showing respect to his father. But the fact that his death will be felt by everyone in the city, and the establishment of a cult at his tomb, places his death in the realm of public ritual, finally connecting Hippolytos with the rest of the citizens,⁶³² from whom he so consciously distanced himself throughout the play.

Conclusion

There is no evolution in Hippolytos' character, just as there is no evolution in the character of Jason, as we shall see in the next chapter. Hippolytos dies a firm believer in his personal idea that he is the most pious and the purest of men, despite the fact that his destruction was caused exactly by his unwillingness to realise that this inflexible and selective perception of piety was as harmful as a total lack of piety and self-control. Del Corno is right to compare him with Oedipus: like him, Hippolytos is guilty of a crime, but neither crime is intentional; their difference, however,

⁶³² See Segal 1988: 55, who in addition notes that Hippolytos will finally be reconciled with the institution of marriage: "'only one of the citizens' and 'all the citizens' (12 and 1462) frame the definition of Hippolytos as set apart for his special suffering. These terms also frame his problematic relation to the 'city' in which marriage remains, after all, central. The institution of marriage that he has rejected (14, 616ff.) will perpetuate his name in the city (1423-1430)".

is that Oedipus is in a constant quest for the truth and does not pretend to know anything, whereas Hippolytos is absolutely convinced that he and he alone knows what is best.⁶³³ Euripides constructs a male character that fails in every possible aspect of religious, civic and private life. Hippolytos' claims a kind of *sophrosyne* which manifests itself in the most excessive way; he utterly rejects sexual activity which leads to his distance from the *oikos* and the *polis*; and he rejects every practice associated with masculine identity, especially adult males. All this contributes to his liminality and creates an unbridgeable gap between him and male practice – and consequently between him and the rest of society – which can only be restored after his death.

⁶³³ del Corno 2005: 65.

JASON

The final case study is the *Medeia*. The play both is and is not about gender. The relationship between Jason and Medeia is usually seen in gender terms, as a conflict of male versus female. Certainly, Jason exploits ruthlessly the freedoms associated with the male in Greek society; and Medeia conducts her revenge using methods more commonly associated with the female such as deception and manipulation, knowing that the children's murder will hurt Jason exactly because he is a man. But to see the play solely in gender terms is reductive. This is also a play of human versus human and Medeia does not do what she does simply because she is a woman. There are aspects of her behaviour which can be either male or female: excessive revenge, loss of self-control and giving in to one's emotions, although a fifth-century audience would certainly feel more comfortably attributing these to a female dramatic character. In the same way, Jason's betrayal and selfishness cannot be considered to be exclusively male characteristics.

Nevertheless, at the same time the play is also about gender roles and experiences. It is dominated almost entirely by its strong female character, which unavoidably attracts scholarly focus to a large degree. Medeia's revenge lies at the centre of the action, becoming the moving force behind which her relationships with the three major male characters of the play (Kreon, Jason and Aigeus) are formed. As a result, in most studies the focus of scholarly analysis falls more or less exclusively on the character of Medeia and the role of the female, whereas Jason is often considered simply as her "foil".⁶³⁴ The gender role of the male is generally sidelined in favour of the more vibrant (and for all the monstrousness of her crime arguably more sympathetic) representative of the female sex, Medeia. Yet Jason's

⁶³⁴ As Blaiklock (1952: 22) has called him.

derelictions shed as much light on Greek views of the male as Medeia's do on the perception of the female. The final section of the thesis focuses on male roles within the house, i.e. men as husbands and fathers, roles which bring to the fore issues of male obligations towards the *oikos* and its members, and also indirectly issues of male intelligence.

Jason, Medeia and marriage

As mentioned above, Jason's character will be examined, to a large extent, through the lens of duties and responsibilities towards the *oikos* and its members. This, however, immediately confronts us with the question of whether we are dealing with a legitimate marriage or not, which consequently invites questions as to how far can one link this with Athenian practices. This is not merely an antiquarian or legal-historical issue. Nor is it an exercise in what Waldock called 'the documentary fallacy',⁶³⁵ as though Jason and Medeia were real people with a past outside the play which can be researched. Establishing the validity of the marriage is important for any reading of the play, since Jason's obligations and the legitimacy of Medeia's claims upon him are profoundly affected by our view of her status. If Medeia is recognised as the legitimate wife, and not as a concubine, then Jason's behaviour towards her as a husband towards a lawful wife needs to be judged accordingly.

Marriage and the relationship between husband and wife are a central theme in the play (along with the child theme, which will be dealt with later). I will first give an account of Athenian practices in order to provide the historical reality of marriage as experienced by the first audience. I shall then argue against a reading of the dramatic situation which

⁶³⁵ Waldock 1951: 11-24 *passim*.

would simply superimpose the historical context on the play. As we have seen in the previous chapters, a Greek tragedy is not a strictly faithful representation of fifth-century Athens practices; the dramatist is free to focus selectively on certain aspects of contemporary experience, while ignoring others. The intra-dramatic world is not continuous with the world of its audience. Accordingly, we are not necessarily meant to think of Medeia and Jason's marriage as a faithful representation of fifth-century Athenian practices of marriage.

According to Pomeroy, "two steps constitute a marriage: 1) the *engye* ('pledging or promising of the bride'). The bride is not necessarily handed over at this point. She, in fact, is not present, for the *engye* is a private contract between men. 2) The *gamos* ('wedding celebration'). The *gamos* leads directly to *synoikein*".⁶³⁶ Whether or not the *engye* was legally binding and constituted the main part of the marriage is examined in detail by Patterson, but is not of great importance for the present study.⁶³⁷ It is sufficient to note that according to her, the *engye* was a private agreement between two men, requiring no public record or witnesses, and she cites as evidence Dem. 27.17 and 28.15, where we can see that "the *engye* was simply a nonbinding betrothal, which neither created the marital state nor required a formal dissolution".⁶³⁸ There are two useful points to be deduced from all this: first

⁶³⁶ Pomeroy 1997: 177. See also Harrison 1968: 2, "the *engye*...is then a transaction between the bride's father and the bridegroom of which the bride is the object, and we may guess that in its earliest form the transaction involved a putting of something into the hand. *Gamos* as a word had the basic sense of 'pairing' and was used of the physically consummated marriage. The active verb *gamein* is normally used of the man in a fully solemnised union...So a 'married' woman is sometimes called *gamete* as opposed to a "concubine", *pallake*". As far as the term *synoikein* is concerned, Harrison (1968: 2) says that it was used "for the factual cohabitation of a man and a woman" (see Dem. 59.16-17; Lacey 1968: 110).

⁶³⁷ Patterson 1991: 51ff.

⁶³⁸ Patterson 1991: 51-52, where she also says that the conception that *engye* was something more formal derives from the frequent references in oratory, where on the contrary marriage ceremonies are hardly mentioned. Thus she rejects the idea supported by some that "the *engye* was the only formal and legally necessary marriage transaction, but it required the completion of the *gamos* and *synoikein* in order actually to become a valid and legal

that regardless of whether *engye* was legally binding or not, it was an essential part of the wedding without which the marriage could not take place, since “the *engye* was the legal means (*kata nomon*) of establishing that a woman would be the mother of a man’s legitimate heirs – and establishing legitimacy is precisely the concern of claimants to an inheritance”.⁶³⁹ Consequently, “one requirement of *gnesiotes*, whatever that may mean, was being born of a union mediated by an *engye*,” and the expression *gyne engyete* was used as the term for a woman being ‘formally married’.⁶⁴⁰ The second, and no less important point, is that this agreement took place between two men, the father of the bride (or her closest living male relative if he was dead) and her future husband (or his guardian, if he was underage).⁶⁴¹ The bride would have no input in this procedure.⁶⁴²

In fifth-century terms then, Jason and Medeia were in violation of every single procedure: he did not agree the marriage with her father (cf. Pind. *Ol.* 13.53-54 *καὶ τὰν πατρὸς ἀντία Μῆδειαν θεμέναν γάμον ἀντᾶ, / ναῖ σῶτειραν Ἄργοι καὶ προπόλοις*), there was no proper *ekdosis* of the bride by the latter and Medeia was not accompanied by a dowry (which in normal circumstances would have been quite extensive given that she was a

marriage. Athenian marriage, on this view, was formally and legally complete without the presence of a wife, whose entry into the house of her husband occurred ‘when it was mutually convenient’.” Harrison (1968: 6-7) had noted earlier that there is no evidence that there was “any legal action to enforce upon either party the carrying out of the *engye*...Nor is it easy to define the further step which was needed to convert *engye* into full marriage”. We have cases in oratory where the *engye* did not lead to marriage, and there is no evidence for any legal action against either party for not going through with the wedding (Isae. 6.22-24, Dem. 27.17; Lacey 1968: 106). The exception (worth noting for the sake of completeness) is the *epikleros*, who (if her father had not already arranged a marriage through *engye*) in Athens in the classical period was pursued and acquired through the process of *epidikasia* (see Just 1989: 96-97; Harrison 1968: 9-12, 110, 132-133, 158-162).

⁶³⁹ Patterson 1991: 52.

⁶⁴⁰ Harrison 1968: 9.

⁶⁴¹ Pomeroy 1975: 63-64.

⁶⁴² This was of course truer for the upper classes. In the middle and lower classes, where the segregation of the sexes was harder and there were more opportunities for young men and women to be in contact, there was a bigger possibility of marrying the person they had chosen in defiance of the authority of their fathers (see Dover 1974: 211).

princesses).⁶⁴³ Medeia's famous bitter words *ἄς πρῶτα μὲν δεῖ χρημάτων ὑπερβολῆ / πόσιν πρίασθαι δεσπότην τε σώματος / λαβεῖν* (232-234), referring to the custom of presenting the groom with a dowry as 'buying' a husband, is a general comment on – and rejection of – the practice, but it cannot be applied to her own unique case (as she herself admits in 252, *ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ αὐτὸς πρὸς σὲ κάμ' ἤκει λόγος*), where the wedding was decided between the future spouses and the links with the bride's family were broken irretrievably.⁶⁴⁴ Contrary to all this, Medeia fell in love with Jason when he came to Colchis in pursuit of the Golden Fleece (*ἔρωτι θυμὸν ἐκπλαγεῖσ' Ἰάσονος*, 8).⁶⁴⁵ It was her own decision to follow him, leaving everything behind and breaking all bonds with her father and homeland (6-8; cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 4.250, *κλέψεν τε Μήδειαν σὺν αὐ- / τᾶ, τὰν Πελῖαιο φόνον*). It is true that we find other (very rare) instances of women choosing their own husbands in the sources.⁶⁴⁶ Herodotus for instance, speaks of Kallias offering his daughters the extraordinary gift of allowing them to choose their husbands themselves (6.122). The fact that Kallias' gesture deserves mention is evidence that it is the exception.⁶⁴⁷ Apart from that, the difference from Medeia is that the father himself allowed the girls to choose, which presumably means that, after the choice, he, being the father, would take

⁶⁴³ Although the dowry was technically not a legal requirement, absence of a dowry, especially in marriages of high status such as this one, was inconceivable. As Lacey (1968: 108) notes, a man marrying a woman without a dowry meant he was doing her a great honour. Apparently, the dowry was given to the prospective husband in advance during the *engye*, and he was obliged to return it if he did not go through with the wedding (see Dem. 27.17; Harrison 1968: 8). On Medeia's unconventional wedding see e.g. Barlow 1995: 38; Cohn-Haft 1995: 1.

⁶⁴⁴ Vellacott (1975: 109) thinks of it as a manifesto, as if Medeia speaks on behalf of every fifth-century upper-class woman who was presented with very limited choice when it came to matters such as marriage. By relating to every woman's experience, she manages to bring herself closer to the female chorus and manipulate their sympathy towards her. On Medeia's "blame language" see McClure 1999b: 379.

⁶⁴⁵ Jason's feelings towards Medeia and his reasons for marrying her will be dealt with later on, pp. 248-250.

⁶⁴⁶ Lacey 1968: 107.

⁶⁴⁷ The chapter is generally deleted by editors as an interpolation.

care of the arrangements with the future husbands in the traditional way and each girl would ultimately become a *gyne engyete* without alienating herself from the paternal *oikos*. Plutarch's *Kimón* narrates how Kimón's sister, Elpinike, got married of her own free will (4.7) without her brother choosing her husband, but again Kimón agreed with the marriage and the bonds between him and his sister were not broken. Finally, Plutarch notes in his *Moralia* 189c that Peisistratos consented to marry his daughter to Thrasyboulos, who was in love with her. Thus even in these seemingly aberrant cases the consent of the legal guardian is present and moreover, it becomes clear from the way the events are recounted that these were all exceptional circumstances, especially if one takes into account the strict segregation of the sexes practiced in the upper classes that left no room for interaction between the sexes.⁶⁴⁸ Medeia's union with Jason was exceptional.

Equally unconventional by Athenian standards is their separation. Apparently, as Pomeroy notes, divorce was in fact quite frequent and a relatively easy procedure in classical Athens.⁶⁴⁹ Cohn-Haft isolates all the nine cases of divorce mentioned in oratory and gives the four reasons for divorce that emerge: initiated by the husband (*apopempsis*), the wife (*apolepsis*), the wife's father (*aphairesis*) and divorce of an heiress in cases where she was married prior to becoming an *epikleros* (*epidikasia*).⁶⁵⁰ Medeia's case (the only case of divorce in extant tragedy) falls roughly into the first category, as it was Jason that initiated the separation. A man was at liberty to ask for a divorce for any reason; Cohn-Haft notes that "no formalities and no grounds were required for a man to divorce his wife. He need only dismiss

⁶⁴⁸ See lines 209-213.

⁶⁴⁹ Pomeroy 1975: 64, where she also notes that "there was no stigma attached"; this, however, contradicts Medeia's concern in 236-237 (*οὐ γὰρ εὐκλεεῖς ἀπαλλαγὰι / γυναιξίν*) referring to the bad reputation divorce creates for a woman. See also Cohn-Haft 1995: 13, who notes that "a divorced woman was inevitably under suspicion as in some way unworthy".

⁶⁵⁰ Cohn-Haft 1995: 4-5.

her"; in practice, however, "attention was evidently also paid to the effect of the divorce upon the wife in those cases in which no fault was imputed to her".⁶⁵¹ An obvious example of this is the case of the *epikleros*, where it was possible for the man to leave a marriage for a more prosperous one, without this making him a villain and without it being considered outside of normal practice (as we see for instance in Dem. 57.41 and as is arguably the case for Jason's marriage to Glauke).

With the obvious exception of cases of adultery, the husband when asking for a divorce would often make arrangements for the immediate remarriage of his ex-wife.⁶⁵² This would serve as a protective gesture against damaging her reputation and the husband would prove that he did not abandon her because of a fault of her own.⁶⁵³ But even if the husband did not make arrangements, her native family would, especially if she was of child-bearing age, in order to serve the need for offspring of a new *oikos*, but also because of the fear that an unmarried divorcee (or widow) could potentially cause shame to the family.⁶⁵⁴

In all cases of divorce the woman, together with her dowry, would be returned to her father's *oikos* and consequently to the *kyreia* of her father or any other male relative if he was dead.⁶⁵⁵ This is very important because it shows that, although a woman came under the *kyreia* of her husband after her marriage, the male members of her paternal *oikos* would support the woman in a number of situations: the father probably had the right to reclaim his daughter from her husband if he thought fit; a woman wishing to divorce her husband had to do it through her father, who would speak on her behalf in public; in general, a woman's natal *oikos* (that is, her male

⁶⁵¹ Cohn-Haft 1995: 10.

⁶⁵² See e.g. Dem. 30.7, 57.41; Isae. 2.7-9; Pomeroy 1997: 169; Cohn-Haft 1995: 13.

⁶⁵³ Pomeroy 1997: 169.

⁶⁵⁴ Pomeroy 1997: 169; Just 1989: 66-67.

⁶⁵⁵ Just 1989: 26, 73; Pomeroy 1975: 64.

relatives) would function as a safety net for her in case she needed protection against her husband. Cohn-Haft argues plausibly that a man would consider carefully before requesting a divorce to avoid incurring the enmity of his wife's family.⁶⁵⁶

Jason and Medeia, however, differ once more. When Jason decides to abandon Medeia, she has no blood relatives to whom she can turn for protection. Neither can she return to her paternal *oikos* as any other divorced woman would, since the bonds with her family were broken and cannot be remedied.⁶⁵⁷ On the other hand, and strangely enough by Athenian standards, Jason did not send her away from the house they were living in as a married couple; nor – equally significantly – does he keep his sons with him.⁶⁵⁸ That last part is very significant, since we already know that children were born in order to provide continuity for the father's patriline and were under his *kyreia*, which means that in cases of divorce they would stay in the paternal *oikos* with their father, whereas the woman would pass to another man's *kyreia* (male relative or a new husband).⁶⁵⁹

All these peculiarities undoubtedly point to the fact that, in the fifth-century Athens of the first audience, this could not have been a legitimate marriage.⁶⁶⁰ To the aforementioned arguments (that there was no *engye* and no *ekdosis*) should be added the uncontested fact that Medeia was a *xene*,

⁶⁵⁶ Cohn-Haft 1995: 14.

⁶⁵⁷ Sicking 1998: 66.

⁶⁵⁸ We do not have enough evidence as to what usually happened to the children after the divorce. Harrison 1968: 44 refers to Dem. 7.40-43, where the children remain with the man; this, however, as he notes, was a divorce by mutual consent, and we have no idea what happened in cases of *apopempsis* or *apoleipsis*.

⁶⁵⁹ Pomeroy 1975: 65.

⁶⁶⁰ This has been pointed out by some scholars. Thus Palmer (1957: 51-52) for instance argues that she was in fact a concubine. More recently, Foley (2001: 262) states that "for Jason, Medeia is a temperamental barbarian concubine (and a typical woman) who must be cast aside for the advantages of a real Greek marriage". Rabinowitz (1993: 141) comments that "it is particularly tempting to make connections to the problematic legislation surrounding marriage in the period...Even if the law [451/450] had fallen into disuse, surely an Athenian audience would recognise Jason's desire for legitimacy as familiar".

who came not from another Greek city, but from a distant and barbarous land; she is not only a non-citizen, she is moreover a non-Greek. Perikles' citizenship decree of 451/450⁶⁶¹ was still in force in 431 when the play was presented, which means that the audience were very much aware of the fact that in the reality of fifth-century Athens the marriage could not take place and the children born from this union could be nothing else but *nothoi*. In accordance with this law, a man in Jason's position had to marry a woman of Athenian citizen provenance, because this was the only way for him to have legitimate children who could inherit his *oikos* and be accepted in the *phratry*.⁶⁶² But a cursory reading indicates that the play does not adhere strictly to Athenian law on the matter.⁶⁶³ At no point does the text indicate that the children were illegitimate. Arguments from silence are of course notoriously unreliable. This is not, however, simply an argument from silence. Medeia uses their existence as an argument against Jason's decision saying that he did not have any reason to look for another wife, as he already has sons to continue his *oikos* (490-491). Against the obvious response that this reflects Medeia's biased perspective and immediate rhetorical needs we may observe that if they were indeed *nothoi*, it would have been an excellent argument for Jason to use when he tries to justify his decision during his first encounter with Medeia. The fact that he never uses the term and neither does

⁶⁶¹ See *Ath. Pol.* 26.4; *Plut. Per.* 37.2-5; Patterson 1981: 102-107; Whitehead 1991: 147; Christ 2006: 17; Hall 1989: 175.

⁶⁶² As the aforementioned arguments of Palmer and Foley would suggest. On the other hand, things were not as straightforward when it came to putting the law into force. Harrison (1968: 25) shows that the law was retrospective, not in the sense that it rendered all existing children of mixed marriages illegitimate, but in stating that all future children of such unions would be *nothoi*, since all existing mixed marriages were annulled. Which means that in the audience there would have been men born in such marriages (since the law was only 20 years old by the time of the *Medeia*) who would not have lost their status of legitimacy and their citizen rights.

⁶⁶³ Cf. Easterling 1977: 180. Besides, applying Athenian law to the Corinth of the play would cause further complications: Jason could not marry Glauke since he is a foreigner in Corinth and she is the daughter of a citizen. All this points again to the fact that we are in a fictive world governed to a large extent by dramatic need.

Kreon, when faced with Medeia, shows that the legitimacy of the children is not an issue in the play, even though it would have been in the historical context of performance.⁶⁶⁴

The nonconformity of Jason's and Medeia's union is further underlined by the striking antithesis with Jason's second marriage with Glauke, which appears to be conventional in every respect. It was decided between the father of the bride and the future husband, and undoubtedly Glauke was a *gyne engyete*, with a handsome dowry attached to her. In fact, Glauke is not even named in the text, she is only referred to as 'the daughter of the king', indicating, as Rabinowitz argues, that the marriage is traditional in every respect and the important element is the relationship established between Jason and Kreon through this marriage.⁶⁶⁵ However, the simple comparison between the circumstances leading to the two marriages is not enough to establish that Jason and Medeia were considered to be anything else than husband and wife by anyone in the play. On the contrary, even if the references to their marriage are scarce, Jason himself is called *πόσις* ('husband', 'spouse') of Medeia 11 times by Medeia, the Chorus and the Messenger. Medeia uses the word three times, in lines 233, 237 and 242 where she speaks about the behaviour of a husband in general, and, although her case is unique, these words could never be put in the mouth of a woman who was not married. Finally, the Messenger uses the word *πόσις* twice within 25 lines (1153, 1178) to denote both the relationship of Jason with Medeia and the relationship of Jason with Glauke, without any indication that there is a differentiation in meaning between the two usages

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. Men. *Samia* 130ff., where Demeas is annoyed by the liberties taken by a girl who is clearly a *hetaira* and yet who seems to have surpassed the limits of her status and is behaving like the mistress of his house: [ΔΗΜΕΑΣ] *τί γάρ; / γαμετήν ἑταίραν, ὡς ἔοικ', ἐλάνθανον / ἔχων / [ΜΟΣΧΙΩΝ] γαμετήν; πῶς; ἀγνοῶ <γάρ> τὸν λόγον. / [ΔΗΜΕΑΣ] λάθ[ρ]ιός τις ὑ<ός>, ὡς ἔοικε, γέγονέ μοι. ... ἐς [κόρακας ἄπεισιν ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας / ἦ]δη λαβ[ο]ῦσα. If Medeia's status was similar to a *hetaira*, both Jason and Kreon would have stressed her limits to her.*

⁶⁶⁵ Rabinowitz 1993: 141.

of the word. In addition, Medeia's complaint to Aigeus that Jason put a woman over her in the house (*γυναικ' ἐφ' ἡμῖν δεσπότην δόμων ἔχει*, 694) implies that her position in the house as a legitimate wife was firmly established.

It may be objected that all these people are close to Medeia and are more or less on her side or biased in some way or other. There is, however, one person who is a complete outsider and enters the stage completely unbiased and ignorant of what was happening, king Aigeus. His status as a foreigner in Corinth provides him with a distance from the events and the people involved with them and he offers an impartial judgement of the situation. Although he never uses the word *πόσις* himself, he never contradicts Medeia when she uses it. To Medeia's *Αἰγεῦ, κάκιστός ἐστί μοι πάντων πόσις* (690) his reply shows concern (*τί φῆς; σαφῶς μοι σὰς φράσον δυσθυμίας*, 692) but never doubt; and when he learns of Jason's decision to marry Glauke his reaction is critical of the action and sympathetic towards Medeia: *οὔ ποῦ τετόλμηκ' ἔργον αἴσχιστον τόδε;* (695).

Moreover, Jason himself uses the words *γῆμαι σέ* in 1341 when referring to Medeia. Rabinowitz notes that the word is usually used of his relationship with Kreon's daughter (see e.g. 594, *γῆμαί με λέκτρα βασιλέων*), and there is no indication that the meaning changes when it comes to Medeia.⁶⁶⁶ There was no need for Jason to refer to his relationship with Medeia as a marriage in the specific emotionally charged circumstances at the end of the play, unless the marriage was real for him as well. He even points out that he preferred to marry Medeia as opposed to a Greek woman, proving that he equates their union with his potential lawful union with the

⁶⁶⁶ Rabinowitz 1993: 141. One could argue that the language of *gamos* is used simply of sexual relationships. This is certainly the case in the *Trachiniai*, where the usage underlines Deianeira's vulnerability, since the more *gamoι* Herakles does, the more precarious her position is and the more Iole becomes a rival. But in the *Medeia* we have no generic sexual terms; on the contrary, the term emphasises formality and obligation. On *gamos* basically denoting marital/sexual relationships see Oakley and Sinos 1993: 9.

latter (*οὐκ ἔστιν ἥτις τοῦτ' ἂν Ἑλληνίς γυνή / ἔτλη ποθ', ὧν γε πρόσθεν ἠξίουν ἐγὼ / γῆμαι σε*, 1339-1341).

All the evidence then points to the conclusion that, despite the inescapable inconsistencies with the laws of fifth-century Athens and the problematic nature of the marriage of Medeia and Jason from a purely historical perspective, we are nonetheless dealing with a real marriage. What is the explanation for that striking departure from Athenian practice at the time the play was performed? Partly we need to take the myth into consideration: Pindar and Hesiod refer to Medeia as Jason's wife, which means that there was a tradition that gave their relationship the status of a marriage before Euripides' version of the story.⁶⁶⁷ It is the abandonment of their union by Jason that initiates her vengeful plan and leads to tragic results. But the necessity deriving from the myth cannot be the only explanation. We must also remember that we are not dealing with real people living in the real world of fifth-century Athens, and tragedy is certainly not a realistic reproduction of fifth-century society.⁶⁶⁸ Easterling's article on anachronism in Greek tragedy puts the matter clearly: "for all the tragedians, even Euripides, the world created by the epic poets exercised a powerful hold on the imagination, offering them a stimulus and challenge rather than any sort of restriction on their creativity, and we should not be surprised to find that they devised ingenious and often subtle ways of suiting it to the contemporary purposes".⁶⁶⁹

The inconsistencies with real life, and the combination of elements from the heroic era together with fifth-century Athenian practice, create an

⁶⁶⁷ See e.g. Hes. *Theog.* 992-1002, especially 999: ...*Αἰσονίδης, καί μιν [Medeia] θαλερὴν ποιήσατ' ἄκοιτιν*; Pind. *Ol.* 13.

⁶⁶⁸ See Allan 2002: 50-51, "in the heroic world of the play Medeia is Jason's legitimate wife and his behaviour cannot be excused as if he were abandoning (in fifth-century terms) a mere foreign *pallake* (or 'concubine')".

⁶⁶⁹ Easterling 1985: 10.

atmosphere of “heroic vagueness”.⁶⁷⁰ From time to time we get glimpses of fifth-century Athens, but the author is at liberty to ignore – and to ask his audience to ignore – the legal formalities familiar to his audience as the play moves between the heroic world and classical Athens.⁶⁷¹ The fact remains, then, that everyone in the play treats Jason and Medeia as a married couple and that there is both active assertion and passive acceptance of the status of their relationship by all the characters, through which Medeia acquires legitimacy as Jason’s legal wife. It would have been easy to make Medeia’s foreignness the central reason for which she was being abandoned, and to make her explicitly a concubine in contrast to a legitimate wife, as is the case with Andromache in Euripides’ play of the same name. This is not the case in the *Medeia*. The text notes her foreignness, with varying degrees of stridency. But it never invites us to read the relationships and the situation exclusively in terms of contemporary Athenian standards. It is the tragedy’s ability to create an imaginative world that absorbs the observer and allows us to engage with the values and structures of that world.⁶⁷²

Male duties and obligations within the marriage

The conclusion that the relationship between Medeia and Jason is a legitimate marriage within the mythical context of the drama has implications for the question of his obligations towards her. If Medeia and Jason were indeed married, Jason’s behaviour must be measured against the minimum requirements of a married adult male. As mentioned above, choosing a more profitable marriage is not blameworthy per se, but

⁶⁷⁰ See p. 126.

⁶⁷¹ Besides, as Boedeker (1991: 110) rightly says, “I cannot think that for many in Euripides’ audience Jason and Medeia would be seen primarily as mythical analogues of contemporary Athenian husbands and wives”.

⁶⁷² This is also of critical importance to our evaluation of both the status of and Jason’s treatment of his children; see below p. 252f.

abandoning his former wife and his children from his previous marriage without provision for their future is unacceptable behaviour in terms of conventional masculine standards. Jason points out to her that her eviction is the result of her opposition to the ruler of the country (*σὺ δ' οὐκ ἀνίεις μωρίας, λέγουσ' ἀεὶ / κακῶς τυράννουσ· τοιγὰρ ἐκπεσῆ χθονός*, 457-458) and places the fault entirely on her. As was noted in the previous section, as a man divorcing his wife (especially in cases such as this, where divorce was initiated by the husband through no fault of the wife) he would have acted in order to protect her reputation by finding her another husband. But Jason did nothing of the sort. He curiously left his *oikos* to become a member of his new wife's *oikos*, leaving Medeia and his sons behind, but without specifying what Medeia's place would be in the new arrangement. When he speaks of his anticipated relationship with Medeia's children, he pictures a utopian future where they would be staying with their mother but they would also benefit from their alliance with royal blood. As for Medeia, in 455 he argues that his wish was for Medeia to stay in Corinth after the divorce and that her own bad temper against the ruler of the city and her jealousy were the reasons that led her to exile (*εἴ σε μὴ κνίζοι λέχος*, 568). But what will her position be then? Will she have a special place in his life and house as a concubine, while Glauke is his legitimate wife? He never says such a thing; on the contrary, he points out the legitimacy of his decision, because Medeia's threats against the royal house were out of control (457-458). In his opening lines he stated how impossible it is to deal with a bad temper (446-447) and, although he does not care about Medeia's accusations against him (451-452), he seems very keen to defend the palace against her threats (457-458). It is important for him to maintain a good relationship with his new father-in-law, and Medeia's wrath causes anxiety in Kreon. So he adopts a passive position by stepping back and allowing matters to evolve. In a world where men are expected to control, his behaviour is problematically

unmasculine, since Jason opts for female-associated passivity instead of active, and thus masculine, reaction. I return to this aspect of Jason's conduct below.

On the other hand, Jason's decision to arrange his new marriage in secret points to the oddness of Jason's behaviour in general. We cannot be sure whether a woman's opinion was taken into consideration in Athenian divorce cases. In theory, it could have been simply a matter between her husband and her *kyrios* without any input from the wife, since women did not have any legal power. But there is no reason to believe that in real life a woman would be kept in complete ignorance of her husband's plans, whatever the legal prescription might have been. Although Jason makes every effort to show her that her reaction to his marriage is irrational, the fact remains that he arranged the marriage with Glauke in secret, and this proves that he was aware of how his decision was going to affect Medeia, especially since she became his wife under very unusual circumstances.⁶⁷³

Gill is right to say that "it is precisely the special circumstances of Medeia's marriage (with the exceptional commitment and status on her side) that give her a special claim to underline the validity of marriage...Jason's speech in response, in which he expresses his radical detachment from their past shared life, takes on an added sting for Medeia, representing as it does an attitude which she must find not only deeply offensive but also closed, as an option, for her".⁶⁷⁴ After the violent and bloody path they followed until they finally reached Corinth, Medeia, to all appearances, turned herself into a conventional wife adjusted to domestic life. Nothing in the play suggests that the intervening time was anything other than a normal life and she was a devoted wife and mother.

⁶⁷³ See Blondell 1999: 160, "the validity of Medeia's point is shown by the fact that Jason feels the need to answer it (588-590)".

⁶⁷⁴ Gill 1996: 161, 165-166.

Jason alleges that her barbarian nature is responsible for her crime (οὐκ ἔστιν ἦτις τοῦτ' ἂν Ἑλληνίς γυνή / ἔτλη πόθ', ὧν γε πρόσθεν ἠξίουν ἐγὼ / γῆμαι σε, κῆδος ἐχθρὸν ὀλέθριον τ' ἐμοί, 1339-1341). Certainly she has a prehistory of and propensity for violence, as the play makes us uncomfortably aware from early on; but the fact is that his own behaviour provoked her reaction, and he must share the responsibility. During the years they spent together as a married couple, her potential for violence and destruction that demonstrated itself in the murder of her brother when she decided to help Jason in Colchis remained buried.⁶⁷⁵ Up to this point, she followed the normal Greek pattern of being a wife; she only struck back when she was provoked.⁶⁷⁶ As Vellacott notes, "her passionate devotion to Jason has been acceptable while it made her an obedient wife (13-15); when it makes her resent infidelity her husband sees it as a barbarous excess".⁶⁷⁷ This brings to the fore all the self-centeredness and opportunism that characterise Jason's behaviour and lie behind his actions. These characteristics are apparent even before he enters the stage, through the descriptions of the Nurse and Medeia herself which, although certainly biased, reveal his selfish way of thinking and the way he perceives marriage.

To Jason, and apparently to fifth-century civic ideology, the political dimension of marriage is very significant. As already noted in previous chapters, marriage was not simply a private matter; it was a male duty strongly connected with both the *oikos* and the *polis*. It was a civic as well as a filial duty to marry, since it was also a man's duty to provide the *oikos* with an heir. Jason's decision to abandon his wife and family was extremely

⁶⁷⁵ Page (1938) sees her as a barbarian witch who could have been expected to act the way she did because of her oriental nature. Rainer (1993: 220), however, disagrees and rightly points out that Medeia's actions are not linked to her ethnicity since there are a number of Greek women that have killed their children and the Chorus compare one of them with Medeia and not some obscure oriental infanticidal figure (μίαν δὴ κλύω μίαν τῶν πάρος / γυναικ' ἐν φίλοις χέρα βαλεῖν τέκνοις, / Ἰνώ μανεῖσαν ἐκ θεῶν, 1282-1284).

⁶⁷⁶ Cf. Barlow 1995: 38.

⁶⁷⁷ Vellacott 1975: 106.

political: he leaves the old marriage not because of his lust for a new and younger wife, but for a more advantageous – financially and socially – marriage.⁶⁷⁸ The marriage will provide him with a better place within the royal house. For this reason he does not hesitate to use Glauke as he used Medeia in the past more than once. His marriage with Glauke does not seem all that different from that with Medeia in that sense; in both cases his purpose is to take advantage of what the relationship offers him. In real life, marriage may often have been approached from a pragmatic perspective. It is the serial instrumentalism compounded with the betrayal of other values that makes Jason's character so unappealing.

Jason's instrumentalism is clear in both his relationships. Medeia and Glauke, and people in general, are obviously just means to an end. He constantly exploits them to the degree that they are not simply objectified; they become mere mechanisms serving his own purposes. In the chapter about Admetos we saw that even though marriages begin as a financial agreement between men, in the course of time men and women ideally develop a certain bond based on reciprocity. But Jason does not seem to have developed any such bond with either of his wives. He does not even utter a word of sympathy for Glauke's death, nor does he show any kind of distress. Certainly, tragedy's tendency to concentrate on what matters makes it unwise to put too much emphasis on Jason's failure to grieve for his lost wife; but still, the absence of any emotional relationship with Glauke mirrors the absence of any emotional bonds with Medeia and brings even more to the fore Jason's instrumentalism. Herakles, Admetos and Theseus all reveal their dependence on their wives once faced with their loss. Their affection is expressed in terms of the importance of the wife within the house and in relation to the children, as has already been shown in the previous chapters.

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. Hippolytos, whose abandonment of family has the completely opposite incentive, since to him the abandonment of his obligations to the paternal *oikos* are very a-political.

The language of affection is limited in terms describing women as good mothers and respectful wives, but the distress behind their words reveals a deeper degree of affection. In particular, Admetos' extended lamentation (although hyperbolic) offers a very good insight into the importance of the wife within a household. Jason on the contrary, shows no signs of emotion in relation to either his old or his new wife. Since the public discourse of marriage in classical Athens does not foreground emotional links or personal happiness but rather procreation, the coolheaded pragmatism with which he approaches personal relationships is unexceptionable when viewed from the perspective of civic ideology. It has become clear that when it comes to the ideology of marriage, the Athenians are strikingly unsentimental compared to the standards of the modern developed world. But social and psychological history cannot be written solely in terms of civic ideology. From the perspective of male interpersonal relations as seen in other literary (con)texts, Jason's conduct is seriously deficient. This does not mitigate the horror of Medeia's crime; but it does act to align both intra- and extra-textual sympathy with Medeia and against Jason prior to her revelation of her plans.

Men and children

The child theme has long been recognised as one of the major themes of the play.⁶⁷⁹ In particular, the relationship between fathers and their children is given unusual prominence and is seen from the perspective of three different men during the course of the tragedy. The first relationship we get to witness is the feelings of Kreon for his daughter. He makes it clear from the beginning that his only reason for banishing Medeia is the protection of his daughter against her vengeful actions (*δέδοικα σ', οὐδὲν δεῖ*

⁶⁷⁹ See e.g. Zuger 1972.

παραμπίσχειν λόγους, / μή μοί τι δράσης παιῶδ' ἀνήκεστον κακόν, 282-283), and he does not even hesitate to declare that he considers his children more important than his own country (Μη. ᾧ πατρίς, ᾧ σου κάρτα νῦν μνεΐαν ἔχω. / Κρ. πλὴν γὰρ τέκνων ἔμοιγε φίλτατον πολὺ, 328-329). His lamentation when he witnesses his daughter's death and his subsequent death because he touched her in his grief cause only sympathy towards him and create a positive portrait of the character (1204ff.).

Aigeus displays a different kind of concern about children that is mainly connected with the political function of the family. Aigeus simply wants an heir for his *oikos* and his throne and for that reason he travels to Delphi and is willing to go to Troezen to ask for Pittheus' advice (664ff., 683). He certainly does not display any kind of sentiment similar to Kreon, mainly because he does not have yet any children of his own; rather, his view of the function of children in a man's life is much closer to Jason's own perception. Aigeus summarises for the audience their own awareness of the importance of children and raising a family for the sake of the *oikos* and the *polis*. He is the proof that a man is really his children; only through them can his inheritance and his *oikos* remain alive.⁶⁸⁰ Between the two of them, Kreon and Aigeus map out what children mean to a man.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸⁰ To some, the presence of his episode exactly in the centre of the play signals the change in Medeia's mind and, by underlying the importance of heirs for a man, offers her the perfect revenge against Jason. On the function of the Aigeus episode as offering Medeia the idea of the infanticide see Bongie 1977: 40; Buttrey (1958: 11) notes that his appearance functions as a turning point after which the revenge is finally set in motion. Mastrorarde (2002: 283) points out the importance of the Aigeus episode either as offering the idea of the infanticide to Medeia or simply solidifying an already made decision. Gill (1996: 164) on the contrary argues that the infanticide was rather an outcome of the agon between Medeia and Jason. The truth is we cannot determine at what point Medeia took the decision to carry out the murder. It is true that she articulates her decision after Aigeus' departure, but she does not declare that it was his presence that made her think of killing the children.

⁶⁸¹ Medeia will use and exploit that knowledge against Jason. Schlesinger (1983: 305, 309-310) argues that Kreon's statement prompts the thoughts of infanticide for the first time. See also Pucci 1980: 110.

Jason is not indifferent to the fate of his children, but at least in the beginning, it is obvious that he has the same instrumentalist approach towards them as the one he has towards Medeia and Glauke.⁶⁸² In the agon with Medeia he says that his sons are enough for him (presumably for the needs of his *oikos*, ἄλις γὰρ οἱ γεγῶτες οὐδὲ μέμφομαι, 558): before he planned marriage with Glauke, his sons by Medeia had secured the survival of his *oikos*. Now that he has decided to divorce Medeia and marry the princess, suddenly it is the children that he will beget with Glauke that will offer him more than his two other sons. More importantly, however, he has betrayed their inheritance by abandoning the *oikos* for a new one. On top of that, we do not hear him utter any word of affection towards them while they are alive; he does not even ask to see them before they depart for exile. The children remain in the house, physically and emotionally associated with the *oikos*, whereas Jason's alienation from the domestic environment (already noted above) is clear through the visual dissociation between him and his offspring, the physical continuation of the *oikos*.⁶⁸³

The excuse he offers to Medeia is that he decided to get remarried not because of personal ambitions but for the sake of the children, is sophistic and specious (545ff.). It is consistent with his tendency to use people as means to an end as we saw earlier in reference to his wives, an instrumental approach to others that can be seen in his relationship with his children as well. To explain his conduct he even argues that the alliance with royal siblings would offer them social and economic advantages. The plausibility of his argument, however, is destroyed by the fact that he has not done everything in his power to keep them with him in Corinth. His duty as

⁶⁸² Cf. Schlesinger 1983: 307; also Dunkle 1969: 102-103.

⁶⁸³ The weight of his decision is even more poignant if one considers what Zeitlin (1990: 76) points out: "the *oikos* is the visual symbol of paternal heredity which entitles sons to succeed their fathers as proprietors of its wealth and movable goods and as rulers over its inhabitants".

a father was to keep them close to him, especially since, as already noted, after the divorce the children most probably stayed with their father. The reason for this is closely connected with the broader perception of the preservation of the *oikos* through the production of legitimate offspring. The children then indisputably always belong to the father's *oikos* and thus their natural place is within that *oikos* regardless of where their mother is. Only in cases of disputed legitimacy are the children supposed to follow the mother.⁶⁸⁴ But in this case there is no allusion to disputed legitimacy (in the same way there is no allusion to doubting the validity of Jason and Medeia's marriage). The physical proximity between father and sons would allow him to protect their interests, and allow them to benefit from his physical presence in the house and his position in the *polis*. In crude terms, Jason is not obliged by law to show affection to his children and, as already said, he is at liberty to remarry. But since he has recognised them as his legitimate offspring, there is a series of obligations towards them, including protection; certainly he should not abandon them at the mercy of whatever prevails, which is exactly what Jason does. His readiness to abandon his children amounts to a betrayal of his duty as a father comparable to his betrayal of his wife.

Jason is right about the benefits of royal siblings for his sons by Medeia. In a world, whether that of heroic myth or classical Athens, where status and networks matter, this is not idle rhetoric. Now, however, that the children are obliged to go to exile with their mother, this royal alliance cannot exist for practical reasons. Only if they all grew up together in the same *oikos* or at least in close proximity in the same city could then his sons take advantage of the situation. As things stand, they are simply exiles deprived of paternal protection. His offer of money and letters for his friends

⁶⁸⁴ This is interestingly opposed to modern practices, where in cases of divorce children are expected to stay with the mother.

abroad (ἀλλ' εἴ τι βούλη παισὶν ἢ σαυτῇ φυγῆς / προσωφέλημα χρημάτων ἐμῶν λαβεῖν, / λέγ' ὡς ἔτοιμος ἀφθόνῳ δοῦναι χερὶ / ξένοις τε πέμπειν σύμβολ', οἱ δράσουσί σ' εὔ, 610-613) offers little to their situation and it is indicative of his wish to be rid of them the same way he wishes to be rid of Medeia so as to avoid facing any consequences. It is instructive that only after Medeia begs him (for her own personal reasons of course) to keep the children in Corinth that he gives in and promises to talk to his wife, and moreover arrogantly thinks he can easily manipulate a woman if he so wishes (μάλιστα, καὶ πείσειν γε δοξάζω σφ' ἐγώ, 944). We are left with the impression that up to this point the idea had never crossed his mind; it is a concession to pressure, not an initiative on his part.

We need to wait until the end to see Jason displaying feelings for them that go beyond objectifying them to serve his purpose. The irony of his entrance in order to protect them against the Corinthians, although the audience already knows that they are dead, is poignant and we finally see him as a father in distress and not just a self-centered man (1293ff.). His final lamentation and the pleas to hold and bury his children are reminiscent of Herakles, Kreon and Theseus when faced with their dead or dying children; they, as he, finally give in to emotion and reveal that their feelings towards their children go deeper than their use for the survival of the *oikos* (ὡς μ' ἀπώλεσας, γύναι, 1310; 1323ff.). The disproportionate nature of his punishment certainly invites pity, but we never forget that a large part of the responsibility falls on him and stems in no small part from his failure towards his *oikos* and the protection of his offspring, which is a failure of the qualities and obligations associated with the adult male.

Jason's dislocation from the *oikos*

As we have seen, Jason, in betraying his wife and children (especially the latter) betrays the whole of his *oikos*. Herakles and Admetos are identified by their role in and importance to the *oikos* and they are closely associated with it in physical terms as well as in terms of duty and responsibility. Jason's problematic relationship with his *oikos* is reflected spatially in this play in a striking variation of Athenian – indeed Greek – marital patterns: he moves away from his *oikos* and he is incorporated into a new one, that of his new bride. Jason's betrayal is highlighted by a unique departure from patterns of male behaviour in terms both of plot and of dramaturgy. Not only is his physical withdrawal from the house representative of this betrayal, but equally importantly it brings to the fore his failure to exercise control over his life – the passivity of the moving underlines the passivity that seems to characterise his life in general.

Marriage has profoundly different implications for males and females in terms of space and movement. Both literature and iconography underline the importance of the departure of the bride from her natal *oikos* and her incorporation to that of her husband.⁶⁸⁵ This movement is fundamental to marriage regardless of chronology, medium and context: from archaic to classical times, it is always women who are depicted as moving. There are a number of stages, varying from the symbolic lamentation of her mother, the song contest between the friends of the bride and those of the groom, with the latter winning and taking the bride away, the grasping of the bride's wrist by the groom, the entrance into the new house and the *katachyteria*, the ritual symbolising the acceptance of the bride

⁶⁸⁵ On wedding iconography and the stages of a marriage see Hague 1988; Carson 1982; Rehm 1994: 12-14; Oakley and Sinos 1993: 32-37.

into the prosperity of her new *oikos*.⁶⁸⁶ Their significance is multiple for everyone involved, marking the hope for the continuation of the *oikos* through begetting legitimate children from a legitimate wife, but especially for the bride they symbolise the movement from the state of the *parthenos* to that of the wife and consequently mother.⁶⁸⁷ Her spatial relocation is the concrete reflection of her change of physical condition and social status. The woman ceases to be a member of the paternal *oikos* and her children will be members of the husband's *oikos*.

This pattern of movement is a constant not just in Athenian society but also in depictions of women and marriage in epic, lyric and tragedy. The most obvious example is Andromache, speaking about her entrance into Hektor's house (*Ἀσιάτιδος γῆς σχῆμα, Θηβαία πόλις, / ὄθεν ποθ' ἔδνων σὺν πολυχρύσῳ χλιδῇ / Πριάμου τύραννον ἐστίαν ἀφικόμην / δάμαρ δοθεῖσα παιδοποιὸς Ἔκτορι, Andr. 1-4; ὦ λέκτρα τὰμὰ δυστυχῆ τε καὶ γάμοι, / οἷς ἦλθον ἐς μέλαθρον Ἔκτορός ποτε, Tro. 745-746*). Medeia herself speaks of the way a new wife enters her husband's house: *ἐς καινὰ δ' ἦθη καὶ νόμους ἀφιγμένην* (238). All this makes Jason's movement all the more unusual measured against the norms of gender experience.⁶⁸⁸ In crude terms, a person leaving the house in order to marry is a woman; thus Jason's move here denotes a fundamental inversion of male roles, which reflects in physical/spatial terms his failure in his masculine duty. This is not of course a matter of sexuality but of gender.

The details of Jason's relocation are never discussed explicitly within the play, but it is made abundantly clear that he is physically disconnected from the *oikos* of his children. The text implies that he has left the house where he lived with Medeia and his sons (e.g. *παλαιὰ καινῶν λείπεται*

⁶⁸⁶ See Hague 1988; Carson 1982; Rehm 1994: 12-14; Oakley and Sinos 1993: 32-37.

⁶⁸⁷ See Rehm 1994: 12; Reily 1989: 431; Hague 1988: 33-34.

⁶⁸⁸ Oedipus in *OT* is another notable tragic example of the man moving into the bride's natal *oikos*, but arguably under very different circumstances.

κηδευμάτων, / κούκ ἔστ' ἐκεῖνος τοῖσδε δώμασιν φίλος, 76; οὐκ εἰσὶ δόμοι· φροῦδα τάδ' ἦδη. / τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἔχει λέκτρα τυράννων, 140; σοὶ γὰρ παρὸν γῆν τήνδε καὶ δόμους ἔχειν, 448; σὺν τέκνοις μόνῃ μόνοις, 513). His freedom of movement in relation to the palace strongly associates him physically with the royal household, an association reinforced by Medeia's taunt at 1394 (στεῖχε πρὸς οἴκους καὶ θάπτ' ἄλοχον), which strongly suggests that he has moved into his new wife's paternal *oikos*.⁶⁸⁹ A man could leave his father's *oikos* to establish a new one, but he would never abandon his own. And yet Jason does so, and moreover he shows no intention of keeping the children with him. The *oikos* is at the heart of the action within the play, but it is Medeia who is strongly associated with it (both physically and in terms of language) whereas Jason appears as an outsider, both emotionally and in terms of staging. A clear indicator is the fact that he always enters and leaves by the *parodoi* and he never enters the house. His dislocation from the *oikos* is sharply contrasted with Medeia's persistent association with it; she dominates the stage building like Klytaimnestra in *Agamemnon* and always comes and goes from within the house. We are left here with the peculiar phenomenon of the female being the representative of the *oikos*. The male is supposed to be at the heart of the *oikos*, and the only reasons for a man abandoning it are death, war or exile; here, however, no such reason exists and we are faced with the conceptual paradox of an *oikos* without a *kyrios*. Jason has chosen to abandon the *oikos* and create new bonds with another *oikos* by planning to have more children with Glauke. The distance is very prominent in the last scene where the children are out of reach for Jason and Medeia does not allow him to touch or bury them (1377ff.). Medeia's

⁶⁸⁹ It is true that in the case of Jason, his house is not his paternal *oikos* and he is a stranger in Corinth. But this is not an issue here, firstly because he is never presented as a non-citizen (since we are in an intermediate world which does not quite conform to Athenian structures); and secondly, because he has created a new *oikos*, and more importantly, he has male heirs.

dismissive 'go home' at 1394, uttered from the roof of the stage building, stresses the broken link between Jason and his former *oikos*. Her concern for the *oikos* (almost assuming the role of the male) is ever present since her incentive was the protection of her children, a striking difference from the alienation from the *oikos* by Jason; ironically enough, in the end it is Medeia, the very person that was trying to protect the *oikos*, that causes its destruction.

However, as noted above, there is more here than betrayal of the *oikos*. The assimilation of his marital movement to that of the female also has connotations of passivity which is stereotypically attributed to the female.⁶⁹⁰ The passivity embodied in Jason's movement from the *oikos* is the culmination of a passive life, expressed in the unheroic portrait Euripides constructs. In Pindar, though Medeia's help is emphasised, Jason is not denied his heroic stature and after her help with the yoking of the bulls he soon departs on the heroic – and masculine – mission of killing the snake guarding the Golden Fleece (*Pyth.* 4.247ff.; cf. Apollonius' portrayal of Jason in the *Argonautica*).⁶⁹¹ In Euripides' Jason, on the contrary, the heroic qualities we see in the previous presentation of the character have considerably diminished. The emphasis on Medeia's help, help coming from a woman, while Jason's heroism is underplayed and treated as a quality belonging to the past, results in an image of a man unable to complete his task without the help of a woman.⁶⁹² Medeia's pivotal role is acknowledged

⁶⁹⁰ As opposed to the active connected with the male. The active/passive polarity is even embedded in the language as already shown (see Introduction p. 55, Admetos chapter p. 131). On gender-specific language and verbal genres associated with women see Willi 2003: 157-197; McClure 1999a: 32-38, 40-47, etc.

⁶⁹¹ On Jason's positive representation in Pindar see Carey 1980: 144.

⁶⁹² For Jason as unheroic (a "non-hero") see McDermott 1989: 1-2; Foley 2001: 267, where she contrasts his lack of heroic qualities with the 'masculine' heroism shown by Medeia. The image of Medeia as a hero was persuasively supported by Knox (1983), who has shown that her reactions and her code of behaviour are much closer to Aias or Achilles than female behavioural patterns.

(although attributed to Aphrodite's influence, 526ff.) by Jason, who offers no competing narrative of his own contribution to the quest. A female presence in aid of a hero is not unheard of: I have already mentioned in the chapter on Hippolytos the relationship of heroes with patron deities such as Athena or Artemis. Medeia is part of that tradition, as we can see in where she assumes a similar function when she aids Jason in his task. But this case is different and the main reason is that Medeia is not a goddess. Undoubtedly she is in possession of magic elements, and despite the fact that at the end she reminds us of a *dea ex machina* as she appears on the chariot of her grandfather, she is nevertheless mortal and she does not fall in the same category as Athena or Artemis functioning as patron deities of heroes and warriors. Therefore Jason's dependence on her for success in his mission constructs an image of him which is insufficient in heroic and consequently male qualities. Jason is presented as dependent, not an active agent, and thus the unheroic shades into the unmasculine.

Against this background it is interesting to see Jason's relationship with his new *oikos*. Though the play chooses to focus more on the failure of Jason to fulfill his duty to Medeia, there are hints in the text such as the fact that it is Kreon, the father, and not Jason, the husband, who rushes in to comfort Glauke while dying. His absence from the scene is poignant, demonstrating a distance from an *oikos* where he is clearly as much of an outsider as he has become for his previous one.

Male integrity

According to Greek ideology men were both more honest and more steadfast than women (Jason himself takes pains to repeatedly refer to the

lack of consistency and self-control of the female nature).⁶⁹³ And yet Jason displays a striking lack of honesty, constancy and integrity in his dealing with Medeia. In the course of the play he appears to be ungrateful, inconsistent and a bad *philos*. His failure is pointed out throughout her repeated reproaches against him, but more poignantly with the words of the Chorus stating that rivers will start flowing backwards since now the word of women appears to be more constant and more trustworthy than the word of men (410-420). And indeed, Medeia proves to possess all these characteristics; the effect is to stress even more Jason's failure since, although consistency, *philia*, gratefulness are not gender-specific, men were expected to be better at them than women.

The key aspect of discussion of this failure in the play is Jason's breaching of the oaths he swore to Medeia. As with so many of the phenomena we have examined, oath-taking in ancient Greece is not gender-specific in general: we see both genders swearing oaths in texts. But as so often, it is equally true that significance and frequency differ with gender. Unsurprisingly men do appear to swear oaths more frequently, and although they are equally binding for men and women, they play a bigger part in male life in the sense that they are strongly connected to the man's public life.⁶⁹⁴ It is firmly established within the tragedy that Jason's behaviour is viewed by Medeia as a major betrayal. The Nurse's prologue speaks of a Medeia who has been shamed (*ἠτιμασμένη*, 20) by Jason's abandonment, and she then refers to formal oath-taking: the use of the right hand and the fact that the gods were called upon as witnesses (*ἀνακαλεῖ δὲ δεξιᾶς / πίστιν μεγίστην, καὶ θεοῦς μαρτύρεται*, 21-22). This use of the

⁶⁹³ On differences between men and women in terms of consistency and emotionality see Introduction pp. 52-53.

⁶⁹⁴ It is also worth noting that men tend to swear by male deities, whereas women usually choose female ones (see McClure 1995: 49; Sommerstein 1995: 64-68, who also points out the exceptions to that rule).

language of the oath-taking takes us away from the realm of marital oaths and into the broader issue of pledging an oath to another person regardless of their status as a husband or a wife.

Medeia offered Jason her help against her father, as well as assistance with getting back his legitimate place from Pelias, and Jason took full advantage of it.⁶⁹⁵ In return for her help, he took an oath to Medeia and it is that oath that Medeia is now accusing him of betraying. In 169-170 she speaks of *Θέμιν Ζηνός*, who is an *ὄρκων ταμίης* (see also 209-210). We know that Zeus was the guarantor of oaths; invoking him, or any other god for that matter, when taking an oath served to make the oath stronger.⁶⁹⁶ By bringing Zeus into the debate about Jason's betrayal she makes his decision not a simple case of divorcing one's wife, but a deeper betrayal of an oath, a betrayal that verges on sacrilege owing to the involvement of the god in taking it. The oath is thus separated from the problems in the legitimacy of their wedding. It does not matter whether or not they are married by Athenian standards. The oath overrides everything else to the extent that even if they are not married in Athenian terms, Jason is still bound to Medeia and her abandonment by him must be considered as seriously as the betrayal of any other oath.

In betraying Medeia, he does not simply fail his wife, he more importantly betrays his benefactor by choosing to downgrade the help she offered him in the past. He denies her what is due to her according to the demands of *philia*.⁶⁹⁷ Dover notes that *philia* is "the Greek term for love – the affection, strong or weak, which can be felt for a sexual partner, a child, an

⁶⁹⁵ Easterling 1977: 180, notes that the purpose was to show that Medeia sacrificed everything for Jason: "she has not merely abandoned her family, she has betrayed them for Jason's sake".

⁶⁹⁶ On oath-swearing see Sommerstein 2007: 137, who further notes that "an oath, even a seemingly casual one, still counted for something – and all the more so when, as in *Nub.*, the existence and power of the gods was an issue". On the sanctity of oaths see Burnett 1973: 13-14.

⁶⁹⁷ See Williamson 1990: 24.

old man, a friend or colleague...This is the relationship between a man and a woman accustomed to mutual enjoyment of intercourse..."⁶⁹⁸ But Jason has betrayed the *philia* that he owed Medeia by abandoning her. Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1158b) suggests that the *philia* owed by a woman to a man is bigger than the one the man was supposed to show her. Even if Aristotle is right (and we should always beware of the danger of treating Aristotle as the spokesman for Greek collective values), it still does not remove the issues of reciprocity and obligation that characterise all relationships based on *philia*. A man is supposed to offer to his benefactor friend a *charis* at least commensurate with the one he has received from him.⁶⁹⁹ Alkestis does not hesitate to point out to Admetos that he owes her for what she did for him and she has the right to demand a favour from him, and Admetos accepts this willingly. But Jason does more than fail in his duty toward his wife; he fails in the (especially masculine) duty to reciprocate.

Jason does not seem to grasp this idea, however. To him Medeia's reaction derives primarily – if not solely – from her sexual jealousy (see for instance *εἰ σε μὴ κνίζοι λέχος* (568) among many other references). We cannot dismiss jealousy entirely because it has been shown that jealousy plays a part in her reactions;⁷⁰⁰ but the sober way she constructs and delivers her argument shows that she does not allow emotionalism or threatening behaviour invalidate it.⁷⁰¹ The text has already made it clear that Medeia's

⁶⁹⁸ Dover 1974: 212.

⁶⁹⁹ See the relationships between Theseus and Herakles and Admetos and Alkestis. In both cases the benefaction was so great that it was impossible for the beneficiary to reciprocate to the same extent. They both, however, tried to offer the best they could do.

⁷⁰⁰ See Sanders 2009: 161-174.

⁷⁰¹ See di Benedetto 1971: 38 on Medeia's argument alluding to the moral code of benefitting friends and harming enemies; also Foley 1989: 65; cf. Introduction p. 36f. Also, Mastronarde (2002: 8-9) argues that Jason, by attributing Medeia's reaction solely to sexual jealousy "taking advantage of the Greek (male) stereotype of females' liability to sexual impulse...he ignores the issues of status to which Medeia herself often refers. On the one hand, Medeia is a wife who has born male children to Jason: by contemporary social norms and by the norms of 'heroic society' as depicted in the poetic tradition, she has fulfilled a vital familial

reaction was initiated by the fact that he broke his oath to her, as her own words show (ὄρκων δὲ φρούδη πίστις, οὐδ' ἔχω μαθεῖν / εἰ θεοὺς νομίζεις τοὺς τότ' οὐκ ἄρχειν ἔτι / ἢ καινὰ κεῖσθαι θέσμι' ἀνθρώποις τὰ νῦν, / ἐπεὶ σύνοισθ' ἄ γ' εἰς ἔμ' οὐκ εὖορκος ἔσσι. / φεῦ δεξιὰ χεῖρ, ἧς σὺ πόλλ' ἐλαμβάνου, / καὶ τῶνδε γονάτων, ὡς μάτην κεχρώσμεθα / κακοῦ πρὸς ἀνδρός, ἐλπίδων δ' ἡμαρτάνομεν, 492-498) and this would cause “public, religious condemnation of Jason’s conduct, for as well as abandoning his family, he has broken his solemn and divine oath of loyalty to Medeia”.⁷⁰² Jason fails – or elects not – to understand that his oath exists independently of any sexual aspect, as becomes apparent from his effort to debase it to plain sexual jealousy. Besides, it is rhetorically convenient for Jason to put the emphasis on sex. If it is true, then it is conveniently according to female stereotyping and the focus shifts from principle to appetites; it diminishes the significance of Medeia’s loss and simultaneously allows him to diminish the significance of his obligation to her from the past.

Jason’s behaviour is not a universal characteristic of Euripidean men. The theme of men and oath-taking appears in *Alkestis* and in *Hippolytos* and in both cases the male protagonists demonstrate an awareness of the seriousness of the situation that is strikingly different from Jason’s. Hippolytos loses his life because he refuses to betray his oath to reveal Phaidra’s passion for him, and Admetos spends a long time defending his oath to his dead wife to never marry again. In both cases betraying the oath is considered a violation in the eyes of the gods and the person for whom the oath was taken. Admetos in particular realises the importance of *charis*. He is determined to honour his oath not only because of the sanctity of the

role and is owed due consideration as a partner in the family...On the other hand, Medeia views herself as a heroic partner in Jason’s adventures. She is not a normal citizen woman, but a princess and a saviour, and she has formed her bond with Jason not as a subordinate in an exchange between her father and her husband, but as an equal”.

⁷⁰² Allan 2002: 61, 81. On the use of oaths in *Med.* see Allan 2007.

promise, but also because of his awareness that he will be repaying the *charis* his wife offered him. Aigeus' character in the *Medeia* demonstrates a similar awareness both of the importance of honouring an oath and the obligations generated by the *charis* Medeia is about to offer him in return for his help. But for Jason oaths seem to have little importance, especially against a barbarian woman, and he certainly does not feel he owes *charis* to Medeia, attributing his success mainly to the help of Aphrodite (526-528 and see above). Jason's reaction to Medeia's demand that he honour his oaths offers an unflattering portrait of his masculine qualities, already damaged by the description of his achievement of his heroic tasks with the help of a woman.

Men and intelligence

The final aspect of this play I wish to discuss is intelligence. The cleverness with which the female protagonist in this play manages to trick and manipulate the three main male figures of the play is striking. She first convinces Kreon to allow her to remain in Corinth for one more day (348ff.), then she manages to extract from Aigeus the promise to receive and offer her asylum in Athens (719ff.) and ultimately, by pretending to have finally come to her senses and endorse the role of the traditional obedient wife, she manages to trick Jason, thus setting in motion her revenge against him (869ff.). Much has been written on how Medeia outwits Jason in particular, and how she seems to be much cleverer than he is; this has been read as a subtle comment on how the female outwits the male, contrary to gender stereotypes.

The first manipulation happens in the scene with Kreon. The king enters the stage prepared to face Medeia's anger and resistance to his decision of exiling her (σὲ τὴν σκυθρωπὸν καὶ πόσει θυμουμένην, / Μήδει',

ἀνειπόν τῆσδε γῆς ἔξω περᾶν / φυγάδα, λαβοῦσαν δισσὰ σὺν σαυτῇ τέκνα, / καὶ μὴ τι μέλλειν ὡς ἐγὼ βραβεὺς λόγου / τοῦδ' εἰμί, κοῦκ ἄπειμι πρὸς δόμους πάλιν / πρὶν ἄν σε γαίης τερμόνων ἔξω βάλω, 271-276). The fact that he does not hesitate to admit that he is afraid of her (*δέδοικά σ', οὐδὲν δεῖ παραμπίσχειν λόγους, 282*) and that this banishment is a cautionary measure against her harming his family are hardly a sign of intellectual weakness. In fact, his fears prove to be true and it turns out that his intuition was right. The only mistake he makes is that he gives in to his pity and lets her remain in Corinth one more day. Medeia certainly manages to trick and manipulate him, but this does not necessarily prove the intellectual weakness of Kreon. The only comment on his intelligence is made by Medeia, and she is hardly a reliable source given her feelings towards him and her wish for revenge.

The second male figure, Aigeus, is also a king and in fact the mythical king of Athens and father of Theseus. In the eyes of the Athenian audience this is an important factor. He has absolutely no reason to side with anyone, and the fact that he shows sympathy to Medeia boosts the sympathetic ties towards her already created by the sympathy of the Chorus and the fact that almost everyone in the play (except Kreon) sides with Medeia and speaks of Jason's baseness. Classifying Aigeus as a simpleton⁷⁰³ does not do justice to the character, nor to the intentions of the playwright. Medeia obviously wants to secure a place to go when she can no longer stay in Corinth, and the offer of asylum in Athens is exactly what she needs in order to proceed with her revenge. She is certainly very careful when presenting her case to him, and his reactions of outrage against Jason's conduct show that he will be taking her side. Besides, he could not have possibly known what she was about to do, since she carefully asks for

⁷⁰³ "Naïf" as Blaiklock (1952: 30) calls him.

asylum as an exile, not as a murderer and an infanticidal mother. Moreover, Aigeus' restriction that he will not help her out of Corinth but he will gladly receive her in Athens reveal an amount of precaution that cannot be considered as stupidity. His move is political, in order not to ruin his relationship with Corinth, but it is also a necessary precaution in case Medeia does something in Corinth that would bring him to the position of helping a person who harmed in any way the royal family.⁷⁰⁴ He remains faithful to the role of the Athenian king and protector of the weak that we see in the face of Theseus on more than one occasion, and he takes the necessary precautions to protect his city and himself. Unlike in the case of Kreon, Medeia does not make any comment on his intellectual ability when he leaves. All she does is bid him farewell without any further comment (*χαίρων πορεύου πάντα γὰρ καλῶς ἔχει. / κἀγὼ πόλιν σὴν ὡς τάχιστ' ἀφίξομαι, / πράξασ' ἂ μέλλω καὶ τυχοῦσ' ἂ βούλομαι, 756-758*), which means that Medeia's purpose here was not to manipulate yet another man, as it was in the cases of Kreon and Jason.

It is with Jason that the manipulation is most elaborate, and the drastic change in her behaviour between their first and their second meeting reveals her ability for deception. Certainly, the clash between male and female is apparent and quite explicit, especially during Medeia's monologue on the misfortunes of female nature and Jason's dismissive opinions about women during the *agon*. But it also shows that intelligence (and dutifulness for that matter) is not necessarily gender-associated and that being a man does not necessarily mean being intellectually superior, in the same way that being a woman does not necessarily imply intellectual inferiority. When it

⁷⁰⁴ Dunkle (1969: 98) does not see Aigeus as an all-positive character: "his reason is plausible but does somewhat undermine our admiration for Aigeus as a rescuer. Our respect for him is further weakened when he welcomes the oath which Medeia requires of him as an excuse which he can offer to Medeia's enemies for protecting her (744)...Self-interest is Aigeus' motivation here. He wants Medeia's help but gives as little as possible in return".

comes to the actual *agon*, we see a clash between two highly articulate people, as well as a man and a woman who present their case using rhetorical schemes as each try to defend their actions.

Medeia is arguably more cunning and more resourceful than all three of them and she emerges in absolute triumph at the end of the play in all appearances. Nevertheless, it is important not to read the conflict between her and the three men in simplistic terms. It would be reductive to say that the play, by presenting female intellect triumphing over male, generalises by arguing that women are invariably more intelligent than men (Medeia is in fact a very unusual person by any standards). Equally, we should be cautious of reading this (or arguably any) play solely in gender terms. As was noted above, this play is about more than gender. Medeia should not be perceived solely as a wronged woman, but rather more broadly as an intelligent and manipulative individual who was both wronged and underestimated, and who sought revenge by manipulating other human beings to implement it.⁷⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the play is among other things about gender, and intellect is one of the areas in which the ideology of male superiority is contested; the play calls into question the assumption that males are inherently and inevitably more intelligent. It is also important not to equate intellectual with moral superiority. Intelligence in the play is morally neutral. Jason abuses his powers of reasoning (evident in his duplicitous rhetoric which contains sophistic elements).⁷⁰⁶ So too does

⁷⁰⁵ Thus it would be misguided to argue that the purpose of the *agon* and the second meeting between Medeia and Jason is simply to point out Jason's intellectual inadequacy against Medeia's female intelligent superiority. In the same way, we cannot argue that Euripides' intention is to show what happens when a woman is betrayed by her husband and decides to oppose her feminine power against his masculine power. Rather, Euripides portrays different types of people reacting in different ways. The play is hardly a cautionary tale of what happens if a woman is provoked and decides to avenge herself. It is a description of the reaction of a person that finds his/herself abandoned and the bonds of *philia* betrayed.

⁷⁰⁶ On Jason's rhetoric see Lloyd 1992: 42-43.

Medeia, who uses it destructively to deceive the innocent as well as the guilty.

Conclusion

Unlike many other Euripidean male characters, Jason seems to remain unchanged from the beginning to the end. In *Herakles* for instance, we see at the end the hero crushed under the heaviness of his crime and deciding to withdraw from his life as the independent hero always helping others, and to put himself into the hands of a friend, on whose help from now on he is going to rely. In the *Alkestis* we witness the guilt and remorse of an Admetos who realises his mistake too late and wishes that he never asked from his wife that she die in his place (fortunately for him, he is presented with a second chance). Even in Pentheus, who remains throughout a violent, impulsive young man, obsessive in his ideas about Dionysos and female sexuality, Euripides offers in the end a glimpse of softness and humanity.⁷⁰⁷

But Jason, like Hippolytos, remains the same: they both present an image of failed or incomplete masculinity. Jason displays a comparable lack of development as the tragedy moves to its end. At the end of the play he is a crushed man. His rush to protect his children from the vengeful reaction of the Corinthians right after the murder of Glauke shows that he has some feelings for his children. These will fully come to surface in the last scene, when Medeia appears on the chariot, where he pleads her to allow him to touch and bury them (*θάψαι νεκρούς μοι τούσδε καὶ κλαῦσαι πάρες*, 1377). At this point the initial sympathy caused earlier by his rush to protect them now comes fully to the surface. The scene inevitably generates some sympathy for Jason, as we witness the despair not only of a father who is

⁷⁰⁷ See *Bacch.* 1316-1326, where old Kadmos, faced with his grandson's scattered body remembers that the boy Pentheus would offer to punish anyone who was mean to his grandfather. Even if his impulse is still violent, the humanity deriving from it gives us a different perspective on the character.

faced with the loss of his sons, but also of a man faced with the deprivation of any possibility of continuation of his *oikos*.⁷⁰⁸

Even at that moment, however, he remains unchanged in character, and despite any feelings of sympathy Medeia's accusations against him during the *agon* earlier still stand, accusations that bring to the fore his multiple failures as a man, a husband and a father.⁷⁰⁹ Euripides does not rewrite the character. Jason is still the selfish male that we saw at his first entrance; he still does not realise the consequences of his actions or his own responsibility in provoking Medeia's extraordinarily cruel revenge by faults and failures of his own. And he still does not utter any word of regret for what he has done; he does not accept his responsibility in the tragedy that has befallen him. On the contrary, he still uses the same stereotypes concerning women (1338-1340) that he used earlier during the *agon*, placing responsibility completely on Medeia.⁷¹⁰ Medeia's words ὦ παῖδες, ὡς ὄλεσθε πατρώα νόσω (1364) that come in response to his ὦ τέκνα, μητρὸς ὡς κακῆς ἐκύρσατε (1363) do not touch him as they should have, had he been aware of his own personal input in the tragedy. We leave him in the same way we leave Hippolytos at the end: we may feel pity for them, we finally even sympathise with them, but on the other hand we cannot forget

⁷⁰⁸ Sicking (1998: 75-76) compares Jason to Agamemnon in the *Iliad* in the sense that they both fail to realise the extent of their opponent's potential, and are thus unable to foresee the destruction they could cause. He argues that there is not "any indication that Euripides wanted his audience to condemn Jason, whose tragic and deplorable situation, on the contrary, is given full emphasis in the final scene". This is hardly the case, however, since the final scene is the first time we feel sympathy for Jason, whereas up until then Euripides took no action to make Jason a likable character. On the contrary, as Moreau (1994: 177) says, we are happy to see him fall; the only drawback is that the children need to be sacrificed.

⁷⁰⁹ See Buxton 1982: 169, "however sympathetic the audience may now be to Jason – and there are analogies with our response to the broken Kreon at the end of *Antigone* – his implied self-exoneration cannot outweigh all the arguments brought against him earlier by Medeia. Nor does his characterisation of Medeia as a monster (1342-1343) convince".

⁷¹⁰ Allan 2002: 43. Allan rightly adds that the use of the word ἀπώλεσα in 1350 by Jason has a twofold meaning, 'I have lost them' and 'I have destroyed them', "creating an ambiguity which the audience can appreciate, despite Jason's unwillingness to admit his own share of responsibility". The irony is evident to everyone except Jason himself.

that the disasters that have befallen them were largely initiated by a fault of their own that they both fail to realise. Jason's punishment is even harsher than Hippolytos': the latter loses his life, but before that his reputation and his relationship with his father are restored. Jason, on the other hand, not only has to see his children murdered (like Herakles does, only he at least is fully aware of his responsibility, not to mention that he did what he did in a state of folly), but also has to spend the rest of his life knowing that he will die alone and, more importantly for a man, without heirs (as Medeia predicts in 1386-1388: *σὺ δ', ὥσπερ εἰκός, καθανῆ κακὸς κακῶς, / Ἀργοῦς κάρα σὸν λειψάνω πεπληγμένος, / πικρὰς τελευτᾶς τῶν ἐμῶν γάμων ἰδών*). Jason comes closest to being a villain than Hippolytos or Admetos, and although a degree of sympathy is allowed in the end, he remains what he was from the beginning. Jason from the beginning is a male who fails on all kinds of duty: to his *oikos*, reciprocity to the people that offered him help, *charis*, adherence to oaths. He lacks the sense of obligation and that does not change until the end of the play.

Medeia is certainly a tragedy that projects the subversion of gender stereotypes. As well as offering us a female figure of unusual character and intellect, it presents the main male character as a man considerably flawed. The great heroic figure we know from Pindar's account in *Pyth.* 4 has been reduced to an egotistical man whose main concern is securing a profitable social status.⁷¹¹ During the *agon* he asserts the superiority of Greekness and Greek values, only to fail to live up to the expectations his Greek identity creates. We clearly see at the end the exchange of roles between husband and wife: Jason assumes the role of the victim that earlier belonged to Medeia and "he also has a less mediated relationship to the children,

⁷¹¹ For Zelenak (1998: 107), this is what "the heroic Athenian male point of view has been reduced to – self-satisfied egotism, no longer concerned with morality but with comfort; not seeking justice but merely preserving a thin veneer of 'civilised' behaviour".

expressing for the first time the sensual feelings for them that have heretofore been characteristic of Medeia".⁷¹² But the play also recognises key positive male qualities in the other male characters, offering a presentation of masculinity that is not altogether negative. Kreon proves his attachment to his daughter and also displays pity and compassion against his better judgment when he allows Medeia to remain in Corinth. Aigeus is an all-positive character, appearing sincere and offering asylum to an exile, showing respect for oaths and honouring *philia*. We thus get glimpses of positive masculinity as well that mitigate the negative impression created by Jason's behaviour in betraying his *oikos* and considering everyone but himself to be expendable.

⁷¹² Rabinowitz 1993: 150. As Zelenak (1998: 101) says, "Medeia is marginalised socially, culturally and politically. In many ways, she is the ultimate outsider, but the expected dramaturgy of gender is turned on its head. It is Jason's perspective that is marginalised and made dramaturgically 'female'. He is also more dramaturgically 'female' by becoming a victim".

CONCLUSIONS

In the present thesis I have looked at plays which are very different, both thematically and in terms of characterisation, and I have addressed very different aspects of male identity, including issues such as public and private life, courage and cowardice, sexuality, domesticity, piety, intelligence, and personal relationships. My reading has been explicitly historical, in the sense that I have tried to locate the plays in a particular culture, in the belief that for males as for females cultural context is both a significant factor in behaviour and in presentation of behaviour. None of these plays is solely, or even primarily, about being a man. As constantly noted throughout the thesis, many of the themes and the behaviours described are not gender-specific, but refer to general human values and experiences regardless of gender. But this does not make gender irrelevant; that a feature may not be gender specific does not make it gender neutral, and a phenomenon which relates to both genders may play out differently or have different implications according to gender. For instance, as we observed in the case of Hippolytos, piety is a quality expected of both sexes. But the firmer base of the male in public life (both sacred and secular) increases the abnormality of a pattern of behaviour which both focuses exclusively on one god and which places the adherent on the margins of society. The same may be said of *sophrosyne*, admired in both sexes but manifested in different ways; again an appreciation of the way in which values and language are enacted by the two sexes nuances one's understanding of play and character.

This, however, is only one way in which gender is important for our reading of the plays. Experience shows that there is often a gap between recognised models of behaviour and lived experience. Thus we are all familiar with the binary opposition between the world within and the world

outside the house, which corresponds roughly with female and male spheres of experience and responsibility. This is a real, not a notional, division of roles. But it is not the whole story. A man has a life, and emotional relationships, within his *oikos*, just as a woman in extreme circumstances may be called upon to fill the lacuna created by male absence. This mismatch between model and reality is touched upon in *Herakles*, as we saw. This element of Euripidean 'realism' need not be read as a challenge to the model, merely a reflection that the neat way in which our conceptual world is organised does not precisely correspond to the way we live.

There is, however, another aspect to maleness in Euripides. If what we have detected is correct concerning the male experience, then tragedy proves to be a more robust testing ground for cultural assumptions. He seems to acknowledge the difficulties stemming from cultural expectations of men, and he creates flawed, yet at the same time recognisably human characters, who constantly struggle to live up to these expectations, only to discover that it is impossible due to their often contradictory nature.

The crisis is nothing new. As seen from the Introduction and throughout the analysis, awareness of the difficulties in being a man is present already in Homer; the need to define ideal masculine behaviours and to censure deviations from it only proves that authors were conscious of the distance between theory and reality as well as of the constant struggle to live up to the social standards. Euripides displays a clear understanding of the fragmentary nature of manliness, and creates characters that function as different parts of masculinity, like for instance in the cases of Herakles and Lykos, or Admetos and Pheres; or by depicting the inner struggle and contradiction within the same character, as in the case of Herakles, Admetos or Hippolytos.

The present study has had as its aim to contribute to the growing discussion of maleness in antiquity by engaging specifically with the

representation of manliness in tragedy. To date, this issue in tragedy has on the whole been studied in conjunction with treatments of manliness in other genres of ancient literature, and not in specialised works on its own. Clearly, due to the size of Euripides' work and the multitude of subjects and characters, it has only been possible to focus on a very small part of his extant tragedies; I have used four plays as case studies, through which I have attempted to comment on the emerging themes. Different plays bring to the fore different issues; a treatment of the rest of the Euripidean corpus (as well as Sophocles and Aeschylus) could provide themes of equal significance and interest. I believe the effort would be rewarded.

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