

CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, AND THE FAILURE OF MOTHERING ON THE ATTIC
STAGE

by

DEANA PAIGE ZEIGLER

(Under the Direction of Nancy Felson)

ABSTRACT

I first extract a normative model for mother-daughter relationships from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* as well as a story pattern of the succession narrative from Hesiod's *Theogony* and Homer's *Odyssey*. Using both of these patterns or models, I investigate the troubled relationship between Clytemnestra and Electra. In Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Electra* the behavior of each character not only fails to conform to the normative model of a mother-daughter pair, it, in fact, exceeds all negative expectations for a functional, reciprocal mother-daughter relationship. Nevertheless, Clytemnestra and Electra are both aware of these societal norms. Both characters are disadvantaged because of the limits of female power, for Clytemnestra at an earlier phase of her life before she killed Agamemnon and usurped the throne. This fact contributes to the failure in mothering and the reproduction of mothering on the Attic stage.

INDEX WORDS: Mothers, Daughters, Ancient Greece, Greek Tragedy, Sophocles, Euripides, Electra, Clytemnestra, Succession

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

Motherhood is not a given. Although women give birth biologically—i.e., by nature, the various ways in which they interact with and “mother” their children depend on the culture in which they live. As a culture changes, the ways in which women “mother” change as well. For example, in our own society, breast feeding has gone in and out of fashion numerous times, and people hold different ideas on issues as varied as co-sleeping and discipline. Any given society may place strictures on women who are pregnant or mothering, but within these guidelines many types of behaviors may be considered “normal” or acceptable. While every mother does not behave towards her children in the same way in any given society and at any particular time period, there is a set of expected behaviors to which most mothers will conform.¹

In ancient Greek society, too, there was a normative model within which women fulfilled their roles as mothers and daughters, a model which can, in part, be reconstructed today through archaeological and literary evidence, notably the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* from around 650 BCE. In Greek tragedy, though, this “normative” framework for mother-daughter interactions sometimes becomes clearer through its *dysfunction*. In both Sophocles’ and Euripides’ *Electra* plays, for example, the relationship between Clytemnestra and Electra is very troubled. It is evident that both playwrights are exploring the expected mother-daughter relationship and questioning what happens when it does not function properly, when, for one reason or another,

¹ See Chodorow 1978 for further discussion of the social constructs of motherhood and the reproduction of mothering.

the mother does not behave towards her daughter or the daughter towards her mother in a way that the society finds suitable.

In order to analyze and understand what Euripides and Sophocles are up to in their depictions of Electra and Clytemnestra, it is first necessary to examine the Athenian society in which the two tragedians lived. Do the female characters portrayed in their tragedies have any relation to the position of real women in late 5th century Athens, when these plays were written?² Were Electra and Clytemnestra designed to raise contemporary issues and ideas, and if so, on which ones does each author comment?

Mothers and Daughters in 5th Century Athens

It is difficult to form an accurate and comprehensive picture of women's everyday lives in ancient Athens. Not only is the time period so far removed from the present day that much information about daily life in general has been lost, but nearly all the sources that we have about women were written by men. As Blundell points out, since there are no surviving texts written by Athenian women, much of what is known about them has been filtered through the male perspective; thus there are some areas of women's lives that are never mentioned in the sources because men either did not know about them or did not deem them important enough to be discussed.³ Much of our information also applies only to relatively wealthy women, or to an ideal situation. The lives of slaves, non-citizens, or poor women would have been quite different.

Nevertheless, scholars can use artistic representations, especially vase paintings, ritual evidence, and literary texts, both prose and poetry, to form a basic idea of the lived experiences of Athenian women and the lives men thought they should live. According to many ancient

² For this paper I will focus mainly on Athenian women because the plays were written by Athenian men and because the lives of women in other Greek societies, in Sparta for instance, could be very different.

³ Blundell 1998, 2.

Greek authors, the ideal situation was for women to be totally secluded from public life. Thucydides' Pericles, for example, in his famous funeral oration, has only this to say to the war widows: καὶ ἥς ἂν ἐπ' ἐλάχιστον ἀρετῆς πέρι ἢ ψόγου ἐν τοῖς ἄρσεσι κλέος ᾖ. "And her glory is greatest who is mentioned least among the men either for valor or for slander." (Th. *Pel.* 2.45.2)⁴ As Rustin points out, "the injunction to invisibility...is completely traditional, since the proper activity of a woman was ἔνδον μένειν [to remain within, Herodas 1.37], and in court they were usually left unnamed unless under attack."⁵ Of course, this kind of seclusion was not possible for all classes of women. Slaves and poorer women had to venture out in public on errands and other daily business, and some women had jobs outside of the house. In general, though, women spent most of their time inside, often secluded in a special section of the home; they were associated with the *oikos*, a word that denotes not just a nuclear family, but can also relate to property, slaves and other family members. It was only during certain religious ceremonies that most women would have played a noticeable public role,⁶ though there is some evidence that concubines or prostitutes may have participated more fully.⁷ In ancient Athens there was a distinction between public and private, *dêmos* and *oikos*, similar to that found during the Victorian period. But while the temptation to compare Athenian women to the women of the 19th century, the "angels at the hearth," is strong due to the degree to which middle and upper-class women in both societies were removed from participation in public life, there are notable differences. Women in the 19th century were considered to be more pure than men and were seen as nurturing, moralizing influences, but to the ancient Greek men, women were a force that

⁴ All translation are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁵ Rusten 1989, 176. For further discussion of the omission of women in court cases of the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, see Schaps 1977, 323-30.

⁶ Blundell 1998, 12.

⁷ See Davidson 1997 and Pomeroy 1975 for further discussion the participation of prostitutes and courtesans in Greek society.

needed to be controlled: “the private sphere was seen as a threat to the norms of public life – the source of disruptive individual interests and ambitions – rather than as a basis for training in the co-operative virtues.”⁸ Therefore, women were assigned domestic roles through which they could be more easily controlled. They were excluded from the public, political and economic spheres, and so apparently it was as wife and mother that a woman could most fully participate in Greek society.

Not surprisingly there is not much information, either in ancient sources or secondary scholarship, on the relationship between mothers and daughters in ancient Greece. There are, of course, numerous reasons for this. Male authors in antiquity had little interest in this type of relationship. Boys were the preferred children, and infant girls were much more likely to be exposed.⁹ It is impossible to tell whether a mother would have secretly hoped for a girl or whether she, too, desired a son. And yet poetry, at times, depicts loving relationships between mothers and daughters. While many of these examples are mythological or fictional, there is also a fragment attributed to Sappho that mentions her daughter:

ἔστι μοι κάλα πάις χρυσίοισιν ἀνθέμοισιν
 ἐμφέρη < ν > ἔχουσα μόρφαν Κλείς ἀγαπάτα,
 ἀντὶ τᾶς ἔγωγὸν Λυδίαν παῖσαν οὐδ’ ἐράνναν... (Fr. 132)

I have a beautiful child whose form is like golden flowers
 Beloved Kleis, in exchange for whom I would not
 Have all Lydia nor lovely...

This gentle poem gives just a glimpse into a tender relationship between mother and daughter.

The literary, archaeological and artistic sources that do exist provide the following general outline of the lives of Athenian women. Girls were married at a very early age and would have generally left their own family to live with the family of their husbands. When a

⁸ Humphreys 1993, 69-70.

⁹ Demand 2004, 17.

mother had a girl, she expected to have to part with her as early as age fourteen, and the two would not necessarily remain in close contact after the marriage, especially if the daughter moved far away. Presumably, when the daughter moved into her husband's household, her mother-in-law (if still living) was also there. Again, though, there is not an excessive amount of primary material on mothers-in-law, and the nature of this relationship has to be conjectured based on myth and literature. Demand even argues that the figure of mother-in-law was often purposely censored, but she also suggests as another reason that the sources are so meager the fact that a husband's mother was not likely to have survived beyond the point at which he was married: "The average female age at death was probably about forty-five. Golden estimates that only about 40 percent of mothers lived to see a son's child. When fewer than half of the brides had mothers-in-law, it may be that the culture did not allot them an active matriarchal role in the new family structure, even if they continued to live in the household."¹⁰

While daughters did leave their households at an early age, they would have spent most of their early years with their own mothers. Free citizen girls were carefully kept inside the home where they could be watched and protected until they were married. The less contact they had with the outside world the better, and the easier to keep their honor and the honor of the *oikos* in tact.¹¹ Since girls did not usually go to school, it would be from their mothers that daughters learned the necessary tools and skills for their own lives as wives and mothers. Women would do all types of jobs inside the *oikos*: manage the household, clean, garden, cook, work with wool, and make clothing for the family. In a wealthy household, the wife would oversee the slaves who were at work on these tasks. Mothers instructed daughters on these duties as well, and young girls spent much time watching after younger siblings and making

¹⁰ Demand 2004, 17.

¹¹ Pomeroy 1975, 72.

items for their trousseaus.¹² And even though girls did not receive any formal education, some did learn how to read, which would help in household management duties, and wealthy families may have provided their daughters with lessons in singing or lyre-playing.¹³ Thus, even if a new wife found herself without a mother-in-law, she could rely on the knowledge and experience that she gained while growing up and taking care of younger siblings, as well as help from other women in the household, friends and neighbors.¹⁴

What, then, can Greek tragedy, written by men and performed by men, tell us about the lives of Greek women? In this thesis, I examine the representations of Electra and Clytemnestra in the plays of Euripides and Sophocles, using knowledge of the mother-daughter bond in contemporary Athenian society as well as modern psychoanalytical theories of mother-daughter relationships.

Scholarship on the *Electra* Plays

The *Electra* plays of Sophocles and Euripides offer two unique versions of the aftermath of Agamemnon's murder. Since each play contains many of the same main characters, with the same action leading up to the murders of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, and since each was written around the same time in the same city, much of the scholarship compares and contrasts the two works, and their respective playwrights. One major focus of this compare-and-contrast approach has been to explore the differences in the action of each play, for example why Sophocles reverses the order of the murders, having Orestes kill Clytemnestra first and then Aegisthus, rather than the other way around as in Euripides' and Aeschylus' renderings, and why Euripides chooses *not* to include Clytemnestra's dream (which is so prominent in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*). The characters, too, are examined against each other. For example, Knox, who

¹² Pomeroy 1975, 63.

¹³ Blundell 1998, 10.

¹⁴ Demand 2004, 22.

credits Sophocles with presenting us with the “tragic hero,” contrasts the Sophoclean hero with the Euripidean one: “Except for Medea, the characteristic Euripidean hero suffers rather than acts...The Sophoclean characters are responsible, through their action and intransigence, for the tragic consequences, but in Euripidean tragedy disaster usually strikes capriciously and blindly.”¹⁵ Scholars often use these differences in plot and character to try to answer questions about the intentions of the playwrights themselves, such as whether Sophocles and Euripides support or denounce the killing of Clytemnestra.

In the scholarship on the individual plays, many of the same topics reappear. Arguments about Sophocles’ *Electra* often center on the author’s views on the matricide. Did Sophocles see it as a just act, or did he condemn it? As Finglass points out in his commentary to this *Electra*, “It often seems...scholars quickly make up their mind whether they are optimists or pessimists. With that decision made, they go through the play and force every episode into their preferred *schema*, without stopping to ask whether the drama might be too complicated a work to submit to such a Procrustean practice.”¹⁶ Kells, for example, falls into the optimist category, and his praise of Sophocles’ craftsmanship is echoed in many other scholars’ commentaries: “Sophocles’ *Electra* is undoubtedly one of the world’s greatest plays...Not a line, not a word is misplaced or superfluous. It is the work, not merely of a great artist, but of an inspired artist.”¹⁷ Further, the commentaries on Sophocles’ *Electra*, much more so than those on Euripides’ play, focus on the character of Electra herself. Knox sees Electra as exhibiting the qualities of a typical Sophoclean hero, right along with Ajax, Philoctetes, Oedipus and Antigone.

While the verdict is somewhat divided in Sophoclean scholarship, most argue that Euripides is much less in favor of the matricide and that he even portrays Clytemnestra in a

¹⁵ Knox 1966, 5.

¹⁶ Finglass 2007, 9.

¹⁷ Kells 1973, 1.

somewhat sympathetic light. Kells states that Euripides denounced the matricide by having Orestes reproach Apollo, who commanded it.¹⁸ And while Sophocles' *Electra* is generally viewed as the model of a heroic figure, Euripides' *Electra* is much less so: "Electra's thirst for revenge derives more from her own sufferings and her personal hatred than from her sense of duty to the memory of her father (though the latter element is not lacking.) Heroic stature is absent in *Electra* and still more in Orestes."¹⁹ Euripides' *Electra* is generally seen as a darker, less optimistic rendering of the myth.

While these have been the major issues in the scholarship on the two *Electra* plays, certainly some scholars have been sensitive to other aspects, including gender. Zeitlin argues that women are never "an end in themselves" in Greek tragedy, even though they may occupy center stage; they function as adjuncts, catalysts, agents, blockers, destroyers, or, as *Electra* does, as assistants to the males in the play.²⁰ Often though, *Electra*'s gender is not a central focus and becomes just a side-note in a larger argument. For example, writing on Sophocles' *Electra* Kells states, "Given her dedication to a single purpose, her intransigence, and her lack of realistic commonsense, we shall see how relentless association with the revenge-principle ruins her mentally and morally. Herself childless, she shall fail to comprehend her mother's maternity, mistaking the psychology of fear for that of pride." Kells, however, fails to elaborate on this interesting idea and continues in the next paragraph with more factors that lead to *Electra*'s ruin. Many scholars provide similarly thought-provoking statements that are quickly abandoned. Others, Knox for example, pay little attention to gender. In his attempt to create an image of the Sophoclean hero, he does not consider how *Electra*, and *Antigone* for that matter, differ from *Ajax*, *Oedipus*, and *Philoctetes*.

¹⁸ Kells 1973, 2.

¹⁹ Kamberbeek 1953, 8.

²⁰ Zeitlin 1990, 69.

Clytemnestra, Electra, and the Failure of Mothering on the Attic Stage

In chapter one, “Normative Mother-Daughter Relationships in Greek Tragedy,” I first examine Demeter and Persephone in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* as a precursor text which would have been familiar to an Attic audience. This Hymn from around 650 BCE sets up the patterns and norms of diction which establish a broad framework for reciprocal mother-daughter relationships. With these features from a functional relationship in mind, I turn to Attic tragedies and focus on the relationships of Clytemnestra and Iphigenia in Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Hecuba and Polyxena in Euripides’ *Hecuba*, and Deianeira and Iole in Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*. These three pairs provide both functional and dysfunctional examples of the mother-daughter bond and help to bolster and flesh out the normative pattern established by the Hymn.

These examples are relatively positive, though not without their own problems. For example, Demeter is nearly incapacitated by the loss of Persephone, and both Clytemnestra in *Iphigenia in Aulis* and Hecuba in *Hecuba* are extremely, and understandably, distressed when faced with the sacrifices of their daughters. In the Hymn and the three tragedies, the mother hopes that her daughter will grow up, marry a powerful husband, and produce children; in addition, there is a warm, reciprocal cross-generational bond between the two women. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the bond between Demeter and Persephone is so close that when Persephone is snatched up and taken to the underworld, Demeter roams the earth in search of her, and she eventually becomes so distressed that she causes all the crops to stop growing. In Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Clytemnestra is overjoyed at the prospect of Iphigenia’s wedding to Achilles and thoroughly questions Agamemnon about the lineage of her new son-in-law. Seeing Agamemnon’s tears, which she interprets as sadness at seeing his daughter leave the household, Clytemnestra points out that she, too, will feel sad to see Iphigenia go: οὐχ ᾧδ’

ἀσύνετός εἰμι, πείσεσθαι δέ με / καὐτὴν δόκει τάδ', ὥστε μή σε νουθετεῖν, / ὅταν σὺν ὑμεναίοισιν ἐξάγω κόρην “I am not so without sense, but it seems that I will be experiencing this very thing; thus I don’t admonish you, when I lead the girl out with marriage songs.” (Eur. *IA* 691-93) Later in the same play, Clytemnestra is distraught and enraged when she learns that her daughter will be sacrificed, and she does all she can to protect Iphigenia. In *Hecuba*, Polyxena herself points out that she was raised with the hope of being βασιλεῦσι σύμφη, “the bride for kingly men,” (Eur. *Hec.* 352), and Hecuba begs Odysseus that she be sacrificed along with her daughter (391-93). Despite the fact that Helen and Hermione have been separated for years, Electra in Euripides’ *Orestes* claims that Helen, who greatly fears the hatred of the whole Greek world still finds comfort and solace in her daughter (Eur. *Or.* 62-66).

In the second chapter, “Clytemnestra and Electra’s Interactions,” I examine the atypical relationship between Clytemnestra and Electra in each *Electra* play against the cultural norms discussed in chapter one. While mother-daughter relationships in ancient Athenian society were expected to provide comfort and support, with the mother preparing her daughter for womanhood, marriage, and childbirth, and with the daughter comforting her mother in old age, in neither play does the relationship between Electra and Clytemnestra appropriately fulfill these duties.²¹ The language each woman uses reflects what she sees as the incorrect behavior of the other, Clytemnestra as mother and Electra as daughter. For example, Sophocles’ Electra characterizes Clytemnestra as μήτηρ ἀμήτωρ, “mother who is not a mother.” (Soph. *El.* 1154) In fact, throughout his play, she constantly avoids calling Clytemnestra her mother.²² Further, in

²¹ To some extent in Euripides, but especially in Sophocles where they specifically refer to Electra as child (for example in line 251), the Chorus of women takes over the role of the caring, wise mother that Clytemnestra is unable or unwilling to perform: ἀλλ’ οὖν εὐνοία γ’ αὐδῶ, / μήτηρ ὡσεὶ τις πιστά, / μὴ τίκτειν σ’ ἄταν ἄταις. “But therefore, to be sure, I speak to you with kindness, just like some trusty mother, that you don’t bear ruin upon ruin.” (Soph. *El.* 233-35) For further discussion, see chapter 2, page 56.

²² For an analysis of Electra’s disavowal of Clytemnestra as a mother figure, see chapter 2, page 53-55.

each play, Electra uses the language of sight and viewing to call attention to her sufferings and to distance herself from Clytemnestra.

Strangely, both Euripides' and Sophocles' *Electra* plays contain hints that Clytemnestra is a sympathetic or loving character, akin to the Clytemnestra of *Iphigenia in Aulis*. In Euripides' s tragedy, Electra's rustic husband even admits that, though Clytemnestra is cruel, she protected Electra from being killed by Aegisthus by marrying her off to a poor farmer (Eur. *El.* 27-28). Furthermore, Clytemnestra quickly comes to help Electra perform the duties and sacrifices associated with childbirth, unwittingly facilitating her own death. Sophocles' Clytemnestra claims that it is impossible for a mother to truly hate her own children: δεινὸν τὸ τίκτειν ἔστιν· οὐδὲ γὰρ κακῶς / πάσχοντι μῖσος ὧν τέκη προσγίγνεται. "To give birth is terrible; not even for the one suffering badly does hatred arise for the child whom she bore." (Soph. *El.* 770-71) How, then, do these hints of sympathy and kindness function in the two tragedies? Do they simply provide a stark contrast to Clytemnestra's behavior, underscoring her cruelty? Or do they serve to cast doubt upon the legitimacy of Electra's own deeds?

In the third chapter, "Clytemnestra, Electra and Succession," I first establish Hesiod's *Theogony* and the *Odyssey*, as archaic Greek 'precursor texts' which, like the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, would have been familiar to 5th century Athenians. These two works establish a paradigm for succession on which the *Electra* plays draw: the possible usurpation of an absent ruler's kingdom (*Odyssey*) and the overthrow of the older generation by the younger and the assumption of the kingship (*Theogony*).

The triangle of Orestes, Electra, and Clytemnestra subverts this succession pattern, in which a mother and a child successfully overthrow the father/husband/king. Looking at various examples of such myths, I argue that Electra, posing as a mother and adopting/creating a child,

overthrows not her husband, but her own mother, who is in fact the most powerful and threatening monarch in the city of Argos.

Clytemnestra's "faulty" mothering fails to provide Electra with the safeguards she needs for her own adulthood, a husband and a child, and robs her of the protection of a brother. Both the ideal psychological bonds between mother and daughter and the supportive political functions of family, inheritance, and succession have broken down. Electra, in each play, unable to secure a husband or a child in the normal manner, fashions herself as a surrogate or even fabricated mother in order to facilitate the murder of Clytemnestra. In Sophocles' version of the story, Electra virtually steps in as Orestes' mother. She frequently mentions that she raised Orestes and even claims that Clytemnestra accuses her of having nourished Orestes for the express purpose of punishing her: ὄν πολλὰ δὴ μέ σοι τρέφειν μιάστορα / ἐπητιάσω. "The one whom you have many times accused me of rearing as an avenger against you." (Soph. *El.* 603-4) Further, just as Sophocles' Clytemnestra uses the childbirth and labor to claim a greater right to their children than Agamemnon,²³ Electra uses this same language regarding Orestes: οἴμοι τάλαιρα τῆς ἐμῆς πάλαι τροφῆς / ἀνωφελήτου, τὴν ἐγὼ θάμ' ἀμφὶ σοὶ / πόνῳ γλυκεῖ παρέσχον. "Alas for the uselessness of my wretched nursing long ago, which I often provided for you in sweet labor." (Soph. *El.* 1143-45) Thus, Electra treats her brother as if he were her own child, and then uses him to murder their mother and avenge their father; in this act she resembles characters such as Gaia and Rhea in the *Theogony*, and Phoenix's mother in the *Iliad*, who all use a male child to overthrow or thwart their tyrannical husbands.

In Euripides' *Electra*, Electra essentially poses as a wife and mother. Though technically married to a poor farmer, they never consummate the marriage. Electra does not fulfill her

²³ In Sophocles' *Electra*, Clytemnestra argues that she had more of a claim to her children than Agamemnon since she suffered through labor with them: οὐκ ἴσον καμῶν ἐμοὶ / λύπης, ὅτ' ἔσπειρ', ὥσπερ ἡ τικτοῦσ' ἐγὼ, "Suffering pain not equal to me, when he sowed his seed, as I when giving birth." (Soph. *El.* 532-33)

“function” as a wife, and, in fact, she frequently laments her current state. Even more strikingly, Electra actually creates a child for herself; she becomes a false mother.²⁴ In order to lure Clytemnestra out to the farmer’s house so that Orestes can kill her, Electra sends word to her mother that she has given birth and that she needs help in caring for the newborn and attending to the necessary purification rituals. Here, once again, Electra uses a false or fabricated child in order to bring about the death of her mother. She effectively manipulates Clytemnestra and takes advantage of Clytemnestra’s maternal feelings.

Ultimately, in part because Clytemnestra has not performed her role as a mother in ways that are satisfactory to her daughter, Electra is unable to attain the “normal” adult relationships that a girl of her position would expect and instead is left to create her own flawed familial relations. Thus, she too experiences a failure either to receive mothering or to nurture another.

²⁴ In this play, Electra’s bond with Orestes is focused much more on the fact that they are brother and sister, rather than mother-child. However, she still does not fulfill her sisterly duties correctly, as she convinces Orestes to kill their mother when it becomes increasingly clear that he does not really want to do so.

CHAPTER ONE

NORMATIVE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS IN GREEK TRAGEDY

Introduction

While many aspects of the lives of women in 5th century Athens remain obscured due to a lack of concrete sources, multiple examples of mother-daughter relationships in ancient Greek epic still exist. Using these literary works can add to an understanding of Athenian women; however, one also has to be mindful of their limitations. As Ormand writes: “[In tragedy] there is another large and complex pattern of imagery that focuses on what men thought *the women themselves* experienced in getting married. Here, clearly, is one of our best sources for the informal social structures in which women lived (though again, these representations should not be confused with actual female experience).”¹ Yet, in combination with the archaeological and ritual evidence, an analysis of these four mother-daughter pairs (Demeter and Persephone from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Clytemnestra and Iphigenia from Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Hecuba and Polyxena from Euripides’ *Hecuba*, and Deianeira and Iole from Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*) can help to form a broad “normative” framework for mother-daughter interactions in ancient Athens. Since in each one of these examples the daughter is a young girl right at the age of marriage, it is important first to understand what marriage means to her and her family in the ancient Athens in which these literary works are situated.

In ancient Athens, a young girl’s marriage was *the* major transition periods in her life. Boys prepared for several discrete changes in status and position in society; girls spent their lives

¹ Ormand 1999, 25.

preparing to move from *parthenos* to *gunê*, from maiden to woman/wife.² Community rituals and religious ceremonies as well as day-to-day activities in the household would have readied them for marriage, motherhood, and domestic duties; for a girl not to be married in ancient Athens was an anomaly and a ground for censure.³ Embedded in their ideas about marriage was a contrast in Greek thought between the negative image of woman as a dangerous threat to the social order and the more positive image of a controlled wife and reproductive mother.⁴ Marriage can be viewed as one step in a process of maturation, domestication, and training that brings a girl, born completely outside of the male world, under the control of male society. Other moments in this progression include menarche, defloration, and the birth of the first child, but marriage is the one event most fully under the control of males.⁵ Marriage allowed men to make alliances between families (through exogamous marriages), protect inherited wealth (through endogamous marriages), and provide a place for the production of legitimate male heirs.

The wedding is one of the best attested rituals in ancient Greece.⁶ Because it was such an important part of the lives of nearly all women and men, weddings were a popular topic in art, especially vase paintings, and in literature of all genres. These artistic representations employ a wide variety of symbols and images and tell many different stories. Weddings were acknowledged as times of joy and sadness, and are depicted through positive and negative

² For further discussion of marriage and its role in the lives of Greek boys and girls, see Vernant, J. P. (1980) "Marriage," in *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, 45-70.

³ Seaford 1987, 106.

⁴ King 2002, 92. See Xenophon's *Oeconomicos*, chapter 7, for a lengthy discussion of the proper training and education of a young wife.

⁵ King 2002, 79-80 explains, "Menarche is a transition which neither men nor women can control. Marriage, in Greek society, is under male control, being arranged between *oikos* heads. Defloration is more ambiguous, covering a spectrum ranging from male control (rape) to female control (seduction). The first parturition may appear as an entirely female event, but there is scope for male control; men are necessary not only for conception but also to bring on labor by having intercourse with their wives and as doctors to speed up labor with appropriate drugs."

⁶ Oakley and Sinos 1993, 3.

imagery. Seaford discusses the varying metaphors and ideas surrounding weddings in Greek literature: the bride, often thought of as a wild, untamed young creature, is forced to undergo an abrupt passage from one life to another; the marrying a young girl is commonly likened to yoking an animal or plucking a flower. In the ceremony, however, the bride is given praise and blessings, and her role in bearing children is recognized. Marriage is figured as a victory of positive over negative tendencies but also of culture over nature.⁷

Typically a wedding was regarded as a positive event, a moment of extreme happiness for both sides.⁸ For the bride, it led to the culmination of her role as a woman. Most of the rituals of a marriage ceremony focused on her.⁹ Even for people who were not members of the bride's or groom's family, a wedding was an exciting communal event. A well-wisher in epic commonly prefaced a plea for pity or help by a wish for prosperity in marriage, as at *Odyssey 6* when Odysseus approaches Nausicaa for help (*Od.* 6.156-61). In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter addresses the young, unmarried daughters of Metaneira with a similar greeting¹⁰: ἄλλ' ὑμῖν μὲν πάντες Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες / δοῖεν κουριδίουσ' ἄνδρας καὶ τέκνα τεκέσθαι / ὥς ἐθέλουσι τοκῆς· “But may all those holding Olympian homes give to you wedded husbands and children to bear, as your parents wish.” (*HDem.* 135-37) In Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Clytemnestra is excited at the prospect of her daughter's marriage to Achilles, and at the mere rumor that there will be a wedding, the messenger runs about shouting joyously for garlands and baskets to be prepared, for the pipe to sound and dancing to begin. He exclaims to Menelaus: φῶς γὰρ τόδ' ἦκει μακάριον τῇ παρθένῳ. “For this very day is a blessed one for

⁷ Seaford 1987, 106.

⁸ Oakley and Sinos 1993, 3, argue that this expectation is one reason that disrupted weddings are such common events in tragedy. Many tragedies deal with brides or grooms who die just before marriage or even during the preparations for their weddings. One such example is Euripides' fragmentary *Phaethon*, in which the young man dies as his wedding is being prepared on stage and the chorus is singing a wedding song for him and his bride.

⁹ Oakley and Sinos 1993, 10.

¹⁰ Foley 1994, 43.

the maiden” (Eur. *IA* 439) and embodies the enthusiasm of the entire army camp at the prospect of the marriage.

Nevertheless, for the ancient Greeks, there was also a sense of fear, reluctance, or sadness associated with weddings. In Greek literature, marriages were either uxorilocal, as in the case of Helen and Menelaus, or virilocal, as with Clytemnestra and Agamemnon or Penelope and Odysseus. In Athens, marriages were generally virilocal, lending sadness to an otherwise happy event, especially for the bride’s family. Once the daughter was married, she was under her husband’s guardianship. It was he who would decide where they would live, as Agamemnon explains when Clytemnestra asks if Iphigenia will go to Phthia with Achilles: κείνῳ μελήσει ταῦτα τῷ κεκτημένῳ, “These things will be a care for that one who is gaining her.” (Eur. *IA* 715) The bride’s separation from her family was often figured both ritually and artistically as a form of death, adding an ominous tone to the event. The bride and groom had to undergo a process of separation, transition and incorporation; the wedding ritual symbolized a parting with the previous existence and marked the move to their new life together.¹¹ For a bride, who may only be in her mid-teens at the time of marriage, the wedding could be a time of anxiety and isolation, as it created separation from family and friends.

The bride’s family, too, would experience sadness at this separation. Both mother and father could feel the loss of a beloved daughter acutely while recognizing the marriage as a blessing. In Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Agamemnon, though he is really crying because his daughter is to be sacrificed, expresses with apparent sincerity the sadness which might equally accompany the giving of a daughter in marriage: ἀποστολαὶ γὰρ μακάριαι μὲν, ἀλλ’ ὅμως / δάκνουσι τοὺς τεκόντας, ὅταν ἄλλοις δόμοις / παῖδας παραδιδῶ πολλὰ μοχθήσας

¹¹ Oakley and Sinos 1993, 3.

πατήρ. “For this sending off is indeed blessed, but nevertheless it stings the parents, whenever a father who has toiled very much hands his child over to another household.” (Eur. *IA* 688-90) Here Agamemnon voices a father’s grief over the loss of his daughter, in this case a daughter who especially cherishes her father.¹²

In Greek literature, the mother-daughter relationship is generally figured as intimate and loving, due to the close, reciprocal bonds that existed between the two.¹³ The bond is especially close in cases where the mother has no other children, such as Helen in Euripides’ *Orestes* or when she has lost all of her other children, such as Hecuba in Euripides’ *Hecuba*, because these mothers literally have no one else for solace. There is πόθος, then, at the time of a daughter’s wedding because the mother is being separated from a beloved child, helpmate, and companion.¹⁴ Such suffering may have been especially bitter in a society where the female role was devalued and women were somewhat isolated from one another, as seems to be the case in 5th century Athens. Psychologist Nancy Chodorow points out that in communities where women have close bonds with women outside of their immediate families and where mothers and daughters remain in close contact after the daughter marries, a mother has less reason to keep her daughter from individuating and becoming less dependent; she has other women to help fulfill her psychological and social needs. Further, because the daughter is surrounded as she grows up

¹²While Electra is perhaps the quintessential example of a daughter who is unquestionably devoted to her father (or his memory), Iphigenia had a similar attachment. In *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Clytemnestra asserts that of all the children she has borne, Iphigenia has always especially loved her father (φιλοπάτωρ...μάλιστα, Eur. *IA* 638-39), and Iphigenia frequently addresses him with loving phrases such as φίλτατ’ ἐμοὶ πάτερ “my most dear father.” (Eur. *IA* 652)

¹³Chodorow 1978, 110, argues that, due to women’s primary parenting function, mothers have a greater feeling of sameness with daughters than with sons and that for daughters, differentiation is a longer and more difficult process than for sons. Further, she writes, “a daughter does not simply identify with her mother or want to be like her mother. Rather, mother and daughter maintain elements of their primary relationship which means they will feel alike in fundamental ways.”

¹⁴I use the term πόθος as a metaphor to encompass all the feelings of sadness, longing, and loss that occur when a mother and daughter are separated. However, the term also appears in Greek epic and tragedy to explain these feelings, as I will discuss later in the chapter.

by other women who serve as mediators between mother and daughter, she is provided with multiple models for personal identification and multiple objects for attachment, and these help her to differentiate from her mother.¹⁵ But in cases where this support system is weak, separation might be all the more painful for both mother and daughter.

The close connection between wedding ceremonies and funerals in Greek culture would also heighten the πόθος of a mother faced with her daughter's marriage. Inasmuch as both ceremonies represented transitions from one phase of life to another, weddings and funerals shared many features. Although little is known about funerary dress, corpses were more often dressed in white, like brides, than in black. Both brides and corpses might wear garlands, fine jewelry and a special *peplos*. Virgins who died near the time of marriage as well as newly married young women were often buried in bridal attire and said to be brides of Hades, like Persephone.¹⁶ Brides and corpses were both ritually washed, and sacrifices were offered before both ceremonies.

The transitional period of marriage could be dangerous. The likelihood that a young bride would soon become pregnant and the high rate of death during childbirth made the transition to a wife and mother quite literally a perilous one. Further religious cults, such as the one to Artemis at Brauron, made the dangerous aspects of leaving maidenhood explicit. One myth tells of a young girl in the service of Artemis who was turned into a bear by the goddess as punishment for losing her virginity.¹⁷ Since Artemis presided over both virgins and childbirth, young brides had to appease her in both these roles. Women who died in childbirth were

¹⁵ Chodorow. 1994, 262.

¹⁶ Foley 2001, 311.

¹⁷ For more on the cult of Artemis at Brauron, where young girls serve for a period of time before their marriages and "act the bear" for Artemis, see Burkert 1977, 151.

considered to be victims of Artemis, and their garments were dedicated at Brauron.¹⁸ Girls offered sacrifices to Artemis as they left behind their childhood and virginity. There are also cases of girls lamenting or offering sacrifices and libations to mythical figures, including Iphigenia, who died as virgins, and this perhaps is an expression of the loss of virginity and girlhood felt by the bride at the time of her marriage.¹⁹

Literary examples make the link between marriage and death explicit. Various genres provide examples of young maidens or new brides who die or are sacrificed: in Euripides' *Suppliants* Evadne dresses in wedding attire to prepare for her suicide over her husband's pyre. In Euripides' *Medea*, Jason's new bride, decked in her bridal gown, dies horribly after donning the robe that she thinks is a wedding gift. Seaford argues that Sophocles presents Antigone's death in a manner that also evokes a wedding.²⁰ The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* serves as a divine prototype of this phenomenon. Although Persephone, a goddess herself, does not die, she literally becomes a bride of Hades and is completely separated from her mother, initially forever, and then for one-third of the year: "Persephone's rape/marriage is an entry into the realm of death, and the associations between marriage and death were so powerful in Greek myth, literature, and cult that at their death both real and tragic virgins were often called brides of Hades."²¹ In tragedy, mothers faced with the actual sacrifice of their young daughters, such as Clytemnestra with Iphigenia and Hecuba with Polyxena, experience the same anguish, but with even greater intensity.

Another way in which mothers suffer at this critical point in their daughters' maturation is that they are forced to relive their own, possibly jarring, terrifying, or simply dissatisfying,

¹⁸ Burkert 1977, 151.

¹⁹ Seaford 1987, 108.

²⁰ Seaford 1987, 108.

²¹ Foley 2001, 310.

experiences with marriage. In many Greek literary works, all admittedly written by males, the young daughter has to face frightening aspects of her impending marriage (or sacrifice), aspects which the mother too endured when she was a girl. Sometimes mothers and daughters even react in similar ways, with occasional flashbacks that hint at aspects of the mother's marriage. In Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Clytemnestra harshly reminds Agamemnon of how he won her by force (βίβ) only after killing her former husband Tantalus and dashing her infant child to the ground (Eur. *IA* 1148-52). Deianeira spends much of Sophocles' *Trachiniae* reminiscing on her life before marriage and recounts the terrifying experience of being courted by the river god Achelous (Soph. *Trach.* 6-17). She also relates to Iole as if to a younger self, or even a daughter. These examples show a mother, at the time of her daughter's marriage, recalling her own experiences, good or bad, and empathizing with her child, or a surrogate child, who has little choice but to undergo the same ordeal.

Further, the mother in such literary contexts may empathize with a daughter who lacks agency, and who, like herself, is totally removed from any involvement in what is ultimately the decisive event in her life. In Athens, the marriage contract, *engyê*, was made between the groom and the father or male guardian of the bride. In some cases, the bride was betrothed at an early age, and many young girls never met their husbands before the wedding. In Greek tragedy, decisions concerning the marriage (or in some cases the sacrifice) of the young girl are made solely by the father and the designated bridegroom.

Marriage, as an exchange of women meant to benefit men, disregards the feelings and the opinions of the women completely. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Zeus orchestrates Persephone's abduction and marriage to Hades totally unbeknownst to Demeter. The lack of agency intensifies Demeter's suffering: despite attempts to save her daughter, which range from

physical contact to emotional pleas and reasoned arguments, she is ultimately abandoned to the control of men. The mother realizes that her daughter is being used as a pawn in the relations of men, based, as it seems to her, on randomness and unfair reasoning.²² In Euripides' *Hecuba*, for example, Hecuba tries to argue with both Agamemnon and Odysseus, questioning the rationale behind sacrificing an innocent girl, Polyxena, to Achilles, rather than Helen, who is both the most desirable woman and the cause of the war. In the end, Polyxena ends up being little more than a beautiful prize of honor for the great warrior Achilles' tomb rather than a young girl with any kind of selfhood. Polyxena's sacrifice in the war that began because Helen eloped with Paris is especially unfair. Clytemnestra, too, in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* even suggests that Helen's child be sacrificed rather than her own daughter. From the perspective of the mothers, these sacrifices are clearly arbitrary and unfair. The sense that their daughters are suffering undeservedly adds to the mothers' anger and grief.

In one way, however, the daughters can sometimes gain an iota of control, as they often choose to go willingly to sacrifice. Polyxena, Iphigenia, and Macaria, the maiden daughter of Heracles in Euripides' *Heraclidae*, all voluntarily sacrifice themselves, rather than being violently dragged to the altar. Although each case is a little different, these characters make a conscious decision to "forgo marriage and sacrifice their lives for family, state, or nation."²³ How much agency the daughters really exhibit is debatable, but the mothers are left behind begging and pleading, trying to get the daughters to change their minds. They are then even further removed from their daughters' lives, a separation which is difficult enough under normal circumstances, as the daughters willingly hand themselves over to the control of men.

²² See Rubin 1975, for marriage as an exchange between men, and a way for them to navigate their relations to each other.

²³ Foley 2001, 123.

A final aspect of the language of grief felt at the marriage or sacrifice of a daughter is that the mother is also re-experiencing the pains she felt while giving birth. Throughout these works, mothers comment repeatedly on the pleasure and pain that comes with bearing and raising children. The argument that a tragic mother uses to try to save her daughter always includes a claim to the child based on the fact that she suffered already in giving birth. The daughter has literally been physically removed from the mother once, and this, at least in the mind of the mother, should give her some right to and control over her daughter's body. Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* claims that she hates her husband because he has murdered Iphigenia and so sacrificed her own "most beloved pain": ὅς οὐ προτιμῶν, ὡσπερὲν βοτοῦ μῦρον, μῆλων φλεόντων εὐπόκοις νομεύμασιν, ἔωσεν αὐτοῦ παῖδα, φιλτάτην ἐμοὶ ὤδιν', "He who taking no heed, just as if it was the fate of a beast, with sheep teeming in the well-fleeced flocks, sacrificed his own child, my most beloved pain." (Aes. Ag.1415-18) The Greek term *ôdis*, as Loraux explains, describes specifically the pangs of labor or the outcome of childbirth: "The young daughter Iphigenia incarnates for her mother a life that has barely been detached from her own body and whose loss her mother feels all the more in an instant of sinister repetition of the wrenching of the ultimate separation—as if Clytemnestra could not stop giving birth in endless parturition as long as her daughter lived."²⁴ Childbirth, another liminal maturation moment in a woman's life, was certainly a painful and dangerous time, especially in the ancient world before modern medicine and anesthesia. It was not uncommon for the mother or the child to die during the process, and in the view of tragic mothers, it is blatantly unjust to have their daughters violently taken from them once again, after they have seen them survive birth and childhood and grow into beautiful young women.

²⁴ Loraux 1998, 39.

Of course, the situations in tragedy are extreme, and in day-to-day real life, the grief that a mother would feel at a daughter's wedding might have varied. Certainly, too, most mothers would have rejoiced and celebrated, even if they felt some sadness. Moreover, mothers participated actively in the wedding ceremony itself, for example, by holding the marriage torch to symbolize their role as a guide to their daughters. In many ways, this participation in an important ceremonial role helped to mitigate the feelings of loss. In *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Clytemnestra even explicitly recognizes the fact that custom and time help ease the pain of separation (Eur. *IA* 694). Wedding rituals focused mainly on the bride in the main transitional period in her life, but her mother would be engaged in preparing her for this day. The mother would help give her daughter a ceremonial bath and would help perform preparatory sacrifices and feasts.

In fact, it was the mothers of the bride and groom who were most directly involved in the transfer of the bride from one house to another.²⁵ On the night of the wedding, the mother of the bride led the procession of torchbearers which guided the bride from her parents' home to the house of her husband. The mother's torch had been lit from her own hearth, and when she reached the groom's house, she lit his family's hearth with the same torch. Although purely symbolic, this carrying of the hearth fire from one house to another allowed the mother of the bride a way to feel emotionally connected to her daughter in her new home. The mother's torch lights the way and protects the daughter until she is received by the groom's mother at the door of her new home, and a "wedding without torches" is one euphemism for an illegitimate marriage.²⁶ In *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Hecuba*, Clytemnestra and Hecuba, respectively, become

²⁵ Oakley and Sinos 1993, 26.

²⁶ Oakley and Sinos 1993, 25.

very upset when they are not allowed to replicate these important mothers' rituals and accompany their daughters to the sacrificial alter.

As a final closure to the marriage rite, on the day after the procession to the groom's house, the mother and father of the bride and other guests would return to continue the feasting, singing and dancing, and most important, to bring various wedding presents called *epaulia*.²⁷ These ceremonies functioned as a way to show respect for the mother-daughter bond and to ritualize the physical separation. Participation by the mother and the father assured an easier acceptance of the loss. The wedding ceremony thus gives the mother a special role in transferring her daughter to her new home and thereby easing the daughter's physical separation from her natal home.

In situations where this small amount of agency is taken away, where mothers are not allowed any such participation in the last moments of their daughters' maidenhood (or life), extreme anger and violence may arise. The men in charge do not even allow Clytemnestra or Hecuba to participate in the procession, dealing a further blow to these distraught mothers. The symbolic aspect present in the transfer of torch fire from one hearth to another is missing; the mother of the bride cannot accompany and protect her child, nor is there a welcoming mother at the other end, only the masses of the Greek army. The mothers try to clutch physically onto their daughters' arms or clothing, challenging the men to violently rip their child away. Clytemnestra offers piteously to accompany her daughter to the sacrifice and hold her garments, as if her touch could somehow protect Iphigenia a little longer; but she is denied even this.

²⁷ Oakley and Sinos 1993, 38.

The Diction of Mother-Daughter Relationships

The diction describing mother-daughter interactions in Greek literature can activate specific story patterns and psychological aspects of this relationship. One large category of reciprocal metaphors deals with the love and care between the two figures. Daughters are helpers, comforters, guides, and supports. They care for their mothers (and fathers) in old age. Hecuba begs Odysseus not to take Polyxena away because she is literally everything to her: ἥδ' ἀντὶ πολλῶν ἐστὶ μοι παραψυχή, / πόλις, τιθήνη, βάκτρον, ἡγεμῶν ὁδοῦ. “This girl is beyond all others a comfort to me, my city, nurse, walking stick, guide on the road.” (Eur. *Hec.* 280-81) Polyxena wonders who will be there to comfort her mother in old age. Even Iphigenia asks Agamemnon in whose house he will dwell when he is old, if she is killed. And though daughters provide much comfort and solace to their mothers, they are still pictured as young animals, calves or other beasts that are cruelly separated from their mothers. Deianeira and Iphigenia are likened to calves, and Polyxena is a colt, πῶλον, ripped from its mother’s breast (Eur. *Hec.* 142). Further, as the character of Rhea in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* illustrates, a mother can be a mediator, an intermediary capable of calming and placating her daughter (*HDem* 458).²⁸

Mothers and daughters are often depicted in terms connoting desire, suffering and sympathy. The word πόθῳ is repeated several times in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, even the old servant recognizes Clytemnestra and Iphigenia’s mutual suffering: οἰκτρὰ πάσεχτον δὺ’ οὔσαι· δεινὰ δ’ Ἀγαμέμνων ἔτλη. “Both of you suffer wretched pains; and this is a terrible deed of Agamemnon.” (Eur. *IA* 887) Adjectives such as δεινὰ and δειλίαια are commonly used. There is also often the assertion that having children is a

²⁸ Thetis in the *Iliad* and Gaia in the *Theogony* are other examples of mothers who perform the role of mediator or counsellor. For further discussion of Rhea’s role as a mediator, see below, pages 29-30.

mix of pain and pleasure. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra reminds the audience of the extreme pain she suffered when she bore Iphigenia and in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* she argues: δεινὸν τὸ τίκτειν καὶ φέρει φίλτρον μέγα / πᾶσιν τε κοινόν ἔσθ' ὑπερκάμνειν τέκνων. "To bear children is a terrible thing and it bears a great charm, it is common to all to burn for their children." (Eur. *IA* 917-18) All these examples of mother-daughter relationship illustrate, in different ways and in different situations, the capacity that mothers and daughters have to share a very close reciprocal bond and the ways in which male machinations, whether through forced marriage, capture, or sacrifice, can disrupt this connection. In a "normal" situation, this rupture is more easily healed, but in the tragic world, when the mothers are irreparably separated from their daughters, the results are violent and ultimately harmful for the mothers themselves.

Demeter and Persephone

The Hymn portrays a very close bond between the two females, which is ruptured by the snatching of Persephone by her uncle/husband Hades, to whom she has been given by the plans of her father Zeus. Demeter and Persephone are divine, and thus in some ways their experiences are meant to differ from those of mortal women. For example, their story has a relatively positive resolution: Persephone, although separated from her mother for one-third of the year, is not "dead" like many tragic human daughters (Polyxena, Iphigenia). Demeter, though she mourns and grieves for her daughter while she is missing, ultimately sees Persephone restored to her for much of the year, and in fact, both goddesses receive greater honors at the end of their ordeal. Yet the two do serve as a divine example in art and literature for human marriage as a rite of passage in which the bride undergoes a symbolic death before she is reborn and

incorporated into a new household.²⁹ Their story provides what is interpreted by some scholars as the first instance of this form of virilocal marriage. It illustrates the price that marriage exacts on the mother and daughter who have to accept that such an institution requires separation and some degree of submission to the male world.³⁰ In addition, each figure in that story can be thought of individually as an ideal, Demeter of a mother and Persephone of maiden daughter and bride. Persephone's alternate name, Kore, is nearly synonymous with *parthenos*, and as her marriage is both a marriage and a death, she is linked with all of the daughters in ancient Greek literature in the stories wherein marriage is equivalent to sacrificial death—notably Iphigenia, Antigone, Cassandra, Deianeira and Alcestis.³¹

Although Demeter and Persephone exhibit an extraordinary reciprocal bond, their relationship is also violated by the interference of males. Their story incorporates many ideas and practices common to tragic tales of human marriage and sacrifice: that marriages are devised and controlled by men (the groom and the father/guardian) and that the daughter and mother have no say, and that they, in some cases, are unhappy with the arrangements. The first few lines of the hymn combine the idea of marriage by snatching (ἄρπάζω) a bride, perhaps an older tradition but one which is very much present in literature, and the more formal contract of a girl given by her father in marriage:

Δήμητρ' ἠύκομον σεμνήν θεὸν ἄρχομ' αἰεΐδειν,
αὐτήν ἠδὲ θύγατρα τανίσφυρον ἣν Ἄιδωνεύς
ἤρπαξεν, δῶκεν δὲ βαρύκτυπος εὐρύσπα Ζεὺς,
νόσφιν Δήμητρος χρυσαόρου ἀγλαοκάρπου (HDem. 1-2)

Fair-tressed Demeter, holy goddess, I begin to sing,
She herself and her slender ankled daughter, whom Aidoneus
Seized, and deep-thundering, far-seeing Zeus gave her
In secret from Demeter of the golden sword, bearing bright fruit

²⁹ Foley 1994, 104.

³⁰ Foley 1994, 108.

³¹ Ormand 1999, 25.

Hades *seized* and Zeus *gave*, both in secret or apart from (νόσφι) Demeter. The use of this term highlights the fact that not only was Demeter nowhere nearby when Persephone was abducted but that she did not give her consent. Foley reads this as Zeus' attempt to impose upon Persephone a patriarchal and virilocal form of marriage which had previously been uncommon among the Olympians.³² Beyond the fact that Demeter does not know what is going on, the narrator repeatedly emphasizes that Persephone, too, is unwilling, as seen in the following three lines:

ἀρπάξας δ' ἀέκουσαν ἐπὶ χρυσείοισιν ὄχοισιν
ἦγ' ὀλοφυρομένην· (HDem 19-20)

And snatching her [Persephone] unwilling into his golden chariot,
He [Hades] led her away lamenting.

τὴν δ' ἀεκαζομένην ἦγεν Διὸς ἐννεσίησι (HDem 30)

And he [Hades] led her [Persephone] unwilling, by counsels of Zeus

ἦμενον ἐν λεχέεσσι σὺν αἰδοίῃ παρακοίτι
πόλλ' ἀεκαζομένη μητρὸς πόθῳ (HDem 343-44)

[Hades] sitting on the bed with his chaste wife,
She [Persephone] being very unwilling in her longing for her mother

Although these depictions of Persephone are the narrator's focalization, Persephone's own speech emphasizes her unwillingness. When she is finally reunited with her mother, and Demeter immediately asks whether she ate anything while in the underworld, Persephone tells how Hades compelled her by force (βίη) to eat the pomegranate seed, even though she was unwilling, ἀκουσαν (HDem 413). Thus, much like the mortal mothers of tragedy, Demeter has been removed from the decision-making process, and Persephone is an unwilling object; she has been used by Zeus to satisfy his brother who was ready to take a wife and is called a "not

³² Foley 1994, 105.

unsuitable bridegroom,” (οὐ τοι ἀεικὴς / γαμβρὸς), as Helios explains to Demeter in an attempt to diminish her anger (*HDem* 83-84); Hades, too, later affirms to Persephone that among the immortals he will not be an unsuitable husband, ἀεικὴς...ἀκοίτης (*HDem* 363). Demeter, who certainly does not participate in any marriage rituals and is initially unsure of even where her daughter is, grieves as much as any mortal mother.

Unlike the mortal mothers, Demeter as a goddess has some recourse beyond supplications and violent rage. Her anger is directed at Zeus himself:

τὴν δ' ἄχος αἰνότερον καὶ κύντερον ἴκετο θυμόν.
 χωσαμένη δῆπειτα κελαινεφέϊ Κρονίῳ
 νοσφισθεῖσα θεῶν ἀγορὴν καὶ μακρὸν Ὀλυμπον
 ὥχετ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπων πόλιος καὶ πῖονα ἔργα
 εἶδος ἀμαλδύνουσα πολὺν χρόνον· (*HDem.* 90-94)

And a more painful and more shameless grief came upon her heart.
 And being angry then at the son of Kronos black with clouds,
 Abandoning the assembly of the gods and high Olympus,
 She went among the cities of men and the rich fields
 Disguising her form for a long time;

Once her child is taken, Demeter reacts by removing herself from the rest of the gods. Initially she goes among mortals, but after the disastrous episode in the house of Metaneira when she attempts to make the infant Demophon immortal, she further removes herself to her temple and refuses to let anything grow. Mortal mothers, as Loraux points out, have little choice when faced with the loss of a child, and their rage turns to violence; Demeter, however, does have the very powerful weapon of secession. This means that she can choose to remove herself from participation in the assemblies of the gods and refuse to tend to the areas of the human realm that are under her control, including agriculture.³³ When Demeter does not allow any grain to grow and famine overtakes the earth, humans are no longer able to offer the sacrifices which the gods so desire. Therefore, it is not long before Zeus decides that Demeter has to be propitiated.

³³ Loraux 1998, 43.

Clytemnestra, who is eventually killed, and Hecuba, who will turn into a dog and jump from a ship into the sea, are both irreparably separated from their daughters, while Demeter eventually receives greater honors is reunited with her daughter, at least for a large part of the year.

The poem highlights the reciprocity of desire and longing in a mother-daughter relationship. Demeter essentially undergoes mortal mourning rituals, donning dark garments and refusing to eat or drink: ἀλλ' ἀγέλαστος ἄπαστος ἐδητύος ἠδὲ ποτήτος / ἦστο πόθῳ μινύθουσα βαθυζώνοιο θυγατρὸς, “But unsmiling, not tasting food or drink she sat wasting away in desire for her deep-girded daughter” (*HDem.* 200-1). The second line is repeated almost in its entirety about a hundred lines later: ἀτὰρ ξανθὴ Δημήτηρ / ἔνθα καθεζομένη μακάρων ἀπὸ νόσφιν ἀπάντων / μίμνε πόθῳ μινύθουσα βαθυζώνοιο θυγατρὸς. “But golden Demeter sitting there apart from all the blessed ones remained, wasting away in her longing for her deep-girded daughter.” (*HDem* 302-4) Persephone too is affected by this deep desire: πόλλ' ἀεκαζομένη μητρὸς πόθῳ “being very much unwilling in her longing for her mother.” (*HDem* 343-44) Demeter mourns for Persephone as one would mourn for someone who has died, and for all practical purposes, Persephone has, in fact, died. She is physically in the underworld, and Demeter does not seem to be able to go to there herself. Persephone too, grieves, as a mortal daughter might who has just been married and has left her childhood home and her companion/mother for the first time to go to live with a stranger/husband. That the two goddesses feel such a strong longing and desire for each other illustrates the high degree of reciprocity between them, a connection that will be echoed in the human mother-daughter pairs.

The Hymn further emphasizes the close bond that can exist between mother and daughter and the important counseling role that a mother can perform with the role of Rhea, Demeter’s

mother. It is Rhea whom Zeus sends to Demeter as a μετᾶγγελος, a mediator, when Demeter has removed herself from the divine and the human worlds and refuses to let anything grow: ταῖς δὲ μετᾶγγελον ἦκε βαρύκτυπος εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς / Ρεῖην ἠύκομον Δημήτερα κυανόπεπλον / ἀξέμεναι μετὰ φύλα θεῶν, “And to them deep-thundering far-seeing Zeus sent as a mediator fair-tressed Rhea in order to lead dark-robed Demeter among the tribes of the gods.” (*HDem* 441-43) Zeus, father of Persephone and brother of Hades, does not go himself, but sends others: Iris, a messenger goddess who is generally sent on such tasks, tries first, but she is not successful in persuading Demeter to return to the counsels of the god. After Iris, Zeus sends all of the other immortals, who in turn promise immense gifts and honors, but Demeter refuses them all. She will not return until she sets eyes on her daughter. In the end, it is Rhea, as mother to both Demeter and Zeus, who is specially suited to this task, and she is the only one who can comfort Demeter. It is clear that Rhea and Demeter have a close bond, and their delight at seeing one another is reciprocal: ἀσπασίως δ’ ἴδον ἀλλήλας, κεχάρηντο δὲ θυμῶ. “And gladly they saw one another, and they rejoiced in their heart.” (*HDem* 458) Similarly, when Demeter and Persephone are finally reunited, the mutual sense of joy and urgency to reunite speed is striking. Persephone delights (γῆθησεν) when Hades informs her that she can return to her mother, and she leaps up (ἀνόρουσ’) immediately with joy (ὑπὸ χάριτος) (*HDem* 370-71). Demeter rushes (ἦιξ’) down out of her temple to her daughter just like a Maenad, and Persephone runs (θέειν) out of the chariot to embrace her mother (385-389).

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* illustrates the intense grief of a mother at being separated from her daughter, excluded from the decision making process, and unable to participate in the usual ceremonies. The daughter, on her part, responds to the mother’s grief with equal concern and longing.

Clytemnestra and Iphigenia

From tragedy, come several examples of mothers and daughters in the human sphere. In Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the reader sees a Clytemnestra years younger than the more familiar husband-murderer of the *Electra* plays and the *Oresteia* cycle. In order to lure his daughter Iphigenia to Aulis so that he can sacrifice her to Artemis, her father, Agamemnon, sends word that she is to be married to Achilles. Iphigenia and Clytemnestra come, and Clytemnestra is full of the excitement and trepidation that might be expected from a mother: ἐλπίδα δ' ἔχω τιν' ὡς ἐπ' ἑσθλοῖσιν γάμοις / πᾶρειμι νυμφαγωγός. "And I have some hope that I come for a noble marriage as an escort of the bride." (Eur. *IA* 607-8) She carefully questions Agamemnon as to Achilles' worthiness as a groom and his family background. As they discuss the arrangements, she notices Agamemnon's tears, which she interprets as sadness at seeing his daughter married and leaving the household; Clytemnestra points out that she, too, will feel sad to see Iphigenia go: οὐχ ᾧδ' ἀσύνετός εἰμι, πείσεσθαι δέ με / καὐτὴν δόκει τάδ', ὥστε μή σε νουθετεῖν, / ὅταν σὺν ὑμεναίοισιν ἐξάγω κόρην· / ἀλλ' ὁ νόμος αὐτὰ τῶ χρόνῳ συνισχνανεῖ. "I am not so without sense, but it seems that I will be experiencing this very thing (thus I don't admonish you) when I lead the girl out with marriage songs. But custom in time will diminish these very things." (Eur. *IA* 691-94) Clytemnestra is a concerned and loving mother, attentive to all the details in the wedding. She acknowledges the pain of separation, but she also seems to find some comfort, or perhaps distraction, in assuring that everything goes according to plan and custom. Despite the fact that they are at an army camp, she is adamant about carrying the marriage out in the proper way. Clytemnestra begins her dialogue with Agamemnon by questioning him about the details, but he is evasive. She asks where Iphigenia will live, whether Agamemnon has made the early sacrifices, when the wedding

banquet will be celebrated, and where the women's feast is to be held (Eur. *IA* 714ff.). When Agamemnon suggests that the banquet will be held in the camp beside the ships, she exclaims: κακῶς ἀναξίως τε· “That is poorly and unworthily done.” (Eur. *IA* 724) She then asks: μητρὸς τί χωρὶς δράσεθ', ἀμὲ δρᾶν χρεῶν; “Why will you act without the mother, with respect to the things which are necessary for me to do?” (Eur. *IA* 728) Upon further questioning, Agamemnon tries to get her to return to Argos, and she reacts with horror:

Κλ λιποῦσα παῖδα; τίς δ' ἀνασχῆσει φλόγα;
 Αγ ἐγὼ παρέξω φῶς ὃ νυμφίοις πρέπει.
 Κλ οὐχ ὁ νόμος οὗτος οὐδὲ φαῦλ' ἡγητέα.
 Αγ οὐ καλὸν ἐν ὄχλῳ σ' ἐξομιλεῖσθαι στρατοῦ.
 Κλ καλὸν τεκούσαν τὰμά μ' ἐκδοῦναι τέκνα...
 Αγ πιθοῦ.
 Κλ μὰ τὴν ἀνασσαν Ἀργεῖαν θεάν.
 ἐλθὼν δὲ τᾶξω πράσσει, τὰν δόμοις δ' ἐγώ·
 ἅ χρὴ παρῆναι νυμφίοισι πορσυνῶ. (Eur. *IA* 732-36; 739-40)

Kl Leaving behind my child? But who will raise up the torch?
 Ag I will provide the light with is required for the wedding.
 Kl It is not custom to do thus nor should the leader be trivial.
 Ag Nor is it good that you dwell among the crowd of the army.
 Kl It is good that I, the one who bore her, give away my child...
 Ag Obey me.
 Kl By the divine Argive ruler.
 But going, manage things outside, and I will manage them inside the house;

In this scene, Clytemnestra tries to assert her right to control the things within the *oikos*, and she wants to fulfill her role as mother of the bride. Yet in the end, utterly removed from any involvement in the situation, Clytemnestra has little recourse. She is not allowed to fulfill her duties, nor can she protect her daughter.

Although Iphigenia, too, is fooled by the fabricated marriage and has little recourse, she does, make the one choice that gives her the slightest bit of authority. After initially mourning and trying to supplicate her father, she decides that she will calmly submit to the sacrifice. Although the mother and daughter continue to reciprocate each others feelings as Iphigenia is led

away, the daughter's choice signals a split between the two. While Clytemnestra continues to view the situation in terms of private, familial concerns, making arguments from the domestic mother-daughter world which she has previously always inhabited, “when she [Iphigenia] surrenders to her father's words, she envisions her sacrifice as an extension of the commitment to family, father, and marriage (though here her commitment is ambivalent) that has characterized her from the start.”³⁴

In this play, marriage and sacrifice are inextricably linked as Agamemnon uses the ruse of marriage to bring Clytemnestra and Iphigenia to the camp. Clytemnestra makes this clear when she corrects herself after calling her daughter a maiden: τὴν δ' αὖ τάλαιναν παρθένον—τί παρθένον; / “Αιδης νιν, ὡς ἔοικε, νυμφεύσει τάχα— “But the wretched maiden—why a maiden? Since now Hades, as it seems, will soon make her a bride.” (Eur. *IA* 460-61) Just as Demeter and Persephone shared in their grief, Clytemnestra and Iphigenia share fates that are inextricably linked. When Clytemnestra is trying to enlist Achilles' help to save Iphigenia she asks: ἢ τίνος σπουδαστέον μοι μᾶλλον ἢ τέκνου πέρι; “About whom else is it more right for me to be anxious than my child.” (Eur. *IA* 902) In her mother's mentality, her actions on the quest to save Iphigenia, even such inappropriate ones as supplicating Achilles, a man who is not a member of her household, on her knees, are right because she is doing them for her daughter. If Iphigenia is to die, then Clytemnestra is too, as she makes clear with the brief but powerful statement: ὦ θύγατερ, ἦκεις ἐπ' ὀλέθρῳ καὶ σὺ καὶ μήτηρ σέθεν. “O daughter, you have come here to destruction—both you and your mother.” (Eur. *IA* 886) Iphigenia, too, poignantly states that the same song of lament will fit both of their fates: οἶ ᾿γά, μᾶτερ· ταῦτόν τόδε γὰρ / μέλος εἰς ἄμφω πέπτωκε τύχης, “Woe is me, mother; for this

³⁴ Foley 2001, 124.

very same song has fallen to both of our fates.” (Eur. *IA* 1279-80) Mother and daughter are inextricably linked: death for one will mean death for the other. Part of this connection is due to the fact that the daughter was actually once part of the mother, and both Clytemnestra and Iphigenia seem to feel that this gives the mother some sort of claim on her daughter. When she begs her father to try to spare her life, Iphigenia says: ἵκετηρίαν δὲ γόνασιν ἐξάπτω σέθεν τὸ σῶμα τοῦμόν, ὅπερ ἔτικτεν ἦδε σοι· “But I fasten my body as a suppliant to your knees, the very body which *she* bore to you.” (Eur. *IA* 1216-17)

In the final moments, the two exchange tearful goodbyes, with Clytemnestra pleading for Iphigenia not to leave her. Deprived of the typical duties of a mother at her daughter’s wedding, the ritual bath, the sacrifices, the carrying of the torch, Clytemnestra offers to accompany her daughter and to help carry her garments:

Iφ	τίς μ’ εἶσαν ἄξων πρὶν σπαράσσεσθαι κόμης;	
Κλ	ἐγώ, μετὰ γε σοῦ...	
Iφ		μὴ σύ γ’· οὐ καλῶ λέγεις.
Κλ	...πέπλων ἐχομένη σῶν.	
Iφ		ἐμοί, μήτερ, πιθοῦ·
	μέν’· ὡς ἐμοί τε σοί τε κάλλιον τόδε.	(Eur. <i>IA</i> 1458-62)

Iph	Who will go leading me before I am to be torn by the hair?
Kl	I, indeed with you...
Iph	not you, to be sure; you do not speak well.
Kl	...holding your robes.
Iph	Obey me, mother;
	Stay; thus in this way it is better for both me and you.

Even in her final moments on stage, Iphigenia shows concern for her mother too. She does not want her mother to accompany her into the crowd of the Greek army. In one of the last lines that she speaks, Iphigenia again acknowledges that she and her mother will be affected similarly by the same event. It will be better for both of them if Clytemnestra stays behind.

In *Iphigenia in Aulis* there are three recurring themes: the reciprocal mother/daughter bond, the inability of one or both to perform her duties, and the grief at a daughter's marriage or sacrifice. This version of the character Clytemnestra, then, anticipates the older Clytemnestra who will kill her husband upon his return from Troy.

Hecuba and Polyxena

Euripides' *Hecuba* takes place after the fall of Troy, and Hecuba and her daughter Polyxena are among the Trojan women who have been taken captive by the Greeks. In the play, Hecuba is dealt one horrible blow after another: her husband and the majority of her children have been killed in the war; one daughter, Cassandra, has been taken as a concubine by Agamemnon; Polyxena, the only daughter that remains with her, must be sacrificed at Achilles' tomb; and her youngest son Polydorus, as she eventually learns, has been killed by the very person who was supposed to protect him, Polymestor.

Much of the play revolves around Hecuba's efforts to save Polyxena from being sacrificed. Polyxena is a girl of marriageable age, and as she reminds us herself, a princess who had been raised with the hopes of being a βασιλευ̅σι νύμφη, "the wife for kingly men." (Eur. *Hec.* 352) She had expected many noble, eligible men to contend with each other in order to win her as a bride. Polyxena further laments to Hecuba the loss of the wedding and husband that she should have had; instead she is going to dwell in Hades and will be forever separated from her mother: ἄνυμφος ἀνυμέναιος ὧν μ' ἐχρήν τυχεῖν...ἐκεῖ δ' ἐν Ἄιδου κείσομαι χωρὶς σέθεν. "Unwedded, without a wedding, as I ought to have received...but there in Hades I will lie far apart from you." (Eur. *Hec.* 616, 618) Again, marriage and Hades are closely intertwined, and it is Polyxena's readiness for marriage that makes her sacrifice all the more poignant. The connection between Polyxena/bride/sacrificial victim is made even more clear because Achilles,

like a groom, has asked for some young girl as a prize of honor, γέρας: ἦλθ' ὑπὲρ ἄκρας
 τύμβου κορυφᾶς φάντασμι' Ἀχιλέως· ἦται δὲ γέρας / τῶν πολυμόχθων τινὰ Τρωιάδων.
 “The ghost of Achilles came above the high peak of his tomb; and he was asking for a prize of
 honor, some one of the much-enduring Trojan girls.” (Eur. *Hec.* 93-95) Odysseus, sounding
 vaguely like the apologist Helios who asserts in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* that Hades is not
 an unworthy match, explains why Polyxena has to be sacrificed: Τροίας ἀλούσης ἀνδρὶ τῷ
 πρώτῳ στρατοῦ / σὴν παῖδα δοῦναι σφάγιον ἐξαιτουμένῳ. “Since Troy has been captured
 [it is right] to give your daughter as a sacrifice to the best man of the army, as he is asking.” (Eur.
Hec. 304-6) The language here of *giving* Polyxena as a sacrifice to Achilles invokes a father’s
 giving of his daughter to a bride-groom. Polyxena’s father, Priam, has been slaughtered,
 however, and thus he cannot protect his daughter from her plight.

While Hecuba pleads and argues with Agamemnon and Odysseus to try to save her
 daughter, Polyxena, like Iphigenia, makes the decision to go peacefully. Although her reversal is
 somewhat sharp, she is faced with only negative options and so she “chooses” to submit herself
 to the sacrifice rather than to live a life of degradation and sexual servitude as a slave. Much as
 Iphigenia ultimately makes the decision to go willingly rather than being ripped from her
 mother’s arms, so, too, does Polyxena. She even urges her mother to restrain herself and think of
 the violent abuse she might suffer if she continues resisting (Eur. *Hec.* 402-8). Just as the bride
 has no choice in a husband and is reduced to an object traded between males, “the virgin
 Polyxena submits to male violence (however muted) in the name of a social order dominated by
 masculine authority.”³⁵ Hecuba, after this decision, is left with little recourse, and she is further
 provoked by the corpse of Polydorus. Near the end of the play she takes her revenge on
 Polymestor and his sons in a very violent manner. Clytemnestra, in the parts of the myth that

³⁵ Segal 1990, 115.

take place after the events at Aulis, turns into a vicious creature, an evolution about which she cautions Agamemnon (Eur. *IA* 1146-84). Hecuba will turn into a dog while she is onboard the ship, a metamorphosis which illustrates her loss of control over her body and her violence and extreme rage.³⁶

After the sacrifice, Hecuba attempts to perform the funerary rituals, a poor substitute, in her view, for the wedding preparations she was unable to do:

σὺ δ' αὖ λαβούσα τεύχος, ἀρχαία λάτρι,
 βάψασ' ἔνεγκε δεῦρο ποντίας ἄλός,
 ὡς παῖδα λουτροῖς τοῖς πανυστάτοις ἐμήν,
 νύμφην τ' ἄνυμφον παρθένον τ' ἀπάρθενον,
 λούσω προθῶμάι θ'— (Eur. *Hec.* 609-13)

But you in turn, ancient servant, taking this vessel
 Having dipped in the salty sea, bring it here
 That I might wash my child with her very final bath,
 Bride and not a bride, maiden and not a maiden,
 And that I might lay her out for burial—

The mother would have helped give her daughter a ritual bath before the wedding, but here Hecuba has to bathe her daughter's corpse. At line 612 she echoes the ἄνυμφον that Polyxena had spoken earlier in the play. As Hecuba mourns her daughter, she emphasizes the loss of what should have been a fortunate marriage and a happy life.

As in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, a strong bond of mutual affection and commonality in victimization unites Polyxena and Hecuba. As soon as Hecuba reveals to her daughter that the Greeks have decided to sacrifice her, Polyxena begins to mourn not for herself, but for her mother:

ὦ δεινὰ παθοῦσ', ὦ παντλάμων,
 ὦ δυστάνου, μάτερ, βιοτᾶς,
 οἴαν οἴαν αὖ σοι λώβαν
 < λώβαν > ἐχθίσταν ἀρρήταν τ'
 ὦρσέν τις δαίμων· < ὦμοι. >

³⁶ Segal 1990, 127.

οὐκέτι σοι παῖς ἄδ' οὐκέτι δὴ
 γήρᾳ δειλαία δειλαίῳ
 συνδουλευσῶ.
 σκύμνον γάρ μ' ὥστ' οὐριθρέπταν
 μόσχον δειλαία δειλαίαν
 < > ἐσόψῃ
 χειρὸς ἀναρπαστᾶν
 σᾶς ἄπο λαιμότομόν θ' Ἄϊδα
 γᾶς ὑποπεμπομένην σκότον,

(Eur. *Hec.* 197-209)

O suffering terrible things, of total wretchedness,
 Of an ill-fated life, O mother,
 What sort, what sort of outrage in turn against you,
 <An outrage> hated and unspeakable,
 Has some divine force roused? <Alas!>
 No longer, no longer will this here wretched child
 Be for you in your wretched old age
 A companion in slavery.
 For just as a young mountain-bred beast,
 As a calf, wretched, you wretched
 < > will watch
 Me torn away from your hands,
 With throat cut, being sent down to Hades, the darkness of the earth,

This highly emotional speech shows both that Polyxena would have performed a central role as caretaker and companion to Hecuba in her old age and that she can sympathize with what she knows her mother will have to suffer in the future. The same adjective *deina* is used repeatedly to describe both women. Hecuba in lines 277-81 begs that Polyxena not be torn from her arms. She says that Polyxena is her city, her nurse, her walking stick, and her guide upon the road. She also demands that it is necessary for Odysseus kill her along with her daughter (θυγατρὶ συνθανεῖν) to which he replies: πῶς; οὐ γάρ οἶδα δεσπότης κεκτημέμος. “How? For I did not know that I possessed masters.” (Eur. *Hec.* 397) Hecuba then declares that she will hold on to her daughter like ivy onto oak, κισσὸς δρυὸς ὅπως (Eur. *Hec.* 398). This image again reflects the idea that Polyxena and Hecuba are mutually dependent or in a symbiotic relationship. Polyxena is Hecuba’s support, just like oak supports ivy. Yet Polyxena is still a calf, needing its

mother. These metaphors also illustrate both how Hecuba is thinking of herself and Polyxena as inextricably connected and the great extent to which both of them are totally under male control, as women and as war prizes. The sacrifice of her daughter deprives Hecuba of even their commonality as captives.

Similarly to the way in which Clytemnestra declared that she and Iphigenia had been dealt the same fate of death, Hecuba cries out: τέθνηκ' ἔγωγε πρὶν θανεῖν κακῶν ὕπο. "I have been killed before I died by evils." (Eur. *Hec.* 431) Again, recognizing and reciprocating her mother's grief, Polyxena tells Odysseus to wrap a robe around her head and take her away, ὥς πρὶν σφαγῆναί γ' ἐκτέτηκα καρδίαν / θρήνοισι μητρὸς τήνδε τ' ἐκτίκω γόοις. "As before the sacrifice indeed, she has melted my heart by the laments of a mother and I melt hers by wailing." (Eur. *Hec.* 432-434) The repetition of the verb τίκω highlights how closely the two mirror each other's pain. When Polyxena is being taken away, Hecuba begs her to reach out her hand and give it to her (Eur. *Hec.* 440-41), just as Clytemnestra begs just to clutch Iphigenia's garments as she is led away. In *Hecuba*, then, the same themes of loss, separation, reciprocation and death appear, along with the eventual degradation of the mother.

Deianeira and Iole

Although not strictly a mother-daughter pair, the relationship of Deianeira and Iole in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* is instructive because, in many ways, it does follow the model of the previous three mother-daughter pairs, and because the play itself is very concerned with marriage and its effect on women.³⁷ At the very beginning of the play, Deianeira states that as a young girl, she had a greater fear of marriage than any other maiden, due in part to the fearsomeness of her suitor, the river god Achelous. (Soph. *Trach.* 5ff.) The chorus also tells the story of

³⁷ Ormand 1999, 36-59, argues that of all of Sophocles' plays, this one focuses most clearly on the dynamics and implications of marriage, on both men and women.

Deianeira's courtship. They describe how she waits alone on a hill watching the contest between Heracles and Achelous, unsure of who her future husband will be: τὸ δ' ἀμφινείκητον ὄμμα νύμφας / ἔλεινὸν ἀμμένει / κάπὸ ματρὸς ἄφαρ βέβακεν, / ὥστε πόρτις ἐρήμα. "But the face of the bride, the object of the contest, awaits piteously; and suddenly she has gone from her mother, just like an abandoned calf." (Soph. *Trach.* 518-30) Although she is consumed by thoughts of her youth and her days just before marriage, Deianeira is in fact no longer a young maiden. Ormand sums up succinctly what has been suggested by several scholars: "For Deianeira, to be a bride is to experience separation, and to resent it."³⁸ But, in fact, the fears that surfaced during her maidenhood continue as negative emotions about marriage in her later life; the word ἐρήμη, abandoned, is used to describe Deianeira both as a maiden and a wife, and Seaford argues that she never fully makes the transition, she is never fully incorporated into her new home, yet returning to her old one does not seem to be an option in the play."³⁹ She is trapped, unable to regain her life as a young girl, which she remembers as carefree, and unable to enjoy her life as wife and mother because she is consumed by concerns. She recounts the difference between her days as a maiden and her troubled life now as the wife of a man who has been absent for a very long time.

ἀλλ' ἡδοναῖς ἄμοχθον ἐξαίρει βίον
 ἐς τοῦθ' ἕως τις ἀντὶ παρθένου γυνῆ
 κληθῆ λάβη τ' ἐν νυκτὶ φροντίδων μέρος,
 ἧτοι πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἢ τέκνων φοβουμένη.
 τότ' ἂν τις εἰσίδοιτο, τὴν αὐτοῦ σκοπῶν
 πρᾶξι, κακοῖσιν οἷς ἐγὼ βαρύνομαι. (Soph. *Trach.* 147-52)

But she takes up an existence without work in pleasures
 Until the very time when one instead of maiden is called wife
 And takes a share of deep concerns in the night,
 Fearing either for her husband or children.
 Then any one might understand, considering her own experience,

³⁸ Ormand 1999, 42.

³⁹ Seaford 1987, 115.

By just what sort of evils I am oppressed.

This speech functions in several ways. It allows the reader access into Deianeira's state of mind and illustrates yet again that she often frames her speeches with concerns about marriage and the divide between *parthenos* and *gunê*. It also sets Deianeira up as sympathetic to the plight of other women who are suffering, especially since she fully expects that any wife and mother would be able to sympathize with her; the ability to do so will be demonstrated as soon as she meets Iole. Finally these lines present Deianeira in relation to the young captives whom she is about to meet. She is compassionate toward them, not jealous or bitter.⁴⁰ Although Iole and Deianeira are ultimately competing for the same man, Deianeira does not turn on Iole in anger but instead seeks out a way to reclaim Heracles' attentions.

Deianeira is a mother with a son who is himself of marriageable age; it is Iole who is the younger of the two and has not, in fact, been married yet. Although, of course, their situation is not directly parallel to a mother-daughter relationship, in many ways it is comparable. Deianeira immediately is drawn to the silent Iole and singles her out among the group of girls.

ὦ δυστάλαινα, τίς ποτ' εἶ νεανίδων,
 ἄνανδρος ἢ τεκνούσσα; πρὸς μὲν γὰρ φύσιν
 πάντων ἄπειρος τῶνδε, γενναία δέ τις.
 Λίχα, τίνος ποτ' ἐστὶν ἡ ξένη βροτῶν;
 τίς ἢ τεκούσα, τίς δ' ὁ φυτύσας πατήρ;
 ἔξειπ'· ἐπεὶ νιν τῶνδε πλείστον ὠίκτισα
 βλέπουσ' ὅσῳ περ καὶ φρονεῖν οἶδεν μόνη. (Soph. *Trach.* 307-13)

O ill-fated one, what young girl are you,
 Are you without a man or have you given birth? For by your appearance
 You are inexperienced of all such things, but someone noble born.
 Lichas, whose child is this stranger?
 Who bore her, and who is the father that begot her?
 Speak; For now I pitied her most of these ones here,
 Looking at her, inasmuch as she alone knows to consider things carefully.

⁴⁰ Easterling 1982, 92.

Again, Deianeira is thinking in terms of the maiden/wife split and immediately wonders if Iole has a husband or a child. Thus Deianeira both identifies with the girl and takes a special interest in her. Iole is the only one who, Deianeira imagines, knows how to consider things carefully, φρονεῖν. Implicitly then, in Deianeira's thoughts at least, the two share some kind of bond. Deianeira is sympathetic to the girl's plight, as someone who has experienced a similar situation of being seized from her own home and taken to someone else's as a bride. Like the mother who remembers her own experiences of marriage at her daughter's wedding, Deianeira vividly remembers her difficult experiences as a *parthenos*, and this is the basis for her connection to Iole. It pains her to see Iole suffering, and she tries to comfort her. She is bothered by not knowing who the girl is: εἴπ', ὦ τάλαιν', ἀλλ' ἡμῖν ἐκ σαυτῆς· / ἐπεὶ καὶ ξυμφορὰ τοι μὴ εἰδέναι σέ γ' ἥτις εἶ. "But tell me, O wretch, from yourself; for it is also a misfortune for me to not know who you, indeed, are." (Soph. *Trach.* 320-1) She tells Lichas to leave the girl alone and even welcomes Iole into the house, perhaps as a mother of the groom would welcome a new bride, going inside herself to prepare things within (Soph. *Trach.* 329-32).⁴¹ Thus something about Iole, her noble appearance, the similarity of her plight to Deianeira's own, attracts her and even causes her to want to take care of and comfort the captive girl.

Although Deianeira seems to take on a sympathetic, maternal role with Iole, the reader never sees Iole reciprocate these feelings. But much as Clytemnestra and Hecuba meet tragic ends, in part because of the trauma they experience with their daughters, Deianeira too, as an

⁴¹ In fact, Deianeira will actually (posthumously) become Iole's mother-in-law. As Heracles is dying, he makes his son, Hyllas, promise to take Iole as his own wife (Soph. *Trach.* 1216-58)

indirect result of Iole's capture, ultimately kills herself. This suicide yet again links marriage and death, as Deianeira stabs herself on the very marriage bed she shared with Heracles.⁴²

Ultimately, marriages in ancient Athenian society and in Attic tragedy could be a stressful time for mothers and daughters. The pair, who likely had an intimate relationship, were being separated. Their society, however, had rituals for ameliorating this stress, which included the mother's participation in the wedding ceremony and rituals. As a guide, both figuratively and literally, for her daughter, the mother could help alleviate some of the pain and anxiety of separation.

In tragedy, this grief is intensified when marriage and sacrifice are mingled and the mothers and daughters are going to be separated quite permanently. These examples especially show exactly how intense the emotions of a grieving mother might be and to what lengths she might go in order to protect her daughter and be reunited with her. In an attempt to graft some sort of rite comparable to the carrying of the marriage torch onto the sacrificial procession, Clytemnestra and Hecuba beg to accompany their daughters. But when the model for participating in the ritual is not followed, or when the mother perceives that she is not being allowed to play this important role in the life of her daughter, there are powerful feelings of grief, loss, and even rage. It is the violation of the close bond between mother and daughter and their lack of any viable alternatives that make these situations so wrenching. In their own ways, each of these four pairs enhances our understanding of the patterns of mother-daughter interactions. And although Clytemnestra and Electra's relationship is highly atypical, it becomes clear that they, too, are aware of how a mother and daughter "should" act. It is in large part because their

⁴² In Euripides' *Alcestis*, in order to save her husband's life, Alcestis offers up her own life on her marriage bed (170-190).

relationship fails to provide such mutual benefits that the two women seem to have nothing but hatred and resentment for one another.

CHAPTER TWO

CLYTEMNESTRA AND ELECTRA'S INTERACTIONS

Introduction

Electra and Clytemnestra are one of the better known mother-daughter pairs in Greek literature, yet their relationship deviates from the patterns established for mothers and daughters in the previous chapter. The “normative” framework for mother-daughter interactions includes such behaviors as the mother instructing and teaching her daughter, helping her prepare for life as a wife and mother, and the daughter providing companionship and consolation to the mother. There is generally a close, reciprocal bond of affection and shared experience. In the case of Clytemnestra and Electra, however, instead of mutual benefactions, the only reciprocal emotion these two share is hate. Clytemnestra has not fulfilled her duties as mother. She has not successfully prepared her daughter for motherhood or marriage nor has she helped arrange for her to transition to a wife and mother; in fact, she has deprived her both of her rightful place in her paternal home and of the protection of a future husband and potential sons. Electra, in turn, does not act as a solace and comfort to her mother, but instead is a constant source of torment to her. She is also involved, in some versions directly, with the murder of Clytemnestra. In a family that has suffered horribly, hatred and envy have been replaced reciprocal love and caring.

The two, nevertheless, do recognize the bonds of kinship that tie them together, and each has her own ideas about how the other should be acting. Mother and daughter censure each other for not fulfilling their respective duties, and both feel that there is something lacking in the other's behavior. By exploring Clytemnestra and Electra's dysfunctional relationships in

Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electra* plays, we can further explicate the "normative" framework for mother-daughter interactions by analyzing what is missing in theirs.

Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* lays the groundwork the characterizations of Electra and Clytemnestra in the *Electra* plays of Sophocles and Euripides, even though it focuses primarily on Orestes, and Electra and Clytemnestra never directly interact. Aeschylus' play was written before the other two, and each of the later authors incorporate parts of his work into their own. In each play, Electra serves as a visual representation of her grief and suffering. While in Aeschylus, the very fact of her mourning makes Electra conspicuous, in both Sophocles and Euripides, she consciously uses this visibility to her advantage. Further, while in *Choephoroi* mother and daughter relay different opinions on the circumstances in which they find themselves, in the two *Electra* plays, they directly challenge and argue against each other's version of events. Finally, although of course she knows that Clytemnestra is her mother, the Sophoclean and Euripidean Electras find various ways to try to invalidate that fact. In struggling against the biological (and mythological) facts, Electra makes use of her ideas of what a mother-daughter relationship *should* be to further distance her self from Clytemnestra.

Electra's Embodiment of Her Suffering

A. Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*

One of the recurring elements of Electra's character is that her suffering, which is both emotional and physical, is apparent in her outward appearance. Appearance can be a very powerful weapon, capable of inspiring pity, fear, or sadness in others, and visual proof strengthens a report or rumor that would otherwise be dubious. In both Sophocles and Euripides, Electra consciously makes herself a striking illustration of the wrongs that Clytemnestra and

Aegisthus are perpetrating upon her in order both to bring shame and censure upon the two and to torment her mother. In Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, Electra does not draw attention to herself with this specific intention in mind, as she does in the other two plays. There is, however, definitely the idea that her suffering is visible in her physical appearance. At the beginning of the play, before the siblings have been reunited, Orestes easily recognizes Electra among a crowd of mourners: καὶ Ἡλέκτραν δοκῶ / στείχειν ἀδελφὴν τὴν ἐμὴν πένθει λυγρῶ / πρέπουσαν. "And I think that my own sister Electra is approaching, conspicuous in her gloomy sorrow." (Aes. *Ch.* 16-18). Even though Orestes has not seen Electra in years, since he was an infant, and she is in a procession of other mourning women, she stands out clearly because of her grief, her mourning (πένθει). The fact that Electra is identifiable specifically because of her sorrow, that she somehow *looks* different than the crowd of mourners that is accompanying her, becomes something that Electra uses to her advantage in the later plays.

B. Sophocles' *Electra*

Sophocles' *Electra* is very aware of her visibility and of the power of the image she embodies. She is a spectacle of the wrongs being committed by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and she is, in turn, a source of pain to her mother. To emphasize the importance of appearance in creating emotions, in this play there are many verbs of seeing. Characters are constantly calling attention by commands to *look*, to *see*. In her initial speech detailing Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' crimes, Electra uses such verbs to emphasize her grief. She is especially outraged that she has to *witness* their behavior. Just as Electra uses her own appearance to torment her mother, she herself has been tormented for more than eight years by having to stand by and watch what she considers to be heinous crimes against herself, her father, and her brother:

ἔπειτα ποίας ἡμέρας δοκεῖς μ' ἄγειν,
ὅταν θρόνοις Αἰγισθον ἐνθακοῦντ' ἴδω

τοῖσιν πατρώοις, εἰσίδω δ' εσθήματα
 φοροῦντ' ἐκείνω ταῦτά, καὶ παρεστίους
 σπένδοντα λοιβάς ἔνθ' ἐκείνον ὤλεσεν,
 ἴδω δὲ τούτων τὴν τελευταίαν ὕβρι
 τὸν αὐτοφόντην ἡμῖν ἐν κοίτῃ πατρὸς
 ξὺν τῇ ταλαίνῃ μητρί, μητέρ' εἰ χρεῶν
 ταύτην προσαυδᾶν τῶδε συγκοιμωμένην. (Soph. *El.* 266-74)

Then what sort of days do you think that I spend,
 Whenever I **see** Aegisthus sitting on the throne of my fathers,
 And I **look at** that man wearing those very same garments,
 And pouring libations beside the hearth where they killed that one [my father],
 And I **see** their ultimate hubris,
 The murderer on the bed of my father
 With my wretched mother, if it is right to call this one mother
 While she is lying with that man.

Orestes might be the lucky one, as he lives in another land, far away from the trouble at home, hearing of the misfortunes of his sister only through messages. Electra, however, is not simply hearing reports of the treachery. She has to live with the murderers of her father and actually see their outrageous behavior.

In this play, seeing for oneself is an important part of knowing, of understanding. Just as Electra suffers more by seeing, Orestes finally realizes the full extent of Electra's suffering, not by just hearing about it, but by seeing her as its visual representation. Before Electra even recognizes who Orestes is, he sees her and understands the full extent of their troubles:

E τί δὴ ποτ', ὦδ' ἐπισκοπῶν στένεις;
 O ὅσ' οὐκ ἄρ' ἤδη τῶν ἐμῶν ἐγὼ κακῶν.
 E ἐν τῷ διέγνωσ τούτο τῶν εἰρημένων;
 O ὄρων σε πολλοῖς ἐμπρέουσιν ἄλγεσιν.
 E καὶ μὴν ὄρας γε παῦρα τῶν ἐμῶν κακῶν.
 O καὶ πῶς γένοιτ' ἂν τῶνδ' ἔτ' ἐχθίω βλέπειν; (Soph. *El.* 1184-89)

E Why indeed, **looking at** me thus, do you groan?
 O Oh, how many of my own sorrows I did not know.
 E What things have been spoken in this matter that you realize this?
 O **Seeing** you conspicuous in many sorrows.
 E And you **see** indeed only a few of my misfortunes.
 O And what could be still more hated to **see** than these things?

Thus much as in *Choephoroi*, Orestes can recognize Electra simply by her appearance; but here he also realizes what she has been suffering as matching his own sorrow.

Sophocles' characters further emphasize the importance of sight for full knowledge when, after Clytemnestra has been killed, Orestes and Electra use word-play to fool Aegisthus. When Electra first tells him about Orestes' death, he hopes for something in addition to the messenger's report that will allow him to know for sure (μαθεῖν, 1454). After she assures him that there is physical proof, Aegisthus wants Orestes' body to be brought out as visual evidence (ὄρᾶν, 1461) to anyone who might have still hoped for Orestes' return. Aegisthus feels certain that after seeing the corpse (ὄρῶν, 1463), even a well-wisher of Orestes would accept his rule without him having to use compulsion. When he asks for someone to call Clytemnestra, Orestes responds: αὐτὴ πέλας σοῦ· μηκέτ' ἄλλοσε σκόπει. "She herself is near you; no longer look elsewhere." (Soph. *El.* 1474) He then pulls the covering away from Clytemnestra's corpse, and when Aegisthus cries out in horror at the sight, Orestes taunts him: τίνα φοβῆ; τίν' ἀγνοεῖς; "Whom do you fear? Whom do you not recognize?" (Soph. *El.* 1475) The truth is revealed to Aegisthus, who, after seeing the proof with his own eyes, is led to his death.

Having to be a witness to the outrages in her own home, Sophocles' Electra knows what a powerful tool sight can be. One of her major complaints against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is that they have not allowed her to marry, to become an adult woman. This is a great source of pain to her as she is forever stuck between *parthenos* and *gune*, but she also uses her liminal position to punish them. In this state, she is also dangerous and difficult to control: "If marriage is a moment of high subjectivity for a woman, Electra seems determined to hold that moment in perpetuity, and thus create room for herself to act."¹ Therefore, when Electra positions herself

¹ Ormand 2001, 62.

outside of the house, at the gates, she is showing the public that her family cannot control her, and she is reminding anyone who might see her of her status as a *kore* and her latent reproductive potential.² Young, unmarried women are supposed to remain safely indoors, yet Electra is outside, publicly mourning and speaking out against her mother and Aegisthus. She capitalizes on what she knows about correct behavior for a young girl in order to bring shame to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Her place in the household is horribly shattered; she is totally alienated and separated from her mother and sister.³ As a physical symbol, a defiant expression of the ruin of the house, Electra declares that she will take no further part in the household, but will remain at the gate until she dies: ἀλλ' οὐ τι μὴν ἔγωγε τοῦ λοιποῦ χρόνου ἔσομαι ξύνοικος, ἀλλὰ τῆδε πρὸς πύλην παρείσ' ἑμαυτὴν ἄφιλος ἀνανῶ βίον. “But for the remaining time I will not in any way be a member of the household, but sitting here before this very gate, without a friend, I will waste away my life.” (Soph. *El.* 817-19)

Sophocles' Electra is aware that this behavior is a source of pain to her mother and Aegisthus (λυπῶ, 355), and some scholars suggest that by constantly mourning for Agamemnon, Electra has psychologically persecuted Clytemnestra for years.⁴ The fact that Aegisthus is currently out of town further allows her to take her stance before the gates, as Clytemnestra points out: ἀνειμένη μὲν, ὡς ἔοικας, αἶ στρέφη. / οὐ γὰρ πάρεστ' Αἴγισθος, ὅς σ' ἐπειχ' ἀεὶ / μή τοι θυραΐαν γ' οὔσαν ἀισχύνειν φίλους. “Being free, as it seems, you are wandering about again. For Aegisthus is not present, who was always restraining you, outside at least, from shaming your family.” (Soph. *El.* 516-18) Clytemnestra's use of “again” (αἶ) emphasizes the frequency of Electra's wandering about, a behavior that brings Clytemnestra a great deal of pain. Electra has, in fact, been a greater cause of grief to her than Orestes, who is

² Ormand 2001, 68.

³ Blundell 1989, 154.

⁴ Ormand 2001, 67.

far away. When Clytemnestra is informed of Orestes' death, she hopes that this will offer her some relief from Electra's torments too. She describes her daughter's effects on her with powerful imagery: ἦδε γὰρ μείζων βλάβη / ξύνοικος ἦν μοι, τοῦμὸν ἐκπίνους' ἀεὶ / ψυχῆς ἄκρατον αἶμα, "For this girl was a greater harm to me, living with me, and always drinking up the pure blood of my soul." (Soph. *El.* 784-86) Thus, Electra, who has for so long suffered from seeing Aegisthus and Clytemnestra prosper, makes herself into a public spectacle and thereby torments her mother by her very presence.

C. Euripides' *Electra*

Euripides' *Electra*, employs a similar use of verbs of seeing. Electra, who has been married to a poor farmer and is outside the palace in the countryside is even more preoccupied with her appearance, emphasizing especially that she does *not* have the accoutrements of a noble daughter that she used to have and which Clytemnestra still enjoys. Electra has dirty hair, torn clothes, and lives in the house of a poor farmer. She repeatedly points out these physical signs as proof of her suffering. Her opening lines show that she hopes even the gods will notice her degradation. She goes outside to fetch water for this express purpose:

ὦ νύξ μέλαινα, χρυσεῶν ἄστρων τροφέ,
 ἐν ἧ τόδ' ἄγγος τῶδ' ἐφεδρεῦον κάρα
 φέρουσα πηγᾶς ποταμίας μετέρχομαι—
 οὐ δὴ τι χρείας ἐς τοσόνδ' ἀφιγμένη,
 ἀλλ' ὡς ὕβριν δείξωμεν Αἰγίσθου θεοῖς—
 γόους τ' ἀφίημ' αἰθερ' ἐς μέγαν πατρί. (Eur. *El.* 54-59)

O black night, nurse of the golden stars,
 In you while carrying this very vessel resting on my head
 I am going in search of the springs of rivers—
 Reaching such a great distance not from some necessity,
 But that I might show the hubris of Aegisthus to the gods—
 And that I might send out laments for my father to the great heaven.

She hopes that the gods (and surely anyone she passes on the road) will see how Aegisthus is treating her, and so she purposely goes to the spring, overruling her husband's objections.

In fact, she does meet people outside the house; first she encounters the Chorus, a group of girls on their way to celebrate a festival of Hera. They try to encourage Electra to come along, even offering to lend her jewels and fine clothing, but she demands that they look at her appearance and asks if such things are fitting for a daughter of the great Agamemnon: σκέψαι μου πιναρὰν κόμαν / καὶ τρύχη τάδ' ἐμῶν πέπλων, "Look at my filthy hair and these tatters of my clothes." (Eur. *El.* 184-85) While she is standing outside the farmhouse conversing with the girls, Orestes and Pylades approach, who initially present themselves as messengers from Orestes sent to inquire about Electra. She forces Orestes to look at her, pointing out the worst aspects:

- E οὐκ οὐκ ὄρας μου πρῶτον ὡς ξηρὸν δέμας;
 O λύπαις γε συντετηκός, ὥστε με στένειν.
 E καὶ κράτα πλόκαμόν τ' ἐσκυθισμένον ξυρῶ.
 O δάκνει σ' ἀδελφὸς ὃ τε θανὼν ἴσως πατήρ. (Eur. *El.* 239-42)
- E First of all can you not **see** how withered my body is?
 O Indeed having been melted away by griefs, thus I grieve.
 E And that the locks of my hair are shaved close by a blade.
 O Your brother and he who is dead, your father, grieve you.

As they continue to talk, messenger/Orestes asks what news he should convey. Electra, above all, is concerned that he tell Orestes about her appearance and lowly situation: πρῶτον μὲν οἷσις ἐν πέπλοις ἀυλίζομαι, / πίνω θ' ὅσα βέβριθ', ὑπὸ στέγαισί τε / οἷσισι ναίω βασιλικῶν ἐκ δωμαίων, / αὐτὴ μὲν ἐκμοχθοῦσα κερκίσις πέπλους, "[Tell him] First in what sort of garments I am dressed, and with what sort of dirt I am weighed down, beneath what sort of roofs I dwell after royal halls, myself toiling over garments at the looms." (Eur. *El.* 304-7) In

addition to her striking loss of rank through her lowly marriage, her physical state will offer proof to her brother of all that she has had to endure.

The characters in Euripides' *Electra* realize that sight has the power to provoke powerful emotions from people. When Electra notices the old servant crying, she wonders if he is crying because of her: τί δ', ὦ γεραίε, διάβροχον τόδ' ὄμμ' ἔχεις; / μῶν τὰμὰ διὰ χρόνου σ' ἀνέμνησαν κακὰ / τηλουρὸς οἶκος καὶ πέπλων ἐμῶν ῥάκη; "But why, old man, do you have these moist eyes? After such a time does this wretched house and the tatters of my clothing remind you of my sufferings?" (Eur. *El.* 502-4) After Orestes and Electra have killed Clytemnestra, the Chorus asks: πῶς δ' ἔτλας φόνον / δι' ὀμμάτων ἰδεῖν σέθεν / ματρὸς ἐκπνεούσας; "But how ever did you dare to look upon the slaughter with your own eyes as your mother expired?" (Eur. *El.* 1218-20) They also reveal that Orestes veiled his eyes as he killed his mother (Eur. *El.* 1221-23).

The Chorus, Orestes, and the Old Man are not the only ones whom Electra hopes to affect with the sight of her dirty body, worn clothes, and humble house. By sending her mother a (false) message announcing that she has given birth, Electra craftily draws Clytemnestra away from the palace to the farmhouse so that she might see (and lament) the conditions in which her daughter is living and into which her "grandchild" has been born. When she details her plan to the old man, he is at first skeptical: πόθεν; τί δ' αὐτῇ σοῦ μέλειν δοκεῖς, τέκνον; "But how? Do you think that there is any concern for you in that one, child?" But Electra quickly assures him that Clytemnestra will come: ναί· καὶ δακρύσει γ' ἀξίωμ' ἐμῶν τόκων. "Indeed; and she will indeed lament the rank of my child." (Eur. *El.* 657-58) Thus, even though Electra and Clytemnestra seemingly hate each other, and Electra has been cast out of her home and is nearly

destitute, she relies on the knowledge that Clytemnestra will still come to help her perform the sacrifices of childbirth. So great is the power of the mother-daughter bond!

Clytemnestra approaches in a beautiful chariot surrounded by slave women, in stark contrast to Electra, as both siblings point out: Ο· καὶ μὴν ὄχοις γε καὶ στολῇ λαμπρύνεται. / Ε· καλῶς ἄρ' ἄρκυν ἐς μέσην πορεύεται. “O: And see how brilliant she is in her chariot and equipment. E: How beautifully she approaches to the middle of our net.” (Eur. *El.* 965-66)

Electra’s plot depends on eliciting sympathy from Clytemnestra, so she goes to great lengths to highlight the disparity in their appearance. The Chorus greets Clytemnestra with a florid address which anticipates Electra’s later address to her mother when she offers to help her down from the chariot.⁵ With exaggerated deference, she calls herself a slave (δούλη, 1004) who has been cast out of her father’s house, Electra offers to help her mother down from the chariot. Immediately, Clytemnestra reacts to Electra’s shabby appearance: σὺ δ' ὦδ' ἄλουτος καὶ δυσείματος χροῶ / λεχῶ νεογνῶν ἐκ τόκων πεπαυμένη; “But you, thus unwashed and your body so ill-clothes, a new mother having just given birth to her new-born child?” (Eur. *El.* 1107-8) It is this, and Electra’s claim that she has no friends to help attend her, that convinces Clytemnestra to go inside the house, ultimately to her death.

By relying on the potent visual image that she herself creates, Euripides’ Electra finds sympathy and support from others. She also positions herself as a conspicuous enemy of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, bringing shame on them in an effort to honor her father and avenge his murder.

⁵ Mossman 2001, 380

Conflicting Versions of Events

A. Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*

In all three plays, Electra and Clytemnestra put forth their own versions of their common story and their accusations against the other. Although in the *Choephoroi* Electra and Clytemnestra never really interact, so they do not directly refute each other's conflicting stories, each gives her own account of Clytemnestra's behavior, and Clytemnestra finally has to answer to Orestes as he is about to stab her. Electra charges that Clytemnestra exchanged her and Orestes for Aegisthus (Aes. *Ch.* 132-34). Later when Orestes confronts his mother with that same accusation, shortly before he kills her, Clytemnestra denies that she sold Orestes, arguing instead that she got no payment and that she sent him out to live with an ally (Aes. *Ch.* 913ff). This play does not afford Clytemnestra the space to defend her actions as fully as the other two plays; but, at least when faced with her own death, she tries to incite pity in her son and to assure him that she was only looking out for his safety.

B. Sophocles' *Electra*

In Sophocles' *Electra*, Clytemnestra and Electra repeatedly debate two major issues: whether Clytemnestra was justified in killing Agamemnon and whether she has any maternal feelings for her children. Electra claims that Agamemnon, having offended Artemis, was right to sacrifice Iphigenia but that Clytemnestra was not right in killing Agamemnon. Instead, Electra posits that she did it out of lust for Aegisthus. However, Clytemnestra asserts her right to have killed Agamemnon because of her maternal relationship to Iphigenia. Much of this argument centers around the two women's understandings of the correct behavior for a married woman in the *oikos*, and they attack the other in disagreement.⁶ While Clytemnestra aligns herself as a

⁶ Ormand 2001, 61.

mother and argues that Iphigenia's sacrifice drove her to murder, Electra sides with her father, and declares that a woman should above all give her allegiance to her husband.

In part because she is trying to invalidate Clytemnestra's position as her mother, Electra refuses to recognize that Clytemnestra has any maternal feelings and argues that she loves her husband and new children more. She blames Clytemnestra for their enmity while Clytemnestra, in turn, blames Electra for their arguments. In fact, Clytemnestra claims that she feels sorrow at the death of Orestes and claims that a mother cannot hate her own child: δεινὸν τὸ τίττειν ἔστιν· οὐδὲ γὰρ κακῶς πάσχοντι μῖσος ὧν τέκη προσγίγνεται. "It is a strange thing to bear a child; for one does not hate one's child, even though suffering horribly." (Soph. *El.* 770-71) Clytemnestra even prepares the urn that she thinks contains Orestes' remains for a proper burial, something she presumably would not have done if she truly hated him (Soph. *El.* 1400-1).

C. Euripides' *Electra*

Euripides' *Electra*, though certainly mourning the death of her father, is more concerned with the loss of her rank and paternal wealth. Electra claims that Clytemnestra has thrown her out of the house and keeps her from her rightful position. She is essentially an exile from her father's house, little more than a slave: δωμάτων φυγὰς πατρῶν / οὐρείας ἀν' ἐρίπνας. / μάτηρ δ' ἐν λέκτροις φονίσις / ἄλλω σύγγαμος οἰκεῖ. "[I live as] an exile from my father's house upon the mountainous cliffs. But my mother in a bloody bed dwells married to another." (Eur. *El.* 209-12) When her husband asks her to prepare some food to give to Orestes and Pylades, Electra points out that it would be no use to ask for anything at the palace, because Clytemnestra surely would not give them anything (Eur. *El.* 416). Electra laments the things that her mother has which she doesn't, food, fine clothing, a beautiful house, a leisurely life, and especially a husband.

Euripides' Clytemnestra has saved Electra from being killed by Aegisthus, and she does come to help her when she thinks that Electra has given birth. She also argues that Electra has always loved her father more: ὦ παῖ, πέφυκας πατέρα σὸν στέργειν αἰεὶ / ἔστιν δὲ καὶ τόδ'· οἱ μὲν εἰσιν ἀρσένων, / οἱ δ' αὖ φιλοῦσι μητέρας μᾶλλον πατρός. "O child, you have always been inclined to love your father; but this thing is even as follows; there are some for the males, and others in turn love their mothers rather than their father."⁷ (Eur. *El.* 1102-4)

Clytemnestra claims that the last straw, on top of the murder of Iphigenia, was Agamemnon's bringing Cassandra back, intending to keep two brides (νύμφα δύο) in the same halls (Eur. *El.* 1033-34).⁸ Electra counters with the observation that Clytemnestra began to beautify herself the moment Agamemnon left for Troy and that she was not right at all to kill him (Eur. *El.* 1069-80). Much as in Sophocles, this question, whether Clytemnestra was justified in killing Agamemnon, drastically separates them: "Paradoxically, it is Agamemnon's fatal ignoring of the superiority of vertical ties which Clytemnestra then points to in her revolutionary hypothetical gender role reversal at 1041-4...but although this does clarify Agamemnon's crime, it does not lessen the fact that Clytemnestra has done the same thing. Electra will pick up on this in the speech which follows."⁹ Thus, in all three plays, Electra and Clytemnestra are at odds over whether Clytemnestra has been a good mother or a wicked one, and whether she was justified in killing Agamemnon.

⁷ Recall Clytemnestra's assertion in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* that of all the children she has borne, Iphigenia has always especially loved her father (φιλοπάτωρ...μάλιστα, Eur. *IA* 638-39).

⁸ Cf. Deianeira's similar complaint in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*

⁹ Mossman 2001, 380-81

Electra Rejects the Behavior and Character of Her Mother

A. Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*

As the biological daughter of Clytemnestra, Electra constantly struggles to differentiate herself from her mother and her mother's behavior.¹⁰ She does this in different ways in each work, but typically she calls attention to the inappropriateness of Clytemnestra's behavior for a mother and explicitly states how she is not like her mother.

Aeschylus' Electra tries to differentiate her own values from her mother's. She prays that she might be σωφρονεστέραν and εὐσεβεστέραν, more prudent and more reverent than her mother (Aes. *Ch.* 140, 141). Orestes and Electra even avoid using the word "mother" as much as possible. When the two siblings are debating revenge and whether they should kill their mother, initially Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are mentioned together and in very generic terms such as "those who killed" (τοὺς κτανόντας, 144) or "the guilty ones" (τοὺς αἰτίους, 273); Orestes at one point calls the murderers "two women" (δυοῖν γυναικοῖν, 304). However, as the drama progresses, Clytemnestra clearly becomes the object of focus, as Anne Lebeck writes,

The figure of Clytemnestra is slowly detached from Aegisthus until at last she stands alone, the true object of the coming retribution. The full implication of the act is brought out first by avoidance, finally by use, of the word μάτηρ... Allusion to parentage is at first obscure. Both Electra and Orestes avoid the word "mother," using shadowy substitutes instead: τοκεῖς, τεκόμενοι, plural and indefinite. Their words are made more prominent by the ambiguity which attends their use.¹¹

Perhaps in an attempt to lessen their own crime, and to make it more acceptable, Orestes and Electra use carefully chosen language to try to erase the fact that Clytemnestra is their mother.

¹⁰ Chodorow 1978, explores some of the reasons that daughters may have a more difficult time differentiating themselves from their mothers, "Because they are the same gender as their daughters and have been girls, mothers of daughters tend not to experience these infant daughters as separate from them in the same way as mothers of infants sons...[thus] women, more than men, will be more open to and preoccupied with those very relational issues that go into mothering—feelings of primary identification, lack of separateness or differentiation, ego and body-ego boundary issues and primary love not under the sway of the reality principle." (109-10)

¹¹ Lebeck 1971, 116.

Electra even points out that her mother is not behaving as a mother should. Clytemnestra has “exchanged” Electra and Orestes for Aegisthus (Aes. *Ch.* 132-34). This dislocation of a mother’s love has fueled Electra’s hatred of her mother: the love and attention that she needed has all been focused on Aegisthus, the new husband.¹² Later, Electra describes why Orestes gets the love that should have gone to Clytemnestra, who she now rightfully hates:

ὦ τερπνὸν ὄμμα τέσσαρας μοίρας ἔχον
 ἐμοί· προσαυδᾶν δ’ ἐστ’ ἀναγκαίως ἔχον
 πατέρα τε, καὶ τὸ μητρὸς ἐς σέ μοι ῥέπει
 στέργηθρον· ἡ δὲ πανδίκως ἐχθαίρεται·
 καὶ τῆς τυθείσης νηλεῶς ὁμοσπόρου·
 πιστὸς δ’ ἀδελφὸς ἦσθ’, ἐμοὶ σέβας φέρων
 μόνος·

(Aes. *Ch.* 237-244)

O pleasant sight that holds for shares for me:
 And necessarily I have to call you father,
 And to you falls my love of a mother;
 But she is completely and justly hated;
 And to you the love for a sister pitilessly slaughtered;
 And as a brother you have been my trust, you alone bearing reverence for me;

Thus Electra clearly feels all alone, except for Orestes. She has lost her sister and father, and she detests her mother. In *Choephoroi*, however, Clytemnestra and Electra never directly interact, nor does Electra take a very active role in urging Orestes to kill their mother. The feelings and rejection that Electra presents somewhat passively are further developed in the later two plays.

¹² The idea that when women remarry, they chose their new husbands and potential children over their children from a previous husband is found elsewhere in Greek literature. In order to urge Telemachus to return home, Athena tells him in *Odyssey* 15. 19-23 that his mother may be about to marry Eurymachus:

μή νύ τι σεῦ ἀέκητι δόμων ἐκ κτῆμα φέρηται.
 οἴσθα γὰρ οἶος θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι γυναικός·
 κείνου βούλεται οἶκον ὀφέλλειν ὅς κεν ὀπιίη,
 παίδων δὲ προτέρων καὶ κουριδίῳ φίλοιῳ
 οὐκέτι μέμνηται τεθνηκότος οὐδὲ μεταλλᾶ.

Beware lest against your will she carries off some possession from the home. For you know what sort of spirit there is in the chest of a woman; she wished to help the home of that man whoever marries her, and of her previous children and her beloved lord who has died she is no longer mindful nor does she ask after them.

B. Sophocles' *Electra*

In the course of Sophocles' play, Electra makes numerous complaints against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, many of which she reiterates over the course of the play, with some slight changes. Three themes permeate her complaints and dominate scholarly discussion: the murder of her father (94-99, 201-8), the fact that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are now lovers (271-74, 561-62), and the fact that she is still unmarried and living under their control (164, 187, 961-62). A fourth and underlying complaint concerns the quality of Clytemnestra's mothering. Electra repeatedly asserts that Clytemnestra is not a mother, that she does not even deserve the title and that she is not acting as a mother should. Electra associates herself very closely with her father, and the paternal line, but the alleged inadequacy of Clytemnestra as a mother may have intensified Electra's rejection of her. Yes, Electra is upset that her father has been murdered, but she directs much of her anger towards Clytemnestra specifically in her role as mother.

Electra is in a precarious position, without a husband or a child to protect her as she ages. She is perpetually stuck in maidenhood, growing older yet not becoming a *gune*. As Kirk Ormand points out,

Electra is without proper male guardians, she has no decent clothes or food, and, as part of this same pattern of treatment, she has not married and has not borne children. She has been prohibited, in effect, from making the transition to married, adult life...Her lack of marriage creates a pattern of her mistreatment.¹³

As discussed in chapter one, marriage was one of the most important events in an Athenian girl's life, and her mother would have helped her prepare for the wedding and would have guided her through the ceremony to her husband's home. The fact that Clytemnestra has not provided these things for Electra especially upsets her. Electra is in a state of perpetual maidenhood, and she blames Clytemnestra.

¹³ Ormand 2001, 63-64.

In Electra's constant attempt to connect herself with her father's line, she frequently uses language that invalidates Clytemnestra's maternity. She calls her μήτηρ ἀμήτηρ, "Mother who is not a mother." (Soph. *El.* 1154) She also questions whether Clytemnestra should even be called a mother, as an adultress alongside Aegisthus: ξὺν τῇ ταλαίνῃ μητρὶ, μητέρ' εἰ χρεῶν / ταύτην προσαυδᾶν τῶδε συγκοιμωμένην. "With my wretched mother, if it is possible to call this one mother as she lies down alongside that one." (Soph. *El.* 273-74) Finally, in direct address, she tells Clytemnestra exactly how she feels about her non-mothering: καί σ' ἔγωγε δεσπότην / ἢ μητέρ' οὐκ ἔλασσον εἰς ἡμᾶς νέμω, / ἢ ζῶ βίον μοχθηρόν, ἔκ τε σοῦ κακοῖς / πολλοῖς ἀεὶ ξυνοῦσα τοῦ τε συννόμου. "And I consider you a master rather than a mother to me, I who lives a wretched life, always living with many troubles from you and your spouse." (Soph. *El.* 597-600) By denying Clytemnestra the title of mother and assigning her the title of *despotis*, Electra also deligitimizes the new social, political and familial order that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus have created.¹⁴ Not only has Clytemnestra tormented Electra, but she has killed her own husband and the father of her children and taken control of his kingdom in Argos. All of the moral outrage and anger that Electra is feeling towards Clytemnestra is evident in the diction that portrays her not as the loving, caring, companion mother discussed in the previous chapter, but as a violent, cruel master.

Yet as her biological daughter, Electra seems to fear that she will become like Clytemnestra. After their *agon* Clytemnestra goes to leave, and Electra dares her to speak out publicly, saying she does not care if Clytemnestra calls her any kind of awful names: εἰ γὰρ πέφυκα τῶνδε τῶν ἔργων ἴδρις, / σχεδόν τι τὴν σὴν οὐ καταισχύνω φύσιν. "For if I am naturally skilled in such deeds, surely I in no way disgrace your nature." (Soph. *El.* 608-9)

¹⁴ Blundell 1989, 155.

Normally, shame would prevent Electra from wanting to be spoken of in public, but Clytemnestra's behavior has pushed her to the extreme. This challenge is both a sarcastic jab at her mother and a realization in Electra that her own behavior may not be above reproach. As Blundell writes,

Her final words also hint that her behavior is indeed reprehensible. With their sarcastic coloring, these four lines have an elusive ambivalence. The ironic claim that she is living up to her mother's *phusis*, besides being an ingenious insult, manages to distance her from Clytemnestra while highlighting their similarity.¹⁵

Electra argues that, if she is behaving at all like her mother, it is only because she has been driven to do so by years of torment and grief. This struggle against becoming like her mother also drives Electra's rejection of Clytemnestra and her behavior.

In her words to the Chorus, however, we get some idea of the feelings that Electra expects from her mother. She, in fact, values the Chorus as surrogate mother because they have a positive reciprocity. Electra addresses them with kindness and appreciates the fact that they have come to help her: ὦ γενέθλα γενναίων, / ἦκετ' ἐμῶν καμάτων παραμύθιον. "O offspring of noble birth, you have come as a consolation for my toils." (Soph. *El.* 129-30) She also delights in their company, because, unlike Clytemnestra, these women return her kindness: ἀλλ' ὦ παντοί- / ας φιλότητος ἀμειβόμεναι χάριν, "But you who are repaying the delight of every sort of friendship." (Soph. *El.* 134-35) The Chorus, too, makes it clear that they have come as a type of mother, constantly calling Electra "child" and advising her: ἀλλ' οὖν εὐνοίᾳ γ' αὐδῶ, / μάτηρ ὡσεὶ τις πιστὰ / μὴ τίκτειν σ' ἄταν ἄταις. "But therefore I address you with good feeling, to be sure, just as some trustworthy mother, lest you bear ruin upon ruin." (Soph. *El.* 233-35)

Even though Electra cannot ever escape the fact that Clytemnestra gave birth to her, she

¹⁵ Blundell 1989, 169.

does all she can to distance her self from her mother.¹⁶ In fact, she has been struggling against this dilemma for quite some time: μῖσός τε γὰρ παλαιὸν ἐντέτηκέ μοι, “For an ancient hatred has sunken deep into me.” (Soph. *El.* 1311) Orestes even acknowledges Electra’s fear of Clytemnestra; once he has killed her, he reassures Electra by saying: μηκέτ’ ἐκφοβοῦ / μητρῶον ὡς σε λῆμ’ ἀτιμάσει ποτέ. “No longer fear that you will be dishonored by the arrogance of your mother.” (Soph. *El.* 1426-7) Electra has been humiliated and tormented by her mother since the murder of Agamemnon. She disapproves of her mother’s behavior and wishes to disassociate from her. Therefore, she constantly overemphasizes her bonds with Agamemnon and disavows her blood ties to her mother.¹⁷

C. Euripides’ *Electra*

Euripides’ play features an Electra who is jealous and envious of her mother. She is not so much afraid that she will become Clytemnestra as she desires the wealth and position that Clytemnestra has. Cast out of her home and married to a poor farmer, she cannot enjoy the benefits of a noble marriage as Clytemnestra does. Electra frequently contrasts her home and appearance with her mother’s. While Electra lives in a lowly home, complete with ragged clothing and a disheveled appearance, Clytemnestra lives in a palace, wears fine robes, and drives in a chariot accompanied by Trojan slaves. Underlying this jealousy is Electra’s assertion that as the daughter of Agamemnon, who fought bravely and brought home wonderful spoils from Troy, such fine things should rightly belong to her. Further, Electra charges her mother

¹⁶ Chodorow 1978, points out that a daughter with an omnipotent, rather than powerless, mother will often turn to her father as a symbol of freedom from dependence and merging with her mother. He is the most available person to help her get away from her mother (121). This may help inform Electra’s insistence on being recognized as her father’s daughter rather than her mother’s and her refusal to identify with her mother.

¹⁷ Benjamin 1988, speaking of a patient who wished she could be a boy and thus disidentify with her mother, argues “A boy who experiences humiliation by his mother will turn to his father and strive to be like him—free of mother’s control. By wishing to be a boy, Lucy was pursuing a similar strategy.” (98) Although Electra never explicitly expresses the wish to be a boy, she fits a similar pattern of striving to disidentify with her mother and seek some kind of power by identification with her father.

with having new illegitimate children who replace the legitimate ones she already has had with Agamemnon. There is enormous insult in that Clytemnestra is treating her legitimate children as the illegitimate ones: ἡ γὰρ πανώλης Τυνδαρίς, μήτηρ ἐμή, / ἐξέβαλέ μ' οἴκων, χάριτα τιθεμένη πόσει· / τεκοῦσα δ' ἄλλους παῖδας Αἰγίσθω πάρα / πάρεργ' Ὀρέστην καμὲ ποιεῖται δόμων. “For she, utterly ruined one of the Tyndarids, my mother, cast me out of the home, esteeming delight from her husband; and bearing other children to Aegisthus, she makes Orestes and me the illegitimate children of the house.” (Eur. *El.* 60-63) Again, Electra charges Clytemnestra with misplaced love. Instead of cherishing Agamemnon, Orestes, and Electra as she should have, Clytemnestra has abandoned her rightful family in exchange for an illegitimate one. Interestingly, though, Electra both denies that her mother cares about her and relies on that very concern. On the one hand, as she explains to Orestes: “women love their husbands, stranger, not their children.” (γυναῖκες ἀνδρῶν, ὦ ξέν', οὐ παίδων φίλα, Eur. *El.* 265). On the other, it is precisely because Clytemnestra shows some concern for her daughter that Electra is able to trick her into entering the farmhouse, where Orestes waits to murder her.

Ultimately, while Clytemnestra and Electra’s interactions in each of the three plays are certainly atypical, the expectations of the “normative” behaviors identified in chapter two still persist. Each woman seems to have in mind an “ideal” mother or daughter. Electra wants a mother who is devoted to her father, who helps her prepare for marriage and childbirth, who reciprocates her feelings of love. Clytemnestra, too, resents that her daughter purposely tries to bring shame to her and constantly rebukes and argues with her. Despite the fact that Electra tries to distance herself as much as possible from her mother, to the point that, in Sophocles, she even denies her that name, not only does Clytemnestra have some maternal feelings left, however slight, but Electra, realizing this, is able to use that fact to her advantage in Euripides. Though

each playwright handles it differently, the mother-daughter bond is central to each play, primarily in the character of Electra, but also in the grounds for Clytemnestra's disappointment in her daughter.

CHAPTER THREE
CLYTMENESTRA, ELECTRA AND SUCCESSION

Introduction

The family unit which is disrupted in this saga is a royal family. Hence, inheritance means kingship and power, and the continuity of the lineage has not just a familial function but a political one. In this chapter I focus on the ways in which the succession struggle intensifies the conflicts between Clytemnestra and Electra. Especially in Aeschylus, but even in Sophocles and Euripides, Clytemnestra moves into a position of power as ruler of Argos after Agamemnon's death. Electra's anger and grief at her father's murder is further exacerbated by the entrenchment of her mother on the throne. She feels compelled to unseat Clytemnestra in an attempt to restore normalcy.

When Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon and took Aegisthus as a lover, she effectively disinherited Orestes and deprived him of his paternal home. Although the details differ depending on the source, after Agamemnon's death, Orestes was essentially an exile.¹ The *Odyssey* never specifically mentions that Orestes kills Clytemnestra and focuses instead on his return from Athens (*Od.* 3.307) to kill Aegisthus as the usurper of his father's kingdom.² In Pindar's *Pythian* 11, Arsinoe, a nurse, rescues the child from Clytemnestra and sends him to Parnassus to be raised by Strophius (*Pi. Py.* 11.15-37), while in the *Electra* plays of Sophocles and Euripides, Electra and an old servant, respectively, are responsible for getting the child out of Argos (*Soph. El.* 13-14; *Eur. El.* 14-19). In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Strophius encourages

¹ For a discussion of the artistic and literary representations of Orestes and his revenge, see Gantz 1993, 676-687.

² Gantz 1993, 677.

Clytemnestra to allow him to raise Orestes because he fears a popular uprising against the royal family during Agamemnon's absence (Aes. Ag. 880-85) or, as Mark Griffiths suggests, because he really fears Clytemnestra herself.³ Although Electra remains in Argos, she too suffers when Clytemnestra and Aegisthus come to power. This suffering is explored to some extent in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, and in greater detail in the *Electra* plays of Sophocles and Euripides. In all three works, Electra is not given the protection that her royal paternal household should afford her, nor is she allowed to enter into a marriage that is fitting for the daughter of a man such as Agamemnon. While her mother enjoys the luxury and wealth of Agamemnon's palace, Electra suffers, maltreated and alone. Thus, in these three tragedies, in order for Electra and Orestes to reclaim the inheritance that they feel is their due, they must overthrow Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

In the *Electra* plays of Sophocles and Euripides, rather than the typical story of strife between father and son, where the son attempts to usurp his father's kingdom, the focus is on the competition between mother and daughter. Each playwright takes elements of the common succession myth story pattern and adapts them to emphasize issues unique to the relationship between Clytemnestra and Electra. The first concern is whether Clytemnestra has the right to rule in Argos. She married Agamemnon and moved to his kingdom, participating in a virilocal system of inheritance. Thus, when Agamemnon died, his kingdom should have passed to his son, Orestes. Instead, Clytemnestra takes Aegisthus as a lover, and he becomes ruler of Argos, ultimately creating a system of matrilineal or uxorilocal marriage with important implications for inheritance.⁴ Although there are other examples of this type of marriage in tragedy, Helen and

³ Griffith 1995, 88, n. 91. Electra and Orestes accuse Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* of having sold Orestes into slavery (132-36, 913-17).

⁴ Scodel 2001, 312: "Uxorilocal marriages are not unknown in epic...Helen's husband is king of Sparta, and Priam's daughters live in annexes of his palace with their husbands (*Il.* 6.247-50)."

Menelaus for example, both the Electras of Sophocles and Euripides reject the idea that Clytemnestra has the right to rule in Agamemnon's place.

Because Electra does not feel that Clytemnestra holds power rightfully or that she killed Agamemnon justly, she claims that it is right for her and Orestes to kill Clytemnestra; in fact they must kill their mother, she argues, in order to avenge their father and to return Orestes to his rightful place in the kingdom. The two playwrights emphasize different aspects of these issues, but both Euripides and Sophocles have Orestes and Electra overthrow Clytemnestra (and Aegisthus). In each play, the succession myth story pattern is activated but adapted, with each character playing a distinctive role.

Succession Myth Story Pattern

In fashioning the conflict between Clytemnestra and Electra in terms of succession and inheritance, Sophocles and Euripides rely on certain story patterns (*fabulae*) which had distinct, set elements that were familiar to their audiences. Three archaic Greek works are especially relevant to this discussion as 'precursor texts': Hesiod's *Theogony*, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and the *Odyssey*. They provide paradigmatic examples of the establishment and acceptance of virilocal marriage (in the Hymn), the possible usurpation of an absent father's kingdom (in the *Odyssey*), and the overthrow of the older generation by the younger (in the *Theogony*). Taken together, they form a set story patterns about succession and inheritance which Sophocles and Euripides then activate in their own works. Elements of the *fabulae* of the precursor texts might appear in the tragedies through the use of similar diction or plot that recalls the earlier works. Combined with a knowledge of the ideal psychological mother-daughter bond, this investigation of the expected functioning of the political system shows why the relationship between Clytemnestra and Electra is so fraught. In Electra's view, at least, Clytemnestra's failed

mothering has not only deprived her of a caring companion but also of a support system as she transitions to adult life.

Hesiod's *Theogony* presents several examples of this type of myth among the gods and serves as a model of this story in Greek literature.⁵ A succession myth typically involves a triad of characters, the father/husband/king, the mother/wife/queen, and the son. The first example in the *Theogony* is that of Ouranos, Gaia, and Kronos. Gaia, one of the four original entities, creates Ouranos, and the two begin producing children. Ouranos, however, will not let these children come out of Gaia:

ὅσσοι γὰρ Γαίης τε καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἐξεγένοντο,
 δεινότατοι παίδων, σφετέρῳ δ' ἤχθοντο τοκῆι
 ἐξ ἀρχῆς· καὶ τῶν μὲν ὅπως τις πρῶτα γένοιτο,
 πάντας ἀποκρύπτασκε, καὶ ἐς φάος οὐκ ἀνίσκε,
 Γαίης ἐν κευθμῶνι, κακῶ δ' ἐπετέρπετο ἔργῳ
 Οὐρανόσ. ἦ δ' ἐντὸς στοναχίζετο Γαῖα πελώρη
 στεينوμένη· δολίην δὲ κακὴν τ' ἐφράσσατο τέχνην. (Hes. *Th.* 154-60)

For as many as sprung from Gaia and Ouranos,⁶
 The most terrible of children, and they were hated by their father
 From the beginning; and whenever anyone of them would first be born,
 He kept hiding them away, and would not let them up into the light,
 In a hollow of Gaia, and Ouranos delighted in his evil deed.
 And monstrous Gaia groaned being strained within;
 And she devised a tricky and evil plan.

Gaia cannot carry out her plan on her own, and so she seeks help from her children. When she calls upon them, all are silent and hold back in fear. Only the youngest, Kronos, whom the narrator mentions also hates his father, steps forward. Gaia supplies him with a sickle and a plan: εἶσε δέ μιν κρύψασσα λόχῳ· ἐνέθηκε δὲ χερσὶν / ἄρπην καρχαρόδοντα· δόλον δ'

⁵ Another familiar example of a related succession myth is the story of Phoenix from *Iliad* 9, whose mother uses him to thwart his father's advances toward a concubine. The myth of Oedipus also fits in this category as a coming of age/overthrowing the father story, even though Jocasta does not directly incite Oedipus to kill his father Laius. *Odyssey* 11.271-80 presents a short version of the myth of Laius, Oedipus and Epikaste.

⁶ Although there is some debate as to whether the ὅσσοι refers to all of the children or just some of them, the important issue in this case is that Ouranos is causing Gaia pain and suppressing at least *some* of his children. For more on this debate, see Glenn Most 2006, 15.

ὑπεθήκατο πάντα. “And hiding him in an ambush she set him down; and she placed in his hands a sharp toothed sickle; and she unfolded the entire trick.” (Hes. *Th.* 174-75) When Ouranos, intent on love-making, approaches Gaia, Kronos reaches out of his hiding place and castrates his father. He throws the genitals behind him into the sea and takes his place as the ruler of the gods (Hes. *Th.* 181-84). Ouranos, however, prophesies retribution for Kronos and the other Titans (Hes. *Th.* 210-12).

Later in the *Theogony*, Hesiod relates the next generation of this family. Kronos takes his sister Rhea as a wife, and whenever she has a child, he swallows each of them in turn:

καὶ τοὺς μὲν κατέπινε μέγας Κρόνος, ὡς τις ἕκαστος
νηδύος ἐξ ἱερῆς μητρὸς πρὸς γούναθ' ἴκοιτο,
τὰ φρονέων, ἵνα μὴ τις ἀγαυῶν Οὐρανιῶνων
ἄλλος ἐν ἀθανάτοισιν ἔχοι βασιληίδα τιμήν. (Hes. *Th.* 459-62)

And great Cronos swallowed them down, whenever each one
Would come from the womb of his holy mother toward her knees,
Planning these things, that no other one of the shining Ouranians
Might hold kingly honor among the immortals.

Rhea goes to her parents, Gaia and Ouranos, for help, before her last child Zeus is born.

Together they come up with a plan for her. She will give Zeus to Gaia to raise in safety and present Kronos a stone to swallow instead of a child. Gaia thus acts as a surrogate or a *kourotrophos*, one who nourishes and raises a child. She protects and hides Zeus until he is ready to return and overthrow his father.

These myths illustrate many of the important elements of the succession *fabula*.⁷ First, the father fears or hates his child(ren), often because of the threat the child poses to his power. Although Ouranos is not given an explicit reason for hating his children (ἠχθοντο, 155), he does

⁷ M. L. West 1966, 23, catalogues the similar elements of this type of story which are found in various Eastern succession myths, including the *Enuma Elish*. He writes, “we begin with a pair of primeval, elemental parents...The parents beget children, who in each case are confined within their mother, and cause her distress; the father hates them, but the mother does not. The children fall silent in fear...Then one god takes courage...He overcomes the oppressive father by means of a trick...He robs him of the symbols of his strength, and the oppression is over.”

so from the very beginning, perhaps because his children are very strong and powerful, even “exceedingly terrible” (δεινότατοι, 155). Kronos’ actions, however, are given an explicit reason: beyond hating his children, he does not want to give up his control, nor does he want any of them to rule the gods, as that would mean his own downfall (461-62). In other words, he does not want them to replicate his own actions. Because of this fear that they will, the father in some way suppresses the child and prevents him from assuming his rightful position in society. This suppression can take the form of a physical interference with the birth, as in the *Theogony*, or the father might expose the child or send him to be raised by a surrogate. This act of violence to the child causes harm to the mother, often both physically and emotionally. Gaia groans and is pained (στεναχίζειτο, 159; στεινομένη, 160) with the children who are forced to remain inside of her; Rhea experiences unending grief (πένθος ἄλαστον, 467) as each child is swallowed. This crime against the child is also a way for the father to control the fertility of the mother who is not allowed to successfully give birth to her children or to nourish and raise them; the children are not allowed to grow and flourish.

Because she is being harmed and because her children are being harmed, the mother comes up with a plan. Usually this involves deceit or trickery; in Gaia’s case it is termed a deceitful and wicked device (δολίην δὲ κακὴν...τέχνην, 160). A male child is then asked to help carry out the trick (δόλος). Sometimes the child has been sent elsewhere and entrusted to the care of a *kourotrophos* until he comes of age and returns. The mother places her hopes in the son and sides with him against the father, helping her child come to power. The plot against the father also contains the idea of punishment or retribution for the crimes he has committed against the mother and child. When Gaia tells her children of her plan, she informs them that if they are persuaded by her, πατρός κακὴν **τισαίμεθα** λώβην / ὑπετέρου “We might pay back the evil of

your father.” (Hes. *Th.* 165-66). However, if the son overthrows the father and comes to power, sometimes he or his mother have to face retribution for their actions. Zeus’ overthrow of Kronos serves, in part, to avenge (τίσσιτο, 472) the castration of Ouranos.

Succession Myth Elements at Work in Sophocles and Euripides

Sophocles and Euripides both incorporate elements of this *fabula* into their *Electra* plays. Rather than the usual triad of father/mother/son, the struggle between Clytemnestra and Electra is foregrounded, with Clytemnestra in the role normally assigned to the abusive father/king and Electra playing the part of the plotting, avenging mother. In ancient Athenian society, public space was dominated by males (Introduction, page 3). Mothers, therefore, had a political need for sons as tools, as ways to express agency. Since Electra does not have a son of her own, she must create or appropriate one to complete the family triad of the succession myth.

A. Adaptation of the *Fabula* in Sophocles’ *Electra*

Sophocles uses diction to evoke and activate the succession *fabula* in his *Electra*. However, the role that each character fills has been adapted from the original pattern to fit the story of a mother-daughter pair. Clytemnestra plays the part typically assigned to the father/husband/king. She is a usurper of Agamemnon’s kingdom, and she prevents Electra and Orestes from enjoying the benefits of a royal household. Clytemnestra, in this play, is connected to power, rule and violence. When Orestes and Electra are reunited, he questions her about the evils she is suffering at the hands of Clytemnestra. Electra explains:

E εἶτα τοῖσδε δουλεύω βίᾳ.
 O τίς γάρ σ’ ἀνάγκη τῆδε προστρίβει βροτῶν;
 E μήτηρ καλεῖται· μητρὶ δ’ οὐδὲν ἕξισοί.
 O τί δρῶσα; πότερα χερσίν, ἢ λύμη βίου;
 E καὶ χερσὶ καὶ λύμαισι καὶ πᾶσιν κακοῖς. (Soph. *El.* 1192-96)

E And then I am a slave to them through violence.
 O For who of mortals inflicts you with this very compulsion?

- E Mother she is called; but in no way is she like a mother.
 O How does she do it? Either by violence (*lit.* hands), or outrage on your life?
 E By violence and outrage and all kind of evils.

Electra specifically blames Clytemnestra here for the violence that she suffers, pointing out that her mother behaves in no way as a mother should. βία, violence, force, or power, is a word that will be connected with Clytemnestra and Aegisthus several times in Sophocles' play. Electra also charges her mother with behaving like a master: *καί σ' ἔγωγε δεσπότιν / ἢ μητέρ' οὐκ ἔλασσον εἰς ἡμᾶς νέμω*, "And I consider you not less a master than a mother to me." (Soph. *El.* 597-98)⁸ These depictions encourage the comparison between Clytemnestra and the other violent abusive rulers in succession myths who take advantage of their power and harm even their own family. Electra says she lives a toilsome life (βίον μοχθηρόν, 599) because of the many evils (κακοῖς πολλοῖς, 599-600) she suffers at the hands of her mother. Even when Clytemnestra is not directing specific violent acts against Electra, her very manner has the power to compel Electra to act in certain ways. Responding to Clytemnestra's condemnation of her behavior, Electra says: *ἀλλ' ἡ γὰρ ἐκ σοῦ δυσμένεια καὶ τὰ σὰ / ἔργ' ἐξαναγκάζει με ταῦτα δρᾶν βία*: "But in fact enmity from you and your deeds utterly compels me to do these things by force." (Soph. *El.* 618-19) A comment by Aegisthus reveals his mindset as well. When he receives the false report that Orestes has died, he wants to display the corpse as proof, so that any person who still anticipated Orestes' return would give up his vain hopes and accept Aegisthus' rule (*lit.* bridle, στόμια, 1462) and would not force Aegisthus to use violence (βίαν, 1462) to

⁸ This use of *δεσπότιν* also emphasizes Clytemnestra's power in the civic or domestic realms rather than the military sphere. As Griffith 1995, 79 n. 66, points out, in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the use of *δεσποτ-* / *δεσποιν-* roots are largely confined to the *Choephoroi*, where the domestic focus is most intense. While Agamemnon's battle prowess and exploits in Troy are emphasized, Clytemnestra's power extends over the civic realm of the city and the more private realm of the home.

teach him sense. Thus, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are clearly accustomed to using force and compulsion to secure their rule.⁹

Chrysothemis, Electra's sister, recognizes this fact as well, but she reacts quite differently from Electra. Chrysothemis frequently reminds her sister that they are not in control and therefore should submit to those who are more powerful. She says that she is only trying to teach Electra to yield to those in power (τοῖς κρατοῦσι δ' εἰκαθεῖν, 396) because it will make things easier for her. Chrysothemis argues that in order to be able to live as a free person, one must obey those who are in power in all things: εἰ δ' ἐλευθέραν με δεῖ ζῆν, / τῶν κρατούντων ἐστὶ πάντ' ἀκουστέα. (Soph. *El.* 339-40) Electra rejects this reasoning, refusing to obey those whose rule she does not sanction. After Electra tries to enlist her sister's help in murdering Aegisthus, Chrysothemis says that she will not tell her mother or Aegisthus about Electra's dangerous words, but she yet again counsels Electra: αὐτὴ δὲ νοῦν σχῆς ἀλλὰ τῶ χρόνῳ ποτέ, / σθένουσα μηδὲν τοῖς κρατοῦσιν εἰκαθεῖν. "But you yourself, having no strength, at some time at least get the sense to yield to those ruling." (Soph. *El.* 1013-14) Sophocles frequently emphasizes the violence and power of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and in the struggle between Electra and her mother, Clytemnestra plays the role of the wicked ruler who must be overthrown.¹⁰

To further emphasize the idea that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are ruling unjustly, the old slave, who raised Orestes and is an adamant supporter of killing the couple, approaches the palace to deliver the false report of Orestes' death. He first asks the servants if it is the home of

⁹ In his *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus also connects Clytemnestra to power and rule. Winnington-Ingram 1948, 138, comments on Aeschylus' use of κρατ- words throughout the play, "κρατεῖ (10) was the first indication of the character of Clytemnestra; κρότος (258) greeted her first speaking appearance; the ironical κρατεῖς (943) marked the climax of her struggle with Agamemnon; and with κρατοῦντε (1673) the first play ended."

¹⁰ Blundell 1989, 155, argues that the political dimension of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra as usurping rulers is enhanced by the fact that the chorus is a group of free citizens rather than the slave women used in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*.

the *tyrant* Aegisthus (τυράννου, 661), and when he sees Clytemnestra approaching, he says he knows he has the right place: πρέπει γὰρ ὡς τύραννος εἰσορᾶν. “For she seems as a *tyrant* in appearance.” (Soph. *El.* 664) Although τύραννος does not always have to mean tyrant in the negative sense and can often just designate the ruler of a kingdom,¹¹ in this play these are the only two examples of the word. People in power, from Apollo to Amphiareus to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra themselves, are usually designated as ἄναξ, lord. The verbs ἀνάσσω and κρατέω are also frequently used to discuss those who rule or are in power in any given situation. The old man unquestionably supports Orestes and Electra and is, in fact, a driving force behind the murders, and his address to both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra as *tyrant* emphasizes his belief that they should not be in control of Argos. Here too, the singular use of the word by the old servant highlights his true feelings about the couple.

Even Clytemnestra comments on her position as a ruler and possible usurper. After experiencing a frightening dream, she prays to Apollo for safety and continuing power:

καὶ μή με πλούτου τοῦ παρόντος εἴ τινες
 δόλοισι βουλεύουσιν ἐκβαλεῖν, ἐφῆς,
 ἀλλ’ ὧδέ μ’ αἰεὶ ζῶσαν ἀβλαβεῖ βίῳ
 δόμους Ἀτρειδῶν σκῆπτρά τ’ ἀμφέπειν τάδε, (Soph. *El.* 648-51)

And if some others are planning to drive me away from my present wealth
 With deceits, don’t allow it,
 But grant that I might always live thus with an unharmed life
 Tending the halls of the Atreidai and these royal powers.

Not only does Clytemnestra realize the threat of plots from her enemies, but she identifies the

¹¹ Kells 1973, 136, argues for the “old, non-depreciatory” sense of the word here. Griffith 1995, 79 n. 66, points out, however, that in the *Oresteia*, Agamemnon is consistently referred to as *king* or *royal* (ἄναξ, βασιλ-) while “not surprisingly, τυρανν- is mainly reserved for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.” I follow Griffith and argue that the use of τύραννος here is marked. See Griffith’s article for a more thorough discussion of Athenian tragedy and democratic ideas.

kingdom as belonging to the Atreidai. This admission, as Finglass points out, strengthens her characterization as a usurper.¹²

With Clytemnestra in the role of a father/husband/king, Electra then becomes the mistreated mother of a son who has been disenfranchised. One of the major complaints that Electra has against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is that they have not allowed her to marry and that she has no husband or children of her own to protect her. Electra mourns: ἐγὼ...ἄτεκνος, / τάλαιν' ἀνύμφευτος αἰὲν οἰχνῶ, "I live always wretched, without a child, without a bridegroom." (Soph. *El.* 164-65) Thus, in some ways, her situation is similar to that of Gaia and Rhea, whose children were physically prevented from being born. Here, though, the female/mother role has been split into two characters. Clytemnestra (as a pair with Aegisthus) has the power, and Electra is the disenfranchised female with a potentially dangerous womb. In fact, there is a very specific reason why Electra and Chrysothemis have not been allowed to marry: Aegisthus fears that they may have children who would threaten him. Just as Ouranos represses his children to protect his power, and Kronos swallows his children for the same motive, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra control and stifle Electra's fertility so that they can stay in power. Electra tells Chrysothemis that the only hope that awaits her is lamentation for her lost wealth and marriage:

καὶ τῶνδε μέντοι μηκέτ' ἐλπίσης ὅπως
 τεύξει ποτ'· οὐ γὰρ ᾧδ' ἄβουλός ἐστ' ἀνήρ
 Αἴγισθος ὥστε σὸν ποτ' ἢ κάμὸν γένος
 βλαστεῖν ἔασαι, πημονὴν αὐτῷ σαφῆ. (Soph. *El.* 963-66)

And no longer hope in any way at all that you will
 At some time get these things [wealth and marriage]; for Aegisthus is not
 So foolish a man that he would ever allow your child or mine
 To grow, a clear source of trouble for him.

¹² Finglass 2007, 292.

Deprived of a child of her own, Sophocles' *Electra* appropriates her brother Orestes as her own son, and she depends on his help to overthrow Clytemnestra. For his safety, Electra had previously sent the young Orestes to be raised by a surrogate, the old slave, in another land, much as Rhea gave the infant Zeus to Gaia to be nourished until he was old enough and strong enough to defeat Kronos. In the opening speech of the play, the old slave, at long last leading Orestes back to Argos, emphasizes that the boy is returning to his paternal home, and he recalls how he received the child from Electra after Agamemnon's murder: ἦνεγκα καὶξέσωσα καὶξεθρεψάμην / τοσσόνδ' ἐς ἥβης, πατρὶ τιμωρὸν φόνου. "I took you and I kept you safe and I reared you up to this very youthful prime, an avenger of your father's murder." (Soph. *El.* 13-14) Thus from the start, the idea of Orestes as an avenging son returning to rid his father's kingdom of usurpers is created.

Sophocles has Electra use the language of nurturing and providing care as well as maternal metaphors to emphasize that she, not Clytemnestra, has performed the role of a mother to Orestes. Electra is connected to a nightingale three times in the play. She claims that just as the nightingale weeps for the child that she murdered, she, as the murdered Agamemnon's daughter, will never cease lamenting before her father's door (Soph. *El.* 107-9). A few lines later, when the Chorus tries to convince Electra to give up some of her grief, she states that she prefers to follow examples of Procne and Niobe, whose weeping is ceaseless (Soph. *El.* 145-52). Both of these mythical characters are notable for their actions as mothers. Procne murdered her son Itys to punish her husband for raping her sister; she is then turned into the nightingale who constantly calls out for the dead Itys. Niobe, who boasted that she was a superior parent to Leto because Leto had only two children in comparison to her own fourteen, saw her seven sons and seven daughters killed by Apollo and Artemis, Leto's children. Niobe was subsequently turned

into a stone that weeps continuously. The Chorus also compares Electra to the all-lamenting nightingale (πάνδυρτος ἀηδών, 1077). Of course, on the one hand these nightingale metaphors serve to emphasize exactly how continuous and how excessive is Electra's grief, a grief mostly connected to the loss of her father and not of a 'child'. But since the comparanda are all mother figures, Electra is putting herself in the category and mindset of the grieving mother. And perhaps grief over a lost child is appropriate in her case as she does not have offspring and, before she is reunited with Orestes, she is, in fact, without her "son".

Further emphasizing the mother-son relationship of Electra and Orestes is the use of diction of "raising" and "nourishing/nursing". In the previous chapter, pages 53-55, I discussed Electra's attempts to disavow Clytemnestra as a mother to her and Orestes. Sophocles' Electra steps in to fulfill for Orestes the duties normally associated with a mother. She says that Clytemnestra has accused her many times of raising Orestes as an avenger against her (ὄν πολλὰ δὴ μέ σοι **τρέφειν** μιάστορα / ἐπητιάσω· Soph. *El.* 603-4) When Electra hears the report that Orestes has died, her reaction is similar to that of the mothers discussed in chapter two, Clytemnestra and Hecuba, whose lives are totally destroyed by the sacrifice of their daughters. Those mothers very much see their fortunes as inextricably linked with their daughters, as Electra's is with Orestes:

Ὀρέστα φίλταθ', ὡς μ' ἀπώλεσας θανών.
 ἀποσπάσας γὰρ τῆς ἐμῆς οἴχη φρενός
 αἴ μοι μόναι παρήσαν ἐλπίδων ἔτι,
 σὲ πατρὸς ἤξειν ζῶντα τιμωρόν ποτε
 κάμου ταλαίνης. (Soph. *El.* 809-13)

Dearest Orestes, how you, dying, have destroyed me.
 For departing you have carried away from my mind
 The only hopes that still remained for me,
 That at some time you would come as an avenger
 Of our father and of me, who is wretched.

With Orestes ‘dead’ and all the hopes that she had when she sent him out of Argos crushed, Electra feels destroyed. Compare how Euripides’ Hecuba demands to be killed alongside Polyxena, claiming that there is no reason for her to live anymore. Electra here expresses a similar sense of loss of her own life and aspirations with Orestes’ death.

This association between Electra and mothers is further emphasized as she recollects taking care of Orestes when he was a baby and laments that it was all for naught:

οἴμοι τάλαινα τῆς ἐμῆς πάλαι τροφῆς
 ἀνωφελήτου, τὴν ἐγὼ θάμ’ ἀμφὶ σοὶ
 πόνῳ γλυκεὶ παρέσχον. οὔτε γάρ ποτε
 μητρὸς σύ γ’ ἦσθα μάλλον ἢ κάμου φίλος,
 οὔθ’ οἱ κατ’ οἶκον ἦσθα ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ τροφός,
 ἐγὼ δ’ ἀδελφὴ σοὶ προσηυδώμην αἰεὶ. (Soph. *El.* 1143-48)

Alas, the wretchedness of my care for you so long ago
 Useless, that I often provided for you
 In a sweet labor. For you were not ever
 Your mother’s more than you were my dear one,
 Nor were the women of the house but I was your nurse,
 And always I was called sister by you.

Here Electra claims to have given more care to Orestes and to have received more affection in return than any of the servants or their other sisters, or even his biological mother Clytemnestra. In addition, her use of πόνῳ γλυκεὶ, sweet labor, connects Electra to the language used by mothers when they describe the pain and delight of giving birth and having children.¹³

Once Electra has established herself as a mother to Orestes, completing the succession myth triad, the two of them join together to plan the death of their mother. Sophocles’ characters are very aware that they are utilizing a trick, a δόλος, just as the characters of the *Theogony* do, especially females such as Gaia. Even Apollo has told Orestes through an oracle that he must accomplish the deed without the help of armed men or an army but with the deceits of a just hand (δόλοισι χειρὸς ἐνδίκους, 37). Clytemnestra realizes the danger of such traps from her

¹³ See chapter 2 for a more lengthy discussion of this type of language.

enemies and prays to Apollo that she might keep current wealth and be protected from the plots of others (δόλοισι, 648). When Orestes and Electra are preparing to kill Clytemnestra, the Chorus prays that Hermes will hide the plot (δόλον, 1396) in darkness. And just as the son who comes to power and becomes himself a violent ruler often has to face retribution, as Cronos did, there are hints that Clytemnestra, as ruler, is facing a similar punishment for her crimes against Agamemnon. His death, too, was accomplished by a trick (δόλος, 197), and Electra accuses Clytemnestra of murdering her father by deceit (ἐκ δόλου, 279). This accusation is justification Electra needs to unseat Clytemnestra, the way one would unseat an illegitimate king.

It is also possible to see Electra, Clytemnestra and Orestes playing other roles. In some ways, Electra herself is like the unruly son of succession myths, such as Zeus or Kronos who overcome their same-sex parent in order to come to power. As a rule, however, Electra depends on Orestes to her carry out her plans, since, as a female, she cannot avenge herself and her father directly. She does, though, actively direct her brother and determine the outcome. In Sophocles, Electra also imagines herself in the role, momentarily at least, of a tyrant-slayer. When she thinks Orestes has died, she turns heroic and she tries to encourage her sister, Chrysothemis, to help her kill Aegisthus, with the promise that the whole land will adore and honor them.¹⁴ Once Orestes returns, however, she resumes the supportive role of a mother who uses her son as her avenue to power.

B. Adaptation of the *Fabula* in Euripides' *Electra*

In Euripides' *Electra*, there are essentially two separate succession storylines at work. Upon Orestes' return, he and Electra divide up duties for the murders of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Orestes and Pylades will find and kill Aegisthus while he is making a sacrifice to

¹⁴ For more on Electra as a tyrant slayer, see Juffras 1991.

the Nymphs, and Electra will take full responsibility for orchestrating the matricide: ἐγὼ φόνον γε μητρὸς ἐξαρτύσομαι. “I, to be sure, will prepare the slaughter of my mother.” (Eur. *El.* 647) Since he deals almost exclusively with Aegisthus, in this play Orestes carries out the more familiar succession tale of a son returning to rid his father’s kingdom of usurpers. As a child, he was rescued by an old servant when Aegisthus was about to kill him, and he was sent by this servant to Strophius to be raised in Phocis (Eur. *El.* 14-19). At his father’s death, he was not allowed to take control of his paternal home and is essentially an exile. Electra wonders if he is living his life as a wanderer (ἀλατεύεις, 131) and the Chorus describes his situation similarly: παλαιᾶ φυγᾶ / πατρίων ἀπὸ δωμαίων τάλας / ἀλαίνων ἔβα. “In ancient exile, he went wandering about, a wretch, far away from the halls of his father.” (Eur. *El.* 587-89) He is the typical avenging son, focusing his attention on punishing Aegisthus and on taking control of Argos, his legitimate realm. For this recovery of the throne from Aegisthus, he needs no prodding by Electra.

In fact, in book I of the *Odyssey*, Orestes is used as an example for Telemachus to emulate. Athena, posing as Mentor, counsels Telemachus to visit Nestor and Menelaus to try to find out information about his father. She says that if Odysseus is dead, after performing the funeral rites and finding his mother a new husband, Telemachus should turn his attention to the suitors and consider in his heart and mind:

ὅπως κε μυστήρας ἐνὶ μεγάροισι τεοῖσι
 κτείνης ἢ δόλῳ ἢ ἀμφαδόν· οὐδέ τί σε χρὴ
 νηπιᾶς ὀχέειν, ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι τηλικὸς ἔσσι.
 ἢ οὐκ αἰεὶς οἶον κλέος ἔλλαβε δῖος Ὀρέστης
 πάντας ἐπ’ ἀνθρώπους, ἐπεὶ ἔκτανε πατροφονῆα,
 Αἰγισθὸν δολόμετην, ὃ οἱ πατέρα κλυτὸν ἔκτα;
 καὶ σύ, φίλος, μάλα γάρ σ’ ὀρώω καλὸν τε μέγαν τε,
 ἄλκιμος ἔσσο, ἵνα τίς σε καὶ ὀψιγόνων εὐεῖπη. (*Od.* 1.295-302)

How in your halls you might kill the suitors either by deceit or openly:

For it is not at all fitting that you uphold this childishness,
 Since you are no longer so young.
 Or have you not heard what sort of fame god-like Orestes seized
 Among all men, when he killed his father's murderer,
 Crafty-minded Aegisthus, who killed his glorious father?
 You also, friend, for I see that you are very beautiful and tall,
 Be brave, so that someone of the later generations might speak well of you too.

Telemachus' situation is in many ways similar to that of Orestes not only in the *Odyssey* but in Euripides. Athena focuses on Orestes' killing of Aegisthus. Although of course Orestes' revenge and seizing of power in Argos includes matricide as well, Athena, in the *Odyssey* exhortation (above) does not mention Clytemnestra. Euripides' Orestes, too, does not really deal much with Clytemnestra. He focuses his energies on killing Aegisthus while Electra is intent on punishing their mother. When the two notice Clytemnestra approaching the farmhouse, Orestes runs inside to await her entrance and leaves Electra to convince her to enter. While he does not hesitate to kill Aegisthus, he has to be goaded by Electra to kill their mother; she spurs him on to matricide by reminding him that they must avenge Agamemnon (τιμωρῶν, 974; τιμωρίαν, 978). His sister even puts her hand on the axe while Orestes covers his eyes, as she helps him kill their mother. This is very similar to Gaia putting the sickle into Kronos' hand at *Theogony* 174, and really illustrates how much agency Electra has in this act. In fact, after the matricide, Electra blames herself for the crime (ἀτία δ' ἐγώ, 1182). Thus, while Sophocles' Electra appropriates Orestes as her own son, in Euripides the focus is much more on their relationship as brother and sister and on the separate duties each performs.

Taking specific responsibility for orchestrating the death of Clytemnestra, Euripides' Electra also plays a role in the second succession story line in the play. Sophocles' Electra fashions herself as a mother through the use of metaphors and diction that emphasizes her caretaking. In some ways, Euripides' Electra fits into the *fabula* as a mother figure because of

the position she is in and through her own plotting. She has been married off to a poor farmer because Aegisthus fears her offspring. In response to Orestes' question about why she has been treated so poorly, she responds: *τεκεῖν μ' ἐβούλετ' ἀσθενῆ, τοιῶδε δούς*. "He wanted me to bear weak children, and thus he gave me to such a man." (Eur. *El.* 278) Orestes then draws the conclusion: *ὡς δῆθε παῖδας μὴ τέκοις ποινάτορας*; "So that you might not bear children as avengers?" (Eur. *El.* 268) Electra is in the position similar to Gaia and Rhea: she is not allowed to have children that could threaten the current power structure. However, Electra takes the further step of not only orchestrating but participating in the matricide. In Electra's continual rejection of and repeated attempts to distance herself from Clytemnestra, this matricide is perhaps the final step, the ultimate form of denial of her mother.

Euripides' Electra actually creates a child as a trap to lure Clytemnestra to her death. She sends the old man with a message to Clytemnestra informing her that she has given birth and asking her to come to the farm to help her perform purification rituals. The old man is at first skeptical

Πρ καὶ δὴ τί τοῦτο μητρὶ προσβάλλει φόνον;
 Ε ἤξει κλυοῦσα λόχιά μου νοσήματα.
 Πρ πόθεν; τί δ' αὐτῇ σου μέλειν δοκεῖς, τέκνον;
 Ε ναί· καὶ δακρύσει γ' ἀξίωμ' ἐμῶν τόκων.
 Πρ ἴσως· πάλιν μοι μῦθον ἐς καμπὴν ἄγε.
 Ε ἐλθοῦσα μέντοι δῆλον ὡς ἀπόλλυται. (Eur. *El.* 655-60)

Pr And what does this have to do with the slaughter of your mother?
 E She will come having heard of my childbirth.
 Pr How? Do you think that you are a concern to that one in any way, child?
 E Indeed; And she will surely lament the position of my child.
 Pr Perhaps; lead the story back to its turning point for me.
 E Having come it is clear that she will be killed.

Electra assures him that she will come, and she is right. Clytemnestra arrives in a fine chariot, ready to help her daughter, and Electra begins to berate her for her crimes. Clytemnestra,

however, behaves quite civilly towards Electra; she even claims that she does not feel joy at the deeds she has done and that her plotting has made her wretched (τάλαινα 1109). Despite the fact that they have been at odds, Clytemnestra clearly feels some sort motherly obligation towards her daughter, and it is exactly this sense of concern or duty on which Electra is counting. She easily convinces her mother to agree to help her with the necessary purification rituals, and when Clytemnestra goes inside the house, she is killed by her two children.

Other dictional clues in Euripides' play invoke the succession myth story pattern. Just as deceit is also an important part of the interactions between Zeus and Prometheus in the *Theogony* 535-570 and *Works and Days* 47-150, so too do Euripides' characters rely heavily on deceit.¹⁵ Right before he exits to go find and kill Aegisthus, Orestes even calls on Gaia (Γαί᾽ ἄνασσα, 678) for protection, as if she is his maternal ally. By invoking Gaia, Orestes also seems to be aligning himself and his mission with her interests. Through the messenger speech, Electra learns that when Aegisthus sees that his sacrifice shows bad omens and says he fears deceit from abroad (τινα δόλον θυράϊον, Eur. *El.* 832-33), Orestes asks: φυγάδος δῆτα δειμαίνεις δόλον, πόλεως ἀνάσσω; “Why do you fear the plot of an exile, since you are ruling the city?” (Eur. *El.* 834-35) When Orestes begins to hesitate about killing his mother, and he questions the oracle of Apollo, Electra rebukes him. She tells him not to fall into cowardice by being unmanly and urges him to kill Clytemnestra by the same trick that he used to kill Aegisthus: ἀλλ' εἶ τὸν αὐτὸν τῆδ' ὑποστήσων δόλον / ὧ καὶ πόσιν καθεῖλες Αἰγισθὸν κτανών; (Eur. *El.* 983-4) When Clytemnestra approaches the farmhouse, and Orestes comments on her fine clothing and chariot, Electra cruelly jokes, καλῶς ἄρ' ἄρκυν ἐς μέσην πορεύεται. “How beautifully then

¹⁵ In Hesiod's two works, uses of the adjective δόλιος and the noun δόλος abound. For example, Prometheus' trick of wrapping bones in fat is called a δολίη...τέχνη, a deceitful skill (*Th.* 540).

she approaches into the middle of our trap.” (Eur. *El.* 965) Electra uses their mother-daughter bond as the basis for perpetrating her deceit; the deception is tailored to the power of that bond.

Much like in Sophocles’ *Electra*, this focus on deceit and trickery is an important element in activating the succession myth story pattern. The farmer says that Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon by using a trick (δόλω, 9), and Electra accuses her: ὄν γ’ ἄφαρκτον ἐκ λόχου ἔκτεινας, ἔργου δ’ ἦν σύνεργός σοι γυνή. “You killed him off-guard, to be sure, from an ambush, and a woman was your helper for the deed.” (Eur. *El.* *915-16) Kronos too comes out of an ambush to castrate Ouranos and has a female, Gaia, as his helper. Just as Kronos had to pay for his crime against Ouranos, Clytemnestra is paying for her usurpation of Agamemnon’s power.

To further emphasize the idea that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus should be overthrown, the playwright represents the pair as masters to Electra. When Clytemnestra comes to the farmhouse after receiving the message of Electra giving birth, Electra approaches the fine chariot and mockingly offers to serve her mother as a servant:

E οὔκουν ἐγὼ δούλη γὰρ ἐκβεβλημένη
 δόμων πατρῶων δυστυχεῖς οἰκῶ δόμους,
 μήτηρ, λάβωμαι μακαρίας τῆς σῆς χερός;
 K δούλαι παρῆσιν αἶδε· μὴ σύ μοι πόνει.
 E τί δ’; αἰχμάλωτόν τοί μὴ’ ἀπώκισας δόμων,
 ἤρημένων δὲ δωμάτων ἤρημέθα,
 ὡς αἶδε, πατρὸς ὀρφανοὶ λελειμμένοι. (Eur. *El.*1004-10)

E Should I not, since I, a slave who has been cast out
 Of my paternal home, dwell in a wretched home,
 Take your blessed hand, mother?
 Cl These slaves are present; don’t trouble yourself for me.
 E But why? You have sent me far away from home, like a war captive
 And with my home having been destroyed, I have been destroyed,
 Just as these women, having been left behind orphaned of a father.

Earlier, as the brother and sister look down at Aegisthus' corpse, Orestes tells Electra that she can say whatever she wants to say to it: σὸς γὰρ ἔστι νῦν / δούλος, πάροιθε δεσπότης κεκλημένος. "For he is now your slave, who was previously called your master." (Eur. *El.* 898-9) As Griffith pointed out in the *Oresteia*, this type of diction is appropriate to the more domestic world of this play, a world not concerned with war.¹⁶ Electra essentially positions herself as a captive slave who has been taken in war. But it is her mother, not a conquering soldier, who has perpetrated such a deed on her. Yet again, Electra does not feel that Clytemnestra has the right to be in the position she is in, and this, in part, is the reason why Electra struggles to overthrow her mother.

Succession in Argos: Clytemnestra's Right to Rule

Agamemnon's death left Argos without a ruler, and while it might seem that Orestes would succeed him by custom, the issue is, in fact, much more complicated.¹⁷ Orestes is a young child when his father is murdered, and he is not old enough or powerful enough to rule. Moreover, as other Greek legends illustrate, patrilineal inheritance is not reliably the case. In Sparta, Tyndareos was succeeded by his 'son-in-law' Menelaos when he married Helen, the offspring of Leda, Tyndareos' wife, and Zeus. In many versions of the myth, Orestes succeeds Menelaos by his marriage to Hermione, Helen and Menelaos' daughter.¹⁸ There are also versions of the legend in which Agamemnon comes to power in Argos by virtue of his marriage to Clytemnestra. In Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* Clytemnestra tells the story of her first marriage to Tantalus and of Agamemnon's violent murder of both her husband and their child (Eur. *IA* 1149-52). Agamemnon then marries her by force; while the text does not explicitly state it, the implication is that Agamemnon's motive for the murders was to obtain

¹⁶ Griffith 1995, 78.

¹⁷ Scodel 2001, 311.

¹⁸ Finkelberg 2005, 68.

Clytemnestra.¹⁹ Apollodorus and Pausanias both agree with the reports of marriage between Clytemnestra and Tantalus (*ApE* 2.16; *Paus.* 2.18.2). Finkelberg discusses the instances of kingship by marriage in Greek sources and concludes: “Each single case, taken alone, proves nothing. But the evidence is cumulative, and the persistence with which the same basic situation recurs over and over again suggests that, as far as heroic Greece is concerned, kingship by marriage was envisaged as a standard pattern of royal succession.”²⁰

The situation in Ithaca in the *Odyssey* is in some ways similar to the one in Argos. Telemachus is too young to take control, and a group of suitors have gathered at Odysseus’ home, demanding that Penelope choose one of them to marry.²¹ Scodel outlines the scenario that might readily be applied to Orestes:

Since there is no adult male to contest Odysseus' property, Penelope's husband would control it...Access to Odysseus' wealth makes marriage to Penelope a "realistic" as well as a "mythological" way to become basileus, as long as Telemachus can be ignored. Telemachus, of course, should inherit his father's property according to custom. The wealth of Odysseus is therefore accessible only if Telemachus dies, or if Penelope's husband could suppress his claims. Presumably the successful suitor could deal with the problem of Telemachus when it arose. Especially if Penelope had other children, the suitors may calculate that she would not support Telemachus' claims against those of her new husband. Athena relies on similar misogynist assumptions when she lies to Telemachus that his mother is about to marry Eurymachus (15.14-24).²²

These issues are at play in both Sophocles’ and Euripides’ *Electra*. Does Clytemnestra have the right to disinherit Orestes and Electra and marry Aegisthus?²³ Should Aegisthus come to power

¹⁹ Gantz 1995, 549.

²⁰ Finkelberg 2005, 69.

²¹ Scholars disagree as to what exactly the suitors will gain by marrying Penelope. Although some have argued that her new husband would simply become king of Ithaca, inheriting all of Odysseus’ land, Scodel 2001, 311, points out that though the initial situation in the *Odyssey* is that marriage to Penelope seems to imply becoming *basileus*, defining exactly what *basileus* means is a complicated question. Others suggest that perhaps the suitors just want Penelope for her beauty, while Halverson 1986, 119, argues “that in fact there is no throne, no office of king, indeed no real Ithakan state, and therefore no succession struggle.”

²² Scodel 2001, 311-12.

²³ Winnington-Ingram 1948, 131, comments on Clytemnestra’s position in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, before Agamemnon has returned from Troy: Clytemnestra stands before us as a ruler, as sole ruler, but only in the absence

because of his marriage to Clytemnestra? Will Clytemnestra have children with Aegisthus whom she will favor over her 'legitimate' children?²⁴ These issues also influence the way that the succession myth story pattern is activated in each author's play.

A. Sophocles' *Electra*

Using the diction and elements of the *fabula*, Sophocles inverts the typical succession myth triangle to highlight the conflicts that are specific to this mother-daughter pair. In his *Electra*, a major source of debate between Clytemnestra and Electra is whether or not Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon justly. Intertwined with this issue are ideas about the correct behavior of a wife and mother and the correct behavior towards one's kin. Clytemnestra supports her own concerns as a mother: her blood-related daughter, Iphigenia, was killed. Electra supports the male side: a wife should always submit to her husband in all things, and thus it was wrong for Clytemnestra to murder her husband. Clytemnestra, however, charges Agamemnon with being the first to violate kinship ties (Soph. *El.* 546). Essentially, the mother and the daughter debate whether it was just for Clytemnestra to kill Agamemnon and to take power. The lines become drawn around these arguments, as Blundell explains:

The murders of Iphigenia and Agamemnon have created two warring groups of *philoï*, cutting across the normal lines of family solidarity. Clytemnestra evinces maternal feelings, generated by the sheer physical fact of motherhood, for both Iphigenia and Orestes...She is despondent about Orestes' death as she is not about Agamemnon's. Though she regards both as enemies, the tie of blood prevails over the tie of marriage as it did with her feelings for Iphigenia.²⁵

of her husband. 'It is right,' says the chorus-leader, 'to honor the wife of a reigning prince, when the male throne is left empty' (259-260). Thus, he argues that Clytemnestra, who is described by the watchman as ἀνδρόβουλον, having the counsels of a man (Aes. *Ag.* 11), would not be enthusiastic about handing control back over to Agamemnon or to young Orestes.

²⁴ Cf. Athena's warning to Telemachus about the dangers of his mother remarrying at *Odyssey* 15.19-23 and Electra's assertion to Orestes: γυναῖκες ἀνδρῶν, ὧ ξέν', οὐ παίδων φίλαι. "Women, stranger, love their husbands not their children." (Eur. *El.* 265)

²⁵ Blundell 1989, 151.

To further highlight how much she disagrees with Clytemnestra, Electra tries to distance herself from her mother in two ways: she does as much as she can to disavow that Clytemnestra is even behaving as a mother²⁶, and she aligns herself with Agamemnon, her father, whenever possible.

Electra even berates her sister Chrysothemis for not choosing to do the same: δεινόν γέ σ' οὔσαν πατρὸς οὐ σὺ παῖς ἔφυς / κείνου λεληῆσθαι, τῆς δὲ τικτούσης μέλειν. “Indeed it is a terrible thing that you, being from your father, forget the one from whom you are by nature, and have concern for the mother who birthed you.” (Soph. *El.* 341-42)

Although certainly Electra is certainly angry with her mother for murdering her father and mistreating her, she also gains an additional benefit from aligning herself with Agamemnon. Her father’s murder is what she uses to attack her mother, as Clytemnestra makes clear when she responds to Electra’s charge that she is ruling unfairly:

καίτοι πολλὰ πρὸς πολλούς με δὴ
 ἐξεῖπας ὡς θρασεῖα καὶ πέρα δίκης
 ἄρχω, καθυβρίζουσα καὶ σέ καὶ τὰ σά.
 ἐγὼ δ' ὕβριν μὲν οὐκ ἔχω, κακῶς δέ σε
 λέγω κακῶς κλύουσα πρὸς σέθεν θαμά.
 πατὴρ γάρ, οὐδὲν ἄλλο, σοὶ πρόσχημ' αἰεί,
 ὡς ἐξ ἐμοῦ τέθνηκεν. ἐξ ἐμοῦ· καλῶς
 ἔξοιδα·

(Soph. *El.* 520-27)

And very often to many people you have spoken out that
 I rule, wanton, and against justice, doing violence to you and your things.
 But I hold no insolence towards you, and I speak evilly of you
 Hearing abuse from you often.
 For your father, and no other thing, is always your pretext,
 That he was killed by me. By me: I know it perfectly.

Clytemnestra here calls Electra’s use of Agamemnon a πρόσχημα, a pretext.²⁷ This raises the question as to what Electra’s underlying thoughts and concerns are.

²⁶ See chapter three, page 53.

²⁷ *LSJ* notes that πρόσχημα is related to the verb προέχω which means *to hold before*, especially to shield or protect. Thus a πρόσχημα is something that is held before oneself, a screen, cloak, or pretext. Certainly, one could

Although the fact that Agamemnon has been murdered is a major motivator in Electra's actions against her mother, there is more at stake. One of Electra's and Orestes' main concerns is that they have been cast out of their home and are treated as exiles or slaves. Electra has been robbed not only of a father but of the protection and comfort of her paternal home. When Electra tries to enlist Chrysothemis' help in killing Aegisthus, she imagines what the citizens will say: ἴδεσθε τῶδε τὸ κασιγνήτω, φίλοι, / ὦ τὸν πατρῶον οἶκον ἐξεσωσάτην, "Look at those sisters, friends, who preserved their paternal home. (Soph. *El.* 977-79) Electra constantly laments that she has no husband or child to protect her (164-65), and in part, it seems that clinging to her father's memory and her father's cause offers her some sort of protection or at least strength. Despite the less-than-ideal characterizations of Agamemnon in other Greek literature, the *Iliad* for example, in Electra's eyes, Agamemnon has done no wrong.²⁸

B. Euripides' *Electra*

Euripides' play has a slightly different way of exploring the issues of succession although there are similar themes. Euripides' *Electra* also constantly aligns herself with her father, and she claims it is shameful for a man to be known by his mother or wife rather than his father. In this work, the Trojan War is mentioned frequently and is used by Electra to comment on correct and incorrect behavior. Electra finds great problems with the fact that others, such as her mother and Aegisthus, are enjoying the spoils of the Trojan War which were won by the great Agamemnon. Clytemnestra, who has kept Trojan captives as slaves, argues that she deserves them in exchange for the sacrifice of Iphigenia and that she has dedicated the rest of the spoils in

interpret the use of this word as an empty accusation on Clytemnestra's part, as Finglass 2007 does. I think it is helpful, however, to explore what other elements are at play here, beyond Electra's grief at Agamemnon's murder. ²⁸ Benjamin 1988, 103 explains, "No matter what theory you read, the father is always the way into the world...He is the liberator, the proverbial knight in shining armor. The devaluation of the mother that inevitably accompanies the idealization of the father, however, gives the father's role as liberator a special twist for women. It means their necessary identification with their mothers, with existing femininity, is likely to subvert their struggle for independence."

a temple (Eur. *El.* 998-1010). Electra, however, is very concerned with manliness and cowardice, and uses the Trojan War to set up a dichotomy between Agamemnon, whom she praises for his exploits, and Aegisthus, who is criticized for not going to war (Eur. *El.* 917-18). At one point she tells Orestes that it is shameful that their father could kill so many men in Troy, but that Orestes, who is younger and has a nobler father, cannot even kill Aegisthus, a man who stayed at home during the war: αἰσχρὸν γάρ, εἰ πατήρ μὲν ἐξεῖλεν Φρύγας, ὁ δ' ἄνδρ' ἐν εἰς ὧν οὐ δυνήσεται κτανεῖν, νέος πεφυκῶς καὶ ἀμεινὸς πατρός. (Eur. *El.* 336-38) She goads Orestes to commit murder by cautioning him against falling into unmanliness (ἀνανδρίαν 982).

Electra does not understand why Clytemnestra would want a man such as Aegisthus, when she was already married to the great commander of the Greeks at Troy. She uses litotes (οὐ κακίον' 1081) to further emphasize her assertion that Agamemnon was a much better husband than Aegisthus. Electra is commenting on the qualities that she values in a man and a husband, qualities which her father had, and which she hopes to inspire in her brother. Included in her hatred of her mother is disdain that Clytemnestra would choose a man such as Aegisthus as a lover. When Electra sees the corpse of Aegisthus, she cannot hold back from finally telling him all the things she always wanted to say while he was alive. As Sophocles' Electra criticizes Chrysothemis for her (perceived) desire to be associated with Clytemnestra, Euripides' Electra insults Aegisthus for being known as belonging to his wife:

πάσιν δ' ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἤκουες τάδε·
 ὁ τῆς γυναικός, οὐχὶ τάνδρὸς ἢ γυνή.
 καίτοι τόδ' αἰσχρὸν, προστατεῖν γε δωμάτων
 γυναῖκα, μὴ τὸν ἄνδρα· κακείνους στυγῶ
 τοὺς παῖδας, ὅστις τοῦ μὲν ἄρσενος πατρός
 οὐκ ὠνόμασται, τῆς δὲ μητρὸς ἐν πόλει. (Eur. *El.* 930-34)

And among all the Argives you hear these following things:

He is his wife's, not the wife her husband's.
 And yet this thing is shameful, indeed for a woman to govern the halls
 Not the man; and I hate those sort of children, whoever is named
 In the city not for his manly father, but for his mother.

Perhaps Electra is also crying out against her own marriage to a poor farmer, a marriage that is far below her station. O'Brien points out that Electra's assertion of disdain could apply just as readily to her as to Clytemnestra.²⁹ Electra chastises Clytemnestra for giving up, and destroying, what she wishes she could have, a noble husband and legitimate children.

Both of these plays contain an exploration of what happens when the normal progression of generations is interrupted. The two playwrights ask, in one way or another, what happens when children are not allowed to pass from one stage of life to another, to take their rightful places, or at least what they perceive to be their rightful places, in the order of things. This topic is frequently explored in Greek succession myths, which tend to revolve around the conflict between son and father or son and usurper. In the *Theogony* Ouranos is protective of his power and essentially will not let his children come into being, so Kronos eventually violently conquers him. Kronos then repeats the same crimes against his own children and is thus overthrown by his son, Zeus.

In these two *Electra* plays, however, the relationship between mother and daughter is more closely examined. Both Sophocles and Euripides create plays that invite the audience to construct an image of what Electra's womanhood could have been out of the deprivations that she currently suffers. The life of a wife and queen is one in which Electra would have rightfully expected to participate. By an emphasis on what she does not have, the absences in her life of husband, children, home, wealth, and through a constant comparison to Clytemnestra, who perhaps for a short time does "have it all," the two playwrights break from the typical focus on

²⁹ O'Brien 1964, 31.

the disinherited son/avenger and explore instead exactly what is at stake when a noble daughter is prevented from completing her time as a *parthenos* and moving forward into her life as a wife and mother and, in this case, as a queen.

CONCLUSION

My thesis has taken as its centerpiece the gendered world of Argos and specifically the problems facing Electra as a daughter and Clytemnestra as a mother. The scholarly literature on the *Electra* plays fails to examine how the biological and psychological bonds between Clytemnestra and Electra affect their interactions. In much of the scholarship, Electra and Clytemnestra are discussed singly, as individuals. They are often seen to represent two totally different, irreconcilable positions: “There is no question of representing the rights and the wrongs of either as relative and debatable: Electra’s right is as absolute as Clytaemestra’s wrong.”¹ But in fact, their relationship as a mother and a daughter greatly affects the ways in which they interact with one another. This bond is of a different kind than that between siblings, between a father and his children, or even between a mother and son. Chapter one draws on the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* to set up a positive model, albeit on the divine level, for mother/daughter relations, and on three Attic tragedies to reinforce and refine that model. In this way, I set up a framework of positive mother-daughter interactions. Chapter two argues that Clytemnestra and Electra are very much aware of this framework even as they fail to replicate it. Both women are suffering from the dysfunction of the very relationship they try hard to reject.

In chapter three, I use the *Theogony* and the *Odyssey* as archaic precursor texts to generate not just a normative framework of mother-daughter psychological interactions but a pattern of political ideas around succession, usurpation, and inheritance. The breakdown of both of these categories is at the center of Clytemnestra and Electra’s fractured relationship. Here, Electra’s age-grade, in arrested maidenhood, is crucial. As Segal points out, “Tragedy stresses

¹ Kamberbeek 1953, 11.

not the orderly process of transition from one stage of life to another but the in-betweenness, the marginality, and the ambiguity in the juxtaposition of the two stages.”² Electra’s “in-betweenness,” her inability to progress to the next stage of wife and mother is not merely one more complaint leveled at Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. In effect, it is a way for the previous generation to control the succeeding one and for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus to possibly secure their power. Marriage to a noble man and giving birth to (male) children are the most viable way for Electra to gain a small amount of political agency. Since Electra has remained a maiden in her mother’s house in Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi* and Sophocles’ *Electra* and has been married to a poor farmer in Euripides’ *Electra*, she has essentially been disenfranchised as a political entity, a wrong which she feels very intensely. Euripides’ Electra even seems to envy her mother: she focuses on their disparity in physical appearance and material wealth. Clytemnestra, in fact, “has it all,” at least for the moment. She is a powerful and wealthy ruler with fine clothing, Trojan War booty, and a beautiful palace. She is married to a man of her own choosing. Thus, Euripides’ Electra sees in her mother all of the possibilities in life that she lacks. Since her mother is the ostensible reason for this lack, Clytemnestra becomes the target for all of Electra’s rage.

Clytemnestra has failed to reproduce mothering in ways which are deemed acceptable to her daughter, and to the society of the authors. To 5th century Athenians, a woman who kills her own husband and assumes political control, whether on her own or with a consort, is surely a despicable and reprehensible figure. Yet each play features much more than simple, unquestioned misogyny, or the exclusion of women from the political realm. Both playwrights show an awareness of psychological turmoil and a willingness to explore family dynamics.

² Segal 1986, 35.

Further, in a newly democratic society which was very concerned with issues of tyranny and nobility, the Argive saga made a lively subject for dramatic exploration on the Athenian stage.

This thesis opens up further avenues of investigation I have only mentioned *en passant*. For example, the full exploration of the idea of Electra as an “unruly son,” which I touch upon on Chapter 4, page 85, could yield a deeper understanding of her character. Further discussion of Electra as a potential mother, especially as a grieving mother such as those in Loraux’s *Mothers in Mourning*, could be very fruitful, especially taking Sophocles’ play into consideration, where Electra likens herself to the famous grieving mothers Niobe and Procne. There is certainly a political side to losing a son, and ancient Greek literature is full of examples of mothers who use their sons as an avenue to power, such as Phoenix’s mother in *Iliad* 9. What does it mean for Electra to be deprived both of an actual biological son and of her younger brother Orestes, who holds the potential to function as a son for her?

Ultimately, the politics of gender make Electra and Clytemnestra interesting blends of features, possibilities, and agendas, and any further investigations into these areas will enrich our appreciation of Sophocles’ and Euripides’ *Electra* plays.

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