

CRITICAL EURIPIDES: INTERSECTING HIERARCHIES
IN *HECUBA*, *ANDROMACHE*, AND *TROADES*

Thesis Submitted for the DPhil in Classical Languages and Literature

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“Faje sempe cose bbone”

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines social hierarchies in Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, and *Troades*. Inserting itself into recent debates on the ideological operations of Euripidean tragedy, it offers new perspectives by exploring hierarchies of gender, class, and ethnicity in these three tragedies, and argues that they can be best examined together. In particular, the thesis analyses how these seemingly distinct hierarchies are ideologically enmeshed and mutually supporting, to the point at times of becoming virtually indistinguishable from each other, even when they are seemingly colliding. I argue that they can be best understood as part of one ideological 'matrix' or 'structure', which is deconstructed by these three tragedies. From the thesis, these plays emerge as particularly 'critical', and this criticism can be contextualised as ideological without losing sight of the aesthetic and affective features of the plays. The tragedian's critique, it is argued, can be best understood as a re-reading of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. By envisioning these tragedies as re-opening tensions seemingly closed by the trilogy, it offers an interpretation of them as particularly critical of hierarchies—social, linguistic, moral, and even aesthetic. Understanding Euripides' critical re-reading of the *Oresteia* as both ideological and aesthetic, it offers fresh insights into the relationship between form and ideology, which emerge as co-constituted, and therefore inseparable. The thesis delineates its own original understanding of ideological critique through which Euripides' critical movement can be better understood and which circumvents the postcritical emphasis on the division between intellectual scepticism and aesthetic experience. Finally, by understanding *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, and *Troades* as enacting and reflecting a deep crisis of ideology, it argues that they offer a valuable model to theorise the ideological interaction and interconnection between hierarchies.

ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡυτή

Heraclitus

INTRODUCTION

“The old world is dying and the new world struggles to be born”

Antonio Gramsci

This thesis investigates hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, and class in Euripides’ *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, and *Troades*. Although scholars have pointed at the parallels between these three tragedies, no monograph has so far been devoted to a synoptic examination of the three. Yet besides the close chronology of the first two (with *Troades* following roughly ten years later),¹ there are plenty of immediately significant overlaps between them: in all of them, Trojan women are central to the development of the tragedy, and in all they have lost their previous status and become slaves;² the memory of Troy and its destruction linger painfully in the background of the new plot; lamentation recurs almost obsessively, with an apex in the ‘complete lamentation’ that *Troades* has sometimes appeared to be;³ the Trojan women suffer some sort of violence, which adds to their previous sorrow for the destruction of Troy; the Greeks appear in a somewhat disturbing light; war is a recurrent theme. From Ennius to Seneca to contemporary remakes, artistic receptions of the three plays throughout the centuries have grasped this similarity by often combining them.⁴ In addition, the three tragedies share typical thematic interests of Euripidean tragedy: the unreliability of appearances, the

¹ Battezzato (2018), 4 concludes that *Hecuba* was very likely produced in 424; Allan (2000), 149 dates *Andromache* to around 425. *Troades* was staged in 415: cf. Kovacs (2018), 1-2.

² Cf. Allan (2000), 166.

³ Lauriola (2015), 65; Suter (2003), 1.

⁴ Lauriola (2015), 50; Dugdale (2015), 110, 136. Cf. Chong-Gossard (2015) on Percheron’s reception of the *Andromache*, which seems to make use of the ghost prologue of the *Hecuba*, and on Racine’s, which also makes use of *Troades* (149, 152-3; cf. also 162 on *L’Andromaca* by Giovanni Paisiello, which blends Euripides’ *Andromache* and Seneca’s *Troades*).

difficulties of communication, the troubling conflict between old ways of knowing and new intellectual trends.

Although a general synoptic monograph on the three might be needed, however, this thesis does not intend to offer a complete examination of these plays' multiple connections. What it intends to do, instead, is to examine social hierarchies —by which I mean gender, ethnicity, and class—in these three tragedies, individually and together. All three offer sustained reflections on these hierarchies. Of interest, for instance, are the discussion of womanhood and the respective expectations connected to male and female: an example is the extended discussion of female virtue by Andromache in both *Andromache* and *Troades*. Second, all three continuously examine ethnic differences between Greeks and Trojans. Hermione's racist rhetoric in *Andromache* and Odysseus' understanding of Greek superiority in *Hecuba* are two clear examples. Moreover, the hammering, obsessive concentration on the condition of slavery of the Trojans inevitably underlies the violence inflicted on them in all three plays. One can think of Andromache's persecution by Hermione in *Andromache* and the sacrifice of Polyxena in *Hecuba*; the entirety of *Troades* can be summarised as an illustration of the violence inflicted on the enslaved Trojans qua slaves. Although some articles and studies on these plays, as well as on other Euripidean tragedies,⁵ have underlined how Euripides' handling of gender structures is often compounded with an equally significant thematisation of ethnicity in the exploration of otherness, this thesis aims to distinguish itself from these attempts in multiple ways.

⁵ In particular, *Medea* and *Bacchae*: Swift (2017); Allan (2002); Luschnig (2007); Segal (1982); Buxton (2013).

First, it enlarges the analysis of Euripidean hierarchies to class and status, hierarchical explorations that are crucial to the development of these plays. Second, it refuses to investigate single hierarchies as ‘central’ to the social examination of these plays. For example, it does not claim that gender, or ‘Woman’, is *the* underlying Other, *the* lens through which the masculine self is constructed and negotiated.⁶ The extensive presence of the other two compels us to go beyond single hierarchies, and to enlarge the discussion of the ideology of Euripidean tragedy to an array of multiple social hierarchies. This leads us to the third point of difference. This thesis investigates this thematisation of gender, ethnicity, and class, and it asks questions on their intersection: how do they relate to the ideological workings of the plays, individually? How do these hierarchies interact with each other? And how do they contribute to the ideological operations of the plays when considered *together*, in their interaction? Is it possible to conceive of a tragedy that is ideologically repressive in some ways and utopian or radical in others? Finally, how does this focus on social hierarchies map onto the plays’ non-social thematic explorations and their aesthetics? My interest, in short, is not so much in the *multiplicity* of categories that tragedy famously explores and threatens, as in the *complexity* of their interrelation and intersection. Centring my analysis on the social order that these three plays explore, I am interested not simply in the way social hierarchies break down, but in their ideological entanglements and positionings vis-à-vis each other in the construction and deconstruction of ideology — the way in which they support each other, are entangled with each other, and even collide with and reroute each other.

⁶ For a critique, cf. Roselli (2007), 90.

In asking these questions, the following thesis avowedly intends to think intersectionally, and to think about intersectionality. The term ‘intersectionality’ is a fraught one. Notoriously difficult to define and diversely conceptualised, ‘intersectionality’ was first used and made famous by legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in reference to the complex experience of women of colour who found themselves not adequately protected and represented by American law.⁷ In advocating for the particularity and complexity of the identity of black women, Crenshaw established the underlying idea of intersectionality shared by many of its subsequent developments: working through essentialised and single axes of oppression or identity fails to adequately represent reality.⁸ Since then, intersectionality has grown steadily in legal studies, political theory, critical theory, policy-making and international institutions, subsuming a wide range of different meanings to the point of being often regarded as a ‘buzzword’.⁹ Scholars of intersectionality have developed different conceptions and models to understand and conceptualise the intersected hierarchies that make up the structure of societ(es) worldwide.¹⁰ One important conceptualisation within the debate has been named ‘constitutive intersectionality’: this is the belief that hierarchical discourses of oppression not only ‘intersect’ to form particular forms of complex identities and oppression, but are actually ontologically ‘enmeshed’.¹¹ Since hierarchies are thought to be mutually sustaining and to be part of ‘one overarching structure of domination’,¹² the project of dismantling structures of oppression is one

⁷ Crenshaw (1989), 139-67. Crenshaw was the first to theorise it formally, but the notion predates its theorisation and has a long history in Black feminist movements: cf. Hill Collins (2015), 8.

⁸ Cho, Crenshaw, McCall (2013), 787, 795.

⁹ Bilge (2013), 410.

¹⁰ Ferguson (2016), 38-60.

¹¹ Yuval-Davis (2006), 193-209; Ferguson (2016), 43.

¹² Hill Collins (1990), 222; Ferguson (2016), 43.

that goes beyond single hierarchies.¹³ As has been advocated, intersectionality can and should be applied in different fields in different ways, but what makes an analysis intersectional is its framing, ‘conceiving of categories not as distinct but always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power’.¹⁴ This thesis aims to sketch an intersectional approach, or rather intersectional *approaches*, to Greek tragedy by analysing the plays’ treatment of multiple hierarchies, but also by interrogating the ideological operations that their intersection — which can take the separate forms of clashing, enmeshment and overlapping — can produce (cf. *infra*).¹⁵

This inevitably brings challenges. Most of all, this selectiveness might appear to be violating the richly wrought web of thematic explorations of these three plays: why should we pay particular attention only to social hierarchies? Is there a risk here of reducing these tragedies to ideological containers? These are important objections, especially in light of recent developments within Classics, literary theory, and critical theory altogether that have put into question the primacy of approaches to literature and society that privilege the analysis of ideology over other aspects. One trend can be generally described as ‘postcritical’: scholars such as Bruno Latour (in ‘Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?’) and Rita Felski (*The Limits of Critique*) have raised important objections to traditional critical approaches, especially in literary studies.¹⁶ Felski, for instance, denounces this type of criticism’s ‘one-sided view of the work of

¹³ Crenshaw (1989), 139-67; Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013), 785-810; Bilge (2013), 405-24; Ferguson (2016), 38-60; Yuval-Davis (2006), 193-209; Hill Collins (1990); Spade (2013); Fauzia and Amenta (2024).

¹⁴ Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013), 795; Spade (2013), 1050. Cf. Hill Collins (2015), 13.

¹⁵ See pp. 24-5.

¹⁶ Cf. also Felski (2023) for a recent summary of the postcritical turn.

art', 'its affective inhibition',¹⁷ 'its picture of society', 'its methodological asymmetry', in particular in the way it seems to deprive the text of any interest if not for the analysis of power.¹⁸ Latour similarly expressed his concern with the dangers of ossifying critical theory as a reading practice, and proposed instead treating the text as an 'assembly' of social, historical, material, emotional 'concerns' that the critic can attend to, instead of reducing them to ideology.¹⁹ The other trend, increasingly popular in literary Classics, can be defined as 'new formalist':²⁰ recent and influential books such as Vasunia's *The Politics of Form in Greek Literature*, Wohl's *Euripides and the Politics of Form*, and Nooter's and Telò's *Radical Formalisms* strive to work towards a new type of formalism that recognises the importance of the aesthetic experience of literature while not losing sight of the way forms can inherently be political. These readings share the fundamental conviction, as Eco already expressed in the '60s, that 'the real content of a work is the vision of the world expressed in its way of forming (*modo di formare*)'.²¹ In this complex context, it is important to clarify the intent and scope of the following thesis.

There is a danger in the postcritical turn to treat critical theory as inherently procrustean, trivialising, and reductionist,²² and to argue that 'other' aspects of the text (eminently, its emotional component and its formal features) are equally, if not more important than ideology. Yet any reasonable critical analysis of literature does not have

¹⁷ This would be an important flaw in the study of Attic tragedy, given the importance of emotion and affection in ancient theories of tragedy: cf. O'Sullivan (2008), 194-5. For the debate on political vs aesthetic readings of tragedy, cf. Heath (2006) with further references.

¹⁸ Felski (2015), 189-95. Objections of this kind were already present in the reactions of scholars that opposed 'critical' readings of tragedy: cf. Griffin (1998); Rabinowitz (2008), 58.

¹⁹ For a summary and critique of Latour, Felski and Levine, cf. Lesjak (2016). Cf. Arnould-Bloomfield (2020), 10; Love (2010), 382.

²⁰ Cf. also Martindale (2010).

²¹ Eco (1989), 144. Translation from Bondanella (1997), 30.

²² Noys (2010), 81 *et passim* for a critique of Latour.

to overlook ‘other’ aspects of the text when criticising its ideological operations and the political work a text performs; likewise, a formalist or postcritical analysis of the text in the Latourian manner might jettison ideology, but this only comes at the cost of erasing the political immanence of its non immediately political aspects.²³ New formalist books such as Wohl’s make this clear by analysing the way form, as well as affect, are intrinsically political.²⁴ As Wohl writes, ‘the challenge is not just to keep these two sets of issues—the aesthetic and the political—in focus simultaneously, but to theorize their interconnection within the text itself, to identify the ideological work being done in and by tragedy’s aesthetic form.’²⁵ Wohl’s point can be enlarged to matters that are neither aesthetic nor immediately obviously political—²⁶Latour’s advocacy for reading the way different aspects of a text ‘assemble’. As some of Latour’s critics have rightly observed, the way in which distinct concerns of a text ‘assemble’ (for example, in the *Oresteia*, concerns about justice, language, morality, family, religion, and Athens) is also inherently ideological (for instance, the *Oresteia* weaves these concerns together in a coherent way that both seems to reinforce ideas of Athenian superiority and to confirm patriarchal institutions, as I will also argue). I believe that a reconsideration and enlargement of postcritical discourse in this direction are needed, and this thesis hopes to offer some indication as to said direction.²⁷ While it

²³ Cf. Flatscher and Seitz (2020), 14: ‘Latour hardly ever addresses the question of power...why should power relations not play a role in the gathering that makes a thing a thing?’. In fact, Felski herself notes elsewhere (Felski 2020) that ‘affective’ readers and critical scholars have more in common than they might think, given how any critical reading involves an identification with a critical perspective that is inevitably an affective process. Yet the reverse is also true: an affective identification acquires its power from the reader’s embodied, social, and political experience.

²⁴ Wohl (2015), 18. Cf. also Rose (1997), 165.

²⁵ Wohl (2015), 4.

²⁶ Cf. Wright (2015), 413 debating whether Wohl’s use of ‘political’ is adequate for matters that are not self-evidently so.

²⁷ An important, recent response to postcriticism is Kornbluh (2019).

concentrates on ideology and makes use of critical theory (in particular, intersectional theory),²⁸ it also does so by contextualising it within these plays' rich web of connections and their formal features. These plays' engagement with language, justice, morality, temporality, as well as their aesthetic features, are not self-standing 'concerns', but are weaved into an ideological nexus that my thesis examines, and that possesses a strong critical potential.

Critical, then, is the approach; but critical are the plays, too. As I hope it will become clear throughout the thesis, these plays are critical in multiple ways. First, they are critical in the sense that they *by themselves* intend to debunk, unmask, and deconstruct. They ask new questions, but they also reopen old questions. This is not a new or original view of Euripides: among the three tragedians, he has often been associated with iconoclasm, radicalism, and philosophical scepticism. Yet is the view of Euripides as the Attic *enfant terrible* really justified? Recent scholars have increasingly called it into question: for instance, Lefkowitz's reappraisal of Euripidean gods shows how little Euripides differs from the more traditional tragedians in the construction of his theological apparatus.²⁹ Allan and Kelly have equally raised important objections to the view that Euripides questions established discourses of gender and ethnicity, for example in *Medea*,³⁰ a play that has often been at the centre of the misogynist-or-proto-feminist debate developed around Euripides since the 20th century.³¹ Analysing Euripides both as literary and social critic, Wright concludes that 'he does not strike us as an aggressively modern or forward-looking thinker', and that he even 'comes across

²⁸ For a summary of the different traditions of critical theory and their relevance to intersectional critical theory, cf. Hill Collins (2019), 54-84.

²⁹ Lefkowitz (2016).

³⁰ Allan and Kelly (2013), 105-9.

³¹ Smit (2002), 102; Hall (1999b).

as a distinctly old-fashioned sort of writer, looking back to the earlier generation of poets'.³² Although we should be wary, I believe, of generalising by assuming that the entirety of the Euripidean production is either traditional or radical, the following thesis makes a case for understanding *these* three tragedies, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, *Troades*, as especially critical of established certainties, be they societal, political, aesthetic, or dramaturgical. This process of criticism, I will argue, is mainly, but not exclusively, articulated in regard to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, a trilogy that has sporadically appeared relevant to readers of these individual tragedies and that yet, I claim, underlies all of them for profound reasons. The ghost of the *Oresteia* in these 'Trojan' plays cannot be understood if we refrain from an analysis of the social hierarchies that underlie them; these, I argue, are fundamental to the Euripidean reception of, and criticism of, Aeschylean tragedy. These plays, then, are also 'critical' in the modern sense by which we speak of 'critical acclaim', 'critical response', 'critical analysis' with reference to the specific aesthetic and literary connotations of the adjective.

Critical, too, in the sense that they are extreme. If 'critical' can also signify 'extremely serious or dangerous, so that there is a risk of death', especially in connection to an illness or injury, then these plays seem to raise the stakes by deconstructing old certainties without providing new solutions. This contributes, I believe, to the often noted grim atmosphere of the *Hecuba*,³³ a play in which not only violence seems to snowball into an undifferentiated degeneration that leaves no space for optimism, but one in which the gods are also notably absent. The application of this connotation of

³² Wright (2010), 182.

³³ Zeitlin (1991), 57 calls it 'the least consoling of Euripides' dramas'; Hall (2001), xx defines it 'one of the bleakest of all Euripides' dramas'; Planinc (2018), 405 notes how modern audiences find it 'unremittingly bleak'; Lawrence (2010), 31 calls the 'universe of the play' 'morally and politically bleak in the extreme'. Cf. Di Benedetto (1971), 144.

'critical' to *Troades* is still more self-evident. A continuous lamentation, a 'total disaster',³⁴ and even an 'horrendous vision[s] of the abyss':³⁵ Euripides' meditation on the suffering of the Trojan women leaves little hope, no answers, as the past of Troy and the future of Greece seem to elude clear-cut considerations of right and wrong, good and bad. Even more than the catastrophic finales of *Bacchae* and *Medea*, perhaps,³⁶ *Troades* refuses to find an end to suffering: while Medea and Dionysus have accomplished their revenge by the end of the play, violence is still in store for Trojans and Greeks alike here, with a sense of endless misery and potential apocalypse for literary Troy as well as contemporary Athens. *Andromache*, instead, superficially strikes as a different case: it is, after all, a tragedy of rescue and salvation, with Andromache, Hermione, and Peleus episodically saved and reassured. The *dea ex machina*, too, seems to 'fix' what we have seen, and to give some solutions. And yet, I will argue, the play continuously poses questions that the ending *ostensibly* cannot truly resolve, and the shadow of this irresolution is projected in the future in a way that once again opens up the narrative, rather than closing it. In this process, both social hierarchies and the phantom of Aeschylus play an important part.

Yet something is critical also inasmuch as it indicates and responds to a crisis. 'Crisis' itself, a fully Greek word, means 'decision', 'judgement', 'turning point'; the moment in which a difficult situation can either lead to safety or degenerate into disaster. As far as we know, Hippocratic medics appropriated the terminology of *krisis* to indicate the turning point in the development of an illness, the moment in which the patient would

³⁴ Poole (1976).

³⁵ Arnott (1996), 111.

³⁶ While Medea's arrival to Athens might have felt disturbing, *Troades* seems to explicitly invite consideration of the Greeks' future shipwrecks and troubles. Dionysus' ending in *Bacchae* 1330-43 predicts exile for Agave, Cadmus and Harmonia; yet the couple will finally live in the Land of the Blessed (1338-9).

either start recovering or quickly die.³⁷ In this sense, then, a critical moment is both a moment of extreme importance, as in the sense above, and a moment that represents a bifurcation of possibilities that will itself resolve the crisis (situation) in one way (recovered health) or the other (death). Either way, a critical moment always represents a crisis, an impasse, that puts us to choose between one possible course of events or the other. But before it is solved, the crisis is the moment in which both courses, both possibilities are still there, tearing us apart. This is self-evidently appropriate to Attic tragedy and its notorious dilemmas, conflicts and tensions. Once again, Euripides might not seem to be doing anything new here in dramatising the ambiguity and duplicity of existence, in problematising judgment; after all, he had staged the conflicted, double Medea torn on stage between maternal instincts and heroic vengeance, just a few years before *Hecuba*. Nonetheless, there is a specific critical drive in *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, and *Troades* that consists precisely in re-opening matters that had been closed, conflicting duplicities that had been solved previously, or that were inevitably implicitly solved in the ideological existence of the polis. This is important, as it compels us to rethink the widely accepted view that ‘tragedy’ puts the status quo into question to further confirm it and solidify it. As we will see, Euripides’ reception of Aeschylus can be interpreted precisely so: as a debunking force that does not simply oppose the oeuvre of his predecessor categorically, but as a drive that re-opens matters, tensions, duplicities and leaves them hanging, refusing the ‘solidifications’ of previous solutions. And one should add that there is enough historical ground to suspect that Euripidean tragedy was more likely than unlikely to come back again to questions that appeared to be solved by the *Oresteia* but whose

³⁷ Hippoc. *Aer.* 11 with Jouanna (2005), 4.

solutions could not stand any longer. For between the *Oresteia* and the *Hecuba*, separated by as many as thirty-four years, Athens had changed. A crisis, or perhaps a set of crises, had been emerging in the polis —³⁸ above all, I would point to the Peloponnesian war (and what it entailed), and the troubling force of sophistic thought (cf. *infra*).³⁹ ‘This’ Euripides, then, is critical in the sense that he reflects and even enacts a crisis, and that he more vividly puts the unresolved tensions and contradictions of society and culture under inspection, refusing comfortable, neat solutions.⁴⁰

At this point, a word is also needed on the way this thesis envisions ‘Euripides’ and his potential critical intentions. Since Barthes, it is customary in all sorts of literary disciplines to speak of the death of the author: meaning is seen as constituted by the reader,⁴¹ listener or viewer, not restricted to the intention of the author (which can neither be retrieved in the case of ancient literature nor is totally relevant, given that the process of artistic creation involves many parts of one’s being and is not fully steered by one’s intentions).⁴² Nonetheless, it is safe to say that empiricist efforts at retrieving the ‘original’ meaning of Attic tragedy still flourish and live side by side with

³⁸ I do not mean that Athens was in a crisis during the war in the sense that Athens was losing; rather, I see the war as catalysing new reflection on crucial moral, political and even ‘existential’ issues, such as ideas of Greekness and barbarism, selfhood and otherness (cf. p. 317).

³⁹ Similarly, Croally (1994), 56. It is usual to see Athens ‘in continual crisis’ in the second half of the fifth century: Rosenbloom (2011), 405. Cf. Foley (2001), 3-18; Di Benedetto (1971), 121.

⁴⁰ Wohl (2015), 120 *et passim* rightly criticises the idea that Euripides simply ‘reflects’ or ‘reports’ the troubled historical events of the late fifth century. Instead, borrowing Raymond Williams’ ‘structure of feelings’, she argues that the *Orestes* articulates ‘all the known complexities, the experienced tensions, shifts, and uncertainties, the intricate forms of unevenness and confusion’ that were in process and would precipitate the crisis of 404. Euripides, then, does not simply reflect a fully formed crisis but rather himself contributes to the articulation of the crisis by teasing out the developing tensions and confusions of society. Cf. Schein (2016), 144.

⁴¹ Martindale (1993); cf. Hardwick (2020), 18-9.

⁴² Another important position is that represented by Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954), who first spoke of the ‘intentional fallacy’. While Barthes’ position, however, can be defined as deconstructionist, Wimsatt and Beardsley articulate a fundamentally new critical perspective that still centres on the text. For a critique, cf. Eco (1992), 40; Knappe (2021), 395-6.

differently oriented studies of their reception.⁴³ The following thesis sits awkwardly, once again, at the intersection of the two.⁴⁴ In a way, reading ideology in these plays means to read immanently, to understand the way in which the plays, whether Euripides meant it or not, engage with the notion of hierarchy (linguistic, moral, social, etc.). In this regard, the influence of Caroline Levine's seminal *Forms* on the following approach is deep and pervasive (and it is from *Forms* that chapter three will take its cue).⁴⁵ Levine understands forms, including networks, hierarchies, wholes, and rhythms, as elements that can constitute one's critical analysis of any phenomena — from reading literature to interpreting politics. Refraining from arguing that the work of art (or any other phenomenon) can only be understood through those specific forms or was *intended* to be understood through those specific forms, Levine shows how a formalist analysis of this kind can illuminate immanent dynamics in the ideologies of the text.⁴⁶

At the same time, however, I believe Vasunia is right in receiving Levine with caution and in insisting that we need to historicise said forms:⁴⁷ one risks seeing wholes and rhythms where the Greeks would not see wholes and rhythms, and this does alter our understanding of tragedy if (and I stress 'if') one is interested in the way an Athenian audience might have received it. So what the thesis adopts is not only a critical-formalist (in short, new formalist) approach, but also paradoxically an approach that is attentive to the historical circumstances in which those forms had meaning when the

⁴³ Most reception approaches do not limit themselves to the meaning the text has 'taken on' in newer contexts, but rather envision this relationship as dialogic: Hardwick (2020), 17.

⁴⁴ Cf. Knape (2021), 399-400 on multi-perspectivism in interpretation.

⁴⁵ Levine (2015).

⁴⁶ Levine (2006), 647: 'it is less about what authors intend or what readers receive than about what forms *do*'.

⁴⁷ Vasunia (2022), 17 (ebook).

play was first performed. In short, regardless of Euripides' intentions, I will aim to shed light on the multiple hierarchies of these three plays and the way they relate and disrupt ideology, like Levine does. But, unlike Levine, I resort to a specifically historicised notion of ideology and hierarchy, and I examine the way in which these hierarchies in the text enmesh, overlap, and clash in ways that affect and contest that ideology.⁴⁸

On the other hand, positing a relationship of critical intertextuality between these plays and the *Oresteia* does involve a degree of intentionalism that cannot be fully dismissed: the plays draw their critical force from a specific reading of Aeschylus' oeuvre, as I will argue, and the shadow of Euripides the author cannot be erased from this understanding of intertextuality. This, however, does not mean that Euripides understood the plays through the notion of hierarchies or that he structured them on that basis. Nonetheless, the critical work these plays perform in relation to Aeschylus' *Oresteia* can be best understood, in my reading, through hierarchies. In short, Euripides' (intentional) ideological critique of the trilogy can be understood as an 'assembly' of elements of form and content, which, however, do respond to a specific ideological drive of the plays and that I argue can be best understood through a critical focus on hierarchies (immanent, non-intentionalist reading). Having said that, although Euripides might as well not have thought through the concept of hierarchy at all or any points in the creative process of these plays, an intentionalist reader will find in the thesis much that can point in the direction of Euripides *intending* to precisely criticise an understanding of existence as easily settled through a rigid hierarchisation of elements.

⁴⁸ Cf. Schein (2016), 144 on the need to read Wohl (2015) with Levine (2015).

A single yet fundamental observation this thesis will make, in fact, leads to important questions that can be framed in an intentionalist manner. *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, and *Troades*, I argue, mobilise and thematise hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, and class/status in a way that is too prolonged to be accidental; it seems that they are indeed essential to the plays' concerns. But this raises the question whether this constant multi-layered questioning of gender, ethnicity, and class hierarchies is deliberately devised, and, if so, why Euripides might have created a more sociologically complex stage than other Attic tragedies. A non-intentionalist reader might note that social discourses are always implicitly present in tragedy; the array of social strata and identities represented on stage is always rich: for instance, *Antigone* can be said to play out tensions revolving around gender, but one can equally find it fertile ground to reflect on the relationship between state and individual, mortal and immortal, father and son. The vast reception of the play is evidence for this: across history, artists and philosophers found the text stimulating reflection on numerous discourses and hierarchies, even if not deliberately explored by Sophocles.⁴⁹ An intentionalist, intersectional reader might respond, however, that these hierarchies in these three Trojan tragedies do not simply lurk under the surface of the tragedy as unintentional ideological forms, and do not simply happen to be accidental to the plays' process of characterisation, but that Euripides mobilised them and thematised them robustly and explicitly. In fact, it is precisely because of the fact that they are all recurrent and explicit that we can perceive that the plays are destabilising them, and it is by no means clear, if the play thematised only one or two of them, that the others would automatically be

⁴⁹ Holmes (2015), 135.

ideologically entailed, visible, and present. I will come back to this more explicitly later. But I will give one quick example to clarify the matter.

Levine makes her argument on hierarchies by indeed resorting to Attic tragedy, and, specifically, to *Antigone*. She argues, as we will see in detail later, that by upholding one hierarchy (gods, humans), she brings other hierarchies into play: female/male, subject/king, kinship/state, state/gods.⁵⁰ Besides Levine's specific point on the way hierarchies work, Levine works through the forms of the play, and so what she says about male/female, gods/humans, king/subjects does not imply that Sophocles necessarily understood the play as made up of these oppositions or expected the audience to interpret the play through a rigid scheme of structuralist thought. And yet, there are significant reasons why Levine mentions some hierarchies and not others: the text makes them palpable. This is the reason why, instead, Levine does not summon, say, the Greek/barbarian hierarchy, the human/animal or the slave/noble one, to understand Sophocles' play. A version of *Antigone* in which barbarian characters appeared is perfectly imaginable, and in that case the ideological enmeshment of that hierarchy with the male/female polarity might have been visible. This, however, does not happen in *Antigone*. Instead, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, and *Troades* are able to raise the question of the way in which social hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, and class relate — and, in my view, show them as part of one constitutive system of signification, whether Euripides meant it or not — because they make them visible, present, tangible. This raises the *possibility* that in consciously expanding on gender, ethnicity, and class, in not limiting the play to one extended thematisation of one or two of these hierarchies, Euripides might have somehow lumped these hierarchies together, might have seen

⁵⁰ Levine (2015), 90.

these processes of marginalisation as somewhat analogous, and might have seen their destabilisation as a multi-layered enterprise encompassing all of them.

Regardless of whether this is the case or not, a critical reader of the sort that Levine is might find analysing these plays particularly interesting precisely because by staging gender, ethnicity and class, it offers a great possibility to see how *these* hierarchies, conceived as Levinian forms, might interact, and what ideological effects this interaction might cause. This is where intersectional theory enters the stage: it is by adopting an intersectional framework, regardless of whether Euripides thought intersectionally himself, that new questions arise: if we consider more than one form of social hierarchy, what changes? How do they interact? Do they really work together ideologically? And if they do, what can this tell us, readers of the 21st century, about the way similar forms in different historical contexts interact in the sustaining or dismantling of ideology *now*?

In what follows, I sketch out different ways of understanding intersecting social hierarchies throughout the analysis of the three plays, and in so doing I am situating my research in dialogue with developing theories of intersectional relationality, especially the different conceptualisations proposed by Patricia Hill Collins.⁵¹ In chapter one, on

⁵¹ Hill Collins (2019), 226-52. Hill Collins distinguishes three possible ways of conceptualising intersectional relationality, i.e., the way social hierarchies relate to each other: addition, articulation, co-formation. An approach based on 'addition' is primarily interested in contesting single-axis thinking by making visible the social hierarchies that have been neglected in critical analysis and that inevitably intersect in the creation of meaning, identity, and oppression (cf. 'overlap' in ch. 1). 'Articulation' captures a mode of relational thinking that conceives of categories as distinct but contingently connected in specific ways in specific historical contexts. Given that 'articulation' also allows the possibility of hierarchies being articulated in conflict, this partly resonates with my approach in the third chapter on *Troades* ('clash'). Finally, 'co-formation' analysis shows how hierarchies are deeply enmeshed and co-constitutive from the outset: they do not exist in isolation and they do not relate to each other as distinct axes, but rather they are already inextricable from each other in their formation. This does not entirely correspond but can be mapped upon my reading of *Andromache* ('enmeshment').

the *Hecuba*, I show how gender, ethnicity, and class *overlap*. By ‘overlap’, I do not simply mean that they are simultaneously relevant in the characterisation of Hecuba and the other characters of the play, but rather that in the ideological operations of the text they can be seen to work together, at times becoming practically indistinguishable from each other, overlapping. These hierarchies, I argue, appear to be, or to be conceived as, part of one ‘matrix’ of signification. Starting from the relationship of intertextuality between *Hecuba* and the *Oresteia*, I contextualise Euripides’ critical stance on Aeschylus by arguing that he envisions ‘social hierarchy’ as fundamental to the dynamic of the *Oresteia* and, subsequently, of his critical response. As will become clear, the point here is that while *Eumenides* operated mainly through the exploration (and, I maintain, hierarchisation) of gender, *Hecuba* re-opens the problem of social hierarchy but enlarges it. A problematic conception of social hierarchy emerges, made up of three overlapping strands, at times virtually indistinguishable from each other. In chapter two, on the *Andromache*, I proceed to unpack this claim on the complexity of ideology in a more sustained way, and I investigate how gender, ethnicity, and class are *enmeshed*. I start from the final insight provided in chapter one and linger on how hierarchies in this play cannot be conceived as pre-existing single forms, as single axes that are somehow paralleled. A reader might take the ‘overlap’ at a broader, general level for granted as the separate exploration of analogical yet distinct discourses of power: I proceed in the second chapter through a closer textual analysis to clarify here that the hierarchies are so tightly knit together that a change in one of them inevitably corresponds to changes in the others. If all these three hierarchies are destabilised, then, they are not destabilised in parallel, separately; rather, they are problematised together, in the same way pulling a thread in a bundle of yarn cannot but trigger the others to move too—precisely because the threads, while being originally distinct, are

often virtually indistinguishable from each other in the skein and cannot be taken in isolation from the others: *enmeshed*. The more we attempt to understand the ironies involving the characters of this play in one discourse, the more we find ourselves enmeshed, accidentally stepping into another. Finally, chapter three, on *Troades*, will engage with some important challenges and insights of Levine's *Forms*, and will understand how hierarchies *clash*. Although this is by no means restricted to *Troades*, the tragedy itself dramatises the search for meaning in a way that asks us to consider different hierarchies as competing against each other, as each character tries to articulate their vision of the world by usually upholding one, with others instead using different ones. Chapter three deals with Levine's claim that hierarchies can be liberating and radical precisely because they do not work together, and, separately, can work against each other, creating new, liberatory spaces. As Levine's argument seems to target the foundations of intersectionality as intended both generally and in the thesis,⁵² I will attempt to show how Levine's insight is both correct and yet unable to take into full account the historical system that links those hierarchies together—in other words, ideology. Both chapter two and three will regularly go back to the *Oresteia*, clarifying how this multi-layered hierarchical deconstruction applies to these plays' critical reading of Aeschylus' oeuvre. In attempting to sketch these three different understandings of intersectionality, I have found each play particularly representative of hierarchies overlapping, enmeshing, and clashing, but each phenomenon is by no means restricted to each individual tragedy. *Andromache's* sustained quarrels between Andromache and Hermione, Peleus and Menelaus, would have worked equally well as a case for the investigation of clashing hierarchies, *Hecuba* might as well be examined

⁵² As Levine herself mentions in her first formulation of 'strategic formalism' (Levine 2006, 652 n3), strategic formalism itself builds on the insights of intersectional analysis. However, it clearly goes in a different direction.

through entangled social hierarchies, and *Troades*' hierarchies also could be said to overlap. For reasons of variety and space, however, I have limited each understanding of intersectionality to each play. As I hope will become clear, however, the three understandings do not contradict each other, and do enable us to see a recurrent way in which these plays similarly treat social hierarchies.

In opening up spaces that question the veracity of reality, this Euripides finally emerges as 'queer'. Soon after this thesis was started, Olsen's and Telò's *Queer Euripides* was published,⁵³ and soon after that *The Routledge Handbook of Classics and Queer Theory*, as part of a significant wave of queer theory within Classics. As the editors of the latter remind us, there are two directions in this trend:⁵⁴

The first is to read historically and to see how various figures, authors, or literary characters present a disruptive version of the subject in relation to contemporary norms. [...] The other direction taken in this section of the volume, sometimes in conjunction with the first, is to show how a particular queer subjectivity challenges our notions of normativity and forces us to recognize something in the ancient world as queer because of our relation to it.

Because of its commitment to the historical nature of the forms and hierarchies explored in the plays, the present thesis clearly moves in the first direction: it considers the act of queering that the plays themselves enact, the radical and manifold ways in which the text itself resists and contests normative structures in that specific historical context. On closer inspection, however, it also moves in the second direction. Man/woman, barbarian/Greek, slave/noble: in the attempt to point them down

⁵³ Olsen and Telò (2022).

⁵⁴ Haselswerdt, Lindheim and Ormand (2023), 4.

historically — as we ask ‘what is the hierarchy at work here?’ —, they continuously prompt us to reflect also on our notions of hierarchies, both in the way we conceptualise them individually and together. For instance, feminist scholarship on tragedy has taken for granted that the validity of its intellectual project relies on a continuum between antiquity and modernity. It is precisely because of the transhistorical, transcultural persistence of patriarchal ideology that studying *Trachiniae* speaks to the present.⁵⁵ But things become blurrier when we move to the Greek/barbarian one: is it of the same value to understand the ideological workings of racial and ethnic ideologies? If the barbarisation of Trojans, so fundamental to these plays’ explorations, seems too different from modern racial ideology, some significant overlaps between the workings of these two differently historicised ideologies also raise the question of whether they can be put in a continuum in a similar way. Finally, matters become even more complicated with class and status: these plays seem not only to thematise and destabilise the differentiation between slave and free, as is commonly noted in scholarship, but, I will argue, they conceive the slave-noble polarity as emblematic of a polarised social hierarchy whereby the slave represents the reified bottom of the social scale and the aristocrat its wealthy and powerful top. Yet few would be comfortable in applying the term ‘class’ to the examination of Attic tragedy without qualifying the semantics of a word we otherwise utilise to speak of our late capitalistic world. Nonetheless, it is precisely because of this, this interplay of sameness and difference, distance and continuum, that reading the plays through these hierarchical lenses allows us to inspect the hierarchies that structure *our* world. This does not mean that there is a fixed ‘them’ and ‘us’, ‘their hierarchies’ and ‘our hierarchies’, that we are

⁵⁵ Wohl (1998), xix *et passim*.

simply inspired by different historicised hierarchies to reflect on our own hierarchies. Instead, these axes appear as already historically unstable and porous, incapable of being contained in one historical context, spectres powerful enough to ‘queer’, to renegotiate ancient and modern conceptions of power at once.⁵⁶ It is because of this that the following analysis is both formalist and historicist, that it strives to understand those forms as both historically contingent and, like Levine, beyond their context.⁵⁷ In assessing the ideological implications of the way hierarchies interact in the text — overlapping, enmeshed, clashing — questions that are neither strictly historicist nor anachronistic arise: what does the relationship of these apparently different-yet-similar hierarchies tell us about their ideological entanglements *now*? And if these hierarchies work in tragedy to reflect and even enact a critical fracture within the established universe of its world, what can they communicate to a world in crisis?

⁵⁶ This responds to Olsen’s and Telò’s idea of queer unhistoricism (Olsen and Telò 2022, 7). As they say, quoting Telò (2020), 9, ‘we believe that notwithstanding the illusion of historical situatedness afforded by the ancient Greek idiom, the text is diachronically stratified, hosting multiple contexts shading into each other that have been or will be actualized in experiences of reading’. On queer unhistoricism, cf. Freccero (2007); Traub (2013); Matzner (2016).

⁵⁷ Cf. Goldhill (2012), 195.

1

OVERLAP

Hecuba at the Intersection: Language, Morality, Hierarchy in *Hecuba*

Hecuba has always appeared to be as strange a play as it is grim. Troy has fallen. The former queen of Troy, Hecuba, has been enslaved after the fall of the city along with the other Trojan women. In the midst of extreme grief and despair, the assembly of the Greek winners, at the suggestion of Odysseus, decide to sacrifice Hecuba's (also enslaved) daughter, Polyxena, to the ghost of Achilles as a gift of honour. When Odysseus arrives on stage to fetch Polyxena, Hecuba desperately attempts to persuade him to spare her, yet the Homeric hero is adamant, firm in his convictions, which he expands on. Instead of joining her mother in supplicating him, however, Polyxena decides to willingly follow him: she prefers death to slavery. In one of the goriest death narratives of Attic tragedy, we hear of how Polyxena bravely offered her body to sacrifice and died, and so the first part of the play ends.

Yet, as has been noted, the play radically shifts topic after the death of Polyxena, with Hecuba now completely devoted to avenging not Polyxena, but rather her last born Polydorus, shamelessly killed by Hecuba's trusted friend Polymestor. In the second part of the play, we witness Hecuba's final desperation at the discovery of the death of Polydorus and the betrayal of Polymestor, and we watch her take her revenge on Polymestor by luring him inside the tent of the captive Trojan women, blinding him, and killing his children. The play ends with Polymestor appealing to Agamemnon for justice, but Agamemnon adjudicates in favour of Hecuba. Having finally avenged Polydorus, Hecuba can exult for a little while, before embarking on the ships that will

take her and the remaining Trojan women to Greece, forever slaves of the Greek winners.

This sudden change of focus and tone is responsible for the play's strange structure. Like *Andromache* and *Troades*, the *Hecuba* is said to be 'broken', 'split', 'incoherent'; this has attracted the majority of the attention of scholars, both modern and ancient,⁵⁸ who have perhaps overestimated Aristotle's precepts on dramatic unity in their evaluation of tragedy.⁵⁹ Equally discussed and perhaps more fiercely debated is another aspect of the play: the morality of Hecuba's revenge and the way it would have resonated with the original audience as a morally positive, honourable action, or a horrifying, barbaric act triggered by her psychological degeneration. Although all Attic tragedy can be said to be interested in complicating the audience's response to the characters' actions, scholars find *Hecuba* a particularly troubled and dividing tragedy in this regard. Finally, no commentary on the *Hecuba* misses the opportunity to mention that the play was part of the school syllabus in the Byzantine era.

In what follows, I aim to move from these and other disjointed, apparently non-ideological 'concerns' (to borrow from Latour) that the play mobilises, to show how fundamentally political they are. Far from living in a detached a-political space, I argue that they are intrinsically ideological, deeply connected to the play's rich understanding of power and hierarchies. I will then argue that the ideological structure of the play is constituted by overlapping, mutually supporting social hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, and class. Although the emphasis will remain on intersecting hierarchies, then, these

⁵⁸ Turkeltaub (2017), 137; Heath (1987), 62; Conacher (1967), 146 with references (n.1).

⁵⁹ Scodel (2009), 19; Segal (1986), 54.

'concerns' will gradually materialise as fundamentally imbricated with the analysis of the play's hierarchical explorations.

I will take my cue from a 1993 article in which the case for a relationship of intertextuality between the *Oresteia* and the *Hecuba* was first put forward. Expanding on this intertextual connection, I will argue that the distortion, ambiguity, and meaninglessness of language constitute a fundamental and continuous focus of the play. With Goldhill, I argue that this crisis of meaning entails momentous consequences for the definition of morality and justice, impacting the play's intertextual criticism of the Aeschylean trilogy. However, my emphasis will fall on the way the *Hecuba* reworks the connection between 'language' and 'sexuality', going beyond gender and encompassing ethnicity and class: the *Hecuba* mobilises and thematises at length multiple social hierarchies that are nevertheless part of the same ideological system. This 'sociological enlargement' also alerts us to the way such hierarchies mutually sustain each other to the point of overlapping in the construction and deconstruction of ideology.⁶⁰ Although the co-presence of multiple social discourses might be immediately recognisable and obvious, this chapter argues that they are not simply 'multiple', 'co-present' in the description of characters, but are rather conceptualised as part of the same ideological matrix. This focus on co-constitution and intersection will finally be used heuristically and metaphorically to think about the relationship between ideology and text, with which the chapter will now start.

⁶⁰ I print the text from the recent edition by Battezzato (2018) except where differently indicated and discussed.

1.1 Language Nightmare: the Ambiguities of *Logos*

1.1.1 Concerning Persuasion

Thirty years ago, Thalmann provided the most comprehensive account of the echoes and intertextual connections between the *Hecuba* and the *Oresteia*. Thalmann takes Polyxena's sacrifice to replay Iphigenia's sacrifice in the *Agamemnon*⁶¹ while teasing out the disturbing implications of human sacrifice, including male violence over women.⁶² Hecuba's revenge is taken to re-enact the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*;⁶³ an allusion that is made explicit at the end of the tragedy, when Polymestor prophesies exactly such murder (1275-81). The intertextual allusions to all three plays in the *Oresteia* become gradually more exact, culminating in the last words of Agamemnon (εὖ δ' ἐς πάτραν πλεύσαμεν, εὖ δὲ τὰν δόμοις/ἔχοντ' ἴδοιμεν τῶνδ' ἀφειμένοι πόνων, 1291-2) which overlap with line 1 of the first play in Aeschylus' trilogy (θεοὺς μὲν αἰτῶ τῶνδ' ἀπαλλαγὴν πόνων, Aesch. *Ag.* 1).⁶⁴ That this

⁶¹ Cf. Schmitt (1921), 57-8; Gregory (1999), xx; Anderson (1997), 9; O' Sullivan (2008), 173.

⁶² Thalmann (1993), 139-40. The famous simile assimilating Polyxena's naked body to a statue during her sacrifice (*Hec.* 560) also replays the artistic metaphor comparing Iphigenia to a painting at *Ag.* 242; Gregory (1999), 113. Polyxena's sacrifice is also described through the typical 'bride of death' imagery: Hecuba calls her νύμφην τ' ἄνυμφον παρθένον τ' ἀπάρθενον (612). Although the trope is pervasive, Polyxena has a special connection in death to Achilles and this seems again to establish a parallel with Iphigenia, whose sacrifice substituted for the wedding that was supposed to take place between her and Achilles: Anderson (1997), 60. Both Iphigenia and Polyxena are compared to sacrificial animals (*Ag.* 232; *Hec.* 526, 206)—a grim twist on the typical animal imagery applied to virgins (Heath 1999, 28 *et passim*; Thalmann 1993, 141). In Hecuba's dream (*Hec.* 90-1), Polyxena is strangely represented by a fawn, which is not a sacrificial animal (cf. Thalmann 1993, 141 n.34); yet ἔλαφος is the animal chosen by Artemis to substitute for Iphigenia at *IA* 1587, 1593 and *IT* 28, 783. One has to note that the only other instances of ἔλαφος in the extant Euripidean corpus can be found at *Hipp.* 218, where Phaedra's desire to run after deer evokes Hippolytus' devotion to the goddess, and at *Hel.* 382, where Helen's second mythological exemplum again connects deer to the cult of Artemis.

⁶³ Thalmann (1993), 148ff. The most evident symmetry is represented by the offstage cries of Agamemnon and Polymestor, followed by the entrance of the avenger. Nussbaum (1986), 416 traces other parallels.

⁶⁴ For the exact allusions, cf. Thalmann (1993), 154. That the *Agamemnon* could easily appear and be re-interpreted as a sequel of the *Hecuba* seems to hold true for recent times, too; for

engagement with the *Oresteia* might have been immediately grasped is likely in view of the reperformance of the trilogy in the same decade the *Hecuba* was written.⁶⁵ To Thalmann, this complex, multilayered engagement is primarily the sign of an ideological engagement of Euripides with Aeschylus' trilogy, a critique of the set of values the *Oresteia* espoused, at least in Euripides' own reading of it.⁶⁶ In Thalmann's view, a significant part of this critique is directed against the specifically gendered violence that the trilogy furthers. And yet this ideological engagement that Thalmann perceives is more profoundly rooted in an array of non-social, apparently non-ideological, and even aesthetic matters. For if ideology can be defined — provisionally —⁶⁷ as the hegemonic cultural forces that structure social existence, naturalise domination, and create 'reality' with sets of practices and structural silences, it does not necessarily start at the level of the most overtly political, but in the most innocent molecules of life. And if texts reproduce and negotiate that ideology, it is from those molecular elements that are encompassed by it and that constitute it that a critical analysis of the text might reasonably unfold. Then even the most apparently innocent philological issue might be a good starting point; and it is indeed from one crucial, often commented element of the *Hecuba* that the critical work of the play will be seen to transpire: persuasion.

instance, the 2022 Punchdrunk production *The Burnt City* brought together the two plays in its immersive theatrical experience on the Trojan war: Andújar (2023), 375.

⁶⁵ Marshall (2023), 416. Cf. Wright (2006), 35.

⁶⁶ Thalmann (1993), 158-9. Nussbaum (1986), 416 interprets the intertextual relationship with the *Oresteia* as a type of reversal of the process of civilised socialisation (from solitary revenge to social connection); Marshall (1992), 89 believes that Euripides expresses a positive judgement on vengeance.

⁶⁷ I linger on my definition of ideology at the end of chapter three.

In his monograph on *Peitho* in Greek literature, Richard Buxton devotes almost two thirds of his discussion to persuasion in Attic tragedy.⁶⁸ The analysis comprehends Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, *Prometheus Bound*, the *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, Euripides' *Medea* and *Hecuba*. Buxton, however, also delineates the trajectory of a gradually declining confidence in the value of *peitho* and in its civilising role at the basis of Athens' idealised self-image:⁶⁹

Athenian success in mid-century generated confidence in the political system which seemed to be nourishing that success, and this confidence found expression in certain of Aeschylus' works which celebrate the 'democratic' worth of *peitho*; however, the reverses suffered by Athens later in the century shook her faith in herself, and led to the mood reflected in, e.g., *Hekabe*, where political rhetoric is represented as potentially cruel and demeaning.

Buxton perceives Aeschylus' tragedies as permeated by an optimism and confidence in the powers of persuasion, and the *Oresteia* seems to him to delineate a progressive development towards a civilised use of persuasion, from 'Peitho the child of Ruin' to 'healing Peitho'.⁷⁰ Thus Clytemnestra in the tapestry scene in the *Agamemnon* quintessentially embodies a form of deception 'masquerading' as *peitho*, the same weapon wielded by Orestes and Electra in *Libation Bearers* and qualified as 'tricky persuasion' by the chorus (Πειθῶ δολίαν, 726).⁷¹ In the *Eumenides*, instead, 'frank and open' *peitho* is restored through Athena's intervention and her successful attempt to persuade the Furies: the 'eyes of Peitho' (ὄμματα Πειθοῦς, 970) have guided her

⁶⁸ Buxton (1982).

⁶⁹ Buxton (1982), 187.

⁷⁰ Buxton (1982), 113.

⁷¹ Buxton (1982), 106-9.

words.⁷² Language seems restored in its capacity to signify, distortion is corrected, and duplicity of meaning is lost in Athena's words: though reverberations of meaning can admittedly be found in the *Eumenides*, the play is interested in at least hinting at the progress that scholars have seen in the treatment of language and signification,⁷³ even if this restoration happens on the divine level and not on the human one.⁷⁴ This does not mean that *Eumenides* is a fully 'closed' play, or that ambiguities do not intrude in its solution; yet to understand it as gesturing towards a closure of definition is a plausible possibility of interpretation. As Goldhill's poststructuralist analysis put it, the *Oresteia* reflects as it enacts the problem of definition, the gap 'between signifier and signified', the capacity of language to deconstruct itself;⁷⁵ a problem that might be contained, though not necessarily solved, by the privileging of one meaning over others — a form of linguistic hierarchisation.⁷⁶

Yet the *Hecuba* emerges from a different temporal horizon.⁷⁷ Two years after Gorgias' visit in Athens, the play was composed at a time when language, meaning and morality were burning concerns in Athens —⁷⁸ preoccupations that undeniably hinged upon the gap between signifier and signified.⁷⁹ Antiphon, for instance, seems to have theorised this semiotic gap in his work *On Truth*, in which he argues that 'for someone who says one thing, there is not in fact one mental concept (nous), nor is there for him one thing'. Antiphon here appears to argue provocatively that 'a single word does not correspond

⁷² Cf. Heath (1999), 46. Cf. Porter (2023), 125.

⁷³ Zeitlin (1996), 111; McClure (1999), 106.

⁷⁴ Porter (2023), 125-6.

⁷⁵ Goldhill (1984).

⁷⁶ See *infra*, sec. 1.2, pp. 54-5.

⁷⁷ Cf. Carter (2004), 4.

⁷⁸ Cf. Hall (2001), xviii.

⁷⁹ Rabinowitz (2008), 48. Cf. Bons (2006) on the central role of sophistic rhetoric in the polis.

either to a single thought or to a single thing' (DK 87 B1).⁸⁰ The general sophistic attention to the exactness of names, as exemplified for instance by Plato's *Cratylus*, primarily hinged on the questioning of the relationship between language and reality;⁸¹ a discussion that has always appeared important to Euripidean plays such as *Helen* and *Hippolytus*.⁸² Importantly, Gorgias' pseudo-nihilistic statement in *On Not Being* that 'nothing is; and if it is, it is unknowable; and if both is and is knowable, it cannot be indicated to other people' (DK 82 B3) is indicative of a renewed sophistic debate about language,⁸³ and specifically about the inability of *logos* to accurately represent and translate reality.⁸⁴

The *Oresteia's* marked concern with persuasion is shared by the *Hecuba*, which extends the discussion of language to include sophistic rhetoric and makes it so central that the play's scholastic fortune has been explained with regard to its pronounced interest in rhetoric, as well as its multiple reflections on the theme of speech-making itself.⁸⁵ Historically, we could say that the most pressing matters of concern about *Hecuba*, along with its ethical import, have been precisely the play's exploration of rhetoric and

⁸⁰ Gagarin (2002), 81, whose translation follows the text as emended by Morrison 1963. Guthrie (1971), 203 notes that Antiphon's statement does not posit that reality does not exist, but simply that language is inadequate to express reality.

⁸¹ Guthrie (1971), 208; Conacher (1998), 74.

⁸² Conacher (1998), 80 *et passim* on *Helen*; Goldhill (2023), 282-3 on *Hippolytus*.

⁸³ Guthrie (1971), 180; Goldhill (2023), 284. Gorgias is engaging in a polemic with Parmenides and his view of the impossibility of not being. As far as we know, however, Parmenides only asserted that being is and can be thought; it seems Gorgias' original addition, on top of negating these two possibilities, to also deny the aspect of communicability: Rodriguez (2023), 208 n.22.

⁸⁴ Bonazzi (2023), 190. Cf. Rodriguez (2023), 210 with reference to Sextus (ὃ γὰρ μηνύομεν, ἔστι λόγος, λόγος δὲ οὐκ ἔστι τὰ ὑποκείμενα καὶ ὄντα, DK 82 B3. 84) and Anonymus (λέγει ὁ λέγων, ἀλλ' οὐ χρῶμα οὐδὲ πράγμα, LM D26a. 21), and pp. 220-1 on Lycophron's possible reaction against Gorgias' fracture between signifier and signified. Bonazzi also claims that the third of Gorgias' thesis might have been the most important of the three, since no alternative is given for it. Cf. Conacher (1998), 73.

⁸⁵ Heath (1987), 43. *Contra*, Gellie (1980), 42 argues that the contradictory statements on rhetoric should not be taken as signs of a developing line of thought in the play and should not even be taken as a theme. Cf. Mossman (1995), 209 *et passim*.

persuasion.⁸⁶ The issue of the representation of *peitho* in the play corresponds with the problem of sophistic rhetoric and its portrayal, given the widespread understanding of rhetoric as the art of *peitho*: Plato's *Gorgias*, for instance, defines his art as that of 'persuading by speech' (τὸ πείθειν... τοῖς λόγοις, Pl. *Grg.* 452e), and Socrates accepts the idea of the sophistic rhetor as a 'practitioner of persuasion' (πειθοῦς δημιουργός, 453a).⁸⁷

Conacher and others believe that the degeneration of rhetoric in the play, increasingly more sophistic, corresponds to a degeneration of Hecuba's character, so that there would be a degree of moral indictment in Euripides' portrayal of sophistic rhetoric and its dangers.⁸⁸ Gregory notes that Hecuba has recourse to persuasion from the beginning, so that the 'degeneration theory' cannot hold;⁸⁹ *peitho* is simply depicted as ineffective.⁹⁰ The *Hecuba*, however, avoids presenting any one picture of sophistic rhetoric, rather using the contemporary discussion on sophistic rhetoric to expand on the theme of the instability of signification as explored by Aeschylus in the *Oresteia*. The two most explicit references to the sophists are contradictory but directly intertwined with the ambiguities of persuasion:⁹¹

τί δῆτα θνητοὶ τᾶλλα μὲν μαθήματα

μοχθοῦμεν ὡς χρῆ πάντα καὶ ματεύομεν,

Πειθῶ δὲ τὴν τύραννον ἀνθρώποις μόνην

⁸⁶ Heath (1987), 42.

⁸⁷ Gagarin (2001), 276 who yet argues that the sophists did not conceive persuasion as the primary aim of their practice.

⁸⁸ Conacher (1998), 65-6; Segal (1993), 201; Reckford (1991), 35. Cf. Michelini (1987), 142.

⁸⁹ Gregory (1999), 64; Gregory (1991), 105. Cf. also Mossman (1995), 105.

⁹⁰ Gregory (1991), 105-7.

⁹¹ Cf. Michelini (1987), 150 on the second.

οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον ἐς τέλος σπουδάζομεν

μισθοὺς διδόντες μανθάνειν, ἴν' ἦν ποτε

πεῖθειν ἅ τις βούλοιο τυγχάνειν θ' ἅμα;

(814-9)

Ἀγάμεμνον, ἀνθρώποισιν οὐκ ἐχρῆν ποτε

τῶν πραγμάτων τὴν γλῶσσαν ἰσχύειν πλέον:

ἀλλ' εἴτε χρήστ' ἔδρασε χρήστ' ἔδει λέγειν,

εἴτ' αὖ πονηρὰ τοὺς λόγους εἶναι σαθρούς,

καὶ μὴ δύνασθαι τᾶδικ' εὖ λέγειν ποτέ.

σοφοὶ μὲν οὖν εἰς' οἱ τὰδ' ἠκριβωκότες,

ἀλλ' οὐ δύνανται διὰ τέλους εἶναι σοφοί,

κακῶς δ' ἀπώλοντ'· οὕτις ἐξήλυξέ πω.

(1187-94)

Sophistic rhetoric is vital to the discussion of the semiotic fracture, the gap between signifier and signified that Goldhill read as a fundamental dynamic of the Aeschylean trilogy. In the first passage quoted above, Hecuba mentions that *peithein* is essentially available to whoever might be able to pay for being instructed in the art of rhetoric; anyone can thus become able to persuade anyone of anything (819). In the second passage, Hecuba claims that the *sophoi* that have contrived such arts of misleading rhetoric eventually fail, thus proclaiming that 'rhetoric ultimately fails in disguising

reality’;⁹² by winning the *agon* here, Hecuba might seem to show that ‘even if clever language may disguise the facts, the facts have objective value’.⁹³ And yet the text does not lean towards an optimistic resolution of the semiotic crisis, even if Hecuba voices it so explicitly: the facts might be objective, but her words do not contrast the possibility that they might be disguised, and the whole presentation of the solution to the ‘semiotic crisis’ is rendered in the form of a conditional sentence.⁹⁴

In fact, Hecuba’s self-presentation as a morally principled speaker is not devoid of shadows. This is not simply because her speech is extremely rhetorically sophisticated,⁹⁵ but because it is difficult to concur that she has done *χρήστα* (1189) and therefore deserves to *χρήστ’... λέγειν* (1189):⁹⁶ she has just engineered the murder of two innocent children while forcing their father to watch. The contradiction is underscored when the chorus reply in admiration that ‘good actions always give starting points for good speeches’ (*ὡς τὰ χρηστὰ πράγματα/ χρηστῶν ἀφορμὰς ἐνδίδωσ’ ἀεὶ λόγων*, 1238-9). Although Hecuba speaks as if she were accusing Polymestor, it is Polymestor who is ‘prosecuting’ her, not the other way around (cf. 1089-131); her murder and morality are under the spotlight.⁹⁷ Thus Hecuba’s self-presentation and the chorus’ supportive comment on her rhetorical performance disquietingly cast a shadow on the possibility that signifier and signified, language and reality (specifically *moral* reality in this case), might be brought together. Therefore, the emphasis cannot fall on the degeneration of Hecuba’s character turning to sophistic

⁹² Battezzato (2018), 242.

⁹³ Battezzato (2018), 243.

⁹⁴ Cf. Mastronarde (2010), 233.

⁹⁵ Mastronarde (2010), 234; Conacher (1998), 65.

⁹⁶ Micheli (1987), 156.

⁹⁷ Cf. Dunn (2017), 453; cf. Gregory (1999), 185.

rhetoric. Nor can it fall simply on the failure/ineffectiveness of *peitho*, as mentioned above. The second statement, if anything, seems to argue the opposite.

Even Kastely's influential argument that *Hecuba* denounces how language can become a mere instrument of power structures is not enough to explain the diversity of the play's reflections on language.⁹⁸ When Hecuba claims that the same speech acquires additional persuasive power when uttered by someone of a higher social standing (293-5), this does have a bearing on the general view of justice and injustice.⁹⁹ But the use of *peitho* encourages us to read this statement along with the others and to include it within the more general emphasis on the fallibility of language to direct human life and its failure to correspond to a truthful, moral reality. While Hecuba claims that the reputation of Odysseus will lend force to his speech in the assembly even if he speaks 'badly' (κακῶς λέγῃς, 293) she probably alludes to the possibility that he might advance something κακός from the perspective of the army, not that he might lose his eloquence.¹⁰⁰ In this way, Hecuba might even be encouraging Odysseus to behave sophisticatedly: regardless of the moral correctness of the proposition, Odysseus' standing, as well as his eloquence, might influence the reception of his *logos*. That words can reflect a (moral) reality that can direct human life seems disproved by several moments and reflections in the play, of different kinds. Through sophistic ability, social rank, or simply deceit, language vacillates as a moral and epistemological tool.

⁹⁸ Kastely (1993); Gregory (1991), 107; Citti (1979), 218; Croally (1994), 63.

⁹⁹ Cf. Battezzato (2018), 115 with Thuc. 2.37.1 and Eur. *Suppl.* 433-41.

¹⁰⁰ Gregory (1999), 82 rightly notices that κἂν κακῶς λέγῃς (293) might mean both 'if you speak foolishly' or 'if you speak badly', but Ennius seems to confirm the first option, as he writes in his *Hecuba haec tu etsi perverse dices, facile Achivos flexeris* (fr. 84 J., 172). Hecuba is not implying that Odysseus might lose his eloquence, but that he might be successful in arguing for a case that the army does not agree with.

In fact, the entire play stages Hecuba's repeated endeavours to master *peitho* in an attempt to resist injustice.¹⁰¹ Every instance is frustrated: Hecuba's first agon with Odysseus revolves around her attempt to persuade him to spare Polyxena (τὸ δ' ἀξίωμα... τὸ σὸν/ πείσει, 293-4; πείθ', 340) — an attempt whose failure is sanctioned when it is Odysseus, and even Polyxena, who tell her to 'be persuaded', 'to obey' (οὐκ, ἦν γε πείθῃ τοῖσι σοῦ σοφωτέροις, 399; πιθοῦ μοι, 402). In the second part of the play, too, Hecuba's supplication of Agamemnon symmetrically repeats the failure of language in the previous supplication scene with Odysseus, but this time qualifies it with an explicit consideration of the nature of *peitho* imbued with contemporary connotations deriving from sophistic rhetoric (812ff.).¹⁰²

But Hecuba's attempts to grapple with language and persuasion also extend beyond this scene, and she does manage to succeed in her speech-making. Yet the tables have now turned, and her rhetorical victories do not heal the fracture between word and reality. For her deception scene of Polymestor seems a double of the tapestry scene of Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*, with Hecuba's successful, deceptive persuasion of Polymestor to enter the tents of the Trojans leading to a horrible infanticide — an instance of deceptive *peitho*.¹⁰³ And finally, the trial, where Hecuba's persuasion is eventually victorious, only superficially solves the problem of *peitho*, as she becomes persuasive only after the murder of Polymestor's children.¹⁰⁴ The idea that there are objective 'facts', as Battezzato has it, easily attainable and reachable by language, appears deeply frail. It is then perfectly appropriate that Hecuba should proclaim that

¹⁰¹ Cf. Michelini (1987), 142.

¹⁰² See *supra*, sec. 1.1.1, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰³ See *infra*, sec. 1.1.2, pp. 45-6.

¹⁰⁴ And, as Gregory (1999), 141 rightly has it, Hecuba was shown to be a clever rhetorician from the beginning, so that the point cannot be that Hecuba has 'learned' how to argue.

this semiotic fracture has been fixed at the same time as she deepens it: this is the culmination of a series of actions and words that have contributed to the enlargement of this gulf, a gulf that never receives healing in the play. The same names of the characters from the beginning of the play have been emblematic of the fracture —¹⁰⁵ Polyxena ‘the much hospitable’, mirrors the epithet of Hades, to which she is doomed; Polydorus, ‘bringing many gifts’, turned into a reified treasure; Polymestor, ‘of many schemes’, ultimately deceived.¹⁰⁶ Even as the play ends, the duplicity of meaning in language cannot be repressed, and Agamemnon, in wishing for an end to his troubles, incontrovertibly recalls the opening of the *Agamemnon* and his own future murder, thus undercutting himself.¹⁰⁷ The semiotic gap is finally re-opened.

1.1.2 Nothing to Do with Athens? The Assembly and the Trial Scene

The *Hecuba* thus extends and complicates the *Oresteia*'s exploration of language, persuasion, and their potential for distortion. However shadowy, there is a sense at the end of the trilogy that a truthful value can be restored to language, that the fracture between signifier and signified can be filled up again. Athena's Peitho represents a halt to the ambiguities that intruded into the language of the characters and the text itself throughout: while Clytemnestra's talent resided in distorting language and thus amplifying the fracture between signifier and signified, Athena has provided the bases of civilised language in the polis by filling this gap.¹⁰⁸ In the *Hecuba*, the nightmare of the semiotic fracture comes back onto the stage, but the circumstances are different from the *Agamemnon* and the *Libation Bearers*. It is not simply the new sophistic

¹⁰⁵ Cf. the famous analysis of Vernant on *OT*: Vernant (2020), 288.

¹⁰⁶ Loraux (1999), xxxviii.

¹⁰⁷ Thalmann (1993), 154-5. On the complexity of Euripides' treatment of the theme 'word vs reality' in the *Helen*, cf. Dunn (2017), 456-8; Wohl (2014).

¹⁰⁸ Heath (1999), 42 with further references.

environment that makes this play different from the *Oresteia*. The *Hecuba* brings the discussion on the unreliability of language into the world of the institutions of the polis, thus jeopardising the integrity of that unambiguous, civilised language that Athena laid down as the foundations of the political world. ‘Political’, ‘civilised’ Peitho is put into question.

This is not simply to be perceived in the open ending of the play but finds its most radical significance in the juxtaposition of the deception scene to the proto-trial scene. Hecuba’s success in deceiving Polymestor and luring him into the tent acquires new significance when placed next to her only successful performance in the proto-trial. Highly allusive of the tapestry scene in the *Agamemnon*, Hecuba exploits to the maximum the gap between the word and reality: this is the only other scene, in extant tragedy, in which a woman lures a man into an enclosed space through the *skene*. The only other comparable scene is Electra’s deception of Clytemnestra in the Euripidean *Electra*, which is indeed modelled on the tapestry scene and is preceded by Clytemnestra’s entrance on a chariot, like Agamemnon in the eponymous play. Like the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, Hecuba relies less on outright lies than on the ambiguity of the process of signification: for instance, she asks Polymestor to keep her treasure ‘safe’, (σώιζεται, 1014), recalling his failure to keep Polydorus safe (682, 1225);¹⁰⁹ she reassures him that the χρήματα she promises to him are σκύλων ἐν ὄχλωι, ‘in the crowd of spoils’ (1014), referring to the ὄχλος of Trojan women (880);¹¹⁰ she finally invites him to enter the tents, so that he might return with his children to the place where he led her son (ὡς πάντα πράξας ὧν σε δεῖ στείχηις πάλιν/ ξὺν παισὶν οὔπερ τὸν ἐμὸν

¹⁰⁹ Battezzato (2018), 211.

¹¹⁰ As Battezzato (2018), 211 notes, the word ὄχλος is almost never applied to material objects.

ὠκισαν γόνον, 1021-2).¹¹¹ But perhaps what matters is less that it is Hecuba who is deepening this gap of meaning rather than the fact that such a gap exists altogether. In fact, ambiguities of signification intrude both into Polymestor's and Hecuba's words: for instance, Polymestor asks whether the χρήματα that Hecuba mentions (1012), and surely intending to mean her treasure, are hidden in her *peploi* (ποῦ δῆτα; πέπλων ἐντὸς ἢ κρύψασ' ἔχεις, 1013); it is from their *peploi* that the Trojan women will draw the hidden daggers they will use to kill Polymestor's children (λαβοῦσαι φάσγαν' ἐκ πέπλων, 1161).¹¹² Yet such an ambiguity in the process of signification also goes beyond character level: when the lying Polymestor tells Hecuba that Polydorus wanted 'to sneak to come and see her' (993), he is inadvertently saying something true, but which does not play a role in the deception plot of Hecuba: Polydorus has in fact come to see Hecuba without Polymestor noticing, as a ghost.¹¹³ And, even more poignantly, Hecuba's ambiguity goes as far as deceiving the audience's expectations.¹¹⁴ Given that the Polymestor story is almost certainly invented by Euripides, it is expected that Polymestor should be killed.¹¹⁵ Hecuba gratuitously lures the audience into believing that he will die: at the end of the scene she tells him that he will go back with his children to the place where he has led Polydorus (cf. *supra*),¹¹⁶ but she had also told him that his children should be present during the meeting should Polymestor die (ἄμεινον, ἦν σὺ κατθάνηις, τούσδ' εἰδέναι, 1006).¹¹⁷ The chorus also take Polymestor's

¹¹¹ Cf. also Gregory (1999), 172: 'when Polymestor, together with the bodies of his two sons, returns to the orchestra where Polydorus' corpse still lies, he will have fulfilled in literal fact her words at 1021-22'.

¹¹² Battezzato (2018), 211.

¹¹³ Battezzato (2018), 993; Gregory (1999), 165.

¹¹⁴ A device noted as 'counterpreparation' by Taplin (1977), 94. Cf. Boedeker (2017), 248 on the connection between counterpreparation and illusion/reality in *Helen*.

¹¹⁵ Gregory (1999), 160; Tetstall (1954), 341.

¹¹⁶ Battezzato (2018), 212.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Scodel (1999), 120: 'as in Homer, differences between what a character plans and what actually happens fall under a rule of attention: they are usually significant'. Of the examples

death for granted (ψεύσει σ' ὁδοῦ τῆσδ' ἐλπὶς ἢ σ' ἐπήγαγεν/ θανάσιμον πρὸς Αἴδαν, 1032-3), but given that they are kept separate from the Trojan women who will actually carry out the plot (cf. 1042-3), we might suspect that they have also been led by Hecuba to wrongly believe so. Just as in the *Oresteia*, Euripides' deception scene focuses on the ambiguity of language, the dangers intrinsic to *peitho dolia* that resides in the duplicity of meaning.

But it is even more disturbing that this scene is juxtaposed to the proto-trial scene in which Hecuba's rhetoric finally wins, and which is redolent of that first trial staged in *Eumenides*. Among extant Euripidean *agones*, the scene is not only emphatically 'judicial' because of the way there is a third character who acts as a judge ('Abrechnungsagon vor einem Richter') —¹¹⁸ something we will find again with *Troades* and its trilogy.¹¹⁹ And not only is Hecuba endowed with traits that remind the audience of the Furies and Clytemnestra.¹²⁰ Rather, the scene is unique in extant tragedy in having a revenge plot followed by 'a judicial procedure assessing the justice of the revenge'; it only happens here and in the *Eumenides*.¹²¹ Yet Hecuba's new success in the civilised art of speech-making casts a shadow on language as the basis of the Athenian juridical world by showing how the semiotic fracture is maintained in both the deception scene and the trial scene. Sophistic rhetoric, which is built and predicated upon a fracture between word and reality, has intruded within the legal word so

that Scodel gives, none is as striking as what happens in the *Hecuba*, nor is Hecuba changing her mind like Hippolytus.

¹¹⁸ Dubischar (2001), 96-7; Karamanou (2018), 182.

¹¹⁹ See *infra*, sec. 3.5.3, p. 287.

¹²⁰ See *infra*, sec. 1.2, pp. 57-8.

¹²¹ Battezzato (2018), 17: 'Hecuba is different from most other ancient revenge plays in that the revenge plot is followed by a judicial procedure assessing the justice of the revenge. Among the other extant tragedies, this happens only in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*'.

fundamental in the formation of the (Aeschylean) polis. However, the *Eumenides* intrudes also at a different moment in the play: the report of the Greek assembly.

The detail of the ‘tie’, with the Greek army almost divided in two, recalls the dynamics of that famous ancient trial supervised by Athena. In fact, Sommerstein notes that the tie must have been a specifically Aeschylean innovation.¹²² Euripides clearly received the Aeschylean innovation (νικᾷ δ’ Ορέστης, κᾶν ἰσόψηφος κριθῆ, 741; ἴσον γὰρ ἔστι τᾶρίθμημα, 754) in *IT* 965-6 (ἴσας δέ μοι/ψήφους διηρίθησε Παλλὰς ὠλένη) and *El.* 1265-6 (ἴσαι δέ σ’ ἐκσφύζουσι μὴ θανεῖν δίκη/ψῆφοι τεθεῖσαι). There are mainly three scenes in extant tragedy reporting the proceedings of a voting assembly: besides the *Hecuba*, these are Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* and Euripides’ *Orestes*.¹²³ Unique to the *Hecuba*, however, is the equal vote of the assembly; a detail it shares with the vote of the Areopagus in *Eumenides*. The nature of the tie and the dynamics of Athena’s vote in connection to the equal vote have received attention in past scholarship,¹²⁴ and Sommerstein and Mitchell-Boyask are persuasive in arguing that Athena must make the tie, not break it.¹²⁵ The situation is similar in the *Hecuba*. There are two polarised factions, but the consensus is not equally split: σπουδαὶ δὲ λόγων κατατεινομένων/ἦσαν ἴσαι πῶς (130-1). The two *logoi* have almost (πῶς) entirely the same support, before Odysseus’ intervention, meaning that one of them is slightly winning. Odysseus, Athena’s protégé, here seems to replay the goddess in his decisive role in the voting, as well as in the act of persuasion, *peitho*, so fundamental to the basis of Athena’s role in the *Eumenides* (ἦσαν ἴσαι πῶς, πρὶν ὃ ποικιλόφρων/...Λαερτιάδες πείθει στρατιάν,

¹²² Sommerstein (1989), 6.

¹²³ Carter (2013), 23.

¹²⁴ Goldhill (1984), 257; Naiden (2023), 369.

¹²⁵ Mitchell-Boyask (2009), 85.

131, 133). Moreover, Euripides takes pains to make Athens central to the assembly: the two sons of Theseus speak in favour of the sacrifice.

The influence of the *Eumenides* and its focus on the civilising effects of language in the trial scene and in the persuasion scene after the trial must then be seen at work long before the proto-trial scene in *Hecuba*. Here *peitho* is far from being the benign *peitho* of Athena: Odysseus, who manages to persuade the army to kill Polyxena for the honour of Achilles (πείθει στρατιάν, 133) is described as a ‘shifty-minded wrangler, smooth-talking people-flatterer’ (ὁ ποικιλόφρων/ κόπις ἠδυσλόγος δημοχαριστής, 131-2). In the trial, Hecuba will criticise the σοφοί that had created the ‘semiotic gap’; Polymestor claims such σοφία at 1136-7; but σοφία was also applied to Odysseus at 228 (σοφόν τοι κὰν κακοῖς ἄ δεῖ φρονεῖν), and 399 (οὔκ, ἦν γε πείθη τοῖσι σοῦ σοφωτέροις).¹²⁶ Much more than Polymestor, it is Odysseus who is perceived by the chorus as disturbingly eloquent when he persuades the Achaean army to sacrifice Polyxena: Hecuba’s invective at 251 ff. singles him out as an unscrupulous demagogue (δημηγόρους, 254) that is ready to ‘say anything’, even to harm friends, to please the masses (ἦν τοῖσι πολλοῖς πρὸς χάριν λέγητέ τι, 257). Hecuba’s use of γλῶσσα at 1187-8 does not directly refer to Odysseus, but suggests sophistic rhetoric (which is hardly used by Polymestor), just as the same word is applied to the sophistic Odysseus of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* (96-9).¹²⁷ What is more, the report of the assembly is described in language that is highly allusive to the sophists’ endeavours in the sphere of language. It is strange that Euripides decides to discard the Iliadic Menestheus to have instead the two sons of Theseus,¹²⁸ and it is even stranger that he wants them to articulate two

¹²⁶ Battezzato (2018), 235.

¹²⁷ Blundell (1987), 327.

¹²⁸ Carter (2013), 37. Michelini (1987), 142-3: ‘Their injection here is sufficiently gratuitous to get some notice’.

speeches supporting just one of the two opinions (δισσῶν μύθων/ ῥήτορες ἦσαν, γνώμη δὲ μιᾷ, 123-4).¹²⁹ It is most likely the sophists that Euripides is alluding to here: while ῥήτωρ was normally applied to the political leaders of Athens,¹³⁰ sophistic *dissoi logoi* must be evoked by δισσῶν μύθων since double arguments are associated irrevocably to the sophistic movement in Euripides' *Antiope*, as well as in Plato's *Protagoras* and Aristophanes' *Clouds*,¹³¹ and so Euripides must be teasing out the disturbing implications of sophistic rhetoric on the democratic debate.¹³²

To do so, the report of the assembly is encroached on anachronistic political language from the Athenian democracy.¹³³ Technical language from polis procedures makes clear that Athens, and the reflection on the establishment of the institutions at the basis of Athens in *Eumenides*, is at the centre of the assembly scene as much as it is at the centre of the proto-trial, and even invites the audience to connect the two. While the decision is 'not sanctioned by a vote' in the report of the *parodos*,¹³⁴ a vote has taken place in the assembly: Hecuba takes it for granted when telling Polyxena (ἀγγέλλουσ' Ἀργείων δόξαι/ ψήφωι τᾶς σᾶς περὶ μοίρας, 195-6), and Odysseus' arrival is motivated by the outcome of the vote: γύναι, δοκῶ μὲν σ' εἰδέναι γνώμην στρατοῦ/ ψήφόν τε τὴν κρανθεῖσαν· ἀλλ' ὅμως φράσω (218-9). So this assembly goes beyond the army meetings in Homer and presents itself as a proto-political institution, whose voting system foreshadows the voting at the basis of the justice system in *Eumenides*.¹³⁵ The

¹²⁹ Carter (2013), 37.

¹³⁰ Michelini (1987), 143.

¹³¹ Michelini (1987), 144.

¹³² Collard (1991), 138.

¹³³ Michelini (1987), 143; Battezzato (2018), 87. Cf. Gregory (1991), 85; Kovacs (1987), 81-2; Mossman (1995), 106. Cf. Willink (1986), 224; Wohl (2015), 123 on the political undertones in the assembly report in *Orestes*.

¹³⁴ Battezzato (2018), 87.

¹³⁵ Raaflaub (1997), 642 argues that the prevailing scholarly view, started by Finley (1978), exaggerates the extent to which the Homeric assembly reflects a pre-political world.

democratic assembly, and the democratic world of Athens altogether,¹³⁶ is brought on stage and shown to be prey to the whim of sophistic demagogues, a point finally made with an outstanding explicitness by Hecuba in her retort to Odysseus (258-9): ἀτὰρ τί δὴ σόφισμα τοῦθ' ἠγούμενοι/ ἐς τήνδε παῖδα ψῆφον ὤρισαν φόνου.¹³⁷ The assembly then foreshadows thematically the destabilisation of civic language of the proto-trial;¹³⁸ but it also mirrors it structurally. As Carter has it, 'the *exodos* thus mirrors the *parodos* inasmuch as a judgment is made on the basis of speeches for and against';¹³⁹ yet the connection runs much deeper.

The assembly scene prepares the grounds for the destabilisation of the 'solidity' of the political *word* established by Athena at the end of *Eumenides* after the trial and by persuading the Erinyes.¹⁴⁰ In juxtaposing the deception scene, clearly evocative of Clytemnestra's intrigue and pre-political *peitho*, to an act of seemingly civilised *peitho* in the proto-trial, the *Hecuba* presents civilised, Athenian *peitho* as being exposed to the same duplicity and ambiguity of Clytemnestra's manipulation of signs.¹⁴¹ Post-political thus merges with the pre-political. Therefore, it is not simply that the creation of a juridical system is 'blocked',¹⁴² and it can be misleading to argue that Euripides here is interested in distancing his contemporary Athenian world from the flawed world of

¹³⁶ The Argive assembly in *Orestes*, also heavily indebted to the *Oresteia*, is 'modelled in every detail on the Athenian assembly': Hall (1993), 266; cf. Barker (2011), 148.

¹³⁷ Mossman (1995), 106.

¹³⁸ Barker (2011), 155 argues that Euripides' *Orestes* investigates the problems of speech in Athenian institutions by drawing on both the assembly in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* and the trial in *Eumenides*.

¹³⁹ Carter (2013), 39.

¹⁴⁰ Burian (2023), 141. Cf. Hesk (2011) on the *Suppliants* and the ambiguity of Athena's resolution in that play.

¹⁴¹ Indeed, also in line with Gorgias' thoughts about deception. Cf. Bonazzi (2023), 192: '*logoi* are intrinsically deceitful, to the extent that they cannot faithfully represent a reality that cannot be faithfully represented'.

¹⁴² Battezzato (2010), 58.

myth, presenting Athens as the culmination of progress.¹⁴³ For otherwise there would be no need to articulate the fragility of language of the 'heroic world' in anachronistic language.¹⁴⁴ Although the myth is chronologically precedent to the facts of the *Oresteia*, the continuous references to the institutions established at the end of the trilogy and to the political world of the Athenian democracy throughout encourage to overlook the chronology and look at the world of the *Hecuba* as a post-political world.¹⁴⁵ The relationship of intertextuality with the plays of the *Oresteia* suggests that the institutions of the polis, based as they are on the solidity of Athen(i)an *peitho* and its clarity, are no advancement from the pre-political world of the first two plays of the trilogy. The *dissoi mythoi* of the very Athenian sons of Theseus, who speak in a proto-Athenian assembly, the duplicitous and national Greek hero Odysseus, protégé of Athena, foreshadow the duplicity of Hecuba-Clytemnestra, who also further problematises the validity of the word of Athena in the trial scene, so evocative of the establishment of civilisation in *Eumenides*. The ambiguities of signification continue

¹⁴³ Allan and Kelly (2013), 110-2.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. the same use of anachronistic legal language in *Orestes*, indeed allusive to the trial of *Eumenides*: Barker (2017), 275; Porter (1994), 126. For anachronistic language in tragedy in general, cf. Ober and Strauss (1990), 248.

¹⁴⁵ In this, I differ from Mossman (1995), 205. Notice how Euripides also presents the world of the *Orestes*, whose trial should lead to the foundations of law, as one already post-political: Barker (2011), 159. Allan and Kelly (2013), 112 argue that *Orestes* 'far from being an expression of fin de siècle disillusion with Athens and its institutions, is essentially no different from Aeschylus' *Eumenides*'. They do recognise that 'another institutional dimension' is added before the final trial, but they argue that this simply further highlights how the problems cannot be resolved in the heroic world of Argos. However, as said above, the 'distance' Allan and Kelly want to see here seems to contradict the play's insistence on the assimilation of the Argive assembly — which, by their own admission, 'is simultaneously a kind of law court' — to indeed the Athenian trial of Orestes, and does underline the fundamental fragilities of the process. Otherwise, why insert it in the first place? Would an Athenian audience really deem an assembly of that kind far removed, distant from its own institutions and rather part of the 'terms by which the heroic world is structured'? Cf. Burian (2011), 114.

until the very end, casting a shadow not only on the future facts of Argos, but on the very polis of Athens.¹⁴⁶

As Thalmann writes, by duplicating the *Oresteia* in prequel form time becomes queer, circular, rather than linear, and the sense of progress is lost: 'there is no ending to this play, only an opening-up onto another text that this one repeats (or that repeats this one?) and that has already been read'.¹⁴⁷ The crisis of signification as a problem of the world of the *Hecuba* only seemingly might be taken to be resolved in the Aeschylean future that is foreshadowed throughout. Rather, the play retrospectively deconstructs the certainties of signification and the resolution of morality inherent to the development of the trilogy. Stuck in a *Teufelskreis*, the world of the *Hecuba* replays, foreshadows, corresponds to, and deconstructs the world of the *Oresteia*. Queering time, the *Hecuba* does not present itself as a prequel whose issues will be resolved by progress, and by the place that represents that progress in *Eumenides*; rather, it is 'progress' itself that proves to be meaningless. The world of *Hecuba* is one of unresolved and unresolvable tensions, where language breaks down and definitions can no longer hold. And yet these tensions have wider implications for the audience's matters of concern.

1.2 Concerns of Justice: Duplicitous Justice and the *Oresteia*

The ambiguity of the *Oresteia* cannot be confined to the linguistic plane. The establishment of the Areopagus, and so the installation of the structures that define (legal) justice for the polis, are fundamental in halting the ambiguities of language: the

¹⁴⁶ So that it is not possible to believe, as Carter (2013), 37 argues, that the mention of the Theseids is a flattering tribute to Athens' love for speech making. Cf. Hesk (2011), 119-36 on the way Athenian decision making is problematised in the *Suppliants*.

¹⁴⁷ Thalmann (1993), 155.

multiple *dikai* and claims to justice that are present in *Agamemnon* and *Libation Bearers* are reduced to one *dike*. Scholars' debates over the development of language in *Oresteia* are paralleled by the disagreement over the presence or absence of shadows over the legal and moral resolution offered by the last play. Goldhill, for instance, believes that the 'logic of the double' that was functional to the whole of the trilogy persists even with the trial and Athena's *peitho*, thus resisting the creation of an unambiguous, univocal meaning to be sought for in the mediation of the doublets.¹⁴⁸ By the beginning of the *Eumenides*, the shifting semantics of *dike* have been much at the centre of attention,¹⁴⁹ but they keep on haunting the last play of the trilogy in the opposition of the claims to *dike* by the two parties that oppose each other.¹⁵⁰ This plurality of *dikai* has to be reduced to a singular *dike*, just like the plurality of meanings has to be reduced to a singularity.¹⁵¹ As Goldhill acutely comments on Athena's assertion that 'she will define the matter accurately' at *Eum.* 488:¹⁵²

Thus after these plays made possible by the shifting of the term *dike*, the court (itself termed *dike*) through its jurors (δικαστάς) will make an accurate decision (δικάζειν) between the two cases (δίκας) either for punishment, revenge (δίκη) or through an appeal to a wider Justice (δίκη) for freedom. In the decision which is the aimed for closure of narrative, it is also deciding on the significance of the single word.

Yet in spite of the difficulties and potential shadows to be cast on the resolution, the play gestures towards the reduction of pluralities to a singularity. While it is true that

¹⁴⁸ Goldhill (1984), 281.

¹⁴⁹ Goldhill (1984), 223.

¹⁵⁰ Mitchell-Boyask (2009), 98-9.

¹⁵¹ Goldhill (1984), 245.

¹⁵² Goldhill (1984), 239.

reverberations of meaning can be traced even after Athena's intervention, it is possible to recognise this without claiming that language's opacity is 'as opaque' as in the rest of the trilogy. In fact, while Goldhill sees a continuation of the problem of difference in the trial and Athena's role, hierarchisation does provide a solution to difference and duplicity. Equally, then, we might be allowed to speak of a hierarchisation of meaning: so that while Athena's words might resound with reminiscences and be open to alternative signification, the meaning of her words seems far more immediately available compared to the endless chain of signification of the *Agamemnon* and *Libation Bearers*. Verbal clarity thus corresponds to a definition of one *dike*, as well as the definition of boundaries between vendetta and legal justice,¹⁵³ and the definition of morality: Orestes is, after all, absolved; the Furies accept, after all, to relent and be subsumed under the new legalised world of the polis. This does not mean that Aeschylus intended to leave no ambiguities, or that the only interpretation should be that *Eumenides* is 'closed'. Rather, a solid avenue for interpretation, for us or for Euripides, might acknowledge that the play gestures towards resolution and closure through a process of moral and linguistic hierarchisation. While I agree that a shadow of ambiguity is cast on the final fixation of meaning, it is plausible to interpret the *Eumenides* as directing the meaning of *dike* towards its legalised conceptualisation and towards the decision of one claim to justice (*dike*) over the other.¹⁵⁴

The *Hecuba*, however, radically undercuts this process of moral and juridical hierarchisation. The semantic ambiguity of *nomos* reflects the theme of justice in the

¹⁵³ Allan (2013), 603: 'when the new legal system is instituted by Athena, the contemporary [...] legal language is striking: the goddess speaks of judges, murder-cases, oaths, witnesses, and evidence (*Eu.* 482-8)'.
¹⁵⁴ The case against Goldhill's open reading was extensively made by Seaford (1995). Cf. Burian (2023), 130; Park (2023), 200; McClure (1999), 108. Cf. instead Naiden (2023), 370; Mitchell-Boyask (2009), 99; Rose (1995), 246.

play,¹⁵⁵ whose definition is also explored and, similarly, found ambiguous. Much has been written of the morality of Hecuba's punishment of Polymestor. As Heath noted in an influential article, the revenge has had a distinctively troubled reception history, with radically opposite views on its morality depending on the historical period.¹⁵⁶ Scholars managed now to break from the straightforward condemnation of the act that was widespread in the reception of Euripides' tragedy after the Enlightenment.¹⁵⁷ In many cases this view has been adopted after noticing that Hecuba's actions are described in terms compatible with Athenian definitions of justice.¹⁵⁸ For example, the vocabulary of legal justice (τιμωρός/ τιμωρία, δίκην δίδοναι) is applied to Hecuba's punishment of Polymestor;¹⁵⁹ Hecuba's just punishment is retrospectively sanctioned as rightful by the proto-tribunal represented by Agamemnon.¹⁶⁰ More recently, Battezzato has rebalanced the debate by arguing that Hecuba's punishment must have appeared to the original audience as both right and excessive.¹⁶¹ This effect, I argue, is produced by Euripides' interest in collapsing the concepts of 'vengeance' and 'legal justice', and in making Hecuba's act morally impossible to judge; a move that runs contrary to Aeschylus.

Hecuba's vengeance is taken by Thalmann to re-enact the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*;¹⁶² an allusion made explicit at the end of the tragedy, when Polymestor prophesies exactly such murder (1275-81). The separation of

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Gregory (1999), 99.

¹⁵⁶ Heath (1987).

¹⁵⁷ Battezzato (2010), 53-4; such scholars are Meridor (1978); Heath (1987); Mossman (1995); Gregory (1999).

¹⁵⁸ Gregory (1999), 107: 'retribution, whether publicly or privately obtained, was an essential component of justice'.

¹⁵⁹ Meridor (1978), 28-9. Allan (2013), 598 notes that the Attic orators use the word to mean both 'legal punishment' and 'revenge'.

¹⁶⁰ Meridor (1978), 30; Battezzato (2010), 58; Gregory (1999), 109.

¹⁶¹ Battezzato (2010), 54.

¹⁶² Thalmann (1993), 148 *et passim*. Cf. Nussbaum (1986), 416 on other parallels.

vendetta from legal justice is crucial in the denouement of the trilogy; the Erinyes have to transform into the benevolent *Semnai* to take their place in Athens. Euripides engages with the aitiology of the institutions, evoking the proto-tribunal of the *Eumenides* in the final part of his *Hecuba*; the barbarian heroine and her accomplices do not simply stand for Clytemnestra, but also and especially for the Furies.¹⁶³ While it is true that '*Hecuba* offers no objective signs of Erinyes or Alastores' in its lack of emphasis on divine machinery,¹⁶⁴ scholars have suspected that an Erinyes works through Hecuba.¹⁶⁵ Hecuba, in what appears to many to constitute the *peripeteia* of the play — namely, the realisation of Polydorus' assassination — prefaces her vengeful plans with the claim that they derive from a 'Bacchic song' learned through an Alastor (αἰαῖ, κατάρχομαι νόμον / βακχεῖον, ἐξ ἀλάστορος/ ἀρτιμαθῆς κακῶν, 685-7). But the most allusive element to the Furies is constituted by Hecuba's final metamorphosis into a dog: Hecuba becomes the 'bitch with blazing eyes' evoking the animality of the Erinyes (cf. *Eum.* 132, 246) and avenging her child(ren?) by obeying to the bloody 'law' of retaliation.¹⁶⁶ The positive transformation of the Erinyes into Semnai is paralleled by the aetiological myth of the creation of the Cynossema, a fire post in Thrace of extreme importance for fifth-century Athenian sailors.¹⁶⁷ And yet Euripides reverses entirely the dynamics of the Aeschylean trial: it is the Erinyes, now, who is the defendant;¹⁶⁸ it is the Erinyes, not Orestes, who is finally acquitted.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Gregory (1991), 108; Nussbaum (1986), 416.

¹⁶⁴ Turkeltaub (2017), 141.

¹⁶⁵ Erbse (1984), 59; Nussbaum (1986), 416; Gregory (1991), 110-1.

¹⁶⁶ Zanotti (2019), 17-8; Battezzato (2010), 37; Burnett (1994), 159; Gregory (1999), 110.

¹⁶⁷ Burnett (1994), 159-60.

¹⁶⁸ See *supra*, sec. 1.1.1, p. 41.

¹⁶⁹ In *Orestes*, Orestes is not acquitted at first: cf. McDonald (1990), 78; Wohl (2015), 123. Cf. also *infra*, sec. 3.6.1, p. 298; *supra*, sec. 1.1.2, pp. 51-2 with footnotes.

Paradoxically, it is the proto-tribunal of Agamemnon that sanctions the justice inherent in Hecuba's vengeance: the language of vendetta is paradoxically employed just after Polymestor's punishment is sanctioned by Agamemnon.¹⁷⁰ But this does not simply mean that 'the creation of a juridical system is blocked' in the *Hecuba*;¹⁷¹ for this would not explain Euripides' need to have Hecuba's vendetta sanctioned by Agamemnon. The double punishment of Polymestor, through Hecuba's savage retaliation and through Agamemnon's proto-legal verdict, is there because vendetta and law have to coincide contradictorily.¹⁷² The boundaries between legal justice and vendetta, boundaries so fundamentally established at the end of the *Eumenides*, completely collapse.

The tie in the assembly attempted to point down one *dike*, deciding between two (116-9). After Agamemnon's verdict, encroached in terms evocative of retaliation and allusive to the *Libation Bearers* (ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ τὰ μὴ καλὰ/ πράσσειν ἐτόλμας, τλῆθι καὶ τὰ μὴ φίλα, *Hec.* 1250-1; ἔκανες ὄν οὐ χρῆν καὶ τὸ μὴ χρεῶν πάθε, *Cho.* 930), *dike* and its morality remain undefined. Polymestor complains that he has to pay the penalty (in its legal meaning) to 'inferior people' (ὕφέξω τοῖς κακίοσιν δίκην, 1253); Hecuba asks him if he deems it unjust, thereby enlarging the meaning of *dike* (οὔκουν δικαίως, 1254). The ambiguity in the linguistic definition of *dike* corresponds to the moral confusion deriving from the collision of vendetta and legal justice: Hecuba suggests that Polymestor's punishment is just because he has committed 'bad things' (εἴπερ εἰργάσω κακά, 1254). But this *dike* is undercut by Hecuba's own actions, indeed described as κακά by the chorus at 1085 (ὦ τλῆμον, ὡς σοι δύσφορ' εἰργασται κακά) and 1106-7 (συγγνώσθ', ὅταν τις κρείσσον ἢ φέρειν κακά/ πάθη), and probably also implied by

¹⁷⁰ Battezzato (2010), 41.

¹⁷¹ Battezzato (2010), 58. Nor is Hecuba simply turning to the vendetta embodied by the Furies in Aeschylus: cf. Gregory (1991), 108.

¹⁷² Cf. Battezzato (2018), 17.

Agamemnon's general use of the word at the beginning of his verdict (ἀχθεινὰ μὲν μοι τάλλότρια κρίνειν κακά, 1240).¹⁷³ Just as the play aligns Hecuba's children with Polymestor's and ultimately Hecuba with Polymestor,¹⁷⁴ it becomes ultimately impossible, for the audience, to express themselves morally, to judge. Morality, justice, language: the problem of *definition* through victory and defeat—which is inevitably a process of hierarchisation—refracts transversally. For those terms that should define morality become unstable and floating themselves.

1.2.1 *Nomos* or *Nomoi*? The Multiplication of (Moral) Meanings

In fact, Hecuba explicitly connects 'the law' and 'morality' in a much-commented passage of the play (798ff.):

ἡμεῖς μὲν οὖν δοῦλοί τε κάσθενεῖς ἴσως:
ἀλλ' οἱ θεοὶ σθένουσι χῶ κείνων κρατῶν
Νόμος· νόμῳ γὰρ τοὺς θεοὺς ἡγούμεθα
καὶ ζῶμεν ἄδικα καὶ δίκαι' ὠρισμένοι·
ὃς ἐς σ' ἀνελθὼν εἰ διαφθαρήσεται
καὶ μὴ δίκην δώσουσιν οἵτινες ξένους
κτείνουσιν ἢ θεῶν ἱερὰ τολμῶσιν φέρειν,
οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἴσον.

¹⁷³ As mentioned above, Hecuba is technically the defence, not the prosecution: Agamemnon's expression is therefore ambiguous inasmuch as he is technically evaluating Hecuba's crimes, not Polymestor's. But here it ironically applies to both.

¹⁷⁴ Turkeltaub (2017), 149.

In making the connection between law and morality, Hecuba foreshadows the failure of her appeal. Justice, as well as morality, will fail to be defined: *nomos*, which distinguishes between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ (cf. 801), in fact becomes later relativised into a plurality of *nomoi* (846-9; 866).¹⁷⁵ This pluralisation, however, is also a pluralisation of meaning¹⁷⁶ which not only occurs throughout the play (εἰ κακῶς νομίζομεν, 326; νόμος δ’ ἐν ὑμῖν τοῖς τ’ ἐλευθέροις ἴσος, 291; νόμων γραφαί, 866; ἄλλως δ’ αἰτίον τι καὶ νόμος, 974),¹⁷⁷ but even within Hecuba’s own statement on the ‘singular’, fixed *nomos*. As has been noted, Hecuba’s phraseology alludes to sophistic scepticism: she clearly intends to mean that a single *nomos*, a moral order, is so powerful and universal to apply to the gods; yet she undercuts her own meaning by alluding to contemporary sophistic speculations about the relativity of *nomos* (and plurality of *nomoi*).¹⁷⁸ These reflections are indeed more explicitly echoed by Hecuba at 866, in which she argues that the νόμων γραφαί constrain men and deprive them of their freedom,¹⁷⁹ redolent of the troubling critiques of *nomos* articulated by Callicles (*Grg.* 484a-b) and, in a different register, by Thrasymachus (*Resp.* 344a-c), in the context of the debate on *nomos* and *physis*.¹⁸⁰ As Turkeltaub has it, ‘up to this point, Hecuba has steadfastly

¹⁷⁵ Segal (1993), 205.

¹⁷⁶ Mossman (1995), 125.

¹⁷⁷ Kirkwood (1947) was the first to interpret the different conceptualisations of *nomos* as central to the plays’ reflection on the fragility of *nomos* intended as an absolute transcendental force.

¹⁷⁸ Segal (1993), 201. *Contra*, cf. Lanza (1963), 433, 436. As I argue below (sec. 1.3.3, p. 112), this passage shares some affinities with Plato’s Callicles in *Gorgias*. Callicles criticises the notion, intrinsic in Athenian ideology, of equality (τὸ ἴσον, 484a); that is exactly Hecuba’s concern, that by not punishing criminals (i.e. Polymestor), justice (τὸ ἴσον, 805) might be lost. He challenges the written, human νόμοι as an imposition of the weaker members of society on the stronger ones, which self-evidently applies to Hecuba’s situation; instead, it is only just and natural that the strong dominates the weak (ὅτι οὕτω τὸ δίκαιον κέκριται, τὸν κρείττω τοῦ ἥττονος ἄρχειν καὶ πλέον ἔχειν, 483d). The idea of the ‘enslaved’ strong individual who shakes off the fetters of restraint to overpower the weaker members of society (who instead are proponents of νόμος and ἴσον) as well as his other references to slavery (καταδουλούμεθα, 483e; ἡμέτερος ὁ δοῦλος, 484a) also seem to provide points of connection between them.

¹⁷⁹ Segal (1993), 200-1.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Battezzato (2018), 188.

presented *nomos* [...] as a singular, fundamental, and universal principle of just social behaviour, but here she replaces that concept with multiple written *nomoi*'.¹⁸¹ As the statement on the singular *nomos* at 799ff., then, betrays an ambiguity of meaning, it reflects the general confusion of the definition of *nomos* and morality within the play. In other words, its definition is already plural and unstable in Hecuba's most forceful assertion of its singularity and fixedness. This moves contrary to the process of linguistic and moral 'clarification' and 'singularisation' of the *Oresteia*: if the (legal) morality of *dike* appears intelligible at the end of the trilogy, it is because the plurality (or, rather, ambiguity) of *dikai* have been reduced to a singularity of meaning.¹⁸² The *Hecuba* moves in the opposite direction, and instead works towards the complication of *nomos*,¹⁸³ making it ambiguous in the same way it makes ambiguous 'good' and 'bad', 'vengeance' and 'justice'. And so, finally, both sides of the historical scholarly dispute over the 'morality' or 'immorality' of Hecuba's character and actions have shared, paradoxically, the same blind spot —¹⁸⁴ an 'attachment to ideals of definitiveness and transparency',¹⁸⁵ but it is the text itself that asks us to abandon ourselves to its opacity, its openness, and its irreducible deferral of definition.

¹⁸¹ Turkeltaub (2017), 145.

¹⁸² See *supra*, sec. 1.1.1, pp. 37, and 1.2, 54-5.

¹⁸³ Cf. Hoffer (1996), 309 on the parallel ambiguity of *dike* and *nomos* in *Ion*.

¹⁸⁴ Interpretations that focus on the annihilation of morality in Hecuba's character (the degeneration theory, cf. Reckford 1991 and Nussbaum 1986) thus appear inadequate to fathom the larger discourse about the problematisation of justice and morality. Gregory (1991), 110ff. rightly notes that Hecuba's metamorphosis into a dog has been too hastily interpreted as a sign of her moral degeneration. Cf. also Burnett (1994) on the positive value of dog imagery and the Cynossema. Mossman (1995) may appear to be the exception, but she is also inclined to read Hecuba's revenge as morally appropriate rather than confusing.

¹⁸⁵ Mastrorarde (2010), 229.

1.3 Deconstruction Beyond Sexuality: Overlapping Hierarchies

The ambiguity of language, the contradictions and difficulties of *Peitho*, the failure to reach a stable meaning finally appear to relate strictly to the treatment of other themes in the *Hecuba*, such as the distinction between justice and revenge, and the ensuing crisis of the concept of morality. In its critical intertextuality with the *Oresteia*, the play re-opens the crisis of definition that the trilogy had worked to resolve, enacting its own original deconstruction. Having thus established that the crisis of definition, and especially of a moral definition, is central to the play, it is the aim of this section to show that this deconstruction of meaning is profoundly rooted in the discussion of social hierarchies. From gender to class to ethnicity, the *Hecuba* enlarges its view of the deconstructed social order, exposing a structure of overlapping axes of hierarchy and power.

1.3.1 Gender: Polyxena's Sacrifice and Motherhood Reclaimed

Language, sexuality, narrative: for all the scepticism about the application of poststructuralism to Aeschylus,¹⁸⁶ it is Goldhill's undeniable merit to have shown how these three apparently different themes are intertwined in the *Oresteia*. According to Goldhill, the narrative openness of the trilogy is interdependent with the remaining ambiguity of its words, its capacity to keep being duplicitous and double. In its turn, the openness of signification is shown to be fundamentally interconnected with the collapse of the gendered structures upholding society.¹⁸⁷ If the definition of meaning remains open and signification forever poised between two meanings, so too does gender remain undefined, undifferentiated. Therefore Goldhill, who believes, as we

¹⁸⁶ Heath (1985), 243-6; Clark and Csapo (1991); Markantonatos (2014), 274.

¹⁸⁷ Goldhill (1984), 56, 280 *et passim*; cf. McClure (1999), 111. Cf. Segal (1999), 57.

saw, that the *Eumenides* does not fix the problem of verbal signification, also argues that Athena's apparent gendered resolution, its differentiation between male and female, is self-undercutting.¹⁸⁸

And yet even if we agreed that openness, duplicity, and ambiguity can be found at a gendered level potentially in any text, it would still be important to detect how any one text differs from others in attempting to domesticate the potential reverberations of its meaning. In fact, the extent to which reverberations extend, and the potential for resistance, are dramatically reduced in the final play of the trilogy compared to the first two.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, while reading ambiguity in Athena's solution is valuable,¹⁹⁰ it does not detract from the significance of her preference of the male and of the ultimate victory of the rights of the father over the rights of the mother. The same can be said about the view that through the *inclusion*, rather than exclusion of women, Athena sanctions a model of equality for the Athenian society,¹⁹¹ or that the functioning of society is predicated upon the essential contribution of the female.¹⁹² The Erinyes might be welcomed and honoured, and the vote might be almost or entirely equal, yet this ought not obscure the fact that 'Orestes *does* win, Apollo's argument [...] that Zeus views the murder of king Agamemnon as the greater wrong is vindicated, and Orestes, the legitimate male heir, is reestablished in his royal house'.¹⁹³ The Erinyes might be revered for their powers and they might contribute to order, but in doing so they accept a position of subalternity to the gods and to the 'largely male regime' that they

¹⁸⁸ Goldhill (1984), 280.

¹⁸⁹ Rose (1995), 217; Heath (1999), 42-6; Buxton (1982), 113-4. Cf. instead Porter (2023), 125-6.

¹⁹⁰ Besides Goldhill, cf. Vellacott (1984), 157; Seaford (1995), 214-7 (with some qualification); Thalmann (1985), 236.

¹⁹¹ Gagarin (1976), 103; Burian (2023), 140.

¹⁹² Burian (2023), 140; Sommerstein (2019), 8; Rose (1995), 258.

¹⁹³ Conacher (1987), 211-2. Cf. Tzanetou (2014).

acknowledge when they call Zeus for the first time 'all powerful'.¹⁹⁴ This does prelude to the domestication of women and their relegation to the private sphere of existence in society in what can still be defined as one of the most striking literary ideological justifications to patriarchy.¹⁹⁵ Although the *Eumenides* gestures towards mediation, the fundamental process at work in the last play is hierarchisation, rather than full equalisation:¹⁹⁶ women are to be acknowledged, and thus not wholly 'erased', yet their relegation to the private/religious sphere of existence is a consequence of a procedure of hierarchisation through which the male is given power over the female. All this largely depends on the simple outcome of the trial, through which Aeschylus makes the gender disbalance in power sanctioned by an Olympian, so as to provide a metaphysical justification to the gender hierarchy in Athenian society.¹⁹⁷

Language, in its turn, becomes clear and unambiguous just as it is stripped not only of feminine guile, but is also taken away from women in the public sphere of existence: the *Eumenides* thus 'celebrates the erasure of women's speech from the polis'.¹⁹⁸ Apparently included, but actually relegated, the female is silenced as language is restored to its integrity, its unambiguous truth, its truthful meaning. The differentiation

¹⁹⁴ Gewirtz (1988), 1054. Cf. Rynearson (2013), 18.

¹⁹⁵ De Beauvoir (1956), 104; Zeitlin (1978); Gewirtz (1988), 1054; Hall (2015), 268. This ideological complexity can be grasped by Marxist analyses of ideology: as Rose (2012), 255 has it, hegemonic ideology can be persuasive only by making concessions and by being superficially ambiguous (cf. Rose 1997, 162). On this, cf. Roselli (2007), 103.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Burian (2023), 140.

¹⁹⁷ This does not necessarily mean that Aeschylus wanted to emphasise the disbalance. In fact, it is possible to see why critics have thought that the trilogy worked towards 'the striking of an appropriate balance between them to preserve domestic and civic order' (Raeburn and Thomas 2011, xliii). For example, Burian (2023), 140 and Rose (1995), 258 are right in noting that Aeschylus' new story of the sanctuary of Delphi is symbolic of the peaceful cooperation of genders at the end of the trilogy. This, however, does not take away from the fact that Phoebe did transfer power to Apollo, so that Zeitlin's claim (1996, 102) that the myth provides 'a direct mythological model for the transference of power from the female to the male' is not to be disregarded.

¹⁹⁸ McClure (1999), 111.

of genders parallels the process of linguistic definition, with the ‘other’ meanings silenced and hierarchised into a spectral position of silence. Again, this does not have to be the only possible interpretation of the resolution of the trilogy; yet it suffices to show that it can be plausibly imagined, whether by us or by Euripides.

Yet what is striking about the *Hecuba*’s intertextual relationship with the *Oresteia* is the way in which it engages with its treatment of gender. Thalmann recognises this as the kernel of Euripides’ take on Aeschylus.¹⁹⁹ First, this is especially visible through Polyxena’s character, who is endowed with a subjectivity and a voice that makes the gender imbalance of this warrior society evident and problematises the gendered violence that was ultimately justified in Aeschylus, especially since she evokes Iphigenia’s sacrifice.²⁰⁰ Second, while Hecuba might be identified with Clytemnestra in her gendered pursuit of revenge, Euripides apparently suggests that ‘a categorical condemnation of women’, such as the one Polymestor makes after being blinded (1177-82), ‘is too simple to resolve the issues not only in his own play but also in the *Oresteia*’.²⁰¹ In fact, the whole act of vengeance of Hecuba is presented in heavily gendered terms. Hecuba replies to Agamemnon’s scepticism at the idea that women can have any power over men at 883-7:

Αγ. καὶ πῶς γυναιξὶν ἀρσένων ἔσται κράτος;

Εκ. δεινὸν τὸ πλῆθος σὺν δόλῳ τε δύσμαχον.

Αγ. δεινόν· τὸ μέντοι θῆλυ μέμφομαι γένος.

Εκ. τί δ’; οὐ γυναιῖκες εἶλον Αἰγύπτου τέκνα

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Tzanetou (2020), 161 on Athenian imperialism; Marshall (1992), 89 on revenge.

²⁰⁰ Thalmann (1993), 147.

²⁰¹ Thalmann (1993), 152.

καὶ Λῆμνον ἄρδην ἀρσένων ἐξώκισαν;

Crawling onto stage, Polymestor cries that ‘women have ruined’ him, ‘captive women’ (γυναῖκες ὤλεσάν με,/γυναῖκες αἰχμαλωτίδες, 1095-6). At the end of his proto-judicial speech Polymestor alludes to the choral ode of *Libation Bearers* in his condemnation of women after being blinded (1172-82; cf. *Cho.* 585-98).²⁰² The ode is reproduced specifically in its misogynistic dimension, and the chorus neglects Polymestor’s speech to comment on his unjustified misogyny: μηδὲν θρασύνου μηδὲ τοῖς σαυτοῦ κακοῖς/ τὸ θῆλυ συνθεῖς ὧδε πᾶν μέμψη γένος (1183-4). Yet what exactly is the effect of Euripides’ reproduction of the gender conflict in the *Oresteia* here? And how does Euripides’ take on ‘Aeschylean’ gender fit into the general reception of Aeschylus’ trilogy?

One simple way in which it is possible to see the difference in the treatment of gender between the *Oresteia* and the *Hecuba* is through the ‘power dynamics’ established at the end of the tragedy. Hecuba seems to replay and foreshadow Clytemnestra, as we saw; a parallel most evident in the deception scene in which she lures Polymestor inside the tents and when he shouts from off-stage when hit (*Ag.* 1343-6; *Hec.* 1035),²⁰³ but also present from the beginning of the play. For Polyxena certainly evokes Iphigenia,²⁰⁴ and Hecuba’s dream might well remind the audience of that archetypal dreamer²⁰⁵ whose nightmare opened the *Libation Bearers* and that appeared herself as

²⁰² Battezzato (2018), 240.

²⁰³ Gregory (1999), 169-70.

²⁰⁴ On Iphigenia and Polyxena, cf. also Pucci (2020), 538.

²⁰⁵ Sophocles’ *Electra* (later than *Hecuba*) also includes Clytemnestra’s dream (417-25). In *IT*, Iphigenia’s dream can also be taken as allusive to her mythical mother’s dream in Aeschylus. Nightmares appear also in Stesichorus’ treatment of the myth (219 PMG = Plut. *De Sera Numinis Vindicta* 554f-555a). Thus, Clytemnestra seems to have been frequently associated with dreams; that feature must have been so peculiar that Sophocles and Euripides did reproduce it, albeit in different form (Krevans 1993, 259 n5.). In *Hecuba*, Hecuba not only dreams, but also asks the Earth to avert the realisation of the ominous vision: ὦ πότνια Χθών/ μελανοπτερύγων

a dream in *Eumenides* — just like Hecuba’s dream opens this play,²⁰⁶ and just like Hecuba’s dream at the beginning of *Alexandros* must have been heavily allusive to the Aeschylean Clytemnestra.²⁰⁷ When Polymestor goes on to quote the ode of the *Libation Bearers* to comment on the nature of women, then, the assimilation of Hecuba’s act to Clytemnestra’s is completed. However, the allusion is immediately followed by the proto-trial, which re-enacts the culmination of the gendered conflicts of the *Oresteia*; this time, however, the winner of the *agon* is not the male, but the female. This is made explicit by the first words of Polymestor after the verdict: οἴμοι, γυναικός, ὡς ἔοιχ’, ἠσώμενος/ δούλης ὑφέξω τοῖς κακίοσιν δίκην (1252-3). I leave out for the moment the (important) consideration that Polymestor is ashamed of being defeated also by Hecuba as a *slave*. The fact that Polymestor recognises a reversal in the gender hierarchy through Agamemnon’s verdict is made further significant by the fact that the verdict is phrased in terms that again are most allusive to the *Oresteia*: ἀλλ’ ἐπεὶ τὰ μὴ καλὰ/ πράσσειν ἐτόλμας, τλήθι καὶ τὰ μὴ φίλα (1250-1; cf. *Cho.* 930).²⁰⁸ The fact that it is Agamemnon that sanctions this gender reversal provides an added layer of irony and allusion to Aeschylus’ trilogy. The crime of Hecuba and the following trial, then, seem engineered to re-thematise the conflict between male and female so fundamental

μητρὸν ὄνειρων/ ἀποπέμπομαι ἔννυχον ὄψιν (70-2). Dreams were believed to have a chthonic origin; the connection was made explicit by the chorus of the *Libation Bearers* (43-6), who also ask that evil be averted and refer to the Earth as ‘mother’ (ἰὼ γαῖα μάϊα; Garvie 1986, 59).

²⁰⁶ A scholion in a codex *ad Ran.* 1331 indicates that vv.68 ff. of the *Hecuba* are being parodied by Aristophanes’ Aeschylus. While Rau (1967), 204 and Battezzato (2010), 124 deem the association too loose, there are similarities between the two passages, for example ‘Hecuba’s emotional vocatives followed by a question, and her pairing of light and darkness in a virtual oxymoron’ (Gregory, 1999, 52; cf. Barlow 1986, 11). If Aeschylus is parodying Euripides’ style, it might make sense for him to choose a passage of a Euripidean play that already visibly borrowed from Aeschylus, as if he were replying to Euripides’ reception of his work. One has to notice that Euripides’ previous parody involved, indeed, the *Agamemnon* (*Ran.* 1276, 1285-9). Cf. Del Corno (1985), 234-6.

²⁰⁷ See *infra*, sec. 3.5.2, pp. 277-8.

²⁰⁸ Thalmann (1993), 152; Krausse (1905), 85.

in Aeschylus' trilogy;²⁰⁹ however, the power dynamics that are established through the final trial and through Athena's intervention in the *Eumenides* are reversed.²¹⁰ While no gods intervene here,²¹¹ the hierarchy appears reversed, thus apparently leading to a different 'hierarchisation' of genders with female on top. Nonetheless, this apparent new process of hierarchisation is deeply frail, and fundamentally unconvincing.

Euripides might have chosen to reverse the power dynamics inherent in the denouement of the *Oresteia*, but in this the *Hecuba* does not considerably differ from the ending of *Agamemnon*, where the gender transgression of Clytemnestra is sanctioned through her acquisition of political power. One important difference, as I argued, is that the proto-trial between Hecuba and Polymestor (overseen by Agamemnon) directly evokes the trial that establishes the gender hierarchy in a universalising manner in *Eumenides*. As such, it is not simply a gendered reversal of power (as many in Attic tragedy), but a take on the Aeschylean establishment of the gender hierarchy. In other words, it seems to engage with the very foundations of the hierarchy established by that trial and to upturn them, rather than merely stage the 'perversion' of normative gendered norms.

And yet such overturning would be innocuous if it just entailed an inversion of power dynamics. The establishment of a power disbalance at the end of the *Oresteia* in fact resides in an ideological justification. This is given explicitly and implicitly in the course

²⁰⁹ Cf. also Zanotti (2019), 14 and Young (2023) emphasising the gendered nature of Hecuba's revenge.

²¹⁰ So it is not really 'vengeance', as Battezzato (2010), 59 has it, that sanctions the reversal of the social hierarchy; rather, it is the victory of Hecuba in the trial that sanctions the reversal of the power dynamics established at the end of the *Eumenides*.

²¹¹ The only divine presence to be perceived in the play is, potentially, in the winds: cf. Papastamati (2017), 378; Gregory (1999), xxxi. Kovacs (1987) argues that the gods stop the winds to allow Hecuba to enact her revenge, thereby sanctioning her actions. Yet cf. Turkeltaub (2017), 139-40 who argues that Euripides leaves this ambiguous.

of the *Oresteia*. Athena proclaims her allegiance to all things male while casting her vote (734-40):

ἐμὸν τόδ' ἔργον, λαισθίαν κρῖναι δίκην.

ψῆφον δ' Ὀρέστη τήνδ' ἐγὼ προσθήσομαι.

μήτηρ γὰρ οὐτίς ἐστὶν ἢ μ' ἐγείνατο,

τὸ δ' ἄρσεν αἰνῶ πάντα, πλὴν γάμου τυχεῖν,

ἅπαντι θυμῶ, κάρτα δ' εἰμὶ τοῦ πατρός.

οὕτω γυναικὸς οὐ προτιμήσω μόρον

ἄνδρα κτανούσης δωμάτων ἐπίσκοπον.

Athena's vote obliquely supports the infamous Apollonian argument that women are not the true parents of their children.²¹² And while the new scientific theories underlying Apollo's argument must have felt at least dubious to the Athenian audience,²¹³ it is undeniable that 'theogony supports embryology',²¹⁴ and Zeus' sole role in the creation of Athena (the very goddess of Athens) gives weight, if not to the Apollonian argument, at least to the importance of fatherhood vis-à-vis motherhood.²¹⁵ In prioritising the father over the mother, Athena and Apollo are laying the ideological basis of patriarchy. Hierarchisation is thus based on the presumed importance of male and female, which gives an ideological basis to the power dynamics established at the end. The negation of the importance of motherhood is fundamental: they both have in

²¹² A fact that Burian (2023), 139 acknowledges while arguing that Athena's statement 'does not depend upon an assessment of the parties' arguments'.

²¹³ Burian (2023), 138-9.

²¹⁴ Zeitlin (1996), 109.

²¹⁵ Collard (2002), xxvii. Cf. Sommerstein (2019), 8; Gagarin (1976), 101-3.

mind Orestes' matricide (contrasted with the importance of uxoricide), but in diminishing it they also erase Clytemnestra's most reasonable motivation for killing Agamemnon — the sacrifice of Iphigenia.²¹⁶ This ideological move was in fact already anticipated in the previous play, where the mother-daughter relationship (so fundamental in *Agamemnon*) was attenuated by the paradoxical undervaluing of motherhood by Clytemnestra herself and the hatred of Electra and Orestes towards her,²¹⁷ as well as the addition of the figure of Cilissa.²¹⁸ This move was in fact accompanied by the reduction of Clytemnestra's motivation to adultery and political ambition.²¹⁹

One can see how the preference towards the male, with its ensuing hierarchisation, ties in automatically with the definition of morality: in subjugating the female, Athena and Apollo are silencing the female's claims to justice, thus paving the way for one *dike*, rather than multiple (Goldhill's 'significance of the single word').²²⁰ So, while it is necessary for any reasonable interpreter to read the dynamics of ambiguity in *Agamemnon*, the space it reserves to Clytemnestra's motherhood, her motivations to kill Agamemnon, and to her claim to justice, it is equally fundamental to perceive how the trilogy slowly undermines such moral ambiguity, *though perhaps never completely*. This process of hierarchisation leads towards a silencing of the female claim to justice

²¹⁶ Zeitlin (1996), 150.

²¹⁷ Zeitlin (1996), 96; Rose (1995), 230.

²¹⁸ Winnington-Ingram (1948), 139; Goheen (1955), 132; Garvie (1986) *ad loc.*; *contra*, cf. Margon (1983), 297.

²¹⁹ Iphigenia disappears in *Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides*; the only reference is at *Cho.* 242, and Clytemnestra ignores Iphigenia's sacrifice at 908ff: Garvie (1986), 105. Brown (2018), 230-1: 'the characters are aware of it even though it is irrelevant to the moral focus now'. *Contra*, cf. Winnington-Ingram (1948), 142, 147.

²²⁰ Goldhill (1984), 239.

(and morality) which corresponds to a silencing of the female *sociologically* in the *Eumenides*.

An immediate reverberation of the trilogy in the *Hecuba* provides a good example of its difference from the *Oresteia* in the treatment of motherhood. At *Cho.* 896ff., Clytemnestra strikingly exhibits her breast before Orestes to convince him not to kill her. The gesture echoes in Polyxena's nudity and the description of her breasts.²²¹ The effect of this engagement is complex but telling. In *Libation Bearers*, Clytemnestra's gesture is the last obstacle Orestes has to overcome in order to accomplish his plans. Motherhood is at the centre of this gesture, with Clytemnestra appealing exactly to that bond of motherhood which is going to be undervalued in the last play. Thus, while it is true that Aeschylus acknowledges the importance of motherhood (the gesture leads to the only, true moment of indecision of Orestes at *Cho.* 896-9),²²² it is equally fundamental that Orestes should neglect the gesture. In the verdict of the Areopagus, Orestes is retrospectively legitimated in neglecting the mother-son bond, in going beyond the hesitation triggered by Clytemnestra's visual plea.²²³ That visual act had so strong an impact to compel Euripides to adhere to Aeschylus' particular at *El.* 1206-7 and *Or.* 527-8, 839-42.²²⁴ Polyxena's act clearly evokes Clytemnestra's but seems to work in the exact opposite direction. First, the context of her gesture recalls Iphigenia's sacrifice, as Thalmann has abundantly argued;²²⁵ the sacrifice of a girl snatched away from her mother is brought back on stage. It can be objected that had Euripides really

²²¹ Hermione in *Andromache* bares her breast in an act that evokes Aeschylus' Clytemnestra: see *infra*, sec. 2.7.1, p. 204.

²²² Garvie (1986), 63-4; Winnington-Ingram (1948), 143; Vellacott (1984), 155.

²²³ An analogous, crucial moment in the contestation and *reaffirmation* of the patriarchal order is Hyllus' hesitation in *Trachiniae*: Wohl (1998), 56 *et passim*.

²²⁴ Cf. Scodel (1996), 123.

²²⁵ See *supra*, sec. 1.1.1, pp. 34-5.

wanted to re-evaluate the importance of motherhood, it would have been more natural for him to have Hecuba bare her breast, since she is the mother. However, Polyxena's action does recall Hecuba, since Clytemnestra's act in *Libation Bearers* is indeed moulded over the archetypal scene of Hecuba baring her breast in the *Iliad*, appealing to motherhood while attempting to restrain Hector from fighting.²²⁶ Polyxena's farewell to Hecuba did mention her mother's breasts, in fact: ὦ στέρνα μαστοί θ' (424). The same endyadic terminology at the moment of her gesture allows us to make the connection: μαστούς τ' ἔδειξε στέρνα θ' (560). At the moment of her death (itself a clear reenactment of the main motivation of Clytemnestra's action, her daughter's sacrifice), she evokes the moment in the Aeschylean trilogy in which Clytemnestra's appeal to motherhood is most vivid—and in doing so she also reminds the audience of her mother Hecuba (both Homeric and Euripidean).

It is not a coincidence that Polyxena's executioner is Neoptolemus. In the *Cypria*, Neoptolemus probably only arranged her body for burial; in Proclus' summary of the *Iliou Persis*, it was not specified who the executioner was; Ibycus might have been the first to cast him into the role of the executioner, but this too is uncertain (*Cypr.* fr. 27 Davies).²²⁷ The mother-daughter bond, about to be broken forever with her death, is contrasted with the father-son relationship; motherhood is sacrificed for fatherhood. The executioner thus has to be Neoptolemus, this παῖς Ἀχιλλέως (repeated twice; 523, 528) who indeed prays to his father at the beginning of his sacrifice by tracing a patrilinear genealogy for himself: ὦ παῖ Πηλέως, πατήρ δ' ἐμός (534).²²⁸ One might

²²⁶ Bowen (1986), 147. Cf. Page and Garvie (1988), 292; Marshall (2017), 192-3. On the intermediary role of Stesichorus and his *Geryoneis* between Homer and Aeschylus, cf. Budelmann (2018), 165.

²²⁷ Gregory (1999), 109.

²²⁸ Anderson (1997), 60.

refrain from comparing Neoptolemus to Orestes and Achilles to Agamemnon. However, the situation does remind us of *Libation Bearers*: a father's tomb is being honoured with libations, his son invoking him and asking for support.²²⁹ Even if we did not want to consider this a reference to Orestes' and Electra's prayers and libations to their father,²³⁰ the son-father relationship is here carefully designed to contrast in the narrative with Polyxena (in Talthybius' narrative, just taken away from her mother Hecuba) and in the actual scene with Hecuba (shortly before prostrate on the ground, in pain after Polyxena has been taken away from her in the preceding scene).²³¹

Yet it is in the second half of the play that motherhood and fatherhood are contrasted in the most striking way. I will gloss over the self-evident emphasis on Hecuba's motherly sorrow for the death of her children. More striking are the workings of Hecuba's revenge, as she seems to engineer it by specifically inflicting the same suffering on Polymestor, thus grouping together Polyxena's and Polydorus' losses as if he were responsible for both — a puzzling line of thought, as scholars have noticed (and tried to explain away).²³² She explicitly constructs the symmetry when ordering to summon Polymestor with his children to then proceed to talk of her two lost children and their common burial (891-7):

Καλεῖ σ' ἄνασσα δὴ ποτ' Ἰλίου

²²⁹ Rose (1995), 243 on the space reserved to the 'invocation of the father' in *Libation Bearers*. The scene was imitated in *Orestes* and *Electra*: Zeitlin (2003), 320; West (1987), 266; Seidensticker (2025), 279; Matthiessen (2002), 130.

²³⁰ The idea of a perverted libation of blood occurred at *Cho.* 578. Cf. Rabinowitz (1981), 175 on the importance of this moment for the theme of fatherhood.

²³¹ On the exchange of women as a fundamental patriarchal practice, cf. Wohl (1998), 18 on *Trachiniae*, where the direction of the exchange is opposite (father to son). Sacrifice is of course an exchange between humans and gods. This case, however, is rather framed as one between father and son.

²³² Turkeltaub (2017), 138-9; Hall (2001), xxii; Walton (2009), 103-4. Gregory (1999), 152: to Hecuba, Polymestor seems the 'joint murderer' of Polyxena and Polydorus. Cf. 882 with Matthiessen (2010), 368.

Εκάβη, σὸν οὐκ ἔλασσον ἢ κείνης χρέος,
καὶ παῖδας, ὡς δεῖ καὶ τέκν' εἰδέναι λόγους
τοὺς ἐξ ἐκείνης. τὸν δὲ τῆς νεοσφαγοῦς
Πολυξένης ἐπίσχες, Ἀγάμεμνον, τάφον,
ὡς τώδ' ἀδελφῶ πλησίον μιᾷ φλογί,
δισσὴ μέριμνα μητρὶ, κρυφθῆτον χθονί.

Therefore, as she envisages the murder of Polymestor's children, she has in mind her own two dead children. The δισσὴ μέριμνα of Hecuba (897) will correspond to the παίδων τε δισσῶν σώμαθ' (1051) of Polymestor,²³³ as Hecuba says before Polymestor comes back blinded on stage, his two children's bodies in the background. Motherhood and fatherhood are also poignantly contrasted in Polymestor's narrative of the murder (1157ff):

ὄσαι δὲ τοκάδες ἦσαν, ἐκπαγλούμεναι
τέκν' ἐν χεροῖν ἔπαλλον, ὡς πρόσω πατρὸς
γένοιντο, διαδοχαῖσ' ἀμείβουσαι χερῶν.
[...]
εὐθὺς λαβοῦσαι φάσαν' ἐκ πέπλων ποθὲν
κεντοῦσι παῖδας, αἱ δὲ πολυπόδων δίκην
ξυναρπάσασαι τὰς ἐμὰς εἶχον χέρας

²³³ Segal (1993), 165.

καὶ κῶλα

The αὶ δέ makes the division clear between a first group of mothers (including Hecuba?) that kill the children and a second group of ‘tentacular’ Trojan women,²³⁴ non-mothers, who keep Polymestor from moving.²³⁵ This is specifically emphasised by their behaviour, as they pose as loving mothers with the sole aim of removing the children from Polymestor to kill them.²³⁶ And again, shortly after this, Polymestor goes on to allude to the misogynistic stasimon of *Libation Bearers*. Thus the play ends with a disquieting vindication of a mother’s rights vis-à-vis fatherhood. It is not simply that the power dynamics between genders are reversed in comparison with the trial of the *Eumenides*, but that the play places emphasis on the very weakness of the patriarchal justification given at the end of it. Just as the mother’s claim to *dike* cannot be erased, and the problem of justice remains unresolved in its ambiguity, so motherhood and womanhood are not silenced,²³⁷ and the hierarchisation at the basis of the Aeschylean resolution is impossible. The ideological drive of the *Hecuba*, then, does not so much reverse the hierarchy established by the *Oresteia*; rather, it reopens its dialectics and its tensions, and it puts into question the idea that a resolution and definition can be obtained. This ‘re-opening’ has a fragmenting impact on the concept itself of hierarchy— linguistic, moral, sexual.

Much discussion has surrounded the matter of Hecuba’s predicted fate and her metamorphosis into a bitch with blazing eyes.²³⁸ We have seen already how Hecuba’s

²³⁴ I follow Battezzato’s emendation πολυπόδων for the transmitted πολεμίων: cf. Battezzato (2018), 238.

²³⁵ Battezzato (2018), 238 notes that Polymestor repeatedly divides the Trojan women into two groups within his narrative.

²³⁶ Battezzato (2018), 237; Pohlenz (1961), 325.

²³⁷ To the point that *Hecuba* would become in later receptions of the play the embodiment of motherhood, for instance in Boccaccio: Dugdale (2015), 113.

²³⁸ Dugdale (2015), 108.

revenge is constructed to be morally ambiguous, and it is hard to concur with those critics that see her vengeance as monolithically negative,²³⁹ and thus interpret the metamorphosis as a punishment, a sign of her degeneration into a beast.²⁴⁰ Dogs occupied a place in the Greek imagination that was deeply ambivalent: as animals, they stood outside civilisation; yet they also stood close to its boundaries in being the most tameable of animals, guardians of houses, even allies of men in their hunting (and thus civilising) efforts against other beasts.²⁴¹ It is therefore highly appropriate that Euripides chose a morally ambiguous symbol for a morally indeterminate character.²⁴² However, the primary import of this metamorphosis is arguably a different one. The dog was an icon of maternity as early as the Homeric poems (cf. *Od.* 20.14), and her instinctive aggressiveness in defence of her pups was proverbial (as the Homeric lines show).²⁴³ The adequacy of the application of this imagery to Hecuba is self-evident.²⁴⁴ The tragedy then ends with a remarkable divine metamorphosis (potentially invented by Euripides himself)²⁴⁵ which, regardless of its moral connotation,²⁴⁶ brings to the fore Hecuba qua mother, and therefore sanctions her vendetta.

²³⁹ For a list, cf. Battezzato (2018) and Heath (1987); of the metamorphosis, cf. Burnett (1994), 151.

²⁴⁰ Hall (2001), xxiii; Gellie (1980), 40; Dugdale (2015), 108-9 with further references. Cf. Meridor (1978), 32.

²⁴¹ Burnett (1994), 152-3; Margariti (2024), 48; Turkeltaub (2017), 149; Raeburn and Thomas (2023), lxvi. Nussbaum (1986), 414 overlooks this.

²⁴² Turkeltaub (2017), 149 shares this a-moral interpretation but interprets the metamorphosis specifically as a symbol of asociality. On the ambiguity of the word and its use by Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon*, cf. Goldhill (1984), 56-7.

²⁴³ Burnett (1994), 154-5; Papastamati (2017), 381.

²⁴⁴ Gregory (1999), xxxiv-v.

²⁴⁵ Gregory (1999), 192.

²⁴⁶ At *Hel.* 375-86, Helen mentions two examples of mythical animal metamorphosis, yet does not attach any blame to the metamorphosed women (Callisto and Cos): Burian (2007), 211; Dale (1967), 92; Allan (2008), 193-4.

The canine connotations of the Erinyes make them a privileged parallel to Hecuba's metamorphosed state,²⁴⁷ but they also make Hecuba align with Clytemnestra. In the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra notoriously calls herself a 'bitch', an ambiguous term both signifying shamelessness and loyalty (607-8; 896).²⁴⁸ While Aeschylus already drew on the canine symbology of the Erinyes to make the connection between them and Clytemnestra, Euripides literalises the metaphorical connection in the body of Hecuba. In vindicating her role as a mother, and in being literally transfigured into a dog, Hecuba thus seems to vindicate Clytemnestra's motivations before her murderous rage even takes place within the chronology of the story. However, extradiegetically, the *Hecuba* reevaluates Clytemnestra's motivations and therefore her claims to justice (and morality). In fact, another clue connects the ending of the *Hecuba* to the beginning of the *Agamemnon*. Hecuba will become κύων...πύρσ' ἔχουσα δέργματα (1265); the dog's burial, the Cynossema (κυνὸς ταλαίνης σῆμα, 1273), will be a ναυτίλοις τέκμαρ (1273). The reason why Hecuba turns into a dog with blazing eyes is that the Cynossema was not only a prominent landmark, but also a fire post: a necessity for Greek sailors, given the narrowness of the passage and the strong sea currents running down from the Bosphorus.²⁴⁹ Euripides seems to signal precisely the presence of fire signs on the Cynossema —²⁵⁰ not only an allusion to Hecuba's dream of the firebrand before giving birth to Paris, but in fact a clear allusion to the beginning of the *Agamemnon*.²⁵¹ One remembers that the watchman at the beginning of the trilogy compares himself waiting for the beacons' sign to a dog (κύνοσ δίκην, 3). Admittedly, Clytemnestra speaks of Mt

²⁴⁷ Gregory (1999), xxxv; Nussbaum (1986), 416; Gregory (1991), 107-11.

²⁴⁸ Goldhill (1984), 56; cf. Papastamati (2017), 381.

²⁴⁹ Burnett (1994), 159.

²⁵⁰ Burnett (1994), 160.

²⁵¹ Burnett (1994), 160 n46 and Gregory (1999), 194 note the use of τέκμαρ in connection with beacons in *Agamemnon*, but do not press the matter further.

Ida as the initial fire post originating the beacon chain (Aesch. *Ag.* 281), so that the Cynossema's imagined first blazing cannot be regarded as the initial beacon triggering the events of the trilogy. But the peculiar association of the word τέκμαρ with fire posts does (Aesch. *Ag.* 272, 315, 352), and in so doing it presents Hecuba's vendetta as contingent to that of Clytemnestra.

In revaluing the mother, the *Hecuba* presents not simply an intertextual reevaluation of Clytemnestra but raises the issue of gender and the establishment of a disbalance at the end of the *Eumenides*. This hierarchisation of power was grounded in an ideological hierarchy through the silencing of the mother's claims to *dike*, and, in doing so, the ideological subordination of woman to man. The *Hecuba* makes the mother's claims as tangible as possible, and sanctions it with the symbol of motherhood (itself alluding to Clytemnestra and the Erinyes). This goes beyond mere reversal of the sexual power dynamics of the *Oresteia*: it is not simply that the hierarchy is reconstituted in reversed form, but rather that the sense of unambiguous *dike*, predicated as it was on the silencing of the female and of the mother, emerges as problematic. Precisely since the trilogy based its definition of morality on the hierarchisation of male and female, this challenge to the moral and ideological bases of the man/woman hierarchy refracts into the play's complication of morality and justice. In fact, as we saw, the word *dike* comes back at the end of the *Hecuba* in a way that seems reductive and ultimately unacceptable, to the point that a (re-)definition of morality does not seem attainable by simply erasing the male: 'do you not suffer justly, given that you have committed wrongs?' (1254), Hecuba asks after the verdict. The question is not answered; this moral ambiguity is therefore predicated upon the re-opening of the ideological solution at the basis of the hierarchy of male and female.

In a 1994 article, Katz contraposes the genre of tragedy with the genre of the *epitaphios*. The *epitaphios*, she claims, offers a vision of an exclusively male existence dominated by a sense of a unified collectivity of men; women, then, are excluded and erased. Tragedy, on the other hand, seems to wreck exactly this sense of collectivity by the recognition of sexual difference, which is the very basis of the way in which the tragic self comes to life.²⁵² This is very similar to the view expressed by Saxonhouse in the seminal *Fear of Diversity*, in which she analyses precisely the exclusion of women as a symbol of difference within the Greek polis. As the ideology of the polis promoted a drive to wholeness, rather than separateness,²⁵³ diversity was explored but ultimately erased in the very myths that it was built upon.²⁵⁴ These myths were received in Attic tragedy, and it is there, according to Saxonhouse, that 'to raise questions about order, unity, power, and rationality, the playwrights often turned to the female, for in her difference from the male she revealed a diversity in nature that threatened the physical order and rational control at which the polis aimed'.²⁵⁵ These views, still hegemonic, might be contested in their indiscriminate application to the entirety of Greek tragedy: is it the case that tragedy wrecks this dream of ideological wholeness, or is it rather that by envisioning the danger of diversity it ends up sanctioning and resecuring that dream?²⁵⁶ I refrain from giving a generalised answer. In reference to this question, however, it is possible to give a specific answer on the *Oresteia*. Katz considers Clytemnestra's sexual diversity in the *Agamemnon* as an example of her thesis that tragedy, in comparison to the *epitaphios*, asks the audience to recognise sexual

²⁵² Katz (1994), 100.

²⁵³ Saxonhouse (1992), 51.

²⁵⁴ Saxonhouse (1992), 51; Mendelsohn (2002), 28.

²⁵⁵ Saxonhouse (1992), 52.

²⁵⁶ For a summary of the debate and in general of feminist readings of Attic tragedy, cf. Wohl (2005b), 155.

difference.²⁵⁷ Yet once the perspective is enlarged to the whole of the trilogy, it is important to take into account that the *Oresteia*, while raising the spectre of sexual difference considerably, works towards its resolution through hierarchy.²⁵⁸ In Euripides, the Erinyes is brought back on stage; the play refuses to hierarchise gender as it refuses to define the boundaries between male and female, challenging not only the ideological, moral basis of the hierarchy (mother/woman's claims to justice vis-à-vis man/father's), but also collapsing distinctions and differentiations between genders themselves. As language remains undefined, gender does too. Yet the process of social hierarchisation that is put under pressure, on a closer look, goes beyond the difference of male and female.

1.3.2 Class and Status: Enlarging the Social Order

In her seminal chapter on the *Oresteia*, Zeitlin writes:²⁵⁹

For Aeschylus, civilization is the ultimate product of conflict between opposing forces, achieved not through a *coincidentia oppositorum* but through a hierarchization of values. The solution, therefore, places Olympian over chthonic on the divine level, Greek over barbarian on the cultural level, and male over female on the social level. But the male-female conflict subsumes the other two by providing the central metaphor that sexualises the other issues and attracts them into its magnetic field.

²⁵⁷ Katz (1994), 88ff.

²⁵⁸ And vice versa, the ideological end might be that of resecuring ideology, but the spectre has been raised. Cf. Zeitlin (1996), 171: 'the project is to lay the female to rest, at least temporarily, and to define the parameters of male hegemony. But in the course of its enactment, the dynamic impulse belongs to the female'. Cf. Wohl (2005b), 152; Foley (2001), 8-10.

²⁵⁹ Zeitlin (1996), 87.

According to Zeitlin, as female is yoked to chaos, chthonic, barbarian, and the male to order, Olympian, and Greek, the sexual polarity in the *Oresteia* is imbued with a moral, even cosmic sense.²⁶⁰ Gender, however, seems to be the central metaphor, the ‘magnet’ attracting the other hierarchies/polarities to itself. On the ‘social level’, specifically, gender is *the* hierarchy at the centre of the stage, on which the whole trial, the verdict, and the vote of Athena converge: ‘in all things, I prefer the male’ (*Eum.* 737). This is also the ideological justification underlying the preference for the father vis-à-vis the mother, discussed above.

When we move to the *Hecuba*, however, a different view emerges. Hecuba, as we just saw, sanctions the ambiguity of a moral definition with οὐκ οὐκ δικαίως, εἴπερ εἰργάσω κακά; (1254). Yet in asking the question she is responding to Polymestor’s reaction at Agamemnon’s verdict (1252-3):

Οἷμοι, γυναικός, ὡς ἔοιχ’, ἠσσωμένος

δούλης ὑφέξω τοῖς κακίοσιν δίκην.

Polymestor’s reaction is, first of all, a sign of Euripides’ reception of the importance of social hierarchies within the definition of morality provided by Aeschylus. In fact, the use of κακός in juxtaposition with Hecuba’s brings out the inherent expectation of the verdict to punish those who are κακοί. But in Polymestor’s view, this is paradoxical and absurd, because he is defeated by those who are technically ‘inferiors’, that is, more κακοί; this is in line with the *moral* definition of a hierarchy of genders within the *Eumenides*, of which we spoke, and that we saw being halted by the *Hecuba*. Yet what is really striking here is the enlargement of ‘the social level’: Polymestor is astounded by

²⁶⁰ Zeitlin (1996), 101.

the fact that he has been defeated by a woman *and slave*, as demonstrated by the emphasis on δούλης, positioned at the beginning of the line in a striking enjambement.

Euripides has prepared the ground for this enlargement of the social level far before in the play, from the beginning. Hecuba's slavery receives repeated attention, along with that of the chorus: Daitz notes how ἐλεύθερος and δοῦλος occur 27 times in the play, over twice as frequently as in any other surviving Euripidean play.²⁶¹ But the play goes much deeper in blurring the lines between slave and non-slave; this has long been recognised in scholarship since Daitz, whose arguments it is worth lingering on.²⁶²

According to Daitz, as well as many scholars after him, the play questions the divide between slave and free, especially (though not exclusively) through Polyxena's acceptance of her sacrifice.²⁶³ This is to be discerned in her sarcastic and proud interaction with Odysseus, whom she exhorts not to be afraid (345) and with whom she displays her decision to die free and proud.²⁶⁴ Polyxena's prideful resolution to die free, of her own will, culminates in the reported speech she utters before she is sacrificed (547ff.):

Ὡ τὴν ἐμὴν πέρσαντες Ἀργεῖοι πόλιν,
ἐκοῦσα θνήσκω· μή τις ἄψηται χροὸς
τούμοῦ· παρέξω γὰρ δέρην εὐκαρδίως.
ἐλευθέραν δέ μ', ὡς ἐλευθέρα θάνω,

²⁶¹ Daitz (1971), 217. Cf. Lawrence (2010), 21-2; Tzanetou (2020), 162 with references.

²⁶² This is often contextualised within the general debate on the legitimacy of slavery at the end of the fifth century: Austin and Vidal-Naquet (1977), 19.

²⁶³ Cf. Citti (1991), 86.

²⁶⁴ Daitz (1971), 219.

πρὸς θεῶν, μεθέντες κτείνατ'· ἐν νεκροῖσι γὰρ

δούλη κεκληῖσθαι βασιλῆς οὔσ' αἰσχύνομαι.

Daitz's argument is compelling, but more should be added. It is often observed in scholarship that Polyxena's sacrifice is vain, and that her nobility appears meaningless. Polyxena might consider herself as free, but, so the argument goes, she is not, she is being compelled to die: 'whatever freedom she appears to have during the sacrifice is at worst an illusion concealing Odysseus' control over her'; her willingness to be sacrificed is 'paradoxical'.²⁶⁵ Yet the paradox is consciously devised to highlight the contrast between Polyxena's status as a slave and her identity as free. In a sense, it is true and obvious that she is being compelled to be sacrificed, and that she willingly refuses to see reality, regarding herself as 'free' at the moment of her death (ὡς ἐλευθέρα θάνω, 550). In fact, this last claim contrasts with her previous lament that she 'dies as a slave, being born from a free father' (δούλη θανοῦμαι, πατρὸς οὔσ' ἐλευθέρου, 420). The fact that these statements are contradictory, however, should not compel us to choose one of the two: rather, their simultaneous presence allows us to see the paradox in action.²⁶⁶ Polyxena is de facto a slave, yet she retains her freedom of character; her sacrifice is the quintessential demonstration of her reification as a slave, yet it is also her most extreme act of will and the demonstration that she still has agency over herself—as she shows so powerfully by stopping the Greeks from holding her, by pronouncing her last words, by baring her breast, and by exhorting Neoptolemus to

²⁶⁵ Turkeltaub (2017), 147; cf. Segal (1990a), 316; Segal (1990b), 113-9; MacLeod (1983), 154; Kastely (1993), 1039. On the feminist readings of this scene, cf. Rabinowitz (1993), 22; Mueller (2017), 508-9.

²⁶⁶ Scholars who see Polyxena as unambiguously free/noble: Conacher (1967), 154-5; Hogan (1972), 252; Collard (1991), 24. Citti (1979), 205-6 takes her as noble and as affirmative of class ideology. Cf. Gregory (1999), 89-90. Gregory (2002), 158, on the other hand, while recognising the paradox, reduces it by claiming that Polyxena is free.

strike her. It is fundamental that we do not dismiss Polyxena's view of herself as 'free': Euripides has willingly introduced this element and elaborated at length on it, most likely diverting from previous versions of the sacrifice. As Battezzato has noted, artistic depictions of the sacrifice all emphasise the powerlessness of the maiden, instead.²⁶⁷

In emphasising her agency, Euripides makes Polyxena's sacrifice strikingly different from Iphigenia's in Aeschylus just as he also underlines the similarities with them:²⁶⁸ while Aeschylus' Iphigenia is gagged and held like a goat on the altar, Polyxena resists being held down (544-8) and utters her brave, proud final words. The detail of Iphigenia's robe falling off the altar (Aesch. *Ag.* 239) is reversed in Polyxena's striking act of disrobing revealing her bare breasts (560).²⁶⁹ A similar manoeuvre will figure in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, where Iphigenia's initial resistance to the sacrifice leaves way to her heroic decision to be sacrificed, in a clear reworking of Aeschylus.²⁷⁰

Polyxena is not the only example of a *parthenos* willingly going to sacrifice in Attic tragedy: the Maiden in *Heraclidae*, Iphigenia in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Praxithea's daughter in *Erechtheus*, and even Menoeceus in *Phoenissae* are all examples of a favourite motif of Euripides.²⁷¹ They are all striking in the way they appropriate a type of Homeric heroism that they would be excluded from a priori given their gender and age,²⁷² and so Polyxena is not unique in her emphasised agency. Nonetheless, she is different from the other martyrs of the Euripidean stage.²⁷³ First, Polyxena is serving no one but herself, while Makaria, Iphigenia, Menoeceus, and Praxithea's daughter all die to benefit

²⁶⁷ Battezzato (2010), 238 n63; Dugdale (2015), 115; Anderson (1997), 59, 230.

²⁶⁸ See *supra*, sec. 1.3.1, pp. 64-5. Scodel (1996), 121.

²⁶⁹ Gregory (1999), 113.

²⁷⁰ McDonald (1990), 78.

²⁷¹ Cf. Mendelsohn (2002), 17.

²⁷² McDonald (1990), 73.

²⁷³ Matthiessen (2010), 300.

others.²⁷⁴ Her motivation is different and unique: she dies for her own freedom.²⁷⁵ Second, both her speech on stage and her reported final words emphasise that she dies to reject her condition of slavery. As said above, she oscillates between denying her own status as a slave and acknowledging it; in either case, she rejects it and finds it inadequate to define herself, just as the tragedy allows us to see that her very act of freedom is in fact forced upon her because she *is* a slave.

And yet the polarity that is adumbrated here is far more complex than slave/free, and what is really at stake is not simply a matter of blurring lines between slavery and freedom. For Polyxena's goals in dying seem to be more complex: 'Polyxena also says she would rather die honorably than live dishonorably, as a slave, she who was born a princess [...]. Here the definition of living well clearly includes not just the moral goods, but the materialistic power-oriented goods described [...] as aristocratic'.²⁷⁶ McDonald's assertion is in fact well grounded in Polyxena's surprising acceptance speech, when she prefaces her rejection of a life of slavery with her previous status, that of a princess born in royalty (346-57):

ὡς ἔψομαί γε τοῦ τ' ἀναγκαίου χάριν
θανεῖν τε χρήζουσ'· εἰ δὲ μὴ βουλήσομαι,
κακὴ φανοῦμαι καὶ φιλόψυχος γυνή.
τί γάρ με δεῖ ζῆν; ἦ πατήρ μὲν ἦν ἀναξ
Φρυγῶν ἀπάντων· τοῦτό μοι πρῶτον βίου.

²⁷⁴ McDonald (1990), 79.

²⁷⁵ Mitchell-Boyask (1993), 121; cf. Gregory (2005), 262.

²⁷⁶ McDonald (1990), 79; cf. Lawrence (2010), 23.

ἔπειτ' ἐθρέφθην ἐλπίδων καλῶν ὑπο
βασιλεῦσι νύμφη, ζῆλον οὐ σμικρὸν γάμων
ἔχουσ', ὄτου δῶμ' ἐστίαν τ' ἀφίξομαι.
δέσποινα δ' ἡ δύστηνος Ἰδαίαισιν ἦ
γυναιξί, παρθένοις τ' ἀπόβλεπτος μέτα,
ἴση θεοῖσι πλὴν τὸ κατθανεῖν μόνον.
νῦν δ' εἰμὶ δούλη.

Polyxena constantly contraposes the status and identity of slavery (τούνομα, 357) not merely to free status, but also to aristocratic and royal status (ἄναξ, 349; βασιλεῦσι νύμφη, 352; δέσποινα, 354). In this section of her speech, Polyxena prefigures the connection that Polymestor establishes in his response after the verdict, that between slavery and κακία, social and moral inferiority. She is regarded as a δούλη (357); however she will reject this identity, since she still can regard herself as free (οὐ δῆτ' ἀφίμη' ὀμμάτων ἐλευθέρων / φέγγος τὸδ', Αἰδη προστιθεῖσ' ἐμὸν δέμας, 367-8), by behaving in a way that proves that she is not κακή (κακὴ φανοῦμαι, 348), i.e., by accepting the sacrifice. She therefore regards herself as still capable of protecting her identity as a princess, since she invites her mother to comply with her decision to protect her reputation, ἀξία (συμβούλου δέ μοι/ θανεῖν πρὶν αἰσχρῶν μὴ κατ' ἀξίαν τυχεῖν, 373-4). The chorus' reaction seems to confirm that Polyxena's decision has secured her ἀξία and her identity as noble (379-81):

δεινὸς χαρακτήρ κάπῆσημος ἐν βροτοῖς
ἐσθλῶν γενέσθαι, κάπῆ μεῖζον ἔρχεται

τῆς εὐγενείας ὄνομα τοῖσιν ἀξίους.

The chorus thus echoes Polyxena's use of typical aristocratic terminology (τῆς εὐγενείας ὄνομα, cf. 357; ἀξίους, cf. 366, 374) and confirms that she is noble, seemingly fixing her identification, *onoma*, with that of an aristocratic person.²⁷⁷ The language of representation intrudes to formulate the desire for a unifying and definitive 'definition', in this case through the idea of a stamp.²⁷⁸ Like Medea's regretful observation, however, that there is no χαρακτήρ from which one can gauge the moral value of a person (519), the chorus' statement on Polyxena's mark of nobility is to be set in contrast with the actual *onoma* that she has been assigned, that of a slave (τοῦνομα, 357). As in *Medea*, the emphasis is on the difficulty in reaching a moral definition of reality; the language of visuality and representation raises questions on morality and its definition, rather than providing certainties. In fact, as we have seen, Euripides engineers the scene so that the paradox inherent in her double, oxymoronic identity is at the centre of the stage, with inconsistent statements echoed by all characters.²⁷⁹

The hierarchy that pervades the Polyxena episode is not simply slave and free, but rather slave and noble. Nobility is intertwined with freedom; although freedom does not equal nobility, the play seems to work towards the association of freedom with nobility and slavery with a lack thereof (as we will see in *Andromache* and *Troades*).²⁸⁰ This is why Polyxena's act is paradoxical: she is regarded as noble and exercises her freedom to be noble (or nobility to be free), demonstrating that she is, morally

²⁷⁷ Cf. Gregory (1991), 96-7.

²⁷⁸ Gregory (1999), 91.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Gregory (1999), 89-90 on the inconsistency in Polyxena's reasoning.

²⁸⁰ Ober (1989), 257: 'much of the aristocratic pattern of behavior was predicated on the possession of great wealth and so involves the ideology of class as well as that of status'. Cf. Citti (1979), 20-1, 210-1. Cf. Eur. *El.* 38; Arist. *Pol.* 1301b1-4 with Ober (1989), 249.

speaking, noble and not κακή;²⁸¹ however she does so by complying with an order imposed on her by her masters, to avoid a definition, an *onoma*, that she actually already has (otherwise she would not have to make such a decision at all).²⁸²

Yet Polyxena's 'acceptance speech' adumbrates a far larger hierarchy and compounds the slave/noble polarity with an added layer. Contrasting her previous life of royalty with the present of slavery, Polyxena understands that while she was first considered 'worthy of kings' (τυράννων πρόσθεν ἡξιωμένα, 366), she might be now bound to be 'sold for some money' (ὄστις ἀργύρου μ' ὠνήσεται, 360), and might be forced to sleep with some slave 'bought somewhere' (δοῦλος ὠνητός ποθεν, 365).²⁸³ In rejecting her identity as a slave and avoiding this destiny, Polyxena associates slavery with reification, refusing to be sold and degraded to an object with a price.²⁸⁴ This is in fact bitterly underscored by the comment of the chorus on her 'stamp', superficially commenting on her nobility, but ironically and inadvertently commenting on the fact that Polyxena has now a market value as a slave.²⁸⁵ Polyxena's contrast between her previous, enviable condition to the present of reification repeats what Andromache says at the beginning of the *Andromache*:²⁸⁶ there, her past bridal procession from Thebe to Troy with 'golden luxury' (σὺν πολυχρύσῳ χλιδῆ...δοθεῖσα, 2) was perverted

²⁸¹ Rosivach (1975), 361.

²⁸² Cf. Gregory (1991), 96-7, which also questions the validity of Polyxena's heroism.

²⁸³ Battezzato (2010), 73.

²⁸⁴ Battezzato (2010), 73. Cf. *Alc.* 675-6 Λυδὸν ἢ Φρύγα...ἀργυρώνητον.

²⁸⁵ The word *χαρακτήρ*, besides *Med.* 519 cited above, occurs in extant Euripidean tragedies only three other times and two in the *Electra*, in which the coinage metaphor is applied to Orestes (τί μ' ἐσδέδορκεν ὥσπερ ἀργύρου σκοπῶν λαμπρὸν χαρακτήρ', 558-9) but is preceded by another coinage metaphor through which the Old Man questions the value of nobility (ἀλλ' εὐγενεῖς μὲν, ἐν δὲ κιβδήλῳ τόδε, 550). Matthiessen (2010) *ad loc.* takes the chorus' statement at face value by connecting it to *Danae* F 329 *TrGF* (φεῦ, τοῖσι γενναίοισιν ὡς ἀπανταχοῦ/πρέπει χαρακτήρ χρηστός εἰς εὐψυχίαν); yet that play also seems to cast shadows on both wealth and divisions of class based on ideas of social or moral value (*TrGF* V, fr. 324 with Jouan and Van Looy 2002, 65 n33; cf. fr. 327 with Karamanou 2006).

²⁸⁶ A passage that similarly oscillates between past royalty and present slavery and was probably on Euripides' mind, given the chronology of the two plays.

into a procession of slavery from Troy to Greece, in which she herself became a priced possession (δορὸς γέρας/δοθεῖσα λείας Τρωϊκῆς ἐξάριετον, 14-5). As we will see, *Andromache* and *Troades* also delineate a complex hierarchy that equates slavery with reification and powerlessness and nobility with royalty, freedom and wealth.²⁸⁷ The *Hecuba* also stages this equation, thus equally delineating and discussing a hierarchy that involves not only slave and free, not only slave and noble, but actually a broad hierarchy that polarises social classes by representing the clash between wealthy and aristocratic or royal (apex of the hierarchy) and reified slavery (at the bottom of the hierarchy).²⁸⁸ Both considerations of ‘status’ and ‘class’²⁸⁹ are constitutive of the type of social hierarchy that the plays delineate and contest.²⁹⁰

In fact, gold is a recurrent image of the play, with repeated references to the proverbial opulence of Troy (150-3, 925, 491-6).²⁹¹ Gold is also the main reason behind Polymestor’s murder, and his greed is fundamental both for the death of Polydorus and of Polymestor’s children (10, 25, 2, 712, 775, 925, 994, 1009, 1206, 1245). Yet the gold motif acquires an even more sinister significance when it is mentioned in relation not to Polymestor’s crime, but in connection with the heroism of the Greeks:²⁹² golden is the armour of Achilles when he appears as a phantom to ask for the sacrifice of

²⁸⁷ The same happens in *Ion*: cf. Hoffer (1996), 315.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Stanton (1995), 16. Wealth and poverty, nobility and low birth are also equated in Euripides’ *Electra*: Rehm (2021), 101. Slavery is absent, but Orestes does initially mistake Electra for a slave woman (110). Cf. also Eur. *Ion* 578-81.

²⁸⁹ Cf. Rabinowitz (1998), 57 on reading ‘class’ in tragedy.

²⁹⁰ One can compare the use Aristotle makes of class and status in the *Politics*: although a division between propertied rich and non-propertied poor appears crucial to his political analysis of democracy and aristocracy, status also plays a crucial role in his political analysis. For example, in the description of the best regime in books 7 and 8, he excludes those who perform ‘banausic’ occupations from citizenship (status, not class, given that they could be relatively wealthy); yet equally important is the exclusion of farmers, given that they lack sufficient leisure to be considered virtuous: cf. Ober (1991), 127.

²⁹¹ The same applies to *Andromache* and *Troades*: Saïd (2022), 65.

²⁹² Cf. Rosenbloom (2006), 257.

Polyxena (110); golden is the sword which Neoptolemus uses to slash Polyxena's throat (543); golden is the goblet from which Neoptolemus pours the libations before the sacrifice (527).²⁹³ To Segal, gold in the play even stands for 'the degeneration of heroic values'.²⁹⁴ And yet gold is most importantly functional in connecting the Greeks to Polymestor, and in creating an association between Achilles' request for Polyxena's death and Polymestor's greed, which in its turn connects the apparently disjointed parts of the plot.²⁹⁵ Admittedly, Achilles' aim is his honour, not acquiring wealth. Yet the difference between Achilles' request and Polymestor's murder is far less solid than it might first appear, given that the play continuously equates royalty and nobility with gold and wealth. This is present in the representation of the present misery of the Trojans in contrast to the past wealth, but aristocratic fame, the *onoma*, also goes hand in hand with the fate of Troy. Hecuba, for instance, denounces the meaninglessness of both (623-8):

εἶτα δῆτ' ὀγκούμεθα,

ὁ μὲν τις ἡμῶν πλουσίοις δώμασιν,

ὁ δ' ἐν πολίταις τίμιος κεκλημένος;

τὰ δ' οὐδέν, ἄλλως φροντίδων βουλευμάτα

γλώσσης τε κόμποι. κείνος ὀλβιώτατος

ὄτῳ κατ' ἦμαρ τυγχάνει μηδὲν κακόν.

²⁹³ Segal (1993), 160.

²⁹⁴ Segal (1993), 160. For a different view of the heroic values in *Hecuba*, cf. Rosivach (1975).

²⁹⁵ Gregory (1991), 93 argues that both Polyxena's and Polydorus' death are presented as arbitrary and avoidable, and this aspect also connects the two parts of the plot.

In an article on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Paschalis has brilliantly argued that Ovid has received the semantic interconnections of the play between the story of Polyxena's and Polydorus' death:²⁹⁶

In the framing story the "many gifts" of *Polydorus* provide the object of the king's murderous greed thus setting the action going; and in the embedded story the ghost of Achilles demands an *honos* (*doron*) in the form of Polyxena's sacrifice and his request triggers the action that follows. It is obvious that Polymestor and Achilles' ghost share the same greed for *praemia*.

Ovid reproduces in fact what is already present in the tragedy. It is Πολύδωρος, the 'much-rewarded', that explains in the prologue how the Greeks are not going to leave Achilles ἀδώρητος (42; cf. δίδοναι, 118; δοῦναι, 305; δωρούμεθα, 537); and the other references to Achilles' request of a γέρας, a 'gift of honour', though not etymologically, also connect to the semantics of Polydorus' name, just as *Polyxena* relates to Polydorus' murder at the hand of his ξένος.²⁹⁷ In making this connection, the play then does not simply connect the arbitrary violence of Odysseus and Polymestor, but specifically Achilles' attainment of his gift and Polymestor's greed.²⁹⁸

Thus, when he takes her away, Odysseus presents Polyxena's sacrifice as a gift, a sign of honour specifically in aristocratic terms, to aristocrats, and refraining from it would in fact undermine the very ideology on which aristocratic heroism lies (306-8):

έν τῷδε γὰρ κάμνουσιν αἱ πολλαὶ πόλεις,

ὅταν τις ἐσθλὸς καὶ πρόθυμος ὦν ἀνήρ

²⁹⁶ Paschalis (2003), 155.

²⁹⁷ Paschalis (2003), 154.

²⁹⁸ Cf. King (1985), 60.

μηδὲν φέρεται τῶν κακίωνων πλέον.

Superficially, these lines might appear to arch back to a purely military hierarchy of valour: Odysseus has just explained that Achilles is to be rewarded because he is ‘the first of the army’ (ἀνδρὶ τῶι πρώτῳ στρατοῦ, 304). But Odysseus here enlarges the view, from the army to the whole political world (αἱ πολλαὶ πόλεις, 306), commenting on the way it is proper that who is ἐσθλὸς receives more than those who are ‘inferior’, ‘worse’ (τῶν κακίωνων, 308).²⁹⁹ It is fitting, Odysseus insists later, to honour the *esthloi* (τιμᾶν τὸν ἐσθλόν, 327). In arguing that Achilles’ tomb needs to be honoured, since otherwise the army would lose their willingness to fight in the future, Odysseus reminds the audience of the *Iliad*, but in fact strongly distorts Homeric heroism, since ‘the Homeric warrior counted on his reputation (κλέος) rather than offerings to his tomb to keep his memory alive’ —³⁰⁰ a distortion that again places emphasis on the connection between materialistic rewards and the noble.³⁰¹

Polyxena behaves not only courageously, but she incarnates the type of aristocratic heroism that Odysseus sees in Achilles. To Odysseus, Achilles deserves Polyxena’s sacrifice and is ‘worth honouring’ (ἡμῖν δ’ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἄξιος τιμῆς, 309) because he has died the most honourable death for a man (θανῶν ὑπὲρ γῆς Ελλάδος κάλλιστ’ ἀνήρ, 310). This finds a symmetry in Polyxena’s willingness to die and defend her worth (ἀξία), rather than live shamefully (συμβούλου δέ μοι/ θανεῖν πρὶν αἰσχροῶν μὴ κατ’ ἀξίαν τυχεῖν, 373-4).³⁰² Odysseus’ heroic/aristocratic avoidance of φιλοψυχία (πότερα

²⁹⁹ Note also that the military hierarchy in some tragedies has been interpreted as a reflection of the hierarchy dividing élite and humble: cf. Carter (2008), 46 with Griffith (1995).

³⁰⁰ Gregory (1999), 84.

³⁰¹ Cf. King (1985), 53. Cf. also Ambühl (2010), 118-9 on the distortion of Homeric heroism in *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, *Troades*.

³⁰² Papastamati (2017) examines Polyxena’s heroism in detail but does not pursue a direct comparison with Achilles’ heroic model.

μαχούμεθ' ἢ φιλοψυχήσομεν, 315) is paralleled by Polyxena's excluding the possibility of showing herself κακή... καὶ φιλόψυχος γυνή (348). The association between aristocratic, martial heroism and Polyxena's 'noble sacrifice' is pressed to the extreme, as Talthybius recounts how she was also honoured by the Greek army with gifts and offerings (πέπλον... κόσμον, 578) to give to the 'bravest and best in courage' (τῇ περισσ' εὐκαρδίω/ψυχὴν τ' ἀρίστη, 579-80). Again, the notion of nobility is associated to receiving gifts; the paradox here is that Polyxena, who has showed herself to be 'best', 'most noble' (ἀρίστη) and therefore receives gifts of honour, has herself been sacrificed as a gift of honour to Achilles, 'best' of the Achaeans (ἄριστον Δαναῶν, 134).³⁰³ Additionally, the Greek army also honours Polyxena by shedding leaves on her body (φύλλοις ἔβαλλον, 574), following the rite of *phyllobolia* which was typical of male, aristocratic athletes.³⁰⁴ Papastamati, in the most recent analysis of Polyxena's death, comments on the *phyllobolia*:³⁰⁵

This constitutes the masculine aspect of the burial honours which Polyxena receives. They are the prize for her manly bravery and courage, which she has proved through her heroic death (579-80). Therefore, the way in which her death is heralded as a (male) athletic victory (579-80) helps to associate it with ideals of masculine achievement and again reflects her heroic *ethos*.

Yet I hope that it has become so far evident that the main thematised hierarchy in the verbal exchange between Polyxena, Odysseus, and Hecuba, as well as in the reported

³⁰³ Cf. Adkins (1966), 200: 'Achilles is an ἀγαθός and a member of the group; Polyxena is a slave, a κακή, not a member of the group; even had she ἀρετή, its claims would not extend beyond the group to which she belongs; and of ἀρετή—the 'competitive' male ἀρετή which alone in fifth-century Athens could have furnished a claim to set against that of Achilles—she has none'.

³⁰⁴ Papastamati (2017), 374.

³⁰⁵ Papastamati (2017), 374.

death of the Trojan princess seems one of class rather than gender (although Papastamati is not wrong, as we will see).

The main responses in both scenes, first to the choice of Polyxena, and then to the report of her death, in fact involve reflections on her nobility. In the first, the chorus articulate the reflection on Polyxena's noble 'stamp' which, as we saw, is self-undercutting in the usage of coinage imagery. In the second, Hecuba's mournful but proud reflections on Polyxena's behaviour also demonstrate that nobility is at the core of Polyxena's sacrifice through a process of thematisation that is almost obsessive (591-8):

τὸ δ' αὖ λίαν παρεῖλες ἀγγελθεῖσά μοι
γενναῖος. οὐκ οὖν δεινόν, εἰ γῆ μὲν κακῆ
τυχοῦσα καιροῦ θεόθεν εὖ στάχυν φέρει,
χρηστὴ δ' ἄμαρτοῦσ' ὧν χρεῶν αὐτὴν τυχεῖν
κακὸν δίδωσι καρπὸν, ἄνθρωποι δ' ἀεὶ
ὁ μὲν πονηρὸς οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν κακός,
ὁ δ' ἐσθλὸς ἐσθλὸς οὐδὲ συμφορᾶς ὑπο
φύσιν διέφθειρ' ἀλλὰ χρηστός ἐστ' ἀεὶ;

Hecuba's statement has rightly been evaluated as fundamental, especially as Hecuba herself seems to end up contradicting it by murdering Polymestor's two children.³⁰⁶ This is true: as I have argued above, one important aspect of the play's denouement is

³⁰⁶ Gregory (1999), 117. Cf. Nussbaum (1986), 403, 406 and 417 on Hecuba's statement on *nomos*; *contra*, cf. Gregory (1999), xxxii.

its willing problematisation of the definition of justice and morality, and Hecuba's statement here is undoubtedly ominous. But Hecuba's observation is not simply moral,³⁰⁷ and it extends beyond signifying that 'the bad remain bad and the good good without reference to extrinsic factors'.³⁰⁸ Given the context of Polyxena's death and the almost obsessive insistence on the topic of slavery vis-à-vis nobility, the expression denotes 'nobility' both in a moral and social sense.³⁰⁹

It is widely acknowledged that tragedy, although generally regarded as a product of the Athenian democracy, shows an attitude towards the old aristocratic system of values that can best be defined ambiguous.³¹⁰ Most of the tragic plots centre on the aristocratic heroes of myth, with minor characters tending to come from the lower strata of society.³¹¹ This ambivalence is interpreted in different ways, with Griffith, for example, arguing substantially for a reiteration in the belief of aristocratic, hereditary superiority within the genre generally,³¹² and Rose, on the other hand, offering a Marxist, 'optimistic' reading of the *Oresteia*.³¹³ Both Rose and Griffith adopt in fact a similar approach, inasmuch as they linger on the dubiously moral representation of tragic heroes, with the former showing how the house of Atreus receives moral condemnation specifically for their accumulation and waste of wealth,³¹⁴ and the latter arguing that royal households in tragedy might suffer from their own misgivings but never completely give way to a new political order.³¹⁵ Both ground their arguments in

³⁰⁷ Gregory (1999), 117.

³⁰⁸ Battezzato (2010), 244.

³⁰⁹ Citti (1979), 224.

³¹⁰ Griffith (1998), 20 *et passim*. And so Athens in general: Ober and Strauss (1990), 237; Roselli (2007), 104.

³¹¹ Griffith (1998), 20-1.

³¹² Griffith (1998), 78.

³¹³ Rose (1995), 185-265.

³¹⁴ Rose (1995), 206.

³¹⁵ Griffith (1998), 78.

the idea that the texts reflect the historical reality of the transition from the old, aristocratic 'regime' to democratic thought, with more or less emphasis on the continuity or discontinuity of such a transition. Tragedy seems then to stage the contradictory tensions within the Athenian democracy about the old system of beliefs and values and the old system of aristocratic inheritance.³¹⁶ Although both are careful enough to consider the ideological *negotiations* tragedy performs, they both appear to take for granted that the hegemonic ideology that is being questioned or reaffirmed is the aristocratic one, not the democratic one —³¹⁷ an underlying methodological basis that is not universally shared and that yet remains influential and (in my view) solid (cf. *infra*).³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Rehm (2021), 103 sums up the historical backdrop of Euripides' *Electra* so: 'The social and economic tensions in Euripides' Athens lie behind these passages: the challenge to hereditary prerogatives posed by Athenian democracy; the rise of self-made citizens (merchants, politicians, artisans) at the expense of the old aristocracy; doubts about the causal link between high birth and good character, and the possibility that nobility lies in behaviour rather than privilege'.

³¹⁷ Cf. Citti (1991). Wohl's reading of the *Alcestis* appears to assume that the ideological baseline of the audience must be democratic (Wohl 2015, 13), but she argues that the play produces a sort of 'false consciousness', reaffirming aristocratic ideology (17; cf. Wohl 1998, xxvi). Cf. also Goldhill (2000), who takes the hegemonical ideology to be democratic, and Allan and Kelly (2013), 95 and n.70 (responding to Griffith). Burian (2011), 96-7 concurs with Goldhill; Carter (2004) and Rhodes (2003) believe that tragedy raises questions that are not *intrinsically* democratic, but rather universal (Carter) or civic (Rhodes). Wilson (2011) argues that Athens and tragedy exhibit a tension between democratic and aristocratic ideologies but the fact that both coexist is itself the sign of a democratic structure, open to dissent.

³¹⁸ Cf. Rosenbloom (2011). Hall (2006), 99 on the continuation of aristocratic hegemony in democratic Athens: 'the contradiction between democratic ideals and the continuing respect for nobility produces frequent tragic discussions of the inheritability of virtue, but on balance the statements on nature versus nurture are surprisingly reactionary'. The objection to Griffith's view (for example as articulated by Allan and Kelly, 2013 n.70) that the democratic polis could not produce a genre that is not egalitarian might be more convincing if it explained why this should necessarily be the case. From a Gramscian perspective, it is perfectly possible that a society that claims to be democratic is permeated by an anti-egalitarian hegemony. Similarly, the idea that a democratic audience would have not tolerated an aristocratic genre seems to me to posit too rigid a correspondence between the ideological import of the plays and what they explicitly say. But ideology or hegemony do not have to be explicit in order to be effective; quite the opposite, in fact, as Marxist theorists have diversely argued (see also my discussion below of Kovacs' argument against the Melos interpretation in *Troades*).

Hecuba's statement has to be contextualised within this general nexus of tensions about the value of the aristocracy, yet it is clear that there is a different spin to her thoughts: the trace of sophistic thought. Hecuba echoes in her words contemporary debates within sophistic thought on virtue and its potential teachability,³¹⁹ but the context of Polyxena's death makes clear that nobility is here meant in both a moral and social sense,³²⁰ so that the undercutting power of sophistic reflections on virtue is in fact also projected onto a class dimension. The intellectual component of the reflection intensifies the problematisation of class distinctions to an extent that exceeds that of other plays, including those analysed by Rose and Griffith. Although sophistic rhetoric was most likely a prerogative of the scions of the wealthiest families of Athens,³²¹ the idea that virtue can be taught, and is thus not merely hereditary,³²² is in itself profoundly unsettling for the ideology of genealogical aristocratic superiority.³²³ Like elsewhere in the tragedy, Hecuba again speaks against sophistic ideas of relativism paradoxically adopting sophistic terminology and undercutting herself.³²⁴ Just like the other instances, Hecuba's confidence is shown to be misplaced, and her own nobility is questioned at the end of the tragedy —³²⁵ although her act must have been perceived as both ignoble and noble.³²⁶ And, while Polyxena's behaviour does seem to confirm Hecuba's statement and thus prove the principle of hereditary nobility,³²⁷ we have seen

³¹⁹ Gregory (2005), 263.

³²⁰ Stanton (1995), 15.

³²¹ Munn (2023), 92.

³²² For example, cf. Protagoras in Plato: *Pl. Prt.* 327a-d.

³²³ Lawrence (2010), 26; Goldhill (2023), 288. Rose (2012), 255 defines hereditary superiority as the main ideologeme of aristocratic ideology. Cf. McClure (1999), 192.

³²⁴ Nussbaum (1986), 400; Conacher (1998), 63. For the *nomos/physis* antithesis, cf. Guthrie (1971), 55-134; Bett (2023), 157-78.

³²⁵ Kirkwood (1947), 68.

³²⁶ Hecuba became not simply 'the embodiment of misfortune' in the Middle Ages; in the *Carmina Burana*, she seems to be exemplifying the instability of political and social power: Dugdale (2015), 112.

³²⁷ Nussbaum (1986), 405.

to what extent Euripides goes to construct her sacrifice as a paradox of class—one in which Polyxena is free and not free, slave and aristocratic, reified object and autonomous agent, subject of Achilles' whim but also his own mirror image.

This sophistic statement on noble *physis* is fundamental because it shows the ideological move of the tragic text. Reading the *Hecuba* with Goldhill, we saw that the ambiguity of a general moral definition is inextricably connected with the refusal to re-assert, or even authentically reverse and re-hierarchise, the hierarchy of genders established at the end of *Eumenides*. Yet by connecting the statement here uttered by the former Trojan queen to Polymestor's surprise that he has been beaten by a woman-slave, a gradually more complex picture emerges. As we anticipated, Marxist readings of the *Oresteia* have occasionally offered interesting readings of the trilogy's complex reflection of class tensions, with Griffith and Rose arguing for basically opposite views. Nonetheless, Griffith's and Rose's Marxist analyses run the risk of overestimating the thematisation of 'class' within the *Oresteia*. This is not to say that tensions within the old aristocratic 'regime' and the flourishing democratic drives within Athenian politics are absent from the Aeschylean text. In fact, it would be hard to imagine such an absence after hearing the almost obsessive critiques of wealth and luxury in the *Agamemnon*³²⁸ or seeing the much debated staging of the foundation of the Areopagus³²⁹ and the Argive alliance.³³⁰ And yet it would be hard to deny that 'class' receives less attention in the characterisation of the characters and especially less extensive thematisation.³³¹ Cassandra's slavery, for instance, is hardly the point of her

³²⁸ Rose (1992), 210 *et passim*; Rehm (2009), 245; Seaford (1998), 123-4.

³²⁹ Rose (1992), 246-7; Sommerstein (1989), 30-2.

³³⁰ Podlecki (1989), 19.

³³¹ Cf. Konstan (1994), 59 and 'latent' class conflict.

scene;³³² Electra and Orestes might be assimilated to slaves in *Libation Bearers* since they have been deprived of their wealth (135, 915) but are far away from the explicit toying of class structures in Euripides' *Electra*;³³³ the chorus of *Libation Bearers* seem anything but alienated from the citizen body of Argos.³³⁴ However, my main observation lies again in the way Aeschylus ignores it in the moral resolution and ideological construction that he offers in *Eumenides*.³³⁵ As Zeitlin brilliantly put it, gender in *Eumenides* represents the entire social plane and works as a 'magnet' for the moral and even cosmic plane: 'the solution, therefore, places Olympian over chthonic on the divine level, Greek over barbarian on the cultural level, and *male over female on the social level* [my italics]'.³³⁶ Zeitlin's dictum does not capture the dynamics of the *Hecuba*, in which the definition of morality, connected though it is to the 'social level' as in Aeschylus, depends on a larger, enlarged conception of the social level which comprehends both gender and class, and in which the two hierarchies seem to work together.

Looking again at Polyxena, then, it is hard to believe that we are meant to see her death as unavenged, and hardly can the plot's structure be irrelevant to its ideological movement. Polymestor laments precisely being defeated by 'inferiors', by which he means both in terms of gender and in terms of status (τοῖς κακίοσιν δίκην, 1253). Here it is not simply the gendered resolution of Aeschylus' trilogy to be intertextually sliced

³³² MacLeod (1982), 142, who argues that all events and characters of the *Oresteia* carry a 'social significance', nevertheless admits that Cassandra is an exception.

³³³ On class tensions in *Electra*, cf. Baechle (2020), 22-43 *et passim*.

³³⁴ Carter (2008), 81. Rose (1995), 233 speaks of the chorus as representative of the 'alienation' of the demos from the life of the polis under tyranny. However, this reinforces the view that the chorus is actually not alienated from the rest of the citizen body and even represents it.

³³⁵ And perhaps it has to be said that the extent, too, to which Euripides goes to question nobility is unmatched by Aeschylus: MacLeod (1982), 144 observes that for all the democratic sentiments of the *Oresteia*, 'the same Aeschylus who idealises a democratic Athens also vividly presents through his choruses and characters the sentiments of loyal subjects of a monarchy'.

³³⁶ Zeitlin (1996), 87. Similarly, cf. DuBois (1982), 115 *et passim*.

open. Polymestor's statement echoes Odysseus' words, his justification of Polyxena's sacrifice on the grounds of hierarchised difference between the noble and manly Achilles, and the 'inferiors' (ὅταν τις ἔσθλός καὶ πρόθυμος ὦν ἀνὴρ/μηδὲν φέρηται τῶν κακίωνων πλέον, 307-8). And so this tragedy invites us to see Odysseus' justification as immediately undercut by Polyxena's death, and, through that, it builds our frustration and disappointment. But Odysseus' justification is finally deconstructed by the act of vengeance of her mother Hecuba, which indeed makes visible the claims of justice of her position despite being a slave and a woman. This liberates the rage inside Hecuba, surely, but also explodes *our* own pent-up anger. And if this explodes, it is because of and through a mechanism of suspension and problematisation of those two social hierarchies.

Importantly, just like Polyxena, Hecuba has not merely made palpable the claims to justice of female slaves by falling back into a type of categorisation and identification as a woman-slave. For Hecuba's revenge might be particularly feminine in its deception; and she might be categorised by Odysseus as merely a slave who should obey her master (397). And yet Hecuba's vengeance is also spectacularly heroic and masculine,³³⁷ and she blinds Polymestor in a striking and explicit replay of the most famous heroic pursuit of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* — the blinding of Polyphemus (on whose name indeed 'Polymestor' has been shaped).³³⁸

Therefore, by repeating the quintessential heroic exploit of her master, who had reasserted his view of social hierarchy as a justification of his violence against the Trojan women, Hecuba again undercuts the categorisations that both Odysseus and

³³⁷ Cf. Allan (2013), 596 with further references on the association of revenge with masculinity.

³³⁸ Segal (1990b), 126-8; Seaford (1982), 168-71; Turkeltaub (2017), 148; Zeitlin (1991), 70.

Polymestor would deploy to keep her silenced. Once again, this is not merely a reassertion of a (reversed) hierarchy, but a demystification of a justification, of a synthesis, based indeed on social hierarchy, and provided by Aeschylus at the end of his trilogy as the very basis of the political, civilised life of Athens.

We can see now that Polyxena's death does lead to a sudden shift of topic, yet it is not forgotten by the play,³³⁹ and the break is highly functional to the ideological operations of the play, as well as its psychagogic working on our affect (which are inextricable). While Polyxena's death seems to lead to a break, a sudden halt, a gasp, the second half of the *Hecuba* fully explodes the contradictions already triggered by Polyxena's behavior, shedding a critical light on the first part of the play (Polyxena's sacrifice, Odysseus' justification) and, intertextually, on the trilogy that had proved so fundamental to the Athenians' conception of their civilisation. It is precisely in the broken, split formal structure of the play that the *Hecuba* stores its radical potential. Through its structure, and through its psychagogic movement, hierarchies of gender and class are problematised and left ambiguous, unresolved, undefined. Releasing the emotional energy accumulated since the sacrifice, we are not only brought to *rationaly* accept one unifying, matricial notion of social hierarchy with two overlapping strands: we emotionally acknowledge that overlap in exulting and in being disturbed by its reversal. Yet these two hierarchies are just part of an even larger conception of the social, only part of the story of the 'sociological enlargement' that Euripides' *Hecuba* envisions.

³³⁹ Cf. Papastamati (2017), 378. Turkeltaub (2017), 138 notes the symmetry between the two children of Polymestor and of Hecuba but believes that the plot of Polyxena's death is only pragmatically subordinated to that of Polydorus; that is, the withholding of the winds gives Polydorus' body enough time to be found.

1.3.3 Ethnic Subversions: More on Social Hierarchies

In Conacher's monograph *Euripides and the Sophists*, the fourth chapter on sophistic rhetoric is devoted entirely to *Troades* and *Hecuba*. At the end of his discussion, Conacher observes:³⁴⁰

The question of Euripides' own attitudes to the various Sophistic teachings behind his Sophistic themes has not, for the most part, been of much concern for the present study. However, in the dramatist's treatment of "the power and the abuses of rhetoric" (at least as we have seen it in the *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*), the attitudes expressed seem more closely related to actual Sophistic views and practices than in the other plays considered. This is, perhaps, particularly true of the attitude expressed towards foreigners.

Conacher proceeds to report the contrasting views of Croally and Hall, the first claiming that Euripides seriously questions the ideology of Greek superiority in *Troades* and *Hecuba* and the second denying it (with some hesitation).³⁴¹ Conacher argues that in the case of ethnicity sophistic attitudes are to be mainly seen in the 'moral' representation of Trojans and Greeks in the play (i.e., sympathetic for the Trojans and unsympathetic for the Greeks). In fact, the matter is more complicated.

The general interconnection between these two sides of sophistic thought in the *Hecuba*, rhetoric and social hierarchy, has already been elucidated. I have already spoken of the semiotic crisis, its effect on the crisis of the definition of morality and justice, and, in its turn, the relationship between the definition of morality and the

³⁴⁰ Conacher (1998), 67.

³⁴¹ Conacher (1998), 68; Hall (1989); Croally (1994). On Hall's hesitation, see *infra*, sec. 1.4, p. 125.

definition of *both* a gender and a class hierarchy on the social level. This is most visible in the last passage examined above, Hecuba's reflection on nobility—a self-undercutting reflection on the stability of morality and social worth that is expressed in the language of sophistic thought. Yet, as Conacher suggests, the treatment of non-Greeks and their relationship with the Greeks is a fundamental theme of the *Hecuba*, and one that equally received attention within sophistic thought. It is then worth examining to what extent the Greek/barbarian hierarchy is explored within the *Hecuba*, and whether the concept, too, can be added to the range of hierarchies that the play envisions in the construction and deconstruction of 'the social level', and to what extent this deconstruction can also be explained with recourse to sophistic thought.

I have noted the importance of gender in Euripides' critical reading of Aeschylus, particularly through Hecuba's vengeance and the final scene with Agamemnon. Hecuba's anticipation of the crime to Agamemnon in the scene preceding her vengeance clearly offers a stereotypical view of female deception, in a passage laden with reflection on gender: to Agamemnon's disbelief that women may have some power over men (καὶ πῶς γυναιξὶν ἀρσένων ἔσται κράτος;, 883), Hecuba retorts that 'the crowd <is> frightening, and difficult to fight against, if assisted by deceit' (δεινὸν τὸ πλῆθος σὺν δόλῳ τε δύσμαχον, 884).³⁴² As Hecuba goes on to say, there are mythical precedents for such a specific act of female violence:³⁴³ she cites the murder of the Danaids and the slaughter of the male population of Lemnos enacted by the Lemnian women: τί δ'; οὐ γυναιῖκες εἶλον Αἰγύπτου τέκνα/ καὶ Λῆμον ἄρδην ἀρσένων ἐξώκισαν (886-7). The lines establish an intertextual connection with the famous

³⁴² See *supra*, sec. 1.3.1, p. 65.

³⁴³ Gregory (1999), 150.

misogynistic stasimon of Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* (631-8),³⁴⁴ which mentioned the crime of the women of Lemnos as emblematic of female violence.³⁴⁵

Yet Hecuba's mythical exempla do not allude simply to female violence or resourcefulness: Aeschylus' ode first mentions Althea and Scylla, and only in the end concludes with the Λήμνια κακά. Here, Hecuba's mention of the Danaids and the Lemnians is not simply intended to evoke two of Aeschylus' tragedies but also anticipate the violence of the Trojan women as an act performed by specifically *barbarian* women.³⁴⁶ As mentioned above, recent, 'postmodern' scholarship has attempted to resist the view developed after the Enlightenment that Hecuba's vengeance signals her moral degeneration: Gregory, more than others, argued that Hecuba's brutal punishment, 'a head for an eye', 'does not exceed the bounds prescribed by custom'.³⁴⁷ And, in general, the desire and even responsibility of retaliation must have been culturally shared by the Athenian audience, even if this desire was seen as legitimate primarily if dealt with through the legal institutions of the polis.³⁴⁸ But elements of Hecuba's vendetta must have made the punishment appear particularly

³⁴⁴ Thalmann (1993), 151.

³⁴⁵ Brown (2018) considers the mention of the 'Lemnian crime' as alluding only to that episode of female violence and disregards the possibility that it might allude to the murder perpetrated by the Pelasgian men as recounted in Hdt. 6. 138. Lebeck (1967), 183-4 and Garvie (1986), 217-8 instead consider both possibilities, thus downplaying the gendered theme in the stasimon.

³⁴⁶ Hall (1989), 169 argues that Lemnos was not presented as barbarian territory on the Greek stage, but also notes that the Lemnian chorus of Euripides' *Philoctetes* may 'have retained some flavour' of its barbarianism. In any case, Lemnos was perceived as exotic, semi-savage and symbolically located at the boundaries of Hellas: cf. Nenci (1998), 318 on Hdt. 6. 318, especially on the recurrent tendency of Lemnian men to abduct foreign women. As for the importance of barbarism to the metaphor, the same could be said about Andromache's assimilation to Niobe (*Andr.* 115-6, 532-4; see *infra*, sec. 2.1, pp. 138-9) and, potentially, Polyxena's to Procne (*Hec.* 337-8; cf. Battezzato 2018, 120). Cf. Hall (1989), 116 on Euripides' *Phoenissae* in relation to Aeschylus' *Septem* and *Choephoroe*: 'Euripides externalizes in the ethnicity of his chorus-members the timorousness and threnodic lyricism which Aeschylus had related exclusively to their gender'.

³⁴⁷ Gregory (1999), xxxiii. The formulation is from Dover (1974), 184.

³⁴⁸ Allan (2013), 596.

barbaric and *barbarian* to the eyes of the Athenians. For example, mutilation in tragedy has appeared to reflect the Athenians' anxieties about such practices in the Persian empire, and acts or threats of mutilation are constantly associated to barbarians on the Attic stage (Sophocles' Thracian Tereus, Euripides' Thoas and Aeschylus' Egyptian herald); comparably to our play, the Phrygian Idaea, wife of Phineus, is said to have gouged out the eyes of her stepchildren in the *Antigone* (966-76).³⁴⁹ Phineus' wife is said specifically to have used a shuttle, comparable to the twisted use of pins in the *Hecuba*, and the reason why it figures in the ode of that play is because the story was set in Thrace (as here).³⁵⁰ In some versions of the story, Phineus himself was blinded.³⁵¹ It is not necessary to imagine a relationship of strict connection between the two stories; it suffices to notice that the punishment was particularly barbaric and 'Thracian'. The excessive revenge of Amestris, Xerxes's wife, on the innocent wife of Masistes (Hdt. 9.108) is an example of the ideological connection between female barbarians and excessive ruthlessness.³⁵² Herodotus' story of a Thracian that had his children's eyes gouged out as a punishment (8.116) has also been used as a parallel for Hecuba's act by Battezzato, who maintains that Hecuba's ethnicity, as well as Polymestor's, is fundamental, as it allows the tragedian to represent violence while displacing it onto the barbarian world.³⁵³

Nonetheless, as explained before, Greeks must have felt that Hecuba's vengeance was both admirable and particularly heinous. Specifically, however, they must have also felt that the Trojan queen's behaviour was as barbaric as Greek. It has been noted once

³⁴⁹ Hall (1989), 159.

³⁵⁰ Brown (1987), 205.

³⁵¹ Griffith (1999), 291. The story was probably told in Sophocles' *Phineus*.

³⁵² Cartledge (1993), 100-1.

³⁵³ Battezzato (2010), 58.

before that there is ‘a certain resemblance’ between the story dramatized by Euripides here and the narrative of the punishment of Artayctes in the ninth book of the *Histories*;³⁵⁴ this suggestion has not received its due attention.³⁵⁵ In response to the Persian Artayctes’ desecration of a shrine, Herodotus recounts how Xanthippus, Pericles’ father, allowed the people of Elaeus to take their revenge on him by nailing him to a plank and stoning his son as he watched (Hdt. 9.120-1). Immediately after, the Greeks set sail, closing the whole *Histories*. The similarities are striking: in both, Greeks reach the Chersonese ‘on their way from their victory on the coast of Asia Minor’;³⁵⁶ Euripides, we should keep in mind, has altered the setting of the story of Polyxena’s sacrifice and changed it from the Troad to the coast of the Chersonese.³⁵⁷ In both stories, the Greeks are witnesses to a horrible case of infanticide where the (barbarian) father of the children is forced to watch the murder of his offspring before his very eyes,³⁵⁸ and is himself atrociously mutilated. Meridor thus assimilates Xanthippus to Agamemnon and recognises that it is disturbing, in the Herodotean narrative, to have Xanthippus and the Athenians sanctioning such a barbaric act.³⁵⁹ It has escaped notice, however, that the aetiology of Hecuba’s Cynossema provides a further, if confusing link to the story of Pericles’ father. While Hecuba’s Cynossema is clearly located on the Chersonese, the Greek world knew of another Cynossema. At *Cat. Mai.* 5.4, Plutarch tells the story of the Dog’s Mound in Salamis and connects it, indeed, to Xanthippus:

³⁵⁴ Meridor (1983), 18.

³⁵⁵ In the most recent commentary on the play, Battezzato (2018), 16-7 again lingers on the parallel. Cf. Foley (2015), 21-2.

³⁵⁶ Meridor (1983), 18.

³⁵⁷ And, it follows, he changed the location of the tomb of Achilles from the Troad to the Chersonese. Cf. Meridor (1983), 18: the tomb of Protesilaos must have been located in the proximity of the Cynossema. Pliny mentions the two places together at *Nat. Hist.* 4. 11 (18): *dein promontorium Chersonesi Mastusia adversum Sigeo; cuius in fronte obliqua Cynossema, ita appellatur Hecubae tumulus, statio Achaeorum. Turris et delubrum Protesilai.*

³⁵⁸ Meridor (1983), 18.

³⁵⁹ Meridor (1983), 19.

κύνας δὲ συντρόφους γενομένους καὶ συνήθεις ἄλλοι τε πολλοὶ καὶ Ξάνθιππος ὁ παλαιὸς τὸν εἰς Σαλαμῖνα τῆι τριήρει παρανηξάμενον, ὅτε τὴν πόλιν ὁ δῆμος ἐξέλειπεν, ἐπὶ τῆς ἄκρας ἐκίδευσεν, ἣν Κυνὸς σῆμα μέχρι νῦν καλοῦσιν.

The same story appears at Plut. *Them.* 10.6 and in a slightly different manner at Ael. *NA* 12.35, who claims that the story was reported before by Aristotle and Philochorus.

It is suspicious that Xanthippus appears in the only other myth connected to the Cynossema in the Greek world (albeit a different one) and in the story that shares the most affinities with Euripides' play, also set in the immediate proximity of the Cynossema. It is virtually impossible to recover the relationship between the two tales. If we maintain that the story existed already by Euripides' times, we should also notice that the anecdote of Xanthippus' dog had a clearly patriotic tone and that the Dog's Mound was a symbol of Athenian pride in the struggle against Persia. In this case, Euripides would be reshaping a symbol of Athenian identity and changing the story by making Hecuba, the barbarian, the new Cynossema. If not, the tale of Xanthippus' dogs still suggests that there was a connection between Herodotus' story of Xanthippus and Artayctes on the Chersonese and Euripides' story of Hecuba's punishment of Polymestor and her transformation into the Cynossema on the Chersonese. Euripides would then be alluding to the story of Artayctes and the Athenians, and would be using the myth of the Cynossema, in some way connected to Xanthippus, to sanction this allusion. In the absence of further evidence, this must remain speculative.

However, whatever the relationship between Euripides' text and the stories that were circulating on Xanthippus' dog, it is not haphazard to imagine that Artayctes' story

could have reverberated in the ending of *Hecuba*.³⁶⁰ That story constituted the very climax of the process of increasing confusion between Greek and barbarian customs in Herodotus' oeuvre:³⁶¹ 'the Greekest of states [...] is now falling into the barbarian pattern, and the Other is coming very close to home'.³⁶² Right between Asia and Greece, Herodotus brings the narrative of the fight between 'East' and 'West' back to that crucial space of exchange and negotiation of boundaries, the Hellespont, where the story had started, and further back to the Trojan war.³⁶³ Euripides, changing the location of Achilles' tomb, does the same. While Hecuba's vendetta is a particularly barbarian and barbaric act, then, Euripides chooses to complicate it by having it sanctioned by the Greek proto-tribunal of Agamemnon, and by possibly alluding to the figure of Xanthippus and his actions in the Chersonese.

Barbarism is fundamental in Hecuba's revenge not simply because of the barbarian undertones of her actions, but also because of the presence of Polymestor. Most observe the first level connection between the assimilation of Polymestor to Polyphemus: they are both savage monsters, lawless, ready to kill innocent lives, essentially asocial. Planinc, using the terminology of barbarism, argues that the references to Polyphemus expose the 'barbarian' tendencies in Polymestor as well as in the other characters—a term, however, that Planinc uses exclusively in a moral and psychological sense (barbaric, rather than barbarian).³⁶⁴ Polymestor's assimilation to Polyphemus, made

³⁶⁰ This does not require us to posit an intertextual relationship with Herodotus, but simply to imagine that the story of Artayctes and Xanthippus continued to circulate and remained vivid in Athenian cultural memory. This seems plausible in view of Xanthippus' popularity and importance.

³⁶¹ Pelling (1997), 56. Cf. Hdt. 9. 78-9 with Vlassopoulos (2022), 14.

³⁶² Pelling (1997), 60-1; Moles (1996), 259-84.

³⁶³ Pelling (1997), 50; Boedeker (1988), 42. Cf. Boedeker (1988), 45 on the Protesilaos-Artayctes episode as a symbolic frame for Xerxes' invasion. Cf. Di Benedetto (1971), 137 on the chronology.

³⁶⁴ Planinc (2018), 411.

obvious by the scene of the blinding and by Polymestor's cries for help (1089-106), makes him appear specifically barbarian and savage. Agamemnon asks Polymestor to 'expel the barbarian from his heart' (ἐκβαλὼν δὲ καρδίας τὸ βάρβαρον/ λέγ', 1129-30) and make his case in a civilised manner: the assumption is that barbarians are lawless, as Agamemnon seems to imply when he says that 'perhaps among Polymestor's people it counts nothing to kill a guest, but it is a serious offence among the Greeks' (1247-8). Obviously, the combination of lawlessness and guest-killing is particularly relevant to the story of Polyphemus as told by Homer. This is also the case for the Euripidean Polyphemus in the *Cyclops*, who also shares with Polymestor an interest in wealth and a complete disregard of laws (*Cyc.* 316-47). By quite literally assimilating the barbarian to the monster, Euripides thus *seemingly* confirms the ethnic hierarchy of Greek and barbarian, also preserving in this way a sense of morality in the definition of what is 'shameful' even while speaking with the language of ethnographic relativism.³⁶⁵ What is more, Polymestor's invective against the Trojan women after the murder emphasises his bestiality and even imbues his character with cannibalistic traits (1057-8, 1070-2) — fully traditional barbarian imagery, to the Greek imagination, and clearly also relevant to Polyphemus.³⁶⁶ Hecuba, too, seems now endowed with a full barbarian identity, along with the other Trojan women: her vengeance, as we saw, is particularly barbaric. If Polymestor is the savage, the animal, as he himself says, the Trojan women also turn into savage dogs (κύνας, 1173) or savage beasts (1072), which in their turn can make Polymestor appear as a more savage beast (θήρ, 1173; cf.1056). But Polymestor can also paradoxically appear as the civilised one, the hunter (κυνηγέτης, 1174).³⁶⁷ The distinction between civiliser and civilised, Greek and barbarian, becomes

³⁶⁵ Battezzato (2010), 83.

³⁶⁶ Hall (1989), 126.

³⁶⁷ Battezzato (2010), 79; Battezzato (2018), 239; Hall (2010), 257.

deferred, and it becomes even more complex by the description of Hecuba's vengeance. For if Polymestor is Polyphemus, Hecuba is Odysseus, the Greek chauvinist of the play, and her Odyssean actions make her a character poised between acceptable and unacceptable, admirable and horrifying, Greek and barbarian.³⁶⁸

While Polymestor and Hecuba are both typically *deceptive* barbarians, Odysseus' own reputation as a liar and a sophistic speaker in the first part of the play is finally illuminated by Hecuba's replay of his own future act of deception of Polyphemus. The assimilation complicates profoundly the Greek/barbarian distinction through Odysseus' eloquence; this seems to find a parallel in the fragments of Euripides' *Philoctetes*. While Sophocles' treatment of the story does present Odysseus under the worst light possible,³⁶⁹ it is Euripides' version that seems to have introduced the themes of panhellenism³⁷⁰ and of Greek vs barbarian — an assumption that is supported also by noting that *Philoctetes* was staged as part of the same trilogy as *Medea*.³⁷¹ The clearly orientalisising portrayal of the Trojan embassy as greedy (*TrGF* v, fr. 794) gives way to their explicit 'barbarisation' in Odysseus' reply (*TrGF* v, fr. 796):

ὑπὲρ γε μέντοι παντὸς Ελλήνων στρατοῦ
αἰσχρὸν σιωπᾶν, βαρβάρους δ' ἔαν λέγειν.

The problem with Odysseus' characterisation in this play is his own verbal deceitfulness: he begins the play by pretending to be a follower of Palamedes, the very man that he had falsely accused of having betrayed the Greeks.³⁷² So, while the play

³⁶⁸ Polyphemus' savagery in the *Cyclops* is equally put into question, especially in the way the *Cyclops* shows signs of cultural progress and refinement: cf. Dunn (2017), 460-1.

³⁶⁹ Olson (1991), 282-3. Cf. Stanford (1954), 115-7.

³⁷⁰ Scodel (2009), 55.

³⁷¹ Calder (1979), 61; Hall (1989), 116.

³⁷² Cf. Scodel (2009), 58.

encourages the Greek audience to identify with Odysseus' cause and presents it even as a panhellenic attempt to win the fight against barbarians,³⁷³ the moral integrity of the champion of Hellenism is put into question by his own barbarian deceitfulness. In the same trilogy in which Jason's oath-breaking and Medea's deceit raise fundamental issues revolving around ethnicity and language (on which, cf. *infra*), Euripides seems to have chosen to portray Odysseus' verbal sophistry in the context of the Trojan war as a destabilising element to the definition of Greek identity. In *Hecuba*, the Trojan queen's vengeance is based on the same ability to deepen the gap between signifier and signified of the Greek and chauvinistic hero of the same play.

More importantly, however, it was Hecuba who initially spoke, as a barbarian, against the traits that are associated to Polymestor-Polyphemus as a barbarian (799-801):

ἡμεῖς μὲν οὖν δοῦλοί τε κάσθενεῖς ἴσως·
ἀλλ' οἱ θεοὶ σθένουσι χῶ κείνων κρατῶν
Νόμος· νόμῳ γὰρ τοὺς θεοὺς ἡγούμεθα
καὶ ζῶμεν ἄδικα καὶ δίκαι' ὠρισμένοι [...].

Hecuba's declaration is self-undercutting, based as it is on the fixity of *nomos*, ambiguously admitting as meaning the opposite of what she wants to say (a sophistic(ated) spin on tragic irony).³⁷⁴ To a closer inspection, Hecuba's statement has important implications for the Greek/barbarian hierarchy. The 'rhetoric superlative',³⁷⁵ namely the idea that *nomos* has power over the gods, most likely recalls the most

³⁷³ Scodel (2009), 60.

³⁷⁴ See *supra*, sec. 1.2.1, pp. 59-61.

³⁷⁵ Battezzato (2018), 179-80: 'it does not imply that a conflict for supremacy between *nomos* and the gods exist'.

famous use of this form, Pindar's famous statement that 'nomos is the king of all, mortal and immortal' (νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεὺς θνατῶν τε καὶ ἀθανάτων ἄγει δικαίων τὸ βιαιότατον ὑπερτάται χερί, fr. 169a, 1-4).³⁷⁶ Hecuba intends to mean that there is one universal 'law' that rules over the course of events and actions, for both mortals and immortals.³⁷⁷ But here Pindar's dictum seems to be subverted by the sophistic connotations of the expression. It is not simply the νόμῳ γὰρ τοὺς θεοὺς ἡγούμεθα that resounds with sophistic religious scepticism: there are reasons to suspect that Pindar's expression itself was already appropriated by sophistic thinkers. In Plato's *Gorgias*, for instance, Callicles quotes the expression to demonstrate its argument that the stronger members of society have a right to do whatever pleases them: Pindar's νόμος is manipulated by Callicles into meaning 'law of the stronger' (*Grg.* 484a-b).³⁷⁸ Callicles' ideas appear to have been shared by the sophist Antiphon, who similarly sets up a contrast between νόμος and φύσις, identifies self-interest as natural and just in his philosophical treatise *On Truth*, and deems the constraints of convention/law as fetters imposed on natural disposition (DK 87 B44A).³⁷⁹ The *Gorgias* thus appears to substantiate the view that Hecuba's statement of νόμος is self-undercutting inasmuch as she inadvertently echoes ideas about the relativity and inadequacy of human law/custom that were most likely circulating in Athens in the 420s. Yet the sophistic debate on the constructedness of *nomos* cannot be taken in isolation from the genre

³⁷⁶ Chrysippus imitates Pindar's quote and blends it with lines of the passage from the *Hecuba*: *SVF* III, 314 (Radice 2002, 1122-3 in Battezzato 2010, 93).

³⁷⁷ Asheri (1990), 256.

³⁷⁸ See *supra*, sec. 1.2.1, p. 60.

³⁷⁹ Cf. Gagarin (2002), 68. Cf. Pendrick (2001) for a list of the textual parallels as well as a list of the differences in nuance. As Pendrick points out, Dodds (1959), 268-9 thought that Callicles' image of the lion might have been inspired by Antiphon.

that in those same years explored precisely the diversity of customs in the ancient world: ethnography.

Closer in time to the *Hecuba* is another famous attestation of Pindar's maxim, indeed encroached in sophistic terminology: Herodotus' account of the relativity of human custom, which is also 'the most famous statement of the ethnographers' discovery of the cultural relativity of taboo'.³⁸⁰ While the Greeks cremate their dead, the Indians eat the bodies of their kin, and both would be equally horrified to resort to each other's method. Herodotus concludes: ὀρθῶς μοι δοκέει Πίνδαρος ποιῆσαι νόμον πάντων βασιλέα φήσας εἶναι (Hdt. 3.38). Three clues seem to suggest that Euripides might be reflecting Herodotus specifically in his interpretation of Pindar. First, Hecuba is specifically alluding to the universal value of those 'unwritten laws' whose validity Herodotus is questioning; ethnography most likely catalysed sophistic discussion over *nomos vs physis*.³⁸¹ Second, Hecuba is pleading for justice specifically for the murder of Polydorus and the sacrilegious disposal of his *body*, tossed into the sea by Polymestor. The whole episode focuses on burial. Agamemnon enters while asking Hecuba why she has not buried Polyxena yet (726-7); he then notices the body of Polydorus by the tents (733-5); Hecuba points at the corpse again at the beginning of her entreaty (760); Agamemnon asks more information as to the discovery of the body, and Hecuba reveals the sacrilegious treatment of Polydorus' corpse (777-82), which is followed by Hecuba's formal request for punishment and her pronouncement on *Nomos*. In an interesting ring composition, the episode ends with Hecuba's request to halt Polyxena's

³⁸⁰ Hall (1989), 186.

³⁸¹ Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella (2007), 435 on Herodotus: 'the relativistic spirit of Ionian science permeates this chapter, reinforced—as it seems—by a more recent experience of sophistic antilogy [...]. The names of Protagoras, Hippias, and Prodicus have been suggested as possible inspirers of Herodotus' views in this chapter; but Herodotus could himself have inspired these and other famous contemporary Sophists'. Cf. Hall (1989), 185-6.

burial so that both siblings might be cremated and buried together (894-7).³⁸² So we have a *barbarian* woman asking for compensation for the murder of her son as well as for the sacrilege done to his body, in the name of the ‘unwritten laws’ that she claims are universal. Even if Herodotus’ statement on the relativity of *nomos* did not work as an intertext, Herodotus’ passage itself may have been influenced by sophistic thought on the relativity of *nomos*. Although Herodotus is not necessarily a relativist in the same way Antiphon is, this passage does seem to share sophistic influences, and the Pindaric sentence had been probably appropriated also by Hippias (ὁ δὲ νόμος, τύραννος ὦν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, Pl. *Prt.* 337d) and appears at the beginning of the Hippocratic *Generation*.³⁸³ This suggests that by the time Herodotus was writing, the Pindaric maxim had been appropriated by the sophists in their reflections on the relativity of *nomos* — reflections which would be often articulated in regard to the Greek/barbarian distinction, as in the *Dissoi Logoi* (DK 90.2).³⁸⁴

Hecuba’s identity as a barbarian seems impossible to disentangle from the sophistic speculations on the relativity of νόμος by the time the play was being written—a point that is also elucidated by Plato’s Calicles. For Calicles also grounds his theory that powerful men should follow φύσις over respecting νόμος in the example of the Persians’ imperialism (483d); and although Calicles diverges from Herodotus inasmuch as in his case νόμος should not be respected but trampled upon, both take barbarians as evidence for questioning the universal value of νόμος. The same happens with Glaucon in book 2 of Plato’s *Republic*, in which he makes a point on the human

³⁸² Notice that the visual impact of Polydorus’ body on stage — ἐπὶ σκηναῖς, as Agamemnon says metatheatrically at 733 —, continuously indicated and pointed at by the characters, must have been arresting.

³⁸³ Thomas (2007), 70.

³⁸⁴ Thomas (2007), 70.

constructedness of *nomos* by telling the story of Gyges (Pl. *Resp.* 358e-360d).³⁸⁵ That it is Hecuba, then, the barbarian queen, to argue for the opposite view, is a paradox, for, as Tyndareus explains in *Orestes* (486-7), it is ‘Hellenic’ to ‘not to aim to be above the law’, in a passage that also alludes the sophists’ aversion to *nomos* (whom Tyndareus indeed despises, 489). And yet Hecuba’s revenge shows her wrong. Just as Hecuba’s nobility is called into question by it, her apparent un-barbarian belief in the *nomos* gives way to a type of barbarian revenge which, however, seems also assimilable to the quintessential heroic exploit of Odysseus, representative of Greek superiority in the play. The connection between the two sides of sophistic debate that Conacher saw at work in the *Hecuba* becomes clearer: sophistic questioning of the stability of meaning and morality, νόμος, naturally leads to the deconstruction of the ideological divide between Greek and non-Greek. This connection is not explicitly made in any of the extant fragments of the sophists, but an instance of problematic *nomos* in connection to ethnicity appears in a famous papyrological fragment of Antiphon (DK 87 B44B) which plays on the typical contrast *nomos/physis*:³⁸⁶

<we know them and we respect them>; but those [scil. probably laws] of those people who live far away we neither know nor do we respect them. Thus in this regard we have become barbarians toward each other, since, in nature at least, we are all fitted similarly by nature in all regards to be both barbarians and Greeks. But it is possible to examine what is necessary <in what exists> by nature for all

³⁸⁵ On the role of the ‘barbarian repertoire’ in Greek reflection on morality, cf. Vlassopoulos (2022), 17-8.

³⁸⁶ Cf. Bett (2023), 171 on *nomos* in the fragment, as well as on Hippias’ similar statement in Pl. *Prt.* 337c-d. Due to the difficulty in interpretation, I use here the translation by Laks and Most (2016). Cf. Barnes (1987), 5; Gagarin (2002), 66-7; Vlassopoulos (2022), 194; Balla (2023), 244-5; Pendrick (2001), 354-5 with further references on the cosmopolitan implications of this fragment.

humans and <what is provided to them> in conformity with <the same> properties, and <in these things none> of us has been defined as either b<arbaria>n or Greek.

Whatever the connection between Euripides' *Hecuba* and specific sophistic or ethnographic thought, the crisis in the definition of justice fundamentally hinges on the crisis of νόμος, here most vividly embodied in the confusion of ethnic behaviour expected by Hecuba as well as by the Greeks. In other words, while we saw gender and class being fundamental to this crisis of a moral definition, it is ethnicity here that undercuts the core of the play's philosophical, destabilising reflection — the statement on the fixity of νόμος.

Finally, the last part of the play hardly helps reestablishing ideological hierarchies of ethnicity. When Hecuba claims that Greeks and barbarians could never be friends (πρῶτον οὔ ποτ' ἂν φίλον/τὸ βάρβαρον γένοιτ' ἂν Ἑλλησιν γένος/οὐδ' ἂν δύναιτο, 1199-201), this overlooks not only the fact that Agamemnon has already promised her support against Polymestor,³⁸⁷ but also her own similarity to what could be thought of as Greek character. Additionally, while the verdict does not seem to throw into disarray hierarchies of ethnicity (unlike those of gender and class), and while the last part of the play seems to delight in Polymestor's barbarism and Hecuba's barbarian degeneration, similarities between Greeks and barbarians reach an apex that cannot go unnoticed. Hecuba seems in this last part of the tragedy to prove Odysseus' chauvinistic accusation that barbarians are inferior to Greeks because they are incapable of treating friends as friends (οἱ βάρβαροι δὲ μήτε τοὺς φίλους φίλους/ἠγεῖσθε, 328-9). However, this section also coincides with the most explicit echo of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: from the

³⁸⁷ Battezzato (2018), 13.

whole deception scene in which Hecuba lures inside, tension is built up to Polymestor's cry (ὦ μοι, τυφλοῦμαι φέγγος ὀμμάτων τάλας, 1035), echoing Agamemnon's famous cry when Clytemnestra kills him, and finally to the juridical scene that we saw recalling the final of *Eumenides*, thereby foreshadowing the equally barbaric infringement of *philia* in the very Greek household of Agamemnon in Aeschylus' trilogy.

The differentiation and hierarchisation of Greek and barbarian are, in fact, also present in the process of order that the *Oresteia* delineates. Already Hall noted how one of the most semiotically charged scenes of the trilogy, the 'tapestry scene', hinges on the degeneration of both Agamemnon and Clytemnestra into barbarian behaviour. Clytemnestra's 'hyperbolic flattery' (possibly accompanied by her *proskynesis*), the waste of precious tapestries signalling excess and luxury, Agamemnon's arrival on the chariot, all of these elements suggest this degeneration.³⁸⁸ The confusion between male and female is thus accompanied in the first stages of the trilogy by a confusion of Greek and barbarian. Yet this, as Hall also recognises, is redressed by applying the vocabulary of barbarism to the Furies in the last play,³⁸⁹ to then proceed to the process of hierarchisation that we saw before in gendered terms. This detail is in fact important: this process is concerned with the definition of a hierarchy of ethnicity only implicitly, only inasmuch as this hierarchy maps onto the gender dichotomy whose differentiation the trilogy works towards. Since the barbarian world is one of female power, effeminacy, and luxury,³⁹⁰ it is a consequence of the final gender hierarchisation that a hierarchy of ethnicities is also tacitly established (and not the other way around). As Zeitlin has it, gender is the central magnet in the trilogy, around which a series of

³⁸⁸ Hall (1989), 206-7.

³⁸⁹ Hall (1989), 205.

³⁹⁰ Zeitlin (1996), 92.

oppositions cluster; it is gender, its differentiation and hierarchy, that is at the basis of the Aeschylean depiction of the birth of civilisation.³⁹¹ But in the *Hecuba* these hierarchies are functional discourses whose thematisation is equally explicit and whose overlapping problematisation constitutes part of the process of sociological complication that the play enacts.

1.4 The Master's House: Overlapping Hierarchies and Intersectionality

Implicitly, many, if not all analyses of Attic tragedies take into account more than one hierarchy.³⁹² Fewer studies, however, have examined how social hierarchies are mapped onto each other: for example, this is what Hall and Zeitlin do when they analyse the way the ideological belief in Greek superiority is projected onto the gender hierarchy in the *Oresteia*: these two polarities overlap in the conceptual, equally ideological creation of civilisation in Aeschylus.³⁹³ Rather than limiting themselves to the recognition that the social order is conceptualised as 'multiple' by tragedy, studies

³⁹¹ Zeitlin (1996), 101.

³⁹² Swift (2017), 80-7 devotes two sections of her chapter on *Medea* to 'Medea as Barbarian?' and 'Medea as Woman'. Cf. Allan (2000), 178 on how Andromache is 'emphatically other' in *Andromache*. There is yet a difference between approaches such as these, which recognise the multiplicity of social themes, and the one I am sketching inasmuch as they do not analyse the way social hierarchies ideologically interact and intersect (precisely because they do not start from the assumption that social axes might be intersectional). On *Andromache*, single-axis gender analyses: McClure (1999); Rabinowitz (1984); single-axis class analyses: Torrance (2005); Synodinou (1974); Valtadorou (2022); single-axis race/ethnicity analysis: Vester (2009); Stavrinou (2016); Dué (2006). On *Hecuba*, most studies again focus on one hierarchy and the supposed ideological challenge to it or its reconfirmation; for instance, race/ethnicity for Hall (1989), Conacher (1998), Planinc (2018); class for Daitz (1971), McDonald (1990); gender for Thalmann (1993), Papastamati (2017). Zeitlin (1991), who recognises the ironies surrounding all hierarchies in the play (p. 56), still considers gender as the fundamental polarity of the play (p. 81). Scholarship on *Troades* has also analysed hierarchies in isolation, with the important exception of Croally (1994).

³⁹³ Cf. Roselli (2007), 82 on gender and class. The article, however, does not theorise the ideological interconnection between gender and class, and rather argues that gender in *Heraclidae* can 'operate as a disguise for class in Attic culture' (p. 106).

of this kind stress the way in which the social order is *often* constituted through analogical polarities.

Anthropologically inflected studies of Attic tragedy agree that different cultural codes parallel each other. So complex is Zeitlin’s vision of this ideological intersection that the male/female attracts as a magnet that she tabulates it in this kind of scheme, here reproduced (my emphasis):³⁹⁴

MALE	FEMALE
Apollo	Erinyes
Olympian	Chthonic
Unbind (will, salvation)	Bind
Marriage (non-kin)	Kinship
Father	Mother
Law (court)	Ritual (altar)
Intention	Act
Odd (three, trilogy)	Even (two, tie, lex talionis)
Center	Limit (frontier, interior)
GREEK	BARBARIAN
City	House
Culture	Nature

³⁹⁴ Zeitlin (1996), 112.

Future (young)	Past (old)
Order	Chaos
Rule	Unruly (misrule)
Above	Below
Head-Phallos	Belly-womb
Active	Passive
Creativity	Fertility
Reason	Unreason (sexuality, passion)
Light	Dark
Life	Death
Clarity (plain speaking)	Obscurity (riddle, metaphor)
Intellect	Senses
Positive	Negative

Zeitlin's systematisation is in fact supported by ancient testimonies of similar schemes. Aristotle, most importantly, reports the so called 'table of opposites' adopted by some Pythagoreans who believed that contraries were the causal principles of things and so drew these tables by arranging contraries in two separate columns (*Metaph.* 5 986a22-b2):³⁹⁵

³⁹⁵ Goldin (2015), 171; Cartledge (1993), 13.

Others among them say there are ten principles, laying them out in columns – limit and unlimited, odd and even, one and plurality, right and left, male and female, resting and moving, straight and curved, light and darkness, good and bad, square and oblong.

What is striking about such tables of opposites is not simply the dichotomous horizontal contraposition between contraries, but the extent to which vertical members of the same column are also implied to be conceptually linked, forming a semblance of a system:³⁹⁶

research in structural anthropology indicates that the tables are a formalization of arrays of ‘symbolic classification’ which expresses, however inchoately, a pre-scientific world-view with social and ethical implications, according to which the presence of a principle on one column of the table will carry with it, or otherwise be associated with, another principle from the same column.

Pythagorean tables are obviously not ‘intersectional’ in its sociological sense, given that the columns mention a wide range of concepts that go beyond the social sphere, yet in a way they represent the formalisation of an implicit system of belief that developed into the Aeschylean one represented by Zeitlin, which, in its turn, reproduces the ideological overlap between the social hierarchy of gender and that of ethnicity.³⁹⁷ By the time Aeschylus wrote, in fact, that process of creation of a Greek ethnic identity in response to the Persian wars had also meant that conceptualisations of society and

³⁹⁶ Goldin (2015), 172; 181 on the evidence Aristotle gives for this at *Metaph.* 13 1093b7-18.

³⁹⁷ The difference is that the *Oresteia* does not seem to deliberately theorise or formalise this system of symbolic associations, while what is striking about the Pythagorean table is the fact that it is ‘a self-conscious formalisation of symbolic associations that pervaded Pythagorean lore and practice’ (Goldin 2015, 179).

order were complicated by the addition of this new conceptual hierarchy. This overlap is what DuBois has called ‘the analogical model’.

In the seminal *Centaurs and Amazons*, DuBois calls the ‘analogical model’ a specific model of classical Greek thought defining normativity within the classical polis. Specifically, DuBois maintains that Greek literature, and tragedy specifically, attests to the way the identity of members of the polis is constructed and negotiated through differentiation with a series of others—animals, women, foreigners—all of which are excluded from the conceptual centre of the polis. Using her metaphor, the Greek male free subject is the centre of the wheel, and these conceptual ‘others’ are the spokes radiating from the hub of the wheel.³⁹⁸ In her turn, DuBois builds on Lloyd’s *Polarity and Analogy* (a book fundamentally imbued with the type of structural anthropology mentioned above)³⁹⁹ and its argument that early Greek thought proceeded through the two basic procedures of polarity and analogy. Applying this model to fifth-century Athenian literature, DuBois argues that the Athenian citizen subject is constructed through differentiation; and, most importantly, this process of differentiation works not only by establishing polar opposites (polarities), but by yoking these polarities through analogy.⁴⁰⁰ Croally, drawing on DuBois, importantly recognises that this creation of the ‘subject’ is primarily ideological: it serves to define the civic identity of the Athenian citizen body in opposition to others like slaves, women, barbarians.

Yet Croally’s understanding of ideology as the ‘authoritative self-definition of the citizen body’ is problematic inasmuch as it risks considering civic identity, rather than

³⁹⁸ DuBois (1982), 129.

³⁹⁹ In particular, Lloyd (1966), 37-41 uses the studies of the Durkheimian scholar Robert Hertz, which elucidate ‘a recurrent characteristic of dualistic conceptions in primitive thought, namely the tendency to correlate or identify the members of different pairs of opposites’.

⁴⁰⁰ DuBois (1982), 4.

power and domination, as the ultimate aim of ideology.⁴⁰¹ This, the *Hecuba* suggests, risks sidelining the play's interest in power and hierarchy, and also, crucially, neglecting the hierarchies present *within* the citizen body (i.e., hierarchies of class and status). Here Audre Lorde's definition of 'mythical norm' might be enlightening to progress beyond considerations of ideology-as-civic-identity towards an understanding of ideology as a matrix of discourses of power:⁴⁰²

Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a mythical norm, which each one of us within our hearts knows "that is not me." In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that *the trappings of power* [my italics] reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practising.

Lorde's writing is one of the most famous examples of what would later be theorised under the name of constitutive intersectionality: in her view, ideology underpins domination, and the structure of domination is based on a system of interconnected hierarchies.⁴⁰³ Because of this, Lorde does not simply intend to advocate for solidarity between socially marginalised groups, but grounds such solidarity in the idea that the system cannot be dismantled by working on one hierarchy only: in Freire's words, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'.⁴⁰⁴ Most crucially, Lorde's

⁴⁰¹ See *infra*, sec. 3.6.2, pp. 309-10.

⁴⁰² Lorde (2019), 54-5.

⁴⁰³ Cf. Ilmonen (2019), 11 on scholars' understanding of Lorde's writings.

⁴⁰⁴ Also cf. Keating (1998), 27.

mythical norm allows us to shift the discussion from the understanding of ideology as the definition of the civic, political identity to the master's house. This master's house is the system of power, itself constituted of semiotic, structural 'systems of meaning through which we represent the world',⁴⁰⁵ those structuralist polarities so well-articulated by studies of tragedy, that the *Hecuba* contests and deconstructs.

In the *Oresteia*, the two discourses of gender and ethnicity are intertwined; the social disorder represented so well by the perversion of gender norms in the first two plays is also accompanied by the perversion of Greekness into barbarism, as in the tapestry scene. The *Eumenides* seems to reestablish social order by acting on both these perversions, although, as I argued, the hierarchy of Greekness and barbarism is implicit and secondary to the 'gender magnet'. And yet the social order in the *Hecuba* is explicitly *represented* beyond single axes and instead reflects, in comparison to the *Oresteia*, an enlargement of the vision of the social. Social order is *thematized* in a multi-layered way, as constituted by dynamics of gender, ethnicity, and class, and this thematisation is the first important difference with Aeschylus' trilogy.

So far, I have discussed gender, ethnicity, and class in the play separately, but it is vital that I state how these hierarchies are not only present separately, but are again ideologically analogical to the point of being overlapping and indistinguishable from each other. Not seeing here this complexity (as opposed to multiplicity) poses the risk of twisting intersectionality back into a single-axis (albeit multiple single-axes) approach:⁴⁰⁶ this is why, for instance, scholars have diversely seen Polyxena's brave act of self-sacrifice as a challenge to class (Daitz, Rabinowitz), ethnicity (Hall, Rabinowitz),

⁴⁰⁵ Hall (1985), 103; Althusser (1969), 231-6.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. May (2015), 22.

or gender (Papastamati), when in fact it is virtually impossible to say whether her athletic, heroic depiction makes her appear as noble, male, or Greek. Likewise, it is impossible to say whether Hecuba and Odysseus are assimilated in terms that are primarily gendered, or whether her blinding of 'Polyphemus' should emphasise more her Greekness, or again whether the whole remembrance of 'Odysseus' slavery' to Hecuba functions as a foil to the discussion of nobility and slavery.⁴⁰⁷ The hierarchies, instead, appear as overlapping axes of social order—a new, enlarged social order, in comparison to Aeschylus, that goes beyond gender. As long as literary analysis remains a single-axis one, the play will appear as an extraordinary and unexplainable iconoclastic act of Euripides, allegedly aimed at shedding light on the condition of slaves (Daitz) or the unfair treatment of foreigners (Rabinowitz). This is, in fact, how Hall ends her last chapter on the Trojan women plays of Euripides. After considering some options as to why Euripides might have gone to such an extent in these plays to deconstruct the moral polarity of Greeks and barbarians, she ends on an aporetic note, noting that not even the Spartanness of the Greeks in these plays can explain the contradiction these plays represent for her view of tragedy as ethnocentric.⁴⁰⁸ Instead of defending any one category, *Hecuba* represents a world in crisis, in which the social order, shown constructed in its overlapping threads of power, is deprived of its ideological fundamentals, ultimately deconstructed. At a hermeneutic level, it not only makes problematic the idea that one social hierarchy or the other might be the only

⁴⁰⁷ The confrontation between them is repeatedly presented as that between a master and a slave (234-7). Hecuba also tries to build her case by reminding Odysseus of how he was captured in Troy during the war and how Hecuba spared him; yet she uses specifically the vocabulary of slavery, defining him her δοῦλος (249) on that occasion.

⁴⁰⁸ Hall (1989), 215.

relevant to the play; the text also makes difficult to distinguish between them, to point them down as the play unravels on stage.

This brings me to the second fundamental difference with the *Oresteia*. In the case of the *Oresteia*, the trilogy works towards the resolution of the chaotic state of things presented in the first two plays. This chaos can be seen to be moral, cosmic, institutional etc., but is primarily represented by gender dynamics, on which the trial overseen by Athena hinges. The definition of meaning, as brilliantly argued first by Goldhill, is intrinsically tied to the definition of morality; in its turn, this is based on the definition of gender, with its differentiation between male and female. As I have made clear, I disagree with Goldhill inasmuch as I do see the *Eumenides* as working towards this definition, and not towards its openness. As already suggested by Thalmann, the *Hecuba* replays the *Oresteia* and foreshadows it, ultimately reopening issues that had appeared, *or could appear*, to be solved by the end of the trilogy. The crisis of meaning, evidently not a new but a renewed issue in the intellectual milieu of the 430s where sophists had made their appearance, slides back into the world of the *Hecuba*. This incapacity of defining has implications for the definition of justice and morality, left ambiguous, and ultimately ties into the notion of gender, here left open. Therefore, the intrinsic connection between 'language' and 'sexuality' that Goldhill saw at the centre of the *Oresteia* is received by Euripides but reworked. The 'construction' of social order becomes here a deconstruction of an entire system of overlapping hierarchical discourses, one that could adequately be called intersectional, and one that goes beyond gender in representing the social totality. This social totality is not only conceptualised as 'multiple', constituted by distinct networks and axes, but rather 'complex', in its etymological sense: as a *structure* constituted by multiple axes that are intimately connected with each other, mutually sustaining, and even overlapping. Not

only does the deconstruction of this ‘complex’ matrix need to be inherently effected through interconnecting, mutually sustaining hierarchies, but *this deconstructive process itself, this critical opening, sheds lights on those interconnections between hierarchies in the constitution of this matrix of power.*

As such, the *Hecuba*’s ideological operations not only can be grasped through intersectional theory, but intersectional theory itself can initiate a dialogue with *Hecuba*. In comparison with some strands of Marxist thought, intersectionalists maintain that exploitation—meaning the material reality of social hierarchy—is not primary in comparison to oppression—meaning the ideologies that uphold social hierarchy—, nor is it entirely different.⁴⁰⁹ In so doing, intersectionalists can theorise that hierarchies of gender, race, and class (but not exclusively) intersect in the material conditions of exploitations. But they can theorise that this exploitation is reciprocally constituted by and constitutes the dynamics of oppression, which, from an intersectional perspective, is always based on an ideological matrix of domination. The importance intersectionality reserves to oppression as a ‘complex’ system in which no hierarchy is primary or constitutes the ‘base’ of a ‘superstructure’⁴¹⁰ necessarily prompts to rethink the idea that only modernity or capitalism can explain the way in which they are weaved together in the current ideological nexus.⁴¹¹ Yet if social hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, and class can appear as mutually sustaining in the process of unveiling that Euripidean deconstruction effects, new questions can be

⁴⁰⁹ Exploitation was and is clearly fundamental in Marxist thought and primary over oppression; or, rather, oppression can be explained as part of the material reality of exploitation – all of which is not shared by intersectionalists: Bohrer (2019); Mezzadra (2021), 5.

⁴¹⁰ Ferguson (2016), 41.

⁴¹¹ Fraser and Jaeggi (2018); cf. Ferguson (2016), 46. Yet it is possible to argue, with the intersectionalists, that capitalism explains how oppressions were *exacerbated*, and were exacerbated specifically in their intersection: Bohrer (2019), 114.

asked on the historical or transhistorical nature of the tendency of ideology to function through overlapping processes of social oppression.

With important differences,⁴¹² DuBois already seemed to read Euripides' *Medea* in similar terms. DuBois deems the Athenian human subject as essentially reinforced by tragedy, although tragedy seems to stage what happens when order (based on differentiation) starts to crack. The tragedies that she investigates, however, apparently focus only on one aspect of the process of differentiation, while *Medea* offers 'a continuous linear discourse about all the problems of difference, animal/human, Greek/barbarian, male/female'.⁴¹³ This 'accumulation' of difference, DuBois observes, in fact seems to represent a reflection on 'otherness' erupting within the polis, as if the ideology of the polis could not contain, marginalise, subordinate anymore the violent forces inherent in otherness.⁴¹⁴ DuBois sees *Medea* as Euripides' 'diagnosis' of the crisis of the analogical model, and its realisation in the *Bacchae*, where Dionysus collapses all of the differentiations. With Dionysus, Euripides thus seems to 'reveal the inadequacy of the old logic of polarity', with 'otherness' again erupting within the polis and destroying it.⁴¹⁵

The *Hecuba* enacts not simply a challenge, but a deconstruction of the system of ideology, itself a semiotic system of representations (in an Althusserian sense), based on overlapping hierarchies of power. This deconstruction is not merely a transgression: it is not Clytemnestra's perversion of femininity, which ultimately ends up reinforcing the hierarchical order of genders, but a multilayered, open, unfixed suspension of a

⁴¹² See *supra*, p. 122.

⁴¹³ DuBois (1982), 118.

⁴¹⁴ DuBois (1982), 118.

⁴¹⁵ DuBois (1982), 122.

multi-faceted prism of identification and hierarchisation, which underlies the ideological construction of order. This order, deconstructed in its overlapping strands, is primarily social and civic; yet if the project of civilisation announced and celebrated by *Eumenides* occasioned a wide range of changes in codes and hierarchies — moral, linguistic, narrative, even divine and cosmic—, the *Hecuba* necessarily re-opens what is commonly accepted as settled in a way that goes beyond the social ‘order’ and the hierarchy on which it is based.

To return to the problem of form, then, adopting an intersectional approach *metaphorically and euristically* as a theory of relationality, co-constitutiveness, and complexity may perhaps illuminate a way forward with critical and postcritical studies. Intersectionality, in my view, can be understood as a perspective on the social that can dialectically navigate the Scylla of Marxist reductionism and/or totalisation and the Charybdis of poststructuralist aporia. Rightly or wrongly,⁴¹⁶ intersectionality is often understood to fragment the subject, or group identity, by focusing on multiplicity.⁴¹⁷ This is to some extent a poststructuralist moment in the dialectic.⁴¹⁸ Yet the second movement is to recuperate this fragmentation—which it inevitably requires—in the enlightening process of explaining their structural enmeshment in the sustainment of oppression and exploitation.⁴¹⁹ In other words, fragments are not left to hang as free-

⁴¹⁶ It is often said that intersectionality can produce divisions within social groups: Carastathis (2013), 942; Ludvig (2006); Ehrenreich (2002).

⁴¹⁷ Mezzadra (2021), 22; May (2015), 50. This is after all the original meaning of intersectionality as intended by Crenshaw (1989), who was primarily interested in highlighting the particular, specific, and largely ignored position of black women before the American law.

⁴¹⁸ Many still think that intersectionality is a poststructuralist theory: Hancock (2016), 164. Cf. Moi (2017), 104.

⁴¹⁹ Hancock (2016), 178. Cf. May (2015), 46. As Lorde famously wrote, ‘it was a while before we came to realize that our place was the very house of difference rather than any one particular difference’ (Lorde 1982, 226). Precisely because intersectionality conceives identity already as not unified and ‘coalitional’, it can breathe life into a politics based on difference that paradoxically unites through that interplay of sameness and difference: cf. Mezzadra (2021),

floating atoms, but are put back together in the explanation of a structure.⁴²⁰ Yet what happened if we appropriated this dialectical movement of intersectional theory to the literary analysis of tragedy? All those fragments, or, as said above in somewhat Foucauldian language, those ‘molecules’ of the text, cease to appear as free-floating molecules, and become inextricable from the ideological operations of the text—its operations, whether Euripides intended it or not, on the matrix of domination the text inevitably engages with and negotiates. Fragments of the text appear not as lonely molecules juxtaposed to other fragments but intimately co-constituted by them and co-constituting them, at times — but not always — even overlapping with each other.⁴²¹ The act of reading, or viewing, in other words of interpreting, means to be concerned, yet these concerns are themselves, despite our best efforts, ideological. For ideology is not ‘behind’ the text, and the text is not a surface under which ideology lies concealed: rather, the inextricability of both — at times even the overlap — challenges the postcritical aspiration to ideological suspension.

7; Bohrer (2019), 257; Cole (2008), 447; Carastathis (2013). By positing identity as already ‘coalitional’, intersectionalists mean that identity is complex (for instance there is no universal ‘Woman’); yet this paradoxically paves the way, rather than forecloses, a wider and powerful politics of coalitions: Carastathis (2013); Crenshaw (1991); May (2015), 41. This is missed by critics such as Moi (2017), who argues that intersectionality attempts to produce ‘rigidly bounded concepts’ (97) and yet in doing so hampers attempts to grapple with ‘concepts’ to the point that political action is rendered impossible (106-7).

⁴²⁰ Ferguson (2016), 39. This was already clear in black feminist thought and activism before Crenshaw: famously, the Combahee River Collective wrote of ‘major systems of oppression’ as ‘interlocking’ in 1974 (Taylor 2017; Mezzadra 2021). This has important implications on the organisation of the ensuing struggle: as Davis (2016), 144 notes, what is at stake is ‘not so much the intersectionality of identities but intersectionality of struggles’.

⁴²¹ But differently from other critical approaches, intersectionality insists on the multiplicity and complexity of the ideological system, so that single elements of a phenomenon can hardly be explained with recourse to one unified explanation, one category. And so likewise it gives us an opportunity to interpret features—or fragments—of the text as inevitably produced by and producing a *nexus* of other fragments. Similarly, we could think, again metaphorically, by using the conceptualisation of the social order as complex as intended by Stuart Hall (1985), 91: the social has a structure, yet it is ‘complex’, which means that ‘it is a complex structure in which it is impossible to reduce one level of practice to another in some easy way’.

Mobilising the audience's and the scholars' disparate concerns — from sophistic rhetoric to the nature of law, from its broken narrative structure to its strange intertextuality — diverse but not disconnected, the *Hecuba*'s drive towards irresolution and critique re-opens ideas of order and normativity, putting into question the notion of hierarchy itself. Yet if this normality is complex, constituted of structural, mutually supporting threads, it deconstructs all of the hierarchies that underlie them, showing them fundamentally interdependent, intersecting, overlapping.

2

ENMESHMENT

Complex Inferiorities: *Andromache* and Its Enmeshed Hierarchies

Staged almost the same year as *Hecuba*, Euripides' *Andromache* seems to be an equally strange, if less grim play. Andromache, too, has been enslaved after the fall of Troy, and she is now the concubine of Neoptolemus, Achilles' son, in Phthia. To add to her misery, Hermione, Neoptolemus' legitimate wife, is persecuting both her and the child she has had with Neoptolemus, perceiving Andromache as a threat to her own position as a wife. Hermione is seemingly barren and anxious that because of her childlessness Neoptolemus might repudiate her and instead consider Andromache and 'Molossus' (as scholars call the child, although the play does not name him so) his legitimate wife and son. The play opens with Andromache sheltered at Thetis' altar, in fear, in the attempt to save herself from Hermione's impending vengeance. Neoptolemus is away, in Delphi, to beg Apollo for forgiveness following a past act of impiety, and so she has no protection against Hermione's attacks. She is informed by a maidservant that her mistress and her father, Menelaus, are plotting against her and Molossus. A tense confrontation follows between Hermione and Andromache that ends with no real progression of the plot: Hermione simply exhibits her arrogance and Andromache her defying spirit.

Enters Menelaus, just arrived in military attire from Sparta to assist his daughter in her despicable vengeance. Menelaus is petty and deceptive, and ultimately deceives Andromache by promising that if she offers herself to die, in a perverted form of heroic self-sacrifice, Molossus will be spared. When she accepts, Menelaus reveals that both will be killed, triumphantly: yet his enthusiasm is short lived, for the aged Peleus

intervenes and rescues Andromache, after an equally caustic debate with Menelaus. As in *Hecuba*, the second part of the play shifts abruptly in tone and direction: now that her plan has failed, Hermione has lost her senses, anticipating that Neoptolemus will cast her out of his house, once he returns to Phthia from Delphi. As Hermione despairs, Orestes, her cousin, appears. He is determined to save her by leading her away with him. Hermione had been promised to Orestes before being given in marriage to Neoptolemus, and Orestes has been monitoring the situation in Phthia, waiting for the right occasion to intervene. Plotting revenge against Neoptolemus, he leaves the stage with her.

The plot shifts a third time. Peleus re-enters the stage only to discover that Neoptolemus, his grandson, has been murdered by the Delphians. With the contribution of both Apollo and Orestes, the Delphians have been deceived into believing that Neoptolemus intended to plunder the temple. Neoptolemus' body is brought on stage, Peleus laments in agitated lyric meters. But the play offers a final, surprising change in direction: Thetis, *dea ex machina*, appears from above to promise Peleus immortality and to redress the wrongs the audience has so far witnessed in the play. What can this strange play tell us about hierarchies, and, specifically, intersecting hierarchies?

The *Hecuba* allowed us to grasp the overlapping deconstruction of gender, ethnicity, and class in the tragedy, paralleled and condensed into a notion of social hierarchy that replays and contests the process of hierarchisation enacted by the end of the *Oresteia*. The *Andromache*, instead, enables us to analyse the way these three hierarchies are not separately destabilised, but rather are simultaneously challenged through their enmeshment. This ideological interconnection — already palpable before the creation

of the play, in the extraliterary world — makes it impossible to individuate changes in one hierarchy without noticing effects on the others. What is more, this profound entanglement raises serious hermeneutic questions: it not only challenges the assumption that the reader can easily distinguish between them, but it also raises the issue of whether each is fully understandable as a separate entity. If *Hecuba* raises the issue of *how* we can distinguish between them in the process of interpretation, *Andromache* more disturbingly asks the question whether this process of distinction *should* be undertaken in the first place. As a bundle of hierarchies, the social order is once again profoundly deconstructed in its totality, emptied of its meaning, by the workings of this play.⁴²² This time, too, this deconstruction has robust connections with the rest of the concerns of the play; this time, too, the shadow of Aeschylus will be impossible to overlook in the critical work the play enacts.

2.1 Andromache, Interrupted: Female Virtue and its Complication

The initial characterisation of Andromache is unmistakably traditional in gendered terms, and she laments and memorialises from the beginning of the play her past marriage as we remember it from Homer; yet the archetypal wife is now placed in a new and complicated environment. The play opens with Andromache's apostrophe, unusually directed at her past rather than present situation. She immediately evokes her marriage to Hector, emblematic of the disruption of the οἶκος which so

⁴²² In the first part of this chapter, the terms 'challenge', 'collapse', and 'question' are used; in the second, 'deconstruct'. While deconstruction will appear to be the best term to define what happens in the play by the end of the chapter, I use at first more cautious terms in the analysis of the play to then show how these are not simply 'transgressions' or 'challenges' to the normative order, but rather procedures of deconstruction that suspend the meaning of hierarchies through which normative reality is understood — both in the play considered on its own and vis-à-vis the *Oresteia*.

fundamentally pervades this tragedy.⁴²³ She frames her vicissitudes in terms of her womanhood: she claims to have been formerly ‘enviable’, but to have now become the most unfortunate of women (νῦν δ’, εἴ τις ἄλλη, δυστυχεστάτη γυνή, 6).⁴²⁴ This nostalgic prelude (on the past) mirrors the prologue itself (on the present). Andromache’s ‘bridal procession’ from Thebe to Troy approximates her forced journey as a slave from Troy to Phthia. In both cases Andromache ‘reached’ (ἀφικόμεν, 3; εἰσαφικόμεν, 13) a new land after ‘being given’ to a man, first to Hector, as a ‘childbearing wedded wife’ (δάμαρ δοθεῖσα παιδοποιὸς Ἑκτορι, 4), and then to Neoptolemus, as ‘his prize of war’ (τῷ νησιώτῃ Νεοπτολέμῳ δορὸς γέρας/ δοθεῖσα, 14-5).⁴²⁵ In Greece, Andromache mutates into an object of prestige and status (λείας Τρωϊκῆς ἐξάριετον, 15) similar to the costly ornaments that she first brought to Troy as her dowry (ἔδνων σὺν πολυχρύσῳ χλιδῆι, 2).⁴²⁶ So she contrasts her current status as a slave and as an object to her previous freedom (τῶν ἐλευθερωτάτων/ οἴκων νομισθεῖσ’, 12-3). Finally, Andromache’s parallel references to Astyanax (παῖδά θ’ ὄν τίκτω, 9) and ‘Molossus’⁴²⁷ (ἄρσεν’ ἐντίκτω κόρον, 24) are imbued with the same tragic irony presenting her second experience as a distorted version of the first.⁴²⁸ While Euripides willingly discards the variant of the myth in the *Ilias Parva* that had

⁴²³ Storey (1989), 18.

⁴²⁴ I print the text from Diggle (1984) except where differently indicated and discussed.

⁴²⁵ Olsen (2022b), 72.

⁴²⁶ This might be an echo of Sapph. fr. 44 V. describing the luxurious wedding procession of Andromache from Thebe to Troy. If this is the case, Euripides has decided to echo only the part of the poem that concentrates on the luxury of the procession and has left out the rest (including the reaction of the Trojans and their different roles in the wedding procession). One should consider that at *Il.* 22.470-2 Homer already speaks of ‘countless gifts’ in connection of the wedding procession of Andromache and Hector; yet there it is Hector who brings the gifts, while Sappho innovates by describing Andromache’s dowry: cf. Budelmann (2018), 142.

⁴²⁷ Andromache’s and Neoptolemus’ child is never named in the play, but he is elsewhere known as Molossus, and I will use ‘Molossus’ throughout to avoid repetition.

⁴²⁸ Grube (1941), 198.

Neoptolemus hurling Astyanax from the walls of Troy,⁴²⁹ the reference to the infanticide is preceded by the memory of Hector's death at the hands of Achilles; poignantly, Molossus is said to have been birthed after Andromache 'was brought to the son of Achilles' (πλαθεῖσ' Ἀχιλλέως παιδί, 25). Andromache's prologue thus shows a split and a comparison between two experiences of womanhood, of which the second seems the degenerated version of the first, and of which the first foreshadows Hermione's condition, that of the legitimate wife. And yet, in spite of this pronounced sense of distortion and exceptionality, Andromache still emerges as the emblem of wifedom, the prototype of the perfect γυνή.

The initial emphasis on her Homeric marriage, her memory of Astyanax and the mention of Molossus crystallise her in the position of wife and mother, but it is in her famous monody that she is constructed as quintessentially *female*. Andromache frames her verses with a priamel that conceptualises lamentation as a specifically feminine characteristic (91-5):

χώρει νυν· ἡμεῖς δ' οἷσπερ ἐγκείμεσθ' ἀεὶ

θρήνοισι καὶ γόοισι καὶ δακρύμασιν

πρὸς αἰθέρ' ἐκτενοῦμεν· ἐμπέφυκε γὰρ

γυναιξὶ τέρψις τῶν παρεστώτων κακῶν

ἀνὰ στόμ' αἰεὶ καὶ διὰ γλώσσης ἔχειν.

As has been noted, Andromache's following verses (103-116) constitute the first and only instance of elegiac metre in extant Greek tragedy. While it is possible that other

⁴²⁹ Stevens (1971), 89.

instances of elegiacs in tragedy have simply not been preserved, the direct transition from speech to elegiac monody⁴³⁰ near the beginning of the tragedy must have been striking.⁴³¹ Elegiacs have an added and specific relevance to Andromache: in selecting the dactylic meter, Euripides evokes the Iliadic lamentation of Andromache for the death of Hector (*Il.* 24.725-45; but cf. *Il.* 22.477-514).⁴³² Lamentation is also underscored explicitly by Andromache: her priamel emphasises the depth of Andromache's sorrow as well as the lament itself through the asyndetic juxtaposition of θρήνοισι καὶ γόοισι καὶ δακρύμασιν (92) in the form of a hendiatriis and the hyperbolic πρὸς αἰθέρ' ἔκτενοῦμεν (93). The choice of elegiacs probably also underscores the fact that Andromache is performing a θρήνος, for ἔλεγχος seems to be linked with lament already in *Iphigenia in Tauris* (143-6) and Aristophanes' *Birds* (217-9),⁴³³ and it was commonly believed in antiquity that the origin of elegy was threnodic.⁴³⁴ In using the elegiac meter, Euripides produces here not simply a lamentation, but *the* quintessential lamentation uttered by *the* quintessential woman. The gendered connotation of lamentation is often obvious and emphasised in many of Euripides' tragedies such as *Medea* (131-212) and the *Suppliants* (79-85).⁴³⁵

The lines from the *Suppliants* (probably produced almost the same year as *Andromache*) similarly draw connections between motherhood, femaleness, lamentation, and supplication. They also compare mourning women to trickling

⁴³⁰ The *scholia vetera* on line 103 inform us that the lines were sung, a view that has been widely accepted by modern scholars: cf. Recchia (2023), 88-9; Gullo (2014), 745. Recchia (2023) also suggests that the verses might belong to an alternative tradition of sung elegiac poetry.

⁴³¹ Allan (2000), 55; Mossman (1995), 52 n16.

⁴³² Allan (2000), 56; Lloyd (1994), 111.

⁴³³ Recchia (2023), 88 n6. As Recchia notes, the scholia *ad locum* also define this elegiac passage as a θρήνος.

⁴³⁴ Page (1936), 209. Recchia (2023), 88 n.6 challenges the view set forth by Gentili (2006), 59 that the connections the ancients saw between elegy and the threnodic genre arose from the elegiac metre of Hellenistic epitaphs.

⁴³⁵ Cf. Foley (2001), 21-55, esp. 37-44; Lloyd (1994), 111.

streams, and they equally evoke the myth of Niobe (*Andr.* 115-6, 532-4).⁴³⁶ The similar context to the elegiacs prove that Euripides meant to round off the lamentation of his character presenting her as the quintessential *mater dolorosa*. But the proximity of Thetis' statue is also relevant: throughout the play, she is the emblematic mother bereft of her child (cf. 246-7; 1235-7). One must imagine the striking visual effect of Andromache embracing the statue of Thetis, especially since the effigy was most likely located at the centre of the stage, in what has been called 'Euripides' most ambitious use of a statue'.⁴³⁷ Andromache's vulnerability is emphasised as she utters her threnodic, elegiac lament and embraces the emblem of interrupted motherhood.⁴³⁸ Although her status has catastrophically degenerated into that of a concubine, the archetypal wife recalcitrates from embodying any other persona than the quintessential γυνή she has always been. Endowed with extremely conventional female features that portray her as the prototypical γυνή, Andromache is crystallised in her past role as Iliadic wife even in the complicated circumstances of her concubinage.

2.1.1 Man-Fighter: A Masculine Andromache?

So far, the characterisation of Andromache has been consistent: immobilised and mourning, she has been quintessentially female. This does not change in what she says to Hermione in the following episode, where she encapsulates the normative Athenian view of womanhood par excellence. It is in fact commonly (if somewhat tacitly) maintained in the scholarship on the play that Andromache, though barbarian, elicits sympathy not simply because she is victimised, but because she appears to be an

⁴³⁶ Stevens (1971), 110; Golder (1983), 132; Page (1936), 218.

⁴³⁷ Wiles (1997), 200.

⁴³⁸ Cf. Golder (1983), 131-2. For the gendered association between speech-making and masculinity on one hand and singing and femininity on the other, cf. Hall (1999a), 100; Lucas (1968), 160; Chong-Gossard (2008), esp. pp. 105-6 on Euripides' *Antiope* (fr. 185 K.).

exemplum of (female) virtue — a ‘deferential and obedient figure’ that recalls ‘the Andromache of *Iliad* book 6’.⁴³⁹ At the beginning of this confrontation, Hermione enters the stage from the door of the palace, appearing in public. After her self-presentation and a racist argument she advances against Andromache,⁴⁴⁰ the two characters debate female virtue (232-45):

Χορός

δέσποιν’, ὅσον σοι ῥαδίως προσίσταται,
τοσόνδε πείθου τῆδε συμβῆναι λόγοις.

Ερμιόνη

τί σεμνομυθεῖς κάς ἀγῶν’ ἔρχη λόγων,
ὡς δὴ σὺ σώφρων, τάμὰ δ’ οὐχὶ σώφρονα;

Ἀνδρομάχη

οὔκουν ἐφ’ οἷς γε νῦν καθέστηκας λόγοις.

Ερμιόνη

ὁ νοῦς ὁ σός μοι μὴ ξυνοικοίη, γύναι.

Ἀνδρομάχη

νέα πέφυκας καὶ λέγεις αἰσχρῶν πέρι.

Ερμιόνη

σὺ δ’ οὐ λέγεις γε, δρᾶς δέ μ’ εἰς ὅσον δύναι.

⁴³⁹ Sorum (1995), 379.

⁴⁴⁰ See *infra*, sec. 2.2, pp. 153-4.

Ἀνδρομάχη

οὐκ αὖ σιωπῇ Κύπριδος ἀλγήσεις πέρι;

Ἑρμιόνη

τί δ'; οὐ γυναιξὶ ταῦτα πρῶτα πανταχοῦ;

Ἀνδρομάχη

ναί,

καλῶς γε χρωμέναισιν· εἰ δὲ μή, οὐ καλά.

Ἑρμιόνη

οὐ βαρβάρων νόμοισιν οἰκοῦμεν πόλιν.

Ἀνδρομάχη

κάκεϊ τά γ' αἰσχρὰ κἀνθάδ' αἰσχύνην ἔχει.

Ἑρμιόνη

σοφὴ σοφὴ σύ· κατθανεῖν δ' ὅμως σε δεῖ.

In the verbal confrontation between Hermione and Andromache, both focus on σωφροσύνη and accuse each other of lacking it. Hermione's view of virtue is predicated on actions; in her perspective, neither Andromache's words nor her own have any relevance to the discussion on virtue. She makes this abundantly clear: at first, she dismisses the importance of Andromache's words by alleging that she is 'trying to speak solemnly', σεμνομυθεῖς (234), a *dis legomenon* found only at *Hipp.* 490, where the Nurse is opposing Phaedra's idealism and is indeed asserting the value of actions over words (490-1). To the Nurse's (reasonable) observation that Phaedra's concern for οἰ

καλοί... λόγοι (487) and λόγων εύσχημόνων (490) will jeopardise her life, Phaedra reinstates her belief in the importance of words, urging the Nurse to stop speaking: ὦ δεινὰ λέξασ', οὐχὶ συγκλήσεις στόμα/ καὶ μὴ μεθήσεις αὐθις αἰσχίστους λόγους; (498-9). This is comparable to Andromache's protestation at 240: οὐκ αὖ σιωπῆ Κύπριδος ἀλήσεις πέρι;. Andromache's sense of virtue seems indeed diametrically different from Hermione's, based as it is on words: she believes that Hermione's words are evidence of her moral sordidness (οὐκουν ἐφ' οἷς γε νῦν καθέστηκας λόγοις, 236) and chastises her over her 'shameful words' (λέγεις αἰσχροῶν πέρι, 238 — cf. Phaedra's τᾶσχα δ' ἦν λέγῃς καλῶ, 505; εὔ λέγεις γάρ, αἰσχα δέ, 503; αἰσχίστους λόγους, 499). Hermione, on the other hand, reinstates her view of virtue as connected to one's actions at 239, when she reproves Andromache for her actions rather than words (σὺ δ' οὐ λέγεις γε, δρᾶς δέ μ' εἰς ὅσον δύναι). Finally, Hermione concludes her speech with the ominous threat that her action will soon speak for itself: ἀλλὰ γὰρ λόγους/ κρύψω, τὸ δ' ἔργον αὐτὸ σημανεῖ τάχα (264-5). The antithesis word-action is an important theme in the play, and one that is fundamental to acknowledge the ironies of the confrontation. It is in fact through her words that the audience is offered with a presentation of Andromache that is both unfeminine and paradoxically contrasts with Andromache's own view of virtue.

Admittedly, she speaks of female virtue in a pragmatic (rather than verbal) way at least twice, in the same passage. Just before their stichomythia, Andromache censures Hermione for complaining about Neoptolemus' concubinage and asks her if she would have killed her husband, had she married one of the (apparently) polygamous Thracians (215-20). However, she is referring here negatively to her ideal of female virtue, which is, as she goes on to say, silent compliance and concealment of one's needs and desires (220-1; another statement redolent of Phaedra's initial silence over her

νόσος in the *Hippolytus*). Moreover, the hypothetical Thracian husband argument was articulated by Andromache in support of her previous censure of Hermione's arrogant complaints about Neoptolemus (209-10). This was all framed by Andromache explicitly in terms of female virtue: φίλτρον δὲ καὶ τόδ'· οὐ τὸ κάλλος, ᾧ γύναι, /ἀλλ' ἀρεταὶ τέρπουσι τοὺς ξυνευνέτας (207-8). To Andromache, proper female behaviour consists of silence, just like in the following stichomythia. The second and only other instance of a potentially pragmatic view of female virtue is Andromache's unique mention of her repeated suckling of Hector's bastards. She remembers it nostalgically and deems it a token of her value as a woman and wife (221-7): she concludes by contrasting her admirable restraint with Hermione's alleged sexual insatiability (καὶ ταῦτα δρῶσα τῆ ἀρετῆ προσηγόμην/πόσιν, 226-7). But the strange mention of her submissiveness is still brought into the discussion as a counterexample to Hermione's complaints: it is Andromache's silence that matters here, and indeed she suckled Hector's bastards 'so as to show no bitterness' against Hector (225). This is a completely original Euripidean innovation:⁴⁴¹ Euripides here diverts from myth, exaggerating Andromache's submissiveness through the strange invention of Hector's infidelity.

Andromache's 'masochism',⁴⁴² her allegiance to a hyperbolic and excessive male rhetoric, is problematic. Allan suggests that such rhetoric is too overblown; rather, 'we are brought to reflect on these clichés of sexual difference by the speaker's extreme formulation of them'.⁴⁴³ Similarly, it is not easy to accept Andromache's later advice to Menelaus that he should not imitate women, for women are 'a baneful evil' (ἀτηρὸν

⁴⁴¹ Lloyd (1994), 119. Cf. Stevens (1971), 121-2 mentioning the existence of Ἐκτορίδαι in Hellanicus of Lesbos (*FGrHist* fr. 31.5).

⁴⁴² Pomeroy (1975), 105.

⁴⁴³ Allan (2000), 184; Pomeroy (1975), 105-7. Cf. Olsen (2022a), 152. *Contra*, cf. Citti (1979), 156-7.

κακόν, 353). Even more arresting is Andromache's generalising statement at the end of her *agon* with Hermione (269-73):

δεινὸν δ' ἔρπετῶν μὲν ἀγρίων
ἄκη βροτοῖσι θεῶν καταστῆσαί τινα,
ὃ δ' ἔστ' ἐχίδνης καὶ πυρὸς περαιτέρω
οὐδεὶς γυναικὸς φάρμακ' ἐξηύρηκέ πω
[κακῆς· τοσοῦτόν ἐσμεν ἄνθρωποις κακόν].

Even if one decides to include 273, the sense of the utterance remains the same: Andromache speaks in first person plural, including herself within the women that her generalising misogynistic statement attacks.

But a strong irony is palpable in the presentation of Andromache's character: the play constantly makes a spectacle of Andromache's verbal defiance and rhetorical daring. Andromache's reply to Hermione encapsulating her view of female virtue begins with quite a lengthy contextualisation of her freedom of speech (183-91) 'which makes ostentatious use of the kind of rhetorical techniques which were being developed in the later 5th C'.⁴⁴⁴ This culminates in the proud affirmation of her unwillingness to yield to the pressures that would not let her speak: ὅμως δ' ἑμαυτὴν οὐ προδοῦσ' ἄλώσομαι (191). Scholars highlighted that Andromache's rhetorical strategies are bound to be unpersuasive from the beginning: they lack tact and sympathy, and at times reach a level of verbal aggression which is naturally counterproductive. Andromache herself will underline this in 459-60, when she speaks about her own verbal resistance, and

⁴⁴⁴ Lloyd (1994), 117. Cf. Goebel (1989), 35.

provokes Menelaus to proceed with her murderous intents: ὡς ἀθώπευτόν γέ σε/ γλώσσης ἀφήσω τῆς ἐμῆς καὶ παῖδα σὴν. Stevens explains Andromache's failing rhetoric by arguing that Euripides' dramaturgical purpose in such a type of *agon* is simply to enable characters to state their case.⁴⁴⁵ But it is also possible to argue that her strangely self-defeating rhetoric unveils Andromache's daring character and her verbal resistance no less than Antigone's *agones* displayed her daring and disobedience.⁴⁴⁶

This is certainly implied by Hermione's first reply: τί σεμνομυθεῖς κάς ἀγῶν' ἔρχη λόγων,/ ὡς δὴ σὺ σώφρων, τάμὰ δ' οὐχὶ σώφρονα; (234-5). Hermione again bids Andromache to be silent at 249, to which she replies that she will be silent: ἰδοῦ σιωπῶ κάπιλάζυμαι στόμα (250). The next verses again foreground Andromache's speech, even if they ostensibly regard a practical action. Hermione asks Andromache to *tell* her what she wants to hear (i.e., that she is going to leave the altar; ἐκεῖνο λέξον οὔπερ οὔνεκ' ἐστάλην, 251), to which Andromache mockingly replies that she can only *tell* her that she has no sense (λέγω σ' ἐγὼ νοῦν οὐκ ἔχειν ὅσον σ' ἔδει, 252). The apparently awkward phrasing — why would Hermione need Andromache to *tell* her that she is leaving the altar? — again directs the audience's attention to Andromache's role as a speaker, and to the significance of her *words*. Once more, Andromache's verbal defiance is evident in her dialogue with Menelaus, which she herself presents as an *agon* out of Hermione's *words* (ὅστις θυγατρὸς ἀντίπαιδος ἐκ λόγων/τοσόνδ' ἔπνευσας καὶ γυναικὶ δυστυχεῖ/ δούλη κατέστης εἰς ἀγῶν', 326-8). Ironically, she even suggests possible explanations (which she proves to be inconsistent) justifying Hermione's

⁴⁴⁵ Stevens (1971), 118.

⁴⁴⁶ Lloyd (1994), 117 also contemplates the possibility that the purpose of the *agon* was to display Andromache's character, but believes that the dominant characterisation emerging from the scene is Andromache's 'intellectual superiority'. Cf. Mossman (1995), 101.

potential expulsion from Neoptolemus' house after her murder (σὺ δ' ἐκδιδοῦς/ ἄλλω τί λέξεις; πότερον ὡς κακὸν πόσιν/ φεύγει τὸ ταύτης σῶφρον; ἀλλ' οὐ πείσεται, 344-7). After her aggressive plea to Menelaus, the chorus cannot help but censure Andromache because of her lack of self-restraint: ἄγαν ἔλεξας ὡς γυνὴ πρὸς ἄρσενας <...> καί σου τὸ σῶφρον ἐξετόξευσεν φρενός (364-5). The chorus' statement is surprising, given that Andromache is arguing, if aggressively, for a just cause (she is confronted with the potential death of her child).⁴⁴⁷ When Andromache pleads her case in front of Peleus, again, she prefaces her explanation of the situation with τί σοι λέγω; (560). Just before leaving the stage, after Peleus' successful expulsion of Menelaus, Andromache thanks Peleus for saving her life, and warns him to watch out for potential ambushes, to which Peleus interestingly replies to not speak cowardly words like women do (οὐ μὴ γυναικῶν δειλὸν εἰσοίσεις λόγον, 757). By this line, the last to be uttered to and about her, we realise that Andromache has not spoken like a woman at all throughout the play.⁴⁴⁸

A good parallel for Andromache is provided by Electra and Antigone. Sophocles' Electra is akin to Euripides' Andromache in her masochistic allegiance to patriarchy; to some feminists, she represents the 'archetypal defender of the patriarchal order'.⁴⁴⁹ However, as the play increasingly blurs the distinction between ἔργα and λόγοι, Electra's verbal powerfulness, her use of words as 'weapons' make her a highly transgressive woman to the point that she appears to be oscillating between masculinity and femininity: to Wheeler, she appears to be '*hors catégorie*'.⁴⁵⁰ Similarly, Antigone has appeared since

⁴⁴⁷ Lloyd (1994), 126.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. Aristotle's criticism of the Euripidean Melanippe as too σοφή for a woman (*Poet.* 1454a28ff.): as Montemurro (2019), 80 and Mayhew (1999), 201 note, it is her verbal sophistication that is unbecoming for a female character for Aristotle.

⁴⁴⁹ Wheeler (2003), 383; cf. Kristeva (1986), 48.

⁴⁵⁰ Wheeler (2003), 383.

Hegel to embody 'feminine' irrationalism against Creon's 'masculine' rationalism; her defiance in the play, after all, is instrumental to performing a stereotypically female act, that of observing the funeral rites of a member of her family.⁴⁵¹ For instance, Buchan argues that Antigone's defiance is motivated by domestic, female concerns; she does not venture into the masculine realm of politics, thus retaining her femininity: in her words, 'she wishes to bury him because that is her task, her responsibility, even her right as a woman'.⁴⁵² But one wonders whether the same reasoning could not be applied then to tragic women altogether. Even the most manifestly masculine women in Attic tragedy act in defence of domestic rather than public reasons, but they are explicitly presented as masculinised, and the text of the tragedies insist on this troubling ambiguity.

Antigone is one of them. As Butler's influential reading rightly maintained, it is specifically her verbal audacity that is perceived by Creon to be transgressive in heavily gendered terms —⁴⁵³ an opinion shared by Ismene, who had earlier categorised Antigone's speech as unfeminine.⁴⁵⁴ By her own defiant act, but above all, by her own defiant speech, Antigone has become 'a man' (484-5).⁴⁵⁵ Although Creon and Antigone do (to an extent) embody a contrast between masculinity and femininity, this can be explained with Griffith's observation that hyperbolic and emblematic femininity is often functional as a foil to the characterisation of masculinised heroines like Medea

⁴⁵¹ Griffith (2001), 130.

⁴⁵² Buchan (1999), 112.

⁴⁵³ Butler (2000), 10-1: 'Antigone's deed is, in fact, ambiguous from the start, not only the defiant act in which she buries her brother but the verbal act in which she answers Creon's question; thus hers is an act in language'.

⁴⁵⁴ Griffith (2001), 132.

⁴⁵⁵ Griffith (2001), 132; Saxonhouse (1985), 29.

and Clytemnestra.⁴⁵⁶ Antigone appears in the end to be one of the most fully developed portrayals of the ‘masculine woman’ in Greek tragedy.⁴⁵⁷

But Andromache is no less masculinised than Antigone. Her speeches are equally defiant, caustic, sarcastic — sarcasm being also a typical feature of Antigone’s rebellious voice.⁴⁵⁸ But it is also her verbal skilfulness and logical rigour that strikes a dissonant note with the archetype of submissive wife that she should otherwise embody. Andromache’s rhetorical ability is redolent of the skillfully wrought speech of Pasiphae, an archetypal ‘transgressive woman’, against her husband Minos in Euripides’ *Cretans*. In *TrGF* v, fr. 472e, defending herself from the accusations of lasciviousness and adultery that have been raised against her, Pasiphae resorts to arguments and rhetorical techniques that Andromache also uses in her eponymous tragedy in order to prove her innocence. Pasiphae’s defence has appeared to scholars to be ‘a beautiful piece of rhetoric’,⁴⁵⁹ ‘[s]ophistic brilliance’,⁴⁶⁰ and the ‘rigorosa tecnica’⁴⁶¹ of the argument has been praised. Like Pasiphae,⁴⁶² Andromache is also accused of sophistry by Hermione at 245; like her, Euripides takes pains to present her as a skilful orator capable of arguing logically but vehemently against her accuser — except Pasiphae’s transgression does not seem in contrast, but in line with her persona as the archetypal ‘bad woman’. In both cases, however, the verbal audacity of the heroine is underscored through a paradoxical emphasis on their virtuous, ‘feminine’ silence, radically complicating their position vis-à-vis the norms of female virtue. Pasiphae, too, is proud

⁴⁵⁶ Griffith (2001), 124.

⁴⁵⁷ Pomeroy (1975), 99.

⁴⁵⁸ Kitzinger (1976), 178-9. Cf. Conacher (1967), 176.

⁴⁵⁹ Webster (1967), 90; Tralau (2017), 443.

⁴⁶⁰ Reckford (1974), 319; Tralau (2017), 443

⁴⁶¹ Cantarella (1964), 78; Tralau (2017), 443.

⁴⁶² Cozzoli (2001), 78 tentatively translates as ‘si è affilata dunque la lingua’.

of her ability to keep her bestiality as a secret for long before Minos disclosed it to the public, but the contradiction between her past gender-compliant behaviour and her present verbal brazenness is underscored by the reaction of her husband at 44-6.⁴⁶³ Like Antigone and Pasiphae, Andromache's verbal confrontation with Hermione and Menelaus endows her with a transgressive and masculine aura which paradoxically contrasts with her own view of proper womanhood, which indeed consists of silence.

Like Medea and Clytemnestra,⁴⁶⁴ the pathetic description of her maternal protectiveness frames her masculinisation as all the more striking. But, in comparison to Medea, Andromache is not simply 'transgressive'. More crucially, she becomes her own paradox: women should be silent, but she herself, the emblem of female virtue, cannot be silent. As we will see, Andromache's silence and her verbal defiance are also fundamental in *Troades*. After announcing to Andromache the dreadful news that the Greek generals have decided that Astyanax must be killed, Talthylbius exhorts her to remain silent and to abstain from cursing the Greeks, for otherwise they will leave the corpse of her child unburied (731-4):

ἡμεῖς δὲ πρὸς γυναῖκα μάρνασθαι μίαν

οἴοί τε. τούτων οὐνεκ' οὐ μάχης ἔρᾶν

οὐδ' αἰσχρὸν οὐδὲν οὐδ' ἐπίφθονόν σε δρᾶν,

οὐδ' αὖ σ' Ἀχαιοῖς βούλομαι ῥίπτειν ἄρας.

⁴⁶³ Chong-Gossard (2008), 149. That silence and speech might have been thematically important in the *Cretans* may be suggested by the dense web of intertextual connections with the *Hippolytus*, where the theme is investigated at length: Cozzoli (2001), 10. Cf. Chong-Gossard (2008), 134-45 on silence in the *Hippolytus*.

⁴⁶⁴ Griffith (2001), 124.

Here Euripides plays on the etymology of Andromache's name (man-fighter), a source of 'concern' for many literary critics and readers both in Greece and Rome, including Ennius ('*Andromachae nomen qui indidit recte indidit, item... imitari dum uoluit Euripidem... ille ait ideo nomen additum Andromachae quod ἀνδρὶ μάχεται*, Varro, *Ling.* 7.82;⁴⁶⁵ cf. *TrGF* ii, fr. 1094; *Anth. Gr.* 11, 378.5).⁴⁶⁶

Andromache's own vision of virtue, then, is not only problematic because 'overblown': rather, its masochistic exaggeration brings to the fore the normative expectations of silence and compliance in Athenian gender ideology: as Pelling has it on the Andromache of *Troades* (who is less hyperbolic than this one), 'the point would be lost if Andromache's marital behaviour and ideals were simply routine. She needs to be an extreme example of what she is'; it can represent, in other words, 'an ideological construct'.⁴⁶⁷ Yet if even the archetypal 'good woman' is brought to transgress this ideology of silence,⁴⁶⁸ some important questions must be raised that do not simply categorise Andromache as an unsympathetic character,⁴⁶⁹ but rather question the value of the morals inherent in these expectations, and in the hierarchical structures that they

⁴⁶⁵ Jocelyn (1967), 236-8 argues that Varro and Cicero were wrong in assuming that Ennius was directly working from a Euripidean play. Her suggestion that Ennius might have translated a Greek imitator of Euripides does not impair the argument, as imitators would often copy their predecessor's phrases, by Jocelyn's own admission.

⁴⁶⁶ Graziosi and Haubold (2010), 50. Cf. the peculiar iconography of Andromache represented as fighting the Greeks in a cup attributed to the Brygos Painter (Paris, Musée du Louvre, G152, *ARV*² 369.1; *BAPD* 203900): cf. Young (2023), 88-9. By extension, female warriors wielding pestles in Ilioupersis iconography have been identified as Andromache: cf. Williams (1991), 52. Cf. also Sen. *Tro.* 668ff.

⁴⁶⁷ Pelling (1999), 193.

⁴⁶⁸ Though Andromache's intervention in the *Iliad* may already appear transgressive in the way she *speaks*: cf. Seaford (1993), 137; Zamperetti Martín (2018).

⁴⁶⁹ Torrance (2005), 66 is quite unique in underlining Andromache's defying and even transgressive character, yet she concludes that this means that Andromache is not 'an entirely sympathetic character in her fifth century context'.

inhere to and support.⁴⁷⁰ On a closer look, however, this hierarchical disturbance cannot be understood in isolation from the other social discourses that the play mobilises. Before resuming our discussion of the gender structures explored and upturned by the play, then, it is necessary to take into consideration the other hierarchies that the scene on Andromache's female virtue activates and explores — the first being the moral difference between Greek and barbarian.

2.2 Inventing the Barbarian Hermione: Ethnic Discourse and Class

When Hermione enters the stage, soon after Andromache's elegiacs and before Andromache's display of rhetorical ability, she is dressed extravagantly and luxuriantly, and draws attention to the clothes that she is wearing (147-55):

κόσμον μὲν ἀμφὶ κρατὶ χρυσέας χλιδῆς
στολμόν τε χρωτὸς τόνδε ποικίλων πέπλων
οὐ τῶν Ἀχιλλέως οὐδὲ Πηλέως ἀπὸ
δόμων ἀπαρχὰς δεῦρ' ἔχουσ' ἀφικόμην,
ἀλλ' ἐκ Λακαίνης Σπαρτιάτιδος χθονὸς
Μενέλαος ἡμῖν ταῦτα δωρεῖται πατήρ
πολλοῖς σὺν ἔδνοις, ὥστ' ἔλευθεροστομεῖν.
[ὕμᾱς μὲν οὖν τοῖσδ' ἀνταμείβομαι λόγοις.]

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. Vernant (2020), 300 on Oedipus: 'superhuman and subhuman are joined and are mixed together in the same person. *And as this person is the model of man*, all limits which would permit one to delineate human life, to fix unequivocally its status, are erased'.

σὺ δ' οὔσα δούλη καὶ δορίκτητος γυνή

δόμους κατασχεῖν ἐκβαλοῦσ' ἡμᾶς θέλεις

τούσδε...

In a striking parallel to her father,⁴⁷¹ she is concerned with her self-presentation as a wealthy member of the upper classes through her excessive display of wealth.⁴⁷² The visually striking headpiece and the embroidered robe are a sign of her freedom, which she immediately contrasts with Andromache's status as a slave.⁴⁷³ It is her wealth that enables her to 'speak freely' (ὥστ' ἐλευθεροστομεῖν, 153);⁴⁷⁴ Andromache implicitly acknowledges this when in her reply she expresses her fear that her enslavement might prevent her from speaking (ἐγὼ δὲ ταρβῶ μὴ τὸ δουλεύειν μέ σοι/ λόγων ἀπώση πόλλ' ἔχουσιν ἔνδικα, 186-7). She is arrogant, yet not wrong, for 'the connection of independent wealth to free speech is characteristic of the aristocratic world of heroic myth'.⁴⁷⁵ The difference in social standing is exactly what Hermione stresses when she immediately after defines Andromache δούλη καὶ δορίκτητος γυνή (155). Although Hermione recognises that Andromache used to be wealthy like her (164), she tells her to acknowledge that she is a slave and to behave like one. Her injunction follows to fall prostrate at her knees, sweep her house, sprinkle Achelous' water from golden jars (another symbol of wealth), and to admit her situation of inferiority and alienation in Phthia (165-8).

⁴⁷¹ See *infra*, sec. 2.3, p. 163.

⁴⁷² Collard, Cropp, and Lee (2009), 247: 'Hermione is status-conscious'.

⁴⁷³ McHardy (2020) analyses examples of female violence against other women in Greek tragedy (including Hermione and Andromache) and finds that *status* is crucial: 'violence is regularly associated with status and power dynamics, where a woman seeks to subdue or belittle her perceived rival by playing on her status as a slave' (p. 28).

⁴⁷⁴ For the importance of the word in Athenian self-perception, cf. Aesch. *Suppl.* 948-9 with Burian (2011), 112.

⁴⁷⁵ Allan (2000), 130.

However, Hermione’s self-characterisation is engineered through a more complex intersection of hierarchies. Immediately after, she reminds Andromache that she is now living in a Greek city (Ελλάς πόλις, 169) and is thus powerless. This is coherent with the chauvinistic rhetoric and her sense of superiority as a Greek woman. The pleonastic clarification that she is from ‘the Laconian land of Sparta’ (ἐκ Λακαίνης Σπαρτιάτιδος χθονός, 151) can be interpreted as having contemporary relevance— the villainous Hermione is quintessentially Spartan — but is also a sign of Hermione’s identification as a Greek. In fact, she ends her speech by contrasting the allegedly barbarian custom of polygamy with Hellenic monogamy, and includes herself within the Greek community that Andromache, she enjoins, should not corrupt with her barbarian practice: ἄ μὴ παρ’ ἡμᾶς ἔσφερ’ (177). At 243, finally, Hermione again speaks in first person plural, as the representative of a collective and civic ‘we’, declaring that ‘we do not govern the city by barbarian laws’: οὐ βαρβάρων νόμοισιν οἰκοῦμεν πόλιν. In fact, the most patent differentiation that Hermione intends to make is not that between slave and aristocratic, but between barbarian and Greek, thus articulating what has been called ‘the most flamboyant passage of anti-barbarian rhetoric in extant tragedy’ (170-6):⁴⁷⁶

ἔς τοῦτο δ’ ἦκεις ἀμαθίας, δύστηνε σύ,
 ἢ παιδί πατρὸς ὃς σὸν ὤλεσεν πόσιν
 τολμᾶς ξυνεύδειν καὶ τέκν’ ἀθύεντῶν πάρα
 τίκτειν. τοιοῦτον πᾶν τὸ βάρβαρον γένος·
 πατήρ τε θυγατρὶ παῖς τε μητρὶ μείγνυται

⁴⁷⁶ Hall (1989), 188.

κόρη τ' ἀδελφῶ, διὰ φόνου δ' οἱ φίλτατοι
χωροῦσι, καὶ τῶνδ' οὐδὲν ἐξείργει νόμος.

We will see later that Hermione's rhetoric will prove unsubstantial. However, it is also important to consider that the audience, or at least a part of it, might have not disagreed with Hermione. For instance, as Stevens notices, it was observed by Herodotus in 1.135 that Persians 'imported' incest from Greece. However, Stevens also includes other examples of Greek writers testifying to the practice of incest in foreign countries.⁴⁷⁷ Hall, similarly, who observes on these lines that the audience surely must have not forgotten their Jocasta and Oedipus or Macareus and Canace,⁴⁷⁸ elsewhere adduces evidence for the connection in Athenian ideology between incest and barbarism.⁴⁷⁹ This means that it is not easy to conclude that Hermione's accusations must have immediately rung hollow to the Athenian audience.⁴⁸⁰ But what is certain is that Euripides took pains to build this flamboyant piece of chauvinistic rhetoric, also supported by Hermione's accusation against Andromache of making her barren through magic potions (157-60; cf. 32-5):

στυγοῦμαι δ' ἀνδρὶ φαρμάκοισι σοῖς,
νηδὺς δ' ἀκύμων διὰ σέ μοι διόλλυται·
δεινὴ γὰρ ἠπειρῶτις ἐς τὰ τοιάδε
ψυχὴ γυναικῶν [...]

Again, while the accusation is ostensibly false by the end of the tragedy, the argument is not far-fetched, if one remembers that the play was written a few years after

⁴⁷⁷ Stevens (1971), 117.

⁴⁷⁸ Hall (1989), 189.

⁴⁷⁹ Hall (1989), 53.

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. Grube (1941), 201.

Euripides' own *Medea*, where the name-character was also shown to be endowed with specific pharmaceutical skills related to the sphere of fertility (*Med.* 718).⁴⁸¹

And yet it is exactly through the articulation of these two discourses that the play undercuts Hermione's presentation. Throughout her speech, and during the *agon*, Hermione's identification as a member of the aristocracy, her display of wealth, her presentation as a member of the upper classes of society intersect with discourses of ethnicity. Hall has well demonstrated that flaunting wealth may in Athenian tragedy have 'barbarian' connotations, which however need to be contextualised by searching for what she calls the 'vocabulary of barbarism'.⁴⁸² Such terminology is applied to Hermione by the first two lines of her speech: both her κόσμον... χρυσέας χλιδῆς (147) and her στολμόν τε χρωτὸς τόνδε ποικίλων πέπλων (148) are evocative of the luxuriant clothing usually associated with barbarians.⁴⁸³ Even more than ἀβροσύνη, Hall regards χλιδή as the main word associated to the excessive luxury of the Persian court in Aeschylus' *Persae*. She rightly notices that 'gold' and 'golden' are constantly applied to the Persians, with the opening sentence of the play defining the palace 'rich and golden'.⁴⁸⁴

More importantly, the juxtaposition of the adjective 'golden' to χλιδή is simply the reverberation of Andromache's presentation of her former self in the second line of the play (ποθ' ἔδνων σὺν πολυχρύσῳ χλιδῆϊ, 2), anticipated by the previous address of Andromache to Asia as a whole.⁴⁸⁵ For Andromache appeared from the beginning

⁴⁸¹ Stevens (1971), 95. Critics have easily dismissed Hermione's words: cf. Dué (2006), 162: 'because Hermione is an admittedly sex-crazed murderess, her denigration of Andromache is severely undercut'.

⁴⁸² Hall (1989), 210.

⁴⁸³ Hall (1989), 209.

⁴⁸⁴ Hall (1989), 80-1, 128.

⁴⁸⁵ Erbse (1966), 281; Kamerbeek (1943), 57. Cf. Golder (1983), 126 n.13.

emphatically as an ‘Asian’ woman. The play opened with Andromache’s apostrophe, unusually directed at her past rather than present situation.⁴⁸⁶ More specifically, however, the initial words of the play did not refer to Troy at all, but rather to Ἀσιάτιδος γῆς σχῆμα, Θηβαία πόλις (1). As the play opened, Andromache immediately addressed not Troy, not even Cilician Thebe, but rather Asia as a whole,⁴⁸⁷ a striking orientalisising opening that immediately categorised her as a barbarian woman.

Hermione’s entrance seems to repeat Andromache’s emphatically oriental retelling of her story:⁴⁸⁸ her rich dowry, which she flaunts in 153 (πολλοῖς σὺν ἔδνοις), is again an echo of Andromache’s ἔδνων in line 2. Hermione also specifies that this is the dowry she reached Phthia with (ἀφικόμην, 150), quite a gratuitous specification, if it were not a repetition of Andromache’s use of the same word in 3 (ἀφικόμην), moreover in the same metrical position at the beginning of her speech. In assimilating Hermione to Andromache, Euripides foreshadows the paradox of Hermione’s hostile behaviour and rhetoric. In fact, when she tells Andromache that ‘here is not Hector, nor Priam nor gold, but a Greek city’ (οὐ Πρίαμος οὐδὲ χρυσός, ἀλλ’ Ἑλλάς πόλις, 169), χρυσός strikes a dissonant note with her verbal emphasis on her golden diadem, visible to the audience as she utters this sentence. At the same time, it also contrasts with the immediately precedent χρυσηλάτων/ τευχέων (166-7). Through the barbaric aspect of her apparel, Hermione ‘ousts Andromache from the unenviable position of the extravagant queen’,⁴⁸⁹ and strikes a parallel with the barbarised Helen of *Orestes* (126-9, 1426-36)

⁴⁸⁶ Stevens (1971), 84.

⁴⁸⁷ Stevens (1971), 85. σχῆμα generated some textual problems: one of the scholia glosses it as πρόσχημα, but the lack of parallels casts significant doubt on its reliability. The periphrastic use of the word with a genitive, on the other hand, could hardly designate the city of Thebe, but would be rather equivalent to Ἀσιᾶτις γῆ.

⁴⁸⁸ Olsen (2022a), 152 has interpreted Hermione’s exaggerated repetition as exposing ‘the normative sexual order’.

⁴⁸⁹ Battezzato (1999-2000), 358.

and Clytemnestra of *Electra* (314-7, 966, 998-1003).⁴⁹⁰ Her expectation that Andromache should fall at her feet (165), moreover, is effectively a request of *proskynesis* — exactly like the equally barbarised Helen, her mother, in *Troades*.⁴⁹¹

Most importantly, Hermione's later entrance on stage in the second 'part' of the play literalises the metaphor of the barbaric Hermione. After Andromache's *agon* with Menelaus and her rescue by Peleus, Hermione runs in frenzy from the house to the stage, repeating her first entrance, yet in a poignant *contrappasso*. Her monologue before her *agon* with Andromache drew attention to her golden headpiece on her head and embroidered clothes 'on her skin' (147-8); this time, she starts by expressing her intention to tear her hair and lacerate her skin (825-7).⁴⁹² The visual reversal of her display of wealth must have been impressive; with it, the audience witnessed the spectacular rejection of Hermione's wealth,⁴⁹³ her transition from the élite woman that she boasted to be to a slavish, helpless, barbarian character. Instead of her golden diadem, her hair is rather covered by a mantle, a signal that Hermione seems to be past her previous display of confidence, but also a symbolic stage prop that assimilates her to Andromache. Hermione refers to the mantle generally as λεπτόμιτον φάρος (831). φάρος is a quite general word for 'cloak', but a scholiast informs us that this φάρος is a κρήδεμνον, a more specific type of veil covering shoulders and head and used by Euripides for the mourning Antigone at *Phoen.* 1490.⁴⁹⁴ The funeral nuances of Hermione's presentation appear also through her threat to tear her hair, rend her

⁴⁹⁰ Stavrinou (2016), 7.

⁴⁹¹ See *infra*, sec. 3.1, p. 238. Saïd (2022), 80.

⁴⁹² Cf. Stavrinou (2016), 10.

⁴⁹³ Stavrinou (2016), 12: 'her tearing off the dress symbolises the casting off of her previous status and all her pretensions'; cf. Scharffenberger (2020), 148.

⁴⁹⁴ Stevens (1971), 195.

peplos, and lacerate her body.⁴⁹⁵ These clues again approximate Hermione's lyric lament to Andromache's unique elegiacs, which we saw also appropriated the semantics of threnody. Hermione now wishes for death and even wonders why she should keep on living at all (841-4), repeating the same disconsolate rhetorical questions of Andromache in her lamentation (ὦμοι ἐγὼ μελέα, τί μ' ἐχρῆν ἔτι φέγγος ὀρᾶσθαι/ Ερμιόνας δούλαν, 113-4). It might not be a coincidence that Hermione wishes to die by fire in 847, as this was the first threat she uttered against Andromache in 257, and Hermione's fury against Andromache was also compared to fire by the chorus at 487. Her lyric lament, to be paralleled with Andromache's elegiac song in the 'first act', is punctuated with a tragic irony that emphasises the *peripeteia* of Hermione's condition by assimilating her to Andromache: she wonders which god's statue she should now run to as a suppliant, and whether she should fall at the knees of her own slave as a slave: τίνος ἄγαλμα θεῶν ἱκέτις ὀρμαθῶ; /ἦ δούλα δούλας γόνασι προσπέσω; (859-60).⁴⁹⁶ 859 echoes Hermione's impious threat that the altar of Thetis would not save Andromache in 160-2; 860 is inevitably redolent of her previous command to her slave to prostrate and fall at her knees (προσπεσεῖν τ' ἐμὸν γόνυ, 165).⁴⁹⁷

Repeating avian imagery previously associated with her slave (411; 505 on Molossus), Hermione also wishes to transform into a 'dark winged bird' to fly away from Phthia (861-5):⁴⁹⁸

Φθιάδος ἐκ γᾶς

⁴⁹⁵ Lloyd (1994), 146.

⁴⁹⁶ Torrance (2005), 47.

⁴⁹⁷ McHardy (2020), 24.

⁴⁹⁸ I follow here Stevens' emended text.

κυανόπτερος ὄρνις ἀρθείην

πευκᾶεν σκάφος ᾗ

διὰ Κυανέας ἐπέρασεν ἀκτὰς

πρωτόπλοος πλάτα.

Strikingly, Hermione's escapism does not comprehend Sparta. As Kyriakou observes, Hermione is in a 'tight spot' because, much like a foreign prisoner-woman, she is isolated as a result of the alienation from her original household and failure to be socially integrated into the new household.⁴⁹⁹ Hermione's isolation, which she confirms again in 918 (αἰδοῖ γε· καί μ' ἔρημον οἴχεται λιπών), parallels Andromache's initial isolation (νῦν δ' ἔρημος εἶ φίλων, 78). But it is even more striking that Hermione wishes 'to fly away where the ship of pine wood passed between the dark cliffs', which strangely imbues Hermione's escapism with a specific exotic undertone. In *IT*, the Symplegades represent the boundary that must be crossed to be saved from the barbarity of Tauris (241, 392, 746, 889-91).⁵⁰⁰ The association between the Argonauts and the Symplegades is found in *Medea*, where the direction of the crossing is clearly towards Colchis (1-2).⁵⁰¹ Above all, the chorus has just mentioned the Symplegades in the previous ode in reference to the Argonautic expedition, which prefigures the clash between Greeks and barbarians in the Trojan war (790-801).⁵⁰² Andromache was isolated in Greece; Hermione, a Greek woman, becomes alienated from Phthia and dreams of flying to Asia, becoming the barbarian woman that we already suspected she was since the very first lines that she uttered.

⁴⁹⁹ Kyriakou (2016), 144.

⁵⁰⁰ Parker (2016), 144.

⁵⁰¹ Allan (2002), 70.

⁵⁰² See *infra*, sec. 2.3, pp. 175-6.

In fact, by the end of the play, Hermione's actions prove how she does not measure up to her own definition of σωφροσύνη, forced to commit actions that overlap with the allegedly barbarian vices she earlier castigated (170-6). Family murder and sexual relationships with members of the same family, associated with τὸ βάρβαρον γένος (173), are now projected onto her character. Ironically enough, Hermione will marry Orestes, her cousin.⁵⁰³ This would not necessarily be seen as incestuous in Athens, but Euripides takes pains to underline the family ties between them. Hermione supplicates Orestes by Zeus 'the god of kindred', a reference which is anticipated by Orestes when he tells the chorus of 'foreign women' (ξένοι γυναῖκες, 881 — foreign to Orestes, that is)⁵⁰⁴ that he is looking for Hermione, τηλουρὰ γὰρ/ ναίουσ' ἀφ' ἡμῶν πεδί' ὁμῶς ἐστὶν φίλη (889-90). The shared origin is emphasised again by Orestes when he tells Hermione that τὸ συγγενὲς γὰρ δεινόν, ἔν τε τοῖς κακοῖς/ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν κρεῖσσον οἰκείου φίλου (985-6). What is more, Orestes is not only Hermione's cousin, but is also the murderer of her husband Neoptolemus.⁵⁰⁵ Even more ironically, Orestes repeatedly refers to Clytemnestra and his murder (884; 973-81) and goes as far as defining himself ὁ μητροφόντης (999) — quite a prosaic word that is repeatedly applied to Orestes in Euripides' *Orestes* as an insult (479, 1140, 1424, 1587).⁵⁰⁶ The conceptual connection between Orestes' matricide and barbarian custom is notably articulated in *IT* by Thoas, a barbarian himself, who is shocked at the news of Clytemnestra's murder at the hand of her son: Ἀπολλων, οὐδ' ἐν βαρβάροις ἔτλη τις ἄν (1174).⁵⁰⁷ The connection between

⁵⁰³ Cf. Synodinou (1974), 74.

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. also the emphasis on Orestes' foreignness: καὶ μὴν ὄδ' ἀλλόχρως τις ἔκδημος ξένος/ σπουδῆ πρὸς ἡμᾶς βημάτων πορεύεται (879-80).

⁵⁰⁵ Boulter (1966), 54.

⁵⁰⁶ Cf. Willink (1986), 273 on the pejorative definite article.

⁵⁰⁷ Hall (1989), 186.

incest and kin murder, strong in Hermione's view of barbarian ethos, is explicitly made by Orestes when he tells Hermione that he cannot marry 'outside the family' (973-6).

As her presentation as Greek and noble falters, Hermione lives through her own *peripeteia* not simply in the generic sense of a reversal of fortune, but precisely in the unmasking of a similarity, an assimilation, of herself, to the same character she disparaged as both a slave and a barbarian. What is more, it is precisely because of her paradoxical status (rich and royal, but ignoble) that she is characterised as a barbarian; and it is precisely because she is barbarised that her aristocratic status shows to be devoid of nobility and degenerates into its polar opposite, slavery — for slavery and barbarism are ideologically overlapping. The two hierarchies are enmeshed, and the disturbance of one triggers a similar reversal in the other thread of the skein. Yet if status/class and ethnicity can be said to be mutually supporting, and mutually undermining, what is the role of the man/woman hierarchy in the skein? Can Andromache's destabilisation of female virtue appear as another interlocking thread of this entanglement? Or is it rather a separate, distinct axis? Before we return to Andromache's gender, it will be best to examine the scene in which Andromache's transgression is most overtly underscored: the second confrontation of the play, that between Andromache and Menelaus.

2.3 Menelaus with the Complex: Class and Gender in Crisis

Andromache's invective against Menelaus earns her the criticism of the chorus, who reproach her for her gender transgression. To this, however, Menelaus replies (366-79):

γύναι, τάδ' ἔστι μικρὰ καὶ μοναρχίας

οὐκ ἄξι', ὡς φῆς, τῆς ἐμῆς οὐδ' Ἑλλάδος.

εὖ δ' ἴσθ', ὅτου τις τυγχάνει χρεῖαν ἔχων,

τοῦτ' ἔσθ' ἐκάστω μείζον ἢ Τροίαν ἐλεῖν.

κάγῳ θυγατρί (μεγάλα γὰρ κρίνω τάδε,

λέχους στέρεσθαι) σύμμαχος καθίσταμαι.

[...]

δούλων δ' ἐκεῖνον τῶν ἐμῶν ἄρχειν χρεῶν

καὶ τῶν ἐκείνου τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἡμᾶς τε πρός·

φίλων γὰρ οὐδὲν ἴδιον, οἵτινες φίλοι

ὀρθῶς πεφύκασ', ἀλλὰ κοινὰ χρήματα.

μένων δὲ τοὺς ἀπόντας, εἰ μὴ θήσομαι

τάμ' ὡς ἄριστα, φαῦλός εἰμι κού σοφός.

Menelaus' defence picks up on Andromache's accusation (324-9) that he is φαῦλος (325) and not worthy of Troy (328-9). However, his rebuttal is constructed upon his social status, and specifically upon his royal status (μοναρχίας, 366) and his possessions (χρήματα, 377), replicating the fastidious display of wealth of Hermione at 147ff. Menelaus articulates several points, yet they all share basic aim: asserting his power and defending him against the charge of moral ineptness, which at the end of his speech is categorised both as being φαῦλος and (not) being σοφός — terms constantly associated in the play with the assessment of morality. Menelaus' defence attempts to re-establish his moral integrity by appealing to his social authority, yet this authority

has important connotations of status and class. Milani argued that by the fifth century the concept of δοῦλος came to constitute the logical antithesis to two different identities, namely that of master (δεσπότης) and free (ἐλεύθερος).⁵⁰⁸ The two antitheses do not necessarily overlap: a master is always free, a free man is not necessarily a master. But they do overlap in Menelaus, who speaks of his identity as a free man, a master, and even a monarch. Deceiving Andromache, Menelaus is anxious to end the agon by reasserting the hierarchy inherent in their contrast: ἀλλ' ἔρπ' ἐς οἴκους τούσδ', ἴν' εἰς ἐλευθέρους/ δούλη γεγῶσα μήποθ' ὑβρίζειν μάθης (433-4). He appeals to his power and freedom, and grounds these in his authority as an owner, thus bringing about a different yet overlapping contrast between passive possessions-slaves (φίλων γὰρ οὐδὲν ἴδιον, οἵτινες φίλοι/ ὀρθῶς πεφύκασ', ἀλλὰ κοινὰ χρήματα, 376-7) and powerful owners-masters (δούλων δ' ἐκεῖνον τῶν ἐμῶν ἄρχειν χρεῶν/ καὶ τῶν ἐκείνου τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἡμᾶς τε πρὸς, 374).⁵⁰⁹ Wealth here intersects with Menelaus' identity as a master in a way that creates an opposition between powerless slaves at the bottom of the social scale and the rich monarch, powerful over other free men as well as over his slaves — a polarised hierarchy founded on assemblages of class and status markers, as we saw with *Hecuba*.⁵¹⁰

Yet Menelaus' mobilisation of the discourse of class is not new: the play has enigmatically raised the issue of status and class from the beginning. The very first lines immediately presented Andromache's reversal of status, perpetuating a typical form of

⁵⁰⁸ Milani (1972), 49-53.

⁵⁰⁹ An important precedent is Menelaus in Sophocles' *Ajax* (esp. 1052-90), in which not only is Menelaus despotic as he is here, but he also appears to be a power-crazed aristocrat who argues that social hierarchy should be respected in both the city and the army, and that Ajax was merely a δημότης (1071): Garvie (1998), 223; Finglass (2011), 441. According to Hesk, he is not entirely despicable: Hesk (2012), 105, 110.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. also Rosenbloom (2011), 410 on X. *Ath.* 1.9.

peripeteia in Attic tragedy as one can see, for example, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*. In that tragedy, the god-like initial condition of the hero is tragically perverted into that of the scapegoat:⁵¹¹ the two roles are part of a vertical 'axis occupied at the summit by the divine king, at its base by the *pharmakos*':⁵¹² Andromache's strong lamentation of the caprices of destiny that changed her status from 'the freest' to the least free underscores the implicit fragility of the distinction (αὐτὴ δὲ δούλη τῶν ἐλευθερωτάτων/ οἴκων νομισθεῖσ' Ελλάδ' εἰσαφικόμην, 12-3). Yet the encounter of Andromache with her former slave again insists on the precariousness of this differentiation. The former slave immediately calls her 'mistress', refusing to change form of address: δέσποιν', ἐγὼ τοι τοῦνομ' οὐ φεύγω τόδε/ καλεῖν σ', ἐπεὶ περ καὶ κατ' οἶκον ἡξίου/ τὸν σόν, τὸ Τροίας ἠνίκ' ὠκοῦμεν πέδον (56-8). Andromache, on the other hand, replies by calling her 'dearest fellow-slave', insisting that she *is* a slave now: ὦ φιλτάτη σύνδουλε (σύνδουλος γὰρ εἶ/τῆ πρόσθ' ἀνάσση τῆδε, νῦν δὲ δυστυχεῖ) (64-5). Andromache is helped by and asks for assistance from the servant as a typical mistress would do on the tragic stage; the atmosphere of secrecy and intimacy reminds us of the nurse-confidante scenes frequent in tragedy. For a moment we forget that Andromache is now as much of a slave as the former servant is, until the slave-woman exits. Then, she utters a desolate pronouncement on the meaninglessness of her life in many ways comparable with Andromache's masochist and sexist *gnomai*: ἀλλ' εἴμ', ἐπεὶ τοι κού περιβλεπτος βίος/ δούλης γυναικός, ἦν τι καὶ πάθω κακόν (89-90). Again, as in the case of Andromache's masochist rhetoric, we should be wary of taking such an extreme sentence at face-value.⁵¹³ The βίος δούλης γυναικός is exactly what is at stake:

⁵¹¹ Vernant (2020), 284.

⁵¹² Vernant (2020), 289.

⁵¹³ Torrance (2005), 44; Citti (1979), 201; Vester (2009), 299 take this to signify that Andromache truly remains different from her fellow slave and is thus to be taken seriously.

the reason why the servant is willing to sacrifice herself is the life of a slave-woman, and that ‘slave-woman’ is none but Andromache.⁵¹⁴ In fact, Andromache immediately goes on to lament her own condition in her unique elegiac lines, of which half are devoted to her slavery (106-16), and the chorus soon enter to remind her that she is dangerously oblivious to the fact that she is now a ‘slave-woman’ (γνώθι δ’ οὔσ’ ἐπὶ ξένας/ δμῶις ἀπ’ ἀλλοτρίας/ πόλεος, 136-8).

But the disturbance of the hierarchy penetrates deeper than this. For the distinction is not simply blurred through an emphasis on the caprices of fate, but the very ideology that would legitimate the hierarchy is challenged. In Euripides’ *monde à l’envers*, the moral dichotomy between noble and non-noble, is confused and questioned, even utterly reversed, to the point that centuries of literary criticism have dismissed the *Andromache* just by finding fault with the ‘black-and-white’, ‘melodramatic’ portrayal of the Spartans in the play as compared to Andromache.⁵¹⁵ Even the critics most sympathetic to Hermione are unmoving in their denunciation of the moral emptiness and unheroic behaviour of Menelaus —⁵¹⁶ an emphatically negative characterisation that contrasts with Homer,⁵¹⁷ and that will occur again with the Menelaus of *Orestes*, famously considered ‘too base’ by Aristotle (*Poet.* 1454a), yet might be first engineered by Euripides here.⁵¹⁸ The Sophoclean Oedipus shouldered the burden of a double, paradoxical social position, corresponding to an oxymoronic moral identity which is

⁵¹⁴ Gregory (2002), 159 mentions this to prove her point that in tragedy enslaved aristocrats are treated differently from born slaves; but surely the idea that ‘a slave’s life is of little consequence’ is ironic, given that the fellow-slave is risking her life for, indeed, a slave.

⁵¹⁵ Kitto (1961), 232.

⁵¹⁶ Lee (1975), 11 with further references on secondary scholarship.

⁵¹⁷ Stelow (2020) gives a full account of the treatment of the figure of Menelaus in the archaic period and concludes that Menelaus ‘entered the fifth century as a popular pan-Hellenic hero and minor deity’, and only later, in drama, did his portrayal become negative and flat (p. 295).

⁵¹⁸ Allan (2000), 113 notes how Euripides characterises Menelaus in different ways throughout his production.

only revealed throughout the tragedy, after the *peripeteia*: the ‘equal of the gods’, θεοῖσι... ἰσοῦμενον (31), is revealed to be, to have always been, ‘equal to nothingness’, ἴσα καὶ τὸ μηδέν (1187-8).⁵¹⁹ Here Andromache, the woman, the slave, the barbarian, is reminded by the chorus that she is a Trojan woman vying with ‘masters, natives of Sparta’ (δεσπόταις ἀμιλλᾶ/ Γλιᾶς οὔσα κόρα Λακεδαίμονος ἐγγενέτασιν, 127-8), and that therefore she ‘is nothing’ (οὐδὲν οὔσα, 134). Soon, however, Andromache morally towers over Menelaus the Greek nobleman and monarch, who instead appears ‘to be nothing’ (οὐδὲν γεγῶσι, 320; σὺ δ’οὐδὲν εἶ, 641).⁵²⁰

As mentioned in ch. 1, the democratic state of the polis did not necessarily impact aristocratic hegemony, and the ideology of hereditary nobility was never superseded, even in the context of the technically egalitarian polis that proclaimed the freedom and moral nobility of all Athenian citizens. The sophists, however, with their claim to be able to teach ‘virtue’, and with the stress their theories generally placed on its relativity, most likely catalysed such debates on the social definition of nobility.⁵²¹ Aristotle disputed the correlation between wealth and nobility, but defended an ‘aristocratic theory of descent’ in his lost *Περὶ Εὐγενείας*, maintaining that nobility was behaviourally inherited and derived from noble ancestors.⁵²² But Aristotle also quotes one of Gorgias’ pupils, Lycophron, who was known to have asserted that ‘in truth there is no real difference between the lowly born and the nobly born’, and that ‘preference for it looks to opinion’ (ὡς πρὸς δόξαν οὔσαν τὴν αἴρεσιν αὐτῆς; DK 83 A4).⁵²³ Euripides’

⁵¹⁹ Vernant (2020), 284.

⁵²⁰ Allan (2000), 53 with Strohm (1977), 124 recognises that ‘a central theme of the action’ is the dissonance between ‘inborn nobility’ and ‘slavery’. Teucer at *Soph. Aj.* 1093-6 also demolishes Menelaus’ *status* (εὐγενεῖς, 1095) by claiming that he is a nobody (μηδέν, 1094; μηδένας, 1114): Hesk (2012), 114.

⁵²¹ See *supra*, sec. 1.3.2, pp. 96-7.

⁵²² Chroust (1972), 22-3.

⁵²³ Chroust (1972), 20; Sprague (1972), 69.

Andromache approximates Lycophron's emphasis on the relativity of class distinctions (cf. ὦ δόξα δόξα, 320), placing not only under pressure the equation between wealth and nobility,⁵²⁴ but even questioning the ideological-moral divide between the upper and lower classes through its hybrid portrayal of the status/class hierarchy articulated in the confrontation of Andromache and Menelaus (as well as Hermione).⁵²⁵ In the *Electra*, the terminology of δόξα will be again employed in Orestes' famous denunciation of the unreliability of social appearances, of both wealth and status (367-85): οὐ μὴ ἀφρονήσεθ', οἷ κενῶν δοξασμάτων/ πλήρεις πλανᾶσθε, τῆ δ' ὀμιλία βροτοῦς/ κρινεῖτε καὶ τοῖς ἤθεσιν τοὺς εὐγενεῖς; (383-5).⁵²⁶

Yet the same challenge to this hierarchy is already present in the earlier *Andromache*. The most direct formulation is uttered by Peleus at the end of his *agon* with Menelaus: κύδιον βροτοῖς/ πένητα χρηστὸν ἢ κακὸν καὶ πλούσιον/ γαμβρὸν πεπᾶσθαι καὶ φίλον· σὺ δ' οὐδὲν εἶ (639-41). Peleus also adds that bastard children might be better than legitimate children, reproducing one of Euripides' favourite themes, that of the 'noble bastard', 'reflecting interest in the contrast between convention and nature (νόμος and φύσις)':⁵²⁷ πολλάκις δέ τοι/ ξηρὰ βαθεῖαν γῆν ἐνίκησε σπορᾶ, /νόθοι τε πολλοὶ γνησίων ἀμείνονες (636-8). The Greek *nomos* (νομίζεται, 693) that distinguishes the upper from the lower classes of society is again the target of Peleus' invective when he complains that more honour is unfairly attributed to a single general while the labour

⁵²⁴ Allan (2000), 186; cf. *El.* 367-72. On the other hand, traditional statements on nobility are also common: Battezzato (2018), 152; Hall (1989), 99. Cf. Allan (2001), 156 on *Heracl.* 297-8.

⁵²⁵ Cf. the famous fragment from the *Melanippe Captive* similarly speaking of τῶν κενῶν δοξασμάτων (*TrGF* v, fr. 495, 40-3). On the fragment, cf. Gregory (2002), 154. Melanippe's and her children's slavery seems also to have been fundamental to both the development of the plot and the thematic interests in the tragedy: Collard and Cropp (2008), 587-9. Cf. Citti (1979), 204 on *Ion* 850ff. and 206 on *Melanippe*.

⁵²⁶ Though it is not clear how utopian the play is: Wohl (2015), 75-6. Wohl (2015), 88 n.13 also notes that δόξασμα is an uncommon word, and figures in Euripides only in the fragment from the *Melanippe Captive* (cf. *supra*), in which indeed nobility is contrasted with appearance.

⁵²⁷ Lloyd (1994), 138; Lee (1975), 13.

rests on the shoulders of the common soldiers who receive no credit (693-705; cf. again the use of the terminology of δόξα at 696: ὁ στρατηγὸς τὴν δόκησιν ἄρνυται); this is evocative of the way Odysseus' apparent assertion of a military 'hierarchy' in the *Hecuba* is endowed with deep class connotations.⁵²⁸ As Odysseus contextualises his military hierarchy with broader political considerations on social hierarchy, here Peleus does the same, disparaging Menelaus' social posture,⁵²⁹ and decrying how those individuals who are in positions of power in the city disdain the common people and assume they are superior, when in fact the *demos* is wiser (699-702).⁵³⁰ As we will see, the vocabulary of δόξα is again applied to reflect on the fragility of status and class definitions in *Troades*. As the disgusted Aeschylus complains in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1062-73), Euripides caused the rich aristocrats of the city to pretend they are poor (1065-6) by dressing royal characters in rags (1063); but he also taught sailors to disobey their superiors (1071-2).⁵³¹ What is more, the vocabulary of δόξα in connection to status returns in *Acharnians* 439-41, where Dicaeopolis begs Euripides to dress him in rags to 'have the look of a beggar' (δεῖ γάρ με δόξαι πτωχὸν εἶναι τήμερον, 440) and parodies the philosophical language of appearance and reality of a Euripidean fragment (εἶναι μὲν ὅσπερ εἰμί, φαίνεσθαι δὲ μή, 441).⁵³² Like Lamachus'

⁵²⁸ Hall (2006), 123. Lines 699-702 are possibly interpolated (cf. Stevens 1977, 179). If they are not, however, notice that Peleus' φρονοῦσι δήμου μεῖζον, ὄντες οὐδένες (700) goes back to 641, which establishes an interesting connection with what the chorus said about Andromache at 134 (οὐδὲν οὔσα).

⁵²⁹ At Soph. *Aj.* 1073-6, Menelaus also parallels the respect of superior members of the city, essential to his view of political stability, with the sustainment of the military hierarchy in the army: Garvie (1998), 223.

⁵³⁰ McClure (1999), 192 argues that these lines implicitly decry how men of low status yet great wealth are elected as officials, but it is hard to see how the text might encourage this reading. What is more, Menelaus remains both wealthy and *well born*, and he is the main target of Peleus' invective. Cf. Di Benedetto (1971), 127.

⁵³¹ Specifically, they 'speak back' (ἀνταγορεύειν, 1072; ἀντιλέγει, 1076).

⁵³² The scholia to Aristophanes assign them to *Telephus*, but cf. Collard, Cropp, and Lee (2009), 44. Cf. Ingrosso (2020), 82 on the general Aristophanic appropriation of the Euripidean theme of appearance/reality.

frightening military attire that contrasts with the Dicaeopolis in Euripidean rags (567-94),⁵³³ here Menelaus' heroic armour, which should be a symbol of his aristocratic virtue, is rather emblematic of his immorality, and, above all, his effeminacy.

For Menelaus' nobility does not simply become questioned by itself, but specifically through the disturbance of the man/woman hierarchy that Andromache already effects. As Hall notes, 'concomitant on female strength is masculine weakness',⁵³⁴ and Andromache's masculinisation is specular to Menelaus' feminisation. Andromache points out that he appears in warrior garb: νῦν δ' ἔς γυναιῖκα γοργὸς ὀπλίτης φανεῖς / κτείνεις μ' (458-9). The hand-to-hand combat of hoplites was often conceptualised as the quintessential demonstration of one's manly virtue, ἀνδρὸς δ' ἔλεγχος... εὐψυχίας (*HF* 162; cf. 157-64);⁵³⁵ Medea famously criticises the hierarchy of the relative duties of men and women, expressing her preference to stand in the hoplite phalanx rather than give birth.⁵³⁶ Yet Andromache explicitly contrasts Menelaus' hyper-masculine war costume with her own womanhood: the implication is that his display of strength and military prowess is nothing but a travesty, as the only warrior that he is fighting is a powerless and helpless woman. This is the same accusation levelled at 324-9:

σὺ δὴ στρατηγῶν λογάσιν Ἑλλήνων ποτὲ

Τροίαν ἀφείλου Πρίαμον, ὧδε φαῦλος ὢν;

⁵³³ Cf. Ar. *Ach.* 56-3 with Olson (2002), 220. Similarly to what Peleus says (*And.* 693-705), Dicaeopolis protests that hard-working ordinary citizens labour in the battle-ranks while young generals and officials like Lamachus enjoy a life of pleasurable embassies as well as a substantial public pay: cf. Olson (2002), xl-xli. What is more, Lamachus' frightening Gorgon-decorated shield (Γοργόν', 574) is comparable to Menelaus γοργὸς ὀπλίτης (458).

⁵³⁴ Hall (1989), 208.

⁵³⁵ Barlow (1996), 132. It is true that these words are uttered by Lycus, the 'villain' of the *HF*, but his case here has appeared to be quite strong: cf. Barlow (1996), 131. Cf. Roselli (2007), 141.

⁵³⁶ Mastronarde (2002), 214.

ὄστις θυγατρὸς ἀντίπαιδος ἐκ λόγων

τοσόνδ' ἔπνευσας καὶ γυναικὶ δυστυχεῖ

δούλῃ κατέστης εἰς ἀγῶν'; οὐκ ἀξιῶ

οὔτ' οὔν σὲ Τροίας οὔτε σοῦ Τροίαν ἔτι.

At 362, she fears that Menelaus might be ruthless διὰ γυναικείαν ἔριν. The implications might appear the same as 387, namely that Menelaus is doing 'great wrong for a trivial reason'. However, Andromache's implicit accusation is that Menelaus is acting not simply *for* a woman, but even *like* a woman; in entering the feud and supporting Hermione, he is implicitly downgrading himself.⁵³⁷ Like 324-9, the implication is that Menelaus has lost his heroic masculinity. In fact, Andromache suggests explicitly that Menelaus' behaviour approximates that of a woman (352-4):

οὐ χρὴ 'πὶ μικροῖς μεγάλα πορσύνειν κακὰ

οὐδ', εἰ γυναικῆς ἐσμεν ἀτηρὸν κακόν,

ἄνδρας γυναιξὶν ἐξομοιοῦσθαι φύσιν.

Andromache explicitly denounces the falseness of appearances when she protests that it is almost unbelievable that somebody as φαῦλος as Menelaus might have been in charge of the Greek army and seized Troy (324-5). This contrast between apparent heroism and effeminacy will also be applied to Menelaus in Euripides' *Orestes*, where

⁵³⁷ Cf. Scharffenberger (2020), 152: 'the phrase γυναικείαν ἔριν' is 'used by Andromache in 362 to signify simultaneously Hermione's jealousy (i.e. 'a strife between women') and also Menelaus' rivalry with Paris (i.e. 'a strife over a woman')'.

Orestes bluntly explains that Menelaus is ‘no born warrior, but a brave man among the ladies’ (οὐ γὰρ αἰχμητῆς πέφυκεν, ἐν γυναιξὶ δ’ ἄλκιμος, 754).⁵³⁸

But lines 352-4 conjure up an important intertext. At *Med.* 889-92, Medea famously employs misogynistic stereotypes in order to deceive Jason:

ἀλλ’ ἐσμὲν οἷόν ἐσμεν, οὐκ ἐρῶ κακόν,
γυναῖκες· οὐκ οὖν χρῆν σ’ ὁμοιοῦσθαι φύσιν,
οὐδ’ ἀντιτείνειν νῆπι’ ἀντὶ νηπίων.

The lines are similar in content (exhortation to not approximate a woman’s physis coupled with the misogynistic association of womanhood and triviality), but also share an almost identical phrasing: ὁμοιοῦσθαι φύσιν (890) and ἐξομοιοῦσθαι φύσιν (354); οὐ χρῆ (352) and οὐκ οὖν χρῆν (890); εἰ γυναῖκές ἐσμεν ἀτηρὸν κακόν (353) and ἐσμὲν οἷόν ἐσμεν, οὐκ ἐρῶ κακόν (890). In Medea’s case, her allegiance to Jason’s sexist outlook is feigned, instrumentally built and employed to further her schemes. Her generalisation on women’s (bad) nature, is substantially exposed as staged, a play within the play. Medea’s behaviour through the (actual) play in fact suffices to show that she can act like a man, performing a series of gender-transgressive acts that make her look more like a Homeric hero in her aspirations than the malleable woman she wants to appear here.⁵³⁹ Just as Medea’s exhortation to Jason to not approximate a woman’s nature adumbrates the possibility that in fact a man’s and a woman’s nature might not be as fixed and different, Andromache’s similar plea functions as a foil to both her masculine defiance and Menelaus’ femininity.

⁵³⁸ Cf. Willink (1986), 204.

⁵³⁹ Cf. Barlow (1995), 42.

Another important similarity should be detected between Menelaus-Andromache and Jason-Medea. Menelaus and Jason are insistently proved by Euripides to be unreliable and unfaithful. The theme of broken oaths figures prominently in *Medea*, and Menelaus is depicted in the same unfavourable light when he tricks Andromache into leaving the shrine of Thetis so as to kill her (425-63; so immediately after Andromache's accusations of effeminacy), as well as when he abandons his daughter. The act of deception is denounced explicitly by Andromache (οἴμοι· δόλω μ' ὑπῆλθες, ἠπατήμεθα, 435) and even acknowledged by Menelaus himself (κήρυσσ' ἅπασιν· οὐ γὰρ ἐξαρνούμεθα, 436).⁵⁴⁰ Both Jason and Menelaus have appeared to be 'barbarised' through this characterisation, since 'the Greeks liked to think that they were trustworthy, while barbarians were not'.⁵⁴¹ But in *Medea* Jason's unfaithfulness triggers the Chorus' annunciation of the reversal not of Greek and barbarian, but rather of male and female (410-3).⁵⁴²

In fact, this discourse was foreshadowed already in the initial dialogue between Andromache and the servant. At 60-3, the loyal slave of Andromache warns her former mistress of Menelaus' and Hermione's schemes against her and Molossus (δεινὰ γὰρ βουλεύεται/Μενέλαος ἐς σὲ παῖς θ', ἃ σοι φυλακτέα, 62-3; notice that the verb is singular and the emphasis is on Menelaus), and Andromache asks her about the kind of 'plots' that they are 'weaving' (66): ποίας μηχανὰς πλέκουσιν αὔ. Yet this same word, μηχανάς, is used just a few lines later, when Andromache asks the servant to act as a messenger between her and Peleus, and categorises 'scheming' as a fundamental

⁵⁴⁰ In comparison with Sophocles' *Hermione*, Euripides makes Menelaus 'duplicitous' also by betrothing Hermione to Orestes and then promising her to Neoptolemus, an act indeed categorised in *Andromache* as a form of treachery by Orestes (967): Allan (2000), 17.

⁵⁴¹ Allan (2002), 72-3.

⁵⁴² Buxton (2013), 238.

feature of womanhood: *πολλὰς ἄν εὐροῖς μηχανάς· γυνὴ γὰρ εἴ* (85). The same association of scheme-making and womanhood, which is extremely common in Euripides,⁵⁴³ is found again explicitly in the *Andromache* at 911, when Orestes enquires whether Hermione has ‘plotted against her [Andromache] such things as women contrive’ (*μῶν ἐς γυναικ’ ἔραψας οἷα δὴ γυνή*). The chorus also assign the responsibility for the war of Troy to Aphrodite’s ‘deceitful words’ (*δολίοις δ’ ἔλε Κύπρις λόγοις*, 289). The general Euripidean emphasis on deception as an emblem of femininity is so pervasive that Zeitlin concludes that ‘for the man [...] resort to *dolos* (trickery) undermines masculine integrity and places his honour under the gravest of suspicion’.⁵⁴⁴

Andromache’s suspicion is supported in the next scene by Peleus’ more aggressive accusations.⁵⁴⁵ Among the charges levelled against Menelaus, Peleus mentions not having been able to keep Helen at home and having allowed her excessive freedom; having waged war against Troy for Helen, causing the death of Achilles and many others; having returned home ‘woundless’ (i.e., without displaying any sort of military prowess); having resolved to spare Helen after seeing her naked (592-631). The lengthy and various accusations of Peleus, however, all share the common underlying belief that Menelaus is effeminate, and in fact the allegations are prefaced by questioning Menelaus’ status as a man: *σὺ γὰρ μετ’ ἀνδρῶν, ὧ κάκιστε κάκ κακῶν;/ σοὶ ποῦ μέτεστιν ὡς ἐν ἀνδράσιν λόγου;* (590-1). Menelaus’ interest in not appearing *phaulos* finally appears to be radically undercut by Andromache’s accusation of *phaulotes* in gendered terms —accusations that are made even more explicit with

⁵⁴³ Stevens (1971), 104.

⁵⁴⁴ Zeitlin (1996), 358.

⁵⁴⁵ Hermione, too, accuses her father of having broken her trust (854-7): Allan (2000), 102.

Peleus, who also repeatedly disturbs the hierarchy between the upper and lower classes.

Paradoxically, Peleus' disturbance of the hierarchy is followed by the fourth choral ode, which seemingly celebrates wealth and nobility (766-76),⁵⁴⁶ in almost Pindaric taste:⁵⁴⁷

ἦ μὴ γενοίμαν ἦ πατέρων ἀγαθῶν
εἶην πολυκτῆτων τε δόμων μέτοχος.
εἶ τι γὰρ πάσχοι τις ἀμήχανον, ἀλκᾶς
οὐ σπάνις εὐγενέταις,
κηρυσσομένοισι δ' ἀπ' ἔσθλων δωμαίων
τιμὰ καὶ κλέος· οὔτοι λείψανα τῶν ἀγαθῶν
ἀνδρῶν ἀφαιρεῖται χρόνος· ἃ δ' ἀρετὰ
καὶ θανοῦσι λάμπει.

Lloyd introduces the chorus saying that the strophe 'praises wealth and noble birth',⁵⁴⁸ and Stevens is puzzled by the irrelevance of these lines to the action. He concludes that 'the generalised praise of noble birth, wealth and courage is inspired by loyalty and admiration for the House of Aeacus and leads up to the specific reference in the epode'.⁵⁴⁹ On closer inspection, however, it seems paradoxical that the chorus should

⁵⁴⁶ Again, the connection is underlined: cf. Citti (1979), 210-1.

⁵⁴⁷ Allan (2000), 217. Cf. the epinician undertones of the first stasimon of *Trachiniae* and their relevance to the theme of nobility: Wohl (1998), 19.

⁵⁴⁸ Lloyd (1994), 142; Jouan (1966), 59-60. Cf. Citti (1979), 212; Kyriakou (2016), 139: 'the third stasimon is the only part of the play that celebrates glory, and indeed any virtue... it also expresses confidence in the prowess of such excellent, noble people' (yet cf. p. 140).

⁵⁴⁹ Stevens (1971), 186.

be referring to Peleus when they express their wish to be born ‘of noble fathers and with a share in a wealthy house’; first, because Peleus himself has just before repeatedly disturbed the rigidity of the moral distinction between humble and noble birth; second, because the house of Peleus is hardly presented as πολύκτητος in the *Andromache* (Andromache defines Neoptolemus the ‘islander’, 16; Hermione’s rich clothes being ‘no offering from the house of Achilles or of Peleus’, 147-50; Hermione’s reported frustration of being ‘rich among the poor’, 209-12).⁵⁵⁰ But the chorus’ view of wealth and nobility is rendered puzzling by the antistrophe, where they obliquely comment on the injustice of Hermione and Menelaus, alluding to the attempted murder of Andromache and Molossus in their denunciation of violent injustice and ‘unjust power in the home or in the city’ (785-7),⁵⁵¹ which brings *όνείδεσιν* (‘disgrace’, 784). If the ode starts with an emphasis on being aristocratic (*πατέρων ἀγαθῶν*, 766; *ἔσθλῶν δωμάτων*, 772) and wealthy (*πολυκτῆτων δόμων*, 769; *ἀλκᾶς/ οὐ σπάνις εὐγενέταις*, 770-1) as markers of imperishable *τιμᾶ* and *κλέος* (774), and concludes in the epode with a similar emphasis on Peleus’ *εὐκλειαν* (800), the antistrophe raises the question of the validity of such markers.⁵⁵² The chorus might further specify that the glorious victory also needs to be just to be worthy of *δόξα* (*κακόδοξον*, 779). Yet if this alludes to Hermione’s and Menelaus’ overpowering of Andromache and Molossus, then it is suspicious that the example of victory they select for Peleus is his participation in the first destruction of Troy, which is instead called *εὐδόκιμον* (799). For Troy’s most recent destruction is all but celebrated as glorious by the chorus in this play (cf.1009-

⁵⁵⁰ Stavrinou (2016), 9; Hall (2001), xxxii.

⁵⁵¹ Kyriakou (2016), 143 on the relevance of Hermione’s behaviour and fate to this ode.

⁵⁵² Cf also Kyriakou (2016), 143, arguing that the chorus’ confidence in the success of the noble and the support they have is shown to be misplaced. This has both a practical and moral dimension: ‘Orestes and his family survive and succeed. Ultimately, then, noble families cannot always guarantee protection to their members, nor do immoral families always fail to assist them’ (p. 144).

46):⁵⁵³ another fragile δόξα? Rather than reconfirming hierarchies of status, the ode deepens the issue the play has raised, through Menelaus, on the unreliability of appearance in connection with nobility and slavery.

This problematisation of social hierarchies was the focus of Synodinou's monograph on slavery in Euripides, which indeed takes the *Andromache* to exemplify the crisis of this moral, hierarchical categorisation.⁵⁵⁴ The main objection to the first part of her thesis mainly consists of the observation that Euripidean plays about Trojan *captives* cannot be taken to problematise *slavery*, since the nobility of the Trojans is in fact a sign of their previous royal and free-born status; 'real' slaves, instead, are supposedly always presented as debased, wicked, and unreliable,⁵⁵⁵ or noble inasmuch as they remain obedient slaves.⁵⁵⁶ Yet, besides missing the metaphorical use of slavery here and in the other Trojan plays — as symbolic of class and status tensions —, this objection avoids recognising that much of the thematic focus of these plays palpably lies in the discussion of slavery and what slavery is (about 17 occurrences of δοῦλος-derived words alone cluster in the *Andromache*; we saw an even higher number of occurrences in *Hecuba*). Perhaps more importantly, the identity is constantly summoned and imposed on Andromache both by herself and by the other characters on stage, including the sympathetic chorus (126-34, 155, 375-5, 433-4). She is constantly reminded that she is a slave, and Andromache corrects her own servant when she calls

⁵⁵³ Allan (2000), 221 does not read this as ironic, but he does note that it is in contrast with the Phthians' sympathy for the Trojans we have so far witnessed, and in a footnote (n.110) comments that 'in the fourth stasimon the chorus' tone is very different... even the first sack of Troy is seen there as an inexplicable manifestation of divine destruction'.

⁵⁵⁴ Synodinou (1974), 87. Cf. Citti (1991), 86.

⁵⁵⁵ Milani (1972), 72-3; Hall (2006), 110-1. Cf. Thalmann (1999), 33 on the way in which Eumaeus is represented as a noble slave precisely because, we find out in book 15, he is the son of an aristocrat.

⁵⁵⁶ Scodel (1980), 84; Rabinowitz (2008), 57; Citti (1991), 87; Di Benedetto (1971), 217. Cf. Eur. *Ion* 854-6, in which a slave can be said to be *esthlos*, but only because the speaker, who is indeed a slave, is ready to 'repay' his masters with his own life (ll. 850-3).

her mistress (64-5). As we saw with Polyxena, then, the plays require the audience to complicate their view of what being 'noble' means through a paradoxical acknowledgment that these characters are slaves. This paradox would be missed if we simply dismissed their characterisation as 'slaves' as something that the audience would immediately see through as unacceptable or unrealistic. The emphasis is there for a reason — to question the status of the characters — and is in line with the typical sophistic questioning of differentiations that we saw with the Antiphon papyrus. In fact, it is possible that sophistic thought also articulated some scepticism on slavery itself: for Aristotle formulates his conception of natural slavery precisely by arguing against some intellectuals who problematise the institution (Arist. *Pol.* 1. 5-6. 1253b, 1255a-1255b).⁵⁵⁷ What is more, although Trojans must have been particularly noble and sympathetic characters for a Greek, Homer-imbued audience, the 'orientalisation' of Troy also meant that they were now reconfigured as barbarians.⁵⁵⁸ The idea that barbarians were naturally slaves was commonly held and would last at least until Aristotle,⁵⁵⁹ and he indeed uses it to respond to those thinkers who had put into question the legitimacy of slavery in reference to war captives.⁵⁶⁰ This further corroborates the view that it would not be immediate to dismiss the slavery of these Trojan characters.

The paradox Trojan slaves embody, then, has disturbing consequences, if not for the institution of slavery, for the distinctions of class and status that structured the world

⁵⁵⁷ He does not mention their names, but the terminology is unmistakably sophistic: τοῖς δὲ παρὰ φύσιν τὸ δεσπόζειν· νόμῳ γὰρ τὸν μὲν δοῦλον εἶναι τὸν δ' ἐλεύθερον, φύσει δ' οὐδὲν διαφέρειν. διόπερ οὐδὲ δίκαιον· βίαιον γάρ (1253b. 20-3). The names of Antiphon, Lycophron and especially Alcidamas have been suggested: cf. Laurenti (1993), 9.

⁵⁵⁸ Trojans were orientalised also in the Parthenon marbles: Rabinowitz (2008), 40.

⁵⁵⁹ See *infra*, sec. 3.3, p. 264.

⁵⁶⁰ Besso (2011), 81-2.

of the audience. Menelaus' as well as Hermione's status is constantly put under pressure and finally falls into pieces through their dialectical relationship to the noble slave. At the same time, the disturbance of Menelaus' nobility is not simply questioned internally; rather, it is through the intersection with the discourse of gender that the masculinised Andromache, and then Peleus, put into question the aristocratic appearance of this false *esthlos*.

2.4 Menelaus the Barbarian

Menelaus' presentation as a debased monarch, however, goes beyond the mere destabilisation of class categories. The 'negative' portrayal of his character problematises the supposed moral superiority of the higher classes, but it does so while appealing to a well-known 'stock-figure' of tragedy: the tyrant. A recurrent character on the Attic stage, the tyrant is characterised by an anxiety to defend his power over his subjects and by his excessive *pleonexia*.⁵⁶¹ Excess of wealth was strongly connected with tyranny in tragedy, possibly because historical tyrants maintained their power through money.⁵⁶² Some sophists, as we may be allowed to infer from Plato's *Gorgias* (469c-471d) and the *Republic* (2.359b-361b), also considered the tyrant as the freest individual on earth in his unrestrained pursuit of his rapacious desires.⁵⁶³ Menelaus naturally underlines both his status as free and his wealth, but the use of *μοναρχία* is more telling.

⁵⁶¹ Ugolini (2017), 458; Seaford (2003), 97 on tyrannical greed as not simply a defect of character, but as 'the desire for the means of tyrannical power'. Hill (2020), 57 disagrees with Seaford and with Lanza (1977), 45-64 by arguing that greed and rapacity are by no means associated to sole rules in tragedy; interestingly, Hill mentions *Hecuba* (p. 278) as one of the few examples in which they see the connection. *Andromache*, too, explicitly makes the connection between Menelaus' flaunted *monarchia* and his rapacity.

⁵⁶² Seaford (2003), 105; Kallet (2003), 122. Cf. Lee (1997), 230 on *Ion* 629-31.

⁵⁶³ Raaflaub (2003), 76-7; cf. Hill (2020), 80-1.

In *Supplices*, the word μοναρχία is politically charged and obliquely connected to tyranny. Theseus boasts of having given ‘sole rule’, μοναρχία, to the *demos* (452); but this anachronistic emphasis on the democratic nature of Athens is soon put contrasted with tyranny in the agon with the Theban herald (*Supp.* 429-55).⁵⁶⁴ What is more, the ‘tyrannical’ Theban herald, theoretical supporter of sole rule, delineates an ideological contrast in class terms with Theseus: for if democratic rule is praised by the latter because of his egalitarian nature that confers the same share to both rich and poor alike (*Supp.* 408; cf. 430-4), the Theban despises the possibility of giving power to any ἀνὴρ πένης (423-5).⁵⁶⁵ Similarly, in Herodotus’ Constitutional Debate in book 3 of his *Histories*, Otanes intervenes in favour of democracy by disparaging the tyrannical nature of the μούναρχος in contrast with the ἰσονομίην of the *demos* (Hdt. 3.80.3-4), basically equating the word μοναρχία with tyranny (intended in its negative connotation). In his interaction with Andromache, Menelaus also displays a series of other traits that would have been immediately perceived by the audience as tyrannical. Excessive violence against enemies is the most notable element, and is often coupled with the tyrant’s obsessive fear that his authority might be impaired.⁵⁶⁶ This is evident immediately before Peleus’ entrance, when Menelaus’ cruelty reaches its apex at 519-22 by arguing that Andromache and Molossus are his enemies (ἐχθρούς, 520), and they need to be killed to remove ‘fear’ from the household (ἐξὸν κτείνειν/καὶ φόβον οἴκων ἀφελέσθαι, 521-2).

⁵⁶⁴ Graham (2017), 163-4; Burian (2011), 104-6.

⁵⁶⁵ Compare the words of the Old Oligarch in the *Constitution of the Athenians* (1.5), in which poverty and the lack of education that derives from it are the reason why the *demos* should not have the power: Graham (2017), 172-3.

⁵⁶⁶ Ugolini (2017), 458-9.

This is followed by Molossus' tearful supplication (530-5) to be spared, rejected by Menelaus (537-8) — a sign of his 'mental inflexibility', an additional emblematic feature of the tragic tyrant.⁵⁶⁷ While he does not physically violate Thetis' shrine, Menelaus' 'tendency toward impiety'⁵⁶⁸ is also underscored by Andromache's invocation of divine justice, which, if not straightforwardly belittled, is none the less dismissed by Menelaus: τὰ θεῖα δ' οὐ θεῖ οὐδ' ἔχειν ἡγή δίκην;/ ὅταν τὰδ' ἦ, τότε οἴσομεν· σὲ δὲ κτενῶ (439-40). More broadly, Menelaus comes close to killing two suppliants, of whom one was also taking refuge at the shrine of Thetis;⁵⁶⁹ and so, along with his daughter, he must be associated 'with the hyperbolic cruelty and irreligion of the stage tyrant (like Lycus in *Hercules Furens*, Polydektes in *Dictys*, Creon in Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus*)'.⁵⁷⁰ Finally, putting men to death without trial was also associated with tyranny,⁵⁷¹ and this is evident when Andromache asks to stand trial (355-60), when the chorus call the murder 'lawless', ἄνομος (491), and explicit in the next scene with Peleus' and Andromache's protestations (τί πράσσειτ' ἄκριτα μηχανώμενοι, 549; οὔτε τῷ δίκη/κρίναντες οὔτε τοὺς ἀπόντας ἐκ δόμων/μείναντες, 567-9). Granted, Menelaus is not a tyrant in the strict sense of the word,⁵⁷² namely, a despotic monarch who has obtained power through violence and usurpation.⁵⁷³ In claiming authority over Peleus' property, however, Menelaus dares to replace Peleus, who is not only the κύριος of the house, but also the reigning king of Phthia.⁵⁷⁴ As Allan has it, Menelaus' 'interference'

⁵⁶⁷ Ugolini (2017), 463.

⁵⁶⁸ Ugolini (2017), 458.

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. Seaford (2003), 98 on tyrants abusing sacred space. On the sacredness of Thetis' shrine here: cf. Wiles (1997), 200.

⁵⁷⁰ Stavrinou (2014), 396.

⁵⁷¹ Seaford (2003), 107; Raaflaub (2003), 74.

⁵⁷² Cf. Carter (2004), 21 on Creon in *Antigone*.

⁵⁷³ Cf. Hill (2020), 86 on Cratin. *PCG* IV, fr. 258.

⁵⁷⁴ A similarly 'tyrannical' Menelaus is that of Sophocles' *Ajax*, who wrongly believes to have authority over Ajax and other members of the army (Soph. *Aj.* 1097-1104; cf. Hesk 2012, 112-

is ‘tyrannical’, and the second stasimon does allude to this when the chorus express their preference for one tyranny over a double tyranny in one city, as well as for one helmsmen over two when the ‘ship of state’ is overwhelmed by violent winds (479-85):⁵⁷⁵ οὐδέ γὰρ ἐν πόλεσι δίπτυχοι τυραννίδες/μιᾶς ἀμείνονες φέρειν (473-4). More explicitly, the connection between interference in domestic affairs and public tyrannical action is made by Peleus when replying to Menelaus’ statement that he is κυριώτερος than him (πῶς; ἢ τὸν ἀμὸν οἶκον οἰκήσεις μολῶν/ δεῦρ’; οὐχ’ ἄλλις σοι τῶν κατὰ Σπάρτην κρατεῖν; 581-2).⁵⁷⁶ The public relevance of this quarrel is also underscored by the visual impact of Peleus’ sceptre, emblem of his royal power over Phthia, that he raises in the air to threaten Menelaus (588). As in *Hecuba*, the hierarchy staged during the confrontation of Andromache and Menelaus is thus one between slave and royal, between the most disempowered and the most empowered, the poorest and the richest, the least free and the freest, mixing considerations that can be mapped onto both ‘class’ and ‘status’ categories. Similar to the metaphorical dichotomies of the Platonic Calicles (*Grg.* 484a-b) and Thrasymachus (*Resp.* 344a-c), the polar opposites of this hierarchy are the ‘tyrannical’ master and the slave;⁵⁷⁷ yet this hierarchy is not simply literal, and rather entails a profound metaphor for the tension between the ‘weak’ members of society who appeal to *isonomia*, and the ‘strong’ ones.

The implications of this portrayal of Menelaus are significant, and they do not simply blur the moral distinction between noble and non-noble. As Hall has it, ‘the most

3), but also at Eur. *Or.* 1660-1 and *TrGF* v, 723 (*Telephus*): Garvie (1998), 225; Finglass (2011), 448. Cf. Kyriakou (1998), 301.

⁵⁷⁵ Allan (2000), 214.

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. Vester (2009), 301.

⁵⁷⁷ Calicles does not explicitly mention tyranny. However, as Reale (2017), 333 notes, his vision legitimates tyranny.

important distinction 5th-century literature draws between Greeks and barbarians' is 'the polarity between democracy and despotism'.⁵⁷⁸ Hall convincingly contextualises such interconnection in the historical circumstances of 5th century Athens: the rise of Persia, the birth of Athenian democracy, the Persian control of some eastern Greek cities through tyrants until roughly the 4th century, culminating in the conceptualisation of the Persian wars as the struggle of Athenian democracy (and not simply Greek freedom) against Eastern despotism.⁵⁷⁹ In the same work, Hall cautiously warns against the risk of taking every instance to tyranny in tragedy as necessarily 'orientalised', suggesting paying attention to the frequency of the 'vocabulary of barbarism' to draw conclusions.⁵⁸⁰

Even if one avoids the consideration that Hermione's earlier presentation as a barbarised woman might have influenced the audience's preconceptions about Menelaus,⁵⁸¹ the scene between Andromache and Menelaus ends with the slave woman's explicit denunciation of Spartan barbarism (445-53):⁵⁸²

ὦ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποισιν ἔχθιστοι βροτῶν

Σπάρτης ἔνοικοι, δόλια βουλευτήρια,

ψευδῶν ἄνακτες, μηχανορράφοι κακῶν,

ἑλικτὰ κούδεν ὑγιᾶς ἀλλὰ πᾶν πέριξ

⁵⁷⁸ Hall (1989), 54.

⁵⁷⁹ Hall (1989), 58 *et passim*. As Raaflaub (1979) notably puts it, 244, Persian monarchy was conceptually the 'Tyrann par excellence'. Cf. Hill (2020), 73.

⁵⁸⁰ Hall (1989), 210. For example, Hill (2020), 67-70 notes among the 'sole rulers' in tragedy that are described through the language of freedom/slavery Aeschylus' Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, Sophocles' Creon and Aegisthus, Euripides' Lycus and Pentheus; yet these are all Greek rulers and Hill does not argue that they are barbarised.

⁵⁸¹ See *supra*, sec. 2.2. Menelaus' and Hermione's attempts to violate the sanctuary of suppliants seem also 'barbaric': cf. Eur. *Heracl.* 130ff with Citti (1979), 230.

⁵⁸² Hall (1989), 214.

φρονοῦντες, ἀδίκως εὐτυχεῖτ' ἀν' Ελλάδα.

τί δ' οὐκ ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστίν; οὐ πλεῖστοι φόνοι;

οὐκ αἰσχροκερδεῖς, οὐ λέγοντες ἄλλα μὲν

γλώσση, φρονοῦντες δ' ἄλλ' ἐφευρίσκεσθ' αἰεῖ;

ὄλοισθ'.

Andromache's invective not only reverses the typical equation between barbarian and deceptiveness, but also 'lies parallel to, and undercuts, the viciousness of Hermione's anti-barbarian rhetoric'.⁵⁸³ By the end of this episode, then, Menelaus' tyrannical behaviour has fully assumed all the necessary nuances needed to appear specifically barbaric.⁵⁸⁴ Yet this transgression of behavioural expectations is also compounded in the following scene by Menelaus' chauvinistic rhetoric in his *agon* with Peleus, which indeed hinges upon Greek ethnicity and barbarism. Menelaus counters Peleus' insults at 645ff. by alleging that Achilles' father is disregarding the kin relations that bind their families together to defend what he regards as an enemy and an inferior being (648-54):

αἰσχρὰ μὲν σαυτῷ λέγεις

ἡμῖν δ' ὀνειδίη διὰ γυναῖκα βάρβαρον

τήνδ', ἣν ἐλαύνειν χρῆν σ' ὑπὲρ Νείλου ῥοὰς

ὑπὲρ τε Φᾶσιν, κάμῃ παρακαλεῖν αἰεῖ,

⁵⁸³ Hall (1989), 214.

⁵⁸⁴ On Menelaus' barbarisation: Dué (2006), 162; Allan (2000), 103, 132. He was also barbarised in the *Orestes*, with Tyndareus explicitly insulting him in this manner at 485: βεβαρβάρωσαι, χρόνιος ὦν ἐν βαρβάροις (Hall 1989, 189).

οὔσαν μὲν ἠπειρῶτιν, οὐ̃ πεσήματα
πλεῖσθ' Ἑλλάδος πέπτωκε δοριπετῆ νεκρῶν,
τοῦ σοῦ τε παιδὸς αἵματος κοινουμένην.

Neither the Nile nor the Phasis, respectively the southern and northern limits of the 'civilised' world, are specific to Andromache as a Trojan, but the vagueness emphasises the generalisation of Menelaus' words. His argument that by killing her he would do a favour to Peleus (660-1) is followed by the observation that it should not be tolerated that Andromache's offspring, of barbarian stock, might become the rulers of Phthia and govern over Greeks (662-7):

ἦν παῖς μὲν ἡμῆ μὴ τέκη, ταύτης δ' ἄπο
βλάστωσι παῖδες, τούσδε γῆς Φθιώτιδος
στήσεις τυράννους, βάρβαροι δ' ὄντες γένος
Ἑλλησιν ἄρξουσ'; εἴτ' ἐγὼ μὲν οὐ φρονῶ
μισῶν τὰ μὴ δίκαια, σοὶ δ' ἔνεστι νοῦς;

Menelaus here voices Greek cultural anxieties about Eastern tyranny and barbarian domination that had so profoundly shaped the Hellenic consciousness since the Persian wars, and his statement parallels others in the Euripidean corpus.⁵⁸⁵ Once again, however, Euripidean irony is palpable in the paradox of having Menelaus, whom we just saw behaving like the most ruthless barbarian,⁵⁸⁶ voicing an ideological, hierarchical

⁵⁸⁵ See *infra*, sec. 3.2, p. 247.

⁵⁸⁶ Stavrinou (2016), 15-6 also notes Peleus' point that Menelaus has come back from Troy without a scratch, and took his fine armour in its fine case to Troy and back to Greece in the same conditions (616-8), and argues that this further barbarises Menelaus.

imperative that many Greeks in the audience must have agreed with, and which was stable enough to endure until Aristotle (who indeed quotes Euripides).⁵⁸⁷ This naturally parallels his daughter's similar paradox. Menelaus' transgression does not merely signify his own personal failure as a character: rather, in the same way Andromache's gender transgression is destabilising because she voices normative ideological thoughts on female virtue, Menelaus does not simply undercut himself but also destabilises the ideological import of the content he voices. If Andromache complicates the meaning of female virtue, Menelaus puts under pressure the meaning of the distinction between Greek and barbarian. This will become clearer in chapter three, with the other Andromache, in *Troades*. But here the irony intensifies when we realise that Menelaus is allegedly defending Phthia from *barbarian tyranny*, exactly at the moment when Peleus' intervention on stage emphasises the illegitimacy of Menelaus' tyrannical abuse of power in Phthia (cf. 632ff.): τούσδε γῆς Φθιώτιδος/ στήσεις τυράννους (664-5). Like Andromache and Hermione, Menelaus also presents himself in a hyperbolic, overemphasised manner that contrasts with his own performance throughout the play.

But crucially, the demolition of Menelaus' discourse on ethnicity, effected through his ambiguous upper status which endows him with tyrannical traits, intersects with his most explicit characterisation as effeminate. As we saw, Peleus challenges the Homeric characterisation of the heroic Menelaus by claiming that he can hardly be counted among men, and that he has been so foolish to wage a war for a woman. What is more, Menelaus is a coward, and has never even engaged in combat while at Troy: he is unwounded (616),⁵⁸⁸ and he has returned to Greece with his 'splendid weapons' in

⁵⁸⁷ See *supra*, sec. 2.3, p. 177; *infra*, sec. 2.5, p. 187.

⁵⁸⁸ This is a striking diversion from *Il.* 4.127-47: Allan (2000), 21.

their ‘splendid coverings’ in the same conditions they were at the beginning of the war (616-8). Instead, his insistence in retrieving Helen has destroyed many ‘noble souls’ (ψυχὰς δὲ πολλὰς κάγαθὰς ἀπώλεσας, 611) and ‘noble children’ (εὐγενῆ τέκνα, 613). His effeminacy here intersects with his barbarisation, for the ideas that male (Asiatic) barbarians are effeminate, lovers of luxury, overfond of their wives, or even subjugated to them are commonplace in Greek ethnocentric thought, as the presence of the Phrygian eunuch in *Orestes* also suggests.⁵⁸⁹ Yet in suggesting that Menelaus is effeminate, Peleus, alongside Andromache, also demolishes his heroic identity, which is an important part of the play’s exploration of aristocratic birth: for the choral ode that immediately follows celebrates Peleus’ heroic exploits as signs of the discourse of nobility in a social sense.⁵⁹⁰ Thus, at the end of that ode, when the Nurse reassures the frantic Hermione by claiming that she is the daughter of ἀνδρὸς ἐσθλοῦ...σὺν πολλοῖς...ἔδνοισι (872-3), that Neoptolemus will not cast her out simply because of a ‘worthless barbarian woman’ (870), and that Menelaus will save her, the irony is strong. For the Nurse is wrong: Menelaus will not return to save her, and the idea that Hermione is different from the ‘worthless barbarian’ is immediately proved wrong by the ensuing scene, which sanctions her *peripeteia* into a barbarian-like slave. With that line, the demolition of Menelaus’ nobility (as well as Hermione’s) is sanctioned; yet this nobility is crucially destabilised at the intersection with gender and ethnicity. And ethnicity, in its turn, is challenged by the effeminacy as well as the problematic status of Menelaus, and so on. But this simultaneous destabilisation is in fact also embodied in the title character herself, that masculinised woman whose characterisation is, in fact, complex.

⁵⁸⁹ Hall (1989), 209-10.

⁵⁹⁰ See *supra*, sec. 2.3, pp. 174-6.

2.5 Complex Inferiorities: Andromache at the Intersection

As strong as the equation between ‘tyrant’ and ‘barbarian’, however, was the association between ‘slave’ and ‘barbarian’,⁵⁹¹ which is here in fact encapsulated in the tragic persona of Andromache. The robust dramatic-textual connection between the two identities undoubtedly reflected reality, as the overwhelming majority of slaves in Athens were also Eastern foreigners.⁵⁹² In another sense, that barbarians were felt to be naturally ‘slavish’ was a consequence of the association between barbarism and tyranny, exemplified for example by Helen in Euripides’ play of the same name when she observes that ‘amongst barbarians are all slaves except a single man’ (Eur. *Hel.* 276).⁵⁹³ The connection is most notoriously verified and sanctioned by Aristotle, as we saw; in the same passage he quotes one line of Euripides’ *IA* as support for his thesis: βαρβάρων δ’ Ἕλληνας ἄρχειν εἰκός, ἀλλ’ οὐ βαρβάρους (1400).⁵⁹⁴ In fact, tragedy often reproduces and strengthens the association between slavishness and barbarism, to the point that Hall concludes that ‘the tragedies of Euripides in particular frequently express the chauvinist imperative that Greeks must rule barbarians, not *vice versa*’.⁵⁹⁵ This lies precisely at the core of Menelaus’ rebuke, when he accuses Peleus not only of betraying his relatives to favour a barbarian woman (645-61), but also of tolerating the

⁵⁹¹ Hall (1989), 164-5; Rabinowitz (2008), 40; Vogt (1974), 17. Cf. Du Bois (1982), 80 on Hdt. 6. 135.

⁵⁹² Hall (1989), 196.

⁵⁹³ Hall (1989), 193, 196 *et passim*. Yet cf. Rankine (2022), 65-75.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. Rabinowitz (2008), 40; Saïd (2022), 77; Synodinou (1974), 59 and Vlassopoulos (2013), 193. On Aristotle’s view of the equation, Simpson (1998), 19 and Ambler (1987), 392-3 offer some nuancing. However, even if there is some flexibility implied in Aristotle, he mostly accepts the equation between servile and barbarian. At *Pol.* 4.7.1327b20-36, Aristotle differentiates between people from colder climes, Asian barbarians, and Greeks. Although Asians are recognised to be intelligent (as Ambler notes), they are still associated to a slavish character, while Greeks are not only inherently free, but also capable of ruling others. At *Pol.* 6.1295a1-23 Aristotle comes back to the idea of barbarian slavishness in the treatment of tyranny. Cf. *supra*.

⁵⁹⁵ Hall (1989), 197.

possibility that Andromache's sons might reign over Phthia (662-7).⁵⁹⁶ Yet Menelaus' dictum is heavily undercut.

While Menelaus thinks of himself as a Greek nobleman but ends up acting like a barbarian tyrant, Andromache may be categorised as a slave, and thus barbarian, but her constant defiance and noble behaviour single her out not only as a masculine character, but also as noble and Greek. Andromache's defiance of silence constitutes an important part of her masculinisation, as we saw, but her frank and critical response to Hermione's entrance speech in 186-91 also illuminates that the 'slavish barbarian' is anything but fawning:

ἐγὼ δὲ ταρβῶ μὴ τὸ δουλεύειν μέ σοι

λόγων ἀπόση πόλλ' ἔχουσαν ἔνδικα,

ἦν δ' αὖ κρατήσω, μὴ 'πὶ τῷδ' ὄφλω βλάβην·

οἱ γὰρ πνέοντες μεγάλα τοὺς κρείσσους λόγους

πικρῶς φέρουσι τῶν ἔλασσόνων ὕπο·

ὁμως δ' ἑμαυτὴν οὐ προδοῦσ' ἄλώσομαι.

While citing the disadvantages of one's position was a rhetorical commonplace often used in Euripides' tragedies,⁵⁹⁷ this specific instance is more problematic. Hippolytus or Orestes may use the same rhetorical preamble (*Hipp.* 986-91; *Or.* 544f.), for instance, but there is no doubt that their condition enables them to speak if they want so. But Andromache is a slave, and her statement on her willingness to speak freely singles out her character as noble and intrinsically free. One should compare, for instance, Ion

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. *TrGF* v, 719 (*Telephus*): 'Ἕλληνες ὄντες βαρβάρους δουλεύσομεν;.

⁵⁹⁷ Lloyd (1994), 117.

wishing his mother to be Athenian, for ‘if some foreigner should land inside a city of pure blood, while in word he may be called a citizen, in fact the mouth he gets is just a slave; he has no *parrhesia*’ (*Ion* 671-5).⁵⁹⁸ While opening up a fracture in the idealisation of *parrhesia* as the emblem of Athenian egalitarianism,⁵⁹⁹ Andromache behaves unlike a slave.⁶⁰⁰ In her prelude, moreover, she implicitly raises the issue of speech raised by Hermione during her entrance: Hermione had justified her ἔλευθεροστομεῖν precisely by appealing to her social status (147-53).

The prelude abruptly shifted to the real purpose of Hermione’s entrance, accusing Andromache. Yet the contrast Hermione set up between her social stature and Andromache’s position remains central, almost encouraging us to frame Hermione’s prelude in a specifically classed sense: σὺ δ’ οὔσα δούλη καὶ δορίκτητος γυνή (155). It is through her specular prelude and her following speech that Andromache apparently subverts the slave-noble hierarchy, as both Allan⁶⁰¹ and Torrance have noted.⁶⁰² Yet the problem here is that Andromache’s most explicit act of defiance and problematisation as a slave — the prelude above — frames the exposition of her views on feminine silence. Torrance, quite alone in the scholarship on the play, does recognise that the Euripidean Andromache is deliberately portrayed as fierce and different from the ‘submissive’ Iliadic Andromache;⁶⁰³ she also recognises that her status as a slave is

⁵⁹⁸ Cf. Burian (2011), 99-101; Carter (2008), 72.

⁵⁹⁹ Burian (2011), 102.

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. Finglass (2018), 300, with *Aj.* 1257-8; Eur. *Phoen.* 392; Aesch. *Pers.* 584-97.

⁶⁰¹ Allan (2000), 130: ‘the connection of independent wealth to free speech is characteristic of the aristocratic world of heroic myth...Andromache subverts her opponent’s simple-minded distinctions’.

⁶⁰² Torrance (2005), 44-5 notes how Andromache’s nobility emerges in comparison with her fellow-slave and is thus underscored in the following scene with Hermione, who indeed rebukes her for her inability to adapt to her slave status.

⁶⁰³ Torrance (2005), 62. Later adaptations and re-interpretations have also read *Andromache* as a play that promotes quite traditional gender structures: cf. Chong-Gossard (2015), 157-8.

constantly rejected by Andromache, who is internally ‘noble’ and of royal stock.⁶⁰⁴ But the problem with this perspective is that it does not see the interconnection between Andromache’s status and gender: it is precisely because she behaves unlike a slave, that she is ‘noble’, that she contradicts her own dictum on female silence. But it is at the end of the tragedy, too, that this is visible. For Thetis (as we will see below) will reverse the gendered patterns so far established within the play in the denouement of this tragedy by silencing men and daring to *speak*, and yet will do so primarily because of the complication of her femaleness. Naturally, what complicates the regular man/woman, wife/husband hierarchy is her divinity; yet the text rather focuses on her *nobility*: Peleus enthusiastically obeys to her commands by praising his γενναῖα συγκοιμήματα (1273) and by noting how her behaviour is ‘worthy’ of herself and her descendants (ταῦτα δ’ ἀξίως/ σαυτῆς τε ποιεῖς καὶ τέκνων τῶν ἐκ σέθεν, 1274-5).⁶⁰⁵ Even if 1279-83 could be spurious,⁶⁰⁶ Peleus’ assertion that it is better to marry from the noble (ἔκ τε γενναίων χρεῶν/ δοῦναί τ’ ἐς ἐσθλοῦς, 1279-80) attests that his earlier comments are immediately understandable as primarily emphatic of Thetis’ nobility — in line with Peleus’ similar thoughts on marrying ‘noble women’ at 619-23.⁶⁰⁷ To return to Andromache’s complication of female virtue, then, Andromache’s status, her nobility, entails a radical questioning of the normative ideology of female compliance that she herself voices. But given that servility was also ideologically connected to barbarians, by courageously responding to Hermione, Andromache is not only behaving like a free citizen and is not merely unfeminine, but also disproving the discursive association

⁶⁰⁴ Torrance (2005), 62.

⁶⁰⁵ This is an echo of Andromache’s accusations against Menelaus, which had the opposite effect of Peleus’ acknowledgments here—i.e., calling into question Menelaus’ status and repute (οὐκ ἀξιόσω, 323; οὐκ ἀξιῶ, 328, οὐκ ἄξι’, 367).

⁶⁰⁶ Stevens (1971), 246; Lloyd (1984), 164.

⁶⁰⁷ Lloyd (1984), 164.

between servility and barbarians. Menelaus attempts to conceal his effeminacy, underlined by Andromache's comments and her own masculinisation, through an appeal to his status and wealth, yet this 'nobility' is undercut by his feminisation itself and by the barbarisation of his character. But this process of barbarisation, in its turn, must be seen as effected by his effeminacy and his ambiguous status. And this ambiguous status is all the more put into question by the noble slave, Andromache. And so, to return to the start of this chapter, it is not simply that Andromache fails to live up to her own expectation of femininity; she precisely complicates the normative, hegemonic view on gender she reports *through the intersection of this hierarchy with the others*.⁶⁰⁸ But if we perceive her as noble, it is because that one hierarchy (slave/noble) is already unstable. All hierarchies, in their interconnection, are disturbed: each disturbed axis triggers the destabilisation of the others, in a skein that has no clear beginning or ending. There is, so to say, no 'initial', 'singular' thread of the skein that activates the others; all of these hierarchical threads are mutually entailing, difficult to tell apart, enmeshed.

In fact, ideologically, Andromache's speech-making is not simply 'unfeminine'. The logical, sophisticated nature of Andromache's λόγος strikingly contrasts with the standard (Greek) view that the logical articulation of speech defined Greekness in contrast with the barbarian, most famously exemplified in Isoc. *Antid.* 293-4 and *Paneg.* 50.⁶⁰⁹ In contrast with Greek logical argumentation, barbarian diction on stage was

⁶⁰⁸ This complication makes the definition itself of female virtue precarious, as I argue in chapter 3. This constitutes a major difference between my reading of Andromache's gender paradox and Torrance's, who instead reads 'transgression' as an act that would produce not ideological destabilisation, but rather simply an antipathy in the Athenian spectator. In view of what I am arguing here as well as throughout my thesis, I believe that transgression might be not an adequate term to capture the process of ideological destabilisation and deconstruction in these plays.

⁶⁰⁹ Hall (1989), 199; Allan (2000), 132; Croally (1994), 109. Cf. *Soph. Aj.* 1260-3.

often portrayed as distorted by excessive emotionalism, an idea which is reflected also in the association of unrestrained lamentation with barbarism and in the equation lyric verse: barbarian = trimeter: Greek.⁶¹⁰ Gathering evidence for this association, Hall mentions the *Andromache*.⁶¹¹ However, it is undeniable that Andromache's speech-making involves a variety of 'rhetorical techniques which must have become familiar to educated Athenians' by the last decades of the fifth century.⁶¹² Her speech-making in the confrontation with Menelaus marks her behaviour as Greek, manly, and noble.⁶¹³

Andromache's simultaneous characterisation as Greek, noble, and masculine reaches its apex with Menelaus, to whom she represents a tragically ironic counterpart. An important example of this is Andromache's self-sacrifice, which is perhaps the most patent manifestation of Andromache's noble character. We have seen how the chorus reproaches Menelaus and Hermione indirectly by censoring the men wielding political and domestic power unjustly who incur in disgrace, *όνείδεσιν*. Andromache voices similar aristocratic concerns when she decides to sacrifice herself to spare Molossus' life, proving to be interested in avoiding *όνειδος* more than the aristocratic Spartans of the play (408-10):

οὐ δῆτα τούμοῦ γ' οὐνεκ'άθλιου βίου·

έν τῶδε μὲν γάρ ἐλπίς, εἰ σωθήσεται,

⁶¹⁰ Hall (1989), 130-1.

⁶¹¹ Hall (1989), 132.

⁶¹² Stevens (1971), 118.

⁶¹³ Allan (2000), 137: 'Andromache's mastery of language now goes beyond the Greek/barbarian polarity and challenges the stereotypes of gender role. Her powerful female rhetoric destroys Menelaus' claims to political power'. But surely it is unlikely that the audience should have perceived Andromache's behaviour simply as unfeminine, especially given the importance of Menelaus' barbarisation in the episode; both hierarchies are involved, as well as the slave-noble polarity. On this last one and speech-making, cf. Vester (2009), 299.

έμοι δ' ὄνειδος μή θανεῖν ὑπὲρ τέκνου.

It has been recognised that Euripides recalls in the tragedy the encounter between Andromache and Hector at the Scaean Gates in the sixth book of the *Iliad*.⁶¹⁴ Andromache here behaves like her husband Hector, 'the hero of αἰδώς',⁶¹⁵ when he justified his choice to fight before the Iliadic Andromache by appealing to his sense of shame at the thought of the reproaches of the community should he desert the battlefield (*Il.* 6.441-6). Like Hector, Andromache is also torn between the choice of saving her life and her sense of what is right and expected of her. Hector's only wish, namely that Astyanax might survive and become an even greater warrior than himself, is reflected in Andromache's statement that Molossus has to survive because 'in him there is hope' (έν τῷδε μὲν γὰρ ἐλπίς, 409). In Euripides' tragedy, Andromache is the new Hector, and it is her who now invokes 'the tribunal of heroic shame culture', when she argues that if Menelaus kills her, he will have to 'stand public trial for this murder, for 'participating' will force him 'to accept responsibility': έν τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς καὶ σὺ τόνδ' ἀγωνιῆ/ φόνον· τὸ συνδρῶν γάρ σ' ἀναγκάσει χρέος (336-7).⁶¹⁶ The line may also be taken as Andromache's faith in and reliance on law, to be compared with Andromache's protestations that she is about to be executed without a trial,⁶¹⁷ and indeed έν is often used in forensic contexts to denote a tribunal.⁶¹⁸ Again, there is some irony in having a barbarian slave-woman expressing her belief in law on the Athenian stage, precisely as in *Hecuba*, where the fallen queen strongly proclaims her belief in an absolute νόμος when she pleads Agamemnon for justice (799-805).

⁶¹⁴ Graziosi and Haubold (2010), 49.

⁶¹⁵ Graziosi and Haubold (2010), 205.

⁶¹⁶ Allan (2000), 137.

⁶¹⁷ See *supra*, sec. 2.4, p. 180.

⁶¹⁸ Stevens (1971), 138.

As Lee has it:⁶¹⁹

Despite the restrictions imposed by *nomos*, her true nature manifests itself. Though she is one of the *ἐλάσσονες* (in conventional terms), she cannot 'betray herself' and shows that she is, in fact, very far from being *ἐλάσσων* (189ff.). This is seen most clearly at the beginning and end of her confrontation with Menelaus.

Yet this 'inferiority' and 'superiority' is constructed explicitly as an enmeshment of destabilised hierarchical discourses of gender, ethnicity, and status. The *Andromache* thus mobilises a series of social hierarchies, which appear at first sight as single discourses, individual axes of hierarchies that at times 'intersect' or even clash, for instance when the agon and stichomythia between Hermione and Andromache on female virtue include racial stereotypes and reproduces tensions within the ideology of Greek ethnic superiority. However, these axes gradually appear interlocking and interconnected, always implying the others. Andromache's nobility puts into disarray the man/woman distinction, and Menelaus' status is destabilised by this as well as the nobility of his slave.⁶²⁰ But his Hellenic pride is also undercut by his barbarism, and this process of questioning is tied to his status and gender; this discourse of ethnicity, however, had been already destabilised by Hermione, and even the 'Hellenic' Andromache before her. Yet both Andromache and Hermione's ethnic identities were not problematised individually, yet rather through their ambiguous status... and so further. As Matzner already anticipated in his preface to *Complex Inferiorities*, it is noticeable that changes in one's social positioning in poetry results to other

⁶¹⁹ Lee (1975), 11.

⁶²⁰ Wohl (1998), 139-40 argues that Alcestis' nobility masculinises her and feminises Admetus, while also casting a shadow on his social status, but she believes that the play represses these distortions of the social order in the end.

repositionings and changes.⁶²¹ Such relationship of structural interconnection between social hierarchies is exactly what modern theories of intersectionality maintain: conceptualising hierarchies as *enmeshed* challenges the idea that ‘each discrimination has a single, direct and independent effect on status, wherein the relative contribution of each is readily apparent’,⁶²² and instead understands ‘social divisions’ as ‘constituted by each other in concrete ways, enmeshed in each other, although they... are also irreducible to each other’.⁶²³

While it is possible to acknowledge, with intersectionality theorists, that hierarchies are always enmeshed and implicitly entail each other, *Andromache* offers a strikingly sustained mobilisation of intertwining ideological discourses. We could easily imagine a play in which Andromache’s status as a slave is not pressed or altogether erased; would Hermione’s racial rhetoric, or Menelaus’ hierarchical degeneration into an effeminate character, still be so vividly interconnected to the issue of class? Had Hermione’s exaggerated chauvinism been excluded from the play, or Menelaus’ categorisation of Andromache as a mere barbarian to expelled from Greece, would we be able to read dynamics of ethnic ideology in the play through the explicit exploration of gender and class? This might as well be possible. However, it remains that all of these hierarchies, all of these discourses, are *not* excluded or simply latent; rather, their presence is tangible and extreme. What is more, the *normative* ideological logic inherent in these hierarchies is explicitly voiced, even if only to criticise it, by the characters on stage. For instance, Hermione’s tirade against Andromache is ‘the most flamboyant passage of anti-barbarian rhetoric in extant tragedy’; Peleus’ re-evaluation

⁶²¹ Matzner (2018), 1-11. Cf. also Chaldekas (2022).

⁶²² King (1988), 47; May (2015), 22.

⁶²³ Guidroz and Berger (2009), 65.

of wealth and bastardy seems equally unparalleled, and his advocating for the common soldier against the general is also remarkable.⁶²⁴ And obviously, Andromache's overblown masochism seems not only shocking, but to also ask important questions on a wife's submission to her husband and on the normative imposition of silence on women. All of these hierarchies are tangibly mobilised in their intersection, and the order inherent in their logic pushed onto the verge of meaninglessness. But can this disorder be fixed by the happy ending of the play?

2.6 Intersectional (Irre)Solutions: Leaving Loose Ends

It is often observed on Attic drama that tragedy seems particularly interested in exploring marginal identities and questioning accepted certainties,⁶²⁵ but usually concludes with a re-assertion of the status quo, reaffirming ideologies by and through the denouement of the play.⁶²⁶ A clear example is the *Oresteia*, working as it does towards the redefinition of 'normal' boundaries between genders initially transgressed by Clytemnestra (and by Agamemnon before her).⁶²⁷ A more implicit case of a potential re-assertion of ideology in tragic resolutions might be that of *Medea*, as understood by those scholars that believe that Medea's vengeance reconfirms her character as an uncivilised and emotional woman. While the play questions the very notion of the stability and differentiation of genders through Medea's transgressive behaviour, to these critics the tragedy shows what would happen were women allowed to act like

⁶²⁴ Hall (2006), 121.

⁶²⁵ For a summary of the different views on this process of interrogation, cf. Rosenbloom (2006), 245-6 with further references.

⁶²⁶ Griffith (1998), 78; Loraux (1987), 60; Wohl (1998), 28 though with some specification. Cf. Wohl (2005a), 138 on Segal's understanding of tragedy's ideological operations.

⁶²⁷ Allan and Kelly (2013), 109.

men, and ultimately reconfirms Medea's femaleness and barbarism.⁶²⁸ Thus, what the plot does not accomplish, the representation does.⁶²⁹

One important critic in this strand is Griffith, who places due emphasis on the role of the ending of Attic tragedies. In fact, one of Griffith's articles comes closest to adopting an intersectional approach in the analysis of the way both patriarchy and aristocratic hegemony are systematically reinforced, reconstituted and reconstructed by the resolutions of Attic tragedy. Griffith thus writes:⁶³⁰

the 'order' that is (re)imposed at the end of a tragedy, in the form of the surviving king and/or his representatives (often blessed, or at least confirmed, by Olympian deities as well), is normalized and naturalized through its assimilation to a restored family order: the élite father knows best; it is he who can and should take care of us, and if he errs, he must be rescued and replaced by (an)other(s) like him.

What could be observed about the *Andromache*? In part, the tragic text invites us to sense that matters are resolved not only at the very end, when Thetis 'concludes on a note slightly less pessimistic about matrimony',⁶³¹ but two other times, given that the play is episodic: Andromache and Hermione terminate their stories happily *before* the play comes to its conclusion. The two seem to be reinscribed entirely within patriarchal customs: both Andromache and Hermione leave the stage in the same way, hushed to silence, 'reassured' by Peleus and Orestes (750-65; 989-94). Both, it seems, have now found a *kurios*, with the once proud and independent Hermione now ready to marry

⁶²⁸ Cairns (2014), 137: 'Euripides' *Medea* ... suggests that chaos and destruction would result should women ever act like men, demand equality, and throw off the constraints that their society places on them'. Cf. Gagarin (2002), 147.

⁶²⁹ Cf. Hoffer (1996), 290. Or the ritual frame of the festival: Rabinowitz (2008), 55.

⁶³⁰ Griffith (1998), 78. Cf., for instance, Eur. *Hel.* 1678-9.

⁶³¹ Hall (2010), 253.

Orestes - if her father consents to, as she specifies (987-8).⁶³² As for Andromache, we hear more about her future in the prophecies of Thetis, at the end of the tragedy; as expected, she will also not remain unmarried, and will become Helenus' wife in Molossia (1243-5).

What about class? By the end of the tragedy, Andromache and Molossus are not only finally free, but they are also destined to (re)acquire royal status by becoming the new royal family of Molossia (1243-9). First, this shows again how the polar opposite to 'slave' in the tragedy (as well as in the other two plays) is not simply 'free' (like Daitz and others claimed), but rather 'noble', and even 'royal'. Second, it would seem to support the arguments of those critics of Synodinou. Inasmuch as Andromache, as they claim, has never been properly a slave, the ending just fixes reality, showing what the play implicitly presents throughout. Griffith's theory would then seem vindicated: as the play emphasises the persistence of rule by the élite, it also reconstitutes and reconfirms notions of gender and its prescribed hierarchy. In terms, finally, of the Greek/barbarian hierarchy, little is said at the end, but the Phthians and the Trojans, who had been intimately connected by bonds of sympathy,⁶³³ part ways: Andromache will depart and will necessarily be married to another Trojan, Helenus, not a Greek. While Greek superiority, then, does not appear to be explicitly reaffirmed, the two parts of the polarity grow distant.

And yet, this sudden and strange *dea ex machina* hardly works in the direction of a resolution, and not merely in the sense of what is often observed about the Euripidean *deus ex machina* — that 'its implausibility seems only to reemphasize the impossibility

⁶³² Cf. Citti (1979), 139-40.

⁶³³ Sorum (1995), 386.

of resolution'.⁶³⁴ First, Phthia is, quite uniquely in tragedy, left without a ruler in the predicted future. Peleus, we know, will bury Neoptolemus and immediately move to the house of Nereus, and then will live happily ever after as a god with Thetis. Given that Neoptolemus is dead and Molossus is leaving, the city is left with no royal member, and Euripides leaves no clue as to its future. Naturally, Molossus, Andromache and Helenus will become a new royal family, but one can accept that this is a resolution only if one believes that there is no tension between the extensive focus on Andromache's slavery and her status.⁶³⁵ But even in that case one would have to grapple with the problematic notion of that 'half-slave', Molossus, becoming soon king (of admittedly a semi-civilised region). Griffith believes that 'the theatre audience is regularly brought to accept, and be satisfied by, a particular 'tragic' resolution involving the reaffirmation of continued aristocratic domination, through the play's associated [...] reinforcement of [...] habits of filial obedience and dependency on a strong father'.⁶³⁶ However, here the only figure to be left reigning is Helenus, who is hardly a father and will also never set foot on Phthia. The only paternal figure on stage, Peleus, who is also the current sovereign, leaves the throne empty. And the reason why he leaves it throws into disarray another fundamental hierarchy.

In a way, the family order that is supposed to mirror the persistence of aristocratic domination *is* reconstituted, and Peleus is honoured (and deified!), even if the polis seems left without a king. Thetis, *dea ex machina*, returns to her husband, in ring composition with the beginning of the play, in which we had heard of Thetis'

⁶³⁴ Wohl (2015), 129 on *Orestes*.

⁶³⁵ Cf. instead Vester (2009), 298: 'Andromache's actions disclose a *physis* at odds with her self-representation as powerless. Her behavior and manner contradict her avowed understanding of status as defined by *nomos*'.

⁶³⁶ Griffith (1998), 75.

interrupted marriage to Peleus: she thus promises a happy ending for the family, with a reunion for the divine couple and their dead son, Achilles (1254-62). However, this reassertion of patriarchal structures is marked by an odd incongruity: the play could have ended with a different *deus ex machina*, but it is up to Thetis, specifically, to tell Peleus what to do. In a way, she is obviously reporting Zeus' will; in another way, however, Thetis saves Peleus, thus reversing the pattern previously observed: the despairing Andromache was saved by Peleus, the distraught Hermione by Orestes.⁶³⁷ Now, the roles are reversed, and it is Peleus that is saved and even blessed, by a god, surely, but a *female* goddess specifically. In fact, Peleus also recalls Andromache and Hermione in his intense mourning in lyric meters,⁶³⁸ that activity that Andromache defined as quintessentially female and which connects her character intimately to that prototype of *mater dolorosa*, Thetis,⁶³⁹ physically represented on stage by her effigy.⁶⁴⁰ This is quite ironic for Peleus, given that masculinity had been the focus of his exchange with Menelaus, and his last lines to Andromache underlined the inferiority of female speech (οὐ μὴ γυναικῶν δειλὸν εἰσοίσεις λόγον, 757) as he hushed her to silence. Now, as Thetis says, it is time for Peleus to stop grieving (1233-8) and to listen as she speaks (ῶν δ' οὐνεκ' ἦλθον σημανῶ, σὺ δ' ἐνδέχου, 1238).

But the most striking inversion is represented by her instructions to wait at cape Sepias, from where she will take him to his new abode, escorted by a chorus of fifty

⁶³⁷ Scharffenberger (2020), 148: 'Andromache's lingering anxieties concerning an ambush by Menelaus' men (752-756) are replicated in Hermione's worries that her elopement with Orestes will precipitate a pursuit by Neoptolemus or Peleus (989-992)'.

⁶³⁸ Scharffenberger (2020), 148 also notes that Peleus similarly falls to the ground (1076-80) in a manner that reminds the audience visually of the suppliant postures of Andromache and Hermione and that he cries out that 'he is nothing' (1077; cf. 134). Cf. Cyrino's argument about the 'feminised' old Oedipus of *Phoen.* 1539-81: Cyrino (1998), 98.

⁶³⁹ Olsen (2022b), 68; Rabinowitz (1984), 121-2.

⁶⁴⁰ Cf. Storey (2017), 132 on Peleus potentially falling before the statue at 1225.

nymphs: this is a clear inversion of the typical bridal procession through which the Greek wife would be escorted from her paternal house to that of her husband. Here, instead, it is Peleus that will be escorted into Thetis' abode — the house of Nereus. This, again, is placed in ring composition with the beginning, in which Andromache lingered on her 'double' bridal procession, from her house to Hector's to Neoptolemus'.⁶⁴¹ The father's authority is thus protected, surely, but it is protected by this prototype of mother, Thetis, who is also responsible for leaving the throne of Phthia empty of kings, and will instead transfer royal power to a bastard king, 'Molossus'. This, in its turn, means that the only royal ruling figure left standing is also a half-barbarian; the other two royal figures left are full barbarians. The two parts of the polarity are all but divided from each other: the Molossian line is directly part of the 'race of Thetis and Peleus', as she reassuringly explains, meaning that their *genos* will not go extinct, just, she adds, like the race of Troy, for 'the gods care about Troy, too' (1251).⁶⁴² The Father's problematisation of his role within the gendered institution of marriage—in Griffith's meaning of the word Father—thus paves the way for the deconstruction of hierarchies of class and ethnicity.

Thetis, then, does weave in all of the threads of the play, but not by forcing them back into their normatively supposed order. In fact, she does so by continuing a process of hierarchical subversion already started with Andromache (of whom she is a double), a process which, while apparently proceeding through single axes, in fact always involves an enmeshment of social hierarchies. Rose observes that the politics of class in the *Oresteia* are intertwined with sexual politics: like Griffith, Rose also believes that the role of the aristocratic father draws scrutiny in tragedy in a double way: in his

⁶⁴¹ Olsen (2022b), 84.

⁶⁴² Cf. Sorum (1995), 386.

relationship with the common people, and in his treatment of women (eminently his wife). Thetis' subversion of the gender roles inherent in the institution of marriage (which she is *prima facie* helping to reconstitute) immediately weakens the rigidity of the differentiations at the basis of other ideologies. This, in its turn, is precisely possible because they do not constitute single ideologies, but are part of one overarching structure of power, one normative center, one matrix.

It is common to argue that tragedies start when societal structures falter. But in fact, although they are in crisis, we should notice that the *Andromache* opens with a stress on the status quo of social hierarchies: Andromache is a slave barbarian woman constantly reminded of her multifaceted role at the bottom of the hierarchy. Equally commonly, scholars have assumed that tragedies end by implicitly or explicitly reconstituting the ideologies at the basis of such societal structures: the *Andromache*, however, while it *prima facie* reconstitutes those societal structures (marriage, ethnic separation/'racial' purity, aristocratic domination), it ends by giving no ideological justification to these, and in fact by stressing how ideologies remain disrupted in their apparently reconstituted form.⁶⁴³ These social structures thus remain containers empty of the very ideological content that is supposed to fill any social structure of power.⁶⁴⁴ By grounding the moment of the re-constitution of order in an inversion of the normative order itself, the meaning of these hierarchical structures becomes suspended, rather than reaffirmed, as Wohl argued in her reading of the *Bacchae*, and

⁶⁴³ On the way the device of the *deus ex machina* in general raises more questions than gives answers, cf. Lefkowitz (2016), 158.

⁶⁴⁴ Cf. Wohl (2015), 85 on the ending of the *Electra*, which equally provides a resolution yet a deeply unconvincing one: 'it does bring the play to an end, but that end is devoid of significant content'. Wohl, however, still believes that the audience is invited to believe in it (cf. *infra*).

the 'system' which they constitute *deconstructed*, rather than temporarily challenged.⁶⁴⁵

Recently, Wohl has clarified how Euripides' *Electra*, for all its radical examination and problematisation of class and nobility, ends smothering the utopian tendency raised by the tragedy itself. The reassertion of aristocratic structures at the end of the play, as well as the acceptance of divine design in connection to it, blocks the potential for a radical appraisal of the ideology of aristocratic superiority (and of class distinctions connected to it). And yet, at the end of her chapter, building on Lukacs, Wohl suggests also another possibility: it might be precisely the containment of the energy working towards the collapse of social hierarchy that could represent the utopian tendency of the *Electra*.⁶⁴⁶

Might it be precisely through the conclusion of the play that those hierarchies, so sharply reasserted and yet so empty, might be more powerfully contested? Paradoxically — in typically Euripidean fashion — it might be precisely in the suffocation of alternatives to what is 'normal,' in its closing of these emancipatory spaces that have been opened throughout the play, that the *Andromache* might appear to be most radically *open*. And if the *Hecuba* re-opened the tensions of its Aeschylean intertext, the critical potential of this openness has to be sifted through the *Andromache* in its equally Aeschylean ghosts.

⁶⁴⁵ Wohl (2005a), 138, on Segal (1982).

⁶⁴⁶ Wohl (2015), 87-8.

2.7 Hierarchy, Structure, and Meaning: the Shadow of the *Oresteia* and the Open *Andromache*

2.7.1 Social Hierarchies and the *Oresteia*

In this process of critical discussion of hierarchies, the *Oresteia* plays again an important role. First noting the Aeschylean echoes in the play, McClure argued that the *Andromache* represents female speech as difficult to control and potentially disruptive of domestic as well as political harmony:⁶⁴⁷

It first converts Hermione into a kind of Clytemnestra, who has killed her husband, metaphorically cloaking him with death... while casting Orestes in the role of the seducer, Aegisthus, a cowardly stitcher of plots who kills his man unarmed. Such domestic treachery, promoted by women's sexual jealousy and their unchecked speech, leads to wide-ranging social and political upheaval, exemplified by the mythic Trojan war and dramatised in this unlikely domestic dispute between an aging slave woman and her bourgeois mistress.

We should add to McClure's point that Hermione recalls Clytemnestra also visually, most strikingly when she bares her breast just before Orestes enters (and, as McClure also says, there is a chance that Orestes actually sees her breasts).⁶⁴⁸ Given that the same scene from *Libation Bearers* was probably on Euripides' mind when writing the *Hecuba*, it can hardly not be the case here.⁶⁴⁹ Orestes, on the other hand, appears really

⁶⁴⁷ McClure (1999), 201. Cf. McHardy (2020), 25.

⁶⁴⁸ Stavrinou (2016), 13 points that it 'is the single other extant instance of such an act on the tragic stage'. Cf. Pucci (2020), 527 on Eur. *El.* 1206-7.

⁶⁴⁹ Hermione's breasts also connect her to her mother Helen: Peleus explains how Menelaus dropped his sword and refrained from killing her once he saw her breasts (629). In that same passage, Peleus repeatedly suggests that Hermione has inherited from her mother the ways of a 'bad woman' (619-26; cf. κακῆς γυναικός, 621; κακὴν δάμαρτ', 626). Yet, in fifth-century Attic

too evocative of that famous other tragic seducer and paramour, Aegisthus. Just like Aegisthus (and differently from Paris, the other mythical paramour), Orestes is responsible for the death of the 'patriarch', who is currently away from home, but indirectly, through others (cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 1634-5). This ultimately corroborates a picture of Orestes as particularly deceiving, which is underlined by the use of the word *μηχανοπράφος*, used not only in Andromache's invective against the Spartans (447), but also applied to Orestes plotting the death of Neoptolemus (1116). As McClure notes, *mechane* is used at the beginning of the tragedy explicitly to categorise female deceptiveness, but it is also used of Menelaus' scheming, seemingly indicating that men's language has been 'corrupted' by feminine guile.

But Orestes does not simply substitute for Aegisthus. At 995-6, Orestes himself categorises his plans to kill Neoptolemus as a 'plot woven of immovable meshes' (*μηχανή πεπλεγμένη/βρόχοις*). The terminology of 'enmeshment' here is redolent of Clytemnestra's revenge in *Agamemnon*:⁶⁵⁰ at Eur. *El.* 154, Electra laments Agamemnon like a swan calls to its father trapped in 'the snares of the net' (*βρόχων*), while at Eur. *Or.* 1315 the same word is applied to the plot Electra and Orestes are planning against Hermione. Orestes, then, is not simply evocative of Aegisthus, but even swaps places with his Aeschylean mother.

The dichotomy female deceit-masculine prowess, which was so pervasive in Athenian normative ideology and tragedy, is an underlying problem in Orestes' characterisation.

This is not simply anticipated by his question to Hermione in 911 (*μῶν ἔς γυναῖκ'*

tragedy, Helen and Clytemnestra are continuously paralleled and continuously substitute for each other, and Peleus' mention of Hermione as daughter of Helen (621) abruptly gives way to the memory of Iphigenia (625).

⁶⁵⁰ McClure (1999), 163-4; Denniston (2017), 68.

ἔρραψας οἷα δὴ γυνή) and 995-6 (τοῖα γὰρ αὐτῷ μηχανὴ πεπλεγμένη/ βρόχοις ἀκινήτοισιν ἔστηκεν φόνου/ πρὸς τῆσδε χειρός). Rather, Orestes' four-line reported slander against Neoptolemus (1092-5) echoes the four-line reported instigation of the 'bad women' who allegedly visited Hermione and roused her to take action against Andromache (932-5), the 'Sirens' that give Hermione the chance to articulate a tirade against the corrupting influence of women's deceiving gossip.⁶⁵¹ Finally, it has not gone unnoticed that Orestes beguiles Hermione, too, through a cunningly deceiving rhetoric: 'he subtly leads Hermione's narration [...] and plays purposefully on her jealousy'.⁶⁵² Although it is true that Andromache had presented deception as a feminine ability, the true harbingers of guile and manipulation in this play are men; both Andromache and Hermione, instead, are beguiled. This type of gendered inversion, however, is compounded by a sinister shadow cast on the hero's Greekness.

For the narrative of Neoptolemus' death further challenges Orestes' masculinity while inverting and playing with tropes often used on the tragic stage to define Greekness and barbarism. In *IT*, the outnumbered and defenceless Greek heroes, Orestes and Pylades, fight off the Taurians (1369-70) and display the athletic valour that Greek men developed through boxing and the *pankration*.⁶⁵³ According to Hall, the play is representative of the discursive association between barbarism and *deilia* and between Greekness and manliness, *andreia*. Because barbarian men were deemed deficient in manliness and courage, they were thought to resort to deceit and guile, like women, and/or to rely on the sheer force of numbers.⁶⁵⁴ The same trope 'à la Thermopylae' is

⁶⁵¹ Both are introduced by the word λόγους in the exact same metrical position. Cf. Scharffenberger (2020), 148.

⁶⁵² Allan (2000), 145.

⁶⁵³ Hall (1989), 124. Citti (1979), 217 parallels Neoptolemus' confrontation with the Delphians with the same passage as well as Eur. *Or.* 1395.

⁶⁵⁴ Hall (1989), 123-4.

present in the narrative of the Phrygian slave of *Orestes*, in which again the horde of barbarian eunuchs (superior in numbers but represented as cowardly and weak) is beaten by Orestes and Pylades (inferior in numbers but valiant and 'manly'; 1473-89).⁶⁵⁵

But the *Andromache* stages a different Orestes. In Delphi, Orestes defames Neoptolemus by alleging that he has come to Delphi to sack the temple, a slander that convinces the Delphians and mobilises them (1092-9, 1109-11). While Neoptolemus prays to Phoebus before the shrine, armed Delphians lie in ambush in the shade of a bay-tree (1114); among them is Orestes, now pointedly called 'the son of Clytemnestra, the contriver of all these things' (1115-6). The shade where Orestes lies in ambush contrasts with the description of Neoptolemus 'standing in full sight' (1117).⁶⁵⁶ From 1118 until 1160, the messenger concentrates on the valour of Neoptolemus, outnumbered by armed enemies (cf. 1126, 1129, 1136-7, 1153-5) and with no armour (1119), who resists valiantly to the attacks of the multitude. His masculine *andreia* is emphasised throughout: γοργὸς ὀπλίτης, which we saw applied to Menelaus ironically, here (1123) instead adequately defines the courageous Neoptolemus after he finds and wears an armour. Neoptolemus enduring the attacks of the Delphians is compared to a dancer performing the 'Pyrrhic dance' (1135), a military dance actually performed in Athens that may be paralleled with Hall seeing an extra-literary reference to the Greek *pankration* in the *IT*. But the messenger concentrates even more on the barbarism and *deilia* of his assailants, who, while outnumbered and armed, pelt him with missiles from afar (1128) and 'achieve nothing' (1133, ἀλλ' οὐδὲν ἦνον). The missiles they throw are not simply arrows and javelins (1132-3), but also 'ox-piercing spits pulled from the

⁶⁵⁵ For both passages, however, cf. Saïd (2022), 81-3.

⁶⁵⁶ Stevens (1971), 228.

slaughtered beasts' (1134), which gives a sense of primitive savagery. When Neoptolemus resists them again, they turn their back and flee 'like doves at the sight of a hawk',⁶⁵⁷ and the messenger reports the death of many Delphians as they flee in utter frenzy (1140-4).⁶⁵⁸ It is only through the intervention of Apollo that Neoptolemus dies. The mutilation of his body, 'utterly destroyed by savage wounds' (πᾶν δ' ἀνήλωται δέμας/ τὸ καλλίμορφον τραυμάτων ὑπ' ἀγρίων, 1154-5) finally reveals the inner savagery of the Delphians and of Orestes.⁶⁵⁹ But the climax of their barbarism is reached when we finally realise that Neoptolemus has been killed *inside* the temple of Apollo;⁶⁶⁰ other references to the setting anticipated that the Delphians were attempting to murder Neoptolemus by the altar (1111-3; 1123, 1138). The confrontation between Orestes and Neoptolemus casts a shadow over the hero who elsewhere appears as the champion of Greek values. What is more, the irony in this scene also relies on the fact that the Delphians, who are 'deceptive' inasmuch as they lie in ambush, are in turn being deceived by Orestes. Yet if Menelaus' 'feminine' deceptiveness contrasted with his presentation as a γοργὸς ὀπλίτης and undercut his aristocratic heroism (cf. 457-60),⁶⁶¹ Orestes' nobility here is similarly affected by his

⁶⁵⁷ Although the simile is traditional (cf. *Il.* 21. 493-6, 22. 139-43), doves were associated with Delphi, and so there could be a degree of irony in using a Delphic animal to underline the cowardice of the Delphians: cf. Arnott (1996), 115 on Diodorus Siculus 16. 27. 2. Although *Il.* 22. 139-93 applies the image to Hector, the other Homeric instance, together with Aesch. *Supp.* 223ff and *PV* 857, restricts the dove metaphor to women.

⁶⁵⁸ Saïd (2022), 81.

⁶⁵⁹ Segal (1999), 1, 31-3 emphasises the centrality of the word ἅγιος in Greek conceptualisations of civilisation and savagery as early as Homer.

⁶⁶⁰ Stevens (1971), 234.

⁶⁶¹ It is interesting that in those lines Andromache metaphorically describes Menelaus retreating from Hector as a sailor, given the lower-class connotations of the word ναύτης (cf. *Ar. Ran.* 1071-2, discussed above). Orestes also protests that Menelaus has betrayed him by giving Hermione in marriage to Neoptolemus after he had promised her to him, and calls this deceptiveness σοῦ πατρὸς κάκη (967). The νίκαν ... κακόδοξον (779) that the chorus have disparaged in the ode preceding Orestes' entrance seems relevant more to Orestes' successful plot, than Menelaus' and Hermione's unsuccessful one. Commenting on the murder of Neoptolemus, the messenger rebukes Apollo as a ὡσπερ ἄνθρωπος κακός (1164) because he has vindictively remembered 'old quarrels' (1165): this clearly applies to his protégé, too.

un-heroism. Again, it is possible to see with Orestes how gender, class, and ethnicity intersect and how the destabilisation of one is interconnected with the questioning of the others.

This Orestes is not merely 'immoral', but he also embodies those features associated to social 'inferiors', especially women, that the trilogy works to repress in its teleology. In *Andromache*, Orestes is really too similar to his mother and is indeed called the 'son of Clytemnestra' in the moment he is also called 'weaver of plots' (1115-6). This foreshadows the type of critical, as well as ironic, intertextual use made of the *Oresteia* in Euripides' *Orestes*: in that play, Orestes will not only resemble his mother morally, but also adopt a number of images and archetypes that make him align with the female.⁶⁶² Yet as Zeitlin explains, this hierarchical reversal is important, and it cannot be regarded as Euripidean 'mischief': rather, it involves a critique of a 'vision' of the world 'founded on a belief in hierarchical stability'.⁶⁶³ While the *Oresteia* begins 'with an image of confusion in sexual categories and ends with firm hierarchical distinctions established between male and female', 'this play resurrects the old image, inverts it, corrupts it, and by this inversion, affirms and even escalates the confusion'.⁶⁶⁴ What is more, this confusion is not only sexual, Zeitlin argues, but 'this collapse signals the collapse of the subsidiary polarities which are subsumed under the fundamental rubric of the male-female dichotomy',⁶⁶⁵ for example in the subtle assimilation between the

⁶⁶² Zeitlin (1980), 57.

⁶⁶³ Zeitlin (1980), 63.

⁶⁶⁴ Zeitlin (1980), 63.

⁶⁶⁵ Zeitlin (1980), 63. Although, of course, I do not believe that the 'other' polarities are subsidiary, and that 'gender' is the central social hierarchy. What is more, I have argued both in ch. 1 and here that hierarchies are so enmeshed that they often overlap and are indistinguishable from each other, so that even neat differentiations between them as distinct hierarchies are problematic.

Atreid hero and the Phrygian slave.⁶⁶⁶ In *Andromache*, Orestes works as an equally important symbol of multiple hierarchical reversal precisely in connection with Aeschylus' trilogy, and no solution is offered for the future. Yet if the Aeschylean hero is a renewed issue for the play, so is his Aeschylean patron.

2.7.2 Apollo, God of Justice?

Euripides has engineered his play to combine two stories, that of Andromache in Phthia and that of Orestes and Hermione. But an added element is represented by the role of Apollo. Although Orestes forgets to mention in *Andromache* that Apollo has required the matricide, he seems to have again a special relationship to Apollo (999-1006):

ὁ μητροφόντης δ', ἦν δορυξένων ἐμῶν
μείνωσιν ὄρκοι Πυθικὴν ἀνὰ χθόνα,
δείξω γαμεῖν σφε μηδέν' ὧν ἐχρῆν ἐμέ.
πικρῶς δὲ πατρὸς φόνιον αἰτήσει δίκην
ἄνακτα Φοῖβον· οὐδέ νιν μετάστασις
γνώμης ὀνήσει θεῶ διδόντα νῦν δίκας,
ἀλλ' ἔκ τ' ἐκείνου διαβολαῖς τε ταῖς ἐμαῖς
κακῶς ὀλεῖται· γνώσεται δ' ἔχθραν ἐμήν.

Thus, the Apollo who is responsible for the death of Neoptolemus is also Orestes' patron. Apollo appears as a particularly problematic figure in the *Andromache*: Neoptolemus has asked for forgiveness, but Apollo's behaviour seems uncompromising

⁶⁶⁶ Zeitlin (1980), 63; Vlassopoulos (2022), 14. Cf. Lefkowitz (2022), 99-118.

and terrifying.⁶⁶⁷ Delphi, on the other hand, is also represented in ‘quite sordid terms’, with ‘rumours and worries about money in the air’.⁶⁶⁸ What is more, the Delphians kill him inside the temple, and in a barbaric way. Scholars have attempted to find a political, historicist explanation to this starkly negative picture of Apollonian cult, but Allan remarks how this cannot provide a good explanation for the critical portrayal of Apollo.⁶⁶⁹ The myth of Neoptolemus’ death through Apollo’s will was already established (Pindar recounts it in *Paeon 6* and *Nemean 7*);⁶⁷⁰ it is the connection with Orestes that is original. Here the role of Apollo as patron of Orestes is deliberately intertwined with the story of Neoptolemus’ death, and both are presented in a particularly negative light.

In her recent, influential reevaluation of Euripidean gods, Lefkowitz argues that Apollo is simply more distant compared to other gods and ultimately resolves human issues;⁶⁷¹ yet this cannot be the case of *Andromache*. Here Apollo has Neoptolemus brutally killed as he begs for forgiveness for his earlier verbal offence and it falls to Thetis, who remains conspicuously silent about Apollo’s responsibilities, to offer some consolation.⁶⁷² What is more, although Lefkowitz might be right in arguing that the gods should not be expected to care about mortals,⁶⁷³ the whole manner in which the narrative of Neoptolemus’ death is engineered seems to emphasise the sordid nature

⁶⁶⁷ Lloyd (1994), 159: ‘the god’s vindictiveness is emphasized by the mythological innovation of N. being killed while trying to apologize’.

⁶⁶⁸ Allan (2000), 252.

⁶⁶⁹ Allan (2000), 253. He quotes Roberts (1984), 83.

⁶⁷⁰ Allan (2000), 27-8, 260. *Nemean 7* has a very different tone; although Neoptolemus is fated to die at Delphi, it is Apollo’s reward, not a punishment. The scholia on *Nem.7* interpret this as Pindar’s palinode of his treatment of Neoptolemus in *Paeon 6*, in which Neoptolemus was said to have offended Apollo with his murder of Priam.

⁶⁷¹ Lefkowitz (2016), 123 *et passim*.

⁶⁷² Cf. Wilson (1979), 10.

⁶⁷³ Lefkowitz (2016), 109 *et passim*.

of Delphi and Orestes as well as the cruelty of Apollo.⁶⁷⁴ As Torrance has observed, ‘the killing is impious and Apollo is portrayed very negatively in this play’; to do so, ‘Euripides reverses the paradigm of Sophocles whose Neoptolemus in *Hermione* had been the villain, while the Sophoclean Orestes seems to have heroically rescued the persecuted Hermione’.⁶⁷⁵ Moreover, although Apollo is ultimately justified in the tragedies Lefkowitz analyses, there remains indeed some degree of difference between the representation of Apollo in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* and the Euripidean Apollo in *Ion* who not only rapes Creusa but also refrains from appearing at the end of the play, in fear of being reproached (*Ion* 1557-8). Regardless, in the context here of a web of connections to the *Oresteia*, the role of Apollo and Delphi should not be underestimated.

Immediately after Orestes’ departure with Hermione, the chorus identifies Apollo as responsible for the fall of Troy, along with Poseidon (1009-27). They had built the walls of the city once; now they have deserted it. Yet the second half of the ode switches to comment on the matricide of Orestes: they remember the murder of Agamemnon at the hand of Clytemnestra, and hers at the hand of Orestes (1028-30). Apollo’s role is thrust sharply into view, as the chorus wonder how they are to believe that he commanded the matricide through his oracles (1031-5): ὦ δαῖμον, ὦ Φοῖβε, πῶς πείθομαι; (1036).⁶⁷⁶

Regardless of its potentially theological implications, this dark depiction of Apollo casts a shadow precisely on his role as guarantor of justice. This is clear in the messenger’s

⁶⁷⁴ On the important positive and metaphorical role of Delphi in tragedy, cf. Dougherty (1996), 263.

⁶⁷⁵ Torrance (2013), 195.

⁶⁷⁶ For a discussion of the textual issues, cf. Stevens (1971), 216-7.

more pronounced criticism of the god in connection not with the matricide, but with the murder of Neoptolemus (1161-5):⁶⁷⁷

τοιαῦθ' ὁ τοῖς ἄλλοισι θεσπίζων ἄναξ,
ὁ τῶν δικαίων πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις κριτής,
δίκας διδόντα παῖδ' ἔδρασ' Ἀχιλλέως.
ἐμνημόνευσε δ' ὥσπερ ἄνθρωπος κακός
παλαιὰ νείκη: πῶς ἂν οὖν εἴη σοφός;

Apollo here is specifically designed as the lord of prophecy and the judge of 'what is just' for men. While the first part of his designation is commonplace, the second is not strictly typical: it is Zeus who usually oversees justice.⁶⁷⁸ Regardless of whether this is a conscious allusion to Apollo's role in the foundation of the legal system established in *Eumenides*, the idea that Apollo is an 'arbiter of justice' is undercut precisely by the blurring of the concept of justice and revenge — a move shared by the *Hecuba*, as we saw. Here, too, the legal language of the Athenian institution is disturbing in its application to retaliatory violence: Andromache does suggest a form of justice that resembles the legal procedures of Athens (358-60). Yet it is the same Menelaus who explicitly voices the ethics of revenge when deceiving Andromache (τοὺς παθόντας ἀντιδρᾶν, 438) that also describes the killing as a 'vote' or 'decree' (σὲ μὲν ἡμετέρα /ψῆφος ἀναιρεῖ, παῖδα δ' ἐμὴ παῖς /τόνδ' Ἑρμιόνη, 517-9), and the chorus uses the same word (ζεῦγος πρὸ δόμων ψήφω θανάτου/ κατακεκρμένον, 495-6).

⁶⁷⁷ Notice also how *ἀδύτων* (1033), a rare term in Euripides, is repeated in the description of Apollo's voice coming from the *ἀδύτων* (1147), again creating a connection between Apollo's role in the murder of Clytemnestra and the killing of Neoptolemus. Cf. Kyriakou (2016), 141.

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. *Ion* 442-3, in which Ion protests that the gods act unjustly, while prescribing laws for men. There, however, the accusation is generalised and applied to all gods.

At the end of the *Orestes*, Apollo prophesies precisely the death of Neoptolemus (1653-6), and it does so in the context of his *deus ex machina* immediately after predicting in condensed (and altered) form the plot of *Eumenides*:

[...] ὃς δ' οἶεται

Νεοπτόλεμος γαμῆν νιν, οὐ γαμῆ ποτε.

Θανεῖν γὰρ αὐτῷ μοῖρα Δελφικῷ ξίφει,

δίκας Ἀχιλλέως πατρὸς ἐξαιτοῦντά με.

The resolution of the problem of justice is doubly undermined here: first, it is a divine tribunal, not the Areopagus, who will absolve Orestes, with no rational justification being given; second, as Zeitlin underlines, ‘there is no question even of the vendetta as a principle being superseded in any permanent way by a more advanced form of justice... neither the god nor the mortal transcends the *lex talionis*’.⁶⁷⁹ In *Andromache*, Apollo’s role in the foundation of human justice is already deeply undermined by his overemphasised vindictiveness. What is more, the messenger expresses his frustration both at Apollo as ‘arbiter of justice’ and as ‘dispenser of oracles’, putting into question Apollo’s truthfulness, which has to be understood within the broader emphasis of the narrative on deception (the Delphians lying in ambush, 1114-5; Orestes’ deception of the Delphians, 1090-5, 1116; Orestes’ allegation that Neoptolemus is lying, 1110). Although the Loxias’ traditional characteristic is indeed his ambiguity, his ‘obliqueness’ (as the epithet signals),⁶⁸⁰ there is a disturbing and unflattering consonance between his protégé’s deceptiveness and the god’s ability to provide indication and direction to

⁶⁷⁹ Zeitlin (1980), 71.

⁶⁸⁰ Cf. Lefkowitz (2016), 99 and her argument on how Apollo is simply difficult to understand, not negatively portrayed in Euripides.

mortals through language. As the chorus said, how can we be *persuaded* (ὤ Φοῖβε, πῶς πείθομαι)? How can we rely on him and on his *peitho*? Regardless of whether Apollo is theologically compromised, the questioning of his power potently deepens the epistemological and moral confusion the play explores and enacts.

2.7.3 Queer Time, Queer Aesthetics

This particularly unfavourable portrayal of Orestes as well as Apollo and Delphi has an impact on the temporality of the play. Although Orestes' action here is technically chronologically precedent to the foundation of the Areopagus and the Aeschylean resolution, these elements cast a shadow on the solution offered by the *Oresteia*, and on its narrative of progress. Thetis seems to offer a solution to this process of moral as well as hierarchical transgression, and Orestes' future in Athens might appear to also offer hope in the containment of these 'perversions'. But if Thetis' solution rings hollow, as we saw, Orestes' characterisation also impairs this chronological, teleological reading. Thus, the play 'queers' time in the sense that a teleological progression, a resolution, seems heavily improbable. This process of queering of temporality, the rejection of a sequence of progress, entails a significant disturbance in the narrative succession of the play, as well as its structure, constantly disparaged due to its lack of unity.⁶⁸¹

For the play is also structurally and aesthetically 'queer' in the sense that it refuses a narrative structure based on progress and teleology and is rather endowed with a 'sickening fluid', a-structured development⁶⁸² that mutates 'from suppliant drama to

⁶⁸¹ Erbse (1966), 276; Albini (1974), 93; Garzya (1951), 112; Papadimitropoulos (2006), 147-8; Torrance (2005), 39 with references.

⁶⁸² Burnett (1971), 131; cf. Scodel (2012), 19.

escape play to a tragedy of divine vengeance for human misdemeanour'.⁶⁸³ Narrative becomes deprived of sequential logic, and rather unwinds under the aesthetic criterion of surprise,⁶⁸⁴ with the *nostos* of Neoptolemus continuously anticipated and then frustrated—⁶⁸⁵an anti-teleological structure. What is more, the play does not grant the typical epistemological superiority of Attic tragedy to its original audience, for events are surprising and unpredictable for characters and spectators alike: Andromache's salvation by Peleus, Hermione's by Orestes (and in general the combination of the two stories), Neoptolemus' second visit at Delphi and murder by Orestes, and Peleus' deification by Thetis are completely Euripidean innovations and/or variations on what were already alternative strands of myth (cf. the end of *Orestes*).⁶⁸⁶

What is more, the episodic structure of the play itself does invite considerations of meaning, it implicates the audience in the understanding of its tripartite structure, to then frustrate them. As we have seen, links are numerous between the three episodes: mourning, helplessness, and salvation, for instance, connect Andromache, Hermione, and Peleus. Themes undeniably repeat themselves, with some clear ironic effects,⁶⁸⁷ yet what is the purpose of this juxtaposition in the narrative? What conclusions are we to draw for the plot that we watch? In a world where so much is left to surprise, and events (or individuals) follow no linear logic, 'they remind us that the world does not conveniently arrange itself thematically'.⁶⁸⁸ Or, even, that although the ironies of

⁶⁸³ Hall (2010), 252. Cf. McClure (1999), 158-60.

⁶⁸⁴ Allan (2000), 84-5 first argued in favour of this 'aesthetic of surprise' with 'philosophical significance' noting how 'discontinuity and artful frustration of expectations work together to produce intriguing and disconcerting results'.

⁶⁸⁵ Hall (2010), 252.

⁶⁸⁶ Allan (2000), 27, 34, 36-7; cf. Zeitlin (1980), 71 on *Orestes*; Wohl (2014), 148-9 on *Helen*.

⁶⁸⁷ Scharffenberger (2020), 145.

⁶⁸⁸ I borrow this idea from Solodow's understanding of thematic links in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Solodow (1987), 28-9.

similarity between characters seem to undercut some specific ideas they have, there is no specific meaning in the way events unravel.⁶⁸⁹ No clear interpretation of the thread that links them together can be provided, if not for the meaninglessness of the sequence of events itself. As we will see, this frustrating mechanism of inviting connections to hamper a clear understanding of linearity in the tripartite structure of the play will be crucial in Euripides' engineering of his Trojan trilogy, culminating with *Troades*. This anti-teleological aspect is then both articulated through the aesthetics and narrative of the play and has an important impact on the audience's construction of the meaning of the narrative itself. This is similar to the vicious cycle established by the *Hecuba*, a narrative that is both the repetition of a following event and that yet undoes it, collapsing the notion of narrative *telos* itself — rather than being the prequel that easily fades into the future events of the *Oresteia*.

And indeed the *Andromache* queers time precisely at the moment of its supposed 'future' resolution, blocking the imagined 'progress' and teleology of the *Eumenides*. For not only does 'Agamemnon's son, the matricide... not shrink from further murderous violence';⁶⁹⁰ Thetis even announces that the grave of Neoptolemus in Delphi will perpetually shame the crime of 'the Oresteian hand' (φόνον βίαιον τῆς Ορεστέας χερός, 1242 — a metapoetic gesture?).⁶⁹¹ What is more, Thetis' *dea ex machina* attempts to give this *telos*, indeed by giving orders and prophetising about the future. And yet, in doing so, she deprives Phthia of a ruler: Peleus will be gone, Hermione has already left with Orestes, Neoptolemus is dead, Andromache will live in Molossia with

⁶⁸⁹ Cf. Di Benedetto (1971), 123 on *Hippolytus*.

⁶⁹⁰ Zeitlin (2009), 694.

⁶⁹¹ At *Ar. Ra.* 1124, Aeschylus performs the prologue of *Libation Bearers* under the request of Euripides, who calls it *Oresteia*: Πρῶτον δέ μοι τὸν ἐξ Ὀρεστέας λέγε.

her child. Almost uniquely in tragedy, the royal household has come to an end.⁶⁹² What is more, it is Greek lineage that comes to an end in general: Orestes will marry Hermione, who is barren (at least in this version; Thetis does not express herself on the matter):⁶⁹³ 'the Greeks [...] are threatened with the failure of their line'.⁶⁹⁴ The house of Atreus too comes to an end; there is no future. Yet even this no-future can indicate a queering of time, a disruption of the political discourse of social reproduction (ultimately based on normative social structures), which eradicates the possibility of a teleology, as Andújar notes on the Labdacid line at the end of Euripides' *Phoenissae*.⁶⁹⁵ In *Andromache*, the sense of a happy ending given by Thetis' future leaves no royal member on the throne of Phthia, with the future of the city uncertain. The future of Argos is endangered, too, and the only futurity in sight is that of the barbarians and the semi-barbarian Molossus. Again, the 'irresolution' of social hierarchies is intimately bound to this queering of temporality, the problematisation of futurity as well as the questioning of 'progress': the play does not work towards the 'fixing' of a natural order of hierarchies just as it does not proceed towards establishing a future for Phthia and Argos.

Just as these hierarchies are only superficially 'fixed' at the end of the tragedy, the play also leaves open the possibility of a gap between (external) appearance and (internal) reality.⁶⁹⁶ What is more, in this interrogation of appearances, questions arise

⁶⁹² Compare the final prophecy of Dionysus at *Bacch.* 1130-43, with Cadmus and Harmonia exiled, transformed into snakes, and then fated to reach the land of the Blessed. At the end of *Medea*, Jason is still alive, yet the royal household is entirely dead.

⁶⁹³ In Sophocles' *Hermione*, Orestes and Hermione beget a son, Tisamenos, also recorded in other sources: Allan (2000), 18; Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick, Talbot (2006), 4, 6, 14. Here, the text is silent on this potential variant of the myth.

⁶⁹⁴ Zeitlin (2009), 693.

⁶⁹⁵ Edelman (2004); Freccero (2022), 44; Andújar (2022), 183.

⁶⁹⁶ As Wohl recognises the utopian tendency in terms of class in the play, she also argues that the play raises the spectre of the instability of class divisions to just stifle this utopian impetus by reconfirming Orestes as the noble hero of the play and asking us to believe in it despite his

concerning the inherent rigidity of these categorisations —⁶⁹⁷ questions that remain ultimately unresolved. Like Cassandra’s sophistic rhesis in *Troades*, as we will see, Euripides gestures towards a counterintuitive form of reality based on a world where things are reversed.⁶⁹⁸ Rather than envisioning the reversal of normal hierarchies as temporary transgressions that necessitate fixing,⁶⁹⁹ Euripides suspends the norms altogether, leaves ungrounded the hierarchies that structure ideology, deconstructing it and ‘opening an imaginative space onto it’ —⁷⁰⁰ in other words, queering it. The anti-teleological, episodic, ‘queer’ structure of the play relies on an aesthetic of surprise that is closely linked to the theme of the unreliability of appearances, and, in turn, to the instability of hierarchies. Affective response and the deconstruction of social discourses finally appear fully enmeshed in each other: opening oneself up to the unexpected involves embracing a type of queerness that suspends social categorisation. The deconstruction of commonly accepted reality in this play re-opens Aeschylus’ constructive project of civilisation; yet this unruly openness cuts across different aspects of the play — its presentation of hierarchies, its temporality, its irresolution, and its queer aesthetics.

2.7.4 Openness: Hierarchical Forms, Hierarchical World

In his *Opera Aperta*, Umberto Eco theorises a specific type of artwork (literary, musical, or visual) that remains ‘open’, ambiguous. Eco is interested in asserting the specificity

character’s weakness: ‘the *anagnorisis* both enacts and exposes this stifling effect when it asks Electra—and us—to put faith in artifice, not essence, *kena doxasmata*, not *ethos*’(p. 76). But this view might curtail the great emphasis placed in both *Electra* and *Andromache* on social reality as indeed made up of *kena doxasmata*. The ending of the *Andromache* enacts a superficial suggestion of order that in fact keeps the gap between appearance and reality open.

⁶⁹⁷ Cf. Rankine (2022), 72-3.

⁶⁹⁸ The theme of reality and counter-intuitive reality is central to *Helen*: cf. Griffiths (2020), 325 with contextualisation.

⁶⁹⁹ Cf. MacLeod (1982), 138 on the *Oresteia*.

⁷⁰⁰ Wohl (2005a), 138, on Segal (1982).

of this form of art to modernity, yet also formulates a transhistorical notion of literary and artistic openness. According to Eco, certain works are endowed with an open form: they do not offer an attainable understanding of their meaning, and this openness of meaning derives from the collapse of causal and linear links in the narrative form. Yet this open aesthetic can be understood as an ‘epistemological metaphor’:⁷⁰¹ the way in which aesthetic forms in a certain historical period are structured reflects the way in which contemporary culture envisions reality.⁷⁰² Eco writes on medieval art:⁷⁰³

the closed and univocal work of the medieval artist reflected *a conception of the world as a hierarchy of clear and fixed orders* [my emphasis]. The work of art as a pedagogical message, as a monocentric and necessary organisation... reflects a syllogistic science, a logic of necessity, a deductive consciousness by which reality can appear, step by step, with no accidents and in one direction only, proceeding from the primary principles of science that are the same as the primary principles of reality.

Yet the ‘open work’, he argues, springs precisely from a crisis of this hierarchically organised, stable view of the world, which is inevitably connected to a narrative structure that proceeds ‘logically’ —or, as Eco says, syllogistically. For instance, Eco argues, this destabilisation of the principle of causality is reflected by those music compositions in which a musical structure cannot necessarily determine that which follows (for instance as seen in serial music):⁷⁰⁴ the absence of a tonal centre from which the subsequent movements may be inferred from the premises is a reflection of

⁷⁰¹ Eco (1962), 42.

⁷⁰² Eco (1962), 42.

⁷⁰³ Eco (1962), 42. Cf. Monti (2021), 10.

⁷⁰⁴ Eco (1962), 43.

this crisis. This is what he calls ‘the poetics of the work of art devoid of necessary and foreseeable conclusions’ (*l’opera d’arte priva di esito necessario e prevedibile*), poetics that are typical of the ‘open work’.⁷⁰⁵

Eco’s theorisation of the open work illuminates the ‘critical’ interconnections of the *Andromache* — the way its queer aesthetics, its fragmented structure and atypical narrative episodicity refract the crisis of signification underlying this new, fluid, unpredictable world.⁷⁰⁶ For the play, as we saw, recalcitrates from being ‘logical’: there is no unifying hero or heroes; plot arcs follow an aesthetic of surprise for characters and spectators alike; events do not follow from their premises, and they are neither inevitable nor probable, to the displeasure of the ‘syllogistical’ Aristotle (who speaks in precisely these terms: *Arist. Poet.* 1452a);⁷⁰⁷ hierarchical definitions are constantly invoked to define morality and order and yet cannot be reinstated even in the end. These matters of ‘concern’ (to say it with Latour), and this aesthetic of surprise, are not only identifiable, then, as an ‘epistemological metaphor’; this epistemological metaphor, too, betrays an ideological critical movement, a potent rupture of the hierarchical world that Eco sees dominating the closed work of art.

It would be hard to neglect the shadow of sophistic thought in the *Andromache*’s articulation of its epistemological metaphor, especially if considered in parallel with the *Hecuba*. The world of both plays is unpredictable, and this unpredictability is

⁷⁰⁵ Eco (1962), 44; Monti (2021), 10.

⁷⁰⁶ Cf. Monti (2021), 2.

⁷⁰⁷ Aristotle should not necessarily be taken as representative of the whole spectrum of ancient views on tragedy. But his ideas on the way tragedies should follow a linear plot, in which events follow from each other, are in line with Eco’s theorisation of the ‘syllogistic’ structure of the closed work. Eco’s use of the term in fact evokes precisely this Aristotelian model of the world and narrative based on causality. This helps clarify the difference between *Andromache* and, say, *OT*, *Agamemnon*, or even *Medea*. On Aristotle’s definition and its contradictions, cf. Wohl (2014), 142-8.

predicated on the fracture between word and fact, signifier and signified, appearance and reality. Definitions of virtue, worth, and identity, on which characters seem to almost obsessively rely, often gratuitously, are increasingly rendered inconsistent.⁷⁰⁸ Menelaus' and Hermione's ethnic chauvinism, for instance, as well as their belief in their noble status, is constantly deconstructed, but the point is that they are both framed in terms of virtue and wisdom (ἀμαθίας, 170; σώφρονα, 235 ὁ νοῦς, 237). This is also the case of Andromache's tirade on female *sophrosyne*. But this undecidability of wisdom and virtue, which each character problematises both for themselves (they are their own contradiction to the moral tenets they claim are absolute) and the others (such moral tenets are based on hierarchies, yet these hierarchies are deconstructed), expands beyond the discussion of social hierarchies.

They are part of a larger, general confusion of wisdom according to which each character attempts to assert their logic, their understanding of the world, yet this logic is repeatedly shown to be labile, inconsistent — not less when they attempt to articulate their views on the responsibilities for the war:⁷⁰⁹ 'even as it engages in a search for the sources of its characters' sufferings, the tragedy also problematizes the impetus to articulate causes and affix blame'.⁷¹⁰ This is going to be a central point in the sophistic influence on *Troades*, as we will see. The *Andromache*, to borrow one of its central terms, constantly revels in the incessant exposition of δόξα from the perspective of all the characters involved, an operation that can be paralleled by the sophistic

⁷⁰⁸ The play has often appeared to be black-and-white melodrama: Butrica (2001), 190; Garzya (1952), 116; Martinazzoli (1946), 115; yet cf. Kyriakou (2016), 137-54.

⁷⁰⁹ Kyriakou (2016) focuses on this confusion of wisdom in the play at length, and specifically lingers on the issue of responsibility in the debate between Peleus and Menelaus (pp. 150-3).

⁷¹⁰ Scharffenberger (2020), 152.

interest in δόξα:⁷¹¹ Andromache's invective against Menelaus begins with a complaint about the unreliability of (social) repute (ὦ δόξα δόξα, μυρίοισι δὴ βροτῶν/οὐδὲν γεγῶσι βίοτον ὠγκώσας μέγαν, 319-20; cf. 330-2); Peleus denounces the unfair *nomos* of attributing more glory to the generals in the military hierarchy (ὁ στρατηγὸς τὴν δόκησιν ἄρνυται, 696) and complains that he is not as old as he appears to the others (ἡμεῖς δ' ἔτ' ὀρθοὶ κού γέροντες, ὡς δοκεῖς, 761); Menelaus seems to complain against Peleus' repute (τοὺς φρονεῖν δοκοῦντας Ἑλλησιν, 646-7).⁷¹² Most importantly, this chain of 'floating signifiers' (as we will see in *Troades*), is explicitly stopped by Thetis when she announces the future 'bridal procession' of Peleus and trenchantly declares that it is Zeus' *doxa* (Ζηνὶ γὰρ δοκεῖ τάδε, 1269) — finally a 'singular' meaning that is somewhat ironic both because of the strangeness and unexpectedness of this *doxa*, and because of the use of *doxa* in the Euripidean coda, when the emphasis is naturally on its instability (τὰ δοκηθέντ' οὐκ ἔτελέσθη, 1286).⁷¹³

The fallacy of each logic is exposed as the plot of the play itself follows an 'aesthetic of surprise', diverting from the audience's expectation in plot development as well as dramatic typology, and delivering a play with no unifying character, no single 'hero' or 'heroine' (and so, in a way, *Troades* too follows this scheme). To return to McClure's argument, then, that *Andromache* represents sophistic rhetoric as inherently dangerous and as a contaminating practice for the polis, this play (as well as the other two Trojan ones) emerges then not as a clear-cut denunciation of sophistic practices,

⁷¹¹ Bons (2006), 41: 'humankind lives in a contingent world, in which the state of affairs or (lack of) facts alone more often than not is not sufficient to reach a clear decision on an issue'. Cf. Willink (1986), 124 on Eur. *Or.* 235-6 (δόξαν γὰρ τόδ' ὑγείας ἔχει. / κρεῖσσον δὲ τὸ δοκεῖν, κἂν ἀληθείας ἀπῆ).

⁷¹² On the textual difficulties of 645ff., cf. Stevens (1971), 174.

⁷¹³ Cf. Lefkowitz (2016), 194-7. Cf. Wohl (2014), 157 on the same coda in *Helen*: 'the dogma of improbable probabilities becomes a universal law and the whole world is said to work like the unbelievable fictions inside the play'.

but a critical tragedy that uses ideas diversely elaborated on and invigorated by sophistic thought, with no pretense of offering a univocal message. We will return to this matter with *Troades*. But the world of the *Andromache*, I hope it appears now, engages with its 'epistemological' substrate in complex and provoking ways. Misleading rhetoric, like the Sirens' melodies, might be disquieting, and it might bring about destructive effects on individual and polis alike. This might be compared with Odysseus' demagogic sophisms in the *Hecuba*. Both plays, however, inherently reflect sophistic thought without necessarily condemning it. In fact, they implement it in a contradictory and complex way to open a critical gap on the certainties of their culture, on its hierarchies that purport to order the world, on the mediation of conflicts effected by its apparatuses (including, indeed, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*). Their disjointed, 'accidental' form eventually becomes emblematic of their queer logic and of their inherently critical movement.

As Wohl rightly notes in her book on new formalism, Aristophanes makes Euripides damned in the *Frogs* because of the way he is *both* technically and politically innovative, 'democratic'.⁷¹⁴ The lack of structural unity in these plays, their 'ugliness', contributes to a suspension of closure, a deferral to the future beyond the scope of the play itself.⁷¹⁵ According to her analysis, if *Hecuba* leaves unresolved the matter of Polyxena's death to divert to a new plot abruptly, if *Troades* attaches a strange prologue to a detached play with an abrupt ending, Wohl argues that these devices might lead the audience towards a sense of non-closure, thus stimulating them to take action in the future. The *Andromache's* queer, episodic structure is not only non-teleological, but anti-teleological: each episode ends in a surprise, a reversal of structural and narrative

⁷¹⁴ Wohl (2015), 6.

⁷¹⁵ Wohl (2015), 62.

expectations, with the final *dea ex machina* by Thetis—itself a surprise—only seemingly fixing this cycle of individual reversals. This suspension, I maintain, is not merely to be projected on another (real) ‘future’, in which spectators will resolve these issues: captured by the openness of this work, the audience of this play seems rather interpellated in the *present* to remain open, ‘to think, to see, to comprehend, to turn the tables, to love, to use subterfuges, to suspect wrongs, to consider things from all angles’, as Aristophanes’ Euripides says about his own tragedy in *Frogs* (νοεῖν ὀρᾶν ξυνιέναι στρέφειν ἑρᾶν τεχνάζειν/κάχ’ ὑποτοπεῖσθαι, περινοεῖν ἅπαντα, 957-8).⁷¹⁶ As bell hooks would have it, Euripides’ critical enterprise constructs an interactive process with his audiences, one in which we are urged ‘to think long, hard, and critically; to unpack; to move beneath the surface; to work for knowledge’;⁷¹⁷ above all, it requires ‘radical openness’.⁷¹⁸ The world that is left at the end is a reversed one, awaiting the resolution of the *Oresteia* and yet explicitly undermining its attempted closure:⁷¹⁹ it might be an overly neat solution to reassert order, unity, hierarchy in a world that is complex, unstable, and ultimately queer.

⁷¹⁶ ‘Openness’ might be regarded as a sophistic and even Gorgianic feature: Bons (2006), 42-3.

⁷¹⁷ hooks (2010), 15. hooks here specifically mentions the critical appeal of deconstruction within academic circles.

⁷¹⁸ hooks (2010), 15.

⁷¹⁹ Cf. Scodel (1980), 121 on the Trojan trilogy: ‘entwined in the drama of the actors is a drama of ideas, whose tensions remain unsolved even when the play itself is brought to an end’.

3

CLASH

Collision and Apocalypse: Finding Meaning in

Troades

Troades is a sort of apocalypse. An incessant lamentation, a play without a plot, a bleak condemnation of the atrocities of war, a hopeless nightmare with no possibility of salvation: these are but a few of the common perspectives on the tragedy staged for the first time in 415 BC, last of a trilogy including *Alexandros* and *Palamedes*. Troy has fallen: the city is smouldering, toppled, sacked. Poseidon, who in Euripides' version seems to have been well-disposed towards Troy in the past, bids farewell to the city. In a strange joint prologue, Athena appears on stage to concoct with Poseidon her vengeance on the Greeks, who have outraged her. Yet in spite of the future predictions on the shipwrecks of the Greeks, we hardly hear of their sufferings in what follows. Instead, Hecuba lifts herself from the ground, lamenting alone and then with the chorus the new life of slavery into which she has fallen, the destruction of the city she once reigned in, and the death of Priam and her children. Talthybius arrives to finally convey the news: the Greeks have allotted each woman to a different master, and he has come to fetch Cassandra, the virgin priestess of Apollo, to serve as Agamemnon's concubine. Cassandra, however, rushes on stage in Bacchic frenzy, and enthusiastically approves of her concubinage, engaging in her exposition of a long, counterintuitive 'vision' of the facts. Andromache, instead, has no energy left in her, and she voices some distinctly bleak thoughts on her preference of death over survival. Hecuba here reminds us that she is still a leader, as she encourages Andromache to live on and adapt to her life as a slave of Neoptolemus, for by doing so Astyanax will survive, and maybe even found Troy again. Say no more: Talthybius returns on stage to announce that the Greeks, convinced

by Odysseus (again!), have voted to kill the child by hurling him from the walls of Troy. After a heart-wrenching farewell between mother and son, Andromache is taken away forever, to serve as a slave and concubine in Phthia (as we have seen in *Andromache*). Enters Menelaus, triumphant and swaggering, and with his entrance the play changes tone and theme. No more lamentation, and no more Trojan women. Helen, instead, is dragged from the tent of the captives, as Menelaus is to take her to Greece, to kill her in retaliation for her adultery. But Hecuba convinces Menelaus to let her confront Helen in an *agon* — such is the level of her resentment that she wants to do so, even though he has already decided to kill her — and what unravels is a scene full of acrimony and venom (as well as the most debated scene of the play), in which Helen rejects her accusations of responsibility and even blames Hecuba instead. Menelaus ends by reinstating his view that Helen will be killed, but we know from the established tradition that she will actually survive. The apex of desperation is reached in the following scene, in which Astyanax's mangled and blood-smeared body is brought on stage on Hector's shield, lamented by Hecuba and the other Trojan women, who attempt to adorn his body for burial with what little they have left. The Greeks now announce that the ending is near, as they give orders for Troy to be finally burned to the ground. The towers of Troy crash, the city burns, and Hecuba's mind seems to eventually deteriorate under the enormity of her suffering. Lamenting for their city, families, and futures, the Trojan women part ways, in the direction of the Greek ships that will take them across the sea to live on as slaves.

Destruction and collapse: *Troades* is a play that can be easily condensed into these two words, as the world of the Trojan women disintegrates, and everything they have known loses their meaning. The whole play is that 'all-embracing moment of shock, awe and recognition, at which we realize that one world has given way to another', a

‘moment of dislocation from one reality to another’, ‘from dream to nightmare’.⁷²⁰ Yet if a nightmare could be understood as the distortion of the reality from which we would gladly wake up, the distorting shadows of *Troades* refract reality in a way that constantly presents that nightmare as all too real, and the questions that arise from this fracture of reality are legitimate, powerful, and open. The typically tragic problem of defining selfhood and otherness, Croally argued, is rearticulated through a mode of questioning that catches fire so vastly and destructively that it cannot plausibly be quenched. In Croally’s analysis — closest in scholarship to the approach so far presented —, the play sifts this issue of selfhood through ‘interdependent and mutually reinforcing’ polarities of identity, including ‘men and gods, men and women, the free and the enslaved, Greeks and barbarians’, definitions that collapse under ‘the effect of war’ (by Croally’s own admission, ‘this has something in common with Euripides’ other Trojan war-plays, *Andromache* and *Hecuba*’).⁷²¹ And yet Croally’s vision does not account for another type of violent confrontation and destructive clash that the world of *Troades* (as well as *Andromache* and *Hecuba*) brutally enact: not that between two extremes of the same problematic hierarchy, but rather the competing claims of different hierarchies in the organisation of the world.

Recently, Levine’s chapter on the concept of hierarchy in *Forms: Wholes, Rhythms, Hierarchies, Networks* has used Sophocles’ *Antigone* to prove her point that hierarchies *can* be separated, and that they are not mutually supporting or deconstructing.⁷²²

Levine is of the idea that change can happen when hierarchies clash, with the collision

⁷²⁰ Poole (1976), 283.

⁷²¹ Croally (1994), 70. Croally admits that for reasons of clarity his analysis does not linger on the interconnection between the polarities, but he rather posits it as a theoretical basis.

⁷²² Williams (2024), 486.

often provoking unusually liberatory outcomes for one or more of the hierarchical 'forms' involved.⁷²³

Sophocles' *Antigone* is used as an example of the way in which hierarchies can disturb ideologies by clashing with each other:

Antigone is obedient to the gods and disobedient to the state. She upholds one hierarchy (gods, humans) and so violates another (king, subjects). But in the process she happens to bring other hierarchies into play: she begins as feminine (lower) and an enemy of the state (lower) who favours the particular ties of kinship (lower), but by speaking out against the king becomes a public actor (higher), who is loyal to the gods (higher) who are on the side of people (higher). Which means that her single choice of one hierarchy over another [*scil.* her choice of upholding one hierarchy] manages to transform a whole series of others.

By upholding one, Antigone seems to destabilise many of the hierarchies of the play. Ideology, then, seems not to be based on hierarchies 'working in concert'.⁷²⁴ In short, Levine claims that 'crude, binary ideologies... can dominate the social, cultural, and economic world at some moments, while at others, pressed by alternative and competing political imperatives, they also falter, are transformed, or even temporarily disappear'.⁷²⁵ Rejecting the idea that discourses of domination are neatly parts of one 'totalisation' (an idea she shares with Latour), Levine's perspective counters the view so far proposed on *Hecuba* and *Andromache* — namely, that their radical potential comes from the total deconstruction of a system of mutually supporting hierarchies. In

⁷²³ Levine (2015), 107.

⁷²⁴ Cf. also Levine (2006), 633 on her 'strategic formalism': 'social change comes not so much from active and intentional agency as from the openings that materialize in the collisions among social and cultural forms'.

⁷²⁵ Levine (2006), 630.

what sense, then, can Croally speak of mutually supporting hierarchies in maintaining civic ideology, if these hierarchies appear to actually not work together and can be separated? From this perspective, social hierarchies can overlap and produce ‘intersectional’ subjects (i.e., multiply oppressed), but if these discourses are to be conceived as ideologically different, separate axes of social hierarchy that *sometimes* intersect in the case of multiply oppressed characters, then it follows that hierarchies do *not* belong to one ideological matrix, one system of signification. Can upholding some hierarchies be useful in dismantling others? In abruptly shifting from its general argument to its Levinian counterargument, this chapter turns to *Troades*, a play that not only shows hierarchies collapsing, but it also shows them colliding, clashing, competing against each other — most prominently in the most debated scene of the play, hinging on the Greek ‘competition’ par excellence — the *agon*.

3.1 Starting from the End: Competing Hierarchies in the Agon between Hecuba and Helen

In *Troades*, as in *Andromache* and in *Hecuba*, hierarchies work in concert in the basic sense that they are all embodied in the eponymous character(s). In the case of *Troades*, it is often said that Hecuba occupies the ‘leading role’.⁷²⁶ However, the play is called *Troades* for a reason: the episodic structure maps onto the characters who appear on stage at the beginning of their episode and leave at the end, at least for the first part of the play.⁷²⁷ By the time Helen enters the stage, the play seems to have acquired this

⁷²⁶ Hall (2001), xxv; Anderson (1997), 157. Cf. Scodel (2012), 19.

⁷²⁷ Cf. Munteanu (2010-2011), 138; Vivante (2014), 671.

structure: Cassandra and Andromache have so far adhered to this pattern, each escorted by some Greek and leaving the stage to depart with their new master.⁷²⁸

Therefore, when Helen is dragged on stage by Menelaus' attendants, the rhythm seems to be broken: no Trojan woman; rather, their enemy, as it seems from Hecuba's and the chorus' indictment. Yet her presentation is prefaced by Menelaus' specification that she is numbered with the other Trojan women among prisoners (871-2):

δόμοις γὰρ τοῖσδ' ἐν αἰχμαλωτικοῖς
κατηρίθμηται Τρωάδων ἄλλων μέτα.

This recalls the beginning of the tragedy, where Poseidon introduced the setting by classifying Helen among the Trojan captives (νομισθεῖσ' αἰχμάλωτος ἐνδίκως, 35).

From the beginning of the scene, then, we are encouraged to think of Helen *as* a Trojan woman, and to regard it as the third of the 'individual' episodes that we have so far seen. This initial reconsideration of Helen as a Trojan woman also polarises the scene:⁷²⁹ adding Helen to the captives means creating a gendered division between the men, in charge of each individual Trojan woman, and the women, at the mercy of their masters. Had Helen been considered Greek or had she been reconciled immediately with Menelaus, as other sources claim,⁷³⁰ gender would have been a far less significant concept in the scene. But as we are encouraged to see her as another Trojan *woman*, the play apparently becomes a polarised confrontation of male and female.

The scene begins with an emphasis on gender (864-6):

⁷²⁸ Lloyd (1984), 303-13.

⁷²⁹ Anderson (1997), 157.

⁷³⁰ Kovacs (2018), 129.

ἦλθον δὲ Τροίαν οὐχ ὅσον δοκοῦσί με
γυναικὸς οὐνεκ', ἀλλ' ἐπ' ἄνδρ' ὃς ἐξ ἐμῶν
δόμων δάμαρτα ξεναπάτης ἐλήσατο.

From the statement's opposition of γυναικὸς to ἄνδρ' (865), it transpires that Menelaus is primarily interested in justifying his behaviour in gendered terms. The chorus' comment at the end (1033-5) proves that he is specifically anxious about the accusations of effeminacy that they mention (as well as other sources, including the *Andromache* itself):⁷³¹

Μενέλαε, προγόνων τ' ἀξίως δόμων τε σῶν
τεῖσαι δάμαρτα κάφελοῦ πρὸς Ελλάδαος
ψόγον τὸ θῆλύ τ', εὐγενῆς ἐχθροῖς φανεῖς.

The ring composition, then, seems to provide this specific frame for the entire Helen episode, but it is in Hecuba's speech that this becomes most palpable. Hecuba will do anything to have Helen's head on a plate, including deploying typically misogynistic commonplaces against her opponent: Helen emerges as an example of a bad woman, the anti-Andromache, but she also seems to emerge as an example of the inferiority of all women, and their subjugation to the male. Strikingly, Hecuba finishes her *peroratio* by saying (1030-2):

στεφάνωσον Ελλάδαδ' ἀξίως τήνδε κτανῶν
σαυτοῦ, νόμον δὲ τόνδε ταῖς ἄλλαισι θεῖς

⁷³¹ See *supra*, sec. 2.3, pp. 169-73. Meridor (2000), 24.

γυναιξί, θνήσκειν ἤτις ἄν προδῶ πόσιν.

Gender is not the only thematised hierarchy at work in the confrontation between Hecuba and Helen. When Menelaus enters and justifies his decision to come to Troy, he mentions that he has obtained revenge on the ξεναπάτης (866)—in itself, a trait often associated with barbarians (as is clear from the *Hecuba*).⁷³² This is specified in the next two lines (867-8), in which Paris' transgressive behaviour is said to have been rectified and his land (γῆ, 868) punished by the 'Hellenic spear' (δορὶ πεσοῦσ' Ἑλληνικῶ, 868) with the help of the gods. But the antithesis becomes crucial in Helen's exposition of her innocence. Helen deems the clash between Greek and barbarian fundamental to the reasons why she should be spared her life: Paris chose her, instead of opting for the alluring promises of Hera and Athena, both willing to risk Greece's independence and promise Paris rule over Asia and Europe (925-31):

ἔκρινε τρισσὸν ζεῦγος ὄδε τριῶν θεῶν:

καὶ Παλλάδος μὲν ἦν Ἀλεξάνδρῳ δόσις

Φρυξὶ στρατηγοῦνθ' Ἑλλάδ' ἐξανιστάναι,

Ἥρα δ' ὑπέσχετ' Ἀσιάδ' Εὐρώπης θ' ὄρους

τυραννίδ' ἔξειν, εἴ σφε κρίνειεν Πάρις·

Κύπρις δὲ τούμῳ εἶδος ἐκπαγλουμένη

δώσειν ὑπέσχετ' εἰ θεὰς ὑπερδράμοι

κάλλει.

⁷³² Hall (1989), 187: 'one of the most important taboos was the violation of the ancient law which protected both guest and host'. Cf. *Hec.* 1247-8.

Surprisingly, we hear very little of Paris' judgement of the goddesses before Euripides.⁷³³ Of the extant Euripidean dramas before *Troades*, it is *Andromache*, *Helen*, and *Hecuba* that mention the judgement at length,⁷³⁴ but in none of these we hear of the bribes of the goddesses. On the other hand, of the later sources, all of them mention the goddesses having offered some sort of bribes to Paris, and it is not entirely to be excluded that they might be drawing from an earlier predecessor. However, Stinton notes in his overview that Helen's speech in *Troades* presents at least two feasibly Euripidean original elements: 'to the gift of Athena, military prowess, is added a detail not in the tradition—conquest of Greece; and Hera's gift of kingship is explicitly extended to Europe'.⁷³⁵ In fact, these two elements are mostly lost in later descriptions of the bribes: all agree on Aphrodite's bribe (the love of Helen), but even Ovid remains generic when talking about the other two (*Ov. Her.* 16.81-2).⁷³⁶ It is possible, then, to believe that Euripides might have invented the detail of Athena offering conquest of Greece and of Hera tyranny over Europe.⁷³⁷ The two are not the same, technically,⁷³⁸ but one has to note that these two bribes are pleonastic: Hera and Athena have roughly been offering the same thing. In fact, Helen differentiates them but also lumps them together as entailing the same thing, the Greeks' potential subjection to barbarian rule (932-5):⁷³⁹

⁷³³ Stinton (1990), 17, with discussion of the allusion in the *Iliad* (25. 29-30) and the *Cypria* (cf. *Procl. Chrest.* arg. Cypr.). Cf. Wilson (1979), 7-8.

⁷³⁴ Stinton (1990), 26-44.

⁷³⁵ Stinton (1990), 45; Hall (1989), 196.

⁷³⁶ Lloyd (1984), 306 adds Pseudo-Apollodorus (*Epit.* 3.2), in which Hera offers rule over the entire world, and the hypothesis to Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* (*PCG* IV, fr. 38 = *CGFP* 70), in which Hera's gift is τυραννις ἀκίνητος and Athena's εὐτυχία κατὰ πόλεμον: 'these stories are in agreement about the nature of the gifts offered but not about their scope'.

⁷³⁷ Di Benedetto (1998), 69.

⁷³⁸ Lee (1976), 231: 'ἔς δόρυ σταθέντες refers to Pallas' promise (926), which at least guaranteed a fight; τυραννίδι to Hera's (927f.), which entailed a more subtle form of conquest.'

⁷³⁹ Cf. Barlow (1986), 211.

νικᾶ Κύπρις θεάς, καὶ τοσόνδ' οὐμοὶ γάμοι

ῶνησαν Ελλάδα': οὐ κρατεῖσθ' ἐκ βαρβάρων,

οὔτ' ἐς δόρυ σταθέντες, οὐ τυραννίδι.

ἃ δ' ἠτύχησεν Ελλάς, ὠλόμην ἐγώ [...].

Helen's life is at risk here, and this is the main reason for her argumentation. Yet the stress on the way she represents quintessential femininity makes it also a specific issue about the role of women and the boundaries of their social position. To save herself and justify her transgression as a woman, Helen thus relies on the inherent hierarchy of Greek and barbarian, and argues that the only reason why this hierarchy still holds—thankfully, according to a Greek perspective—⁷⁴⁰is *because* she has transgressed her gendered space. As Saïd notes, Helen here prefigures 'what would become one of the major themes of the panhellenic discourse and political propaganda of the fourth century':⁷⁴¹ Isocrates' view (*Hel.* 67-8) that the Trojan war was 'the most useful campaign to the Greeks' (ὠφέλιμος) and that it was a turning point for the historical supremacy of the Greeks over the barbarians resounds with Helen's statement that her elopement with Paris represented a 'benefit' to Greece, and its 'fortune' (ῶνησαν, 933; ἠτύχησεν, 935).⁷⁴² Thus, it seems that Helen upholds one hierarchy (Greek/barbarian), to challenge the rigidity of another (man/woman), if not to reverse it (we remember that Menelaus' masculinity is at stake). Naturally, this does not mean that Helen explicitly voices ideas that subvert it; in fact, she supports arguments that superficially conform both to gender and ethnic norms; Hecuba will do the same.

⁷⁴⁰ Goff (2009), 66.

⁷⁴¹ Saïd (2022), 71.

⁷⁴² Saïd (2022), 71-2, also noting that Menelaus says the same thing in *Andromache* (681-3). Cf. Rosenbloom (2006), 251-2.

However, accepting her argument inevitably means to ideologically put into question what female virtue means and to reconsider the gender norms threatened by her transgression and Menelaus' feminisation. Helen will technically lose the debate, but the possibility that she might be convincing is already evidence for the idea that hierarchies might be used 'against each other'.

Hecuba's reply equally voices ideas in line with both the Greek/barbarian and man/woman hierarchies; yet if we choose her, the opposite ideological disturbance will take place. She immediately rejects Helen's 'Hellenocentric' argument by sustaining her own 'Hellenocentric' argument—a masochist, like Andromache in *Andromache* (971-4):⁷⁴³

ἐγὼ γὰρ Ἥραν παρθένον τε Παλλάδα
οὐκ ἐς τοσοῦτον ἀμαθίας ἐλθεῖν δοκῶ,
ὥσθ' ἢ μὲν Ἄργος βαρβάροις ἀπημπόλα,
Παλλάς δ' Ἀθήνας Φρυξὶ δουλεύειν ποτέ.

First, then, Hecuba attacks Helen's hierarchical argument by seemingly voicing ideas of Greek ethnocentrism. It is because this hierarchy is so strong that even a barbarian queen cannot accept that the goddesses might have wanted to enslave Greece.⁷⁴⁴ However, Hecuba goes further, and in fact weaponises the hierarchy repeatedly against Helen, implying that she has herself transgressed it and has become barbarised. These are certainly the implications of 990-7, in which she claims that Helen followed Paris

⁷⁴³ Goff (2009), 68: 'Hekabe willingly names herself a barbarian and denigrates her people – anything in order to see Helen's head on the plate'.

⁷⁴⁴ Hecuba's argument here is shaky: Kovacs (2018), 283; Lloyd (1984), 311. *Il.* 4.30ff. makes clear that Hera was ready to sacrifice her favourite cities to obtain Troy's destruction.

out of her desire for luxury and extravagance, as well as of 1020-5, in which Helen is said to have required Trojans ('the barbarians', Hecuba calls her people thus) to prostrate themselves before her (the typical barbarian act of *proskynesis*).⁷⁴⁵ These two last points are shared by her Euripidean daughter, Hermione in *Andromache*, who also told the enslaved Trojan to fall at her feet and appeared before the audience clothed in rich garments.⁷⁴⁶

The implication is that Helen has become a barbarian; in so doing, Hecuba not only limits herself to demolishing Helen's pose as the saviour of Greece, but also engages with her ethnic identity and reverses it.⁷⁴⁷ Thus Hecuba switches to describe how, instead of coming before Menelaus all 'dressed up' (symptom of barbarisation), she should have shaved her head, in shame. This means, in other words, having Helen reoccupy her position in the man/woman hierarchy. This leads the way for the final *peroratio* and Menelaus' approving comment mentioned above: Helen has to be killed, and in so doing she should set a *nomos* for all women.⁷⁴⁸ What is more, in despising Helen as 'barbarised' and in voicing a masochistic 'racist' rhetoric, Hecuba is paradoxically 'Hellenic': for not only does she speak like a Greek philosopher and politician, and not only is she the marshal of *nomos* (cf. Eur. *Or.* 486-7) and *sophrosyne* (1027), but she also becomes the voice of Greek ethnocentrism. As Goff comments, more striking than even Helen's luxury is 'the distressing spectacle' of Hecuba 'as she identifies—even if only strategically—so wholeheartedly with her conquerors'.⁷⁴⁹ Therefore, just as Helen's discourse challenged the rigidity of the man/woman

⁷⁴⁵ Croally (1994), 149-50.

⁷⁴⁶ See *supra*, sec. 2.2, p. 157.

⁷⁴⁷ Croally (1994), 108.

⁷⁴⁸ Citti (1979), 149. Goff (2009), 70 notes how extreme Hecuba's proposal is: not even fifth-century Athens went as far as adopting the death penalty for adulterous wives.

⁷⁴⁹ Goff (2009), 70; Croally (1994), 109.

hierarchy upholding the Greek/barbarian one, Hecuba's speech implicitly challenges the boundary between Greek and barbarian, and in so doing re-establishes the proper boundaries between man and woman and goes as far as suggesting the death penalty for adulterous women. And, of course, Hecuba wins the debate (at least superficially):⁷⁵⁰ as Goff has it, 'if the war was started by a woman's independent movement, it will nonetheless end with all the women including Helen being moved around at men's disposal'.⁷⁵¹ Does the play then encourage the audience to accept the type of hierarchical intersection Hecuba is voicing, ultimately condemning Helen and reinscribing the proper order inherent in the gender hierarchy while casting doubt on the fixity of the cultural divide between Greek and barbarian — as many scholars implicitly accepted?⁷⁵²

This is an objection to constitutive intersectional approaches that Croally does not address: if, as he argues, the Helen scene shows her degeneration from Greek to barbarian and thus questions the Greek-barbarian divide, is it not inescapable for the play to then hold Helen responsible and effectively condemn her, thus reformulating the gender hierarchy in its proper form? In what way can we still say (at least about *Troades*) that hierarchies mutually support each other if they can be taken apart, as separate social, hierarchical axes which can be used against each other, one disrupted to validate the other, one upheld to question the other? To reply to these questions, let us now consider the scenes of Cassandra and Andromache.

⁷⁵⁰ Lee (1976), 912-3 notes that the order of the speakers is reversed, so that the defendant speaks first and so that 'the stronger argument and the speech of the sympathetic character come second'. *Contra*, cf. Lloyd (1984), 304. Goff (2009), 70-1 argues that the order of the speakers does not give any reliable indication as to the winner.

⁷⁵¹ Goff (2009), 64.

⁷⁵² I linger on the analysis of secondary literature in this regard at the end of this chapter.

3.2 Cassandra's Marriage: Partial Deconstruction?

Cassandra's entrance is prefaced by Talthybius' exchange with Hecuba during which the Trojan women are informed of their allotment, the focus being on their renewed status as slaves. Polyxena, actually already dead, is said by Talthybius to have been assigned to 'attend' Achilles' tomb (τύμβωι ... προσπολεῖν Ἀχιλλέως, 264). Hecuba's reply betrays her concern over her daughter's status, as she complains having borne 'a daughter to be an attendant at a tomb' (πρόσπολον έτεκόμαν, 265). Andromache, instead, has been chosen by the 'son of Achilles', as his prize (Ἀχιλλέως έλαβε παῖς έξάριετον, 274), and Hecuba will be the slave of Odysseus (277). The Trojan chorus intervene to ask about their own allotment (293-4), but Talthybius cuts short and tells his attendants to fetch Cassandra, as it is time to bring her to her new master, Agamemnon (294-7). The stage has so far been dominated by 'slavery' in all its ugly prospect—the news of the allotments and the depictions of a horrible future—and its present ugliness, with Talthybius' patronising, cold, and overall unsympathetic treatment of the Trojan women.

But Cassandra's sudden entrance cuts this short. Immediately the tone shifts as well as the theme: Cassandra enters brandishing torches and singing a hymenaeus, celebrating what she regards as her marriage (310-3),⁷⁵³ and she exhorts the other Trojan women to join in the nuptial songs and dances (338-41). That Cassandra interprets her fate as one of marriage necessarily means that she discards her status as a slave, essential to the beginning of the scene, and instead celebrates a fundamental transitional moment in the life of any (free) Greek woman. This was anticipated by Talthybius, who had

⁷⁵³ Cf. Anderson (1997), 162: 'Euripides announces the subject [sc. marriage] with visual splendour in the wedding torches which herald her entrance [...] and he sets the theme to music in her energetic bridal song'.

responded to Hecuba's concern that Cassandra might become the slave of Clytemnestra (250-2):⁷⁵⁴

Ε. ἦ τᾶ Λακεδαίμονία νύμφα

δούλαν; ὦμοι μοι.

Τ. οὐκ, ἀλλὰ λέκτρων σκότια νυμφευτήρια.

Translations of νυμφευτήρια, for example Kovacs' 'sharer of his bed',⁷⁵⁵ or Barlow's 'concubine',⁷⁵⁶ are not exact. Croally notes how it means 'nuptials';⁷⁵⁷ this corresponds to the designation of Clytemnestra as a 'wife' (νύμφα), the line above. So, while Talthybius in a way anticipates the assimilation of Cassandra's condition to that of wife,⁷⁵⁸ the text also encourages us to overlook the fact that she will end up in this situation because she *is* a slave. Thus constructed, Cassandra stands out among the other Trojan captives (so far) in presenting her experience as one not of slavery, but of marriage, and thus of womanhood.

Cassandra's initial ecstatic celebration gives way to an exposition of her perspective, in which she argues that the Trojans are far better off than the Greeks, in a strikingly 'sophistic' take on the Trojan war.⁷⁵⁹ She prophesises both Agamemnon's death and Odysseus' labours, but finishes by asking to be immediately taken to Agamemnon's ship, as she is too eager to depart (455-6). Her enthusiasm to adhere to her fated role, to 'wed' Agamemnon, reaches its apex. Croally takes Cassandra's 'pseudo-marriage' to be part of a process of gendered questioning, as this pseudo-marriage reveals the 'hazy

⁷⁵⁴ On the class connotations of Hecuba's concern, cf. Citti (1979), 222.

⁷⁵⁵ Kovacs (2018), 169.

⁷⁵⁶ Barlow (1986), 171.

⁷⁵⁷ Croally (1994), 88.

⁷⁵⁸ Croally (1994), 88.

⁷⁵⁹ Allan (2000), 126.

and insecure status of the Greek wife'.⁷⁶⁰ In his view, this is part of a larger process in the play not of 'collapsing' the man/woman polarity, but of questioning it.

Yet the radical potential of Cassandra's presentation of her slavery as marriage in fact sits at the intersection of hierarchies. There is little in the text to suggest Croally's view that Cassandra's marriage questions *prima facie* the normative expectations of gender roles or the hierarchy inherent in the man/woman polarity. In fact, Cassandra's enthusiasm in accomplishing this 'quintessentially female' task seems unproblematic in the context of single-axis gender ideology. Even if these nuptials are ironic and perverted, she does not seem to question the legitimacy of 'marriage' or the man/woman hierarchy by itself. But once the perspective is enlarged, Cassandra's submission, her upholding of this one hierarchy, does in fact produce a radical movement in the polarities that cluster on her character and in the play.

In her first *rhexis*, Cassandra lingers again on the topos of the 'reluctant... *parthenos* about to lose her virginity',⁷⁶¹ but quickly explains that through her marriage she will kill Agamemnon, becoming *νικηφόρον* (353). In the last part of her *rhexis*, she returns to this word when addressing her brothers in the world below, to where she will come after killing Agamemnon, becoming *νικηφόρος* (460) — in ring composition.⁷⁶² The word is 'carefully chosen' and 'carefully emphasised through its position at the end of the phrase and line', and has a strong tradition of being used in heroic contexts.⁷⁶³ The adjective presents Cassandra's marriage to Agamemnon as a kind of heroic, athletic victory:⁷⁶⁴ in fact, Cassandra asks Hecuba to 'crown' her (*πύκαζε*, 353). This connects

⁷⁶⁰ Croally (1994), 96.

⁷⁶¹ Goff (2009), 53.

⁷⁶² Kovacs (2018), 185.

⁷⁶³ Barlow (1986), 176.

⁷⁶⁴ Mills (2014), 171 on the similarity with the *Iliad*.

her to her later mention of ‘the glorious death as a garland, *stephanos*, won for the city, even though a wise man will in general shun war’ (400-2).⁷⁶⁵ Goff claims that Cassandra’s speech is inconsistent inasmuch as she rejects war but repeats the traditional heroic code. But this is constructed in ironic symmetry with her own fate:⁷⁶⁶ the generic formulation of *kalos thanatos* is built to arch back to Cassandra’s own destiny, her death.⁷⁶⁷

It is true that in the first *rhexis* she does not articulate extensively the connection between her death and her revenge, simply saying that by marrying she will kill him. Yet in the second she does: she speaks of her marriage in Hades (445), and her body after her death (448-50). It is finally at the end of the speech that the connection is made clear: it is not simply that by marrying him she will kill him; it is by her own death that she will destroy the house of Atreus.⁷⁶⁸ In fact, she says that she ‘will come triumphant to the dead below’ (460) once she has wrecked the house of Atreus (459). Like Polyxena, then, Cassandra mobilises a robust rhetoric of *kalos thanatos* to present herself as a traditional Homeric hero.⁷⁶⁹ Cassandra has argued that the Trojans ‘have the greatest glory’, since ‘they died for this country’ (Τρῶες δὲ πρῶτον μὲν, τὸ κάλλιστον κλέος/ ὑπὲρ πάτρας ἔθνησκον, 386-87). It is thus significant that at the moment of her farewell she addresses her own fatherland (ὦ φίλη πατρίς, 458), to then swiftly proceed to the prediction of her own death and assert that she is soon going to

⁷⁶⁵ Goff (2009), 55.

⁷⁶⁶ This contradiction is overseen by those critics who see Cassandra as voicing an ideologically ‘feminine’ point of view critical of war: cf. Babbotti and Torrente (2020), 180.

⁷⁶⁷ Rodighiero (2016), 183.

⁷⁶⁸ A take on the common trope of the bride of death in tragedy: Papadopoulou (2000), 523. Compare the use of the same trope in the Cassandra scene of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*: Mitchell-Boyask (2006), 279. On the trope, cf. Ormand (1999), 25-6.

⁷⁶⁹ For the ‘epically coloured vocabulary’ here, cf. Rodighiero (2016), 182.

join her brothers in the world below. Cassandra thus claims for herself the κάλλιστον κλέος of Hector and Paris (386).⁷⁷⁰

Like Polyxena at *Hec.* 341-78, Cassandra voluntarily surrenders herself to her masters, knowing that she will die. But, in articulating this heroic rhetoric, she conflates the two possibilities available to the Homeric hero: to kill or to be killed. Hector says so in response to Hecuba's famous plea, when he argues that his only two possibilities are killing Achilles or dying (*Il.* 22.108-10). Polyxena in *Hecuba* more explicitly evokes that specific moment in the *Iliad*,⁷⁷¹ as she has in turn to reject Hecuba's entreaty to resist Odysseus and the Greeks (*Hec.* 402-14). But while Polyxena has only one possibility, dying, Cassandra will both die and kill nobly. In fact, the two are one and the same to her.⁷⁷²

In doing so, Cassandra also contrasts her own *kalos thanatos* with Agamemnon's, who, instead, will be buried dishonourably, being himself κακός (446): a truly *kakos thanatos*. Yet this view of Agamemnon echoes Talthybius' surprisingly disparaging view of his own great leader.⁷⁷³ It is striking how Cassandra addresses Agamemnon as ὦ δοκῶν σεμνόν τι πράσσειν (447); but it is even more striking to remember that Talthybius has also said that 'those that are grand and wise by repute are no better after all than those who count for nothing' (ἀτὰρ τὰ σεμνὰ καὶ δοκήμασιν σοφὰ/ οὐδέν τι κρείσσω τῶν τὸ μηδὲν ἦν ἄρα, 411-2; notice the use of δοκέω).⁷⁷⁴ Talthybius is here

⁷⁷⁰ Notice also that Cassandra specifically explains that Paris, too, has obtained a fine reputation through marriage with Helen; this further links Paris and Cassandra, who has just sung about her upcoming 'marriage' with Agamemnon.

⁷⁷¹ And the same probably Makaria: Mastronarde (2010), 265.

⁷⁷² Ambühl (2010), 111 also argues that the picture of the 'Trojan victory' sketched by Cassandra 'might well be seen as an extrapolation from the prominence given to the description of Hector's funeral at the end of the *Iliad*'.

⁷⁷³ Barlow (1986), 180.

⁷⁷⁴ Cf. Barlow (1986), 178 on the relevance of these lines for the central theme of the play, 'the theme of people not being what they seem'.

adding to a theme that we know was developed at length in the *Alexandros*, that of social appearances in terms of status,⁷⁷⁵ with the distinction between nobility and slavery repeatedly scrutinised and put into question through sophistic terminology in the extant fragments.⁷⁷⁶ What is more, Talthybius here seems to present himself as wiser than Agamemnon in terms of his wealth: although ‘he is poor’ (καὶ πένης μὲν εἰμ’ ἐγώ, 415), he would never have wanted to sleep with Cassandra (416).⁷⁷⁷ Talthybius’ status is underlined shortly after by Cassandra, who calls him λάτρης (424); yet this responds to his definition of Hecuba as λάτρης of Penelope (422), and soon she will call herself Ἀπόλλωνος λάτρην (450).⁷⁷⁸ Both are ‘servants’. Coming, however, after Talthybius’ arresting denunciation of appearances *in terms of class and status*,⁷⁷⁹ the word adds to the wider emphasis on Cassandra’s social positioning,⁷⁸⁰ underlining the contrast between her slave status and the aristocratic heroism she voices throughout the scene. Thus Cassandra’s presentation of herself as a Hector alter is not gratuitous, but is specifically qualified as a paradox of class and status.⁷⁸¹ This paradox seems

⁷⁷⁵ Cf. Kovacs (2018), 193, which parallels the lines with *Andr.* 319-20, 699-700.

⁷⁷⁶ Karamanou (2018), 183-4 in general and 200-1 on *TrGF v*, 61b. Cf. Scodel (1980), 84 rightly emphasises how remarkable the discussion on status is and says that ‘Alexander’s demand to compete [in the aristocratic, athletic games], therefore, presents the issue of slaves and masters in its most emphatic and radical form’.

⁷⁷⁷ Cf. Scodel (1980), 111-2 on this passage in comparison to other passages of the trilogy that deal with the divide between poor and rich.

⁷⁷⁸ Scodel (1980), 109. Kovacs (2018), 196 deletes 424 but this is only justified by the idea that were 424 to pick up the same word at 422, it would be made explicit, which seems arbitrary. Kovacs also justifies it by arguing that while heralds are often rebuked in Euripidean tragedy, Talthybius here is not unsympathetic; yet he has just said that Cassandra’s words would deserve punishment and that he would never even consider sleeping with Cassandra.

⁷⁷⁹ Citti (1979), 226, after arguing that Euripidean tragedy reinforces social hierarchies of class, notes that this critique of Talthybius is outstanding (and therefore has to argue that it is a marginal observation).

⁷⁸⁰ The word also appears in *Alexandros* (*TrGF v*, 46a), either in reference to Paris himself or (more likely) in reference to Priam’s retainers: Karamanou (2018), 176.

⁷⁸¹ Cf. Ebbott (2014), 797. Synodinou (1974), 32 argues that, like in Aeschylus, Cassandra’s slavery is not criticised in her scene, but it is clear that even though she does not explicitly criticise her status this is a major theme here. This elucidates also the importance of investigating ‘status/class’ as opposed to ‘slavery’ in this play (as well as *Andromache* and

particularly stark when one considers that the scene, ending on such a bombastic vision of herself as an aristocratic hero, started with a sustained stress on the women's slavery and on Talthybius' purpose in coming to the tents —leading to Agamemnon her new slave, Cassandra. Although Cassandra might seem similar to the other 'heroic' self-sacrificing maidens of Euripidean drama, the fact that she is a slave (and that slavery is per se under the spotlight in this scene and in the whole play) makes her different:⁷⁸² Makaria, Iphigenia and Praxithea's daughter are free, aristocratic characters, whose 'ennobling', 'Homeric' aspect seems in contrast with their gender,⁷⁸³ not their social status.⁷⁸⁴ Cassandra, instead, follows the example of Polyxena of *Hecuba*, whose self-sacrifice could be understood *primarily* as a confusion of status rather than gender categories.⁷⁸⁵ It seems true, then, as Levine has it, that it is by upholding one hierarchy (man/woman) that another is thrown into disarray (slave/noble).

Hecuba): Synodinou misses this problematisation of Cassandra's status because she is mainly thinking in terms of a slave/free divide.

⁷⁸² Cf. Ebbott (2014), 797.

⁷⁸³ Tzanetou (2014), 567. Cf. McDonald (1990), 79-80 on Iphigenia; Wilkins (1990a), 331 on Makaria; Wilkins (1990b), 181-4 and Munteanu (2020), 903 on all of them. O'Connor-Visser (1987), 197-9 remarks that nobility (in a *social*, not simply moral sense) is common to all of them: 'in the dramatisation of heroic myth Euripides accepts the moral values of heroic times. The only person who can be ἀγαθός and ἐσθλός is a person of noble descent'. Yet this view overlooks the extended emphasis on and thematisation of Polyxena's and Cassandra's slavery, which is deliberately and repeatedly stressed to contrast with their nobility and is to be taken seriously as a paradox of social status. Moreover, O'Connor-Visser stresses how 'noble birth is the prerequisite for being a good, brave person' and how 'this value persists into the fifth century and later' but also how this is criticised by the sophists (p. 204). Yet we have seen how this play, *Andromache*, and *Hecuba* are imbued with sophistic thought, and in fact O'Connor-Visser also notes in the same page that Euripides sometimes similarly seems to question the value of noble birth in assessing one's worth and identity. Cf. Karamanou (2018), 200-1 on *Alexandros*.

⁷⁸⁴ Roselli (2007) argues that although the Maiden of *Heraclidae* is aristocratic, her sacrifice could resonate with lower-class men of the audience because of the Maiden's 'marginal status': 'by presenting the Maiden as relatively subordinate and as a quasi-hoplite Euripides stresses the potential for the radical agency of other "others" in the city' (p. 144). Yet this is more of an argument on the extra-literary, potential ideological reception of the play, rather than on how the internal elements of the play are ideologically interrelated and overlapping. At the end of the article, Roselli notes that *Hecuba* offers a more emphatic representation of aristocracy vis-à-vis slavery/lower class. Cf. Citti (1979), 215, 217 with Eur. *Heracl.* 621ff.

⁷⁸⁵ Cf. instead Papastamati (2017), 374 with Loraux (1987), 46.

Cassandra's *rhesis*, however, is not only hinged upon this paradox of class. In fact, the great bulk of the speech is constituted by her refutation of the fact that the Trojans have lost. Yet besides reversing the categories of 'winners' and 'losers', Cassandra's *rhesis* specifically hinges on the condemnation of the 'Greek invasion': the Greeks have invaded Troy for futile reasons, and have thus died an inglorious death, with Cassandra specifying that 'they were not being robbed of their own boundaries, nor of their high-towered fatherland' (375-6). The Trojans, instead, have died most gloriously defending their country (387). Interestingly, Cassandra's observations foreshadow Helen's statements in the *agon* with Hecuba: then, Helen will mobilise explicit ideas of Greek superiority to claim that it is thanks to her that the Greeks have not been conquered by the 'barbarians'. In anticipating this rhetoric, Cassandra anticipates the very explicit ethnic undertones of such a rhetoric, but she subverts it.

The whole 'invention of the barbarian', to echo Hall, was due to the Persian invasion, an act that the Greeks saw as traumatically dangerous, and capable of turning them all into slaves of barbarians.⁷⁸⁶ In fact, one of the first justifications of Athenian imperialism was Athens' self-presentation as a leader in the defence of Hellas from the potential threat of another Persian invasion.⁷⁸⁷ But in Cassandra's view the two have been reversed: it has been the Greeks who invaded Troy, and it has been the Trojans who have valiantly fought for freedom and have died gloriously. What is more, Cassandra here seems to be echoing terminology and tropes belonging to the *epitaphios* genre, which makes her speech not only Hellenic, but specifically Athenian.⁷⁸⁸ In particular, she voices the common trope of the 'decision to prioritize the well-being of

⁷⁸⁶ Hall (1989), 196; cf. Rabinowitz (2008), 40.

⁷⁸⁷ Low (2023), 147.

⁷⁸⁸ Warwick (2022), 348 *et passim*.

the city over his own life', with Thucydides' Pericles speaking of κάλλιστον δὲ ἔρανον, 2.43.1-2; Cassandra says that the Trojans died for their city and thus obtained τὸ κάλλιστον κλέος (386).⁷⁸⁹ Another trope is the 'command to transmute grief into pride', to which Thucydides' Pericles again resorts to (2.44.1). A third is 'the valorization of the defense of the fatherland against foreign invaders', fundamental to Cassandra's glorification of the Trojans. In her view, the Trojans become not only similar to the Greeks of Marathon and Plataea, but even to the Athenians of Pericles' times.⁷⁹⁰ We have come a long way from Cassandra's acceptance of her marriage: through the upholding of this one hierarchy (man/woman), she will subvert the power and moral expectations underlying the ideologies of class and status, appropriating a type of aristocratic heroism that places her well above her master and the Greeks. But in this glorification of Trojan heroism she mobilises and reverses ethnic and 'racial' ideologemes that were basic pillars of the Greek sense of ethnic superiority.⁷⁹¹

Scholars have often dismissed Cassandra's *rheseis* in the play as evidence of her delusion, with some arguing that she has lost her mind under the weight of violence.⁷⁹² Yet recent scholars have rightly highlighted that she is 'very much in control, clear sighted, and ironic rather than mad'.⁷⁹³ Moreover, Cassandra always tells the truth,⁷⁹⁴ a

⁷⁸⁹ Warwick (2022), 348.

⁷⁹⁰ One should also compare Cassandra's view at 400-2 (φεύγειν μὲν οὖν χρὴ πόλεμον ὅστις εὖ φρονεῖ/εἰ δ' ἔς τόδ' ἔλθοι, στέφανος οὐκ αἰσχρὸς πόλει/καλῶς ὀλέσθαι, μὴ καλῶς δὲ δυσκλεές) with the similar sentiment (and phrasing!) of Pericles at Thuc. 2.61.1 (καὶ γὰρ οἷς μὲν αἴρεσις γεγένηται τᾶλλα εὐτυχοῦσι, πολλὴ ἄνοια πολεμῆσαι: εἰ δ' ἀναγκαῖον ἦν ἢ εἴξαντας εὐθὺς τοῖς πέλας ὑπακοῦσαι ἢ κινδυνεύσαντας περιγενέσθαι, ὁ φυγῶν τὸν κίνδυνον τοῦ ὑποστάντος μεμπτότερος). Pericles similarly argues that the Athenians are fighting to *defend* themselves: Foster (2010), 193. Cf. Hornblower (1991), 331-40.

⁷⁹¹ An 'ideologeme' is one of the many underlying 'narratives' that constitute 'ideology' in Jamesonian theory: Roberts (2000), 90.

⁷⁹² Goff (2009), 52 for a summary of views.

⁷⁹³ Papadopoulou (2000), 527 lingers at length on this irony, but argues that it is Euripides' irony, not Cassandra's: ultimately, it would underline her delusion.

⁷⁹⁴ Cf. Anderson (1997), 160-1.

simple yet fundamental fact which is often overlooked, and this has to be taken into account to avoid dismissing her vision as merely a deranged distortion of reality.⁷⁹⁵ The play here performs a sophistic(ated) operation: by imbuing the prophetess' speech with a counterintuitive version of reality,⁷⁹⁶ the audience is asked to consider seriously her imagined monde à l'envers.⁷⁹⁷ This means, in other words, considering the hierarchical reversals (of class and ethnicity) that she envisions in her 'madness' as valid and truthful. In grounding these hierarchical reversals in the speech of an inspired prophetess, the play sophistically deconstructs these hierarchies.⁷⁹⁸ Rather than envisioning transgression as a perverse form of reality that needs fixing, as often in tragedy,⁷⁹⁹ the passage here suggests another possibility: namely, that the reversals of these normative hierarchies might correspond to a more 'accurate' form of reality (as opposed to a wrong, perverted reality). In inviting the audience to entertain this possibility, the play thus works towards the delegitimation, or, rather, deconstruction, of these hierarchies.⁸⁰⁰ Rather than reinforcing binaries through their temporary reversal or confusion, the play's blurring of opposite hierarchical concepts serves

⁷⁹⁵ Goldhill (2006a), 135; Rodighiero (2016), 183.

⁷⁹⁶ Cf. Wohl (2014), 149 on the 'counterfactual history' of the *Helen*; cf. Griffiths (2020), 325-7.

⁷⁹⁷ Cf. also Scodel (1980), 120: 'the Trojans, we are told, are more blessed than the Greeks, and Cassandra must be believed. Yet the entire *Troades* is occupied with Trojan suffering'.

⁷⁹⁸ Compare this to what Bons (2006), 43 observes about Gorgias' definition of his *Encomium* as playful: 'mentioning playfulness does not imply that the speech is reduced to meaningless wordplay. If this game is played earnestly, the fictional case of Helen becomes a valuable exemplary realisation of Gorgias' views on the power of speech. The closing sentence, therefore, is saying that (almost as a prefiguration of postmodern philosophy) the speech is to be taken both seriously and not'.

⁷⁹⁹ Seaford (1995), 212-7; Hall (2006), 125 *et passim*. Cf. Goldhill (2006b), 332-6.

⁸⁰⁰ What Chesi (2023), 88 calls 'the queer attack on the Real'. Telò and Olsen (2022), 5 define their queering of Euripidean drama as a reading based on 'imaginative anti- or non-normative modes of discursive and embodied becoming materialized in tragic form'. This largely overlaps with my reading of the deconstructive operations of the text. Although they insist with Freeman 2010 (p. 17 n.35) that queering is different from deconstruction, I take the two terms as largely equivalent (like Chesi) inasmuch as they are both practices of reading that emphasise the anti-identitarian, anti-normative movements of the text, often by reversing normative identities and attacking accepted reality (as in this scene, in my reading). On the connection between Derrida and queer theory, cf. Hite (2017); Wilchins (2004), 33-45.

instead 'to undo' the system they constitute, and 'to open an imaginative space beyond it'.⁸⁰¹

Cassandra's deconstruction, however, seems partial: as she upholds one by embracing her 'marriage', she puts into motion a series of other hierarchies, comprehending especially status and ethnicity, which become reversed. In a way, her pose as a Homeric hero assimilates her to a specifically *masculine* type of heroism, with *νικηφόρος* being grammatically ambiguous.⁸⁰² Yet it has to be admitted that this automatic destabilisation of gendered categories seems overall not compounded by a strong thematisation of the male/female divide, and its potential deconstruction. In other words, even though Cassandra aptly strives to show how Greek/barbarian and slave/noble are overturned in her *rhexis*, she does not do the same for man/woman, and her 'marriage' with Agamemnon is ultimately based on this division.⁸⁰³

3.3 Andromache's Intersectional Dilemma: Clashing Hierarchies

It is exactly this hierarchy that the following scene insists upon,⁸⁰⁴ to the point that Pelling quotes the entirety of Andromache's monologue on female virtue and considers it a favourite for historians interested in the Greek perception of gender.⁸⁰⁵ Yet Andromache's monologue is prefaced, as with Cassandra, by a frame that reiterates the focus on her slavery and its opposite, nobility, rather than on the male/female divide.

⁸⁰¹ Wohl (2005a), 138, on Segal (1982) and structuralist readings of tragedy at large. On the connection between this argument and queer theory, cf. Haselswerdt (2024), 171-3.

⁸⁰² Barlow (1986), 180.

⁸⁰³ Freccero (2022), 45-6 takes Cassandra's scene to be one of the few glimpses of female resistance in the play, but she believes that this is illusory.

⁸⁰⁴ Cf. Anderson (1997), 162.

⁸⁰⁵ Pelling (1999), 189-90. Cf. Hall (2001), xxxiii-xxxiv; Citti (1979), 141.

Andromache enters on a wagon piled high with spoils (573-6).⁸⁰⁶ Like Polyxena in Hecuba (*Hec.* 360) and Andromache in her eponymous play (*Andr.* 2-4, 14-5), she is reified into a prized possession which will be brought to Phthia. Andromache's first words underline her status as a slave: Ἀχαιοὶ δεσπόται μ' ἄγουσιν (577). The entrance itself, besides providing another visual echo of the *Oresteia* (Agamemnon's entrance with Cassandra in *Agamemnon*), starkly contrasts with Priam's entrance on a royal chariot in *Alexandros*, in which it functioned as a symbol of royal status.⁸⁰⁷ Immediately, her *amoibaion* with Hecuba frames this as a catastrophic degeneration of status: Hecuba laments that 'Troy is lost', and their wealth with it (βέβακ' ὄλβος, βέβακε Τροία, 582). She adds a lament for the 'nobility of her children' (ἐμῶν τ' εὐγένεια παίδων, 583). The children are also lost, and so the impersonal expression is usually taken in place of the concrete noun with adjective to mean 'my noble children'.⁸⁰⁸ But in fact the abstract εὐγένεια serves to frame the reversal of status. A few lines later, Andromache laments precisely this (614-5):

ἀγόμεθα λεία σὺν τέκνω: τὸ δ' εὐγενές

ἔς δοῦλον ἦκει, μεταβολὰς τοσάσδ' ἔχον.

Andromache's statement links back to her first sentence, showing again how she is presented as a reified possession, and how this connects to the notion of slavery.⁸⁰⁹ The opposite end of the hierarchy, as we saw in the other chapters, appears not to be freedom, but nobility.⁸¹⁰ Andromache's life of freedom coincided with her life of

⁸⁰⁶ Yet cf. Anderson (1997), 162 who thinks that the cart should be taken as a symbol of marriage.

⁸⁰⁷ Marshall (2022), 171.

⁸⁰⁸ Kovacs (2018), 220.

⁸⁰⁹ Kovacs (2018), 228: 'like the contents of the wagon Andromache is λεία, 'plundered goods', but the verb used, ἄγειν, is one applied to sentient booty, such as livestock'.

⁸¹⁰ Cf. Rosenbloom (2006), 263.

nobility, and a version of the play in which Euripides decided to stress freedom, rather than nobility, is imaginable; however, the text here emphasises the conversion of high status into low status, not simply or exclusively freedom; Andromache implicitly decries the loss of her freedom, certainly, but explicitly lingers on the degeneration from *nobility* into *slavery*.⁸¹¹

Yet when Andromache begins her famous monologue, this catastrophic reversal is differently qualified. If Hecuba's statement at 612 had lamented the destruction by the gods of things that were 'highly regarded' (τὰ δὲ δοκοῦντ' ἀπώλεσαν, 613), Andromache now speaks of her previous attempts at the 'game' of gender in gaining 'repute', τῆς εὐδοξίας (643).⁸¹² It is in this context that her famous monologue on female virtue unravels. In this monologue, Andromache paints a picture of normative womanhood that seems far less overblown than the views of Andromache in her eponymous play and closer to the norms of fifth-century Athens (643-56):⁸¹³ Andromache stayed within the house (650), did not associate with other women for gossip (651-2), kept a 'silent tongue' and 'tranquil eye' before Hector (654), and knew when it was time to yield to him (or, interestingly, not yield to him, 655-6). However, this idealised view of the perfect marriage and the perfect wife fails: 'even when Andromache acts in accordance with ideology, her reward is to become the concubine of the son of her husband's murderer'.⁸¹⁴ Croally is quick to add that this is evidence that the male/female hierarchy, while not 'collapsed', is still problematised. And yet it is also obvious that Attic tragedy deals with disrupted marriages from its very

⁸¹¹ Cf. the discussion of Cassandra's slavery vis-à-vis nobility above and Karamanou (2018) on this polarity in *Alexandros* (183-4 and 200-1 on *TrGF* v, 61b); Scodel (1980), 105.

⁸¹² See *supra*, sec. 3.2, pp. 244-5 on the use of δοκέω in the Cassandra scene.

⁸¹³ Hall (2001), xxxiii-xxxiv; Kovacs (2018), 233.

⁸¹⁴ Croally (1994), 96.

beginnings: Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, Medea and Jason, Deianira and Heracles, Jocasta and Oedipus, Hermione and Neoptolemus, and so on. It does not follow that the ideology of gendered difference intrinsic in the institution of marriage is problematised by the simple failure of specific characters, male or female, in doing it 'properly'.⁸¹⁵ These marriages all fail because partners fail to adhere to proper norms of behaviour connected to the idea of marriage.⁸¹⁶

Andromache, however, seems different. It is not simply that the marriage was disrupted by Hector's death, and certainly it was not disrupted by Hector's failings as a husband (cf. 673). Even Croally's view that the male institution of war is responsible for the failure of gender ideology does not fully capture the ironies of the situation.⁸¹⁷ Andromache paints a painstaking picture of the 'idealised' Athenian wife to then declare it paradoxically producing the opposite effect—of turning her into a 'Helen', by having to sleep with a new man (who is also, conceptually, the enemy of her husband).⁸¹⁸ In other words, Andromache spells out the rules of the game, to then declare that these rules produce effects that undermine the whole game.⁸¹⁹

But the specific point in which the idealised 'norm' of womanhood and wifhood is problematised resides, in fact, at the intersection of gender and status:⁸²⁰

Andromache's reputation as the 'perfect woman' made Neoptolemus want her as his

⁸¹⁵ Coo and Finglass (2020), 9. Cf. Wohl (2005b), 153.

⁸¹⁶ Allan and Kelly (2013), 108-9; Tzanetou (2014), 565.

⁸¹⁷ Croally (1994), 89.

⁸¹⁸ Goff (2009), 59: 'the kind of sexual mobility that characterises the fall of the city threatens to make a mockery of Andromache's previous life by turning all women into Helen'. On the implicit comparison between Andromache and Helen, cf. Anderson (1997), 163.

⁸¹⁹ Barlow (1986), 190. On the importance of adultery in connection to the exploration of gender norms in Euripidean tragedy, cf. Coo and Finglass (2020), 10 with Sommerstein (2020), 62-72.

⁸²⁰ Cf. the disparaging comment on Conacher (1967), who writes on Andromache's monologue (p. 142): 'Andromache's speech is disappointing: a set of rhetorical exercise on two unrelated themes'.

‘wife’ when she was enslaved (καὶ τῶνδε κληδῶν.../... ἀπώλεσέν μ’.../... ἐβουλήθη λαβεῖν/ δάμαρτα, 657-60), but this creates a dilemma: if she sleeps with Neoptolemus, she will appear disloyal, ‘bad’, to Hector (κακὴ φανοῦμαι, 663); if she does not, she will be hated by her new master (664). Andromache here echoes Hector’s predictions of her enslavement at *Il.* 6.455-8,⁸²¹ yet Homer avoids including references to her sexual subjugation. Euripides, instead, adds this new element to contrast with and contradict Andromache’s identity as the archetypal chaste wife.

Andromache’s dilemma is one in which the two hierarchies are mobilised and clash in the most striking way. It is precisely the fact that she is a slave that risks turning her into a Helen, which risks completely overturning everything she has done to be a ‘good’ woman. Andromache thus voices ideas that encourage to see hierarchies as different axes—so different that they can have different ideological prescriptions and can thus clash with each other. In this sense, we can see how valid Levine’s call might appear to envision ‘the social as an intricate overlapping of contestatory forms, each trying to impose its own order’.⁸²²

Andromache’s dilemma here appears imbued with sophistic ideas on the relativity of virtue. What is considered virtuous seems contingent on a specific position, status, and situation; a complication of morality that echoes the author of the *Dissoi Logoi* when he describes how the same thing might be regarded as both good and bad depending on the circumstances and the person (DK 90.1), as well as the Platonic Protagoras when he argues that nothing is good or bad in itself, but only in relation to its context and

⁸²¹ Pucci (2016), 79 n152. Cf. Anderson (1997), 160 on the influence of book 6 on the structure of the whole play; Goff (2009), 58 on the characterisation of Andromache.

⁸²² Levine (2006), 651.

application (Pl. *Prt.* 334a-c).⁸²³ Although the *Dissoi Logoi* are later than *Troades*, it is important to remember the role of gender and sexuality in the work's sophistic exposition of ethic relativism, for example in the second *logos* on 'what is beautiful and what is shameful' (DK 90.2). In the clash between slavery and womanhood, slavery then seems to undermine the very rules of the game of gender.

Scodel argues that it was already standard in the Homeric epics (especially the *Iliad*) to present concubinage as different from rape and assimilable to marriage.⁸²⁴ This is the reason why, for instance, Briseis leaves Achilles 'unwillingly',⁸²⁵ or why Sophocles' Tecmessa takes on the role of the sympathetic wife.⁸²⁶ With the latter example, scholars have grappled with the confusing status of Tecmessa and her emotional relationship to Ajax, by showing how, although Tecmessa echoes the Iliadic Andromache of book 6, Sophocles describes her ultimately as a slave.⁸²⁷ Thus, Sophocles builds on this already Homeric perception of the concubine as capable of building an emotional bond with her master, and goes as far as assimilating her to the role of the archetypal wife, Andromache. In doing so, Sophocles can make the relationship between her and Ajax more personal, authentic, and emotional.⁸²⁸

⁸²³ Cf. Conacher (1998), 42-3; Molinelli (2024), 110-1. Bett (1989), 146 notes that Gorgias seems to have put forth an argument for the variability of virtue in connection to one's social station (Arist. *Pol.* 1260a). Bett notes that this cannot fall under the umbrella of ethical relativism, but Andromache's dilemma here complicates the view through the overlapping moral requirements of her contradictory status. On Plato's Protagoras and the question of the unity of virtue, cf. Denyer (2008), 134; Ausland (2017), 72.

⁸²⁴ Scodel (1996), 138-41.

⁸²⁵ At *Il.* 19.282-302 Briseis mourns Patroclus, but in doing so she laments in advance Achilles: cf. Dué (2007), 236-7.

⁸²⁶ Torrance (2005), 53.

⁸²⁷ Patterson (2012), 388; Burian (2012), 75; Bridges (2023), 194; Synodinou (1987), 99.

⁸²⁸ Cf. Kovacs (2018), 235 on Soph. *Aj.* 485-91.

Although Tecmessa also partially alludes to the violence inherent in her relationship with Ajax,⁸²⁹ Cassandra and Andromache render the equation between concubine and wife particularly disturbing.⁸³⁰ Andromache's example is particularly telling, given how Tecmessa echoes the Iliadic Andromache in addressing Ajax. In *Troades*, instead, Andromache mobilises the same archetype of the Iliadic Andromache (archetypal wife), and, like Tecmessa, embodies the equation in her persona; she also exaggerates it in the sense that she compares marriage and slavery in the most violent and grim circumstances. But Andromache heavily disrupts this equation by presenting the two identities, slave and wife, as mutually exclusive alternatives. The equation is thus turned into a paradox. Andromache, the perfect wife, emblem of female virtue, has become a slave because of her virtue: 'the etymological link of that *damarta*, 'wife', with *damazein*, to 'conquer' or 'tame', becomes pointed: a favourite (tellingly favourite, indeed) image for marriage is that of the violent breaking in of the recalcitrant female, but that image is to have new, starker relevance to her servile future'.⁸³¹ Her slavery might undermine her own female virtue. In itself, the whole scene thus takes what was left from the Cassandra scene —the emphasis on her marriage— and complicates the only hierarchy left untouched by Cassandra by working on the prototype of ideal womanhood, Andromache.⁸³² As with Cassandra, the potential for radical disruption sits at the intersection of hierarchies. Cassandra's marriage, the quintessential experience of womanhood, upheld the man/woman hierarchy to disrupt those of class and ethnicity. Andromache seems instead to be forced into the role of the slave, and by

⁸²⁹ Burian (2012), 76.

⁸³⁰ Rabinowitz (2017), 206 on Cassandra's 'marriage'. Rabinowitz thinks that Hecuba shows how distorted a marriage Cassandra's is but still believes that overall 'the fact of sexual slavery is minimised by this slippage between the language of marriage and rape'.

⁸³¹ Pelling (1999), 193.

⁸³² Cf. instead Rabinowitz (2017), 206.

abiding to the rules of this new game, she is abandoning those of the game of gender while raising the spectre of the relativity of gendered morals.

Yet does Andromache really embrace her identity as a 'good' slave and abandon her identity as a 'good' woman? Does her monologue simply relativise gender by taking on a different, unproblematic identity? The text seems to favour this way of reading hierarchies. The metaphor of the yoke, for instance, is repeated twice with different meanings. At 669-70, she says that 'not even a mare that has been separated from its companion bears the yoke easily' (ἔλκει ζυγόν), commenting on the possibility of being disloyal to Hector by sleeping with Neoptolemus. Andromache's loss of her virginity to Hector is equally described through this metaphor just five lines later: ἐκ πατρὸς λαβῶν δόμων/ πρῶτος τὸ παρθένειον ἐξεύξω λέχος, 675-6. But immediately after (677-8) the yoke is not that of sexual and marital union; rather, she laments being transported towards 'the yoke of slavery' (δοῦλον ζυγόν). Thus, one yoke seems to inevitably replace the other.

This is implicitly recognised by Pucci when he argues: 'Andromache has been chosen, she says, to be the wife of the son of Achilles, Neoptolemus (659: Ἀχιλλέως με παῖς ἐβουλήθη λαβεῖν δάμαρτα), but she knows that she will actually be his concubine'.⁸³³ Just like the majority of readings which felt compelled to solve Polyxena's paradox by either deeming her delusional or proclaiming her nobility, the danger is similar here to underestimate the contrast of identities that Euripides has constructed.⁸³⁴ Pucci takes again Andromache as delusional in the moment she articulates her identity as

⁸³³ Pucci (2016), 74. Cf. Scodel (1998), 148 and Torrance (2005), 56 underlining the juxtaposition of δάμαρτα and δουλεύσω.

⁸³⁴ Cf. Scodel (1980), 11 who complains that 'Andromache about to be dragged off to the bed of an enemy, discusses propriety of behaviour in women, and the respective merits of life and death'.

concubine in terms of legitimate wifedom; she is a slave, not a wife. On the other hand, others stress how Andromache's stature as a wife overshadows the identity others want to place on her by reaffirming her loyalty to Hector in 667ff. 'in a great crescendo of love and despair'.⁸³⁵ Lee goes as far as saying that Andromache might actually become Neoptolemus' legitimate wife, given that the stories regarding the marriage of Hermione and Neoptolemus are conflicting (which seems unattested).⁸³⁶ Alternatively, Lee proposes that the word δάμαρ at 660 might have a different, unattested meaning than 'lawful wife' — a stretch that once again shows the scholars' difficulty in keeping the paradox alive, the critics' desire to choose one or the other. Scodel is compelled to look back (or forward?) to Euripides' *Andromache*, to argue that the Andromache of *Troades* will make her choice and will become almost 'a legitimate wife'.⁸³⁷ But why, then, if we have to see Andromache as either 'slave' or 'woman', is this new identity as concubine repeatedly described as analogous to that of the legitimate wife?⁸³⁸

Yet, although critics have tried in one way or the other to dissolve it, the paradox is meant to be there, and is meant to be insolvable. In fact, we should say that Andromache does not anticipate what she is going to do.⁸³⁹ Slavery and wifedom, the hierarchies slave/noble and man/woman, are thus mobilised to work against each other, each 'trying to impose its order' on the other. The prototype of the perfect woman thus speaks of what it means to be a perfect woman to then clarify how this has been made meaningless by the intersection of her identity as a woman with slavery. But as slavery

⁸³⁵ Barlow (1986), 191.

⁸³⁶ Lee (1976), 191.

⁸³⁷ Scodel (1998), 149-50.

⁸³⁸ Goff (2009), 51 asks the same question about Cassandra, considering it a peculiarity of her 'alternative' vision, but the same confusion of marriage and concubinage is present throughout the play.

⁸³⁹ Poe (2020), 264: 'whether Andromache would allow herself to try to build a new future remains an open question'.

disrupts the very ideological emblem of the perfect woman by relativising it,⁸⁴⁰ so Andromache's nobility casts shadows on the legitimacy of her slavery.

She might decide to comply with the requests imposed by her new identity as a slave, yet this identity is ideologically undermined by Andromache's example of virtue. In fact, Hecuba's piece of advice for Andromache—that she should indeed comply with the requests of her masters and forget about Hector—is contradicted by her own statement in the debate with Helen.⁸⁴¹ There, she says that a 'woman of nobility' would surely have considered suicide, which Helen seemingly never did (1012-4).⁸⁴² The adjective Hecuba uses here is not simply or generically 'good', but 'noble' (γενναία, 1013). Thus, Andromache's 'nobility' resides in her virtuous behaviour as a woman. This is exactly what Andromache says, entertaining the possibility of sleeping with Neoptolemus: she will appear 'bad' (κακή ... φανοῦμαι, 663; cf. Helen defined as κακή at 1056). But the fact that she might assume this identity, have sex with Neoptolemus and thus become κακή, cannot take away from the fact that her thoughts of suicide in her monologue already categorise her as a 'noble' woman. This is encouraged by the presence of terminology associated to wifedom, which keeps on raising the spectre of Andromache qua legitimate wife and respectable lady, and by the emphasis on Andromache's nobility. In doing so, Andromache's adherence to normative womanhood, her 'nobility', continuously raises doubts on her potential future as a slave.⁸⁴³ Talthylbius himself, immediately after announcing the army's decision to kill Astyanax, exhorts Andromache to be 'wise' and to not grieve excessively, *as befits her noble birth* (μήτ'

⁸⁴⁰ This is often missed by those accounts which argue (differently from Rabinowitz 2017) that the condition of women is problematised by the play but that it is mainly through the victimisation of the Trojan women that this critique is developed: cf. Munteanu (2010-11), 137.

⁸⁴¹ Goff (2009), 69.

⁸⁴² Amerasinghe (1973), 102 notes how Hecuba's suggestion of suicide is illogical.

⁸⁴³ Cf. Synodinou (1974), 13-4.

ἀντέχου τοῦδ', εὐγενῶς δ' ἄλγει κακοῖς, 727).⁸⁴⁴ Talthybius continues by emphasising Andromache's femaleness: she is 'just one woman' and should thus refrain from thinking she can fight with men (ἡμεῖς δὲ πρὸς γυναῖκα μάρνασθαι μίαν/ οἴοί τε. Τούτων οὐνεκ' οὐ μάχης ἐρᾶν, 731-2),⁸⁴⁵ playing on the gendered etymology of her name.⁸⁴⁶ By repeatedly exhorting her to silence and submission, Talthybius forces Andromache back into the paradigm of womanhood, while recognising her nobility — proving that Andromache's remarkable behaviour as a woman, representative of her nobility, contradicts her identity as a slave.

Equally, the exhortation to remain silent, grieve with restraint, and not fight with men repeats Andromache's retelling of her behaviour with Hector: while Andromache 'kept before him a quiet tongue and tranquil look' (γλώσσης τε σιγὴν ὄμμα θ' ἤσυχον πόσει/παρεῖχον, 654-5), now she is told to do the same (σιγῶσα δ' εὖ τε ταῖς τύχαις κεκρημένη, 737). With Hector, Andromache knew when it was time to 'win' over Hector and when it was not: (ἤδη δ' ἄμ' ἐχρῆν νικᾶν πόσιν/κείνω τε νίκην ὧν ἐχρῆν παριέναι, 655-6); here, Talthybius tells Andromache that she should be wise and know that she is not in a position to fight with men (οἴοί τε. τούτων οὐνεκ' οὐ μάχης ἐρᾶν, 732).⁸⁴⁷ Talthybius, then, remembers Andromache's nobility and casts a shadow on the

⁸⁴⁴ Citti (1979), 224.

⁸⁴⁵ Cf. Goff (2009), 61.

⁸⁴⁶ Capettini (2007), 222 *et passim*. Cf. Lauriola (2015), 69.

⁸⁴⁷ Fifth-century Athenian literature seems to use the silencing of Andromache in book six of the *Iliad* repeatedly to explore the relationship between genders: Tecmessa in *Ajax* is silenced (583ff.) after referencing the same passage at length. In Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* it is this same episode that becomes emblematic of the sexist violence of Lysistrata's husband: πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει (520) is a direct quote from Hector's final farewell to Andromache at the end of that passage (*Il.* 6.492). The triumphant inversion of gender roles is acclaimed by the chorus in the reversal of exactly this Homeric hemistich: πόλεμος δὲ γυναῖξι μελήσει (538). The point in *Lysistrata*'s reversal, most importantly, opposes the act of silencing that both Lysistrata's husband and the chorus of old men want to impose on the Athenian women. Cf. Perusino (2020), 222; one should also note the emphasis on silencing at *Lys.* 506, 509, 514-7, 519-21, 527-31. *Il.* 6. 490-3 are echoed at *Od.* 1. 356-9: cf. Di Benedetto (2010), 193; Kirk (1985), 224.

legitimacy of her future slavery; at the same time, however, his incentive to be 'noble' problematises the ideology of genders implicit in Andromache's monologue. If a woman is expected to be 'silent' and give in to men when required, as Andromache says, surely now Talthybius' parallel exhortation seems troubling. Andromache has just received the horrifying news of the decree passed on Astyanax — he is to be flung from the walls — and Talthybius' words here undercut the view that female virtue can be easily defined and attained, again showing its relativity through extreme circumstances. Can the audience unproblematically accept that Andromache, as a noble/good woman, should be silent now? And if they cannot, how can the ideological prerequisite of feminine compliance and silence hold here? In other words, Talthybius' exhortation seems to undermine Andromache's gendered ideal of female silence as previously discussed in her monologue — a similar 'relativisation' of female virtue as the one represented in Andromache's paradox. Since Andromache's monologue seems to paint a picture of the 'normative' morality inherent in the man/woman hierarchy, and since she seems to embody the archetypal 'good' woman, this is a challenge to the hierarchy itself and to the definition of female behaviour. As 'nobility' loses its meaning (cf. 744), what it means to be a 'noble woman', i.e., a good woman, also suffers a loss of meaning (and vice versa).

But the crucial corollary to this powerful destabilisation of gender norms is provided by the following scene. Helen suggests precisely that slavery undermines the 'rules' of gender in a serious way (but see footnote for a discussion of scholarly scepticism): she speaks of Aphrodite as a force that 'enslaves' even Zeus (κείνης δὲ δοῦλός ἐστι, 950) and argues that she married Paris by force, as if she was 'enslaved' (πικρῶς ἐδούλωσ',

964).⁸⁴⁸ While Helen was not really enslaved in the same way as Andromache, the terminology suggests the degree to which Andromache is constructed as a parallel to Helen.⁸⁴⁹ As Menelaus says in the *Orestes*, anachronistically alluding to the sophists, ‘among the wise everything that derives from compulsion is a form of slavery’ (πᾶν τοῦξ ἀνάγκης δοῦλόν ἐστ’ ἐν τοῖς σοφοῖς, 488).⁸⁵⁰ Both Helen and Andromache, compelled by circumstances that can be assimilated to slavery, are forced to contradict the rules of the game of gender and sleep with the enemies of their husbands (in both cases regarded as a new marriage; cf. 660; 398-9, 932, 962). In this further assimilation, the blurring of lines between Andromache and Helen, good woman and bad woman,⁸⁵¹ creates serious doubt as to the morality inherent in the man/woman polarity—especially because the Helen scene is framed to a large extent as if the ‘correct’ fixing of gender norms depended on it. As we saw, Andromache and Hermione in the *Andromache* adhered to the same pattern: superficially on opposite ends of the scale,

⁸⁴⁸ Barlow (1986), 211 notes the similarity with *Hipp.* 447-61; that passage, however, does not use the language of slavery. Nonetheless, Phaedra’s paradox (good woman turned bad by Aphrodite’s compulsion) is a good parallel for Helen here: Artemis says she has come to reveal Phaedra’s ‘frenzied lust or, in a way, nobility’ (1300-1). Note also how Artemis there states that Theseus’ *human* responsibility can be exculpated in the light of Aphrodite’s responsibility (συγγνώμης, 1326; Helen uses the same word at 950). This parallel strengthens Helen’s argument here. Many critics doubt that Phaedra and Helen can truly be exculpated, given the importance of double causation in Greek morality (Allan 2008, 17; Winnington-Ingram 1960; Halleran 1995, 41); however, Knox’s 1952 article on the complication of double causation in *Hippolytus* (esp. pp. 4-5) provides still valid reasons to nuance Phaedra’s responsibilities: cf. Blomqvist (1982), 405; Ebbott (2017), 112-119. Given the similarity with Helen’s defence, they would also corroborate Helen’s argument for her innocence and would make it harder to dismiss it: cf. Nikolsky (2015), 36 on the parallel. On the complication of Helen’s responsibility and Gorgias’ argument on the power of love, cf. Bonazzi (2023), 198; Worman (1997), 186. Cf. Lloyd (1984), 305 on the complication of the concept of responsibility in sophistic thought and especially Barney (2016), 12.

⁸⁴⁹ Gregory (1991), 172 contrasts them, saying that ‘Andromache is an authentic, Helen a simulated victim of force’; Croally (1994), 154 retorts that ‘Hecuba’s condemnation of Helen is conducted in terms which are supposed to be applicable to all women (1031-2)’.

⁸⁵⁰ West (1987), 216.

⁸⁵¹ Helen was not uncontroversially the ‘bad woman’ in Homer, but she is usually negative in the tragic tradition and Euripides seems to assume often ‘an extremely censorious stance towards Helen based upon the most negative possible interpretation of Homer’ (Holmberg 1995, 19).

their assimilation questions the status divide between enslaved concubine and legitimate wife,⁸⁵² but it is possible to see how it also undercuts any rigid distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ woman.⁸⁵³ For if Andromache in her play had made problematic the concept of female silence and compliance, a liberatory space is opened up for Hermione, too;⁸⁵⁴ the same can be observed about her mythical mother here. Can Helen be condemned for her transgression as a woman if she has lived through the same situation we have just seen the archetypal good wife caught up in?⁸⁵⁵ And if she cannot be condemned, how can the gender ideology hold in the wake of this complication?⁸⁵⁶ Andromache’s intersectional position thus represents a paradox that deconstructs the very ideal of the gender norm of fifth-century Athens while raising serious doubts over the legitimacy of Andromache’s future status. The two hierarchies then might come with different ideological prescriptions, but only superficially does one remain stable in its meaning: both, instead, suffer a loss of meaning from their interaction.

As we have seen repeatedly, the slave/noble and Greek/barbarian polarities have a pronounced ideological connection (slave: barbarian = noble: Greek). Then, one should admit the possibility that the disturbance of class and status categories in Andromache’s scene—visible in the blurring of concubine and wife, enslaved

⁸⁵² Cf. Barchiesi (2007), 113 on how Euripides’ *Andromache* anticipates the way in which Ovid’s *Ars* (indeed through *Andromache*) resists the polarisation between the ideal wife and the concubine required by patriarchal ideology. Cf. also Gibson (2009), 99.

⁸⁵³ Helen is again assimilated to an Iliadic archetypal good wife, Penelope, in Euripides’ *Helen* (three years later than *Troades*) with the result of creating a radically new Helen who is even better a wife than Penelope: cf. Holmberg (1995), 34-40 *et passim*.

⁸⁵⁴ Cf. Olsen (2022a), 148 on Rabinowitz (1993) and her argument on the separation of women as fundamental to tragedy’s reassertion of patriarchal structures.

⁸⁵⁵ Allan (2008), 51 on the *Helen*. The *Helen*, like the Helen scene here, raises doubts on Helen’s responsibility: Allan (2008), 17.

⁸⁵⁶ Mendelsohn (2002), 226, 232 *et passim* argues for a reevaluation of the divide between ‘good’/ ‘passive’ and ‘bad’/ ‘active’ women in Attic tragedy, advanced for the first time in Freudian terms by Rabinowitz (1993).

Andromache and noble Andromache, ‘noble’ woman and ‘bad’ woman—might implicitly and automatically result in a weakening of this equation. In other words, since Andromache is a Trojan, questioning the legitimacy of her slavery might be enough to cast a shadow on the Greek/barbarian hierarchy, undermining this fundamental equation which was so stable as to endure down to Aristotle’s times and his formulation of ‘natural slavery’ on precisely that point.⁸⁵⁷ But Euripides has gone further, just as with Cassandra,⁸⁵⁸ previously in the play: the last lament of Andromache entirely hinges on the strongest ideological deconstruction of this hierarchy.

Andromache’s heart-wrenching farewell to Astyanax lingers on the absurdity of the ‘human sacrifice’ (747-8), just like Hecuba on Polyxena’s literal sacrifice at *Hec.* 260-1.⁸⁵⁹ The word τύραννον (748) stresses the view of Trojans as barbarians, but does not imply the possibility of tyranny over Greece, as Helen will argue. Instead, again it is the Greeks who perform a barbaric human sacrifice.⁸⁶⁰ Andromache explicitly gives voice to this hierarchical reversal in what has been often described as the most radical critique of the ideology of Greek superiority in Greek literature: ὦ βάρβαρ’ ἐξευρόντες

⁸⁵⁷ Torrance (2005), 64-5 on 1255a33-5: Aristotle justifies his theory of ‘natural slavery’ not simply because barbarians are slavish and the Greeks are free; barbarians are said to be not *noble* universally as Greeks are, although they might define themselves as noble in their country (αὐτοὺς μὲν γὰρ οὐ μόνον παρ’ αὐτοῖς εὐγενεῖς ἀλλὰ πανταχοῦ νομίζουσιν, τοὺς δὲ βαρβάρους οἴκοι μόνον). See *supra*, sec. 2.3, p. 177; sec. 2.4, pp. 184-5.

⁸⁵⁸ Or, for example, in *Hecuba*: I have argued that while the confusion of Greek and barbarian is an implicit consequence of the confusion of Trojan slaves and noble Greeks, Euripides has added to this confusion through a number of specific ‘ethnic’ elements, for instance by having Hecuba’s barbaric revenge correspond to the ‘civilising’ act of Odysseus blinding Polyphemus, as well as by the allusion to the story of Artayctes.

⁸⁵⁹ 748 is a problematic line, but deletion (Kovacs 2018, 246-7; West 1980, 15) is based on the idea that Astyanax is not sacrificed but flung from the walls, yet the presentation of murder in metaphoric sacrificial terms is a pervasive trope of tragedy. In the play, Priam and male Trojans are said to have been slaughtered at the altars (134, 562, 1316), and the verb σφάζω is used. Nauck’s emendation (1862, 149) οὐ σφάγιον (υἱὸν) is not to be disregarded.

⁸⁶⁰ On barbarism and human sacrifice and its complication in *IT*, cf. Kearns (2023), 35-7.

Ἕλληνας κακά, / τί τόνδε παῖδα κτείνειτ' οὐδὲν αἴτιον; (764-5).⁸⁶¹ Andromache goes as far as envisioning the Greeks eating Astyanax's body (ἄγετε φέρετε ρίπτειτ', εἰ ρίπτειν δοκεῖ·/ δαίνυσθε τοῦδε σάρκας, 774-5).⁸⁶² By applying the ethnographic cliché of barbarian cannibalism to the Greek army,⁸⁶³ Andromache radically problematises this ideology by reversing Greek and barbarian —⁸⁶⁴ an act of ideological deconstruction that largely exceeds the flexibility of sympathy allowed by Greek tragedies, like Aeschylus' *Persians*, to barbarians.⁸⁶⁵ Instead, it mobilises the moral hierarchy of Greek and barbarian in its mostly explicit ethnic connotations to overturn it.

Yet this racial reversal, on a closer look, is not explicitly connected to class structures. Andromache's last monologue starts and finishes, again, with marriage: Andromache stresses how wretched her marriage was at the beginning, and even goes as far as saying that she only gave birth to Astyanax to see him die (ὦ λέκτρα τάμ' ἀδυστυχῆ τε καὶ γάμοι / οἷς ἦλθον ἐς μέλαθρον Ἐκτορός ποτε, 745-6). At the end, she ironically calls her new 'marriage' 'beautiful', founded as it is on the murder of her own son (ἐπὶ καλὸν γὰρ ἔρχομαι/ ὑμέναιον, ἀπολέσσασα τούμαυτῆς τέκνον, 778-9). Once again, the loss of meaning of one hierarchy (man/woman) is connected to that of another

⁸⁶¹ Hall (1989), 221: 'no specific contemporary thinker can be proven to have been as radical as his Andromache'. Cf. also Papadodima (2014), 335; Segal (1990b), 127. Gregory (2005), 265 rightly insists on the *difference* between the radical inversion of the polarity in this passage and Aeschylus' nuanced portrayal of ethnicity in *Persians*. Cf. instead Kovacs (2018), 248: 'it is hard to see why Andromache, who is non-Greek, should describe cruelties as characteristic of her own race'; Rabinowitz (2017), 204: 'there is an underlying ethnocentrism in these lines'. Both seem to me to miss the point of the paradox. On the ethnocentrism of the whole play, cf. Rodighiero (2016), 178.

⁸⁶² As Wohl (2015), 47 has it on this passage, 'not only is there an automatic affinity between Athenian audience and Greek heroes in a play structured by a polarity between Greek and barbarian, but this play goes out its way to emphasise the analogy between imperial Athens and the conquering Greeks'.

⁸⁶³ Cf. Goff (2009), 62.

⁸⁶⁴ The *Cyclops* also engages with the notion of cannibalism (Harrison 2014, 198), exploring with irony ideas of barbarism and Greekness. Polyphemus had already been 'barbarised' in the *Hecuba* through his alter ego Polymestor.

⁸⁶⁵ Allan and Kelly (2013), 104.

(Greek/barbarian), which in its turn implicitly questions the legitimacy of another (slave/noble), which had opened the whole scene (e.g., the emphasis on Andromache's new condition as a slave), and which was challenged by and challenging for the man/woman hierarchy. Superficially, then, hierarchies can appear to clash and can be instrumentally manipulated by characters to attain their rhetorical aims or to comply with their attempts to put things into their order, but this does not mean that the ideological operations of the text correspond to those disentangled hierarchies. If anything, *Troades* goes to an unprecedented extent in representing all these hierarchies as entangled, and in deconstructing all of them in their intersection. Characters might be tempted to reimpose order in their own way, relying on one 'meaning', one hierarchy, yet the text operates to slowly undermine each of these attempts. This is a deconstruction not only of the categories that defined Athenian citizenship, as Croally has it,⁸⁶⁶ but a whole system of connected and mutually reinforcing moral hierarchies, with its pretension of defining good from bad, order from chaos, superior from inferior, meaning from meaninglessness.

3.4 Levinian Forms, Emancipatory and Counterproductive

Finally, it is possible to see how Levine's understanding of the way liberatory spaces arise through collision is not wrong. In a broad sense, we can say that one fundamental way (though probably not the only one) in which hierarchies can be challenged is not in an individual effort to destroy them from the inside, individually. Instead, it appears that an interaction, a clash between hierarchies mobilises operations that *can* produce radical outcomes of liberation. For instance, Andromache's confrontation with Hermione hinges on a clash between the man/woman hierarchy, upheld by

⁸⁶⁶ Croally (1994), 44.

Andromache, and the Greek/barbarian one, upheld by Hermione. This confrontation produces radical effects, and indeed decades of scholarship have highlighted how Andromache's 'virtuous' behaviour unsettles Hermione's ideas of ethnic superiority. As hierarchies impose *their form* on the others, they produce radical outcomes, and so they do not simply 'internally' problematise themselves. Rather, Levinian collision happens at the intersection.⁸⁶⁷ One can even surmise that all the enmeshed challenges to the hierarchies we have seen in ch. 2 can be described as collisions: Hermione's status collapses under the weight of her barbarisation; Menelaus' Greekness is deformed by his problematic fixation on wealth and power (like his daughter); his status is rerouted by his ambiguous gender. Finally, Levine's argument is specifically enlightening for these three Trojan plays: for the presence of 'intersectional characters' necessarily and tangibly catalyses and makes visible different social hierarchies and stages their interaction and inevitable clash. This finds a parallel in the modern experience of intersectional subjects who not only experience the presence of multiple ideological discourses in society, but are aware of the often conflicting demands this intersection makes on them.⁸⁶⁸ This means that the intersectional as a site of colliding ideological hierarchies is an extremely salient place where the ideological system can shortcircuit. And yet, Levine's approach conceives these axes as intrinsically separate, distinct forms that clash, and this leads to the understanding, for example, that 'ethnicity' might be put into question by upholding 'gender' in either the Andromache/Hermione confrontation or the Hecuba/Helen *agon* I started this chapter with.

⁸⁶⁷ In fact, it is interesting to note that Levine herself notes in a footnote in her original paper on strategic formalism that she has been inspired by intersectionality theory in the formulation of her reading practice: Levine (2006), 652 n.3.

⁸⁶⁸ Bohrer (2019), 221: 'the intersectional tradition generates its epistemology from the real contradictions experienced by oppressed people'.

In *Andromache*, too, Andromache's nobility can be said to clash in a Levinian sense with gender, and problematise her own dictum.⁸⁶⁹ Crucially, however, Andromache is not 'noble': she is a slave. If we perceive her as noble, it is because that hierarchy is 'already' problematised, and so the problematisation of one is concomitant to the disturbance of the other here. Similarly, but differently, in *Troades* Andromache's slavery (rather than nobility) contradicts her femaleness; but this slavery is already put into question by her 'virtue', her 'nobility' as a woman (so her femaleness also disrupts her slavery). Equally, in *Andromache* that one hierarchy of status that problematises female virtue is also not problematised by itself, but in that play, too, Andromache's slavery is problematic because she also maintains traits of the archetypal noble woman/legitimate wife/respectable lady — as well as because of the Hellenic character of Andromache's actions and thoughts that ideologically contradicts her slavery. These processes of problematisation are concomitant and interlocking. Crucially, we would not be able to perceive the problematisation at the level of gender if we did not read it intersectionally, which is what critics have in fact missed in their analysis of *Andromache* and *Troades*: it is because of Andromache's (already confusing) status that what she says about female virtue, both in *Andromache* and *Troades*, is sophisticatedly shown to be labile, relative, problematic. The fact that these hierarchies clash does not mean that they should be conceived as single axes that at times end up reinforcing some ideological prescriptions and challenging others. This would be to ignore the inevitable ideological work of deconstruction performed internally within the play and the extraliterary reality of the way discourses of gender, ethnicity and class would overlap

⁸⁶⁹ Cf. Wohl (1998), 31 on *Trachiniae*: Deianira's 'status and gender work against one another in defining her public persona and her relations with others', but Wohl's overall argument is that through the tragic exchange of women tragedy consolidates both patriarchy and aristocratic domination.

together in the ideology of the polis, as in DuBois' analogical model. These hierarchies are ideologically enmeshed and mutually sustaining; their deconstruction, then, happens not individually, but simultaneously, together, at their intersection.

Hill Collins observes how social hierarchies are *articulated* in different ways in different contexts,⁸⁷⁰ which means that they do not necessarily converge in practice at all times.⁸⁷¹ At times, in fact, since their articulation is fluid, they might even come into tension with each other, and one can contradict the other. Although the articulations are shifting, the matrix of ideology Hill Collins envisions does not have to be a perfectly coherent system, and ideology does not have to be monolithic: it articulates itself in different ways according to the circumstances. Paradoxically, it can reproduce itself through contradiction and even *thrive* through contradiction; contradiction is not excluded from the matrix, since the matrix is not a rigid grid.⁸⁷² Indeed, one can say that Black feminist thought was born out of the need to explain how ideology was reproducing itself in and through feminist and anti-racist spaces; and so the matrix in that case could be said to be thriving through clashing hierarchies (in one space, gender over race, in the other race over gender). Ideologically, however, these discourses remain part of the same ideological system of domination constituted by mutually supporting hierarchies.⁸⁷³ While the intersectional remains a site of tension *between* ideologies and can produce 'radical outcomes', a shortcircuit, as with the two

⁸⁷⁰ Hill Collins (2019), 233. Hill Collins is specifically thinking about temporal, historical contexts. She borrows the concept of articulation from Stuart Hall: Hall (1985), 92.

⁸⁷¹ Hill Collins (2019), 233.

⁸⁷² Ferguson (2016), 43 speaks of the intersectional ambition to theorise 'the diverse-yet-unified nature of power, one that illustrates how oppressions which sometimes contradict each other also systematically uphold an unfree and punishing world'.

⁸⁷³ Hall (1988), 166: 'in our intellectual way, we think that the world will collapse of the result of a logical contradiction; this is the illusion of the intellectual—that ideology must be coherent, every bit of it fitting together, like a philosophical investigation. When, in fact, the whole purpose of what Gramsci called an organic [...] ideology is that it articulates into a configuration different subjects'.

paradoxical Andromaches, this contradiction is not symptomatic of their separateness; it is rather a crucial site of tension that enables the matrix to unravel in its enmeshment. Although hierarchies might ‘clash’ on stage, at a character level, and at a phenomonic level, at the ideological level they mutually entail each other, and it is through this entanglement that they are all *ideologically* deconstructed.

Levine’s strategic formalism brilliantly exposes how, in some crucial environments and situations, hierarchies and discourses of power do not work together; yet as of today it cannot explain why some forms of power tend to attract each other in the construction of ideological structures and formations.⁸⁷⁴ In other words, if strategic formalism avoids recognising the wider structure in which forms are situated, the risk is rejecting the attempt to understand an organising social totality,⁸⁷⁵ and envisioning forms (or hierarchies) as ‘free-floating, unanchored or ungrounded by the larger political contexts within which they must function.’⁸⁷⁶ Reading networks or forms as free-floating risks jettisoning the attempt to understand deeper functionings of the social structure, of ideology;⁸⁷⁷ for ideology is not ‘solid’, but neither is it entirely ‘fluid’. Rather, a more politically active formalism would conceptualise ideology as viscous: albeit malleable and transformable, ideology tends to be adhesive and tenacious. A more strategic formalism would then individuate areas of contradiction, rupture, and fluidity between different hierarchies or forms, but would also attempt to account for the way in which ideology brings them together persuasively in the construction of its (ideological) reality. For otherwise jettisoning the process of theorising the social

⁸⁷⁴ Cf. the similar critique of Foucault in Hall (1985), 92-3.

⁸⁷⁵ Something which intersectionality theory does not refrain from theorising: Ferguson (2016), 44. Cf. Hall (1985), 91.

⁸⁷⁶ Lesjak (2016).

⁸⁷⁷ Cf. Ferguson (2016), 45.

totalisation might mean that ‘we will only be left able to ‘hamper’ networks and power, to use Levine’s language, rather than grasp and overturn them.’⁸⁷⁸ Yet the texts of these Trojan plays inevitably ask us to complicate this vision, to imbricate us in our reading of hierarchies, to constantly overstep the limits of axes, to see them trespassing into the domain of others not because they are distinct and free-floating but precisely because they are imbricated, part of the same web — and to finally find us entangled in the skein that these texts unravel.

3.5 Not Just Mischievous Impiety: *Oresteia* and Meaning

3.5.1 The End of Time: Against Teleology

Troades, too, seems to delineate a vision of the world that is different from and subversive of Aeschylean drama, as in *Andromache* and *Hecuba*. As Zeitlin has it on the *Orestes*:⁸⁷⁹

those firm polarities of Aeschylean drama are undermined, mocked, and finally negated. And since those Aeschylean polarities once operated in the service of a vision that was founded on a belief in hierarchic stability, Euripidean confusions must be construed as more than mischievous impiety.

The chaos of the world of *Troades*, one in which the concept itself of hierarchy falters, intermittently alludes to its future developments in Argos, as the *Hecuba* and *Andromache* also do. Yet if those plays, produced ten years before this, alluded to their futures and yet radically undercut them, this tragedy drives that process to an extreme. As we saw, the argument on the *Teufelskreis* of the *Hecuba* hinges on one fundamental

⁸⁷⁸ Lesjak (2016).

⁸⁷⁹ Zeitlin (1980), 56.

symbol: fire. By highlighting how the foundation of the Cynossema must be seen as particularly important in the connection between the ending of the *Hecuba* and the beacons at the beginning of the *Agamemnon*, we saw that that play produces its most allusive link, presenting the events of the trilogy as the chronological sequel of the Thracian events — a sequel whose resolution is undermined by the renewed emphasis on its weakness. Yet *Troades* in many ways pushes this symbolic link further, and it is precisely from this element that an analysis of its relationship with *Oresteia* must begin.

Beacons and flames are central to *Troades*: above all, in the Cassandra scene (298, 380, 320, 343, 344, 348, 351); in the description of the last night of Troy (548); of the sunlight when Menelaus comes to take Helen (860), of Paris (922); of the past sacrifices of the Trojans (1063); of Troy burning (1080); of the thunderbolt of Zeus the chorus hope strikes Menelaus' ship (1104); of the final torches with which the Greeks burn Troy at the end (1257, 1261, 1274, 1296, 1318). The significance of this imagery, especially of its visual aspect, has been recently evaluated by Marshall, who notices that Cassandra's use of torch imagery is allusive both to the rest of the Trojan trilogy and to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*: at the end of her scene, she will embark onto the ship that will arrive in Argos in *Agamemnon*, and 'some spectators might even connect the light seen by the Watchman in the prologue of *Agamemnon* with the burning of the city intimated in the final moments on *Troades*'.⁸⁸⁰ Marshall, however, limits himself to noticing how the play is 'a prequel' of the *Oresteia*, in the same manner as those scholars that before Thalmann interpreted the *Hecuba*'s final lines merely as a connecting joint signaling linear progression towards the *Oresteia*. However, torches are fundamental in the *Oresteia* not only in the 'Watchman' scene, as Marshall has it. In fact, they constitute a

⁸⁸⁰ Marshall (2022), 170-1.

fundamental element of stagecraft that Aeschylus used to signal the linear progression of his trilogy. Burian notes how torches are employed in the final scene of the *Eumenides*, with animals and purple robes, as a powerful metaphor signifying that perversions have been redressed, civilisation established.⁸⁸¹

The whole Trojan trilogy rejects the linearity implicit in the form of an interconnected trilogy. In a way, the story is developed through this special interconnected trilogy: the destruction implicit in *Alexandros* is made explicit in *Troades*. But at a deeper level, at the level of redressing social distortions, of reaching clarity, of distinguishing truth from falsehoods, of having a sense of the role of the divine in the order of the universe, in other words, of progress, *Troades* does not grant such a comfortable linearity. The image of the torches used in the final burning of Troy, recalling the dream of the firebrand Alexandros in the first play of the trilogy, signals rather a trajectory towards the dismemberment of a civilisation,⁸⁸² not its conceptual foundation.

But this problematisation of progress is connected to the use of firebrands, and so articulated in connection to Aeschylus. The finale of the *Orestes*, with the 'hand-held torch fires', is 'a grim inversion of the torches of ritual celebration in the *Oresteia*'s final scene';⁸⁸³ but given that the use of the roof probably recalls the Watchman at the beginning of the *Agamemnon*,⁸⁸⁴ it might recall both. Torches, then, appear to be used as a sign of progression that can be radically inverted, turned into a symbol that collapses the distance between beginning and ending. What is more, although Pindar mentions fire in Hecuba's dream, it is perfectly possible that Euripides invented the

⁸⁸¹ Burian (2023), 142.

⁸⁸² Cf. Anderson (1997), 168.

⁸⁸³ Torrance (2013), 56.

⁸⁸⁴ Torrance (2013), 56.

motif of the firebrand in *Alexandros*, in allusion to the *Oresteia*: for Pindar probably mentions a creature that is πυρφόρον and Εκατόγχειρα (Sn.-M., *Paeon* 8a = fr. 52i A),⁸⁸⁵ and it is likely that the Euripidean version was a twist on this fire-breathing monster of the tradition.⁸⁸⁶ The same applies to Cassandra's prophecy in *Alexandros* of the metamorphosis of Hecuba into a dog, 'the delight of torch-bearing Hecate' (Ἐκάτης ἄγαλμα φωσφόρου κύων ἔση, *TrGF* v, fr. 62h);⁸⁸⁷ this further corroborates the argument that the transformation of the queen in *Hecuba*, too, foreshadows fire as an element allusive to the beacons of Aeschylus' trilogy.

So *Troades* refuses the project of an interconnected trilogy and its linear progress per se, but also specifically in connection to Aeschylus. As scholars have noted, the interconnected Euripidean trilogy is unique, and the form is more Aeschylean than Sophoclean or Euripidean. However, given the importance of the *Oresteia* as an intertext here, rejecting the linearity of the trilogy form is connected to the rejection of the process of thesis, antithesis, synthesis implicit in the form of the Aeschylean trilogy.⁸⁸⁸ Firebrands, then, become an element that not only signals the impossibility of linear progression in the Euripidean trilogy; but also a critique of the moment of synthesis of *Eumenides*, of its resolutions, its fixings and orderings of the social, temporal, moral, and even cosmic levels. The dream of the firebrand has turned into the final burning of Troy: the fire that signalled linearity and progress in Aeschylus is now

⁸⁸⁵ For a discussion, cf. Karamanou (2018), 7-9 with further references.

⁸⁸⁶ No extant fragment of the *Alexandros* describes the symbolism of the dream, but it must have been a torch in Euripides, for Helen says so at *Tro.* 922: cf. Kovacs (2018), 28, who also argues that it was described in the prologue of the play. Ennius' *Alexander*, clearly indebted to Euripides, also mentions it (fr. 17 J. = inc. 151 M., p. 41: *adest adest fax obvolvata sanguine atque incendio*).

⁸⁸⁷ Karamanou (2018), 285-6, also noting that the *PMG* fr. Adesp. 965 might antedate Euripides. In the fragment, however, the dog (Hecuba) is said to be χαροπός, not specifically fiery.

⁸⁸⁸ Cf. Torrance (2013), 52-3 on how *Orestes* seems to be constructed as an *Oresteia* in reverse, with allusions going from *Eumenides* to *Libation Bearers* and finally to *Agamemnon* in the last part of the play.

its opposite. This impacts even the individual narrative and aesthetics of the final play of the Trojan trilogy.

Troades has been often disparaged until the last century in scholarship as a play both 'static' and structurally fragmented, not to mention the strange addition of the first scene between Athena and Poseidon, which seems to bear almost no relevance on the rest of the play.⁸⁸⁹ The queer aesthetics of the play, its strange 'lack of plot', its unusual structure with no real prologue setting out the events of the play and no real *deus ex machina*, can be explained as a form of refusal of progression — or even refusal of progression translated into aesthetic form.⁸⁹⁰ Importantly, as has been noted by Dunn, *Troades* has an inverted structure: the first scene between Poseidon and Athena seems almost a *deus ex machina*, while the ending is strikingly different from other Euripidean endings. Of all the four elements found in Euripidean tragedy (*deus ex machina*, the concluding prophecy, the *aition* and the choral exit), the first three are certainly not present, while the choral exit does not deploy the typical marching anapaests, and rather finishes abruptly with a lyric antistrophe, with no reference to the conclusion of the action.⁸⁹¹ As Dunn elucidates, the element of staticity and this structural inversion are related precisely because both lack a *telos*: 'the inversion of the action in the *Trojan Women* thus deprives it of an end or goal. By so doing, it dramatises human experience deprived of a goal, suffering stripped of false hopes and expectations'.⁸⁹² This can be

⁸⁸⁹ All episodes of the play can appear as detached from each other. Cf. Poe (2020), 256: 'in *Troades* there is no causal relationship between any two adjacent units of action'.

⁸⁹⁰ Telò and Olsen (2022), 5-6. *Troades* did not enjoy particularly good critical acclaim until the 20th century. Part of the reason is Schlegel's view of the play as lacking an identifiable Aristotelian plot: Hall (2010), 268; Lauriola (2015), 65; Schlegel (1846), 179-80. Hall (p. 269) with Bates (1930), 199-200, differently to my argument here, argues that the drive of the plot can be understood in performance.

⁸⁹¹ What is more, in all extant tragedy it is only in Aeschylus' *Persae*, *Eumenides* and *Suppliants* that the chorus ends with lyrics, thus making it possible that Euripides is alluding to Aeschylus.

⁸⁹² Dunn (1993), 35.

said also about the ‘progression’ of the trilogy as a whole: if *Alexandros* had opened with Hecuba’s lamentation for the (never realised) death of a child, Paris, *Troades* closes with her performance of the final rites for Astyanax.⁸⁹³ The beginning coincides with the end: no progress is made.⁸⁹⁴

3.5.2 The Failure of Communication and the Semiotic Gap

Yet the anti-teleological manipulation of beacon imagery expands beyond the disruption of linear time, for its symbolism was already more complex in Aeschylus. In the *Oresteia*, the beacons at the beginning of the *Agamemnon* introduce a fundamental theme in the play, that of language and communication, and foreshadow the gap between signifier and signified, to say it with Goldhill, that *Eumenides* attempts to fix.⁸⁹⁵ Thus, it is significant that torches appear at the end of the *Eumenides* to signal this progression: from epistemological doubt and semiotic confusion to certainty. One might even surmise that it is important that the audience *sees* the torches at the end of *Eumenides*, while in *Agamemnon* the beacon chain has to be imagined, out of the visual field of the audience, for the ‘visualisation’ and ‘concretisations’ of metaphors, including torches, is fundamental to the *Oresteia*.⁸⁹⁶ Euripides’ *Orestes*, instead, reverts this process of concretisation, for example by internalising the Furies as a psychological process, with important implications for the theme of language and reality.⁸⁹⁷

⁸⁹³ Scodel (1980), 69.

⁸⁹⁴ Freccero has recently explained the episodic sequence of *Troades* also in this manner, connecting the queer temporality of the play with its queer aesthetics: Freccero (2022), 47. Cf. Kornbluh (2019), 74-99 on *Wuthering Heights*.

⁸⁹⁵ See *supra*, sec. 1.1.1, pp. 36-7. Karamanou (2015), 392 interprets it as Dionysiac symbolism.

⁸⁹⁶ The ending of the *Eumenides* is so ‘concrete’ that it approximates reality: cf. Scodel (2012), 20.

⁸⁹⁷ Torrance (2013), 57. The same can be said about the finale of *Troades*, in which the destruction of the city is imagined: cf. Hourmouziades (1965), 123. Hourmouziades imagines ‘the procession of a group of torch-bearers marching from one parodos across the acting area towards the opposite parodos, which leads to the city’—an image that seems very close to that of *Eumenides*.

In the Trojan trilogy of Euripides firebrands appear in the end to signal the failure of communication: it underlines how the failure of interpretation, of interpreting the first dream of Hecuba in the *Alexandros*, brings to the utter destruction of Troy.⁸⁹⁸ Moreover, it is possible that the dream of Hecuba is allusive to that of Clytemnestra in the *Libation Bearers*: the symbolism of Hecuba's (in both *Hecuba* and *Alexandros*) and Clytemnestra's dreams alludes to their children (differently from Stesichorus' version). In the case of *Alexandros*, the connection is clearer (if more complex):⁸⁹⁹ both Hecuba and Clytemnestra dream of giving birth to something (a serpent, a torch) that symbolises their long-lost son and who will return to destroy them (differently from Atossa's dream at Aesch. *Pers.* 159-248).⁹⁰⁰ What is more, Aeschylus himself probably combined the version of Stesichorus (*snake*, but symbolising Agamemnon) with Pindar's *Paeon* 8a.19-21,⁹⁰¹ in which Hecuba *gives birth* to a fire-carrying monster, probably an Erinys; the same paeon from which Euripides has probably (though not certainly) taken the imagery of the fire for Hecuba's parturition dream. Yet Euripides has changed the symbolism from Pindar, and has opted for a simple firebrand, in connection with the *Oresteia*. Just like Clytemnestra, the instability of the interpretation of the dream has tangible consequences for Hecuba and her family, for both children return to destroy them, and both fail to recognise them for who they are.

⁸⁹⁸ Scodel (1980), 78.

⁸⁹⁹ Hyginus (fab. 91, ed. Marshall) describes the dream as Hecuba giving birth to a burning firebrand *from which snakes issue (ex qua serpentes plurimos exisse)*, which clearly echoes Clytemnestra's: Karamanou (2018), 139. Given Hyginus' tendency of contamination, however, we cannot know whether snakes were mentioned in connection with the dream in *Alexandros*, and Karamanou ultimately takes the detail to derive from Pindar's version.

⁹⁰⁰ One has to note that Aeschylus' version of the dream differs from Stesichorus' precisely in the idea of birthing the snake and in it being symbolic for the son, for in Stesichorus the serpent rather represented Agamemnon and it simply approached Clytemnestra in the dream (Plut. *De Sera Numinis Vindicta* 554f-555a): Davies and Finglass (2014), 505.

⁹⁰¹ Brown (2018), 308.

This is a failure of interpretation that *seemingly* receives fixing (in both the Trojan trilogy and the *Oresteia*): one might argue that although characters have misinterpreted the firebrand, the audience and even the characters now understand what that dream signified. And yet this would be too optimistic. Although Euripides might be said to employ time often ‘as a witness’ that clarifies truths from falsehoods,⁹⁰² the trilogy deeply ironises the role of time as ‘creator of deceptions and dispeller of others.’⁹⁰³ A fragment of the *Alexandros* is enlightening in its irony. In *TrGF* v, fr. 60, Priam (presumably) allows the not-yet-recognised and still-slave Alexander to join the athletic contexts by expressing his trust in time: ‘time will reveal you; through that evidence, I shall know if you are good or bad’ (χρόνος δὲ δείξει <σ> · ὧ̃ τεκμηρίω μαθῶν/ ἢ χρηστὸν ὄντα γνωσόμεσθά σ’ ἢ κακόν). Here the statement is imbued with a multi-layered irony that carries destabilising implications for how the audience is invited to conceive both time and knowledge: ‘in the short run, the seemingly lowly herdsman Alexandros is going to prove his worth at the athletic games, thus subverting the position of his opponents. In a larger time-scale, however, the long-lost son bringing joy upon his unexpected homecoming [...] will ultimately prove to be disastrous for Troy and its royal *oikos*’.⁹⁰⁴ Paris’ social and moral worth are inextricable, and time’s first ‘revealing’ action results in deception.⁹⁰⁵ This complicates the simple view that time’s linear progress eradicates falsehoods and instead suggests that truth is deferred, just as the truth of Paris’ social identity is deferred, undefined. From ‘bad’ to ‘noble’ to ‘bad’, the emphasis here is on the suspension of his social and moral status,⁹⁰⁶ the ultimate uncertainty on one’s worth and identity; this epistemological uncertainty, in

⁹⁰² Cf. Karamanou (2018), 194.

⁹⁰³ Scodel (1980), 90.

⁹⁰⁴ Karamanou (2018), 194. Cf. *TrGF* v, fr. 63.

⁹⁰⁵ Scodel (1980), 90.

⁹⁰⁶ Cf. instead Citti (1979), 206.

turn, is interconnected with the problematisation of linear time. This finds a parallel in the characterisation of Hecuba in the *Hecuba*: from noble to slave to a strange, undefined moral status that both asserts her heroism and her immorality. Just as *Hecuba* refrains from proving Hecuba's aristocratic inner self or the opposite through her vengeance, so does the Trojan trilogy suspend moral and social definition as the teleology of time is disrupted.⁹⁰⁷

In fact, is the dream of Paris-as-firebrand really representative of the destruction of Troy? Or is it rather symbolic of that other chain of beacons that is departing from Troy at the same time the events of *Troades* unravel before our eyes? Rather than being readily available, the meaning of the dream is deferred. Interpretation, then, still remains an unreliable practice for characters and audience alike, and so the language that underlies it. To this effect, direct or explanatory allusions between the plays of the trilogy are minimised,⁹⁰⁸ links are teased but 'indirect', for otherwise they would come too close to imposing a sequential narrative of causality.⁹⁰⁹ Yet the universe of the trilogy does not offer the comfort of a clear chrono-logical chain of events, and this bending of linearity is disturbing in its multiple ramifications: no progress, no certainty, no clear truth. The torches that burn Troy at the end of *Troades* take on a meaning disturbingly opposite to the enlightening beacons of hope of the Panathenaic procession in *Eumenides*.

⁹⁰⁷ Collard, Cropp and Gibert (2004), 48: 'the linkage that is generally seen between the first and last plays of the Trojan trilogy is real but not simple, for while the events of *Alexandros* sow the seeds of Troy's destruction in a limited sense, they do nothing to explain or justify the city's fate; they are simply part of it, and have no decisive prominence in the later play'. Scodel (1980), 107-8 notes that while *Alexander* technically hinges on Paris' movement from slavery into freedom and acknowledgment as noble, in *Troades* the Trojan women are 'moved deeper into slavery' throughout.

⁹⁰⁸ Cf. Anderson (1997), 170.

⁹⁰⁹ Scodel (1980), 79.

Palamedes, too, is most likely to have deployed beacons as a symbol of epistemological disruption. Although we cannot know if the detail was preserved in Euripides, in the attested versions of the myth Nauplius, Palamedes' father, must have avenged Palamedes by using deceptive beacons to lure the returning Greeks onto the rocks.⁹¹⁰ If this was mentioned, it would emphasise the symbolic value of the beacons as unstable signifiers. At l.90 of *Troades*, Poseidon mentions Caphareus in connection to the future shipwrecks of the Greeks: but Caphareus is also the home city of Palamedes, and this likely contributes to presenting the punishment of the Greeks as owing in part to their judicial murder of Palamedes and as linked to the deceptive beacons of Nauplius.⁹¹¹ What is more, it was Palamedes himself to have invented beacons to communicate messages (cf. Soph. *TrGF* iv, fr. 432, 6-7):⁹¹² the perversion of communication as deception would replay the emphasis of the play on the distortion of writing into forgery.⁹¹³ If we are to imagine Nauplius' beacons as the 'sequel' of *Palamedes*, as Poseidon in *Troades* also seems to confirm, then the link with the beginning of the *Agamemnon* becomes palpable. What is more, Stesichorus' *Oresteia* already mentioned Palamedes in connection specifically with the story of Agamemnon's death; and while it is unclear exactly how, it is possible that it envisioned Oeax or Nauplius avenging Palamedes by supporting either Aegisthus or Clytemnestra.⁹¹⁴ Indeed, Euripides mentions at *Or.* 431-3 that Oeax hates Orestes for the murder of Palamedes, and Pausanias (1.22.6) mentions that Oeax assisted

⁹¹⁰ Torrance (2013), 145. Cf. Eur. *Hel.* 767, 1126-31 with Allan (2008), 234, 274.

⁹¹¹ Scodel (1980), 66. Kovacs (2018), 141 arguing against Koniaris (1973), 92. As Kovacs (2018), 46 also notes, Poseidon is the grandfather of Palamedes.

⁹¹² Jenkins (2005), 39.

⁹¹³ See *infra*, sec. 3.5.3, pp. 291-2.

⁹¹⁴ Davies and Finglass (2014), 500; Willink (1986), 158.

Aegisthus when Orestes came back,⁹¹⁵ further corroborating the possibility that we should read the *Palamedes* as also foreshadowing Aeschylus' trilogy. As the hero himself says in the *Palamedes*, he invented *grammata* so that 'someone across the expanse of the sea can know clearly at a distance everything that is happening at home' (*TrGF* v, fr. 578, 4-5). But Palamedes' trust in language reflects a misplaced optimism that cannot simply be resolved in the teleological, extra-literary perspective by the *Oresteia*; the fixing of language cannot simply be comfortably imagined in the future, with the Areopagus and Athena.⁹¹⁶ As with the *Hecuba* and *Andromache*, it opens up a fracture within the solution that the trilogy had given to the semiotic nightmare of the first two plays of the trilogy.

Torches have indeed become the symbol of the persistence of this semiotic confusion in *Troades* in the Cassandra scene, in which torches are not only visually present, but are also continuously mentioned. Our attention is repeatedly drawn to the torches that Cassandra carries, which now seemingly function as symbols of marriage.⁹¹⁷ This was also the case in the last scene of *Eumenides*, in which the reconstitution of society was based on the reconstitution of marriage in its proper form. But this 'marriage' that Cassandra celebrates is technically not really a marriage, and is even the occasion for a sophistic rhesis of Cassandra in which the natural meaning of things is reversed. This is not merely the sign of linguistic confusion, the gap between signifier and signified, but has clear implications on social structures that also depend on distinctions and

⁹¹⁵ West (1987), 213. According to a different version given by Dict. Cret. *Ephem.* 6.2 and Hyg. *Fab.* 117, Oeax prompted Clytemnestra to murder Agamemnon.

⁹¹⁶ See *supra*, sec. 1.1.2, pp. 50-3; sec. 2.7.3, pp. 215-6.

⁹¹⁷ Marshall (2022), 170: 'Cassandra's use of them as an inverted symbol reinforces that fiery imagery in both this tetralogy and in the *Oresteia*'.

definitions, as we saw. Yet this subversion of reality based on a counterintuitive order as well as on a problematisation of definition is immediately linked to the *Oresteia*.

In her first *rhexis*, Cassandra mentions her marriage in connection to the death of Agamemnon, to then engage in a striking aposiopesis (356-64):

εἰ γὰρ ἔστι Λοξίας,
Ἑλένης γαμεῖ με δυσχερέστερον γάμον
ὁ τῶν Ἀχαιῶν κλεινὸς Ἀγαμέμνων ἄναξ.
κτενῶ γὰρ αὐτὸν κἀντιπορθήσω δόμους
ποινὰς ἀδελφῶν καὶ πατρὸς λαβοῦσ' ἔμοῦ ...
ἀλλ' αὐτ' ἑάσω: πέλεκυν οὐχ ὑμνήσομεν,
ὃς ἐς τράχηλον τὸν ἐμὸν εἴσι χιτῶνων,
μητροκτόνους τ' ἀγῶνας, οὓς οὐμοὶ γάμοι
θήσουσιν, οἴκων τ' Ἀτρέως ἀνάστασιν.

Euripides here condenses the whole plot of the *Oresteia* in a few lines, refusing to recount it. This is highly ironic, given that this whole Cassandra scene is highly evocative of the trilogy, if not for the torches, definitely with the casting away of Cassandra's sacred apparel (*Tro.* 451-2; *Aesch. Ag.* 1264-8).⁹¹⁸ But far from being mere parodic allusion, or a sign of emulation, Cassandra presents here her marriage as a way to kill Agamemnon. Through this further confusion of roles and definitions, Cassandra presents her marriage to Agamemnon as largely correspondent to that of Clytemnestra

⁹¹⁸ And for the frenzied prophecies: Karamanou (2015), 394.

and Agamemnon, and counterintuitively encourages the audience to place her in the role of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra (thus repeating what Hecuba does in her eponymous play). At the end of the scene, she calls herself one of the three Furies. But more is indeed at play: ‘now is not too soon for you to be on the lookout for a breeze for your sails’, she says at 455 (immediately after recalling the Aeschylean Cassandra in throwing away her apparel). With this, Cassandra is exhorting the Greeks (perhaps Agamemnon specifically)⁹¹⁹ to be on the lookout for the first wind to sail. In this context, it is impossible to not perceive the irony: Cassandra here refers to the winds in Aulis and Iphigenia’s sacrifice,⁹²⁰ further corroborating the link to Clytemnestra’s revenge in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* — all of this, moreover, in a scene that is most visually evocative of the Cassandra scene of the *Agamemnon*.⁹²¹ The marriage she celebrates, then, is a striking inversion of common marriage practice, and is presented as the same perverted marriage of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra of the *Agamemnon*.

This alternative ‘reality’ of Cassandra problematises the Aeschylean resolution of reality based on the hierarchisation of values and the hierarchisation of meanings.⁹²² For she evokes the Aeschylean developments of her story so vividly at the same time as she wrecks the dream of an attainable certainty in language, as she reverses through her *rheseis* the common, natural order of reality based on hierarchy and differentiation. Her torches, then, are *neither symbols of truth nor of the perversions of that truth* — rather, they are again representative of the persistence of the semiotic gap, a fracture

⁹¹⁹ Kovacs (2018), 202.

⁹²⁰ Aeschylus’ Cassandra was already obliquely compared to Iphigenia: Rehm (1994), 50-2; Tarkow (1980), 157-8; Debnar (2010), 135.

⁹²¹ Croally (1994), 228-31, although Croally is cautious and limits himself to ‘compare’ the two scenes. Collard, Cropp and Gibert (2004), 47 argue that the Cassandra scene in *Alexandros*, too, must have been inspired by Aeschylus’ Cassandra. Lauriola (2015), 70 notes that opera composers have often contaminated Euripides’ Cassandra with Aeschylus’.

⁹²² See *supra*, sec. 1.1.1., and 1.2, pp. 53-4.

that here becomes sanctified inasmuch as it is embodied and voiced by a divinely inspired prophetess. Social hierarchies appear again to be inextricable from the wider fracture of 'reality' this play (with the other two) represents and enacts.

What is more, Cassandra's prophecies here in *Troades* are most likely placed in ring composition to the prophecy of Cassandra in *Alexandros*, in which she must have warned Hecuba about the firebrand.⁹²³ If this is the case, this second occurrence delineates no clear progression from the failed communication of the first prophecy and this second one, for in both cases she is not believed. In this case, additionally, the sophisticated nature of this reflection on language goes beyond character level and maps onto the audience level, putting into question the audience's own understanding of reality: for now the 'weaker argument' (both from the perspective of the characters *and of the audience*) is made into the stronger one by the words of a prophetess who is always right. The disbelief of Cassandra's first speech in *Alexandros* brings destruction: what consequences are in the store for the audience, if they refuse to seriously consider Cassandra's counterintuitive reality in *Troades*?

3.5.3 The Effects of the Semiotic Gap: Who is Responsible? What is the Truth?

It is in the light of this re-opened 'semiotic gap' that we can recontextualise the debate on the Helen scene. Given that the hierarchies employed by both Helen and Hecuba are heavily problematic, as explained above, readings that avoid this complication cannot but side with one or the other: either Helen is innocent and can be exculpated (the gods have decided to keep Greece free, but this implied a loss of sexual control for which she

⁹²³ Karamanou (2015), 392.

cannot be blamed), or she is insincere and unconvincing, and we are meant to enjoy her downfall (and so gender structures would be reinforced). But the scene works exactly towards the problematisation of responsibility as it works towards the deconstruction of the hierarchies employed in the characters' game of blaming and judgement: not only is Helen's guilt called into question by the relativisation of female virtue and the juxtaposition with Andromache, but her accusations against Hecuba are also true. We have indeed seen Hecuba sparing Paris in the first play of the trilogy, the *Alexandros*.⁹²⁴ The gods, too, have appeared at the beginning of the tragedy and Athena has made explicit how they will destroy the Greeks in the same way she has destroyed the Trojans, so Hecuba's argument that the gods have played no role in Helen's elopement is unconvincing.⁹²⁵ But, crucially, this means that Hecuba, too, cannot be fully blamed. The process at work in this scene may be understood as a case of double determination, typical of Greek tragedy. But the problem is that this *agon* is framed as a judicial *agon*, one in which a third party—Menelaus, in this case—needs to pass a sentence and reach a verdict; a complication of responsibility here starkly impacts the notion of judgement, and the idea of moral assessment connected to it.⁹²⁶ This emphasis on judgement thus both explains the strange need to frame this scene as a judicial *agon* (Menelaus already decided that she will die) and is in line with the theme of judgement and particularly of judiciary judgment which we know was explored in the trilogy.⁹²⁷

⁹²⁴ Poe (2020), 271.

⁹²⁵ Kovacs (2018), 43-4; Scodel (1980), 97.

⁹²⁶ Scodel (1980), 81.

⁹²⁷ Kovacs (2018), 46; Collard (2017), 358. Cf. Scodel (1980), 82: 'the *agon* held in the presence of an arbiter is not so frequent that its appearance in three successive tragedies could be coincidence, and the artificiality with which the prosecutor enters the debate in each case adds to the resemblance'.

For in *Alexandros* we know that Paris underwent trial before Priam for behaving haughtily towards his fellow herdsmen; *Palamedes*, even more, culminated into the trial of Palamedes before the Greek army, unjustly accused by Odysseus of treason and put to death. As Karamanou notes, the theme of the contrast between ‘seeming’ and ‘being’ pervades all three trials and debates, and so appears ‘to reflect the socio-political ambiguity and frailty of human judgement in a period in which the political and military fate of Athens was held in balance’.⁹²⁸ If the trial in *Alexandros* was resolved in favour of the defendant (Paris himself), contrarily to what happens to Helen, the sentence passed on Paris deepens the problem of the gap between signifier and signified. For at that point in the play Paris not only is not yet recognised as the long-lost son of Hecuba and Priam; but Paris himself, like Helen, is anything but simple to assess morally. The whole tragedy seems to conventionally develop towards the *anagnorisis*, the recognition of Paris as an *esthlos* (and this would reinforce ideas of inborn nobility);⁹²⁹ but the irony here is poignant, for this recognition is in fact a misrecognition.⁹³⁰ The recognition of someone as ‘good’ turns out to be the first chapter of a trilogy that culminates into the destruction of Troy. Equally, if we are to believe recent reconstructions of the trial that have identified Paris’ prosecutor as Hecuba herself,⁹³¹ layers of irony accumulate as Hecuba’s own negative judgement of Paris is both wrong and correct,⁹³² and if this is the case, her own prosecution against Helen equally becomes less self-evidently justified. To go back, then, to the overdetermination of guilt in the Helen scene, it is vital

⁹²⁸ Karamanou (2018), 35.

⁹²⁹ Citti (1991), 87.

⁹³⁰ As Karamanou (2018), 23 notes, *Alexandros* bears ‘generic affiliations’ with *IT*, *Ion*, and *Helen*, all characterised by ‘family reunion’ and all ‘rescue’ tragedies. The irony, here, is that this is a rescue tragedy (which plays on the etymology of the name *Alexandros*, ‘saved man’) for a man that is going to cause the destruction of Troy (also recognised by Karamanou 2018, 24).

⁹³¹ Kovacs (2018), 36-7; Collard, Cropp and Gibert (2004), 39.

⁹³² Karamanou (2018), 185.

to note how the framing of this scene as a judicial agon puts into question that the simple view that both (as well as the gods) have a share in responsibility. While this is undeniably true, the question of responsibility and guilt is framed within an investigation of moral assessment, which remains disquietingly open.⁹³³ Critics of both ‘schools’, supporters of Hecuba or Helen, and even those who argue against both in view of double causation, have done so in the attempt to explain away the inevitable complexity of the text and the opacity of judgement which is at the core of the scene.⁹³⁴ As in the case of the troubled exegetical history of Hecuba’s revenge in *Hecuba*, the text hampers any view of Helen or Hecuba here as either right or wrong.⁹³⁵ Hecuba technically wins the *agon*, but this victory is neither necessarily reflective of the morality of her position nor effective (Helen will survive).

It can be understood within the larger framework of the play’s meditation on the unsubstantial nature of victory itself:⁹³⁶ *nike* and *stephanos* are constantly invoked by each character of the play, but precisely because of this they become emptied of meaning, ‘floating signifiers’ detached from any moral truth and even tangible effects. The *stephanos* might be on a first level that of the Greeks’ victory or of the glory of Greek

⁹³³ Collard, Cropp and Gibert (2004), 47 argue that it is unlikely that Paris was portrayed simply as an instrument of divine justice against Trojan insolence in *Alexandros*, given that in *Troades* ‘no rational ordering of the world... can explain or justify the fall of Troy’.

⁹³⁴ Croally (1994), 138 notes how Helen speaks first, even though she is the ‘defendant’, which is unusual in Euripidean *agones*. Scholars who believe Helen loses the debate point out that in Euripides the defendant is usually the second speaker and usually wins, and so draw the conclusion that since she speaks first and is ‘rebutted’ by Hecuba, then we are meant to see her as unconvincing or losing the debate. But we could also equally say that the defendant usually wins in Euripidean debates; the structural exceptionality of this agon might also be engineered to contribute to the opacity of the moral assessment of the scene.

⁹³⁵ This is in line with sophistic treatments of responsibility, often investigated indeed in imagined legal settings: Antiphon, for instance, constantly complicates the matter of judgement in his *Tetralogies*, in which ‘specific arguments and counterarguments match each other, resulting in no firm conclusion’: Gagarin (2002), 118. The easy resolution of joint responsibility is often avoided and dismissed, especially in the second *Tetralogy*: Gagarin (2002), 119-21.

⁹³⁶ Goff (2009), 46; Scodel (1980), 117.

cities (στέψει ναοὺς ἀπὸ Τροίας, 576; ἀρετᾶς, 222-3; στέφανον ἔφερον/Ἑλλάδι, 565-6), including that which Menelaus might give to Greece by killing Helen (στεφάνωσον Ἑλλάδ', 1030). Odysseus convincing the Greeks to kill Astyanax is also presented in terms of victory (νικᾷ δ' Ὀδυσσεὺς, 721; τοιαῦτα νικήσειε τῶν αὐτοῦ περι, 724). Yet Helen also claims that she should be crowned for saving Greece (ἔχρηῃν με στέφανον ἐπὶ κάρᾳ λαβεῖν, 937), and that she should have received a 'victory prize' instead (ἀντὶ νικητηρίων, 963); and her lover Paris had also been crowned in the *Alexandros* (*TrGF* v, 61d).⁹³⁷ Cassandra's *rhesis* turns it upside down: the Trojans have won, and they have won a *stephanos* of glory (στέφανος οὐκ αἰσχρὸς πόλει/καλῶς ὀλέσθαι, 401-2); she, too, should receive a 'crown' on her 'victorious' head (μῆτερ, πύκαζε κρᾶτ' ἐμόν νικηφόρον, 353; cf. 460).⁹³⁸ Finally, *stephanos* becomes more disturbing when it is applied to the death of Astyanax, in the description of his burial on the shield (Ἔκτορος φίλον σάκος/στεφανοῦ, 1222-3), of the towers from which he will fall (βαῖνε πατρῶων/πύργων ἐπ' ἄκρας στεφάνας, 783-4), of the adornments for his corpse (πέπλοισιν ὡς περιστείλης νεκρὸν/στεφάνοις θ', ὄση σοι δύναμις, ὡς ἔχει τὰ σά, 1143-4). Even the corpse of Astyanax can receive the *stephanos*, and even the corpse itself is a *stephanos*. Crucially, even Athens has been crowned (οὐράνιον στέφανον λιπαράσι <τε> κόσμον Ἀθάναις, 803). More than floating, they become 'fleeting' signifiers: each character's claim of victory fleetingly defers the audience's understanding of who the real winner is, just as judgement and responsibility are constantly deferred between characters and cannot be ascertained.⁹³⁹ The concept of hierarchy itself becomes precarious, as the hierarchy between superior and inferior is shown to be not only

⁹³⁷ Karamanou (2018), 214.

⁹³⁸ Cf. Scodel (1980), 118: 'the great examination of victory and defeat...is the Cassandra episode'.

⁹³⁹ The connection between moral indeterminacy in the Helen debate and Cassandra's questioning of victory was first made by Croally (1994), 159-60 *et passim*.

arbitrary (i.e., grounded in no moral justification), but the identities of superior and inferior are also confused.

This is anticipated by the part of the play that has paradoxically seemed to provide a clear-cut moral resolution of the play, namely the prologue between Athena and Poseidon that sanctions the Greeks' punishment in the future. Yet here Athena's wrath has little to do with the actions of the Greeks in the play (the rape of Cassandra has already happened), so that it is not a clear punishment for what we see. And although she mentions that she wants the Trojans to rejoice (65-6), the rape of Cassandra is particularly hateful to Athena not because of the injustice they commit against the Trojan priestess, but because Athena herself and her temples have been insulted (69). The instability of Athena's allegiance, underlined by Poseidon (67-8), but also reasserted in Helen's report of the goddess' bribe (she was ready to enslave *Athenians* to barbarians) is almost a theological representation on the divine scale of the instability of the concept of hierarchy itself,⁹⁴⁰ of the continuous deferral of a 'winner' in the process of (practical, moral, linguistic, social) hierarchisation.⁹⁴¹

⁹⁴⁰ Cf. Croally (1994), 73: 'the gods...bring about a certain equivalence between the victors and the vanquished'. As Croally also notes, Athena might punish impiety, yet the gods are constantly said to have abandoned the Trojans in spite of their pious behaviour towards them — and in fact we are witnessing their greatest ally bid farewell to the city, not intervening in the events of the play that unfold so tragically for the Trojans. At 23-4, moreover, Poseidon stresses that he has been 'defeated' by Athena and Hera, and Athena is his 'enemy', as she explicitly says when entering the stage; but by the end of the scene this tone of defeat terminates, with Poseidon now an ally of Pallas in the destruction of the Greeks. In order to create this effect, Euripides has innovated by already turning Poseidon from previous enemy of the Trojans (as we know from the *Iliad*) to previous ally, now nostalgic: Kovacs (2018), 122.

⁹⁴¹ One could interpret the prologue to be symbolic of a clear moral resolution (cf. Lefkowitz 2016, 14-6). But if Athena's action punishes Greek impiety here and serves as a moral lesson ('worship the gods and heed their commands'), why is the play on Trojan suffering—if Athena is not really punishing them for the way they treat Trojans in what we see? This, combined with what we hear about the judgement, as well as the problematisation of responsibility (for both the Trojans and Helen) hardly seems to work in the direction of a moral lesson of that kind. Instead, it emphasises the capriciousness of these gods, which can so easily upturn reality and hierarchies (the gods have made the Trojan royalty into slaves and were ready to enslave Athenians to barbarians). This does not mean that the portrayal of the gods encourages the

The problem, then, is not simply the attainment of a stable, moral truth (which is inevitably a matter of hierarchy), but truth *in language*. The troubling effect of the ‘semiotic confusion’ we saw in *Hecuba* is, on a closer look, central to all the trial scenes of the trilogy, and it is so here, too, since the chorus underline what they believe is Helen’s distortion of the truth through language (πειθῶ διαφθείρουσα τῆσδ’, ἐπεὶ λέγει/ καλῶς κακοῦργος οὔσα· δεινὸν οὖν τόδε, 967-8). In one remaining fragment of *Alexandros*, too, a character, most likely Paris defending himself, emphasises the ‘inverse relation between eloquence and justice’ which ‘pervades all three-trial debates of this production’ (ἄναξ, διαβολαὶ δεινὸν ἀνθρώποις κακόν·/ἀγλωσσία δὲ πολλάκις ληφθεὶς ἀνήρ /δίκαια λέξας ἦσσαν εὐγλώσσου φέρει, *TrGF* v, 56).⁹⁴² Above all, this connection must have been clear in the second play of the trilogy.

Although the state of the *Palamedes* is fragmentary, it is likely that in the case of Palamedes the trial must have been one in which Agamemnon’s judgement was wrong and unjust, differently from the *agon* between Helen and Hecuba which we saw being obscure not at a character level, but at an audience level. But just as we saw with the *Hecuba*, the obscurities at a character level are also fundamental to the exploration of the instability of meaning in language, which is then projected beyond to the audience themselves.⁹⁴³ The *Palamedes* is a particularly important case for understanding the intimate interrelationship of semiotic confusion, responsibility, and judgement, since,

audience to disbelieve them; yet they are not guarantors of morality and justice in the same way Athena is in *Eumenides*, and the play does not offer such a neat moral lesson.

⁹⁴² Karamanou (2018), 190.

⁹⁴³ Goff (2009), 54: ‘if all the spectators see is confusion on the part of the characters, how can they be sure that they are also not caught up in the dynamic?’. Although Goff’s observation is right, this does not mean that the confusion at an audience level is simply triggered by the confusion at a character level (for otherwise it would be quite solvable and even ironic). Here, the dynamics of the text continuously defer the definition of responsibility, morality, justice, victory at the level of the audience.

as far as we know, the play hinged on Palamedes qua inventor of writing. Although the causes of Odysseus' envy are unclear, we know with certainty that Odysseus falsely accused him of treason by forging letters addressed to Priam. It is a poignant irony that the same hero who in the tragedy boasts of having made communication possible is undone by its own invention,⁹⁴⁴ but also one that speaks to the inherent instability of that invention.⁹⁴⁵ In one fragment, Palamedes proudly reminds the Greeks of his inventions, including writing; yet he ironically undercuts himself when claiming that 'a tablet does not allow one to lie', referring specifically to tablets that 'pass judgement on those matters in which men have fallen into bitter strife' (*TrGF* v, fr: 578. 8-9).⁹⁴⁶ Once again, the forensic use of language is scrutinised; what is more, this is part of Palamedes' self-defence in his trial, already a forensic situation. But if Phaedra's letter should be understood within the play's meditation on linguistic confusion,⁹⁴⁷ here, too, the inconsistency of writing seems to have found an equally troubling parallel in the semiotic, verbal confusion represented, once again, by Odysseus.⁹⁴⁸ This was already the case in *Hecuba*, as we saw, but it is also in *Troades* that Odysseus uses his verbal powers to convince the army to sacrifice Astyanax. In *Troades*, too, like in *Hecuba*, Odysseus' disturbing eloquence has had effects on the judgement of the Greek army (721).

⁹⁴⁴ Woodford (1994), 165; Collard, Cropp and Gibert (2004), 96.

⁹⁴⁵ An invention both fragile and powerful in its purpose: it seems that in the play *Oeax*, Palamedes' brother, managed to communicate with his distant father Nauplius by writing the story of what had happened on oars and entrusting them to the sea, which eventually brought them to Nauplius and triggered his vengeful plots: Woodford (1994), 166; Wright (2019), 194. This duplicity could be paralleled to Gorgias' reflection in the *Encomium on logos* as both unstable and powerful: cf. Mourelatos (1987), 156-7 *et passim*, who gives a different interpretation of Gorgias' language theory by focusing on his emphasis on power.

⁹⁴⁶ Jenkins (2005), 43.

⁹⁴⁷ Collard, Cropp and Gibert (2004), 96 make the connection.

⁹⁴⁸ Cf. Jenkins (2005), 45 on Euripides' *Palamedes*: 'Euripides is fascinated (as Derrida after him) by the intrinsic lability of the sign, and each critic dissects his respective story to prove the mutability of the written word in its broader semantic context'.

Here, it is impossible to not see the shadow of Gorgias, although scholars have repeatedly tried to disprove a connection between *Troades* and the sophist.⁹⁴⁹ Both *The Defence of Palamedes* (DK 82 B11a) and the *Encomium of Helen* (DK 82 B11) revolve around the issue of responsibility and guilt, as in the two plays that make up the trilogy:⁹⁵⁰ for instance, in *Troades* Helen uses the Gorgianic arguments that it was decided by the gods that she would be given to Paris, that Paris married her by force, and that love is a force that cannot be resisted, which impairs and problematises the notion of agency.⁹⁵¹ Both these demonstrations of rhetorical ability are, indeed, connected to the problem of linguistic instability. The connection between Helen's defence and Gorgias' philosophical production, in fact, can be seen to lie precisely on that point. It is tantalising to connect, as many have done, the meditation on language in the *Encomium* to *On Not Being*, in which Gorgias claimed in clear polemic with Parmenides that nothing exists, that if something exists, it cannot be known; and even if it can be known, it cannot be communicated (DK 82 B3).⁹⁵² The *Encomium* seems to advance on this point: 'language cannot really be a matter of conveying to others either what we think or the objects we perceive in the world'.⁹⁵³ Even if the piece is a *paignion*, as Gorgias says, it is an exercise that shows how language can trouble one's understanding of responsibility and moral assessment,⁹⁵⁴ all while throwing substantial shadow on the validity of the gendered norms that Helen is expected to

⁹⁴⁹ Scodel (1980), 90 n. 26; Lloyd (1992), 100-1.

⁹⁵⁰ Cf. Lauriola (2015), 49-50, considering responsibility *the* crucial issue in *Troades*.

⁹⁵¹ Croally (1994), 155.

⁹⁵² Scodel (1980), 100. Cf. Croally (1994), 227. Cf. Rodriguez (2023), 205 on the polemical relationship with Parmenides; cf. Wohl (2025), 22 on the problematic relationship between language and ontology already in Parmenides.

⁹⁵³ Barney (2016), 22-3; Bonazzi (2023), 189. For the *Encomium* as a defence of rhetoric, cf. Poulakos (1983).

⁹⁵⁴ Barney (2016), 12: 'this argument about the powers of logos is usually found quite unpersuasive [...]. Gorgias knows perfectly well that we standardly praise and blame people for actions performed because of persuasion [...]. He is arguing that we are wrong'.

comply with.⁹⁵⁵ If the archetypal adulteress can be *plausibly* pardoned,⁹⁵⁶ then a space opens up for a problematisation of fixed gender norms (not that Gorgias specifically intended to open it up); the type of move that Euripides seems to effect with Andromache and, indeed, Helen.⁹⁵⁷ Both Gorgias' and Euripides' Palamedes expose the deceptiveness of appearances, with Gorgias' character calling opinion 'the most untrustworthy of things', in contrast with knowledge (DK 82 B11a 24).⁹⁵⁸ Yet in both cases it does not follow that there is a 'knowledge' we should seek, dispelling 'opinion', in a Parmenidean sense: the *Encomium* seems rather to suggest that the emphasis is on the impossibility of knowledge.⁹⁵⁹ Regardless of whether Euripides was indeed reflecting Gorgias directly, this preoccupation of the effect of language on responsibility, moral judgement, and specifically judicial truth is inherently sophistic.⁹⁶⁰ This deeply sophistic problematisation of language qua epistemological and moral instrument, which can be found at large in the corpus of sophistic thought, makes definition particularly difficult, and it opens a rift within commonly accepted 'reality' in a way that receives no healing and that makes Euripides' tragedy *critical*. To understand how *Troades* remains critical and radically different from previous tragedy, it is time to

⁹⁵⁵ Gorgias is misleading in presenting Helen's guilt as commonly accepted before him, but that serves his aims. See *supra*, sec. 3.3, p. 262 with footnotes.

⁹⁵⁶ Cf. Gagarin (2001), 286: the Helen argument in Gorgias was probably unconvincing to a Greek audience, yet the point is making it plausible, so as to 'open up new ways in which to think about language, emotion, causation, and responsibility'. Cf. also Versényi (1963), 44.

⁹⁵⁷ Cf. Goldhill (2023), 287.

⁹⁵⁸ The deceptiveness of appearances is crucial to the *Helen*: Wright (2006), 41 notes that the emphasis remains on epistemological confusion, and that this confusion is projected onto the audience, not simply contained at a character level.

⁹⁵⁹ Cf. Rodriguez (2023), 221.

⁹⁶⁰ One could compare the way in which the discussion of sophistic rhetoric at Pl. *Gr.* 459c-461b turns to the relationship between rhetoric, morality, and justice (and at 480a-481b): cf. Bons (2006), 37; Bonazzi (2023), 196 on Antiphon. Lampe (2020), 117: 'the examples of Gorgias, Antisthenes, Alcidamas and Antiphon show that jury trial occupied a privileged location in sophistic imagination'. Antiphon, in general, can be said to bring the issue of responsibility into the Athenian court: cf. Innes (1991), 222. The problematisation of 'justice' in reference to a juridical context also occurs in Antiphon's philosophical work *On Truth*: Gagarin (2002), 74-5.

enlarge the analysis of this difference to all three plays. Yet in returning to *Troades*, some aspects of this play's radical openness will finally appear, and with some important hermeneutic implications that apply to all three tragedies.

3.6 *Troades*, the Trojan Plays, and the (Re-)Opening of Reality

3.6.1 Re-Opening Tragedy

Troades, as well as *Andromache* and *Hecuba*, are open plays. I have mentioned Eco's understanding of it, yet a way to express such openness *in its interconnection with previous tragedy* is through the concept of 'negative dialectic' elaborated by philosopher Theodor Adorno. Although Adorno writes specifically within and about a capitalistic, modern world, a negative dialectic can be characterised as a theoretical procedure, a philosophical enterprise that is timeless and unbound to a specific historical circumstance. A negative dialectic, to put it simplistically, is a dialectical movement that primarily aims at showing the fractures within reality, and especially the rifts within the 'concept' itself. To Adorno, the *proton pseudos* of Western philosophy is indeed the concept of the concept itself, that is the belief in a stable, unitarian identity of the concept.⁹⁶¹ This, Adorno variously argues, corresponds to a dangerous erasure of contradiction, the aspects that contradict and deny the identity of the concept. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno clarifies how this erasure of contradiction results in a form of identity-thinking that corresponds in the capitalist, modern world not simply to a lie, a *pseudos*, but to concrete forms of violence and reification.⁹⁶²

⁹⁶¹ Petrucciani (2007), 91-2.

⁹⁶² Held (1991), 189.

In this context, the elaboration of a negative dialectic corresponds instead to the need of exposing the rifts within the concept. A negative dialectic is a theoretical project aimed at putting under pressure the acceptance of identity-thinking, and it does so by showing the contradictions 'not simply between concepts, but also within concepts themselves'.⁹⁶³ The promise of a negative dialectic, then, is not really the establishment of a new form of truth. Rather, it is a form of 'critical thought oriented towards the non-identical', towards complicating definitions and categories of identity. It aims not at 'ordering and classifying, establishing causal connections that allow us to operate and manipulate, but rather at highlighting the rifts, the contradictions of reality, the disquiet and instability that make it precarious, and so at keeping open the possibility of an awareness that a different reality is possible, and that towards this [sc. different reality] the unreconciled contradictions tend'.⁹⁶⁴

Attic tragedy works through crisis: it is precisely the rupture of the unity, often triggered by the 'Other' (women or foreigners), that causes tragedy. Yet what changes between plays is how they use this crisis as a way either to fundamentally reconstitute 'normal' reality or to shed light on the radical instability and arbitrariness of reality. Although Aeschylus' oeuvre, then, springs from the crisis of institutions, practices, and hierarchies, it also works towards its resolution in a way that resolves — or attempts to resolve — contradictions by reasserting stability — in terms of language, sexuality, narrative, to say it with Goldhill; or in terms of concept, identity-thinking, and reality,

⁹⁶³ Adorno (2008), 2, 7.

⁹⁶⁴ Petrucciani (2007), 99. I am aware of the tension between the Adornian lens and the otherwise deconstructive account given of Euripidean tragedy. Adorno and Derrida pursue different philosophical projects, yet what interests me is their shared critique of what is commonly perceived as objective, immediate, and real: cf. Terzi (2016), 203-23. In any case, I summon neither Adorno nor Derrida in a strict methodological sense, and so it is possible to place them in dialogue through Euripides.

to say it with Adorno. But Euripides' take on Aeschylus attacks precisely the reconciliation that Aeschylus attempts and the stability he proposes.⁹⁶⁵ In terms of language, the worlds of the *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, and *Troades* emphasise the rift between signifier and signified, both in terms of language and in terms of appearance. This problem of definition, which seemed sorted in the *Eumenides* through the definition of justice, comes back on stage to affect the definition of justice and morality. This complicates, and ultimately defers, the process of determining who is right and who is wrong—most evidently, in the complex moral situation of Hecuba's revenge in *Hecuba* and in the matter of the responsibility for the Trojan war in *Troades*. And finally, since this stability was founded in Aeschylus on the 'identity-thinking' that resulted from the differentiation between genders and the silencing of the female, Euripides re-opens the problem of social hierarchies, challenging not only the silencing and erasure of the Other from the political world and their inferiority, but also the fundamental instability of concepts per se, the complication and deferral of their definition. One better comes to understand the process of reversal effected in all these three tragedies: they do not reverse the identities and moral expectations connected to these identities per se, nor do they claim to *expose* a 'more accurate' form of reality. Rather, in reversing normality and in suggesting that this *might be* 'more accurate', there is a form of suspension of belief, a critical drive, a negative dialectic that serves to put into question the viability, veracity and stability of reality itself.

⁹⁶⁵ Compare Adorno's attack on Hegel's synthesis: cf. Held (1991), 192. In Rose's account of the possible responses to dominant ideology, these plays would fall in the approach that he categorises as promoting a 'radical ideology', that is the approach that responds 'with categorical negation of the assumptions of the status quo' (Rose 1997, 162). Cf. Parkin (1971), 97-102.

In his engagement with the Atreid saga in *Orestes*, *Electra*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, too, Euripides seems to emphasise Clytemnestra's womanhood and motherhood almost as if they were a critical response to the solution offered by the *Eumenides*. In *IA*, for instance, Euripides' Clytemnestra has been designed precisely to turn from chaste, compliant, silent wife, to transgressive and verbally defiant.⁹⁶⁶ This, however, is more than simply a return to the transgressive Aeschylean Clytemnestra: Euripides has taken care to divert from tradition and present Agamemnon in the worst possible light. We hear of how he killed Clytemnestra's previous husband as well as her previous baby, and how now she will not be compliant anymore if Iphigenia is sacrificed.⁹⁶⁷ Rather than simply furnishing the genealogy of a monster, Euripides' Clytemnestra problematises the idea that women should be silent, and that the mother's authority should be valued less than the father's.⁹⁶⁸

In Euripides' *Electra*, too, gender structures are eroded not simply at the level of plot, but more deeply destabilised.⁹⁶⁹ First, Clytemnestra's speech, like in *IA*, emphasises the disparity of power and treatment between mother and father, wife and husband, but also male child and female child (what would Agamemnon have said, had she killed Orestes?). Second, as noted by Rehm, Euripides emphasises Clytemnestra's motherhood almost obsessively in the play;⁹⁷⁰ and if the *Oresteia* gradually devalued her as a mother, for example in her treatment of Electra in *Libation Bearers*, Euripides' Clytemnestra instead seems designed to be more merciful toward Electra and to even show some sort of 'grand-maternal instincts'.⁹⁷¹ Third, the *agon* between Electra and

⁹⁶⁶ Synodinou (2020), 248-53; Citti (1979), 129.

⁹⁶⁷ Synodinou (2020), 251; Citti (1979), 129.

⁹⁶⁸ Synodinou (2020), 252-3.

⁹⁶⁹ For the specific Aeschylean echoes, cf. Cropp (1988), xxxvii.

⁹⁷⁰ Rehm (2020), 98.

⁹⁷¹ Rehm (2020), 99. Cf. Barrett (2020), 292.

Clytemnestra — the only other *agon* in extant tragedy between two women besides that of Andromache and Hermione, and that of Helen and Hecuba — also seems to reassert gender norms through Electra by presenting one ‘good’ woman and one ‘bad’ woman to then undercut it through the problematic masculinity of Electra.⁹⁷²

Finally, in *Orestes* one of the most explicit echoes of *Eumenides* is indeed constituted by the infamous Apollonian argument on the inferiority of the mother: Orestes tries to use it again to persuade Tyndareus, but this time the argument fails,⁹⁷³ and so does his argument that he was protecting *nomos* by killing his mother (932-42). Fast forward and Orestes congratulates Electra on devising their murderous plan and says she has ‘acquired a man’s mind’ (1204-5), in contrast with the opening scenes in which Orestes had asked her to be different in behaviour from Clytemnestra and Helen: ‘now Orestes unwittingly congratulates her for becoming an Aeschylean Clytemnestra’.⁹⁷⁴ Once again, this does not mean that Aeschylus’ portrayal was not nuanced: there is much in the trilogy, especially in the *Agamemnon*, that would seem to represent and even favour Clytemnestra’s claims to justice and her position as a woman. Yet the drive of the trilogy works towards its solution, and its solution implies a hierarchisation that needs her silencing. In contrast to it, *Troades* not only victimises women and mothers to an extreme extent (indeed, such victimisation and the complementary pity would be innocuous and even conservative by itself);⁹⁷⁵ but Cassandra’s alternative reality in

⁹⁷² Rehm (2020), 94; Barrett (2020), 292.

⁹⁷³ Torrance (2013), 49.

⁹⁷⁴ Torrance (2013), 53. Cf. Synodinou (1988), 317. Cf. also Wohl (2015), 125 on Orestes’ declaration that ‘he will never tire of killing evil women’: ‘with each iteration—Clytemnestra, Helen, Hermione—the woman’s evil becomes less apparent and her killing less just’.

⁹⁷⁵ Cf. Citti (1991), 88 is right: just because the Trojan women are victimised and sympathetic, it does not mean that slavery as an institution is called into question. Yet the thematic explorations and ironies of slavery vis-à-vis nobility problematise Citti’s view that it is *not* called into question. Cf. instead Loraux (2002), 50-3.

Euripides foreshadows the events of the trilogy while retrospectively (or prospectively) deconstructing the order that inhered to it and that it enacted.

Here, and in the other two plays, the Euripidean engagement with Aeschylus shows a specific interest in undoing this process of social hierarchisation, and to undo it through an enlarged conception of the social constituted by an enmeshment of intersecting hierarchies; yet this move has concomitant effects on spheres of the play's concern that are not strictly social, and that yet we can now see are also 'ideologically' oriented. This does not mean that these three plays, or the *Oresteia*, are merely constructed according to a specific ideological drive, and that the 'other' concerns of the play follow it. But it does mean that concerns both aesthetic and of non-strictly ideological content can be seen as contributing to and co-constitutive of the ideological rupture of the text, and this drive of ideological rupture of the text can be seen to be not only contained, but also produced by the presence of those concerns. They are, in other words, co-constituted, inseparable—perhaps even enmeshed.

3.6.2 Re-Opening Ideology

The contextualisation of Euripidean criticism as a fracturing of 'reality' allows us to understand the ideological dialectical movement these three tragedies enact without reducing the text to mere ideology. If this critical gesture operates a 'negative dialectic' of Aeschylus' oeuvre and his contemporary world altogether, and exposes the rifts of reality, it necessarily must be larger than the critique of oppressions and it must involve a series of factors that cannot be understood as merely social. Yet this movement itself is ideological inasmuch as it necessarily opens up an imaginative space for those oppressed by suspending what counts as 'natural', 'realistic', or even 'real'—and not merely by envisioning the disruption of such hierarchies as a temporary transgression

of the norm. The notorious Euripidean ‘realism’,⁹⁷⁶ thus understood, appears to radically question accepted reality itself — for ‘realism can only be threatened if it is shown to be in some way inconsistent or untenable; if... ‘realism’ turns out to be nothing of the sort.’⁹⁷⁷ As such, this process fundamentally hinges on a deconstruction of both social domination and hierarchy itself as an organising principle of reality.

It is through this frame that we can look with fresh eyes at *Troades* (but also *Andromache* and *Hecuba*) in the context of the long-lived debate on their connection to war. *Troades* was produced in 415, at the height of Athenian imperial expansion in the Aegean, and since antiquity the particularly horrifying, apocalyptic depiction of war in the play has appeared to comment negatively on the imperial project. An old, historicist, but still commonly held position is that *Troades* reflects, responds, and even denounces the atrocities committed that same year by Athens in Melos. There, too, the entire male population of the island had been killed, and women and children had been enslaved. An equally old scholarly tradition has fiercely put this into question, and recently Kovacs’ edition of *Troades* appears to have pronounced the final word on the topic: Melos fell mid-December and Euripides must have had the trilogy ready before then.⁹⁷⁸ Additionally, there are other elements that Kovacs takes to disprove the view of *Troades* as a critical drama (that is, critical of Athenian imperialism).⁹⁷⁹ It is not my intention to

⁹⁷⁶ Cf. Michelakis (2013), 50-1. Arnott (1996), 116 interprets it as a potentially iconoclastic gesture, yet in the sense that it is closer to the common details of reality. This tradition of viewing Euripides as ‘realistic’ can be traced back as early as Ar. *Ran.* 959-60. Cf. Barrett (2020), 280-4.

⁹⁷⁷ Fisher (2009), 16. Fisher is speaking about ‘capitalist realism’. By his own admission, he is inspired by the Lacanian conception of the Real (that which ‘ideological’ reality must suppress) and Žižek’s reformulation of it. Cf. Kornbluh (2019), 72.

⁹⁷⁸ Kovacs (2018), 8-9 *et passim*.

⁹⁷⁹ The problems with Kovacs’ argument are multiple, but two seem to me to be particularly important. First, one artwork does not need to be explicitly critical in order for it to be so ideologically (and, in fact, Adorno would argue that autonomous art, capable of being really critical, is not even intentionally critical in its content). This also squares well with the idea, that Kovacs raises as an objection, that Euripides needed the support of the city to stage his

summarise the debate, nor to claim that Kovacs is wrong; in fact, it would be hard to believe now in a one-to-one historicist correspondence between Troy and Melos.⁹⁸⁰ And yet, *Troades* does not have to directly reflect Melos in any direct, one-to-one connection in order for it to be raising deep, troubling questions on Athenian foreign policy.⁹⁸¹ The issue here is that a strictly historicist refutation does not account for the other ways in which a text can both reflect the circumstances of its time⁹⁸² and contribute to the cultural production of the period.⁹⁸³ There is, quite simply, little basis for Kovacs' 'total' refutation in light of the play's constant questioning: how can an anti-hierarchical conceptualisation of existence be categorically excluded from resonating with an audience that was both historically in the midst of war and culturally prompted to rethink the nature of power by the advent of sophistic thought? Regardless of Euripides' intention—which might as well be coinciding with the play's ideological

plays, and explicit critique would have been counterproductive. What is more, comedies like *Acharnians*, which was extremely critical of the city and yet won first prize, seem to disprove Kovacs' absolute conviction: cf. Olson (2002), li. Second, Kovacs summons the idea that most Athenian sources seem to be accepting of the practice of enslavement in war and in general of the violent treatment of the defeated. Yet this seems to me to create a circular argument in which Euripides must be necessarily compliant because the ideological drive of the sources on this matter is consistent. But this is precisely how ideology works everywhere, in all historical periods—by being hegemonic. This is potentially a dangerous argument, as it both accepts a view of 'ideology' as monolithic and unbreakable and reifies and 'others' a conception of 'ancient' ideology as uncontested, attributing implicitly an incapacity of critical thought to the ancient world. Cf. Griffin (1998), 49 with Goldhill (2000), 40.

⁹⁸⁰ Mills (2020), 880-1 notes again the unlikely chronology, with Van Erp Taalman Kip (1987); Poe (2020), 256-7.

⁹⁸¹ Poe (2020), 257; Rosenbloom (2006); Saïd (1998), 284; Citti (1991), 82. Mills (2020), 881 argues that the play certainly condemns war, but that it does not follow that Athens is the target: the target might as well be Sparta's treatment of Plataea (with Roisman 1987, 46-7). And yet this view does not account for the more disturbing presence of Athens in these plays (for instance, the sons of Theseus in *Hecuba*, or the ode to Telamon in *Troades*), the presence of anachronistic language that points to the Athenian institutions, and it also seems to too categorically exclude the possibility that the audience might see their city reflected in the role of the abusers, rather than the victims. Cf. Rabinowitz (2017), 202-5.

⁹⁸² Rabinowitz (2008), 50 admits that Melos was probably on the audience's minds but sees *Troades* as ambiguous. Cf. Saïd (1998), 278-9 for a review of previous, now outdated, readings of tragedy as reflecting political events *stricto sensu*.

⁹⁸³ Wohl (2015), 120. This an idea also present in Jameson: cf. Jameson (1981), 76 with Levine (2006), 625.

movement, the point here is that *Troades*' clever manipulation of forms, its subtle questioning and queering of time, narrative, reality, language and society is more likely to have put into question, rather than to have left intact, the extraliterary project of domination of the Athenians in the Aegean—just as much as it puts into question any other project of domination.

Once again, sophistic thought plays a crucial role in *Troades* and these plays' ideas on power, and its echoes on this aspect fundamentally prompt us to rethink these play's relationship with ideas of domination.⁹⁸⁴ Constantly, in contemporary fifth-century literature, sophistic debates on morality are presented by our sources as hinging on the question of power,⁹⁸⁵ and on what someone who is in a position of power, either contextual or natural, should do with that power.⁹⁸⁶ We have already seen how Pindar's maxim on *nomos basileus*, which echoes in Hecuba's words, was appropriated by Callicles' understanding of *nomos* as the right of the stronger. There, interestingly, Callicles means 'strong' specifically in a social sense, alluding to the 'strong' members of society. What is more, in that passage Callicles constantly invokes the metaphor of the slave, defining those powerful members of society fettered by ideals of *isonomia* as 'enslaved' by the many who are weak — an idea that echoes with Menelaus' retort against Tyndareus at *Or.* 488 that adhering to *nomoi* is a form of compulsion, and any form of compulsion, 'according to some wise men', is a form of slavery.⁹⁸⁷ Similar is

⁹⁸⁴ Cf. Hoffer (1996), 290; Allan (1999/2000), 151 *et passim* on sophistic ideas on power and Euripides' *Children of Heracles* and *Suppliant Women*.

⁹⁸⁵ The only extant logos attributed to the Sicilian founders of rhetoric, Corax and Tisias, indeed hinges on a dispute between a weak man and a strong man, with both deploying strength as the main concept of their arguments from probability (*Arist. Rh.* 2.24.11, 140217-28): Gagarin (2001), 282. Cf. also *Pl. Prt.* 350d-351a.

⁹⁸⁶ Note the way in which Gorgias in Plato (*Grg.* 456b-457c) defines sophistic rhetoric as the supreme power encompassing all existent powers (ἀπάσας τὰς δυνάμεις συλλαβοῦσα ὑφ' αὐτῆ ἔχει, 456b).

⁹⁸⁷ Helen, moreover, who voices in *Troades* her related argument that she was compelled by a stronger force than her, and therefore was enslaved, is clearly sophistic if not Gorgianic; she

Thrasymachus' sophistic thesis in book I of the *Republic* (338c-344c), according to which justice corresponds to what the stronger members of the society, the rulers, constitute as 'just' for their own advantage. Again, when Thrasymachus radicalises his argument to the extreme, he argues that the most blessed individual is the tyrant. Here, as we saw also in *Andromache*, the polar opposite of the tyrant is the citizens that he enslaves, indeed called slaves by Thrasymachus (ἐπειδὴν δέ τις πρὸς τοῖς τῶν πολιτῶν χρήμασιν καὶ αὐτοὺς ἀνδραποδισάμενος δουλώσεται, 344b).⁹⁸⁸ The slave does not correspond to the strongest members of society, but to the weakest. In the second book of the *Republic*, Glaucon takes a somewhat different stance by imagining the laws as a social contract established between men. Yet anyone, he argues, would choose to damage others if that implied a benefit to themselves, and if they had the power to do it: it is only the 'violence' of *nomos* that compels men to adhere to principles of equality (νόμῳ δὲ βία παράγεται ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ ἴσου τιμὴν, 359c).⁹⁸⁹ Of course, there are plenty of overlaps here that can be traced with debates in Thucydides, such as the Mytilenaeen or indeed the Melian one,⁹⁹⁰ in which Athenian domination is described precisely in these terms, as carrying out a type of *Realpolitik* that is deeply entrenched in sophistic terms in the right of the stronger.⁹⁹¹ And Athens *could* be described as a *tyrannos* (Thuc. 1.124.3, 2.63.2, 3.37.1, 6.85.1).⁹⁹² And yet one does not need to argue for a connection

equally makes constant use of notions of power and strength (οὐχὶ μικρὰν θεὸν, 940; Διὸς κρείσσων, 948; κράτος, 949; δοῦλος, 950; θεῶν κρατεῖν, 964).

⁹⁸⁸ Cf. Lycus at *HF* 250-1: μεμνήσεσθε δὲ/δοῦλοι γεγῶτες τῆς ἐμῆς τυραννίδος.

⁹⁸⁹ This is a sophistic idea that was anticipated by Antiphon's argument that serving one's interest is always best, and that one should obey the laws only in the presence of witnesses if complying with law implied one's disadvantage (DK 87 B44A). Instead, those who are just in the conventional sense most of the time are fated to ruin. As Pendrick (2001), 64-5 notes, the difference is that Antiphon does not explicitly focus on the right of the stronger. Cf. Balla (2023), 244.

⁹⁹⁰ Goldhill (2023), 290; Rosenbloom (2011b), 256-7. MacLeod (1983), 154-6 compares the *Hecuba* and the Melian and Plataean dialogues.

⁹⁹¹ Thomas (2006), 90 with some important nuancing.

⁹⁹² Low (2023), 154-5; Carter (2004), 16; Rosenbloom (2006), 259.

between them to see that the ideological movement of *Troades*, *Hecuba*, and *Andromache* inevitably puts into question the legitimisation of any form of domination and that it constantly puts pressure on commonly accepted reality.⁹⁹³ What is more, this process of questioning, which might appear anti-sophistic, is paradoxically articulated in language that is clearly sophistic.

It is important to note, additionally, that the plays constantly suggest an identification between the mythical Greek masters of these plays and the Athenians, for instance when the two sons of Theseus argue 'like sophists' in favour of the sacrifice of Polyxena; when the proceedings of the Greek assembly in both *Hecuba* and *Troades* take on Athenian anachronistic elements; when in *Troades* Hecuba gratuitously argues that the gods would have never risked enslaving the *Athenians*, specifically; when, in the second stasimon of *Troades*, the chorus mentions 'shining' Athens (802), its 'sacred hill' (801) and the myth of Athena's gift of the 'grey olive' (801-3) and yet does so while addressing Salaminian Telamon as the first Greek to have sacked Troy, with Heracles.⁹⁹⁴ What is more, the extremely disturbing portrayal of Athena in *Troades* — which one could see complementing and contrasting that of *Eumenides* — can hardly support the view that she appears here to praise Athens through her demonstration of 'courage in war and the cultivation of civic values'.⁹⁹⁵ These elements suggest that it is not tenable to believe, at least for these plays, that the Athenian spectators are meant to understand, through distance and difference, that 'progress has been made' — for these plays constantly

⁹⁹³ This is similar to the notion of ideology put forth by Hoffer (1996), 289-90, who yet argues that Euripides reconfirms this ideology.

⁹⁹⁴ Wohl (2015), 47; Barlow (1986), 199: 'such an image [sc. celebratory and serene, of Athens] in conjunction with the picture of their great hero Heracles would have brought pleasure and pride to the audience, but as the ode unfolded it would also have brought a new perspective'.

⁹⁹⁵ Lefkowitz (2016), 77. Even Lefkowitz, who takes Athena to uncompromisingly stand for the 'celebration of Athens', admits that the Athena of *Troades* is particularly ruthless.

gesture towards types of practice, normality, and reality that sound all too contemporary and Athenian to dismiss as examples of a flawed mythical past.⁹⁹⁶ The teleology of progress, above all things, is the first to be impaired by the critical movement of these Trojan plays.

The opening up of a critical space for Athens necessarily prompts reflection on the view that these three plays are simply anti-Spartan pamphlets and celebrations of Athens.⁹⁹⁷ Superficially, all three certainly contain an exaggerate amount of ‘vitriol’ against Laconic characters,⁹⁹⁸ and there can be hardly any doubt that many would have found pleasing to hear Andromache’s tirade against Sparta in *Andromache* or to find their stereotypes on Spartan women reconfirmed in *Troades*.⁹⁹⁹ Equally significant is the chorus’ wish in both *Hecuba* and *Troades* to be slaves in Attica but never in Sparta (*Tro.* 208-13; *Hec.* 466-74).¹⁰⁰⁰ Yet a closer look at the plays — one that goes beyond the simple citation of selected statements made at character level — allows us to see them as able to also reflect critically on Athens and as sceptical of any moral hierarchy, no less those that derive from war, the ultimate test of superiority;¹⁰⁰¹ sceptical of any straightforward ordering of right and wrong. If the sympathetic Trojans can also stand for the Athenians, thus further delineating the shadow of the vile Spartan enemy,¹⁰⁰²

⁹⁹⁶ I am referring to the argument put forth by Allan and Kelly (2013), 115, also partially dealt with in a footnote above (see *supra*, sec. 1.1.2, p. 52). Cf. the summary of the argument at 100-1: ‘for tragedy addresses current issues using an imaginary world of the past which is systematically and pervasively unlike that of the audience, and does so in a way that often confirms the validity of contemporary Athenian norms’. Cf. Rabinowitz (2008), 54 and Segal (1986), 67 on the interplay of distance and identification.

⁹⁹⁷ Centanni (2011), 40-1; Mills (2020), 879-80; Stavrinou (2016), 1. Cf. Kitto (1961), 230 on the *Andromache*: ‘not incidentally, but fundamentally, a violent attack on the Spartan mind’.

⁹⁹⁸ Hall (1989), 215. Cf. Battezzato (1999-2000), 358-9; Stavrinou (2016), 3: ‘Euripides establishes Sparta as a repository of perverted values’.

⁹⁹⁹ Roisman (2022), 50. Cf. Citti (1979), 148-9. For an overview of the anti-Spartan patina of *Troades*, cf. Mills (2020), 881.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ambühl (2010), 115; Battezzato (2016), 141-2. Cf. Rabinowitz (2008), 52.

¹⁰⁰¹ Havelock (1972), 71; Croally (1994), 50.

¹⁰⁰² Hall (1989), 214.

they are the same Trojan women who imagine and empathise with the tears of a Spartan woman who cries by the Eurotas (*Hec.* 650-7).¹⁰⁰³ If Thebes symbolically appeared to be an anti-Athens, Zeitlin notes how Troy instead seems to be ‘the conscience of Hellas, a site for looking inwards, for the self-examination of values’;¹⁰⁰⁴ a place that not so much catalyses the celebration of potential victory or explores the disaster of potential defeat, as it enacts ‘the continual interrogation of the ruinous effects upon victor and vanquished alike’.¹⁰⁰⁵

As we have already seen, Euripides’ use of sophistic thought is contradictory, and this is important particularly in the wake of the renewed debate in the relationship between Euripidean tragedy and the sophists. As Allan has it, ‘Euripides was neither a follower nor an opponent of any individual sophist, but a powerful and penetrating thinker who explored contemporary ideas in an individual way’.¹⁰⁰⁶ The universe of these three plays is terrifying: not only are fundamental certainties destabilised, but the violence that springs from the rupture of these conventions is both liberatory and extremely frightening. Hecuba in her eponymous play has our sympathy (and presumably that of the majority of the audience) when she argues that *nomos* should be respected, and that if it is not respected it is impossible for humans to distinguish good from bad. Yet the text of the tragedy first undercuts her by imbuing her words with the echoes of sophistic thoughts on the relativity of *nomos*, and then simply proves her wrong.¹⁰⁰⁷ Her final revenge both gathers our sympathy and alienates us, and it both opens up a

¹⁰⁰³ Cf. Battezzato (2016), 150; Di Benedetto (1971), 139.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Zeitlin (2009), 684. Cf. Goldhill (2006b), 333.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Zeitlin (2009), 694. Cf. Amerasinghe (1973), 103. Athenians as early as 425 were perfectly capable of having a nuanced position on the war: one only needs to think of Dicaeopolis at *Ar. Ach.* 497-556: Olson (2002), xli.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Allan (1999/2000), 145.

¹⁰⁰⁷ This is very similar to what Allan (1999/2000), 154 observes on the *Suppliant Women*.

space for liberatory, emancipatory rebellion as it exposes its terrifying nature — a complexity that contradicts the notion recently advanced of Euripides as, in some ways, anti-sophistic.¹⁰⁰⁸ Nevertheless, this space has been opened, there and in the *Andromache*, where similar thoughts on the problems introduced by sophistic rhetoric in the city resound with Hecuba’s denunciation of Odysseus’ and Polymestor’s sophistry.¹⁰⁰⁹ On one side, the deceptive Orestes and Menelaus of the play attract our antipathy, and so what they represent. On the other, the *sophe* Andromache that speaks against Hermione’s chauvinism (σοφή σοφή σύ, 245)¹⁰¹⁰ is simply presented as right in the same way Dionysus is when he is also ridiculed by Pentheus as *sophos* in *Bacchae* (σοφὸς σοφὸς σύ, 655);¹⁰¹¹ the tragedy allows us to raise our eyebrows at the idea that Andromache and Molossus are simply slaves and uses the *nomos-physis* antithesis to question this;¹⁰¹² the complication of virtue, articulated through the ironic problematisation of Andromache’s views on female virtue, is an important, critical component of the play’s reflection that seems to be vindicated. Perhaps ever more powerfully, *Troades*’ apocalypse confuses ‘us’ through a Gorgianic destabilisation of

¹⁰⁰⁸ Lefkowitz (2016), 24-48 *et passim* has expressed this view, noting that sophistic references can be explained by the assumption that Euripides simply wanted his characters to express themselves in contemporary fashion; in many instances, Lefkowitz argues, characters who voice sophistic ideas are proved wrong by the end of the tragedy (specifically, on matters relating to the gods). And yet both views seem to me to not fully grasp the complexity of the use of sophistic ideas in Euripides.

¹⁰⁰⁹ What is more, it is possible to argue that the sophists already disapproved of rhetoric as deceptive or ineffectual, and that they did not conceive persuasion as the goal of their speeches and antilogies; yet they still used it to raise questions on ‘major intellectual issues of the day’: Gagarin (2001), 289-90. This would be closer to my view of Euripides’ use of sophistic rhetoric.

¹⁰¹⁰ Allan (2000), 125.

¹⁰¹¹ Admittedly, the complication of σοφία as ‘wisdom’, in general, is a major theme of the *Bacchae*. Yet both Hermione and Pentheus intend to accuse their opponents here specifically of ‘rhetorical trickery’ (Allan and Swift 2024, 199), i.e., sophistry. Interestingly, both Andromache and Dionysus oppose Greek ethnocentrism, and both appear to be physically bound and are eventually freed (cf. *Andr.* 720 and *Bacch.* 615-21, 1017-9, 1215, 1278).

¹⁰¹² Vester (2009), 297. Cf. Citti (1979), 205.

language and responsibility.¹⁰¹³ This appears as terrifying, especially when this responsibility is sought for in the wake of extreme violence and destruction, and especially for an audience experiencing an exhausting war. And yet the play equally asks us to sit with the uncertainty, to reject simple solutions, to refute easy schematisations that inevitably terminate with inconsistent hierarchies of good and bad. *Troades'* 'apocalypse' both laments the crisis and enacts the crisis through its very act of communal mourning.¹⁰¹⁴

Understanding these plays as contesting *domination* allows us to requalify both the need to speak of hierarchies and the definition of 'ideology' and 'ideological' so far implied. Although scholars have repeatedly, since Vernant, analysed tragedy's controversial exploration of dichotomical categories of identity, requalifying these plays' concerns with polarities as explorations of *hierarchies* allows us not to lose sight of the problem of power and domination. In this regard, I differ from Segal's structuralist understanding of tragedy as negotiating mutually sustaining cultural codes in the creation of civilisation, which seems to me to sideline the role of ideology as a system of power and to risk universalising those categories as essential to civilisation:¹⁰¹⁵ in my understanding, it is not the ideology of the polis that inserts itself into an anthropological grid of essential structures, but a more reciprocal, if undefinable, process of sustainment between an atavic tendency to dichotomise and

¹⁰¹³ By the use of 'us', I intend to stress that I am not reading affect (or the other 'forms' of the text) simply in an historicised way, as Felski has accused scholars of affect of doing: Felski (2020), 139.

¹⁰¹⁴ This is similar to what Rosenbloom (2006), 271 has argued, albeit from a different perspective.

¹⁰¹⁵ In particular, in the introduction to Segal (1999). While I speak of ideology as a system of domination, for instance, Segal (1986), 52 speaks of a 'complex network of interrelated symbols, patterns, and structures that encode the *values of the culture*'. Cf. Goldhill (2006b), 336.

hierarchise and the ideological discourses of power of the city.¹⁰¹⁶ But I also differ from Croally's understanding of ideology as explained in his analysis of *Troades*: the play, as he has it, explores 'the authoritative self-definition of the Athenian citizen'. In particular, Croally argues that through the questioning of the polarities that constituted the identity of the Athenian citizen (male, free, Greek, human) the ideology of self-definition is under scrutiny in the play.¹⁰¹⁷

By using polarity as a heuristic device, here the risk is seeing the problematisation of Athenian *civic identity* as the core of the play's exploration of this system of polarities.¹⁰¹⁸ This approach risks sidelining considerations of power and domination, if applied to *Troades* (and plays like *Troades*), which considerably makes the suffering of the weak central. Importantly, it takes too seriously the (itself ideological) pretense of Athenian culture to present the citizen body as homogeneous in terms of class, flattening differences and eluding the discussion of power within the internal body of the citizens. It risks, in other words, implying that the 'real' ideology under scrutiny is the 'internal', civic, polis ideology that allows free, male, Athenian citizens to define themselves; while I believe that the Trojan plays' contested ideology can best be understood as a system of mutually sustaining ideologies of power that cuts across the seeming homogeneity of the citizen body. As such, it is not primarily a disruption of the Athenian citizen self (although it might also affect that), but rather a deconstruction of the ideological system of domination that underlies reality. As Hall and Althusser have it, ideology is constituted of 'the systems of meaning through which we represent the

¹⁰¹⁶ Cf. Citti (1979), 14-5.

¹⁰¹⁷ Croally (1994), 119.

¹⁰¹⁸ The same applies to DuBois (1982), which clearly underpins Croally's definition. Although DuBois does not explicitly define ideology, she claims in the introduction to be interested in the way the 'Greek subject' would ideologically situate himself in his present; the subject does this according to the logic of polarity and analogy.

world to ourselves and one another’;¹⁰¹⁹ this process of signification is not neutral, but is constituted by and constitutes discourses of domination. Although these three tragedies might put into question the ‘mythical norm’ of Athens, they do so not gratuitously, but rather to open, or re-open, an understanding of reality as based on a fixed order, and this might have ideological implications that pertain *both to the internal self-definition of Athenian power and to its external ideology of domination*. Thalmann understood Euripides’ criticism of Aeschylus in *Hecuba* as primarily aimed at ‘its ideology of war, its easy slides into violence, and its hierarchical structure of genders, all of which the *Oresteia* might seem to legitimate as the necessary price for that “progress” that culminates in fifth-century Athens.’¹⁰²⁰ *Troades*, as well as the other Trojan plays, can be seen to be critical inasmuch as they are ideologically critical, in the sense that they put into question those — inevitably violent,¹⁰²¹ inevitably unstable — hierarchies on which an understanding of reality is founded.¹⁰²² In the Latourian sense, these plays’ concerns are inextricable from their ideological drive, their contestation of domination. With *Troades*, in particular, the simple acts of reading, seeing, and empathising require us to engage in a continuously frustrated act of interpretation, as the play itself reroutes all the hierarchical lenses through which we see the world.

¹⁰¹⁹ Hall (1985), 103; Althusser (1969), 231-6.

¹⁰²⁰ Thalmann (1993), 158-9.

¹⁰²¹ Hoffer (1996), 290. Cf. Chou (2014), 129.

¹⁰²² In this sense, I receive Loraux’s fuller definition of ideology as ‘the idea that the city-state must be—and so, by definition is—one and *at peace* [my italics] with itself’ (Loraux 2002, 26), which has the merit of understanding ideology not only as a practice of ‘unification’, but specifically as a practice that attempts to erase conflict and duality. Yet I enlarge it specifically with regard to the notion of power, which seems to me to be central to these plays. For a summary of understandings of ‘ideology’ within Classics and beyond, cf. Rose (1997), 155-66.

3.6.3 Re-Opening Interpretations

When these hierarchies are taken apart from each other, from either a character or a reader, there is always an implicit risk to partly restore hierarchy, even if unwillingly. For instance, Andromache's female virtue might be the stable fulcrum that puts ethnicity and/or class into disorder, according to some readers, in *Andromache* and/or *Troades*; Helen's responsibility might reassert gender norms but question the divide between Greek and barbarian in *Troades*; or the destabilisation of the gender hierarchy in *Hecuba* might appear to be linked to Hecuba's 'barbaric' revenge that reasserts her barbarism. But the analysis of colliding hierarchies in *Troades*, at the beginning of this chapter, alerts us that looking at the world through single and/or distinct hierarchies, like characters in the play do, allows us to put it into order at the risk of delusion.

For instance, scholars of the *Andromache* have often taken either hierarchies of status or ethnicity (or both) to be heavily put under pressure; yet they mostly agree, implicitly or explicitly, that this is specifically effected through Andromache's gender. For instance, Vester argues that the play destabilises two hierarchies (ethnicity and status) in the definition of citizen identity (which she contextualises with the relaxation of the citizenship law during the war). Repeatedly, however, she notes that this is only possible because of Andromache's exemplary behaviour as a woman and potential wife/mother.¹⁰²³ Although, then, Vester sees the ideological and historical interconnection between status and ethnicity in the creation of civic identity, these two hierarchies are seen to be destabilised by upholding the man/woman one (Andromache is 'subservient and loyal').¹⁰²⁴ Stavrinou focuses on ethnicity and equally

¹⁰²³ Vester (2009), 305.

¹⁰²⁴ Vester (2009), 305.

comes to similar conclusions: 'although a mere *pallake* now, Andromache is still exemplary in her adherence to absolute standards of female propriety'.¹⁰²⁵

Saïd famously formulates a strong case for taking Euripides as *never* reinforcing the Greek/barbarian hierarchy in his tragedies. When it comes to Helen in *Troades*, she argues that Helen's claim to have benefited Greece with her adultery is part of a long tradition of Greek ethnocentrism that saw the war of Troy as a prefiguration of the Greek fight against the barbarians, and that saw it as a 'one of the major themes of the panhellenic discourse'. Yet she notes that usually such statements are voiced by characters with weak, even ridiculous arguments.¹⁰²⁶ Yet this idea naturally means that if Hecuba has the last word and Helen's argument is specious and ridiculous, if we are meant, in other words, to agree with Hecuba, then the collision of gender and ethnicity rhetoric here inevitably leads to the reinstatement of gender normality through the sanction of Helen's transgression and the judgement passed on her actions. Implicitly, privileging the axis of ethnicity leads to the reassertion of a 'patriarchal' interpretation of the text.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, readings such as these move parallel to what the characters in *Troades* do: they take hierarchies as separate, which are inevitably levers and fulcrums of meaning, and use them to understand *meaning*: in the case of the characters, their interpretation of reality; in the case of the readers, their interpretation of the text. In either case, this corresponds to an attempt to put things into order, by clinging on the hope of meaning, by finding a lever or a fulcrum, something that might

¹⁰²⁵ Stavrinou (2016), 17. Rabinowitz 1998 takes gender and status to be robustly reaffirmed through an inversion of Greek/barbarian in the play. Cf. Sorum (1995), 386 on the way the play seemingly rewards 'the virtuous woman' and expels 'promiscuous women' (p. 387) while proving Hermione's chauvinist rhetoric unsubstantial (p. 378).

¹⁰²⁶ Saïd (2022), 72.

put things back into definition, into clarity.¹⁰²⁷ These plays, I have argued, oppose any such attempt. In this sense, and to these approaches, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, and *Troades* are ‘recalcitrant’ texts,¹⁰²⁸ continuously opposing our attempts to find one hierarchy in the hope of interpretation — whether from a character, from a reader, or from a scholar— and offering a vision of reality as open. It is a terrifying world, but perhaps not a fully aporetic, frozen one. For this opening of reality has the potential to enlarge the ‘horizons of possibility’ over which ‘realism’ tyrannises.¹⁰²⁹ ‘From a situation in which nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again’.¹⁰³⁰

¹⁰²⁷ This is evocative of what Wingrove (2016), 131 calls ‘the isomorphism of politics and theory’ in relation to Honig’s *Antigone*, the correspondence between the attempts of ‘final mastery’ through ‘conceptual closure’ in the political realm and in the interpretive, theoretical world.

¹⁰²⁸ Honig (2013), 191: ‘the contemporary focus on the reception, interpretation, rewriting, or restaging of classical texts tends to treat those texts as endlessly malleable, not as also resistant to their receptions. And yet, sometimes the texts exceed and resist the demands of their interpreters’.

¹⁰²⁹ Cf. Fisher (2009), 81. Cf. Kornbluh’s similar analysis of the unresolved antagonisms of *Wuthering Heights*: Kornbluh (2019), 99 *et passim*.

¹⁰³⁰ Fisher (2009), 81.

CONCLUSION

“There is light in darkness, you just have to find it.”

bell hooks

Myths, to recapitulate the structuralist view, encode that polarity [tame and wild] into details of ritual, food, sexuality, family life, spatial relationships, and other areas. Each code is a patterned model of the whole, and each, in its own characteristic terms, expresses an analogous message. Uncoded, those particulars reveal the deep structure of the society's concern and its modes of organizing reality. Each code is homologous with every other code. Taken together all the codes constitute the value patterns and underlying mental structures of the society.

With these words,¹⁰³¹ Segal summarises the Lévi-Straussian view of myth as reflecting and mediating a network of ‘codes’, and the ensuing structuralist enterprise of decoding the system by revealing ‘the interlocking parallels, the homologies among the various codes of the social order’.¹⁰³² In so doing, Segal is writing as one of the most notable voices of a structuralist school of interpretation of Greek tragedy, who pay attention to the way sexual, linguistic, ritual, religious codes are negotiated in tragedy and are continuously compared to each other. Tragedy, Segal continues, stages crises within this system of codes, and by doing so ‘the totality of the social and cosmic order becomes

¹⁰³¹ Segal (1999), 15.

¹⁰³² Segal (1999), 15.

visible in its interlocking relations at just the moment when that order is deeply threatened or pushed to its furthest limits of intelligibility'.¹⁰³³

The tragic work in which this system is perhaps most fully visible is, in Segal's system, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and the scene that he analyses is indeed the tapestry scene mentioned above. To Segal, the tapestry scene of the *Agamemnon* is one of the most powerful scenes of Greek tragedy precisely because the violation it entails is constructed as an enmeshment of violated codes—linguistic, sexual, ethnic. Yet as the trilogy progresses, Segal admits, the *Eumenides* attempts to find a solution of mediation between the different cosmic forces of the universe, thus approximating the mediating function of myth intended in a structuralist sense. I have argued before that this mediation between opposing factors still is based on a hierarchisation that at least tries to resolve the problem of duplicity and doubleness by privileging and valuing as superior one term of the polarity and marginalising, muting, eclipsing the other term as inferior. In the case of the denouement of the *Eumenides*, for instance, the 'gender magnet' comes to exemplify the other codes so that the male is brought back at the centre: linguistic hierarchisation, the privileging of one meaning, thus mirrors the hierarchisation between the sexes.

Hecuba, *Andromache*, and *Troades* engage with the Aeschylean trilogy in the subtle and complex attempt to articulate a critical position on this process of hierarchisation—a process of hierarchisation that faces again the same crises it was supposed to have solved. In re-opening these issues, Euripides does not mobilise a different strategy than what the rest of tragedy does in Segal's structuralist or even post-structuralist opinion: these plays similarly stage and dramatise crises of meaning based on crises of

¹⁰³³ Segal (1999), 15.

differentiations. Boundaries and limits collapse just like identities and hierarchies do. But there are important considerations to be made on the specificities of these three tragedies.

Goldhill, using Bourdieu's concept of misrecognition, speaks of tragedy performing a sort of recognition of the misrecognition:¹⁰³⁴

a stable society continues on its course precisely by not recognizing the arbitrary limits and organization of its own system of beliefs, which it determines as 'natural' and 'proper'. For Bourdieu, the establishment of what is thought 'natural' in each culture depends on such 'misrecognition'— which is how he terms the working of the unquestioned organization of ideas inherent in a culture's attitudes and assumptions.

And yet tragedy recognises this misrecognition by putting under pressure the idea of what is thought as 'natural': as Goldhill has it, it is in 'times of flux in a society, such as fifth century Athens' that the misrecognition is recognised, and during which cultures face crises.¹⁰³⁵ Nonetheless, it is precisely by virtue of the flux and shape-shifting ferment of fifth-century Athens that we are not easily entitled to imagine the cultural circumstances that gave birth to the *Oresteia* as the same that produced the Trojan plays.¹⁰³⁶ Two important factors make the culture of the 420s different from that of the 450s: first, the impact of the Peloponnesian war, during which the Panhellenism of the Persian Wars gave way to a reconsideration of Greekness and the boundary between

¹⁰³⁴ Goldhill (2023), 152.

¹⁰³⁵ Goldhill (2023), 152. Cf. Segal (1986), 64: 'tragedy itself seems to arise when social, political, and moral systems are in crisis or at a crossroads'.

¹⁰³⁶ Cf. Saïd (1998), 295.

Self and Other;¹⁰³⁷ second, the cultural and philosophical impact of the sophists. Goldhill himself recognises sophistic thought as crucial to the process of recognition of the misrecognition, given its interest in the destabilisation of categories such as ‘natural’ and ‘conventional’:¹⁰³⁸ it is not a coincidence that the text he analyses in that chapter is the *Hippolytus*, indeed imbued with sophistic thought and contemporary to the *Andromache* and *Hecuba*. While tragedy, then, recognises the weakness of meaning and differentiation from its beginnings and is in a sense ‘critical’ from its undertakings, the Euripidean Trojan plays are more deeply critical of the culture it produces them on the impetus of sophistic thought and the general cultural crisis of the 420s and 410s.¹⁰³⁹ This critique of culture is thus a critique also of the texts that make up that culture, including the dramatic text par excellence which was also being revived in the 420s: Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*. In this light we can explain the relationship of intertextuality between these plays and the trilogy; an intertextuality which, it would be important to add, is also an intervisuality, an incessant presence of visual echoes of that trilogy, a ‘stagecraft of memory’ — Cassandra’s scene in *Troades* throwing her apparel away must remind us of *Agamemnon*,¹⁰⁴⁰ Hermione bearing her breasts in *Andromache* echoes with the gesture of her Aeschylean aunt,¹⁰⁴¹ *Andromache*’s chariot entrance in *Troades* also evokes the entrance of *Agamemnon* and *Cassandra*.¹⁰⁴²

¹⁰³⁷ Di Benedetto (1971), 128-9 takes the war to have catalysed tensions of class, rather than cultural anxieties surrounding the Greek/barbarian divide.

¹⁰³⁸ Goldhill (2023), 152.

¹⁰³⁹ For instance, Goldhill’s analysis of the *Oresteia* inevitably shows that Aeschylean tragedy was perfectly capable of exploring the ‘semiotic gap’ years before sophistic thought spread. Allan (1999/2000), 155 compares Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* with Euripides’ sophistic-inflected *Suppliant Women* and notes that while Aeschylus similarly explores ideas of law and political systems, there is a different, more structural, more prolonged exploration of these issues in Euripides (and, importantly, they are left open).

¹⁰⁴⁰ Cf. Anderson (1997), 171.

¹⁰⁴¹ Stavrinou (2016), 13.

¹⁰⁴² For a complete study of visual echoes of the trilogy in *Troades*, cf. Marshall (2022), 151-80.

In this sense, then, what Euripides does here is in line with the process of Attic tragedy to shed light on crises of meaning and definition. At the same time, however, it exceeds it: it is Euripides, after all, who boasts in the *Frogs* to have included in his plays reasoning (λογισμός) and scrutiny (σκέψις) as an ‘incitement to critical thought’.¹⁰⁴³ What is more, the engagement with Aeschylus means that these tragedies not only use ‘myth’, but an already literary and tragic form of myth. And so, for instance, the crisis of differentiation in terms of class in the *Electra* is inextricable from the play’s interrogation of myth, and specifically of the myth of *Libation Bearers*: Orestes’ famous statement that there is no clear sign to distinguish noble from base undercuts his own heroic persona, and questions the myth as recounted by Aeschylus: ‘the play demands that we consider the moral conundrum of the matricide, for example, or the perplexing state of a world in which Apollo is no longer wise, and at the same time it encourages scrutiny of the workings of the performance itself’,¹⁰⁴⁴ and, I would add, it encourages scrutiny of the version of the myth as told by Aeschylus.¹⁰⁴⁵ Once we recognise this relationship of metapoetic critique, there is another important differentiation to be made.

While all tragedies (and even all literature, according to Segal) represent the world as a complex system of codes that break down (I stress again, not necessarily with the same purposes), it is by no means realistic to believe that all tragedies deal with the same polarities with the same force or attention. This is true even of the *Oresteia*, that Segal praises precisely for its complexity of codes, and that however does not deal with

¹⁰⁴³ Barrett (2020), 279.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Barrett (2020), 295.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Barrett (2020) recognises the importance of the critique of the *Oresteia* in this epistemological challenge of Euripides in the *Electra* at p. 292, where *Libation Bearers* is defined as ‘its chief intertextual interlocutor’.

all codes of human society in the same way, for otherwise it would not be easily understandable. In fact, when the trilogy needs to be most understandable and most clear—that is, at the end of the trilogy, gender becomes *the* hierarchy par excellence, with the cosmic, cultural, and divine hierarchies *implied* in its articulation.

This Euripides seemed to have particularly understood in his engagement with the Atreid saga in *Orestes*, *Electra*, *IT*, and *IA*.¹⁰⁴⁶ And yet, although gender is such a fundamental component of Euripides' re-reading of Aeschylus, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, and *Troades* seem to enlarge the social order by thematising hierarchies of ethnicity and status. In this process of 'sociological enlargement', the collapse of boundaries of the gender polarity and its hierarchy is accompanied and complicated by the collapse of hierarchies dividing slave and noble as well as barbarian and Greek. At the end of chapter one and in the whole of chapter two, in particular, I have tried to show how these procedures of hierarchical collapse entail each other and at times are even indistinguishable from each other. For instance, on the collapse of gender structures in *Andromache's* scene with Menelaus the collapse of structures of ethnicity and class is overwritten in the *Andromache*. The *Hecuba* equally mobilises these three hierarchies to overturn them: as we saw, many scholars have interpreted the sacrifice of Polyxena as proof of her reversal of gender expectations, rather than a noble act that contrasts with her overemphasised status as a slave. This is not wrong, but neither is it entirely correct: the overwhelming emphasis on the noble-slave hierarchy would seem to contradict the more feminist reading. But in fact both are true, and one could argue that it would be impossible to not perceive how the barbaric act of sacrifice that puts the Greeks under such a negative light in that scene might also mobilise discourses of

¹⁰⁴⁶ See *supra*, sec. 3.6.1, pp. 297-9.

ethnicity and overturn them. Similarly, Cassandra's rhesis of self-sacrifice in *Troades* both invites the audience to envision her as an aristocratic hero in contrast with her slave status and triggers an inversion of specific ethnic ideologemes underlying the Greek-barbarian hierarchy. Like Cassandra, Polyxena's hierarchical collapse is multifaceted, and separating the overlapping strands, or the overlapping codes, as Segal would have it, seems impossible. Social hierarchies gradually appear less distinct and more enmeshed, at times overlapping with each other in the construction and deconstruction of the social order.

One might say with Segal that the codes are always overlapping in tragedy and in literature altogether, but once again caution should be advised. Would the Greek/barbarian distinction still have been collapsed or even just explored in the *Hecuba*, had Polyxena been a Greek enslaved heroine that defied categories of gender or status? Would the distinction between social classes and statuses still be under such extreme pressure in the *Andromache* had Andromache been a free barbarian woman relating to her equals in status (though Greek and, with Menelaus and Peleus, male)? Would female virtue still have been deconstructed or explored in *Troades* had Euripides chosen to destabilise or explore the hierarchies of aristocratic/slave and Greek/barbarian through a *male* Trojan (a question which we might at least consider viable in the light of the consistent fragments of the *Alexandros*)? These questions might be not entirely rhetorical: the conceptual overlap of barbarism with slavery, for instance, and the concrete reality of the majority of slaves in Athens being foreign,¹⁰⁴⁷ make an 'implicit' connection between them perhaps automatic even when it is only one hierarchy, slave-noble or barbarian-Greek, that is destabilised. But in these three

¹⁰⁴⁷ Citti (1979), 207.

plays the connection is tangible and precisely established by the extensive presence and mobilisation of all these three hierarchies — mobilisation that is triggered by the presence and voice of the ‘intersectional’ Trojan women.

By mobilising these three hierarchies, these plays weave together the codes of the system through something more than ‘a metaphor’, as Segal defines it, and seem to offer a version of the ‘analogical model’ on stage (in DuBois’ words) to just overturn it. The reversal of hierarchies then corresponds to a multi-faceted suspension of codes, a calling into question, a Utopian rupture of the system which challenges the principle of a realistic ‘natural order’ through a suspension of hierarchies, and vice versa. This system is not merely social, as Segal already argued, but can also be seen made palpable in these tragedies on the linguistic, moral, juridical, temporal, and even aesthetic sense. But the multifaceted social critique is strong and critical (in the sense of being extreme) precisely because of the way it is a prolonged deconstruction of the social order, leaving no hierarchy unaffected, no axis meaningful enough to put things into order. In his account of the way *Troades* problematises polarities, indeed, Croally stresses precisely the extremeness of this process of ideological questioning of the play and identifies this as ‘having something in common with Euripides’ other Trojan war-plays—*Andromache* and *Hecuba*’.¹⁰⁴⁸

Can we explain this extremeness in connection with these plays’ questioning of multiple hierarchies and interpret this simply as a matter of emphasis? In other words, do these plays appear extreme in their questioning simply because they question

¹⁰⁴⁸ Croally (1994), 70: ‘although this manner of questioning ideology is not uniquely Euripidean, there remains a certain difference about *Troades*, which is marked by an affirmation that the problems that the characters encounter when using the polarities are both very extreme and extreme because they are an effect of war’.

multiple social hierarchies, and, in doing so, they appear to be particularly iconoclastic? Segal offers a different answer: the *interconnections* between codes become visible in the moment the system of codes is threatened. Changing the emphasis from threat to crisis, I would say that if the plays reflect and enact a deep, extreme crisis of the system, a deconstruction of the system itself, then it is precisely in these plays that the interconnections between the different ‘codes’—the hierarchies—become visible. This can be understood as the connection (or intersection?) between these plays as *critical* (staging, reflecting, enacting a crisis) and their intersectional questioning. By staging a deep deconstruction of signification, all those codes of value and signification become visible, not only individually, but also in their (inevitably ideological) intersection. The system’s intersection (its intersectional nature, its structure made of sustaining connections and mutually reinforcing hierarchies), in other words, appears palpable precisely when it is in a deep crisis.

To return to the start—for any ending is also a beginning, any beginning an ending, if we are to listen to Euripides—these plays’ potential lies in the way they make palpable a structure that is hidden: by showing how a system crumbles down to pieces, the plays shed light on those focal points of interconnection between the pieces that had sustained the structure, on the structure itself; on the connection between time and narrative; or responsibility and gender, status, and ethnicity; or language, visibility, and power.¹⁰⁴⁹ By mobilising those hierarchies, the text makes their interconnection visible. And if the structure had been fixed before, put up again, this second gesture—this re-reading, this critical enterprise – is critical precisely inasmuch as it puts pressure on

¹⁰⁴⁹ This is what Segal (1986), 74 argues on all Attic tragedy: ‘tragedy experiments with the reversal or violent interweaving of the codes of the social order and deconstructs the system to show the hidden logic of its workings’.

the joint in which the broken structure had been glued together. But, through this act, those interconnections that had made up the system become clearer than had been before.

That system is, of course, historically bound and to be historically contextualised. Yet in a way these three plays inevitably seem to extend beyond their immediate context, precisely through these hierarchies. As mentioned in the introduction, it is no surprise that feminist scholars have read and re-interpreted *Troades* as a play that has something to say on *gender*.¹⁰⁵⁰ Because of a stronger continuum between ancient conceptions of gender and modern ones, it is by default deemed applicable: the hierarchical form presented by the text is *our* form, and this is an important reason why feminist studies of Greek tragedy, and classical literature altogether, can be important to understand *the present*. But what about the Greek/barbarian hierarchy? Caution might be advised. Yet *Troades* has certainly appealed to decolonial, anti-racist interpretations.¹⁰⁵¹ In the introduction to this adaptation of the play, Sartre reminds us that the boundary between the two is porous:¹⁰⁵²

I speak a few times of “Europe”. The idea is modern, but corresponds to the ancient opposition between Greeks and barbarians, between Greater Greece [...] and the establishments of Asia Minor, where Athenian colonial imperialism reigned with a ferocity Euripides denounces pitilessly.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Cf. Chong-Gossard (2015), 157 on the reception of the *Andromache* and how Racine reads and stages gender; Dugdale (2015), 134-5 on gender in *Hecuba* and its reception in the 2004 production by Foursight Theatre directed by Naomi Cooke. Nussbaum (2020) is an exciting feminist article that uses *Hecuba* to make its point.

¹⁰⁵¹ Cf. Chong-Gossard (2015), 166 on the reception and explicitly racial aspect of Hermione’s chauvinism in Eric Bentley’s *A Time to Live*; Dugdale (2015), 133 on the staging of *Hecuba* by the African Continuum Theater Company.

¹⁰⁵² Sartre (1968), 130; Lauriola (2015), 66; Loraux (2002), 9.

Scholars, too, who have insisted on the specific historical contextualisation of the emergence of 'race' as a concept, have highlighted the important role ancient understandings of Graeco-Roman civilisation vis-à-vis barbarism had in Western imperialism and racist discourse. The text of these tragedies, and the forms therein visible or latent, are certainly operating through an understanding of cultural, ethnic difference between Greeks and barbarians different from modern racialisation. And yet, the Greek/barbarian hierarchy in *Troades* implicates us immediately in an understanding of our own racialised categories, and it does so precisely because the forms of the play are porous, not easily contained in one historical context.¹⁰⁵³ They can — and, simply, they do — communicate to us, prompting an acknowledgement of their practical difference just as much as they prompt our recognition of their ideological similarity.¹⁰⁵⁴

What about the 'status' hierarchy at work in the play? Euripides seems to blend considerations of both class and status in these three plays (not only noble and slave, but also rich and poor), creating a broad social hierarchy that is embodied on stage by the aristocrat-slave categories; these, however, are clearly not the same as class distinctions in modern, late capitalistic societies, and surely they do not correspond to traditional Marxist understandings of class.¹⁰⁵⁵ And yet, the *Manifesto* does begin so:¹⁰⁵⁶

¹⁰⁵³ The same has happened with *Medea*: Smit (2002), 102; Smit (1992); Mimoso-Ruiz (1982), 139-96.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Cf. Rabinowitz (2008), 33-4 on Vernant, Vidal-Naquet, tragedy and colonialism.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Cf. Ober (1991), 113-4 on de Ste. Croix (1981), who argued that Aristotle's *Politics* could be understood through class, and Finley (1973), who rejected Ste. Croix's perspective and found status, instead, to be fundamental to Aristotle's conception of social hierarchy. Ober shows how Aristotle actually blends considerations of both status and class (p. 132).

¹⁰⁵⁶ Marx and Engels (2020), 7.

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

For Marx and Engels there are important and obvious differences between that ancient struggle and their contemporary struggle. Yet there also similarities. More than that, in fact: they are different actualisations of the same transhistorical struggle. They are different forms, or, to say it in formalist terms, they are different forms of the same transhistorical form. Then a tragedy's use of its own historicised form of class and status inevitably implicates us in our understanding of class as we experience it,¹⁰⁵⁷ precisely because the form/ hierarchy the tragedy mobilises can be placed in a continuum with our conceptualisation of the same hierarchy, of the same form —¹⁰⁵⁸ a practice that is immediate and instinctive when we engage in a feminist reading of an ancient play.¹⁰⁵⁹ Once again, *Troades'* rich text also prompted interpretations with clear social agendas.¹⁰⁶⁰ Yet in mobilising multiple social hierarchies whose affordances cannot be contained within their historical context only,¹⁰⁶¹ these plays also prompt

¹⁰⁵⁷ This does not mean that 'we' experience it and interpret it univocally: cf. Hall and Stead (2020). Cf. the use of Hecuba from *Hecuba* as a symbol of the instability of political power and status in the *Carmina Burana*: Dugdale (2015), 112.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Cf. Wohl (1998), 63-4. And one can also argue that tragedy can generally share the paradoxical pessimistic yet optimistic spirit of Marxism through the exposure of the knowledge that 'suffering is unnecessary', that it involves a 'response to suffering' (and not only in the case of Brechtian drama): cf. Leonard (2015), 11-2 on Steiner (1961), Williams (1966) and Brecht.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Smit (2002), 106; Cardinal (1987), 42.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Cf. Davis (2010-2011), 458; Lauriola (2015), 73.

¹⁰⁶¹ Felski (2008), 15: '[tragedy] assumes very different forms across the contingencies of history and time but [...] also undermines the progressivist logic of modern thought'.

new, original questions. Can these hierarchies' ideological enmeshment be mapped onto contemporary theories of intersectionality? If the ideological intersectionality of these hierarchies predates modernity, what is the role of (post)modernity in the sustainment of this ideological system? The dialectic effected by these Trojan women might be negative, but as they force us to consider and reconsider the constructedness of reality, a new order might materialise in the crisis. The brightest fire can shine even in the midst of Troy's darkest night.

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