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Animal metaphors and the depiction of female avengers in Attic tragedy

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ANIMAL METAPHORS AND THE DEPICTION OF

FEMALE AVENGERS IN ATTIC TRAGEDY

by

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ABSTRACT

In the attempt to enrich classical literary criticism with modern theoretical perspectives, this thesis formulates an interdisciplinary methodological approach to the study of animal metaphors in the tragic depiction of female avengers. Philological and linguistic commentaries on the tragic passages where animals metaphorically occur are not sufficient to determine the effect that Attic dramatists would have provoked in the fifth-century Athenian audience. The thesis identifies the dramatic techniques that Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides deploy to depict vengeful heroines in animal terms, by combining gender studies of the classical world, classical studies of animals and posthumanism. It rejects the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic views of previous classical scholars who have interpreted the animal-woman metaphor in revenge plots as a tragic expression of non-humanity. It argues instead that animal imagery was considered particularly effective to express the human contradictions of female vengeance in the theatre of Dionysus. The thesis investigates the metaphorical employment of the nightingale, the lioness and the snake in the tragic characterisation of women who claim compensation for the injuries suffered within and against their household. Chapter 1 is focused on the image of the nightingale in comparison with tragic heroines, who perform ritual lamentation to incite vengeance. Chapter 2 explores the lioness metaphor in the representation of tragic heroines, who through strength and protectiveness commit vengeance. Chapter 3 examines the metaphorical use of the snake in association with tragic heroines, who plan and inflict vengeance by deceit. Through the reconstruction of the metaphorical

metamorphoses enacted by vengeful women into nightingales, lionesses and snakes, the thesis demonstrates that Attic dramatists would have provoked a tragic effect of pathos. Employed as a Dionysiac tool, animal imagery reveals the tragic humanity of avenging heroines whose voice, agency and deception cause nothing but suffering to their family, and inevitably to themselves.

CONTENTS

experience as a Classics teacher both in higher and secondary education allowed me to write a thesis that reflects the blended learning journey of my PhD.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to those people who assisted me in the writing of the thesis from its initial stages to its final draft. In particular, I would like to thank my supervisors Prof. Fiona McHardy, Prof. Susan Deacy and Dr. Susanne Greenhalgh for their helpful feedback and inspirational comments. I would like also to thank current and previous members of staff at the University of Roheampton, namely Prof. Mike Edwards, Dr. Marta Garcia-Morcillo, Prof. Ted Vallance and Dr. Arianna Ciula, for their academic support. A special thank goes to my boyfriend Daniele, my mother Paola, my father Paolo, my sister Valeria and my best friend Anna Chiara, who have encouraged me to complete my PhD despite all the difficulties.

Editions, Translations and Abbreviations

All the references to classical literary texts are based on the editions available on the electronic database of the *TLG*. In the few cases annotated, I accept the variants from other MSS or adopt the conjectures proposed by other editors to support my reading of the tragic passages where a textual problem appears.

I include translations of ancient Greek terms, borrowed and adapted from the *LSJ*, to make my thesis accessible to a wider audience. The translations of quotations from ancient Greek texts and works of scholars writing in languages other than English are my own.

Authors and titles of ancient works are abbreviated according to the list of the *OCD*. The following list of abbreviations is based on the online version of *L'Année Philologique*. In addition to the journals referenced, it includes the abbreviations of the editions and the dictionaries adopted.

A&A	*Antike und Abendland: Beiträge zum Verständnis der Griechen und Römer und ihres Nachlebens*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
AC	*L'Antiquité Classique*, Bruxelles: [s. n.].
ACD	*Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis*. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyptem.
AJPh	*American Journal of Philology*. Baltimore (Md.): Johns Hopkins University Press.

AncW	*The Ancient World*: A scholarly journal for the study of Antiquity. Chicago (Ill.): Ares Publishers
Arethusa	*Arethusa*. Baltimore (Md.): Johns Hopkins University Press.
Arion	*Arion*: A journal of humanities and the classics. Boston (Mass.): Boston University, Office of Scholarly Publications.
Athenaeum	*Athenaeum: Studi di letteratura e storia dell'antichità*. Como: New Press.
CJ	*The Classical Journal*. Ashland (Va.): Randolph-Macon College, Department of Classics, Classical Association of the Middle West and South.
ClAnt	*Classical Antiquity*. Berkeley (Calif.): University of California Press.
CLS	*Comparative Literature Studies*. University Park (Pa.): Pennsylvania State University Press.
CPh	*Classical Philology*. Chicago (Ill.): University of Chicago Press.
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
CW	*Classical World*. Pittsburgh (Pa.): Duquesne University, Department of Classics, Classical Association of the Atlantic States.
Daedalus	*Daedalus*. Cambridge (Mass.): The MIT Press on behalf of American Academy of Arts&Sciences.
DELG	Chantraine, P. (1968) *Dictionnaire étimologique de la langue grecque*. Paris: Klincksieck.
DELL	Ernout, A. and Meillet, A. (1932) *Dictionnaire étimologique de la langue latine*. Paris: Klincksieck.

EG	Stefani, A. (1965) *Etymologicum Gudianum*. Leipzig: Teubner.
EM	Lasserre, F. and Livadaras, N. (1976) *Etymologicum Magnum Genuinum*, Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo.
EuGeStA	*Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity*. Lille: Université Charles-de-Gaulle.
FHG	Müller, K. (1841–1870) *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*. Paris: Didot.
GRBS	*Greek, Roman and Byzantine studies*. Durham (N.C.): Duke University, Department of Classics.
G&R	*Greece and Rome*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Helios	*Helios:* A journal devoted to critical and methodological studies of classical culture, literature and society. Lubbock (Tex.): Texas Tech University Press.
Hermes	*Hermes*: Zeitschrift für klassische Philologie. Stuttgart: Steiner.
Hesperia	*Hesperia*: The journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Princeton (N.J.): American School of Classical Studies at Athens.
HSPh	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.
ICS	*Illinois Classical Studies*. Champaign (Ill.): Stipes Publishing L.L.C.
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*
IntJSAPro	*International Journal for the Study of Animal Problems*. Available at: http://animalstudiesrepository.org/intjsapro (Accessed: 29/06/16).

JHS	*The Journal of Hellenic Studies*. London: Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies.
JLTS	*The Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies*. Lincoln (Ne): University of Nebraska Press.
LSJ	Liddell, H. G. and Scott, R. (1940) *A Greek-English Lexicon*. (9th ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
MD	*Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici*. Pisa: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali.
Mètis	*Mètis*: Anthropologie des mondes grecs ancien: histoire, philologie, archeology. Paris: E.H.E.S.S.
Minerva	*Minerva*: Revista de filología clásica. Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, Secretariado de Publicaciones.
Mnemosyne	*Mnemosyne*: Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Leiden: Brill.
NTQ	*New Theatre Quarterly*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
OCD	Hornblower, S., Spawforth, A. and Eidinow, E. (2012) *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. (4th ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
OJA	*Oxford Journal of Archaeology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
PCPh	*Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society.
Phoenix	*Phoenix*: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada. Toronto (Ont.): University of Toronto Press.
PLF	Lobel, E. and Page, D. L. (1968) *Poetarum Lesbiorum fragmenta*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
PMG	Page, D. L. (1967) *Poetae Melici Graeci*. Oxford: Clarendon

Press.

PMLA	*Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*. NewYork: Kraus Reprint Corp.
QS	*Quaderni di storia*. Bari: Dedalo.
QUCC	*Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica*. Pisa: Serra.
RPh	*Revue de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes*. Paris: Klincksieck.
TAPhA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*. Baltimore (Md.): Johns Hopkins University Press.
TLG	*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*
TrGF	*Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*: Vol. 2, Kannicht R. and Snell, B. (1981) *Fragmenta adespota*; Vol. 3, Radt, S. (1985) *Aeschylus*; Vol. 4, Radt, S. (1977) *Sophocles*; Vol. 5, Kannicht, R. (1981) *Euripides*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.
TPS	*Theater and Performance Studies*, London: Routledge.

INTRODUCTION

In the theatre of Dionysus, female avengers are associated with the wild, the world of untamed creatures. Just like wild animals, they are depicted as territorial, menacing and violent. However, they are not involved in simple acts of savagery, cruelty and irrationality. By blurring the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, humanity and animality, and mind and body, they enact what I define as a 'metaphorical metamorphosis'. The tragic heroines are imagined to abandon their human aspect and go through an animal transfiguration in revenge plots. They do not undergo an actual zoomorphic transformation, but they are attributed animal feelings, traits and behaviour in verbal imagery. As the most evocative among the birds, the nightingale gives voice to tragic heroines eager for a vengeful resolution. As the most powerful among the mammals, the lioness displays the agency of tragic heroines responsible for exacting vengeance. As the most deceptive among the reptiles, the snake reveals the treachery through which tragic heroines plot and accomplish their vengeful plans. Considered particularly fitting for tragic productions at the festival of Dionysus, the nightingale, the lioness and the snake capture female characters in the dramaturgical passage from suffering to vengeance.

0. 1   A Dionysiac reading of the animal-woman metaphor

This thesis aims to open up new perspectives and stimulate the debate on the dramatic role played by women and animals in the theatre of Dionysus. Through

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the application of an interdisciplinary methodology, I investigate the dramatic significance of animal imagery in the depiction of female avengers. The combination of gender studies of the classical world, classical studies of animals in antiquity and posthumanism leads towards an understanding of the animal-woman metaphor in revenge plots. By referring to the ritual context of fifth-century Athenian dramatic festivals, I explain and justify the metaphorical comparison of vengeful women with tragic animals. The tragic employment of animal imagery in female characterisation is nuanced on the basis of the kind of vengeance represented in the theatre of Dionysus. The nightingale metaphor gives voice to tragic heroines who, through ritual mourning and eternal weeping, are in search of vengeance. The image of the lioness empowers dangerous and protective heroines to commit tragic acts of vengeance. The snake metaphor reveals the tragic plans of vengeance conceived and realised by treacherous heroines. Employed as Dionysiac devices, the nightingale, the lioness and the snake signal that female vengeance is about to happen and bring about suffering.

The Dionysiac significance of the animal-woman metaphor in revenge plots emerges from my reading of the scholarship and my interpretation of the tragedies that this thesis presents. In the light of the influence of Dionysus on Attic production of tragic plays,[1] I argue that women and animals are the medium

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[1] On Dionysus and tragedy, see Pickard-Cambridge, 1946; Ridgeway, 1966; Pickard-Cambridge, 1968; Taplin, 1974; Foley, 1980:107-33; Seaford, 1981:252-75; Segal, 1986; Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988: 381-412; Goldhill, 1992:97-129; Longo, 1992:12-9; Padel, 1992a:336-65; Winkler and Zeitlin, 1992; Csapo and Slater, 1995; Lada, 1996:397-413; Cartledge, 1997:3-35; Easterling, 1997:36-53; Storm, 1998; Goldhill and Osborne, 1999; Di Marco, 2000; Wilson, 2000; Dobrov, 2001; Rehm, 2002:35-62; Rhodes, 2003:104-19; Seaford, 2006; Csapo and Miller, 2007; Rabinowitz, 2007; Sommerstein, 2010:30-46; Damen and Richards, 2012:343-69; Rutherford,

through which the playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides unfold the tragic action towards a vengeful resolution. By making use of animal metaphors in key moments of their tragic plays, Attic dramatists announce, stage and comment on female vengeance. They metaphorically employ the images of the nightingale, the lioness and the snake to foreshadow the tragic implications of female vengeance. When tragic heroines are compared to these creatures, they are represented as planning, inciting and committing vengeance within and against their household. The ambiguous and polysemous symbolism of the nightingale, the lioness and snake illustrates the metamorphic representation of female avengers. Split between grief and anger, tragic women are metaphorically transformed into wild animals when injured in intra-familial vengeful dynamics.

The animal-woman metaphor reflects the complex dynamics of tragic plays staging the Dionysiac self-destruction of the household.[2] The conflicting relationship of tragic women with the members of their family is illustrated by animal imagery in revenge plots. This is justified by the interactive function of metaphor, which has been recognised both in ancient and modern linguistic theories. Defined by Aristotle (*Poet*. 1457b1-2) as a kind of ὄνομα, 'noun', metaphor does not assume a simple rhetorical function. This figure of speech implies instead a transformation from a linguistic and social perspective. From a linguistic point of view, metaphor is 'a transfer of meaning, through analogy' (1457b6-9). It is the concept of similarity that generates the metaphorical

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2012; Rodighiero, 2013; Csapo and Wilson, 2014:292-9; Goff, 2014b:1477-80; Lanzillotta, 2014a:286-8; Rabinowitz, 2014a:520-6; Rehm, 2014:1335-41; Scullion, 2014:280-5; Tzanetou, 2014b:563-70.

[2] I use the term as defined by Seaford, 1994:344-62, in his interpretation of the Dionysiac context of tragic plays staging the self-destruction of the household.

expression where two different entities are compared. From a social perspective, the function of metaphor consists in connecting different values, on the basis of what Black (1962:25-47) calls 'complex implications'. The background of 'associated commonplaces', which gives the meaning to the metaphoric utterance, is created by beliefs shared by the collectivity. Building on this linguistic theory,[3] I argue that the animal-woman metaphor assumes a social, interactive and metamorphic function in ancient Greek tragedy. It creates a complex vengeful network around tragic heroines whose voice, agency and deception cause nothing but the destruction of their family.

In the theatre of Dionysus, Attic dramatists employ animal metaphors as communicative devices because of the way in which the Athenians engaged with the natural world around them. They make complex use of images from the natural world to express the tragic humanity of female characters who vengefully react to the injuries suffered within and against their household. As Thumiger (2008) argues, animals 'participate in the world of the play, impinging on the definition of humanity in a way comparable to no other semantic group' (2). From her perspective, animal imagery does not have a simple decorative and ornamental function, but it rather reveals the common ground between animals and humans in ancient Greek tragedy. She argues that in the fifth century BC the animal world was not opposed to, but rather associated with, the human world from an emotional perspective. As Thumiger states, 'animals can convey emotional experiences and represent human vulnerability, representing the human condition

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[3] For other linguistic studies on the function of metaphor, see for example Ricoeur, 1975; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Ortony, 1988; Lackoff and Turner, 1989; Coulson, 1995; Fauconnier, 1997; Fauconnier and Turner, 2003; Turner, 2006; Punter, 2007.

in a moment of crisis, or under the constraints of necessity' (8). I shall add that animals function as tragic communicators revealing the causes and effects of female vengeance in plays staging the self-destruction of the household. In conformity with the Dionysiac context of revenge plots, animal imagery gives expression to the tragic humanity of the violent intentions, plans and acts of female characters.

The animal-woman metaphor evidences the prominence of Dionysus in tragic plays revolving around intra-familial violence. As Padel (1992a) states, 'all the Greek gods are violent, in their fashion', but Dionysus's 'specialty is to connect interior violence – violence of *phnenes*, distorted perception, individual emotional storm – with performed, exterior violence' (336). Because of the lack of evidence, it is difficult to determine how violent acts were staged in the fifth-century Athenian theatre.[4] However, the tragic employment of animal imagery discloses the violence of Dionysus and other ambiguous deities, such as Zeus, Apollo and Athena. According to Lanzillotta (2014b), 'whether as defenders of divine prerogatives or as guardians of human justice, the gods' intervention in human affairs usually implies violence' (1462). It is the ritual context of dramatic festivals that justifies the zoomorphic representation of human and divine violence in tragic plays. As Henrichs (2000) states, animal sacrifice is one of the tragic images evoked by Attic dramatists 'to represent and valorise non-ritual forms of violence', with the aim of 'magnifying and elevating' violence, or any

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[4] For discussion of the controversial representation of violence in ancient Greek tragedy, see for instance Goldhill, 1992:97-129; Easterling, 1997:36-53; Sommerstein, 2010:30-46; Taxidou, 2012:1-13; Andò, 2013.

other 'mundane act of self-motivated aggression' (174).[5] Referring to this reading, Thumiger (2014a) argues that the tragic metaphor of sacrifice, which indicates the destiny of both humans and animals, represents a 'means of exorcising crisis and making violence and bloodshed possible to contemplate' on the Attic stage (113).

The Dionysiac taste for violence is intensified by the tragic employment of the animal-woman metaphor in revenge plots. Attic dramatists compare vengeful women to wild animals by playing with the epic tradition. With particular reference to Homeric similes,[6] they create a tragic repertoire of animal metaphors for the stagecraft of plays staging female vengeance. As Rutherford (2012) states, because of their 'bolder and more daring' effect, the tragedians prefer metaphors to similes, whose 'connector like' makes 'the comparison gentler and less striking' (120). By adapting Homeric similes to the Dionysiac context of tragic plays, Attic dramatists could provoke a striking effect in the ancient audience. I argue that they ambiguously use animal metaphors to confuse the spectators on the gendered identity of the tragic avenger of the family. They introduce the female counterpart of the most recurrent animals in the descriptions of epic heroes to attribute an active avenging role to tragic heroines. By transferring vengeance from the battlefield to the household, Attic dramatists employ the images of the nightingale, the lioness and the snake in a Dionysiac way. Evoked in plays staging intra-familial vengeance, these animal metaphors would have raised moral

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[5] See also Segal, 1974:289-308; Easterling, 1988:87-109; Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988:141-60; Seaford, 1994:369-71 for a ritualistic interpretation of the representation of animal sacrifice in ancient Greek tragedy.

[6] On the intertextual reference to Homeric similes in Attic tragedy, see for instance Rutherford, 2012:122; Hawthorne, 2014:92; Silk, 2014:713.

questions for the ancient audience. As Rutherford (2012) states, 'bestial comparisons carry moral implications' regarding 'the strength, ferocity and vigour of the subject' in both the epic and tragic traditions (121). However, I shall identify a difference between the Homeric and the tragic employment of animal imagery. In Homer, animal-like heroes empower themselves to attack their enemies and defend their friends on the battlefield. When tragic heroines are associated with animals, they plan, incite and commit vengeance within and against their household.

The Dionysiac employment of animal metaphors mediates the representation of female vengeance in ancient Greek tragedy. When tragic heroines participate in intra-familial vengeful conflicts, they are depicted as ominous, powerful and deceptive animals. Through the nightingale, the lioness and the snake metaphors, Attic dramatists build up the contradictory and multi-faceted depiction of female avengers. These images negotiate the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, humanity and animality, and mind and body that blur in the depiction of vengeful heroines. Considered as typical of and suitable for the festival of Dionysus,[7] the blurring of tragic dichotomies is conveyed by animal imagery in the representation of female vengeance. As Seaford (2003) states, the 'unity of opposites – of life and death, of φίλος and ἐχθρός – is manifest both in verbal *style* of tragedy and its representation of action' (148). My view is that the animal-woman metaphor is one of the stylistic

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[7] On the blurring of tragic dichotomies in the theatre of Dionysus, see Foley, 1980:107-33; Segal, 1982; Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988:381-412; Goldhill, 1992:126-9; Padel, 1992a:336-65; Zeitlin, 1992:66; Seaford, 1994, 1996a:284-94, 2003:141-163, 2006; Padel, 1995; Friedrich, 1996: 257-63; Easterling, 1997:36-53; Storm, 1998; Dobrov, 2001; Thumiger, 2008:3; Rodighiero, 2013; Lanzillotta, 2014a:286-8.

and dramaturgical devices through which Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides depict intra-familial violence in their tragic plays. In the light of the myth, cult and nature of Dionysus, Attic dramatists metaphorically transform female avengers into wild animals. The Dionysiac concepts of revenge, wildness and metamorphosis, which I define in the following sections, are interwoven in the tragic characterisation of the most transgressive heroines performing on the Attic stage.

0. 1. 1 Revenge

The first key aspect of the theatre of Dionysus that I shall define to explain the tragic employment of the animal-woman metaphor is revenge. The term τιμωρία, which denotes the concept of 'retribution, vengeance', derives from the feminine noun τιμή, 'honour', and needs distinguishing from the term κόλασις, which indicates a 'corrective punishment'. Its cognate τιμωρός is specifically used of either a human or divine 'protector, avenger, succourer' (*DELG*, 1120). According to Aristotle (*Rh*. 1378a30-2), the desire for revenge is triggered by ὀργή, 'anger, wrath', in reaction to a slight.[8] By reading the term τιμωρία as a compound of the noun τιμή and the verb ὄρομαι, Saïd (1984:47-90) implies that vengeance consists in 'watching over honour'. Mossman (1999) notes that the term, which first occurs in Aeschylus (*Pers*. 473), signifies 'more than the satisfaction of the avenger's vindictive feelings; it is a necessary restoration of honour to the victim' (171). McHardy (2008:3-6) also interprets vengeance as an act of reciprocity between the victim and the wrongdoer. If the loss of honour

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[8] On anger and other emotions in ancient Greek tragedy, see Konstan, 2007, 2014a:110-2.

leads the victim to claim compensation, vengeance can be considered the debt that the wrongdoer must pay.[9] As McHardy states, in 'disputes over status and power' vengeance is the 'survival technique' through which man can protect himself and his family (7).

Revenge is one of the key themes that signal Dionysiac prominence in ancient Greek tragedy. As represented in the *Bacchae*, Dionysus arrives to Thebes to take vengeance against his mortal family. His cousin Pentheus, the king of the city, is punished with death for having forbidden his cult. By driving mad his aunt Agave, he exacts vengeance through an act of intra-familial violence. As a result of the vengeful plan of the god, the leader of the Bacchants kills and dismembers her own son. Although there are no other surviving tragedies about Dionysus, violent acts of retaliation are prominent in the *corpus tragicum*.[10] The themes of kin-killing, dismemberment and cannibalism were not only part of the Dionysiac cult, but were considered particularly suitable for tragic plays.[11] According to Aristotle (*Poet*. 1453b15-23), it is necessary that the πάθη, 'pathetic events', happen ἐν ταῖς φιλίαις, 'among friends' in tragic plots. The tragic playwright should refer to mythological cases of intra-familial violence to provoke an effect of pathos in his audience. This explains why Attic dramatists attribute an active avenging role to female characters to stage violent acts of retribution. As the god

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[9] See MacDowell, 1966, 1978; Cohen, 1995; Allen, 2000; Herman, 2006; McHardy, 2008:3-6; Cairns, 2014:1167-70 for the interpretation of the concept of vengeance in forensic oratory.

[10] On the prominence of violent acts of retaliation in ancient Greek tragedy, see Blundell, 1989; Belfiore, 2000; Cairns, 2014:1167-70.

[11] On the tragic themes of kin-killing, dismemberment and cannibalism, see Foley, 1980:107-33; Blundell, 1989; Burnett, 1998; Belfiore, 2000; McHardy, 2005:129-50; Cairns, 2014:1167-70; Griffiths, 2014:497-502; Harrison, 2014:197-8; Tzanetou, 2014a:215-7, 2014b:563-70.

of excess and transgression, Dionysus influences the representation of tragic heroines who plan, incite and commit vengeance in reaction to the injuries suffered within and against their household.

The response of the fifth-century Athenian audience to the tragic representation of female vengeance is still a controversial issue in classical scholarship. When considering the social position of women in classical Athens,[12] it is difficult to explain the ominous, dangerous and violent involvement of tragic heroines in intra-familial vengeful dynamics. Burnett (1998) has hypothesised that vengeance would have been perceived as unproblematic, because 'among early Greeks revenge was not a problem, but a solution' (xvi). From her perspective, revenge is one of the non-written laws that regulated the transmission of heritage and family properties in aristocratic societies. As a form of necessary repayment, it was rather problematic for the dramatists. The difficulty for them consisted in provoking dramatic tensions in revenge plots. Burnett justifies the dramatic conflict between order and disorder in ancient Greek tragedy with the intervention of Dionysus (65-98). Due to the influence of the god, tragic heroines are depicted as able to commit violent acts, such as filicide, cannibalism and dismemberment.

In contrast to Burnett's interpretation, others have argued that the tragic representation of female vengeance would have recalled archaic tyranny rather than classical democracy, and therefore would have been considered negatively.[13]

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[12] For discussion of the social status of women in classical Athens, see Gould, 1980:38-59; Foley, 1981, 2001; Walcot, 1984:37-47; Case, 1985; Lefkowitz, 1986; Coehn, 1989:3-15; duBois, 1991a; Rabinowitz, 1993, 2007, 2014a:520-6; Fantham et al., 1995; Hawley and Levick, 1995; Zelenack, 1998; Blondell et al., 1999; McClure, 1999; Mendelson, 2005; Goff, 2014a:513-5; Tzanetou, 2014b:563-70.

[13] Blundell, 1989; Seaford, 1994; Belfiore, 2000; McHardy, 2008; Tzanetou, 2012:97-120.

As McHardy (2008:37) notes, women refuse political expediency and peaceful settlements in favour of vengeful acts in ancient Greek tragedy. From her perspective, this transgressive behaviour becomes especially problematic in the shift from aristocracy towards radical democracy at Athens. There is in fact a fundamental difference between the vengeful dynamics in aristocratic societies and those represented in the fictional tragic family. According to McHardy, blood revenge acts as a form of kin-help, and the victim or his family punishes the wrongdoer through retaliation, when there is no state-operated legal system. However, tragic women do not commit revenge in defence of their family against their enemies, but they, either willingly or unwillingly, act with violence against the members of their own family. As Blundell (1989) explains, the motto 'help friends and harm enemies' was more prescriptive than descriptive in fifth-century Athenian tragedy. It is through the reversal of φίλοι and ἐχθροί that the dramatic tensions were created to raise questions about justice, responsibility and violence. Through plays staging the Dionysiac self-destruction of the household, Attic dramatists celebrated what gave birth to Athenian democracy. Far from being an act of savagery, intra-familial vengeance was the instrument through which social cohesion and ritual collectiveness were achieved in the theatre of Dionysus.[14] In order to investigate further how the animal-woman metaphor was employed in revenge plots, I turn now to the analysis of the concept of wildness.

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[14] On the socio-political function of fifth-century Athenian dramatic festivals, see Winkler and Zeitlin, 1992; Goldhill, 1992:97-129; Seaford, 1994:344-62.

0. 1. 2   Wildness

I define the concept of wildness, which is another key aspect of the theatre of Dionysus, to justify the metaphorical comparison of vengeful heroines with tragic animals. The wild nature of both animals and humans is denoted through different linguistic expressions in ancient Greek. Among the most recurrent terms, the masculine/feminine noun θήρ generally indicates a 'living creature', but it can specifically mean 'beast of prey', such as the lion,[15] the wild boar,[16] the hind,[17] birds and fishes.[18] Another term that defines the wild is the adjective ἄγριος, α, ον, which reveals a multi-layered spectrum of values. It can give the spatial connotation of 'living in the fields';[19] it can indicate the natural state of 'uncultivated' territories[20] or the 'wild state' of human beings;[21] it can assume the moral value of 'fierce', especially in connection with temper;[22] it can depict the 'cruel' nature of things and circumstances.[23] From this linguistic analysis, it is possible to assess that wild animals were believed to dwell far from civilised territories, to be equipped with exceptional strength and to behave ferociously. As Thumiger (2014a) states, they were distinguished from 'beasts of burden or labor,

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[15] Hom. *Il*. 15.585.

[16] Soph. *Trach*. 1097.

[17] Soph. *El*. 572.

[18] Hom. *Od*. 14.291.

[19] Hom. *Il*. 19.88.

[20] Plat. *Phd.* 113b8.

[21] Hdt 4.191.

[22] Hom. *Il*. 9.629.

[23] Aesch. *PV* 177.

herds/flocks (cows, oxen, and bulls; sheep and goats), domestic animals (dogs, horses) and sacrificial animals (bovine or ovine mostly)', because of their threatening nature (112).

Wildness is another key theme that evidences the Dionysiac influence on the tragic depiction of female avengers. As explained in the prologue of the *Bacchae* (13-42), Dionysus introduces his cult in the city of Thebes by subverting the social order. Thebes is the first Greek city the god excites by ritual cries to vindicate his divine birth. In response to the disrespectful behaviour of his aunts, who denied the intercourse of his mother Semele with Zeus, the god recreates a state of nature. As a form of divine punishment, the daughters of Cadmus and all the other Theban women are driven mad. Stricken by the οἶστρος, 'sting', of madness (32), they abandon their houses and run towards the mountains. Dressed in fawn-skins and carrying the thyrsus in their hands, the maenads are embodied forms of Dionysiac nature. Their wild behaviour consists in hunting without weapons, tearing apart animals and attacking men. However, the transgression of natural and social boundaries that characterises the followers of Dionysus does not deny the concept of civilisation. From a ritual perspective, maenadism keeps women under control by bringing about cultic and social unity.[24]

In ancient Greek tragedy, female characters are associated with the world of the wild because of their violent behaviour. According to Padel (1992b), 'animals embody daemonic violence' to define and threaten humanity (142). From her perspective, the zoomorphic representation of tragic heroines reflects not only the human tendency to aggression, but also the attempt to tame the non-

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[24] For a ritualistic interpretation of maenadism, see Segal, 1982; Lefkowitz, 1986; Seaford, 1994:262-75, 2006; Rabinowitz, 2007.

human. By referring to the Aristotelian ideology of gender and reproduction,[25] Franco (2008:265-84) also discusses the metaphorical employment of the wild in female characterisation. In her species and gender differentiation, a wild woman is reluctant concerning marriage, whereas a tamed woman succumbs to male dominance. Corresponding with species differentiation, to be wild emphasises female power, resistance and violence. In connection with gender differentiation, to be tame indicates female inferiority, helplessness and submission. From Franco's perspective, the metaphorical use of animals, either wild or tame, reveals the negativity of women in ancient Greek literature. I depart from this simplistic interpretation by using the concept of metamorphosis to explain the ambiguous employment of the wild in the tragic depiction of female avengers.

0. 1. 3 Metamorphosis

The concept of metamorphosis, which is the last distinctive feature of the theatre of Dionysus that I define, clarifies the metaphorical comparison of female avengers with wild animals. The term μεταμόρφωσις is a feminine noun consisting of the preposition μετά, which in composition indicates a notion of 'change', and of the feminine noun μόρφωσις, 'bringing into shape' (*DELG*, 690). Despite the numerous mythological references to human and divine metamorphoses, it hardly occurs in ancient Greek tragedy.[26] There are instead attested other feminine nouns denoting either physical or psychological transformations, such as μετάστασις which can denote a 'shift' of form, and

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[25] [Arist.] *GA* 766b1-767b8.

[26] *TrGF* 734b,8 K-S; cf. *schol.* ad Aesch. *Supp*. 299, *Ag*. 1145, 1050; Eur. *Hec*. 1266.

specifically a change to one's wrath,[27] μετάβασις which signals a 'reversal' of fortune in dramaturgical terms,[28] μεταβολή which indicates a 'change' of events in the plot.[29] In addition to these compound nouns and their cognates, there are employed verbal forms that signify either an actual or metaphorical transformation in tragic plays. For instance, the factitive verb ἀμείβω indicates 'I change, I alter', in the active form,[30] and the denominal verb ἀλλοιόω means 'I become different, I am changed' in the passive form.[31] However, there is a substantial difference between change and transformation from an ontological perspective. As Gildenhard and Zissos (2013) state, 'transformation, unlike change, does not simply happen; rather, it requires a code of nature, a supernatural (or human) agent, or another catalyst of sorts' (15).

By breaking the boundaries of human identity, Dionysus reveals his transformative power in ancient Greek tragedy. In the *parodos* of the *Bacchae*, the Chorus sing that after the death of Semele, Zeus generated Dionysus, the god ταυρόκερων, 'bull-horned', and crowned him with garlands of δράκοντες, 'snakes' (100-2). In the fourth *stasimon* (1017-9), the Bacchants invoke and exhort the god to manifest himself in the form of bull, snake and lion. As represented in the *Bacchae*, Dionysus is able not only to shift his divine form, but also to alter the human state of mind. According to Seaford (2006), the mystery-cult of Dionysus involved a bodily and psychological transformation of the initiand. The myth of the dismemberment and restoration of the god was re-

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[27] Soph. *Ant*. 718; Eur. *Hec*. 1266, *Andr*. 1003.

[28] Arist. *Poet*. 1452a16, 18, 1455b29; cf. 1455b27.

[29] Arist. *Poet*. 1452a23, 31, cf. 1451a14.

[30] Aesch. *Pers*. 317, *PV* 23; Eur. *Hec*. 1159.

[31] Eur. *Supp*. 944.

enacted in mystic rituals.[32] In Seaford's words, 'the bodily fragmentation of Dionysos (and his restoration to wholeness) was a model for the psychic fragmentation (and restoration to wholeness) of the initiand' (74). Madness, transgression and communality characterise the metamorphic process undertaken during Dionysiac rites.[33] The etymology of maenads, the female followers of the god, is related to the divine possession of their body and mind. The adjective μαινάς, άδος, which means 'raving, frantic', is used in reference to mad women, and specifically to the Bacchants.[34] As the *Bacchae* shows, it is the transformative power of Dionysus that dissolves the barriers between the human, the animal and the divine world in the fifth-century Athenian theatre.

The ritual context of mythological stories involving transformative change has been acknowledged in classical scholarship. Buxton (2009) translates the term μεταμόρφωσις in the catalogue of Odysseus' adventures provided by Strabo (1.2, 11) as 'an astonishing transformation in a sacred context' (27). He specifically identifies the concepts of transgression, madness and multiplicity, which characterise the transformations of Dionysus, in ancient Greek tragedy. With particular attention to the mythological metamorphoses of Cadmus and Harmonia into snakes and those of Procne, Philomela and Tereus into birds, Buxton argues that their tragic representations were strongly influenced by the Dionysiac context. When tragic characters, either female or male, enact a metamorphosis

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[32] Diod. Sic. 5.75, 4.

[33] For discussion of the concept of madness in relation to the Dionysiac context of tragic plays, see Padel, 1992a:336-65, 1992b; Zeitlin, 1992:63-96; Burnett, 1998; McHardy, 2005:150; Mendelson, 2005; Seaford, 2006; Rabinowitz, 2007; Buxton, 2009; Scullion, 2014:280-5; Thumiger, 2014a:112-4, 2014b:785-7; Tzanetou, 2014a:215-7.

[34] Hom. *Il*. 22.460; Aesch. *Eum*. 500; Eur. *Tro*. 173, *Bacch*. 915.

into animals, they 'abandon their human form, either as a consequence of extreme transgressions of the norms of human behaviour, or in a state of unbearable suffering' (62). Therefore, mythological transformations should not be relegated to the realm of the irrational, the monstrous and the supernatural.[35] As Gildenhard and Zissos (2013) note, since Homer there was an aesthetic reluctance about, but also a prominent interest, in myths of transformative change. Mythological transformations, which populated the imaginary of primitive cultures, were represented to frighten and inspire hope (3). This view clarifies the emotional impact that the animal-woman metaphor would have triggered in the fifth-century Athenian audience. By blurring the tragic dichotomies between masculinity and femininity, humanity and animality, and mind and body, Attic dramatists metaphorically transform female characters into vengeful animals to provoke a tragic effect of pathos. Tragic heroines embody the metamorphic nature of Dionysus, so that they can plan, incite and commit vengeance within and against their household. In order to reconstruct the metaphorical metamorphoses enacted by female avengers, I apply an interdisciplinary methodology that, as I outline in the following sections, consists of gendered perspectives, animal studies and posthumanism.

0. 2.　An interdisciplinary methodology

This thesis proposes an interdisciplinary methodological approach to the reading and interpretation of the animal-woman metaphor in ancient Greek tragedy. I

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[35] For other studies on the literary representation of mythological metamorphoses see for instance Irving, 1992; Bynum, 2001.

combine gendered perspectives, animal studies and posthumanism not only to contribute to the current debates of each theoretical field, but also to respond to my research questions. First of all, I draw on gender studies of the classical world to discuss the controversial literary and social role assumed by female characters on the Attic stage. Secondly, I engage with classical studies of animals to explain the ambivalent relationship between the human and the animal world in ancient Greek tragedy. Thirdly, I build on the theory of the posthuman postulated by Braidotti to define the metamorphic identity of tragic women metaphorically compared to animals. The combination of gendered perspectives, animal studies and posthumanism steers towards a Dionysiac understanding of the zoomorphic representation of female characters in tragic plays staging vengeance. By referring to relevant studies that highlight the significance of Dionysus, I clarify how and why the metaphorical comparison of vengeful heroines with wild animals would have triggered a tragic effect of pathos in the fifth-century Athenian audience.

0. 2. 1   Gendered perspectives

I engage with classical studies of gender to investigate the contradictory avenging role attributed to female characters in ancient Greek tragedy. Since the 1970s, feminist scholars have tried to explain the relationship between the representation of women and their social position in antiquity.[36] However, because of the contradictions and ambiguities emerging from the extant literary sources, it is

[36] See for instance Foley, 1981; Case, 1985; Zeitlin, 1996; Fantham et al., 1995; Blondell et al., 1999; Mossman, 2001:374-84; Cawthorn, 2008; Rabinowitz, 2014a:520-6; Tzanetou, 2014b:563-70.

difficult to determine the actual role women assumed in the classical world. The fact that many ancient Greek texts, like tragedies, were written by men implies that the representation of women depended on a biased ideology of gender. Based on the Pythagorean table of opposites, the differentiation between man and woman in the ancient Greek world suggests a dominant male-centred perspective. Corresponding with the distinction between man and woman, the antinomies of 'limit and unlimited; odd and even; unity and plurality; right and left; […] rest and motion; straight and crooked; light and darkness; good and evil; square and oblong' (Arist. *Met.* 986a23-6) structure the ancient Greek perception and representation of reality. Under the influence of feminism, certain classical scholars have attempted to go beyond this dichotomic view to explore the social dynamics of the ancient Greek world. The hierarchical relationship between sexes does not imply male superiority and power, on the one hand, and female inferiority and marginalisation, on the other. Gender differentiation rather reveals the contradictory literary and social role of women in ancient Greece.

As some have argued, the concept of woman is a cultural construction and therefore needs contextualising in the specific society that produces it. In defining the gender ideology of classical Athens, Blondell et al. (1999:48-54) state that the literary invisibility of women corresponded to their social status. Athenian women were in fact excluded from the political, economical, judicial and military spheres of the city. They argue that in patriarchal societies, like Athens, men exercised their power by occupying ruling positions and fighting in the case of war. Women instead were attributed a procreative and nurturing function, and were required to participate in and celebrate religious rites. However, this differentiation of gender roles is more complicated, when considering the historical development of

Athens. As Blondell et al. explain, in the passage from the archaic to the classical age a change of attitude towards women occurred. In the heroic world of Homer, women are depicted as subordinated to men and are attributed marginal roles. However, their epic representation does not completely deny their influence on male decisions about family issues. With the birth of democracy, it seems that the Athenians attempted to reduce and control the influence of women both in the private and public spheres.[37] Represented as blurring the differentiation of gender roles that the democratic government attempted to impose, women are ambiguously visible and powerful in the fifth-century Athenian theatre.

The contradictory relationship between the social and literary role of women in ancient Greek tragedy has been widely discussed by classical scholars. It is debated why tragic heroines play a crucial role in a genre written by men, performed by male actors and aimed at a probably male audience.[38] Though considered the weaker gender in natural and political terms,[39] women are represented as the most active characters in tragic plots. As Blondell (1999) notes, the heroic model of man became controversial and problematic when it was re-enacted by female characters. Tragic women do not behave according to social rules, but they confuse the gender hierarchy that sanctioned male power, superiority and control in the fifth century BC. According to Foley (2001:3-18), Attic dramatists knew perfectly well what was socially expected from women, but

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[37] Th. 2.45, 2.

[38] Although female attendance at the City of Dionysia has been supported by some (Winkler, 1990; Csapo and Slater, 1995; Henderson, 1996), women most likely did not attend the dramatic festivals (Ehrenberg, 1951; Pickard-Cambridge, 1968; Dover, 1972; Podlecki, 1990:27-43; McClure, 1999; Sansone, 2011; Tzanetou, 2014b:563-70).

[39] [Arist.] *HA* 608a35-b3, *Poet.* 1454a19-21, *Pol.* 1260a11, *Rh.* 1367a16-18.

they depicted female characters as transgressing gender boundaries. In Athenian democratic ideology, women were required to maintain σωφροσύνη, 'moderation', and could not act without the support of a κύριος, 'guardian'. However, in ancient Greek tragedy they vehemently invade male spaces and assume male attributes. It is through what Zeitlin (1992:63-96) calls 'playing the Other' that men could represent themselves in the fifth-century Athenian theatre. The otherness of female characters could express 'their experience of suffering or their acts that lead them to disaster' (69).

The transgressive behaviour of female characters in ancient Greek tragedy has been explained and justified in the light of the ritual context of dramatic festivals. By referring to the *Bacchae*, Zeitlin (1992) affirms that femininity dominates the Attic stage because of its association with Dionysus. In conformity with the Dionysiac cult, myth and nature, tragic heroines are represented as blurring natural and social boundaries. This transgressive behaviour has been generally interpreted as either an inversion[40] or a perversion[41] of gender roles, typical of and suitable for the festival of Dionysus. The ambivalence of the god is expressed through the disruption of hierarchies and the re-establishment of the social order in tragic plays.[42] Through the transgression of gender roles, tragic heroines offered a metaphorical location from which moral frontiers and ethical choices were examined. In agreement with Zeitlin, Foley (2001) argues that 'the feminine other' was culturally considered as 'a form of initiation into the

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[40] Turner, 1982; Goldhill, 1992:97-129; Zeitlin, 1996; Burnett, 1998; Foley, 1981, 2001; Mossman, 2001:374-84; McHardy, 2008; Goff, 2014a:513-5; Tzanetou, 2014b:563-70.

[41] Seaford, 1987:106-30; Goldhill, 1997:127-50; Wright, 2005:172-94.

[42] On Dionysus and the transgression of social boundaries, see also Lefkowitz, 1986; Seaford, 2006; Rabinowitz, 2007.

mysteries' able to represent 'the tensions, complexities, contradictions, vulnerabilities, irrationalities and ambiguities' of 'the masculine self' (10). Therefore, the depiction of tragic heroines can be seen as neither a reversal nor a rejection of cultural established norms. Female characters do not simply subvert, challenge and invert the differentiation of gender roles, but their fictional identity is complex and ambiguous.

The Dionysiac representation of tragic women raises many questions from a mythological, socio-political and cognitive perspective. One of the first problematic issues consists in the contradictory relationship between the mythological and social context, where tragic heroines were imagined to act.[43] Segal (1986) argues that by destroying the mediating role of the myth Attic playwrights dramatise gender conflicts. He reads the conflicting points between sexes as the effect of the dramatic attempt to adapt the mythical examples to the social context of the fifth century BC. The representation of the mythical past, creating a dialogue with the contemporary world, was supposed to celebrate the birth of democracy. Through the interweaving of myth and society, Attic dramatists encouraged the exploration of what could transgress the civic order. Also Goldhill (1986) discusses the relationship between myth and society in his interpretation of gender conflicts in ancient Greek tragedy. He argues that sexual differences could provoke a civic discourse, where personal and collective interests collided. Embedded in the Dionysiac context, mythological heroines could celebrate and subvert at the same time the civic ideology of the democratic polis. In explaining the contradictions in the relationship between myth and

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[43] For the mythological role assumed by women in ancient Greek literature, see Walcot, 1984:37-47; Lefkowitz, 1986; duBois, 1991a.

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society, Foley (2001) confirms that tragic heroines did not function as simple cautionary examples in the democratic polis. They rather assumed a central role, by 'serving as a location from which to explore a series of problematic issues that men prefer to approach indirectly' (4). Therefore, the intervention of female characters in tragic plays cannot be read as a justification of the democratic reforms aimed at the control and the reduction of female power. Attic dramatists depict tragic heroines as belonging to an imaginary aristocratic world and locate their actions in a remote mythological past. Through the interweaving of myth and society, they could blur the differentiation of gender roles in female characterisation.

Another problematic aspect is the blurring of the dichotomy of οἶκος and πόλις in the tragic characterisation of female characters.[44] It is difficult to explain the differentiation of gender roles in ancient Greek tragedy in correspondence to the political and private dynamics of classical Athens. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988) argue that gender conflicts illustrate the real tensions between household and state in democratic Athens. The legal system is subverted by female agency, by affirming the importance of a male-centred structure. Also Shaw (1975:255-66) discusses the contradictory relationship between the masculine and the feminine spheres on the Attic stage. He argues that by stepping out of their private space female characters play the tragic role of 'intruders' in the theatre of Dionysus. He does not read a gender reversal, but he identifies both male and female traits in their transgressive behaviour. By going beyond a dichotomic view

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[44] On the binary opposition between οἶκος and πόλις from a gendered perspective, see Humphreys, 1983; Cohen, 1989:3-15; Foley, 2001; Silk, 2003; Wheeler, 2003:377-88; Goff, 2014a:513-5; Tzanetou, 2014b:563-70.

of gender spaces, Foley (1981) sees the tragic differentiation of male and female roles as a Dionysiac reversal of the cultural norm. The subordination of the household to the city is denied by female acts in tragic plots. The representation of tragic heroines as inverting and confirming social rules demonstrates that οἶκος and πόλις were perceived as antithetical and complementary in the fifth century BC. This position is supported by Rabinowitz (1993), who discusses the inconsistency of the social and literary role of female characters, by referring to the institution of marriage. The Periclean Law of 451 BC suggests that, despite their seclusion and exclusion from the political life, women played a fundamental role in preserving and passing on the right of citizenship within the family. By reading gender differentiation as a reflection of male anxieties about sexuality and reproduction, Rabinowitz argues that the fifth-century Athenian audience was aware of the interdependence of the city and the family. The differentiation of gender roles does not correspond in fact to a simple division between private and public spaces on the Attic stage. The opposition between οἶκος and πόλις, which defines the sexualisation of tragic spaces, rather blurs in the characterisation of tragic heroines.

The contradictory relationship between the emotional and cognitive function of women in ancient Greek tragedy is a further controversial aspect. From the perspective of audience-orientated criticism, Lada (2003:397-413) supports the connection between cognition and emotions in the perception of tragic performances. The channel of communication between author, characters and audience is represented by a shared experience of emotions. However, the theatrical representation of social inferiors and feminine emotions was banned by Plato (*Resp.* 605c10-e6), due to its dangerous effects in Athenian society. In

explaining the tragic function of marginal figures, Gould (2003:217-43) argues that women were perceived as opposed to the model expected from the audience. Female otherness did not give expression to the values of the democratic polis, but to the experience of the oppressed, secluded and marginalised. According to Chong-Gossard (2008), despite their subordinated role in the hierarchical social order of the fifth century BC, women occupied a central position in the theatre of Dionysus because of their excessive emotionalism. Through the representation of women, invested by the power of expression and reaction, Attic dramatists could create emotional closure for their audience. Silence was socially esteemed as a female virtue,[45] but tragic heroines were represented in their communicative expressiveness. Also Lacourse Munteanu (2011) argues that the expression of emotions can be interpreted as a reflection of social interactions and values. In agreement with Konstan (2007), he states that human emotions do not correspond to universal categories, but they must be contextualised in the light of the competitiveness of Greek society. Split between suffering and anger, female characters are the emotional medium through which Attic dramatists could represent vengeance, and provoke an empathic response from the fifth-century Athenian audience.

Given the Dionysiac influence on and prominence in Attic tragedy, I propose a new lens through which to look at the contradictory literary and social role assumed by female avengers. As I explain in the next section, I shift the focus from the human to the animal world, in order to understand the controversial depiction of tragic heroines who take on an active role in revenge plots. The metaphorical association of femininity and animality reveals the contradictions of

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[45] Thuc. 2.45, 2; Arist. *Pol*. 1277b20-3.

the tragic representation of intra-familial vengeful dynamics. The tragic employment of animal imagery illustrates the transgressive identity of tragic women who vengefully react to the injuries suffered within and against their own family. However, when female avengers are metaphorically compared or compare themselves to animals, the result of their acts is nothing but loss and grief. By announcing, staging and commenting on the Dionysiac self-destruction of the household, Attic dramatists give expression to private and collective tensions in the transitional passage from aristocratic feuds to the democratic polis. In order to demonstrate that they depict female characters in animal terms to reveal the tragic implications of their vengeful intentions, plans and acts, a clarification of the concepts of humanity and animality in the classical world is needed.

0. 2. 2   Animal studies

In this section, I consider classical studies of animals, with the aim of exploring the human-animal relationship in ancient Greek tragedy. The concept of animality, which indicates the status of being animal, has been repeatedly considered as an apt vehicle to express human nature. The nature of animals and their cultural representations reflect the way in which the concept of humanity was defined and perceived in the classical world. However, the boundary between the human and the animal world is difficult to establish because of the divergent philosophical attitudes towards it both in ancient and modern theories. Since antiquity, two models have been adopted, the oppositional and the continuum, to describe the human-animal relationship. The former emphasises the differences

and the latter the similarities between humans and animals.[46] As Ritvo (2007) states, 'assertions of extreme difference – for example, that animals lack souls, intelligence, or even feeling – have traditionally coexisted with implicit acknowledgements of similarity, even identity' (119). In fact, the relationship between the human and the animal world has been read either in its discontinuity or continuity.

The divergent attitudes towards the concept of animality emerge from the analysis of ancient Greek literary texts. In the excursus provided by classical scholars, the animal world is either distinguished from or compared to the human world.[47] The oppositional model is attested for example in Hesiod, who negates the moral status of animals, in the philosophy of the Sophists, who declare the superiority of humans over animals, and of Aristotle and his followers, who defend human supremacy and affirm animal inferiority in the great chain of being. The continuum model is evidenced instead in the Homeric tradition, where humans and animals share the condition of mortality, in the philosophy of Pythagoras and his followers, who believing in the transmigration of the souls prohibited the slaughter of animals and the consumption of their flesh, and in the theory of metempsychosis provided by Plato, who reads the transmigration of the human soul into an animal body as a form of divine punishment. This excursus demonstrates that the relationship between the human and the animal world was defined and perceived as ambivalent in the classical world.

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[46] I adopt the terms of 'oppositional' and 'continuum' as defined and explained by Alexandridis, 2010:108-12 in her interpretation of the human-animal relationship.

[47] See the excursus provided by Lonsdale, 1979:146-59; Bodson, 1983:312-20; Sorabji, 1993; Alexandridis, 2010:108-12.

Influenced by the anthropological approach of Lévi-Strauss (1962), classical scholars have distinguished the human from the animal world. Animals have been considered 'good to think with', not because of their similarity with but rather due to their multiple differences from the humans, as Romano (2003:9-12) explains. The identification of the differences between humans and animals has justified the superiority of the latter and the inferiority of the former. This culturally established hierarchy has been supported by the employment of the concepts of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism in the investigation of the natural world. The application of anthropocentric and anthropomorphic perspectives emerges for instance from the definition of the human-animal relationship provided by Segal (1963:19-53). From his point of view, nature consists of 'the forces and elements of the non-human world which form man's environment and lie beyond his control' (19-20). The question of human centrality is the focal point of Segal, who notices a change of perspective towards animals from the archaic to the classical period.

According to Segal, in the archaic age natural forces were seen as powerful, autonomous and mysterious. Humans were aware of and accepted their condition of ἀμηχανία, 'helplessness', in front of the dominance of nature. From this pessimistic perspective, human agency and morality were not separated from the animal world. Gods were thought to intervene in human life and humans to lack free will. The concept of guilt was interpreted as a violation of natural forces and external from human power. In the classical period, the awareness of human helplessness became the motivation for trying to control the natural world. With the reduction of the significance of non-human forces, humans thought themselves to be the measure of all things. They did not deny the divine

intervention in their life, but they developed a degree of self-consciousness. The power of rationality justified human centrality in the cosmos. From seeing guilt as an external force, humans began to internalise opposite forces. In the fifth-century humanism, the natural world was seen not only as part of human life, but also as a means to define both human greatness and smallness. By identifying the divine, the natural and the human levels within themselves, humans understood that suffering, violence and destruction were partly caused by their own actions.

With the emergence of the field of animal studies,[48] which criticises anthropocentric and anthropomorphic perspectives, others have attempted to rethink animality in the classical world. After the ecological campaigns for the liberation and preservation of animal species in the 1980s, animal studies has been recognised as an academic discipline. It has attracted interest in Higher Education, bringing about the creation of numerous research centres, such as the British Animal Studies Network (BASN), founded in 2007 and re-launched in 2012. Among the aims of this field, there is the urgency of recasting the relationship between humans and animals in a world affected by environmental issues and dangers. By shifting the focus from humanity to animality, both activists and philosophers have reconsidered the position of wo/man and her/his relation with/in the universe. The view that wo/man is primary and central in the cosmos not only justifies the principle of likeness in human representation, but also discloses the limitations and boundaries of human perception. Therefore, an animal turn is necessary to redefine the concept of humanity, and identify the similarities between the human and the animal world.

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[48] See for instance Fudge, 2002; Steiner, 2005; Ritvo, 2007:118-22; Bekoff and Pierce, 2009.

One of the first classical scholars who has engaged with the field of animal studies is Bodson (1983:312-20). She discusses the challenges and limitations of adopting new perspectives to define the human-animal relationship in the classical world. Although anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism dominated in antiquity, animals were not simply considered useful for economical reasons, as she suggests. Animals directly and actively participated in the life of the ancients, but recent concerns about their welfare and rights risk being anachronistic. There were though strong religious ideas behind the treatment of animals, which are confirmed, for instance, by ancient Greek rules about hunting wild animals (Xen. *Cyn*. 5.14). Given that animals were attributed natural and moral rights, it should come as a surprise that the Greeks felt a sense of empathy with them. From Bodson's perspective, the fact that in antiquity humans considered themselves cleverer than animals was probably the reason why they tried to know more, care about and defend them.

Another pioneer of classical animal studies is Sorabji (1993), who argues that all the theories, which have been formulated about the human-animal relationship, are not sufficient to explain its complexity. In the investigation of the role of animals in the classical world, scholars have always fluctuated between a humanist and an animalist perspective. However, he suggests that it is through complementary approaches that the moral status of animals can be defined. In order to show the divergent attitudes towards animals, Sorabji particularly focuses on philosophical literary sources. He argues that the crisis of Humanism coincided with the denial of reason to animals, proposed by Aristotle (*HA* 588a18-31) and supported by his followers. However, as Sorabji (1993) says, 'if animals lack rationality, are they responsible for what they do and do we owe them justice or

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are they not the sort of beings who can suffer injustice?' (107). The difficulty of providing answers to these questions demonstrates the necessity of rethinking our approach to the human-animal relationship in ancient Greek tragedy.

Classical scholars have adopted either the oppositional or the continuum model to reading and interpreting the tragic representation of the human-animal relationship. Despite the model adopted, they have justified the labile dichotomy of humanity and animality in the light of the Dionysiac context of dramatic festivals. Because of the influence of Dionysus, the human and the animal world are not distinguished, but are ambiguously interwoven. According to Segal (1974:289-308), the human-animal relationship is structurally manifested at a ritual, political, social and linguistic level. The boundary between humans and animals fades, by bringing about an inversion of codes, values and meanings. Because of this dramatic reversal, savagery seems to replace civilisation, and humans need to re-include non-human forces within the polis. As Segal explains, fifth-century humanism consisted in the development of civilisation, through the separation of the human from the animal world, and the refusal of cannibalism, savagery and cruelty. Aware of his inner conflicts, 'man confronted the beast-world outside and inside himself' (308). Segal's interpretation is valuable for understanding the conflicting nature of human identity in the fifth century BC. However, the concept of animality should not be merely interpreted in terms of opposition to humanity.

In contrast to Segal's view, Thumiger (2006:191-210) argues that the human and the animal worlds are represented in relation to each other, rather than in opposition, in ancient Greek tragedy. Adapted to the Dionysiac context of tragic plays, animals are metaphorically evoked to express human emotions,

feelings and reactions. She particularly focuses on the animal imagery employed in the *Bacchae* to demonstrate that nature and culture are not opposed but ambiguously confused. Thumiger does not deny the relevance of the natural world in order to exalt the polis as the place where civilisation is established. Through analysis of the *Bacchae*, she suggests instead that savagery and civilisation cannot be reconciled and the order subverted by Dionysus cannot be restored. From her perspective, the civilised world appears more irrational and less controllable than the wild on the Attic stage. Because of the Dionysiac intervention in the play, the animal world neither contradicts nor complements the human world. With particular attention to the metaphor of the yoke and yoking, Thumiger (2008:1-21) argues that crisis and necessity characterise both human and animal nature. The fact that both animals and humans are subject to fate is the main aspect she outlines to define their common ground.

When considering the ambivalence of Dionysus, I argue that the tragic representation of the human-animal relationship cannot be merely interpreted either in terms of discontinuity or of continuity. The animal world should instead be read both in its similarities with and differences from the human world. As I explain in next section, I adopt a posthumanist perspective to clarify the blurring of the boundaries between humanity and animality in ancient Greek tragedy. Attic dramatists do not describe the animal world to emphasise human centrality, power and supremacy in fifth-century Athens. By embracing an anti-humanist and anti-anthropocentric view, I argue that they metaphorically evoke animals in female characterisation to question the human concepts of retribution, violence and justice. They specifically employ the animal-woman metaphor in key moments of their plays to signal the dramaturgical passage from suffering to vengeance.

Attributed an ambiguous symbolism, animals display the emotional contradictions behind the involvement of tragic women in intra-familial vengeful dynamics. Through a posthumanist non-dualistic understanding of human identity, I demonstrate that female avengers are metaphorically transformed into tragic animals to provoke an empathic effect in the fifth-century Athenian audience.

0. 2. 3 Posthumanism

I adopt a posthumanist perspective to assess how the animal-woman metaphor would have been perceived in ancient Greek tragedy. As a result of anti-anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, posthumanism aims at a new definition of humanity through the concept of non-humanity. In Wolfe's (2010) words, humanism has been constantly linked to 'the search for truth', 'the ability to determine right and wrong', and 'the capacity for self-determination' (XI). A posthumanist discourse, by advocating instead the possibility of decentring wo/man and relocating him/her in the world, offers a fresh angle from which to define humanity. Wolfe does not interpret posthumanism either as posterior to, a rejection, or a transcendence of humanism. By giving emphasis to human experience, it rather reinforces the concept of humanity. Posthumanism reveals in fact human modes of 'communication, interaction, meaning, social significations, and affective investments with greater specificity' (XXV). Thinking beyond humanism is therefore necessary to remove wo/man from the centre and to rethink his/her relationship(s) with(in) the world in posthumanist terms.

Because of his revolutionary way in looking at humanity, Lacan can be considered one of the first posthumanist thinkers. He subverts the Cartesian *cogito*

ergo sum to deny the power of reason in the formation of human identity.[49] By returning to Freud, Lacan suggests that it is the voice of the unconscious that gives meaning to the Subject. He removes the Self from his/her central and signifying position to concentrate on the priority and significance of the Other. As Lacan explains in his theory of 'the mirror stage', the Subject needs dislocating to recognise him/herself. It is through his/her specular image that the Subject becomes aware of his/her own identity. In psychoanalytic terms, the recognition of the image initially brings about pleasure, because the Subject from being fragmented can see the unity and mastery of his/her body in the mirror. After this initial state of fascination, the Subject realises that his/her image is just illusory. Located between fragmentation and unity, the Subject feels a sense of anxiety. This effect is caused by the specular image, which not only anticipates the illusory unity of the body of the Subject, but it also reminds him/her of the previous state of his/her own fragmentation. From his posthumanist perspective, Lacan identifies separation, alienation and loss in the process of formation of human identity.

With particular reference to Lacan, Leonard (2014) argues that it is possible to adopt a posthumanist perspective to understand the relationship between the human and the non-human in ancient Greek tragedy. By applying the psychoanalytical theory of Lacan, she develops the idea that tragic characters are represented as living in a posthuman condition. She specifically analyses the *Oedipus at Colonus* to show the significance of death and life drives in the depiction of the tragic hero. In psychoanalytic terms, it is the conflict between these two drives that brings about the process of civilisation. As Leonard demonstrates, the tragic characterisation of Oedipus confirms that what all human

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[49] Lacan, 1966, 1977, 1998.

beings share is not rationality, but mortality. I agree with Leonard that it is necessary to redefine the concept of humanity in ancient Greek tragedy through a posthumanist perspective. However, the identification of mortality as the link between human and non-human creatures leads into a merely negative interpretation of tragic characterisation. By referring to Lacanian psychoanalysis, Leonard emphasises the concepts of vulnerability, crisis and failure in the tragic representation of human identity.

I adopt the perspective suggested by Braidotti to explore the posthumanist relationship between humanity and non-humanity in ancient Greek tragedy. By going beyond Lacanian psychoanalysis, Braidotti takes a positive direction to define the posthuman. As one of the pioneers of women and animal studies, she argues that it is fundamental to revise our understanding of the process of formation of human identity. As Braidotti (2013) says, 'posthumanism is the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between humanism and anti-humanism, tracing a different framework and looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives' (37). Her posthumanist theory rejects the classical definition of humanism, on the one hand, and avoids anti-humanist assumptions, on the other. She does not equate humanity to consciousness and rationality, but she rather affirms the positivity of decentring wo/man. His/her decentralisation should not be seen in negative terms as the cause of human crisis, failure and loss. Braidotti refuses humanist and anti-humanist definitions, with the aim of proposing a posthuman manifesto, which positively relocates wo/man in the universe. Rather than distinguishing the human from the non-human, she refers to posthumanist 'principles of community bonding, knowing subjects, affirmation of pan-humanity against the provincialism of the mind' (11). From her perspective, a

posthumanist turn is necessary since new ways of defining humanity arise where the crisis of man ends.

I have chosen to adopt the theory of the posthuman postulated by Braidotti in my research for two main reasons. One is structural and the other is thematic. From a structural perspective, posthumanism 'introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species', as Braidotti (2013:1) states. Influenced by poststructuralism, postfeminism and animal studies, she embraces a non-dualistic understanding of human identity. The traditional human divisions between nature and culture, masculinity and femininity, mind and body, organic and technology, self and other, blur in a posthumanist worldview. By moving beyond the dialectics that structures human identity, Braidotti exposes the non-naturalistic structure of the human. She denies dichotomic views of human identity to read instead differences in a positive way. The concept of difference, through which humanism has constantly justified the supremacy and centrality of man in the world, is rephrased in posthumanist terms.

From Braidotti's (2013) point of view, the differences between human and non-human beings reflect the complex nature of human identity. Being human should not spell the inferiority of animals and women as 'naturalised and sexualised others' (37). It should rather give expression to these multiple voices, which 'remerge with vengeance in postmodernity', to relocate humanity in a world without hierarchical power relationships. In this new dialectical scheme, animals and women play a fundamental role in denouncing the partiality and bias of human rationality. It is the identification of differences that has produced the dialectical processes of naturalisation and sexualisation in Western philosophy.

Humanism should instead promote 'emancipation in the pursuit of equality and secularism through rational governance' (31).

From a thematic perspective, the theory of the posthuman postulated by Braidotti offers a metamorphic definition of humanity. By rejecting a dichotomic structure of the world, she demonstrates the necessity of looking at human identity in its transformative nature. She adopts the posthumanist concept of metamorphosis with the aim of defining the complexity of human nature. From her perspective, human identity cannot be seen in its unity and fixity, because of its transitional tendency to move from one place to another. It is through a metamorphosis that the Subject can be de-centred and seen in its active and dynamic nature. In Braidotti's (2002) words, metamorphosis is a 'form of figuration that expresses the hybrid nature we are in the process of becoming' (2-3). The thinking subject is in fact 'a process of expression, composition, selection and incorporation of forces aimed at a positive transformation', as Braidotti (2006:146) states. Rid of its structural dichotomies, humanism should stop worrying about what humans are, but rather investigate what they can become. The posthumanist concept of metamorphosis illustrates the complex, transitional and changing nature of human identity.

Among the posthumanist possibilities presented by Braidotti, there are two specific kinds of metamorphoses that humans can enact. The first is what Braidotti defines as 'becoming-woman' (2002:25), which is a mimetic practice through which the contradictions of a male-centred society are embodied to promote emancipation and egalitarianism. As a process of mimesis, this posthumanist metamorphosis implies a reproduction of male dominant values to express women's contradictory condition. It is the social strategy through which

women can denounce the limits of a patriarchal society, on the one hand, and get socially empowered, on the other. The second kind of posthumanist metamorphosis is what Braidotti (2013:67) calls 'becoming-animal'. In this posthuman condition, the human and the animal worlds are not in a hierarchical opposition. Posthumanism rather implies a world of '*zoe*-centred egalitarianism' (60), where animals and humans share a common ground. As Braidotti explains, the posthuman world is marked by the return of *zoe*, the non-human, vital force of life. Unlike *bios*, which is the human life, *zoe* is a process, interactive and open-ended, dynamic and self-organising. With the posthuman emergence of *zoe*, the differences between the human and the animal worlds vanish, by generating a materialist, immanent and positive transformation. As Braidotti states (2006), 'the process of becoming-animal is connected to an expansion or creation of new sensorial and perceptive capacities or powers, which alter or stretch what a body can actually do' (103). By outlining these two possible metamorphoses of human identity, Braidotti demonstrates that animals and women are not simply the markers of marginalisation, seclusion, inferiority and oppression. The return of naturalised and sexualised minorities in the perception of the world rather reveals the transformative nature of human identity.

I apply the theory of the posthuman postulated by Braidotti to provide a new reading and interpretation of the animal-woman metaphor in ancient Greek tragedy. Her non-dualistic understanding of human dichotomies, her positive reading of the differences between the human and the non-human worlds, and her concept of metamorphosis in the definition of human identity are valuable for and applicable to my dramatic analysis. From the posthumanist perspective of Braidotti, it is possible to restructure the dichotomies of masculinity and

femininity, humanity and animality, body and mind that blur in the tragic depiction of female avengers. These dichotomies are mediated by animal imagery in the metamorphic representation of tragic heroines who are attributed an active avenging role on the Attic stage. When vengeful women are metaphorically transformed into tragic animals, they do not reflect either human superiority and centrality or human crisis and necessity. They rather reveal what Braidotti (2013) calls the 'protean quality' of being 'complicitous with genocides and crimes on the one hand, supportive of enormous hopes and aspirations to freedom on the other' (16). Building on this idea, I argue that the metamorphic identity of female avengers would have triggered an empathic effect in the theatre of Dionysus.

The posthumanist discourse of Braidotti confirms the Dionysiac significance of the metaphorical comparison of women and animals in ancient Greek tragedy. As a result of the tragic coincidence of conflicting values, female characters are imagined to enact an astonishing transformation that brings about a vengeful resolution. The tragic employment of the animal-woman metaphor in revenge plots exposes the 'shared ties of vulnerability' that produce 'new forms of posthuman community and compassion' (69). As Braidotti (2013:70-1) explains, 'an emphatic turn' is necessary to reconsider communication as an evolutionary tool, to identify emotions, and not reason, as the medium of human consciousness, and to read aggression as an evolutionary process. Through the application of her posthumanist perspective, I demonstrate that Attic dramatists metaphorically transform female characters into avenging animals to provoke a tragic effect of pathos in their audience. The tragic humanity of women actively involved in intra-familial conflicts consists in embodying the transformative change that fifth-century Athens undertook to develop radical democracy. This change was

celebrated at the festival of Dionysus through plays depicting the self-destruction of the household as illustrated by the metaphorical metamorphoses of female avengers.

0. 3. The metaphorical metamorphoses of female avengers

I adopt the interdisciplinary methodological approach that I have outlined in the previous sections to reconstruct the metaphorical metamorphoses enacted by female avengers into tragic animals in the theatre of Dionysus. Through the combination of gendered perspectives, animal studies and posthumanism, I define the metamorphic identity of female characters who take an active role in tragic plays staging intra-familial vengeance. By implementing classical textual analyses with these theoretical perspectives, I restructure the dichotomies of masculinity and femininity, humanity and animality, body and mind that blur in the tragic depiction of avenging heroines. My argument is that Attic dramatists do not metaphorically transform female characters into vengeful animals to denounce their bestiality, cruelty and irrationality, but rather to reveal their tragic humanity. Employed as a Dionysiac device, the animal-woman metaphor signals that vengeance is coming and bringing about the self-destruction of the household. By enhancing the process of identification between women and animals in revenge plots, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides could trigger a tragic effect of pathos in the fifth-century Athenian audience.

I apply the interdisciplinary methodology that this thesis formulates to explore the dramatic significance of three specific images in the zoomorphic representation of female avengers. My textual analysis pinpoints the mediating

function of the nightingale, the lioness and the snake in tragic plays depicting female vengeance. I analyse the tragic passages, in which these wild animals metaphorically occur, to show how Attic dramatists build up the multi-faceted characterisation of vengeful heroines. By following the structure of zoological dictionaries of antiquity, I outline the taxonomic characteristics of each animal in ancient Greek tragedy, namely its habitat, skills and role. Through a comparative analysis, I trace the preservation and the innovation of these peculiar traits, with particular attention to the Homeric tradition. The symbolic values of the nightingale, the lioness and the snake raise specific gendered questions in the tragic depiction of female avengers. Each animal reflects the contradictory voice, agency and deception attributed to tragic women actively involved in intra-familial vengeful conflicts. Considered particularly fitting for the festival of Dionysus, the images of the nightingale, the lioness and the snake capture female avengers in their metaphorical metamorphoses.

Chapter 1 explores the metaphorical employment of the nightingale in the tragic depiction of mourning avengers. I analyse the nightingale imagery to open up new perspectives to interpreting the tragic contradictions of the female voice in revenge plots. When tragic heroines are metaphorically associated with or associate themselves with the nightingale, they perform ritual lamentation before vengeance is committed. Through the nightingale metaphor, Attic dramatists capture tragic women in the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance. Classical scholars have traditionally interpreted the tragic nightingale as a symbol of female lamentation. In light of the myth of Procne, Philomela and Tereus, they have tended to emphasise the concepts of loss, suffering and mourning. However, they have overlooked the dramatic association of the

nightingale with vengeance in female characterisation. I argue that Attic dramatists reproduce the call of the nightingale in key moments of revenge plots to create a moment of suspense for their audience. Through a reversal in the mythological transformation of Procne, they foreshadow the tragic implications of female lamentation. Whereas Procne after killing her son laments his death, tragic heroines raise a lament as a prelude to vengeance. In order to reconstruct the metaphorical metamorphoses of mourning avengers, I outline the distinctive features of the nightingale in ancient Greek tragedy. When tragic heroines are compared to the nightingale, they are metaphorically attributed its liminal habitat, musical skills and prophetic role. My textual analysis illustrates the metamorphic identity of the Aeschylean Danaids and Cassandra, the Sophoclean Electra, and the Euripidean Polyxena and Helen. Split between suffering and anger, the tragic heroines modulate the lament of the nightingale to prepare the scene for a vengeful resolution.

Chapter 2 examines the metaphorical employment of the lioness in the tragic depiction of avenging mothers. I investigate the lioness imagery to shed fresh light on the tragic contradictions of the female agency in revenge plots. When tragic heroines are compared to or compare themselves to the lioness, they react to suffering and loss with violence. By revealing power and strength, on the one hand, and the protectiveness after childbirth, on the other, they commit vengeance within and against their own household. Classical scholars have concentrated on the lion image in the Homeric tradition, but less attention has been dedicated to the metaphorical use of the lioness in ancient Greek tragedy. In the few studies focused on the tragic development of the metaphor, the lioness has been interpreted as a symbol of savagery, cruelty and non-humanity in female

characterisation. I argue that, by reverting to the Homeric tradition, Attic dramatists introduce the lioness metaphor to capture tragic heroines in the dramaturgical passage from suffering to vengeance. They attribute both the female and male traits of the Homeric lion to empower female characters, so that they can accomplish their vengeful acts. However, whereas Homeric heroes are metaphorically empowered through the lion metaphor to attack their enemies on the battlefield, tragic heroines become violent lionesses turning against the members of their own family. In order to reconstruct the metaphorical metamorphoses of avenging mothers, I identify the specific features of the lioness in ancient Greek tragedy. With particular attention to the Homeric tradition, I outline the dangerous habitat, the hunting skills and the maternal role metaphorically attributed to tragic heroines. Because of their active involvement in the vengeful dynamics of their own household, the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Tecmessa, and the Euripidean Medea, Clytemnestra and Agave are metaphorically transformed into tragic lionesses.

Chapter 3 analyses the metaphorical employment of the snake in the tragic depiction of deceitful avengers. I explore the snake imagery to offer a new way of understanding the tragic contradictions of the female deception in revenge plots. When tragic heroines are associated with or associate themselves with the snake, they plan and commit vengeance within and against their household. Assuming the deceitful nature of the snake, they are imagined to entangle but to be eventually entangled in intra-family vengeful intrigues. Extensive work has been done on the intertextual relationship between the Homeric and the tragic employment of the snake metaphor. The most recent studies have concentrated on dragon-slaying stories in classical mythology. However, less attention has been

dedicated to the employment of the snake-woman metaphor in ancient Greek tragedy. I argue that Attic dramatists ambiguously play with the snake to give expression to the causes and the effects of the vengeful behaviour of tragic women. In order to reconstruct the metaphorical metamorphoses of deceitful avengers, I outline the specific features of the snake in ancient Greek tragedy. Attic dramatists metaphorically attribute the secret habitat, the marauding skills and the kourotrophic role of the snake to female characters in their tragic versions of dragon-slaying myths. The Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Deianira and Ismene, and the Euripidean Hermione and Creusa are metaphorically transformed into vengeful snakes in tragic plays depicting the self-destruction of the household.

CHAPTER 1

THE NIGHTINGALE

This chapter investigates the metaphorical significance of the nightingale in the tragic depiction of mourning avengers. Through analysis of nightingale imagery, I define the controversial identity of tragic women who perform ritual lamentation to incite vengeance within and against their household. My argument is that Attic dramatists metaphorically transform female characters into tragic nightingales to express the human contradictions of their vengeful laments. This is evidenced in the metamorphic depiction of the Aeschylean Danaids and Cassandra, the Sophoclean Electra, and the Euripidean Polyxena and Helen. By playing the role of mourning avengers, the tragic heroines are represented simultaneously as suppliant, helpless and pitiful, and as unforgiving, threatening and ominous nightingales. Employed as a Dionysiac device, the nightingale-woman metaphor signals the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance in intra-familial conflicts.

1. 1   The voice of the tragic nightingale

The nightingale is one of the most evocative birds employed metaphorically in the tragic depiction of female avengers. Unlike the lioness and the snake, which as I show in the following chapters are evoked to stage female vengeance, the nightingale acoustically announces it. Through the metaphorical reproduction of its call, Attic dramatists give communicative power to vengeful heroines. They

represent female characters in search of vengeance as uttering discordant sounds to anticipate a tragic resolution. The acoustic effects created by the female voice in revenge plots need to be situated within the Dionysiac context of dramatic festivals (see Introduction, pp. 16-7). As Zeitlin (1996:362) states, women were socially expected to be silent in the absence of their male guardian. However, as a result of the Dionysiac influence on tragic plays, they are attributed the 'language of the Other' to reveal the paradoxes of fifth-century Athenian male identity. Similarly, McClure (1999:3-29) explains the transgressive nature of the female voice as the dramaturgical attempt to question male speeches in the democratic polis. As she states, it is striking that 'tragedy contains a larger number of speaking female characters than any other Greek literary genre', when considering the 'restricted role of women's public speech in classical Athens' (2001:5). Used as a tragic 'vehicle for rendering alterity', the female voice does not reflect how women actually spoke in the fifth century BC, but it gives expression to male concerns, fears and desires. Mossman (2005:352-65) also notes that it is difficult to assess to what extent in ancient Greek tragedy female characters spoke like fifth-century Athenian women.[50] Nevertheless, she argues that male actors probably modified their voice 'to sound female', so that female characters could 'sound, if not like women, at least like tragic women' (362). Mossman states that the female voice sounded like the 'provocatively vocal and persistently eloquent Other' (352).

The discordant sound of the female voice is evident not only in the tragic speeches, but also in the tragic songs performed in the theatre of Dionysus. Like Mossman, Hall (2006:288-320) argues that in the democratised genre of tragedy,

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[50] See also Mossman, 2001:374-84; 2012:491-506.

male actors adapted their voice to take on either a male or a female singing role. From her point of view, Attic dramatists signalled gender, class and ethnic differences in tragic characterisation through various vocal techniques. By contrast, Griffith (2001:117-36) states that the fact that a male actor took on the roles of both male and female characters on the Attic stage does not imply that he adapted his voice on the basis of the gendered singing role assumed. If similar metrical and linguistic forms were used for impersonating either a male or a female role, gender did not matter in terms of vocal performance. Specifically in regard to 'female impersonation', Griffith argues that dramaturgical devices, such as 'mask, costume, posture, and movement', rather than voice, could help the audience in the recognition of the gender of the performing character (118-9). If this interpretation is correct, in ancient Greek tragedy male-sounding women would have been suggestive of the complex gendered identity of female characters. Chong-Gossard (2008:65-70) specifically discusses the gendered contradictions of the female voice in Euripidean plays. He interprets the songs of tragic heroines as transgressive forms of resistance to male power. From his perspective, the concepts of helplessness, marginalisation and suffering are not conveyed through silence, but rather through communication in female characterisation.

Through analysis of nightingale imagery, I provide a new interpretation of the depiction of speaking and singing heroines in ancient Greek tragedy. Embedded in the Dionysiac soundscape of tragic plays, the image of the nightingale displays the contradictory nature of the speeches and songs uttered by female characters on the Attic stage. In the following sections, I combine classical studies on the nightingale species with gendered perspectives about lamentation

and vengeance to determine the tragic effect triggered by the female voice in the theatre of Dionysus. I argue that, by alluding to the myth of Procne, Attic dramatists employ the nightingale metaphorically to give expression not only to the powerlessness but also to the dangerousness of the tragic laments of vengeful women. Through a reversal in the mythological metamorphosis of Procne, they represent female avengers as modulating the lamenting song of the nightingale to provoke a tragic effect of pathos in the fifth-century Athenian audience.

1. 1. 1.   The gendered nature of the nightingale's song

I start exploring the dramatic significance of nightingale imagery in female characterisation by outlining its lexicon. Rarely used as a masculine form (*DELG*, 23), the feminine noun ἀηδών, 'nightingale', probably derives from the present participle of the Ionic and poetic verb ἀείδω, 'I sing of, chant'. In ancient Greek lexicographic sources, the term is also explained with the fact that the nightingale was believed to ἀεί ἀείδειν, 'sing continually'.[51] Aristotle (*HA* 536a28-30) claims that both the male and the female species of the nightingale are able to sing. However, by inferring gender norms in birdsongs, he claims that most of the ancient poets identify the female as the songstress. The gendered nature of the nightingale's song is evidenced by its metaphorical employment in ancient Greek tragedy. Attic dramatists make use of the feminine noun ἀηδών not only in the description of actual nightingales,[52] but also in tragic characterisation. Among its

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[51] *EM* α 122,1; *EG* α 29,19.

[52] Soph. *OC* 18, 672; Eur. fr. 88,2 N, 556,1 N, 931,1 N.

occurrences, it is significant that the term is mainly applied to female characters.[53] The only exception consists in the metaphorical employment of the nightingale in the depiction of Palamedes.[54] Furthermore, Attic dramatists evoke the nightingale in tragic characterisation through alternative linguistic expressions. Instead of the feminine noun ἀηδών, they connote the general noun ὄρνις, 'bird', with specific attributive participles and adjectives, such as ἀτυζομένα, 'distraught with grief', ἀέθλιος, 'wretched', and ἄπτερος, 'without wings', to indicate the species of the nightingale.[55] Although these expressions might have been referring to other bird species, the feminine noun ὄρνις probably indicates the nightingale in both female and male characterisation. In other tragic plays, because of their fragmentary status, it is problematic to interpret the nightingale image, but a specific reference to the mythological metamorphosis enacted by Procne can be hypothesised.[56]

The gendered nature of the nightingale's song has been extensively discussed in the light of the myth of Procne, Philomela and Tereus.[57] On the basis

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[53] The tragic heroines metaphorically compared to the ἀηδών are: the Danaids (Aesch. *Supp.* 62), Cassandra (Aesch. *Ag.* 1145, 1146), the Women of Trachis (Soph. *Trach.* 963), Eriboea (Soph. *Aj.* 629), Electra (Soph. *El.* 107, 1077), Polyxena (Eur. *Hec.* 337) and Helen (Eur. *Hel.* 1110).

[54] Eur. 588,3 N.

[55] The tragic characters metaphorically compared to the ὄρνις are Electra (Soph. *El.* 149), Deianira (Soph. *Trach.* 105) and Heracles (Eur. *HF* 1039).

[56] Aesch. fr. 291 R; Eur. *Rhes.* 550, fr. 773,24 N.

[57] For discussion of the myth of Procne, Philomela and Tereus, see Pearson, 1917:221-6; Chandler, 1934:78-84; Thompson, 1966:16-22, 95-121, 315-25; Dobrov, 1993:189-234; 2001:105-32; March, 2000:119-39; Fitzpatrick, 2001:90-101; Monella, 2005; Sommerstein et al., 2006:141-59; Milo, 2008:7-20, 125-54; Scattolin, 2012:119-42.

of classical sources,[58] it would seem that Procne, the daughter of the Athenian king Pandion, was given in marriage to the Thracian king Tereus, by whom she gave birth to Itys. As she felt isolated and alone, she asked her husband to bring her sister Philomela from Athens to Thrace, but on the way Tereus raped Philomela and cut out her tongue to prevent her from revealing his crime. Philomela wove a tapestry to unveil her terrible story to her sister Procne and the two women decided to take vengeance. They slew and cooked Itys, by preparing a special feast for Tereus. As soon as Tereus discovered the truth, he tried to pursue the two sisters with murderous intentions. Zeus took pity and transformed them into birds: Procne became a nightingale, Philomela a swallow and Tereus a hoopoe. According to Sommerstein et al. (2006:142), there were two main traditions of this myth, 'both aetiologies explaining the nightingale's song, existed from an early period'. The first that would seem to develop from a Boeotian or Asian saga is the version attested in the Homeric depiction of Penelope, who compares herself to Aedon, the personification of the nightingale. The second is the version provided by Sophocles in the *Tereus*, which is the only extant, though fragmentary, tragedy staging the mythological metamorphosis of Procne into a nightingale.

Because of the intertextual relationship between the epic and the tragic versions of the myth of Procne, previous scholars have generally interpreted the nightingale as a symbol of female lamentation. In Homer (*Od*. 19.518-29), the nightingale is evoked in the depiction of Penelope, who split between the defence of her household and the attack of her suitors is imagined to sing like Aedon.

[58] See for a reconstruction of the myth of Procne, Philomela and Tereus: the *scholium* ad Ar. *Av.* 212; the *hypothesis* of the Sophoclean *Tereus* in the P. Oxy. 42, 3013; [Apollod.] *Bibl*. 3.195,6.

Creating an emotional link between Penelope and Aedon, the nightingale is specifically connoted by a verb of mourning in the Homeric tradition. In comparison with Penelope, Aedon's song is evoked through the verb ὀλοφύρομαι (522), which used transitively means 'I lament over, bewail', and intransitively 'I lament for the ills of others', hence 'I feel pity'.[59] By citing Pherecydes (fr. 102 M), the scholiast explains the metamorphosis of Aedon with the lamenting nature of the nightingale's song. Metamorphosed into a nightingale, Aedon θρηνεῖ δὲ ἀεί ποτε τὸν Ἴτυλον, 'forever laments Itylus' (518,39). Glossed by Hesychius (α 1502,2 L) as an 'excessive expression of grief' (Aesch. fr. 291 R), the song of the nightingale is evoked to give voice to mourning women in both the Homeric and tragic traditions.

By preserving the mournful nature of the Homeric nightingale, Attic dramatists stage the tragic laments of female characters. Loraux (1998:57-66) connects the image of the nightingale with the myth of Procne to discuss the ritualised performance of female lamentations in ancient Greek tragedy. As she argues, the nightingale does not give voice only to bereaved mothers, but also to the suffering of all tragic heroines. Similarly, Suksi (2001:646-58) compares the mythological metamorphosis of Procne with the stagecraft of tragic lamentations. Just as the gods transformed Procne into a mourning nightingale, Attic dramatists transmute horror and chaos into ordered and melodic compositions. By specifically referring to fr. 583 R of the Sophoclean *Tereus*, Milo (2008) argues that Procne establishes the taxonomic form of tragic lament. This fragment, which has been compared with the laments raised by other tragic heroines, namely Medea (Eur. *Med*. 214-30) and Deianira (Soph. *Trach*. 144-50), represents Procne

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[59] Hom. *Il*. 8.33, 202, 16.450, 22.169; *Od*. 11.418.

as bewailing her misfortunes, status and disillusion. Given the lamenting nature of the song of the nightingale, I turn now to its connection with female vengeance in ancient Greek tragedy.

1. 1. 2 The myth of Procne between lament and revenge

I outline the differences, rather than the similarities, between the epic and the tragic versions of the myth of Procne to explain the vengeful connotations of the nightingale in the theatre of Dionysus. The first difference consists in the representation of the mythological metamorphoses of Procne, Philomela and Tereus. Whereas in Homer Aedon is captured in her solitary transformation into a nightingale, on the Attic stage Procne is imagined to abandon her human aspect together with her sister and to be pursued by her husband. However, the choice of bird in the representation of the metamorphoses of Procne and Philomela varies in the literary tradition. Since Hesiod (*Op*. 564-9), and especially in the Latin versions of the myth,[60] the metamorphoses of the two sisters are inverted: Procne is transformed into a swallow and Philomela into a nightingale. Moreover, the choice of bird in the representation of the mythological metamorphosis of Tereus varies within the tragic tradition. As I analyse later in the chapter, Procne is described as a κιρκήλατος, 'hawk-chased', nightingale in the Aeschylean *Supplices* (62).[61] The Sophoclean *Tereus* provides instead a new model, used in later versions of the myth, which is the double form of hoopoe and

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[60] Verg. *Ecl*. 6.78-81; *G*. 4.511-5; Ov. *Am*. 2.6, 7-10, Ov. *Met*. 6.494-676.

[61] Cf. Hes. *Op*. 203; Hyg. *Fab*. 45.

hawk.[62] According to Sommerstein et al. (2006:142), Sophocles draws on earlier versions of the myth to stage the transformations of Procne and Philomela, but he signals a turning point in the literary tradition for the metamorphic depiction of Tereus. By blaming Philocles for plagiarism, Aristophanes (*Av*. 281) attributes to Sophocles the innovation in the description of the mythological metamorphosis of Tereus.[63] Transmitted by Aristotle (*HA* 633a17-28) in the section of the transformative changes of the birds, fr. 581 R of the *Tereus* is the only evidence that shows the Sophoclean remodeling of the myth of Procne.[64] As a result of Procne's vengeance, Tereus is transformed into a hawk, from whose stomach Itys springs up in the form of a hoopoe. As Giudice (2009:404-12) argues, the final scene of the Sophoclean tragedy finds a visual parallel in the fragment of a *hydria*, where Tereus, Procne and Philomela are captured in their metamorphoses. After vengeance has been committed, the three mythological figures are depicted respectively with a hoopoe, a nightingale and a swallow on their heads.[65]

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[62] Cf. Arist. *Av*. 209-14; [Apollod.] *Bibl*. 3.195,6-8.

[63] See the *scholium* ad Arist. *Av*. 281, where Philocles is said to be the author of a tetralogy on the daughters of Pandion and of a tragedy called *Tereus* or *The Hoopoe*, which is dated after the Sophoclean *Tereus*.

[64] Fr. 581 R, which Aristotle transmits and erroneously attributes to Aeschylus, has been read as belonging to the Sophoclean *Tereus* by Walker, 1893; Pearson, 1917; De Dios, 1983; Dobrov, 1993: 189-234; 2001:105-32; Monella, 2005; Sommerstein et al., 2006; Milo, 2008; Scattolin, 2012:119-41. The Sophoclean authorship of the fragment has been instead questioned by Burnett, 1998:183; Fitzpatrick, 2001:90-101 and March, 2000:119-39; 2003:161, who suggest it was composed by Philocles, Aeschylus' nephew.

[65] See the *hydria* of the Family of the Mannella (c. 470-60 BC), attributed to the Painter of Altamura, Museo Nazionale di Reggio Calabria 27202.

Another difference to consider in the comparison of the different versions of the myth of Procne, Philomela and Tereus includes its geographical details. Whereas the Athenian origin of Procne is not in doubt, it is the location of her marriage with Tereus and of her consequent metamorphosis that varies. The Sophoclean *Tereus* sets the story of Procne, daughter of Pandion, king of Athens, in Thrace.[66] According to Thucydides (2.29, 3), Teres, the founder of the empire that extended over Thrace, should not be confused with Tereus, the mythological husband of Procne. Thucydides locates the marriage of Procne with Tereus in Daulis, rather than in Thrace. By justifying the poetic attribution of the epithet Δαυλιάς, 'woman of Daulis' to the nightingale, he argues that Tereus married Procne in Phocis, where the Thracians used to dwell. He adds that, because of their geographical distance, it is unlikely that Athens and Thrace stipulated an alliance through the marriage of Procne. Likewise, Strabo (9.3, 13) refers to Daulis as the place from which Tereus was believed to come before overcoming Thrace. In his mythological version, Pausanias (10.4, 8) sets instead the marriage alliance between Procne and Tereus in the city of Megara. From Milo's (2008:11-2) perspective, the reference to Megara is not surprising, when considering that it was the site of the heroic cult of Pandion and of the tomb of Tereus. Nevertheless, she considers Daulis as the most archaic setting of the myth of Procne, and Thrace as a Sophoclean innovation that Thucydides polemisises. By building on Zacharia (2001:101-3), who suggests that the geographical details of the myth of Procne reveal the importance of 'kinship diplomacy', Milo suggests that Sophocles might have referred to the economic interests behind the marriage of an Athenian princess with a Thracian king. This reading explains why in the tragic tradition

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[66] See the references to Thrace in the *hypothesis* of the Sophoclean *Tereus* (P. Oxy. 3013, 6,21).

Procne is said to commit vengeance against her husband in defence of her natal family.

The last difference I consider is the motivation and modality of Procne's vengeance. In the earliest versions of the myth, it seems that Aedon, envious of the prolificacy of her sister-in-law Niobe, unwillingly kills her own son Itylus. As attested in the Homeric depiction of Penelope, she is said to murder her own son δι' ἀφραδίας, 'on account of folly' (*Od*. 19.523).[67] In the tragic versions of the myth on the other hand, Procne commits infanticide as a willing act of vengeance. Despite the difficulty in determining whether this belonged to a different myth playing out comparable themes, as Fontenrose (1948:125) suggests, it is the motif of jealousy that causes female vengeance both in the epic and tragic traditions. In the *hypothesis* of the *Tereus*, the term ζηλοτυπία, 'jealousy' (26) is specifically used in the description of the vengeful reaction of Procne to the infidelity, rape and violence of Tereus. According to Fontenrose, there were different stories revolving around double marriage and infanticide, which could have generated the myth of Procne. He points out that female jealousy, when caused by the introduction of another woman within the family, brings about wrath and violence. Instead Sommerstein et al. (2006:153) give emphasis to Philomela's rape to justify Procne's vengeance. In reaction to the violent act committed by Tereus against her sister, Procne vengefully kills her own son. As they argue, 'rape, or the avenging of rape, might not necessarily in itself guarantee the sympathy of the male audience' (153). Milo (2008:7) also identifies rape, mutilation, infanticide and teknophagy as innovative themes in the Sophoclean representation of the myth of Procne. By commenting on fr. 589 R, she infers that

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[67] Cf. Pherec. 102 M.

the adjective ἄνοος, 'without understanding' (1), which is referring not only to Tereus but also to the two sisters, indicates their psychological and physical state of madness.

The intra-familial vengeful dynamics in which Procne, Philomela and Tereus are tragically involved needs to be explained in the light of the festival of Dionysus. Commenting on fr. 595a R of the *Tereus*, Kiso (1984:67-68) argues that λίβανος, 'frankincense', which suggests a sacrificial scene, reveals the Dionysiac influence on the Sophoclean staging of the myth of Procne. The term is also used by Euripides in the *Bacchae* (144) to denote the fragrant resin, burned as incense in honour of Dionysus. In reference to the worship of the god in Thrace, Dobrov (1993:189-234) identifies the scene of recognition between Procne and Philomela before revenge is committed as a Sophoclean innovation. The woven robe, sent to Procne by her sister on the occasion of the Dionysiac festivals, might have displayed the distance between Thracian savagery and Greek civilisation. Milo (2008:62-3) also discusses to what extent Dionysus is involved in the vengeful act of Procne, with particular reference to fr. 586 R of the Sophoclean *Tereus*. She argues that the tapestry woven by Philomela might have been connected to a Thracian festival in honour of the god.[68]

Revolving around the themes of dismemberment, cannibalism, sacrificial slaughter and filicide, the myth of Procne was considered particularly fitting for the fifth-century Athenian dramatic festivals. Burnett (1998:178) identifies the tragic connection between Procne and Dionysus, whose ultimate act of disorder is child-killing. As she notes, 'the knife that Procne used to kill Itys is said to have

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[68] Cf. Ov. *Met*. 6.586-600.

been buried by the Erinyes under the tree where Agave was to kill Pentheus'.[69]

McHardy (2005:129-50) also argues that the misdeed committed by Procne, just like that of other infanticidal mothers, is an appropriate tragic topic. The tragic heroines metaphorically compared to Procne are represented as affected by a form of divinely inspired madness, although their acts of vengeance are committed with rationality. I would add that the myth of Procne was adapted to the Dionysiac context of tragic plays to build up the characterisation of mourning avengers. Through a reversal in the mythological metamorphosis of Procne, Attic dramatists represent female characters as performing the lamenting song of the nightingale to prepare the action for a vengeful resolution. Whereas Procne becomes a nightingale to lament the death of her son after killing him, tragic heroines are compared or compare themselves to the nightingale to modulate a lament before vengeance is committed. By creating a dramaturgical moment of suspense, the image of the nightingale announces the tragic implications of female lamentation in revenge plots.

1. 1. 3   From ritual lamentations to vengeful laments

My reading of the nightingale-woman metaphor is supported by gendered perspectives on the relationship between lamentation and vengeance in ancient Greek tragedy. Defined by McClure (1999:44) as the 'principal speech genre of women', lamentation is the vocal mode through which tragic heroines actively intervene in vengeful dynamics. Paintings on vases and funerary plaques show that women were expected to raise lamentations in funeral rites from the archaic

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[69] Nonn. *Dion*. 44,265-76.

to the classical age.[70] As Alexiou (1974:10) emphasises in her pioneering study on the ritual lament in Greek tradition, the history of this poetic form has constantly seen women as responsible for mourning their next of kin. However, the fact that the celebration of funerary ceremonies was recognised as a female duty does not imply that tragic laments were performed merely to express powerlessness, loss and suffering in female characterisation. According to Holst-Warhaft (1992:1-10), women's laments were complex art forms, because they did not express only suffering and loss, but also wrath and frustration in the experience of bereavement. From her point of view, a lamenting woman was the medium through which the inexpressible pain and status of separation in the experience of loss were violently externalised.

Classical scholars have hotly debated whether the female voice was indeed 'dangerous', as Holst-Warhaft suggests, both in the actual celebration and in the fictional performance of ritual lamentations. As Seaford (1994:74-105) states, women played a fundamental role in death rituals, which the city-state was not only prescribed to celebrate, but also tried to restrict in the fifth century BC. Loyal to the household, they were considered able to raise powerful and dangerous lamentations to demand revenge in civil conflicts. According to McHardy (2004:92-114), the fifth-century Athenian attempts to suppress the female voice in public contexts do not demonstrate its actual realisation. She argues that women could 'bring their influence to bear in the private sphere, usually in cases of

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[70] See for instance the *prothesis* scenes depicted on: the Attic geometric *krater* (750-35 BC), from Dipylon, Kerameikos, by Hirschfeld Painter, National Archeological Museum of Athens 990; the Attic geometric *krater* (*c*. 740 BC), attributed to the Hirschfeld Workshop, The Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York 14.130.14; the Attic Black-Figure *pinax* (second half of the sixth century BC), by the Gela Painter, Walters Art Museum of Baltimore 48.225.

importance to male family members' (102). Therefore, she suggests that despite democratic legislation women might have been still able to incite revenge through lamentation, especially in rural areas of Greece. Foley (2001) also explains that the political restrictions on the female voice in the celebration of funeral rites were caused by its social implications. As she states, female 'mourners were thought prone to foment vendetta, to consolidate aristocratic political rivalries, or to undermine public rhetoric promoting war and other service to the state' (112). In the light of this scholarly debate, Dué (2012:236-350) defines the controversial nature of ritual lamentation between helplessness and dangerousness. As she argues, since 'in recent years laments have been interpreted as powerful speech acts, capable of inciting violent action' (236), it is necessary to redefine the gendered connotations of ritual lamentation in ancient Greek tragedy.

The change of attitude towards female prominence in death rituals and their public expression of grief in funeral rites has raised many questions regarding the vengeful implications of tragic laments.[71] Whereas in the Homeric tradition female lamentations are depicted as an extravagant and out-of-control expression of suffering in connection with burial practices, in the sixth century BC funerary legislation was promulgated to control the involvement of women in their celebration. As Foley (2001:19-56) argues, the tragic representation of female laments did not refer to contemporary Athenian ritual practices. Rather it reveals the continued gendered tensions in the transition from the aristocratic world to the democratic polis. In the ancient Greek world, the city-state prescribed the necessity of honouring the dead, through a collective experience of lament.

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[71] For discussion of the vengeful connotations of female lamentations in ancient Greek tragedy, see for instance Sultan, 1993:92-110; Billing, 2007:49-57; Stears, 2008:139-55.

However, the sixth-century legislation was designed to restrict female involvement in ritual mourning.[72] Solon, for example, was credited with passing a law to contain the disorder of ritual lamentations, such as the self-laceration, and limiting the duration of the lamentation.[73] Alongside restrictive reforms on the celebration of female lamentations, there were an increasing number of funeral orations, where death in the service of the city was praised.[74] This change of attitude towards death and mourning in the fifth century BC reveals what Loraux (1986) calls 'the invention of Athens'. As she states, female lamentations were replaced with the ἐπιτάφιοι λόγοι, 'funeral orations', because of their political and social power in controlling public attitudes towards death.[75]

The relationship between lament and revenge decodes the tragic employment of the nightingale-woman metaphor in the theatre of Dionysus. The nightingale is evoked by Attic dramatists to represent tragic heroines who through ritual lamentation incite vengeance within and against their family. Its allusion to the mythological metamorphosis of Procne intensifies the transgressive role of mourning women in tragic plays staging intra-familial vengeful dynamics. When female characters reproduce the lamenting song of the nightingale, they announce the self-destruction of the household. As Holst-Warhaft (1992:82-103) argues, female prominence in death rituals and their voice in public activities were considered dangerous because they could challenge the social order of the city-state. Frequently accompanied with the shrill sound of the αὐλός, 'pipe, flute',

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[72] [Dem.] 43.62; Pl. *Leg.* 958d-60b; Plut. *Sol.* 21.

[73] Plut. *Sol.* 21.

[74] See, for example, Pericles' speech in Th. 2.34.

[75] See also Derderian, 2001:161-88, for an analysis of the literary genre of the ἐπιτάφιος λόγος in classical Athens.

female lament was the medium through which revenge was promoted in aristocratic societies. From Holst-Warhaft's perspective, the political restrictions on women testify to the passage from the dynamics of vendetta societies to the laws of the 'incipient democracy' (97). According to Seaford (1994: 74-105), there were not economic reasons behind the political restrictions on funeral mourning. It was rather a social attempt to contain the aristocratic clan cults, which aimed to consolidate private property and heritage rights for the γένος. In the classical period, Athens tried to limit cases of rivalry between kinship groups, because the solidarity of the relatives of the deceased and its public manifestation was decisive in fostering civil conflicts. As McHardy (2004:92-114) states, in the society of the fifth century BC, where bloody feuds were rejected in favour of a kind of revenge through the laws, women were thought to be more conservative and bloody-thirsty than men. From her perspective, female lamentations were considered as powerfully dangerous, since they were able to incite reciprocal violence and emphasise the concept of loss rather than the honour of dying in battle.

Through comparison of ritual lamentations with tragic laments, I demonstrate the mediating function of the nightingale's song in female characterisation. According to Alexiou (1974:102-4), there were three kinds of female lamentations in the ancient Greek world: the θρῆνος, 'lament', the γόος, 'weeping', and the κομμός, 'choral lament'. The θρῆνος, which is a lyric song modulated by professional groups of non-kin members, presented gnomic and consolatory elements.[76] The γόος, which is the solo song modulated by the kin of the dead, was characterised by inarticulate wailings and yells. The κομμός, which

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[76] See also Cannatà Fera, 1990.

is a specific form of lament accompanied by wild gestures, was associated with Asiatic ecstasy. However, this archaic distinction, as Alexiou states, disappeared in the classical period and a mixture of all three forms was used to express a poetic lament. This is evidenced by the employment of the nightingale in the tragic stagecraft of ritual lamentations. Its song in fact gives expression to the three forms of lamentations indiscriminately in female characterisation. When female characters compare themselves to or are compared to the nightingale, they perform a θρῆνος to give voice to their grief.[77] As the tragic product of their lamentation, the γόος sounds like the song of the nightingale.[78] They raise an οἶκτος, 'piteous wailing', to express their suffering, bereavement and loss.[79] The noun, which can also mean 'pity, compassion', specifically denotes the continuous and composite laments of tragic heroines. By merging these different forms of lamentation in the song of the nightingale, Attic dramatists stage the ritualised performance of the tragic laments of female characters.

There is no evidence of the musical similarities between ritual lamentations and tragic laments. However, as Suter (2003:1-28) argues, from a metrical analysis it is possible to assess that a tragic lament was performed 'in lyric or spoken meter', 'alone or with other characters', or 'in a κομμός with the Chorus' (3). She specifies that in the common tradition a chorus accompanied a soloist, so that an imaginary dialogue between the dead and living could be created. I argue that this is evident in the tragic laments performed by nightingale-like heroines on the Attic stage. Despite the difficulties in defining the

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[77] Aesch. fr. 291 R; Soph. *Aj.* 631, *El.* 104.

[78] Aesch. *Supp.* 73, 116; fr. 291 S; Soph. *Aj.* 628; Eur. fr. 773,25 K.

[79] Aesch. *Supp.* 59, 64; Eur. *Hec.* 519; cf. Soph. *Aj.* 525.

relationship between female lamentation and tragic laments, the dominant role of the Chorus in directing the emotional response of the audience cannot be denied. Witnessing, accompanying and supporting the lamenting speeches and songs of tragic heroines, the Chorus mediate the interpretation of the nightingale's song. Through the allusion to the mythological metamorphosis of Procne, Attic dramatists metaphorically reproduce the nightingale's lament to translate a ritual performance into a dialogical response to death. When a tragic heroine associates herself with or is associated by the Chorus with the nightingale, the lamenting sound Ἴτυς, 'Itys', usually resonates. From Homer to tragedy the name of the slain child is employed as an interjection of grief,[80] and reproduces the effect of proper funeral mourning with repetitions and alliterations.[81] Just as in ritual lamentations the name of the dead was repeated to compensate the loss of a beloved, the name of Procne's son is the tragic tune of female laments. In addition to the acoustic details of its performance, the song of the nightingale suggests the violent bodily expression of female lamentation. The tearing of cheeks, the rending of hair and clothes, the beating of breasts and the continuous shed of tears, which De Martino (2008) identifies as the distinctive gestures of funeral rites, are deployed in the tragic characterisation of nightingale-like mourning women.

The subversive role played by women in inciting vengeance through lamentation was re-imagined in its tragic implications for the Attic stage. By staging both the lamenting manifestation of suffering and the dangerous desire of revenge by female characters, Attic dramatists could create an effect of pathos in

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[80] Hom. *Od*. 19.522; Aesch. *Ag*. 1144; Soph. *El*. 148; Eur. fr. 773,26 K.

[81] Aesch. *Supp*. 112-6; see De Martino, 2008.

the fifth-century Athenian audience. They adapt the myth of Procne to the Dionysiac context of dramatic festivals, with the aim of preparing the scene for a vengeful resolution. Through a reversal in the causes and effects of the nightingale's song, tragic heroines are imagined to metaphorically abandon their human aspect to foreshadow the self-destruction of the household. As I show in the following sections, the nightingale is evoked to capture the Aeschylean Danaids and Cassandra, the Sophoclean Electra, and the Euripidean Polyxena and Helen in their metaphorical metamorphoses into mourning avengers.

1. 2   The metaphorical metamorphoses of mourning avengers

Classical scholars have widely discussed the gendered contradictions of the tragic laments performed by female characters in revenge plots. However, they have overlooked the dramatic significance of the nightingale metaphor in the depiction of mourning avengers. Through analysis of nightingale imagery, I shed fresh light on the controversial identity of female characters who through lamentation incite vengeance in ancient Greek tragedy. I argue that Attic dramatists make use of the nightingale imagery in key moments of their plays to express the tragic humanity of the lamenting voice of avenging women. The nightingale image reflects the emotional contradictions of the ritualised performance of female lamentations in vengeful dynamics. Split between suffering and anger, tragic heroines modulate the lamenting song of the nightingale as a prelude to vengeance in intra-familial conflicts. Because of their vengeful laments, the Aeschylean Danaids and Cassandra, the Sophoclean Electra, and the Euripidean Polyxena and Helen are metaphorically compared to tragic nightingales.

Aeschylus evokes the nightingale in comparison with the Danaids to signal the dramaturgical passage from lamentation and vengeance in the *Suppliants*. By expressing their vengeful intentions against the Egyptians, the daughters of Danaus raise the lament of the nightingale at the beginning of the tragedy. Classical scholars have focused on the relationship of the Danaids with their cousins to justify the transgressive nature of their lamenting voice. According to Winnington-Ingram (1961:141-2), the Danaids show 'a potentiality of violence' in the only surviving, and probably opening, tragedy of the hypothetical tetralogy that stages the death of the sons of Aegyptus. As he states, forced into marriage by their cousins, the Danaids are 'victims of violence in the *Supplices*', but as a result of a gender reversal they 'become violent agents in the sequel'. With the exception of Hypermestra, who spares her beloved Lynceus, the Danaids, following their father's command, eventually murder the sons of Aegyptus on their wedding-night.

Because of the fragmentary state of the Aeschylean tetralogy, it is difficult to determine why the Danaids refuse to marry their cousins and vengefully react against them. By referring to the expression αὐτογενεῖ φυξανορίᾳ, 'because of the aversion to wedlock among kin' (7), Garvie (1969:212-8) questions the Danaids' motives for taking revenge. As he states, a marriage between cousins was not considered incestuous by law in the fifth century BC, but it might have been disturbing in terms of the law of nature for the suppliants themselves. Through a comparative analysis with other female characters about to be married, Seaford (1987:107) identifies a tragic reversal in the description of the Danaids. From his perspective, the Danaids emphasise the concept of death in their resistance to marry their future husbands, by performing ritual lamentation. Hall (1989:202-3)

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shifts the focus from the sexual to the ethnic status of the Danaids to interpret their rejection of marriage. As she states, Aeschylus deconstructs the polarity Greek/barbarian, by representing the suppliant women as 'barbaric Greeks'. The contradictory ethnic identity of the Danaids is also the central point of Bakewell's (1997:209-28) discussion. Focusing on the concept of μετοικία, he argues that the fifth-century Athenian 'procedure which provided for the partial incorporation of non-citizens into polis life' is relevant in the *Suppliants* (210). Aeschylus might have referred to the large-scale immigration to Athens in the fifth century BC, as Bakewell (2013:3-5) suggests. This is confirmed by the fact that through their supplication the Danaids wish to find not temporary refuge, but permanent residence in Argos.

The lament which the Danaids raise to avoid abduction is interpreted as a perverted form of supplication by Turner (2001:27-50). As he states, the Danaids are not only the 'powerless victims' of their cousins, but also the 'potential persecutors against the victimised city of Argos' (35-36). Mitchell (2006:205-23) identifies the Greek/barbarian polarity in the conflicting relationship of the Danaids with the Egyptians. Depicted as ethnically, physically and morally different from their cousins, the daughters of Danaus take on the double role of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (206). By departing from Turner, Bachrova (2009:289-310) outlines the deviant features in the supplication scene, where the Danaids reveal their aggressive, violent and vengeful nature. Ancestrally connected with Argos,[82] the daughters of Danaus try to obtain protection from Pelasgus by

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[82] Hom. *Il*. 4.171; Hes. fr. 128; Strab. 8.6, 7-8;

threatening him with their intent of suicide.[83] As Bachrova states, 'the threats uttered by the Danaids in the suppliant scene allude to and invert […] the themes of fertility and marriage' (290). According to Rabinowitz (2011:1-21), the ambiguity between rape and marriage justifies the ethnic, sexual and moral conflict between the Danaids and the Egyptians. As she states, the expression uttered by the Danaids γάμον ἀσεβῆ, 'unholy marriage' (9), implies 'an indictment of all men and of the institutions of marriage as being based on force' (9). Although the motives for the Danaids' aversion to marriage remain unclear, Rabinowitz argues that the Egyptians were considered either 'too closely related to them, or too different from them'. By blurring the boundaries between Greek and barbarian, masculinity and femininity, supplication and war, the Danaids raise their lamenting voice to incite and exact revenge against their cousins.

In the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus compares another tragic heroine who through lamentation anticipates a vengeful resolution to the nightingale. Abducted from Troy to Argos, Cassandra raises the lament of the nightingale to prepare the scene for Clytemnestra's revenge. By connecting the mythological past with the tragic present of the House of Atreus, she performs ritual lamentation before being killed. Classical scholars have identified the gendered contradictions of the voice of Cassandra in the tragedy staging the death of Agamemnon. According to Seaford (1987:127-8), Cassandra specifically alludes to the ritual association of marriage with death in her lamenting prophecy. As he states, Agamemnon 'creates a situation in which the mutual subversion of the two incompatible unions issues in death of one or more of the three parties' (127). Mossman (2005:354-5)

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[83] For a dramaturgical interpretation of the gendered contradictions in the suppliant scene, see also Bednarowski, 2010:193-212.

explains the contradictory nature of the voice of Cassandra by referring to her innocent and violated status. From her perspective, Cassandra is represented in silence until the end of the play, but hers 'is not the silence of helplessness, but the silence of power'. Although the Chorus do not give her credibility, Cassandra raises a threatening lament before the accomplishment of Clytemnestra's revenge. By building on the reading of Seaford, Mitchell-Boyask (2006:269-97) argues that Cassandra does not perform a perverted form of ritual marriage as the concubine of Agamemnon but rather as the infernal bride of Apollo. In his words, the sexual aversion of Cassandra to Apollo reflects 'the broader disruptions of conjugal structures in the House of Atreus' (272). In defining the sexual status of Cassandra, Debnar (2010:129-45) suggests that her prophetic role and relationship with Apollo are Aeschylean innovations. Through the employment of bridal imagery in her lamenting prophecy, Aeschylus stages the sexual initiation of Cassandra. As Debnar states, her virginity is significant, when considering that marriage was considered as a ritually sanctioned 'transition that channels the potentially disruptive sexuality and fertility of a young girl towards the prosperation of both the *oikos* and *polis*' (139). Passing through the doors of the palace of Argos, Cassandra renounces her prophetic gift, succumbs to Apollo's power and dies by Clytemnestra's hands, so that the destruction of the House of Atreus can be staged.

Sophocles evokes the nightingale in the depiction of another mourning heroine, who incites revenge within and against her own household. By modulating the lamenting song of the nightingale, Electra actively participates in the vengeful act of matricide plotted and committed by her brother. Classical scholars have extensively discussed the gendered contradictions of the

involvement of Electra in the cycle of revenge of the House of Atreus. Defined by Winnington-Ingram (1980:228) as 'at once the victim and the agent of the Furies', Electra challenges the gender ideologies of fifth-century Athenian society with her lamenting voice. Burnett (1998:119-41) recognises the disturbing effect of the lament raised by Electra, but denies her active role in the vengeful act of matricide. She distinguishes the impulse to revenge shown by Electra from the 'pragmatic, masculine plan' of Orestes. In her analysis of the ethics of tragic lamentations, Foley (2001:145-71) defines the Sophoclean Electra as a 'sacrificial virgin', who actively participates in the matricidal act committed by Orestes. She argues that Electra and Orestes do not respectively represent the female and male avengers of Agamemnon, but they assume complementary roles in the slaughter of Clytemnestra. As Foley states, 'in *Electra*, female and male […] pursue different paths until the final scenes bring them back together' (148). The path followed by Electra is ritual lamentation, through which she can invoke and prepare the scene for the vengeful act of matricide. The boundaries between past and present offence are blurred in the aggressive lamentation raised by Electra throughout the Sophoclean tragedy.

According to Wheeler (2003:377-88), the transgressive nature of Electra needs to be considered alongside the ambiguous representation of her sexual identity. Depicted as a virgin affected by 'jealous frustration', 'passion and pique' (380), Electra performs a perverted form of marriage.[84] He argues that it is her παρθενεία, 'virginity', that might have unsettled the audience, by revealing 'male nervousness at the prospect of women escaping control' (378). From Wheeler's

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[84] Cf. the interpretation of the tragic representation of Electra as performing a perverted form of ritual marriage provided by Seaford, 1985:315-23.

perspective, Electra does not assume quintessentially masculine attributes to incite and accomplish revenge, but her liminal status displays the complexity of her dramatic role. As he states, 'she is pugnacious yet motherly, emotional yet rational; she transgresses, but in defence of patriarchy and patriliny' (383). The complex identity of Electra is also discussed by McHardy (2004:92-114), who argues that mourning and nubility are the two main aspects of her defiant depiction. Her performance of ritual lamentation as an unmarried girl would have been perceived not only as out of control, but also as threatening. Electra initially incites Orestes to revenge, but on learning about his death decides to take on his vengeful role. As McHardy explains, Electra transgresses gender boundaries by taking on the role of avenger. Wright (2005:172-94) provides a nuanced interpretation of the vengeful identity of Electra. Instead of suggesting either a positive or negative reaction by the fifth-century Athenian audience, he focuses on the tragic representation of emotions in her controversial depiction. He notices that, despite the lamenting nature of Electra's voice, 'the number of references to positive emotions, such as joy or pleasure, is extraordinarily high' (177). However, due to the tragic 'tendency to pervert positive experiences into negative ones' (178), the joyful lament of Electra displays nothing but the disruption of the blood ties in her own household. Belonging to the tradition of female lamentations, the opening monody of Electra expresses hopelessness, despair and bereavement, on the one hand, and danger, power and violence, on the other.

Meanwhile, Euripides employs the image of the nightingale in the *Hecuba* to signal the passage from lamentation to revenge in acoustic terms. Incited by her mother to modulate the song of the nightingale, Polyxena laments but accepts her tragic destiny in the aftermath of the Trojan War. She is sacrificed on Achilles'

tomb to placate his spirit, and as a result Hecuba takes on the role of mourning avenger. Although Polyxena refuses to sing the lament of the nightingale, her sacrificial death leads the audience towards the accomplishment of Hecuba's revenge against Polymestor. According to Kirkwood (1947:61-8), captured in her noble reaction to the decision of the Greeks, Polyxena represents a heroic example in contrast to the vengeful nature of her mother. He identifies the tragic patterns of human sacrifice in the representation of her death, with the aim of demonstrating its dramaturgical significance between the first and the second part of the play. Alongside the death of Polydorus, the sacrifice of Polyxena precipitates the transformation of Hecuba into an avenging woman. By referring to the concept of νόμος, 'law', Kirkwood distinguishes the sacrificial act made by the Greeks from the savage act of revenge committed by Hecuba. As he states, 'in obedience to the demands of Nomos', the sacrifice of Polyxena is not 'a capricious act of violence, but a deliberate measure adopted for the good of the Greek army' (64). From the perspective of Hecuba, the death of her daughter is instead the result of a 'cruel and inadequate kind of Nomos' (65), which brings about nothing but revenge.

Conacher (1961:1-26) also discusses the controversial relationship between the sacrifice of Polyxena and Hecuba's revenge. He argues that for the unity of the play, based on the central role of Polyxena in the first part, the consequences of her death follow in the second part. With particular reference to the Nomos of violence, he justifies the dramaturgical function of the sacrificial death of Polyxena. In contrast to the violent intentions and manipulative speeches of the Greeks, Polyxena is represented as a noble girl who accepts death rather than slavery. Like Hecuba, she is not a passive sufferer, but a heroic figure who would have provoked sympathy in the fifth-century Athenian audience. As

Conacher states, the representation of her sacrifice, 'far from being an action separate from the tragedy of Hecuba, helps both to cause and define it' (26). Kastely (1993:1036-49) focuses on the relationship between rhetoric and violence to demonstrate the unity of the *Hecuba*. From his point of view, rhetorical techniques can be identified throughout the tragedy of Hecuba, who first tries to ask grace through supplication and then vengefully reacts to the death of her male and female offspring. As Kastely states, in contrast to 'Hecuba's attempt to act through rhetoric, which is compromised and ineffective', Polyxena 'rejects supplication and embraces death' (1039). However, her sacrificial death is represented ambiguously, when considering that Euripides 'uses the scene to show her heroism, on the one hand, as naive and irrelevant to the larger issues of the play and, on the other hand, as abetting unintentionally the brutality that her stance rejects' (1039).

The dramaturgical significance of the scene of the sacrifice of Polyxena in the tragedy staging Hecuba's revenge is also discussed by Mossman (1999:142-63). She explains why the sacrificial death of a virgin girl would have pleased the expectations of the fifth-century Athenian audience. By reading erotic connotations in the representation of the sacrifice of Polyxena, she argues that the main aim of Euripides was to create a tragic effect of pathos. First of all, the death of a young girl was believed to reverse 'the natural order of things' (145); secondly, the beauty of a girl about to die was seen as a virtuous connotation; thirdly, the chastity of a girl before marriage was not only 'an important virtue', but also 'highly prized, indeed insisted upon, by the community' (146). In her discussion of the sexual identity of Polyxena, Mossman identifies the tragic confusion between sacrifice and marriage. Although this is more evident in the

tragic depiction of other sacrificial virgins, as she notes, Polyxena refers to her infernal union with Hades before dying (368). With particular reference to the modality through which Polyxena is sacrificed by the Greeks, Mossman outlines the gendered contradictions of her dramatic role. By showing her breast and offering her neck to the knife, Polyxena does not merely reveal the submissiveness of a victim in sacrificial contexts, but rather her heroism in warfare. Interpreted in relation to the gesture of warriors before death, the cutting of the throat of Polyxena is intensified and described in its vivid aspects. According to Rabinowitz (2013:195-221), the gendered contradictions in the scene of the sacrifice of Polyxena need to be explained within the Dionysiac context of dramatic festivals. She argues that sacrificial virgins are represented as not only the object, but also the subject of gaze in ancient Greek tragedy. Since 'the tragic festival of the Great Dionysia represented an opportunity for the city to display itself' (198), the fact that Polyxena is looked at by and looks at the executors of her sacrifice is significant. By specifically referring to the words of Polyxena before being sacrificed, ὁρῶ σ', Ὀδυσσεῦ, 'I see you, Odysseus' (342), Rabinowitz suggests that her active gaze is the symptom of her freedom from slavery. Exposed to the sight of all, Polyxena raises her lamenting voice to prepare the scene for Hecuba's revenge before she dies.

Euripides compares the nightingale to another tragic heroine who performs ritual lamentation to accomplish her vengeful intentions. Forced into marriage by the Egyptian king Theoclymenus, Helen pretends to sing the lament of the nightingale to escape with her husband Menelaus. By adopting the mythological

version of the phantom of Helen abducted to Egypt,[85] Euripides could confuse reality and illusion in his happy-ending play. Classical scholars have identified the tragic contradictions of Helen's voice in the tragedy that absolves her of the responsibility for the Trojan War. According to Juffras (1993:45-57), Helen is represented as a female suppliant fleeing from male sexual aggression. However, as the final scene of the tragedy shows, Helen does not raise her lamenting voice merely to express her suffering, submissiveness and passivity. Unlike other female victims of male abduction and violence, she is eventually spared from death. Similarly, Meltzer (1994) argues that Euripides employs the motif of the phantom to depict Helen 'as an object of exchange among both men and gods' (237). By creating confusion between rumour and fame, he gives voice to Helen in order to question the concepts of heroism, power and glory in warfare. The doubleness of her rhetorical laments intensifies the illusory motives and the actual implications of the Trojan War. Holmberg (1995:19-42) analyses the contradictory depiction of Helen in the light of the intertextual relationship between Homer and Euripides. As the first literary example of female subjectivity, Penelope is the model of chastity, loyalty and resistance, and the basis on which the tragic character of Helen is built. Whereas in Homer Penelope represents a positive model of woman in contrast to the negative example of Helen, in Euripides Helen replaces Penelope in the aftermath of the Trojan War.[86]

With particular focus on her feigned performance of ritual lamentation, Foley (2001:29) argues that Helen is depicted innovatively in the second part of

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[85] The motif of the phantom in the myth of Helen is also attested in Stesich. fr. 16 *PMG*; Hdt. 2.112; Pl. *Phdr.* 243a-b, *Resp.* 586c; Isoc. *Hel.* 64.

[86] Cf. the interpretation of the tragic character of Helen as a virtuous, chaste and innocent woman in light of her defence of the marriage oaths provided by Torrance, 2009:1-7.

the tragedy. By emphasising the deceptive nature of her tragic lament, Euripides gives voice to Helen, so that she can flee Egypt and Theoclymenus' advances. From Foley's perspective, the employment of ritual lamentation is a Euripidean innovation, even supposing that the Sophoclean *Electra* was staged before the *Helen*. As she states, Helen uses 'funeral lamentation to get what she wants from a man, because in *Electra* the heroine's lamentation […] is genuine; she is not yet in on her brother's deception' (30). From the perspective of Powers (2010:23-35), the gendered contradictions of the tragic lament raised by Helen can be explained by the complex relationship between the epic and tragic traditions. Although the representation of Helen might have alluded to Penelope, the difference consists in the power and danger of her lamenting voice. After the scene of recognition with Menelaus, Helen takes control of the plot and reveals her deceptive nature. Jansen (2012:327-47) specifically identifies the concept of forgiveness in the depiction of Helen to justify the confusion between reality and illusion created by the myth of the phantom of Troy. She argues that 'in its similarities to the Persephone myth, accompanied by its constant references to it, and in its pervasive intermingling of *eros* and *thanatos*, the *Helen* then may be classified as an *anodos* drama' (330). Emphasised by the invocations of Persephone in her tragic lament, the spectrality of Helen blurs the boundaries between guilt and innocence in the tragedy staging the aftermath of the Trojan War.

Informed and influenced by the theory of the posthuman postulated by Braidotti (see Introduction, pp. 49-54), I provide a new reading and interpretation of the controversial depiction of the Aeschylean Danaids and Cassandra, the Sophoclean Electra, and the Euripidean Polyxena and Helen. Through analysis of the specific tragic passages, in which the nightingale-woman metaphor occurs, I

restructure the tragic boundaries of masculinity and femininity, humanity and animality, body and mind that blur in their metamorphic characterisation. By adopting the posthumanist concept of metamorphosis defined by Braidotti, I argue that Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides metaphorically transform their tragic heroines into nightingales to express the human contradictions of their vengeful laments. As I show in the following sections, the Danaids, Cassandra, Electra, Polyxena and Helen are compared to the nightingale in the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance. They are attributed the liminal habitat, the musical skills and the prophetic role of the nightingale, so that the Dionysiac self-destruction of the household can be announced. Through the reconstruction of the metaphorical metamorphoses enacted by the tragic heroines into nightingales, I demonstrate the effect of pathos that their vengeful laments would have triggered in the fifth-century Athenian audience.

1. 2. 1   Liminal habitat

I start by analysing the habitat of the nightingale to illustrate the Dionysiac setting where tragic heroines in search of revenge perform ritual lamentation. After a review of relevant literary references to this aspect, I argue that Aeschylus and Euripides set the vengeful laments of nightingale-like female characters in a liminal space. Because of the confusion between two different species of the nightingale, it is difficult to determine where it actually dwelled in the ancient Greek world. Its species might have corresponded either to the Common or Rufous Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) or to the Thrush Nightingale (*Luscinia luscinia*). Referring to the Common Nightingale, Pollard (1977:42)

states that this species is 'still plentiful in spring in the more remote and wooded parts of Greece, and in particular in the coastal regions below the slopes of Mount Olympus'. Arnott (2007:2) does not merely refer to the Common Nightingale, but also distinguishes it from the Thrush Nightingale. As he suggests, these two modern species were confused by the ancients because of their physical resemblance. However, the former is a common and widespread summer visitor to Greece and Italy. Still visible during daylight in the Greek countryside, it sings in Mediterranean areas from late April to the end of July. The latter, which scarcely appears throughout Greece, is rather more noticeable because of its louder and more repetitive song. This distinction is remarked on by Aristotle (*HA* 632b20-3), who states that the nightingale 'sings continuously day and night for fifteen days at the time when the hills provide thick cover'.[87] After this period, the nightingale still sings, but no longer continuously. In summer time, when it lays five or six eggs, its varied, clear and modulated song becomes simpler (542b26-7). By referring to the birds' moult, Aristotle explains that in the passage from spring to summer, the nightingale changes its voice and plumage and arrives in Italy under another name.[88]

Ancient Greek poets were aware of the transitional appearance of the nightingale in the natural world. Like other migrant birds, namely the swallow and the hawk, the nightingale is defined as the harbinger of spring in literature. In Homer it is said to sing ἔαρος νέον ἱσταμένοιο, 'when spring is newly to come' (*Od.* 19.519), and in Sappho it is called the ἦρος ἄγγελος, 'envoy of spring' (fr. 136,1 L-P). Because of its association with springtime, the nightingale is

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[87] Cf. Plin. *HN* 10.81-2.

[88] Cf. Ael. *NA* 12.28.

generally located in verdant places. This is evidenced in the Aesopic tradition, where the nightingale is represented as singing ἐπί τινος ὑψηλῆς δρυός, 'on a high tree' (4,1 H) and as ὁμόροφος, 'sharing the same roof', with the swallow (9,1 C).[89] When considering the myth of Procne, it should not be a surprise that the swallow is also said to appear ἔαρος νέον ἱσταμένοιο, 'when spring is newly to come' (Hes. *Op*. 569). As transmitted by Aristotle (*HA* 633a17-28) in the section on transformative changes in the natural world, the hawk is another migratory bird associated with springtime.[90] Fr. 581 R of the Sophoclean *Tereus* attests that the hawk was believed to appear in the same period as the nightingale and the swallow. It is said to change its plumage ἦρι μὲν φαίνοντι, 'when spring appears' (4), by spreading the wing of a κίρκου λεπάργου, 'white-feathered hawk' (5). It then reappears νέας δ' ὀπώρας ἡνίκα, 'when the harvest is new' (7), in the form of a ἔποψ, 'hoopoe' (1). By lurking from autumn to spring, the hawk dwells in δρυμοὺς ἐρήμους καὶ πάγους, 'lonely woods and mountains' (10). Due to the interweaving of myth and nature, the nightingale, the swallow and the hoopoe were considered as harbingers of spring and dwellers in verdant places.

The habitat of the nightingale is evoked in the Homeric tradition to give expression to the lament of Penelope (*Od*. 19.518-20). Confused about what to do with her suitors, Penelope compares herself to Aedon by describing the place where the nightingale sings. The nightingale is specifically connoted by χλωρηΐς (518), which is the poetic feminine form of the adjective χλωρός, ά, όν, 'of the greenwood'. According to Irwin (1974:31), χλωρός indicates a chromatic hue of

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[89] Cf. Artem. *Onir*. 2.66, 31.

[90] Cf. Plin. *NH* 10.86.

'greenish-yellow, pale green', in reference to plants, wood and growing things.[91]

As the opposite of dry, the colour term can metaphorically assume the connotation of freshness, life and blooming.[92] But it can also denote the 'pallor' of the cheeks to describe being fearful or fear itself.[93] As the existence of 'greenish' nightingales is dubious in antiquity, the Homeric adjective χλωρηΐς cannot be interpreted in reference to its plumage but rather to its habitat. The absence of a green-feathered nightingale is confirmed by Hesiod (*Op.* 203), who employs the adjective ποικιλόδειρος, 'with variegated neck' to connote chromatically its plumage. As a peculiar Homeric connotation of the nightingale, the colour of its habitat expresses the anxious and sleepless status of Penelope. Defined as the harbinger of spring, the nightingale sits δενδρέων ἐν πετάλοισι πυκινοῖσιν, 'among the thick foliage of the trees' (520). Referring to the foliage that surrounds the nightingale, πυκινός is the epic form of the adjective πυκνός, ή, όν, which can generally mean 'compact'. It can indicate not only the close union of the constitutive parts of an object,[94] but also a 'repeated, frequent' action.[95] Furthermore, it can be metaphorically used of the mind with the connotation of 'wise' and to denote a person as 'crafty, cunning'.[96] In the Homeric description of Penelope, the adjective is intensified by the adverb θαμά, 'frequently' (521), in reference to the song of the nightingale. Captured in its arrival in springtime and

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[91] Hom. *Od.* 16.47; Soph. *OC* 673; Eur. *Bacch.* 38.

[92] Soph. *Trach.* 1055; Eur. *Hec.* 126, *IA* 1297; Theoc. *Id.* 14.70.

[93] Hom. *Il.* 3.35; Aesch. *Ag.* 1121.

[94] Hom. *Il.* 5.751, 15.529, *Od.* 14.521.

[95] Aesch. *PV* 658, Eur. *Tro.* 235.

[96] Hom. *Il.* 2.55, 3.208, 15.461, 18.216, *Od.* 3.23; Pind. *Pyth.* 4.73, *Ol.* 13.52.

in its verdant dwelling, the image of the nightingale metaphorically emphasises the intensity and continuity of Penelope's lamentation.

The Homeric influence on the representation of the nightingale's habitat is evident in ancient Greek tragedy. As in the depiction of Penelope, the tragic nightingale raises its song ἐν δένδρεσι, 'in the trees' (Eur. fr. 773,24 N), and specifically on the κισσὸς εὐφυής κλάδος 'vigorous branch of the ivy' (Eur. fr. 88,1 N). This is defined with the neuter noun μουσεῖον, which can generally indicate the 'house of music and poetry', and particularly refer to the 'haunts of the Muses'. The verdant place where the nightingale was believed to dwell is also mentioned in the tragic description of Oedipus' grove. The nightingale is heard singing χλωραῖς ὑπὸ βάσσαι, 'from under the green wooded combes' (Soph. *OC* 672). A variety of plant species, namely the δάφνη, 'sweet bay', the ἐλαία, 'olive-tree', and the ἄμπελος, 'grape-vine' (17), connote the holy place where the nightingale modulates its song. As Suksi (2001:654) argues, although the sweet bay and the olive-tree might have respectively referred to Apollo and Athena in order to describe the city of Oedipus' death, the habitat of the nightingale presents peculiarly Dionysiac connotations. It is the reference to the οἰνώψ κισσός, 'wine-coloured ivy' (674-5),[97] that reveals the presence of the god in the city where Oedipus will be buried. Specifically described as flourishing with the plant sacred to Dionysus, Colonus is in fact populated by mourning nightingales. The present participle of the verb θαμίζω (672), which can generally mean 'come often', is used as an adverbial form in reference to the nightingale to indicate not only its 'frequent' appearance, but also its 'constant' and 'repeated' song. Intensified by the verb μινύρομαι, 'I warble' (671), it expresses the lamenting tone of the

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[97] Cf. Eur. fr. 88,1 K.

nightingale, which resonates in the city that 'the Bacchanal god, accompanied with his nursing goddesses, always frequents' (678-80).

The tragic nightingale is imagined to appear not only in verdant places, but also on blood-stained banks. For example, it is located close to the Μέ]λας ποταμός (Eur. fr. 100 A). Collard and Cropp (2008:132) argue that the 'Black River', which probably flowed into Lake Copais near Orchomenus in Boeotia, was famous for the quality of pipe reeds. The adjective μέλας, μέλαινα, μέλαν, which denotes the river, attributes a 'black, dark' hue to the nightingale's habitat. The colour term can be used in reference to wine,[98] waves[99] and earth.[100] It can be also metaphorically associated with death,[101] fate[102] and Hades.[103] Another blood-stained river, where the nightingale raises its song, is the Simoeis (Eur. *Rhes.* 546), which was associated with the river Scamander because of the victims of the Trojan War.[104] The κοίτη, 'nest' (547), of the nightingale is specifically defined with the poetic adjective φοίνιος, α, ον, which in chromatic terms means 'like blood',[105] but it can also mean 'bloody, blood-stained',[106] probably in reference to either public or private loss. Moreover, the term is used in tragic plays to denote

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[98] Hom. *Od*. 5.265.

[99] Hom. *Il*. 4.149, 23.693.

[100] Hom. *Il*. 2.699.

[101] Ibid. 834.

[102] Aesch. *Supp*. 89.

[103] Soph. *OT* 29.

[104] Hom. *Il*. 21.211-26; Eur. *Hel*. 52-3, 368.

[105] Hom. *Od*. 18.97; Aesch. *Sept*. 737; Soph. *Phil*. 783, *Ant*. 1239.

[106] Aesch. *Ag*. 643; Soph. *Aj*. 772, *OT* 466, *Ant*. 601.

as 'bloody, murderous' wild beasts like the snake,[107] mythological monsters like Scylla[108] and violent gods like Ares.[109] From the description of the habitat of the tragic nightingale, it is possible to notice that the colour-terms of its nest convey more than just a contraposition of hues. In ancient Greek tragedy, the nightingale is not evoked to represent natural landscapes at the arrival of spring. It is rather located in a Dionysiac setting whose combination of bright and dark shades expresses its physical liminality. As I show in the following textual analysis, the haunt of the nightingale was considered particularly effective by Aeschylus and Euripides to connote mourning avengers. It is the place where the nightingale sings that captures the Danaids, Cassandra and Helen in the spatial and temporal passage from lament to revenge.

Aeschylus evokes the habitat of the nightingale in order to set the vengeful lament of the Danaids in a liminal space. By blurring the boundaries between homeland and foreign land, he opens the *Suppliants* with the entrance of the Chorus. Under the guidance of their father, the Danaids have fled from Egypt to Argos, with the aim of asking protection from the king Pelasgus. Persecuted by the sons of Aegyptus, they have abandoned the Δίαν χθόνα σύγχορτον Συρίᾳ, 'the land of Zeus bordering upon Syria' (4-5), through which the Nile flows,[110] in search of ματέρος ἀνθονόμους ἐπωπάς, 'the land of our mother browsing on flowers' (539). In the light of their descendance from Io,[111] they have arrived at the sacred grove of Argos to claim refuge from the sexual assault of their cousins.

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[107] Aesch. *Ag.* 1164; Soph. *Trach.* 770.

[108] Aesch. *Cho.* 614.

[109] Soph. *El.* 96.

[110] Aesch. *Supp.* 4, 71, 497, 1024.

[111] Ibid. 15-8, 41, 162, 170, 275-324, 540, 1064.

From the beginning, they appeal to Zeus ἀφίκτωρ, 'protector of the suppliants',[112]

to convince Pelasgus of their Argive origin. Developing from the verb

ἀφικνέομαι, which means 'I arrive at, I come to, I reach', the divine epithet

establishes a dramatic connection between supplication and migration in the

depiction of the daughters of Danaus. Defined both as ἱκέτης, 'suppliant',[113] and

φυγάς, 'exile',[114] the tragic heroines raise a vengeful lament that reveals the

reasons of their departure from Egypt. The noun ἱκέτης, which generally defines

'one who comes to seek aid or protection',[115] in the epic tradition specifically

means 'one who comes to seek for purification after homicide'.[116] In the prologue,

the Chorus clarify that they have not been exiled ἐφ' αἵματι, 'for deed of blood'

(6), but because of their αὐτογενεῖ φυξανορίᾳ, 'aversion to kindred wedlock' (8).

With these words, the Danaids present themselves as mourning avengers (58-67):

{Χο.} εἰ δὲ κυρεῖ τις πέλας οἰωνοπόλων

ἔγγαιος οἶκτον [οἰκτρὸν] ἀίων,

δοξάσει τιν' ἀκούειν ὄπα τᾶς Τηρεΐας   60

† Μήτιδος οἰκτρᾶς ἀλόχου,

κιρκηλάτου τ' Ἀηδόνης,

ἅτ' ἀπὸ χώρων ποταμῶν τ' ἐργομένα

πενθεῖ μὲν οἶκτον ἠθέων,

ξυντίθησι δὲ παιδὸς μόρον, ὡς αὐτοφόνως   65

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[112] Aesch. *Supp.* 1, cf. 385, 479, 616.

[113] Ibid. 21, 27, 815, cf. 653.

[114] Ibid. 202, 420, 820, cf. 5, 196, 330, 737, 777.

[115] Hdt. 2.113, 5.71; Pind. *Ol.* 5.19; Soph. *OC* 634, Th. 1.136, 3.59.

[116] Hom. *Il.* 24.158, *Od.* 9.270.

ὤλετο πρὸς χειρὸς ἔθεν

δυσμάτορος κότου τυχών·[117]

The flight of the Danaids from Egypt to Argos is illustrated by the metaphorical appearance of the nightingale. Having entered on stage with the sacred branches in their hands,[118] the tragic heroines compare themselves to the nightingale to justify their arrival. By specifically referring to the myth of Procne, they connote the nightingale with the adjective κιρκήλατος, ον, 'chased by a hawk' (62), as I have noted above. In the same way as Procne was transformed into a nightingale in her attempt to flee from Tereus, the Danaids are in search of protection from the pursuit of the sons of Aegyptus. Described as a migratory bird escaping from the attack of the κίρκος, 'hawk',[119] the nightingale is captured in its flight ἀπὸ χώρων ποταμῶν τε, 'from lands and rivers' (63). Classical scholars have rejected the *lectio* of the *codex* M and accepted instead the conjecture ἀπὸ χλωρῶν ποταμῶν, 'from livid rivers'.[120] From their perspective, the variant χλωρῶν needs accepting in the light of the epic influence on the tragic representation of the haunts of the nightingale. The adjective χλωρός, ά, όν connotes in fact the nightingale in the Homeric depiction of Penelope (*Od*. 19.518). I argue that ἀπὸ χώρων ποταμῶν τε, 'from lands and rivers' (63), can be instead accepted and

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[117] *Ch*. But if some augur is around, a native, who hearing this piteous wailing will think he listens to the voice of Metis, Tereus' piteous wife, the hawk-chased nightingale, who, kept away from lands and rivers, mourns the loss of her abode, comprehends the death of her child, how destroyed by her own hand he perished, falling upon the wrath of an ill mother.

[118] Aesch. *Supp*. 21-2, 159, 241, 334.

[119] Aesch. *Supp*. 224, 510.

[120] Tucker, 1889:17; Joahnsen and Whittle, 1980:55; Sandin, 2003:77-91.

interpreted as a hyperbolic expression. Used to represent the fearful and desperate flight of the nightingale, it emphasises the connection of the Danaids not only with Procne but also with their ancestor Io. Persecuted by Hera because of her relationship with Zeus, the οἰστρόδονος, 'gadfly-driven',[121] Io left the land of Argos and arrived in Egypt, where she gave birth to Epaphus.[122] Through a reversal in the journey of Io, the Danaids are represented as suppliants fleeing from Egypt to Argos.

The metaphorical comparison of the Danaids with the nightingale does not merely express their fear of being chased by the sons of Aegyptus. Performed as the supplication of newcomers, the lament raised by the Danaids manifests the vengeful implications of their arrival in Argos. Although revenge occurs later in the trilogy, it is in the *Suppliants* that the Danaids express their desire to punish the wantonness of their cousins. The plot of the tragedy develops around the dilemma of Pelasgus over whether to give asylum to the Danaids, in respect of the lineage of Io, despite provoking a war against the sons of Aegyptus, or to refuse it, offending Zeus, protector of suppliants. The dangerous consequences of the inclusion of the Danaids in the city of Argos are evidenced by the reference to the myth of Procne. Because of her κότος, 'wrath' (67), Procne killed her own son to take revenge against her husband. As I discuss in the next chapter (pp. 176-7), the noun, which is used in Homer to denote 'grudge, rancour, ill-will', is used frequently by Aeschylus to announce a vengeful resolution. In the *Suppliants*, it is specifically used of Zeus by the Danaids (385), Pelasgus (479) and Danaus (616). Through the invocation of Zeus τιμάορος, 'avenger' (41), the daughters of Danaus

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[121] Aesch. *Supp*. 16, cf. 308, 557, 563, 573.

[122] Ibid. 41, 170, 275, 583.

demand protection to avoid marriage with the sons of Aegyptus. Pelasgus is aware that the rejection of the supplication of the Danaids will provoke the fury of the ἀλάστωρ, 'avenging spirit' (415), of Zeus. By confusing divine with human vengeance, the flight of the nightingale expresses the wrath of the Danaids. Through a reversal in the causes and the effects of the mythological metamorphosis of Procne into a nightingale, Aeschylus represents the Danaids as vengefully fleeing from the sons of Aegyptus. Whereas Procne fled after committing revenge against her husband, the daughters of Danaus are fugitives in search of vengeance against their future husbands.

In the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus evokes the habitat of the nightingale in the depiction of another tragic heroine who through lamentation announces a vengeful resolution. Abducted from Troy to Argos as the concubine of Agamemnon, Cassandra enters the stage in silence. Showing sympathy for her enslaved status, Agamemnon asks Clytemnestra to accept her into their house. However, the foreign origin of Cassandra is mocked by Clytemnestra, who compares her to a χελιδών, 'swallow' (1050). As glossed by Hesychius (χ 325 S), the barbarians were attributed the ἀσύνθετος λαλιά, 'uncompounded form of speech', of swallows. Because of her ἀγνώς, 'unintelligible', and βάρβαρος, 'barbarous', voice (1051), Cassandra is swallow-like from Clytemnestra's perspective. She is invited to express herself with her καρβάνῳ χερί, 'barbarian hand' (1061), rather than with her voice, and to accept her condition as a θήρ νεαίρετος, 'newly taken beast of prey' (1063). However, the tragic paradox consists in the fact that Cassandra remains silent until line 1072. As a form of resistance to Clytemnestra's provocative words, her silence creates a dramaturgical moment of suspense in the passage from lamentation to vengeance.

Considered by the Chorus as even more ambiguous than her silence, the lament of Cassandra establishes a tragic connection with the myth of Procne, Philomela and Tereus. The image of the swallow would possibly have reminded the audience of the impossibility of communication of Philomela, who after being raped had her tongue cut out. By confusing Philomela with Procne, the nightingale metaphor is introduced (1145) to represent the tragic abduction of Cassandra. In her lamenting words, the anaphora of the aorist form of the verb ἄγω, 'I lead' (1087, 1138), referring to Agamemnon, anticipates the tragic implications of her arrival in Argos. Bewildered and desperate, Cassandra invokes Apollo to know where she has been led to, and the Chorus reply that she has arrived at the palace of the Atreides (1089-90). This is defined by Cassandra as the μισόθεος, 'godless' (1090), house, where πολλὰ αὐτόφονα, 'many murderous misdeeds among kin' (1090-1) happened, and whose πέδον, 'ground', is ῥαντήριον, 'reeking of blood' (1092). By connecting the mythological past with the tragic present of the House of Atreus, Cassandra foreshadows the act of vengeance that Clytemnestra has devised and will accomplish at the end of the play.

The liminal condition of Cassandra is emphasised by the metaphorical employment of blood-stained rivers, where the nightingale was believed to sing. Captured in her abduction from Troy to Argos, Cassandra alludes to the haunts of the nightingale, as follows (1158-62):

{Κα.} ἰὼ Σκαμάνδρου πάτριον ποτόν.

τότε μὲν ἀμφὶ σὰς ἀιόνας τάλαιν'   1159

ἠνυτόμαν τροφαῖς·

νῦν δ' ἀμφὶ Κωκυτόν τε κἀχερουσίους   1160

ὄχθους ἔοικα θεσπιῳδήσειν τάχα.[123]

The three rivers evoked by Cassandra locate her metaphorical flight from Troy to Argos. As I have discussed above, the Scamander was connected to the victims of the Trojan War. Recalling her childhood, Cassandra describes the river in nostalgic terms here. The repetition of the plosive consonants /π/ and /τ/ in the definition of the river Scamander (1158) creates a striking effect to anticipate the abrupt change of setting in the prophecy of Cassandra. Having arrived at the house of Agamemnon, Cassandra locates herself on the banks of the rivers Cocytus and Acheron. The term κωκυτός, which can literally mean 'shrieking, wailing' in lyric poetry,[124] when used as a proper noun refers to the homonym river of the underworld.[125] In association with the Ἀχέρων, 'Acheron', another river of the nether world, it creates a cacophonic effect. The alliteration of the occlusive consonant /κ/ and its aspirated /χ/, emphasises the concepts of death, destruction and bereavement in Cassandra's lament. By referring to the haunts of the nightingale, Aeschylus anticipates the vengeful act that Clytemnestra is about to commit. He sets the lament of Cassandra on blood-stained banks to capture her in the dramaturgical passage from life to death.

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[123] *Ca.* Oh ancestral water of the Scamander! Then, along your shores, miserable, I grew up nurtured; now along the Cocytus, and the Acheron's banks, I think that I will soon raise prophetic strains.

[124] Hom. *Il.* 22.409, cf. 447; Pind. *Pyth.* 4.113; Aesch. *Cho.* 150; Soph. *Aj.* 851, *Trach.* 867; Eur. *Phoen.* 1350.

[125] Hom. *Od.* 10.514; Eur. *Alc.* 458.

Meanwhile, Euripides employs the nightingale metaphor to locate the vengeful lament of Helen in the tragedy that absolves her of the responsibility for the Trojan War. By adopting the version of the myth, according to which Hera sent a phantom to Paris in place of the real Helen, Euripides sets his tragedy in Egypt. As Helen explains in her opening monody, she was abducted from Sparta, her γῆ πατρίς, 'fatherland' (16), to the land nourished by the river Nile (1-3). It was Hermes that sent by Zeus concealed her in a cloud and consigned her to Proteus, the king of Egypt, so that her chastity could be preserved (42-8). However, her marriage with Menelaus is now threatened by Theoclymenus, who has taken charge of Egypt after the death of his father. Forced into marriage by the new king, Helen asks for protection on the tomb of Proteus like a ἱκέτις, 'suppliant' (65, cf. 799). Performed as a supplication, her tragic lament not only clarifies her Spartan origin, but also expresses her suffering and fear for her Egyptian abode. Like the Danaids and Cassandra, Helen is represented as raising a lamenting song in a liminal space, where the boundaries between homeland and foreign land blur.

By evoking the nightingale's habitat, which consists of blood-stained banks and verdant places, Euripides stages the vengeful lament of Helen. At the beginning of the tragedy, Helen alludes to the blood-stained banks of the Scamander (52-3, 368), to express her suffering caused not only by the death of the victims of the Trojan War, but also because of her condition as the victim of Theoclymenus' wantonness. Enhanced by the invocation of the gods of the Underworld, the Sirens and Persephone (167-9), her lamenting words initially convey the concepts of absence, death and bereavement in a truthful and pathetic way. However, her lamentation becomes the deceitful instrument through which

she can escape from Egypt and come back home with Menelaus at the end of the tragedy. In the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance, the Chorus comment on the plan conceived by Helen, as follows (1107-16):

{Χο.} σὲ τὰν ἐναύλοις ὑπὸ δενδροκόμοις

μουσεῖα καὶ θάκους ἐνίζουσαν ἀναβοάσω,

τὰν ἀοιδοτάταν ὄρνιθα μελῳδὸν

ἀηδόνα δακρυόεσσαν,   1110

ἔλθ' ὦ διὰ ξουθᾶν γενύων ἐλελιζομένα

θρήνων ἐμοὶ ξυνεργός,

Ἑλένας μελέους πόνους

τὸν Ἰλιάδων τ' ἀει-

δούσαι δακρυόεντα πότμον   1115

Ἀχαιῶν ὑπὸ λόγχαις.[126]

The nightingale is evoked by the Chorus in the first proper *stasimon* of the play, as Dale (1967:137) argues. By recalling the suffering of the Trojan women, the captive Spartan women express their fear that the plan conceived by Helen can be detected by Theoclymenus. According to Allan (2008:271), 'the Chorus calls upon the nightingale to join in their lament', by creating a parallel with Helen's invocation of the Sirens, 'figures of death and mourning'. As he notes, the use of the imperative aorist ἔλθε, 'come' (1111), stresses the participation of the

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[126] *Ch*. You that under a leafy shelter settle your house of song I will call aloud, the most tuneful bird of song, the tearful nightingale, come, you that through your quivering throat trill your mourning, partner of my laments, as I sing the miserable troubles of Helen and the tearful fate of the Trojan women under Achaean spears.

nightingale in their lamentation. I would add that the Chorus specifically refer to the nightingale's habitat to create a dramaturgical moment of suspense at this stage of the tragedy. The place where the nightingale is imagined to sing is described through chromatic and acoustic details to prepare the scene for the realisation of Helen's plan of vengeance. Through the hendiadys μουσεῖα καὶ θάκους, (1106), which denotes the nightingale's 'house of song', Euripides reveals the duplicitous nature of the lament of Helen. As in the Homeric tradition, the nightingale's song is heard from ἐναύλοις ὑπὸ δενδροκόμοις, 'under a leafy shelter' (1105). The adjective δενδρόκομος, ον, which literally means 'grown with wood', evidences the intertextual reference to the depiction of Penelope (*Od.* 19.520). However, Penelope is compared to the nightingale because of her sincere mournful expression of suffering for the absence of Odysseus. The Chorus invoke instead the nightingale to anticipate the feigned lamentation for the death of Menealus that Helen will perform to escape from Egypt vengefully.

In this way, Aeschylus and Euripides evoke the liminal habitat of the nightingale, which consists of verdant places and blood-stained banks, in order to set the vengeful laments of their tragic heroines. By blurring the dichotomies between homeland and foreign land, marriage and war, life and death, the tragic nightingale metaphorically locates the lamenting voice of female avengers in a Dionysiac setting. Aeschylus evokes the haunts of the nightingale to stage the entrance of the Chorus in the *Suppliants*. Captured in their flight from Egypt to Argos, the daughters of Danaus perform ritual lamentation to claim refuge from the sexual assault of the sons of Aegyptus. They mourn their distance from lands and rivers to give expression not only to their fugitive state but also to their desire of punishing the wantonness of their cousins. In the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus

alludes to the habitat of the nightingale in the depiction of another mourning avenger. Abducted from Troy to Argos, Cassandra arrives at the palace of Agamemnon, where Clytemnestra has planned and will commit revenge. By evoking the blood-stained banks of the Scamander, the Cocytus and the Acheron, she announces Agamemnon's and her own death. Meanwhile, Euripides metaphorically employs the habitat of the nightingale to capture Helen in the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance. Abducted from Sparta to Egypt, Helen refers to the blood-stained banks of the Scamander in her tragic lament to manifest her vengeful intentions against Theoclymenus. At the end of the tragedy, the Chorus evoke verdant places to reveal the deceitful nature of the vengeful lament that Helen will perform to escape. As I show in the next section, mourning avengers are attributed not only the liminal habitat of the nightingale, but also its musical skills.

1. 2. 2 Musical skills

I turn now to the analysis of the musical skills of the nightingale to show the Dionysiac soundscape created by the performance of female lamentations in revenge plots. After examining relevant literary references to this aspect, I argue that Attic dramatists attribute to tragic heroines the vocal techniques of the nightingale, with the aim of reproducing the discordant sounds of their vengeful laments. In the ancient Greek world, the nightingale was considered as a μουσικός, 'musical', bird.[127] Its musical skills are identified by Aristotle (*HA* 536b17), who states that the nightingale teaches its chicks how to sing. By citing

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[127] Pl. *Resp*. 620a7; Artem. *Onir*. 4.56, 25.

Aristotle, Plutarch (973b1) adds that its young when taken and bred apart from their nest are not able to sing. They do acquire instead musical skills through listening and miming the sounds modulated by their mothers.[128] Pondering on what humans should learn from the nightingale, Plutarch specifies its singing skills. He connotes the nightingale with the adjective λιγυρός (974a10), which can generally mean 'clear, shrill',[129] and specifically indicate the breath of the aulete[130] and his performance with the pipe.[131] Moreover, it used to denote the 'sweet sound' of the song of the Sirens,[132] birds[133] and poets.[134] As Theocritus (*Id.* 12) explains, because of its clear voice, the nightingale is ἀοιδοτάτη συμπάντων πετεηνῶν, 'the most tuneful among all the birds' (6). In its description, he employs the compound adjective λιγύφωνος, ον (7), which can mean 'clear-voiced, loud-voiced',[135] but also denote 'sweet sounds'.[136] As Pausanias (9.30, 6) states, the nightingale was believed by the Thracians to sing sweetly close to the tomb of Orpheus. He specifically employs the adjective ἡδύς, ἡδεῖα, ἡδύ, 'pleasant' (8), to connote the melodious voice of the nightingale. According to Aelian (*NA* 1.43), the nightingale is εὐμουσοτάτη, 'the most skilled', bird of the

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[128] Cf. Plut. 973a10, 974a10, 992b10.

[129] Hom. *Il*. 23.215, cf. 5.526, 13.590.

[130] Poll. *Onom*. 4.72,3.

[131] Ibid. 73,3.

[132] Hom. *Od*. 12.44, 183.

[133] Hom. *Il*. 14.290.

[134] Hes. *Op*. 659; Theog. 1.939; Theoc. *Id*. 12.6.

[135] Hom. *Il*. 19.350.

[136] Hes. *Theog*. 275, 518.

wild in producing a polyphonic song.[137] He notices that the nightingale intones a ἁπλοῦν μέλος, 'simple song', ἄνευ κατασκευῆς, 'without preparation', when it is alone, whereas it raises a ποικίλα, 'varied', strain to its audience, when it is captured (5.38).

Because of its ability to produce shrill, clear, sweet and varied sounds, the nightingale functioned as an inspirational model for ancient Greek poets. By linking the natural with the mythological world, the nightingale's song inspired the craft of poetic compositions. In the Homeric tradition, the nightingale, whose song is connoted by the adjective καλός, ή, όν, 'beautiful' (*Od*. 19.519), is evoked to articulate the lament of Penelope. Metaphorically given the 'voice' of Aedon, the personification of the nightingale, she modulates a varied and high-pitched song before the vengeful arrival of Odysseus. In agreement with φωνήν (521), the accusative feminine singular πολυδευκέα is an epic form of the adjective πολυηχής, ές, which can mean 'many-toned', but also 'much or loud-sounding'.[138] The musical skills attributed to the nightingale are dramaturgically emphasised by Aristophanes in the *Birds*, where Procne is invited by Tereus to enter on stage and raise her ἡδύς φθόγγος, 'sweet voice' (681). Later in the comedy, the poet Cynesias expresses his desire to sing like a λιγύφθογγος, 'clear-voiced' (1380), nightingale. His poetic claim of wings is justified by the attempt to find new songs among the clouds, produce proemial dithyrambic songs to the lyre and adopt new musical techniques. In the myth of Er, Plato (*Resp*. 620a7) mentions the poet Thamyras, who after contending with the Muses and being punished with the

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[137] Cf. Pl. *NH* 10.43.

[138] Hom. *Il*. 4.422.

deprivation of his sight chose the life of the nightingale.[139] Among the poets wishing to be transformed into a nightingale, Bacchylides (3) emphasises the sweetness of the notes of its song. He evokes the μελίγλωσσος, 'honey-tongued' nightingale to express his intent to sing with χάρις, 'grace' (97), and obtain glory.

In poetic competitions, the nightingale metaphorically assumed not only the role of the singer, but also of the aulete. Because of its clear, shrilling, sweet and polyphonic voice, it was associated with the player of the αὐλός.[140] Budelmann and Power (2013:1-19) argue that the nightingale-aulete is evoked in sympotic contexts to signal a turning point. With particular reference to Theognis (1.939-944), they consider whether elegiac songs were performed with the accompaniment of the αὐλός or recited without set melody. In the sympotic chain transmitted by the poet, the request of an aulete has a potentially proemial function, so that the audience can be prepared to an imminent musical event. As Budelmann and Power state, the first symposiast called to sing apologises in advance for a potentially weak performance; the second emphasises that, despite the melic skills of his companion, he has been called to sing; the third breaks 'the elegiac chain of musical deferral' (7), by starting the song with the accompaniment of the αὐλός. From their perspective, the sympotic interventions, signalling the transition between speech and song, were probably performed through an in-between mode of delivery. Budelmann and Power's argument is confirmed by the musical intervention of the nightingale-aulete on the Attic stage. As I have mentioned above, in the *Birds* (210-23) Tereus invites Procne to enter

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[139] Cf. Hom. *Il*. 2.595; *Pl*. *Ion* 533b-c, *Leg*. 829d-e.

[140] See Wilson, 1999:58-95 for discussion of the mythic-religious origin of the αὐλός, its performance-contexts, specifically the dramatic festivals of Athens, its connection with Dionysus and its morally transgressive nature.

on stage and play the αὐλός. Commenting on this scene, Grilli (2007:209) argues that the aulete-Procne might have played an instrumental solo, after accompanying the recitative anapaestic verses of Tereus. Despite the difficulties regarding the performative role of Procne, it is interesting to notice the connection between the sounds produced by the αὐλός-player and the nightingale's song.

The musical connection between the nightingale and the singer/aulete is evidenced in ancient Greek tragedy. Defined as ἀοιδοτάταν ὄρνιθα, 'the most tuneful bird' (Eur. *Hel*. 1109-10), the nightingale appears clever and expert in arranging its song.[141] Its activity is expressed, for example, by the verb συντίθημι, 'compose' (Aesch. *Supp*. 65), and by the verb μελοτυπέω, 'strike up a strain, chant' (Aesch. *Ag*. 1153), which consists of the noun μέλος, 'song', and the verb τυπόω, 'I model'. Just as a poet/musician crafts a composition, the tragic nightingale alternates λίγεια, 'acute' (Aesch. *Ag*. 1154), with βαρέα, 'deep', notes (Aesch. *Supp*. 113). Moreover, the polyphonic effect of the song of the nightingale is expressed through the employment of the adjectives ὀξύφωνος, 'high-pitched' (Soph. *Tr*. 963), and ὀξύτονος, 'sharp-sounding' (Soph. *Aj*. 630). These are compounds of the synaesthetic adjective ὀξύς, εῖα, ύ, which can mean 'bright' as the sight,[142] 'quick' as a motion,[143] and 'sharp' as a feeling.[144] It generally indicates 'shrill, piercing' sounds,[145] such as those of the αὐλός,[146] and

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[141] Eur. frr. 88,2, 588,3 N.

[142] Hom. *Il*. 17.372, 14.345.

[143] Soph. *Ant*. 108; Ar. *Av*. 1112; Hdt 5.9.

[144] Pind. *Pyth*. 1.20.

[145] Hom. *Il*. 15.313, 17.89, 18.71, 22.141.

[146] Poll. *Onom*. 4.73, 6.

specifically the 'wail' of the nightingale.[147] Therefore, the acoustic contrasts created by the tragic nightingale cannot be simply considered as the product of its musical virtuosity. Its clear, shrilling, sweet and polyphonic voice was considered particularly effective by Attic dramatists for giving voice to mourning avengers. In light of the mythological metamorphosis enacted by Procne, the nightingale is employed as a musical medium to stage female lamentations. As I show in the following textual analysis, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides metaphorically reproduce the lamenting song of the nightingale to signal a turning point in revenge plots. Embedded in a Dionysiac soundscape characterised by discordant sounds, the nightingale metaphorically suggests the musical modality through which the vengeful laments of the Danaids, Cassandra, Electra, Polyxena and Helen were performed.

Aeschylus evokes the musical skills of the nightingale to reproduce the lamentation that the Danaids modulate to take vengeance against the sons of Aegyptus. Through lamenting sounds, the Danaids attempt to convince Pelasgus to give them refuge from the persecution of their cousins. As I have analysed in the previous section, the opening song raised by the Danaids in their flight from Egypt to Argos is compared to the lament of Procne. Connoted by the adjective οἰκτρός, ά, όν, 'wailing piteously' (61), Procne represents the model that the Danaids follow to perform their supplication. Mediated by the nightingale image, the link between Procne and the Danaids is reinforced by the anaphoric employment of the noun οἶκτος, 'lamentation' (59, 64). Having alluded to the mythological metamorphosis of Procne, the Danaids explain the lamenting nature of their plea as follows (68-76):

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[147] Soph. *Ant.* 424.

{Χο.} τὼς καὶ ἐγὼ φιλόδυρτος

Ἰαονίοισι νόμοισι

δάπτω τὰν ἁπαλὰν   70

Νειλοθερῆ[148] παρειὰν

ἀπειρόδακρύν τε καρδίαν.

γοεδνὰ δ' ἀνθεμίζομαι

δειμαίνουσ' ἀφίλου[149] τᾶσδε φυγᾶς

Ἀερίας ἀπὸ γᾶς   75

εἴ τις ἐστὶ κηδεμών.[150]

Although the Danaids appear in their otherness, speaking like metics and wearing barbaric dresses (234), they perform Ἰαόνιοι νόμοι, 'Ionian strains' (69). According to Johansen and Whittle (1980:70), this expression would have recalled the dirges of the Ionians, which were influenced by Asian modes of mourning. In contrast, Sandin (2003) interprets the strains of the Ionians as musically different from Egyptian modes of lamentation. As he writes, 'just as Procne cries a new sort of lament in her avian-shaped exile, so the girls sing a new, Greek kind of song as they have reached Argos' (85). Sandin's interpretation

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[148] I preserve the *lectio* of the cod. M Νειλοθερῆ, instead of accepting the conjecture εἰλοθερῆ, adopted by Murray (1960) and Page (1972).

[149] Instead of the *lectio* of the cod. Ms δειμαίνουσα φίλους, which is preserved by Murray (1960), I accept the conjecture δειμαίνουσ' ἀφίλου, adopted by Page (1972).

[150] *Ch*. So am I, fond of lamentation in Ionian strains I tear my soft cheek burnt by the Nile and my heart ignorant of tears. I pluck off the flowers of my laments, anxious about whether there is any protector of these friendless exiles from the Egyptian land.

explains the tragic effect that the lament of the Danaids would have triggered in the fifth-century Athenian audience. Accompanied with the ritual gesture of lamentation, the supplication of the Danaids assumes pathetic connotations. While modulating lamenting sounds, the Danaids tear their delicate cheeks and metaphorically their heart, both defined as ἀπειρόδακρυς, 'ignorant of tears' (72). The zeugmatic use of the adjective creates a contrast with the γοεδνά, 'mournful songs' (73), which the Danaids modulate to obtain refuge from the pursuit of the sons of Aegyptus.

Assuming the musical skills of the nightingale, the Danaids continue to perform their lamentation, as follows (112-22):

{Χο.} τοιαῦτα πάθεα μέλεα θρεομένα λέγω

λιγέα βαρέα δακρυοπετῆ,

ἰὴ ἰή,

ἰηλέμοισιν ἐμπρεπῆ·   115

ζῶσα γόοις με τιμῶ.

ἱλεῶμαι μὲν Ἀπίαν βοῦνιν,

καρβᾶνα δ' αὐδὰν

εὖ, γᾶ, κοννεῖς.

πολλάκι δ' ἐμπίτνω   120

λακίδι σὺν λινοσινεῖ

Σιδονίᾳ καλύπτρᾳ.[151]

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[151] *Ch*. Such piteous strains cried aloud I utter, shrill, deep and making tears fall, alas, alas, conspicuous of laments, yet alive I honour myself with dirges. I appease the hilly land of Apia, oh land, you understand my foreign speech. Often rending its linen I fall upon my Sidonian veil.

The modality through which the Danaids perform their ritual lamentation emphasises the vengeful expression of their suffering. Through the combination of λιγέα, 'shrill', and βαρέα, 'deep' (112), sounds, the Danaids cry out their condition as the victims of the sons of Aegyptus. In response to the wantonness of their cousins, they utter ἰάλεμοι, 'dirges' (115), and γόοι, 'wails' (116). The weeping nature of their tragic lament is conveyed through the interjections of grief ἰὴ ἰή (114) and ἰὼ ἰώ (125). Moreover, their dramatic gesture recalls the ritual performance of female lamentation. The action of 'rending' their veil is represented through the employment of the verb δάπτω (70) and the locution ἐμπίτνω λακίδι σύν (121). According to Sandin (2003:102-6), the tearing of the veil does not merely symbolise the mourning of the Danaids, but also their rejection of marriage. I would add that the action of ripping to pieces was considered particularly suitable for the Dionysiac performance of tragic laments. The verb δάπτω, which in the epic tradition indicates the devouring of wild beasts,[152] is used in the depiction of the Danaids to anticipate their vengeful act of kin-killing. Through a tragic reversal in the mythological metamorphosis of Procne into a nightingale, the Danaids are acoustically captured in the dramaturgical passage from suffering to vengeance.

In the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus attributes the musical skills of the nightingale to another mourning avenger. By evoking the mythological metamorphosis of Procne, the song of the nightingale is metaphorically reproduced to stage the vengeful lament of Cassandra. Through incomprehensible and shrieking sounds, she breaks her silence and starts her lamentation by yelling

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[152] Hom. *Il*. 13.830-1, 16.59.

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ὀτοτοτοτοῖ πόποι δᾶ, 'ah! ah! woe!' (1072, cf. 1076). The exclamation ὀτοτοῖ, which Cassandra prolongs without taking breath, is used elsewhere in tragedy to express pain and grief.[153] The sudden utterance πόποι, which frequently occurs in the epic tradition,[154] conveys not only pain but also surprise and anger in Cassandra's lament. The interjection δᾶ, which is the Doric form of γῆ, 'by earth', is used instead as an exclamation of horror.[155] Through ritual invocations to Apollo (1073, 1077, 1080, 1085), Cassandra emphasises the concepts of suffering, bereavement and violence in her lamenting song. The etymological figure ὦπολλον, Ἄπολλον and ἀπώλεσας acoustically connects the name of Apollo with the aorist form of the verb ἀπόλλυμι, 'I destroy utterly' (1082). The Chorus react to the mourning and weeping sounds uttered by Cassandra, as follows (1140-5):

{Χο.} φρενομανής τις εἶ θεοφόρητος,

ἀμφὶ δ' αὐτᾶς θροεῖς

νόμον ἄνομον, οἷά τις ξουθὰ

ἀκόρετος βοᾶς, φεῦ, φιλοίκτοις φρεσὶν

<Ἴτυν Ἴτυν> στένουσ' ἀμφιθαλῆ κακοῖς

ἀηδὼν βίον. [156]

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[153] Aesch. *Pers*. 268, 918; Soph. *El*. 1245; Eur. *Or*. 1389, *Andr*. 1197, *Tro*. 1294, *Ion* 789.

[154] Hom. *Il*. 16.745, 21.420; *Od*. 1.32, 10.38, 17.248.

[155] Cf. Aesch. *Eum*. 874, *PV* 567.

[156] *Ch*. You are someone demented, possessed by the god, you cry out about yourself an unmusical song, like the shrill nightingale, insatiate of laments, alas, full in the heart of sadness, lamenting Itys, Itys, for a life abounding in evil.

The old men of Argos recognise the acoustic similarities between the lament of Cassandra and the song of the nightingale. The comparison is evidenced by the discordant sounds that Cassandra modulates to express her contradictory emotional state. Split between suffering and anger, she cries aloud a νόμος ἄνομος, 'unmusical song' (1142).[157] This oxymoronic expression has been interpreted in different ways. According to Verrall (1889:131), it indicates a 'wild tune', since the νόμος was a tuned arrangement of notes. In contrast, Fraenkel (1950:518) argues that it does not have a technical meaning, and therefore does not refer to the citharodic νόμος. In agreement with Verrall, Fleming (1977:222-33) states that the adjective ἄνομος does not deny the cithadoric performance of Cassandra, but rather it emphasises the disturbing content of her lamentation. As he explains, the cithadoric νόμος, which is connected to Apollo, 'was used symbolically to represent both psychic and cosmic attunement' (229). Because of her disrupted relationship with Apollo, Cassandra violates the musical nomos, which 'from being regarded as a symbol of order' becomes 'a song proper to the spirits of revenge' (231). Raeburn and Thomas (2011:190) also explain the expression νόμος ἄνομος with the 'disordered' and 'disturbing' effect created by the tragic lament of Cassandra. I argue that the oxymoron needs referring to the discordant sounds that characterise the lamenting song of the nightingale. Its musical skills are evoked by the Chorus to describe the modality through which Cassandra performs her ritual lamentation before the realisation of Clytemnestra's revenge against Agamemnon.

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[157] Cf. the use of the adjective ἄνομος, ον, in Aesch. *Ag*. 151.

The discordant acoustic effects created by the performance of the vengeful lament of Cassandra are also conveyed through the adjective ξουθός, ή, όν (1141). In contrast to Fraenkel (1950:520), who argues that the adjective indicates the colour of the nightingale's feathers, other scholars have interpreted it in its acoustic connotations.[158] I argue that the adjective denotes the 'trilling' larynx of the nightingale,[159] by combining sound and movement in the metaphorical reproduction of its song. It can mean in fact 'rapidly moving to and fro' in reference to the alcyones,[160] and to the whirring wings of the Dioscuri.[161] Moreover, it can indicate the 'nimble' of the bee,[162] and the 'twittering' of the swallow.[163] In the depiction of Cassandra, the shrilling and swift notes produced by the nightingale recall the mythological metamorphosis of Procne. This is evidenced by the repetition of the name of Procne's son (1144), performed by the Chorus to accompany the lamenting song of Cassandra. Both involved in intra-familial vengeful dynamics, Procne and Cassandra cry out their suffering by modulating the piercing song of the nightingale. Through a reversal in the myth of Procne, Aeschylus attributes to Cassandra the musical skills of the nightingale to stage her lamentation before vengeance is committed in the House of Atreus.

Meanwhile, Sophocles attributes the musical skills of the nightingale to Electra in order to stage her active involvement in the vengeful conflicts of the House of Atreus. In the prologue, Orestes while plotting his deceitful plan of

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[158] Denniston and Page, 1957:172; Raeburn and Thomas, 2011:191.

[159] *AP* 9.333. *Hymn. Hom.* 33.13. Hom. *Od.* 19.518; Hes. *Op.* 203.

[160] Theoc. *Id*. 7.142.

[161] Aesch. *Ag*. 1142; Eur. *Hel*. 1111; cf. Aristoph. *Av*. 214, 676.

[162] Theoc. *Id*. 7.142.

[163] Babr. 118,1.

vengeance against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus hears weeping sounds (77-81). Having started to wail off-stage, Electra enters to modulate a unique lyric song that assumes the tunes of the nightingale's lament. The fact that the tragedy stages a monody before the entrance of the Chorus gives emphasis to the lamenting song of Electra. By comparing herself with the nightingale, Electra cries out her suffering, as follows (103-9):

{ΗΛ.} Ἀλλ' οὐ μὲν δὴ

λήξω θρήνων στυγερῶν τε γόων,

ἔστ' ἂν παμφεγγεῖς ἄστρων   105

ῥιπάς, λεύσσω δὲ τόδ' ἦμαρ,

μὴ οὐ τεκνολέτειρ' ὥς τις ἀηδὼν

ἐπὶ κωκυτῷ τῶνδε πατρῴων

πρὸ θυρῶν ἠχὼ πᾶσι προφωνεῖν·[164]

Electra's song establishes a connection with the concept of death, which is enhanced by her prayer to chthonic deities, such as Hades, Persephone, Hermes and the Furies (110-2). The polyptoton of the nouns γόος, 'wail' (81, 104), and θρῆνος, 'lament' (88, 94), emphasises the lamenting nature of her monody. Mediated by the image of the nightingale, the lament of Electra not only expresses her grief for the death of her father, but also describes her tragic condition. By evoking the myth of Procne, the nightingale gives voice to the dirges uttered by

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[164] *El*. But I will never cease my wailing and bitter laments, as long as I see the resplendent rays of the stars and this daylight; like that nightingale, deprived of her child, I shall cry out in grief, for all to hear, at these doors of my father's house.

Electra in her state of mourning, isolation and deprivation. The indefinite article τις (107), which literally means 'some', is referring here to the nightingale, so that the connection between Electra and Procne can be established. Moreover, the adjective τεκνολέτειρα (107) explains the comparison between the lament of Electra and the mythological metamorphosis of Procne. The term, which is a Sophoclean *hapax*, has been translated either as 'child-slayer',[165] or as 'child-deprived'.[166] The compound adjective consists of the noun τέκνον, 'child', and the verb ὄλλυμι, which means 'I slay' in the active form and 'I lose' in the passive. I argue that both despair and violence characterise the song of the nightingale in the comparison between Procne and Electra. The difference consists instead in the fact that, whereas Procne raises her lament after the death of her son, Electra modulates the lamenting song of the nightingale to anticipate the death of her mother.

The vengeful connotations of the lamenting song of the nightingale are acoustically conveyed in the monody of Electra. With the accompaniment of the Chorus, she performs ritual lamentation to incite vengeance against Clytemnestra. Assuming the musical skills of the nightingale, Electra manifests both her suffering and anger for the death of her father, as follows (145-9):

> {ΗΛ.} Νήπιος ὃς τῶν οἰκτρῶς
>
> οἰχομένων γονέων ἐπιλάθεται·
>
> ἀλλ' ἐμέ γ' ἁ στονόεσσ' ἄραρεν φρένας,
>
> ἃ Ἴτυν, αἰὲν Ἴτυν ὀλοφύρεται,

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[165] Jebb, 1880; Dugdale, 2008; Raeburn, 2008.

[166] Kells, 1973; Campbell, 1881; March, 2001; Roisman, 2008.

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<p style="text-align:center">ὄρνις ἀτυζομένα, Διὸς ἄγγελος.[167]</p>

In comparison with Electra, the nightingale is connoted by the adjective στονόεις, εσσα, εν (147), which can mean 'full of moaning',[168] but also have the factitive meaning of 'causing groans'.[169] The present participle of the verb ἀτύζομαι, 'distraught with grief' (149), emphasises the lamenting nature of the nightingale's song. By creating a connection with the Homeric depiction of Penelope (*Od.* 19.522), the verb ὀλοφύρομαι, 'I lament' (148), suggests the modality through which Electra mourns the death of Agamemnon. As in the depiction of Cassandra, the name of the slain son of Procne is used as an interjection of grief. Encapsulated between the two accusative forms of Ἴτυς (148), the adverb αἰέν connotes the ever-lasting lament of Electra. The concept of eternity, which justifies the excessive duration of her lamentation, is also enhanced by the mythological reference to Niobe (150-2). Transformed into 'a rocky grave', Niobe 'forever sheds tears' after the death of her offspring. By modulating the ceaseless song of the nightingale, Electra would have created a tragic effect of pathos in the audience. She does not intend to cease her lament until Orestes comes back home and takes revenge against their mother for the death of their father.

In the *Hecuba*, Euripides evokes the musical skills of the nightingale differently from Aeschylus and Sophocles. He attributes its vocal techniques to Polyxena in order to stage the vengeful lament of Hecuba. Informed by the Chorus that her daughter will be sacrificed on the tomb of Achilles, Hecuba starts

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[167] *El.* Foolish is the child who forgets parents pitifully dead; but more congenial to my mind is the mournful bird that laments for Itys, Itys, evermore, distraught for grief, the messenger of Zeus.

[168] Hom. *Il.* 24.721; Soph. *OT* 187, *Ant.* 1145.

[169] Hom. *Il.* 8.159, *Od.* 9.12, 11.383, 17.102, 21.60; Aesch. *Pers.* 1053; Soph. *Trach.* 886.

to perform her ritual lamentation. Through στεναγμοί, 'sighing sounds', and δάκρυα, 'tears' (230), she expresses her suffering for the decision taken by the Greeks. However, her tragic lament does not merely convey the concepts of grief, powerlessness and bereavement. By using the techniques of πειθώ, Hecuba tries to convince Odysseus to spare her daughter from death. Mediated by the image of the nightingale, the persuasive nature of Hecuba's lament is represented as follows (334-41):

{Εκ.}ὦ θύγατερ, οὑμοὶ μὲν λόγοι πρὸς αἰθέρα

φροῦδοι μάτην ῥιφθέντες ἀμφὶ σοῦ φόνου·   335

σὺ δ', εἴ τι μείζω δύναμιν ἢ μήτηρ ἔχεις,

σπούδαζε πάσας ὥστ' ἀηδόνος στόμα

φθογγὰς ἱεῖσα, μὴ στερηθῆναι βίου.

πρόσπιπτε δ' οἰκτρῶς τοῦδ' Ὀδυσσέως γόνυ

καὶ πεῖθ' (ἔχεις δὲ πρόφασιν· ἔστι γὰρ τέκνα   340

καὶ τῶιδε) τὴν σὴν ὥστ' ἐποικτῖραι τύχην.[170]

The nightingale is evoked to give voice to the desperate attempt of Hecuba to frustrate the sacrifice of her daughter. Convinced that the song of the nightingale will persuade Odysseus, Hecuba encourages Polyxena to perform ritual lamentation at his knees. The lament of the nightingale is defined through the poetic form of the noun φθόγγος (338), which can denote the voice of either

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[170] *He*. Daughter, my words in the air have gone, in vain hurled against your slaughter, but if you have greater power than your mother, make haste, provided with the nightingale's voice, to utter all the possible words to save your life. Fall pitifully at the knees of Odysseus and persuade him (you have an argument: he has children too) to take pity on your destiny.

animals[171] or men,[172] and specifically the song of the Sirens[173] and Orpheus.[174] Moreover, the lamenting sounds of the nightingale's song are metaphorically reproduced through the use of the adverbial form of the adjective οἰκτρός, ά, όν (339), which means 'pitiable, lamentable' when used of persons or things, and 'wailing piteously, piteous' in the active sense. Through the combination of acoustic details with the gestures of supplication, Euripides attributes to the nightingale the power of persuasion. However, the tragic paradox consists in the fact that Polyxena does not raise the lament of the nightingale to save her life, but rather to accept her destiny of death. By lamenting her enslaved condition and offering her body to Hades, she urges Odysseus to kill her (357-69). Before leaving the stage, Polyxena asks him to cover her head with the veil, as her heart is melted by the θρῆνοι, 'laments', of her mother, and the heart of her mother is melted by her γόοι, 'weeping sounds' (432-4). By creating a tragic effect of pathos, the song of the nightingale signals the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance in the depiction of Hecuba. From being an expression of filial pity, its lament becomes the prelude to the vengeful reaction of Hecuba to the death of her offspring. As soon as Hecuba realises that she has been deprived of both Polyxena and Polydorus, she takes on the role of mourning avenger.

In the *Helen*, Euripides attributes the musical skills of the nightingale to another mourning avenger. As I have discussed in the previous section, the Chorus call upon the nightingale to comment on the lamenting song of Helen. They specifically connote the nightingale with the superlative form of the

[171] Hom. *Od*. 9.167; Eur. *IT* 293.

[172] Hom. *Il*. 2.791; Aesch. *Supp*. 197.

[173] Hom. *Od*. 12.198.

[174] Aesch. *Ag*. 1630.

adjectival noun ἀοιδός, 'tuneful' (1108), and with the adjectives μελῳδός, όν, 'melodious' (1109), and δακρυόεις, εσσα, εν (1110), which means 'tearful' when used of persons,[175] and 'causing tears' when referring to war, pain and death.[176] As in the depiction of Cassandra, the nightingale is also connoted by the adjective ξουθός, ή, όν, 'trilling' (1111), so that a tragic effect of pathos can be created. Movement and sound are merged in the θρῆνος, 'lament' (1112), which the Chorus perform to express the suffering not only of Helen, but also of all the victims of the Trojan War. Moreover, the present participle of the verb ἐλελίζω (1111), referring to the nightingale, emphasises the lamenting nature of the choral performance of the Spartan women. When used alongside the adjective ξουθός, ή, όν, the verb means 'trilling through the throat a lament'.[177] However, the Chorus do not evoke the nightingale's song merely to accompany the lament of Helen, but rather to prepare the scene for the realisation of her vengeful plan.

The song of the nightingale assumes threatening connotations, when Helen starts to simulate ritual lamentation for the feigned death of Menelaus. At the end of the tragedy, she enters on stage dressed in mourning and uttering weeping sounds. Theoclymenus is astonished by the fact that Helen has changed her white dress for a black one, her hair has been cut off and her cheeks are wet (1186-90). He specifically uses the present participle of the verb κλαίω (1190) to describe the mourning behaviour of Helen in acoustic terms. The verb, which means 'I cry, wail' in the intransitive form,[178] and 'I weep for, I lament' in the transitive,[179] is

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[175] Hom. *Il*. 6.484, 21.506, *Od*. 24.323. Hom. *Il*. 5.737, Hes. *Theog*. 227.

[176] Hom. *Il*. 5.737, Hes. *Theog*. 227.

[177] Cf. the use of the *iunctura* in Ar. *Av*. 213-4.

[178] Hom. *Il*. 8.364, 19.297; *Od*. 10.201, 20.92.

[179] Hom. *Od*. 1.363; Aesch. *Ag*. 890; Soph. *El*. 1117.

used to express pain or sorrow both in the epic and tragic traditions. By assuming the musical skills of the nightingale, Helen convinces Theoclymenus that Menelaus has died in a shipwreck and therefore a funeral rite needs performing. She asks him for permission to make sacrificial offerings and celebrate the rites for the burial of her husband on a ship. However, Theoclymenus is unaware that Menelaus is still alive and Helen has plotted a vengeful plan to escape from Egypt with him. As reported by the messenger (1526-9), Helen has pretended to mourn her husband with ritual cries and gestures. From being an expression of suffering, the nightingale's song becomes the deceitful instrument through which Helen accomplishes her vengeance against Theoclymenus.

So, Attic dramatists evoke the musical skills of the nightingale to reproduce the vengeful laments of their tragic heroines in a Dionysiac fashion. Through the combination of discordant sounds, they capture female characters acoustically in the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance. Aeschylus attributes to the Danaids the vocal techniques of the nightingale, so that they can obtain protection from the sexual assault of their cousins. Through shrill and deep sounds, the Danaids raise a threnody, which displays their vengeful intentions against the sons of Aegyptus. While crying out their grief, they lacerate their cheeks and rend their veil to foreshadow the act of vengeance they will commit within their own household. Aeschylus evokes the musical skills of the nightingale in the depiction of another tragic heroine who performs ritual lamentation before vengeance is committed. Through incomprehensible yells, ritual invocations to Apollo and high-pitched sounds, Cassandra modulates a vengeful lament in the *Agamemnon*. By evoking the myth of Procne, the nightingale captures Cassandra acoustically in her liminality between lamentation

and vengeance. Meanwhile, Sophocles attributes the musical skills of the nightingale to Electra in order to stage her vengeful lament at the beginning of the tragedy. By comparing herself with the nightingale, Electra raises a pitiful, ceaseless and mournful song to express both her suffering and anger for the death of her father. Through a tragic reversal in the mythological metamorphosis of Procne, she performs a transgressive and threatening lament to anticipate the vengeful act of matricide that Orestes will commit at the end of the tragedy. Euripides evokes the musical skills of the nightingale differently from Aeschylus and Sophocles to stage the vengeful laments of his tragic heroines. In the *Hecuba*, the vocal techniques of the nightingale are attributed to Polyxena to signal the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance. Destined to the tomb of Achilles, she is encouraged by her mother to raise the lamenting song of the nightingale to be spared from death. However, when the persuasive attempts of Hecuba fail, the acoustic imagery of the nightingale becomes the prelude to her vengeful reaction to the death of Polyxena. In the *Helen*, the Chorus call upon the nightingale to signal the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance. By modulating trilling and weeping sounds, they not only express the suffering of Helen, but also anticipate the realisation of her vengeful plan. Through the ritual performance of the funeral rite for the feigned death of Menelaus, Helen will in fact escape from Egypt and go home with Menelaus. As I show in the following section, Attic dramatists attribute to their tragic heroines not only the musical skills of the nightingale, but also its prophetic role in order to signal the passage from lamentation to vengeance.

1. 2. 3   Prophetic role

The prophetic role of the nightingale is the last feature that I analyse to show the Dionysiac implications of the tragic lamentations performed by female avengers in intra-familial conflicts. After considering relevant literary references to this aspect, I argue that Attic dramatists represent female characters intoning the vengeful lament of the nightingale to announce the self-destruction of the household. According to Pollard (1977:14), 'birds were one of the commonest forms of omen', but their signs were variable. As he states, birds were 'reliable guides to changes in weather or season', and therefore auspicious at one time and inauspicious at another. A specific passage from the *Phaedo* (84e-85b) attests that the nightingale was believed to modulate an ominous song. Like other μαντικοί, 'prophetic' birds, namely the swan, the swallow, the hoopoe and the dove, the nightingale is said to sing before dying. As Plato suggests, because of the ambiguity of their voice, there were two different traditions attributed to prophetic birds. In contrast to the traditional belief, he argues that the nightingale does not intone a mournful song before death, but rather raises a joyous hymn to the heavens. In order to defend his philosophical interpretation, Plato explains the interpretative failure of ancient Greek poets by the human fear of death.

As an emotional response to death, the song of the nightingale is described both as melodious and mournful in ancient Greek tragedy. Its connection with funeral rites is noted by Suksi (2001:646), who claims that it is not by chance that the nightingale sings by the grove where Oedipus 'will be transformed at his death into a potent cult hero'. This is confirmed by the employment of the adjective λιγύς, λίγεια, λιγύ (Soph. *OC* 671) in reference to the nightingales mourning the

death of Oedipus in Colonus. The term, which can generally mean 'clear, shrill',[180] and is frequently used either of a 'sweet'[181] or 'articulate'[182] sound, assumes after Hesiod the connotation of 'sad'. As I have discussed in the introduction of this chapter, following the Homeric description of Penelope's lament (*Od*. 19.522), the harmonious strain of the nightingale became strictly associated with the form of a plaintive song. Because of the epic influence on its representation, the nightingale's song assumes sombre tones in ancient Greek tragedy. In light of the myth of Procne, the tragic nightingale is acoustically defined as ἀκόρετος βοᾶς, 'insatiate of lament',[183] δύσμορος, 'ill-fated',[184] and ἀτυζομένα, 'distraught in grief'.[185] It is represented as raising a mournful song accompanied with tears,[186] and its continuous wailing[187] is reproduced as an excessive expression of grief.[188] However, the song of the tragic nightingale does not merely express suffering and loss in the passage from life to death. Through the combination of sweet and sad sounds, it also functions as a Dionysiac tool to give voice to mourning avengers. As I show in the following textual analysis, the Danaids, Cassandra and Electra are attributed the prophetic role of the nightingale. Through the metaphorical reproduction of their vengeful laments,

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[180] Hom. *Il*. 14.17, *Od*. 3.176, cf. 4.357.

[181] Hom. *Il*. 9.186, *Od*. 8.67.

[182] Hom. *Od*. 24.62.

[183] Aesch. *Ag*. 143.

[184] Soph. *Aj*. 628.

[185] Soph. *El*. 149.

[186] Soph. *Trach*. 963; *El*. 1077; Eur. *Hel*. 1110.

[187] Soph. *El*. 107; *OC* 672.

[188] Cf. Hesych. α 1502 L.

Aeschylus and Sophocles unfold the tragic action towards the self-destruction of the household.

Aeschylus attributes to the Danaids the prophetic role of the nightingale to anticipate the act of vengeance they will commit against their cousins. Although the death of the sons of Aegyptus probably occurred at the end of the trilogy, the Chorus intone the lament of the nightingale at the beginning of the *Suppliants*. As I have discussed in the section on the habitat of the nightingale, Aeschylus stages the entrance of the Danaids by evoking the lament of Procne. The comparison between the Danaids and Procne is established through the reproduction of lamenting sounds. As the Chorus sing: 'if some augur is around, a native, who hearing this piteous wailing will think he hears the voice of Metis, Tereus' piteous wife' (58-61). The reference to the augur suggests that the lament of the Danaids would have been perceived as obscure and incomprehensible like the birds' song. The noun οἰωνοπόλων (58), which literally means 'one busied with the flight and cries of birds', is used of Calchas[189] and Helenus[190] in the epic tradition. According to Johansen and Whittle (1980:52), the adverb πέλας, 'near' (58), used as an apposition of the augur, indicates his non-Greek identity. I argue that the augur is rather invoked to emphasise the ominous nature of the song of the nightingale. Aware of the mythological metamorphosis of Procne into a mourning nightingale, an ἔγγαιος, 'native' (59), augur would be able to forecast the tragic implications of the lament of the Danaids. What makes the lamenting song of the Danaids ambiguous is not their non-Greek language but rather the reversal of the myth of Procne in their tragic depiction. Whereas Procne sings the lament of the

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[189] Hom. *Il*. 1.69.

[190] Ibid. 6.76.

nightingale after the death of her son, the Danaids are metaphorically transformed into tragic nightingales before killing their cousins.

Aeschylus attributes the prophetic role of the nightingale to another tragic heroine whose lamentation anticipates vengeance. By blurring the dichotomies of divinity and animality, life and death, past and future in the House of Atreus, he stages the ominous song of Cassandra. In response to her cries and invocations of Apollo, the Chorus deploy the present participle of the verb δυσφημέω, 'I use words of ill omen'.[191] Thinking that Cassandra is mourning her own condition, they have not grasped yet that her lament rather foretells the vengeful act that Clytemnestra will commit at the end of the tragedy. The Chorus are aware of her κλέος μαντικόν 'prophetic fame' (1098), but they show their reluctance by saying that they are not looking for a προφήτης, 'prophet' (1099). Their unwillingness is justified by the fact that 'the wordy skills of the prophets bring about only terror' (1134-5). The presentiment of the Chorus is mediated by the image of the nightingale, which as I have discussed in the previous section, gives expression to the vengeful lament of Cassandra. They recognise the similarity between her prophetic strain and the lamenting song of Procne. However, as follows, Cassandra refuses the comparison with the nightingale (1146-55):

> Κα.} ἰὼ ἰὼ λιγείας μόρον ἀηδόνος·
>
> πτεροφόρον γάρ οἱ περὶ δέμας βάλοντο
>
> θεοὶ γλυκύν τ' ἀγῶνα κλαυμάτων ἄτερ·
>
> ἐμοὶ δὲ μίμνει σχισμὸς ἀμφήκει δορί.
>
> {Χο.} πόθεν ἐπισσύτους θεοφόρους [τ'] ἔχεις   1150

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[191] Cf. the use of the verb δυσφημέω in Soph. *El.* 905, 1183.

ματαίους δύας;

τὰ δ' ἐπίφοβα δυσφάτῳ κλαγγᾷ

μελοτυπεῖς ὁμοῦ τ' ὀρθίοις ἐν νόμοις.

πόθεν ὅρους ἔχεις θεσπεσίας ὁδοῦ

κακορρήμονας; [192]

According to Fraenkel (1950:518-30), in the *kommos* with the Chorus, Cassandra refuses the comparison with the nightingale, because she already knows her wretched destiny. By referring to the Platonic explanation of the song of the nightingale (*Phd*. 84a-85b), he argues that both the nightingale and Cassandra have prophetic skills, but the gods assigned sweet life to the former and violent death to the latter. In commenting upon this passage, Raeburn and Thomas (2011:190-2) argue that Cassandra has a vision of her own death under Apollonian possession. From their perspective, she refuses the comparison with Procne, because her destiny will be worse. Cassandra does not in fact have wings to escape, but rather she can only wait until the ἀμφήκες δόρυ, 'the two-edged spear' (1149), of Clytemnestra will kill her. I argue that Cassandra apparently refuses the comparison with Procne to prepare the scene for a vengeful resolution in a Dionysiac fashion. In her unmediated prophecy, she has seen 'infants weeping for their slaughter and their roasted flesh devoured by their father' (1096-7). This image would have created a connection between the banquet of Thyestes,

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[192] *Ca*. Oh! Oh! The life of the clear-voiced nightingale, the gods in fact gave her a winged body and a sweet life without misfortunes, for myself, instead, the two-edged spear waits. *Ch*. From where do you have these violent, god-inspired, vain miseries? Do you arrange your terrible song in an unutterable cry with shrilling notes? From where do you have the ill-omened limits of your prophetic way?

whose hereditary guilt will destroy Agamemnon, with the banquet served by Procne to Tereus. As I have explained in the Introduction (pp. 23-4), the themes of kin-killing, dismemberment and cannibalism were considered particularly fitting for tragic productions at the festival of Dionysus. Through a reversal in the mythological metamorphosis of Procne, Cassandra raises the ominous song of the nightingale not only to lament her own impending death, but also to anticipate the self-destruction of the House of Atreus.

The prophetic role of the nightingale is also evidenced in the response of the Chorus to the lamenting song of Cassandra. From their perspective, Cassandra is violently possessed by Apollo and therefore her 'voice' sounds 'unutterable' (1152). Connoted by the adjective δύσφατος, ον, the feminine noun κλαγγή, which derives from the verb κλάζω, 'I make a sharp piercing sound', is used to denote the 'scream' of birds,[193] the 'howling' of wolves and lions,[194] the 'hissing' of serpents,[195] and the 'baying' of dogs.[196] Described as an animal cry, the lamenting song of Cassandra is perceived by the Chorus as transgressing the limits of her prophetic skills. The ill-omened nature of her lament reaches its apex later in the tragedy, when she clearly foretells the self-destruction of the House of Atreus. After revealing the vengeful plan of Clytemnestra through the lioness metaphor, which I analyse in the next chapter (p. 177), Cassandra states that her death will not remain ἄτιμος, 'unavenged' (1279). Orestes will come back to the palace of Argos as the τιμάορος, 'avenger' (1280), of all the Trojans. Having

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[193] Hom. *Od*. 11.605, cf. Il. 2.100, 10.523.

[194] *Hymn. Hom*. 14.4, cf. 27.8.

[195] Aesch. *Sept*. 381.

[196] Xen. *Cyn*. 4.5.

incited vengeance through her lamentation, Cassandra enters the damned house where death is waiting for her.

Meanwhile, Sophocles attributes the prophetic role of the nightingale to Electra in order to lead the audience towards the act of matricide. Employed in ring composition, the nightingale's song creates a dramaturgical effect of suspense in the passage from lamentation to vengeance in the *Electra*. As soon as Electra is informed of the feigned death of Orestes (929-80), she takes on the role of mourning avenger. In contrast to her sister Chrysothemis, she shows her loyalty to the dead and her heroism in her desire for revenge. Thus, the Chorus comment on the vengeful intentions of Electra (1074-81):

{ΧΟ.} […] πρόδοτος δὲ μόνα σαλεύει

Ἠλέκτρα, τὸν ἀεὶ πατρὸς

δειλαία στενάχουσ', ὅπως

ἁ πάνδυρτος ἀηδών,

οὔτε τι τοῦ θανεῖν προμη-

θὴς τό τε μὴ βλέπειν ἑτοί-

μα, διδύμαν ἑλοῦσ' ἐρι-   1080

νύν· τίς ἂν εὔπατρις ὧδε βλάστοι;[197]

Deserted by Orestes and Chrysothemis, Electra is depicted, through a nautical metaphor, in her courage to 'endure the storm' (1074). However, her heroism

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[197] *Ch*. But betrayed, she endures the storm alone, Electra, forever the death of her father sorrowfully lamenting, like the plaintive nightingale, with no care about death, but ready to leave the light; could she overcome the double Furies? Who could be born so noble?

does not consist in killing her mother to avenge the death of her father. The ever-lasting lament of Electra is interrupted by the recognition of Orestes at the end of the tragedy. Freed from the perpetual waiting and suffering, she is asked by her brother to conceal her joy by carrying on her lamentation. From being an expression of grief and powerlessness, the lamenting song of the nightingale becomes the ominous sign that vengeance is about to happen. Without losing its transgressive connotations, the lament of Electra prepares the scene for the vengeful act of matricide.

So, Aeschylus and Sophocles invoke the prophetic role of the nightingale to capture their tragic heroines in the passage from lamentation to vengeance. By blurring the dichotomies between life and death, danger and protection, suffering and anger in the depiction of mourning avengers, they announce the Dionysiac self-destruction of the household. Aeschylus attributes the prophetic role of the nightingale to the Danaids to forecast the tragic implications of their vengeful laments. By calling upon a native augur, who can recognise the acoustic similarities with the lamenting song of Procne, the Chorus incite vengeance against the sons of Aegyptus. Aeschylus evokes the ominous song of the nightingale in the depiction of another tragic heroine who through lamentation is in search of vengeance. Perceived as transgressive, ill-omened and threatening, the lament of Cassandra is associated by the Chorus with the nightingale's song. However, Cassandra refuses the comparison to anticipate not only her oncoming death, but also the vengeful arrival of Orestes. Meanwhile, Sophocles attributes the prophetic role of the nightingale to Electra in order to prepare the scene for the act of matricide committed by Orestes. In the scene of recognition between sister and brother, the nightingale's song shifts from being an expression of suffering to

a vengeful device. By creating a dramaturgical effect of suspense, the ominous song of the nightingale signals the passage from lamentation to vengeance in female characterisation.

1. 3   Conclusion

Through analysis of the taxonomic features of the nightingale, I have shown the tragic contradictions of the vengeful laments of female characters in the theatre of Dionysus. When tragic heroines are attributed the liminal habitat, the musical skills and the prophetic role of the nightingale, they perform ritual lamentation to incite vengeance. Through a tragic reversal of the myth of Procne, Attic dramatists transform female characters into mourning avengers. Whereas Procne was imagined to lament the death of her son as a result of her vengeance against Tereus, tragic heroines raise their laments as a prelude to vengeance in intra-familial conflicts. As I have shown, the Aeschylean Danaids and Cassandra, the Sophoclean Electra, and the Euripidean Polyxena and Helen enact a metaphorical metamorphosis into tragic nightingales in the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance. In their metamorphic depiction, the image of the nightingale gives expression not only to their suffering, loss and bereavement, but also to their vengeful intentions. Metaphorically given the characteristics of the nightingale, mourning avengers reveal their tragic humanity in announcing the self-destruction of the household.

The Danaids are metaphorically transformed into tragic nightingales in the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance. In the prologue of the *Suppliants* (62), Aeschylus evokes the habitat of the nightingale in order to set

their vengeful laments in a liminal space. Under the guidance of their father, the Danaids have fled from Egypt to Argos, with the aim of asking protection from the king Pelasgus. By recalling the mythological metamorphosis of Procne, they express not only their suffering but also their vengeful intentions against their cousins. Moreover, Aeschylus evokes the musical skills of the nightingale to reproduce the lamentation that the Danaids modulate to incite vengeance. Through acute and deep sounds, alongside the ritual gestures of lamentation, the Danaids attempt to convince Pelasgus to give them refuge from the persecution of their cousins. Finally, they metaphorically assume the prophetic role of the nightingale to anticipate the death of the sons of Aegyptus. Their ominous song is emphasised by the reference to a native augur, who would recognise the acoustic similarities with the lament of Procne. By blurring the boundaries between life and death, danger and protection, present and future, the Danaids are metaphorically transformed into tragic nightingales.

In the *Agamemnon* (1145, 1146), Aeschylus evokes the nightingale to transform another tragic heroine who through lamentation announces vengeance. Abducted from Troy to Argos as the concubine of Agamemnon, Cassandra enters the stage in silence. Compared by Clytemnestra to a swallow, because of her barbarian origin, she raises the lamenting song of the nightingale to announce the self-destruction of the House of Atreus. By confusing Philomela with Procne, Aeschylus signals the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance in the depiction of Cassandra. Her liminal state is emphasised by the metaphorical employment of the habitat of the nightingale at the beginning of her prophetic lament. By evoking the blood-stained banks of the Scamander, the Cocytus and the Acheron, Cassandra would have created an effect of suspense in the audience.

She assumes the musical skills of the nightingale to anticipate the death of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra's hands. The incomprehensible and shrieking sounds uttered by Cassandra are compared in fact by the Chorus to the lament of Procne. Taking on the prophetic role of the nightingale, Cassandra refuses the comparison to unfold the tragic action towards the vengeful act that Clytemnestra has plotted against her husband. By blurring the dichotomies of divinity and animality, life and death, past and future in the House of Atreus, Cassandra raises the ominous song of the nightingale before entering the damned house of Agamemnon.

Similarly to Aeschylus, Sophocles metaphorically transforms Electra into a tragic nightingale to stage her vengeful lament. In the *Electra* (107, 149, 1077), the nightingale is evoked in ring composition to signal the dramaturgical passage from suffering to vengeance. Electra is attributed the musical skills of the nightingale at the beginning of the tragedy to express her suffering for the death of her father. Through weeping, shrilling and unbroken sounds, she modulates the lamenting song of the nightingale until Orestes comes back home. As the scene of recognition is delayed, the lament raised by Electra assumes threatening connotations. As soon as she is informed of the feigned death of her brother (929-80), she takes on the role of mourning avenger. Deserted by Orestes and Chrysothemis, Electra reveals her vengeful intentions against Clytemnestra. However, her everlasting lament is interrupted by the arrival of Orestes at the end of the tragedy. By assuming the prophetic role of the nightingale, Electra does not cease her lamentation, but conceals her joy to support her brother in the matricide. From being an expression of grief and powerlessness, her lamenting song announces the self-destruction of the House of Atreus.

Euripides employs the nightingale-woman metaphor differently from Aeschylus and Euripides. In the *Hecuba* (337), he attributes the musical skills of the nightingale to Polyxena to transform her mother into a mourning avenger. Encouraged by Hecuba to raise the lament of the nightingale to save her life, Polyxena accepts instead her destiny of death. She in fact asks Odysseus to cover her head, so that her mother will not listen to her sighs and wails. The lamenting song of the nightingale is rather evoked to signal the dramaturgical passage from lamentation to vengeance in the depiction of Hecuba. As soon as she realises that both Polyxena and Polydorus have been killed, she raises a vengeful lament. In the *Helen* (1110), Euripides employs the nightingale metaphor to depict another mourning avenger. Abducted from Sparta to Egypt, Helen is forced into marriage by Theoclymenus. By evoking the nightingale's habitat, the Chorus give voice not only to her suffering, but also her vengeful intentions. At the beginning of the tragedy, Helen alludes to the blood-stained banks of the Scamander, because of her condition as the victim of Theoclymenus' wantonness. However, her lamentation becomes the deceitful instrument through which she can escape from Egypt at the end of the tragedy. By evoking the musical skills of the nightingale, the Chorus prepare the scene for the realisation of her vengeance.

From a posthumanist perspective, the nightingale-woman metaphor is employed by Attic dramatists to express the tragic humanity of the voice of mourning avengers. When the song of the nightingale is metaphorically reproduced, a dramaturgical moment of suspense is created. By evoking the myth of Procne, the nightingale acoustically signals the passage from lamentation to vengeance in female characterisation. Through a tragic reversal in the mythological metamorphosis of Procne, Attic dramatists would have provoked a

tragic effect of pathos in the fifth-century Athenian audience. In fact, the nightingale image not only gives expression to the suffering of abducted, enslaved and bereaved heroines, but also prepares the scene for a vengeful resolution. By enacting a metaphorical metamorphosis into tragic nightingales, mourning avengers dramatically announce the self-destruction of the household. In the next chapter, I explore the metaphorical employment of the lioness in the tragic depiction of female avengers. The image of the lioness reveals the tragic contradictions of the agency of mothers in intra-familial conflicts. Attributed the dangerous habitat, the hunting skills and the maternal role of the lioness, tragic heroines are represented not only as warning and inciting but also as committing vengeance within and against their household.

CHAPTER 2

THE LIONESS

This chapter explores the metaphorical significance of the lioness in the tragic depiction of avenging mothers. Through analysis of lioness imagery, I define the controversial identity of tragic women who empower themselves to commit vengeance within and against their household. I argue that Attic dramatists metaphorically transform female characters into tragic lionesses to express the human contradictions of their vengeful acts. This is evidenced in the metamorphic depiction of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Tecmessa, and the Euripidean Medea, Clytemnestra and Agave. By playing the role of avenging mothers, the tragic heroines are represented simultaneously as powerful, strong and violent, and as protective, bereaved and dangerous lionesses. Employed as a Dionysiac device, the lioness-woman metaphor signals the dramaturgical passage from vengeance to loss in intra-familial conflicts.

2. 1   The agency of the tragic lioness

The lioness is one of the most powerful animals employed metaphorically in the tragic depiction of female avengers. Unlike the nightingale, which as I have shown in the previous chapter is evoked to announce female vengeance, the lioness dramatically empowers vengeful women. Through the lioness metaphor, Attic dramatists represent tragic heroines as committing vengeance without the aid of a male guardian. This transgressive behaviour needs interpreting in the light

of the Dionysiac empowerment of female characters on the Attic stage (see Introduction, pp. 35-6). Zeitlin (1992:63-96) justifies the instability of gender roles in tragic characterisation with the fifth-century Athenian context of dramatic festivals. She argues that the hierarchy prescribing gender differences was confused in the ritualised performances in honour of Dionysus. The dramatic roles of 'feminised males' and 'masculinised women' were created 'according to a ritual logic that insists that each gender must for the last time, as it were, act the part of the other', as Zeitlin states (67). However, by rejecting an equal reversal between genders, she emphasises the dramatic role of the feminine Other. From her perspective, tragic women functioned as 'antimodels as well as hidden models' (69) for defining male identity and revealing the contradictions of the masculine world. In Zeitlin's words, as the Other is 'always weaker and inferior to the self' (93), female characters are provided with violence, strength and power to accomplish their vengeful acts.

Burnett (1998) also explains the tragic empowerment of female characters with reference to the Dionysiac context of dramatic festivals. She argues that the carnival atmosphere of the Great Dionysia encouraged Attic dramatists to create a temporary experience of transgression and excess. She specifically interprets the agency of tragic women in revenge plots as a dramatic convention in conformity with the celebration of the epiphany of Dionysus. Tragic women are 'disempowered by physical weakness and disqualified by traditional passivity' (144) to act vengefully, as Burnett states. By considering vengeance as an unproblematically male form of reaction to injustice, she argues that female characters are represented as 'unwomanly and unnatural creatures' in tragic plays (142). In the case of interrupted or failed attempts of masculine vengeance, tragic

heroines are represented as man-like to take on the role of avengers and cause the dissolution of their family.

The tragic depiction of female characters who commit vengeance within and against their household has been hotly discussed in classical scholarship. According to Seaford (1994:344-66), the tragic representation of female acts of vengeance is one of the paradoxical aspects of the theatre of Dionysus. He argues that the vengeful acts accomplished by female characters bring about the self-destruction of the οἶκος in ancient Greek tragedy. As Seaford explains, due to the development of the city-state, tragic heroines are imagined to transcend gender conflicts by using violence within their own family. The tragic involvement of female characters in intra-familial tensions has been also analysed by Tzanetou (2012:97-120). She identifies an inversion of the maternal ideal in the depiction of tragic heroines who commit vengeance against the members of their household. As Tzanetou states, by transgressing the social norms of 'Athenian civic ideology', tragic women are represented 'in negative terms, as vengeful, not nurturing, and harmful towards their offspring' (110).

I open up new perspectives on the reading and interpretation of the agency of avenging mothers in ancient Greek tragedy, by investigating the lioness metaphor. The Dionysiac empowerment of tragic mothers who commit vengeance within and against their household should not be interpreted either in positive or negative, masculine or feminine, human or non-human terms. Adapted from the Homeric tradition, the tragic lioness rather reflects the contradictory nature of the active involvement of mothers in intra-familial conflicts. By merging both the masculine and feminine traits of the Homeric lion, Attic dramatists compare vengeful heroines to tragic lionesses to provoke an effect of pathos in the fifth-

century Athenian audience. In the following sections, I interweave classical studies on the lion species and gendered perspectives about war and childbirth, with the aim of demonstrating the tragic effect triggered by the lioness-woman metaphor in revenge plots.

2. 1. 1 The gendered nature of the lioness's empowerment

I start investigating the dramatic significance of lioness imagery in female characterisation by looking at linguistic and gendered considerations. The term λέαινα, which indicates the 'lioness' in ancient Greek, is a derivative noun. Just as in the formation of other feminine nouns, the suffix –αινα is added to the masculine noun λέων, 'lion'. However, judging by extant ancient Greek literary texts, it seems that the term λέαινα was introduced only in the fifth century BC.[198] Whereas in the Homeric tradition the lion, which is denoted by the term λέων and its epic form λίς, is metaphorically employed in comparison with both male and female characters, on the Attic stage it is linguistically distinguished from the lioness. In extant ancient Greek tragedies, the masculine noun λέων is mainly related to male characters,[199] but it is also used in the description of real lions and

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[198] As confirmed by Konstantinou (2012:125-6) the first occurrences of the feminine noun λέαινα are in Aesch. *Ag*. 1258 and Hdt. 3.108, 12.

[199] The tragic characters metaphorically associated with the lion are: Agamemnon (Aesch. *Ag*. 141, 827, 1259), Adrastus (Aesch. *Sept*. 53), Aegisthus (Aesch. *Ag*. 1224), Eteocles (Eur. *Phoen*. 1573), Hector (Eur. *Rhes*. 57), Heracles (Eur. *HF* 1211, *Heracl.* 1006), Neoptolemus and Philoctetes (Soph. *Phil*. 1436), Orestes (Aesch. *Cho*. 938; Eur. *IT* 297, *Or.* 1402, 1555), Pentheus (Eur. *Bacch*. 1142, 1196, 1215, 1278, 1283), Pylades (Aesch. *Cho*. 938; Eur. *Or.* 1401, 1555), Polynices (Eur. *Supp*. 140, *Phoen*. 411, 1573), and Tydeus (Eur. *Phoen*. 1120).

mythological monsters, such as the Nemaean lion, and the god Dionysus.[200]

Despite the masculine form, the goddess Cybele and the Erinyes are also associated with the lion figure. When it comes to the feminine noun λέαινα, it is always used of female characters,[201] but it is also evoked in the description of a hunting scene, mythological monsters, such as the Chimaera, and the divine metamorphoses of Callisto and Merops, and Io.[202] In addition, the cub of the lion and the lioness is defined with the masculine noun σκύμνος in both the Homeric and tragic traditions. Other tragic references consist of the feminine noun δρόσος, which literally means 'dew', but metaphorically indicates the 'young of animals', and the masculine/feminine noun ἶνις, 'son, daughter', plus the genitive form of

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[200] The masculine noun λέων is used to denote real lions (Eur. *Andr*. 720, *Ion* 1162, *Alc*. 580, *Heracl.* 950, *Cyc*. 248), the Nemean lion (Soph. *Trach*. 1093; Eur. *HF* 360, 466, 579, 1271), the god Dionysus (Eur. *Bacch*. 1019), the goddess Cybele (Soph. *Phil*. 401) and the Erinyes (Aesch. *Eum*. 193). The other animals depicted in the divine metamorphoses of Dionysus are the snake and the bull (Eur. *Bacch*. 100-1, 1017-9).

[201] The tragic characters metaphorically associated with the lioness are: Clytemnestra (Aesch. *Ag*. 141, 1258; Eur. *El*. 1163), Tecmessa (Soph. *Aj*. 987), Medea (Eur. *Med*. 187, 1342, 1358, 1407) and Agave (Eur. *Bacch*. 990).

[202] The feminine noun λέαινα is used to denote real lionesses (Aesch. fr. 660,3 M), the Chimaera (Eur. *El*. 473), and divine metamorphoses (Eur. *Hel*. 379; Soph. fr. 269a,42 R). There are two specific references of mythological metamorphoses into lionesses: in the monodic song of the Euripidean Helen, the tragic heroine says to be different from Callisto, the 'blessed virgin' (375) who 'left the bed of Zeus on four paws' (377), and Merops who Artemis banished from her dances, by transforming her into a hind with golden horns (384). In the fragmentary Sophoclean *Inachos*, Io is captured in a multi-faceted metamorphosis: she becomes cow, lioness and bull.

the lion and/or the lioness. The term σκύμνος, like the other expressions indicating the lion cub, is used to refer to both male and female characters.[203]

The tragic introduction of the term λέαινα is significant, when considering the Dionysiac empowerment of female characters in intra-family vengeful conflicts (see Introduction, pp. 23-4). However, the majority of classical scholars have overlooked the gendered distinctions within the lion family in ancient Greek tragedy. Extensive work has been undertaken on the lion similes in Homer, specifically on male characterisation.[204] Among the few scholars who have noticed the absence of the lioness in the Homeric tradition,[205] Foley (1984:59-78) discusses the case of Penelope, who is compared to a male lion, after realising the murderous intentions of the suitors against her son Telemachus (Hom. *Od*. 4.791). In Foley's words, this is a 'reverse simile', since it implies a metaphorical inversion of gender roles between Penelope and Odysseus. In the absence of her husband, Penelope becomes a strong and resolute woman, despite her bewildered and helpless position. As the result of gender reversal, she defends her household against the attack of her suitors through the feminine art of weaving.

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[203] The tragic characters metaphorically compared to the lion cub are: Iphigenia (Aesch. *Ag*. 141), Orestes (Aesch. *Ag*. 717), Eurysaces (Soph. *Aj*. 987), Pentheus (Eur. *Bacch*. 1174), Diomede (Eur. *Supp*. 1223), Neoptolemus (Eur. *Andr*. 1170), Hermione (Eur. *Or*. 1213, 1493) and Helen (Eur. *Or*. 1387).

[204] For discussion of the lion imagery in Homer see Schnapp-Gourbeillon, 1981; 1982:47-55; Magrath, 1982:205-12; Markoe, 1989:86-115; Clarke, 1995:137-59; Glenn, 1998:107-16; Curti, 2003:9-54; Alden, 2005:335–42; McHardy, 2008:29-33.

[205] Lonsdale, 1990; Konstantinou, 2012:125-40.

Other studies have focused on the use of the lion image in the depiction of tragic heroes, such as Aegisthus and Paris.[206] Through comparison with the Homeric tradition, Wolff (1979:144-50) interprets the image of the paired lions in connection with Neoptolemus and Philoctetes (Soph. *Phil*. 1436). He argues that whereas in Homer the lion represents the courage, power, strength and violence of the heroes, it is mainly associated with vengeance in ancient Greek tragedy. He does not deny the vengeful nature of the lion in Homer, but he points out that it is a symbol of inhumanity rather than of heroism in tragic characterisation. In contrast, Sommerstein (1989), commenting on the lion image in the representation of the Erinyes (Aesch. *Eum*. 194), argues that the lion is 'an ambivalent symbol throughout the trilogy, as a beast of nobility and fierce power, on the one hand, and as a murderous creature revelling in blood-shed, on the other' (116). This reading explains the similarities between the Homeric and the tragic use of the lion metaphor. In the same way as Achilles is compared to a vengeful lion when he kills Hector and mutilates his body (Hom. *Il*. 24.41), tragic heroes are represented as powerful and violent lions in committing acts of vengeance. Given the association of the Homeric and tragic lion with vengeance, I turn now to the metaphorical employment of the lioness in the depiction of avenging mothers.

2. 1. 2   The Homeric lion between strength and protectiveness

Previous scholars have tended to read the tragic image of the lioness in terms of an opposition between the animal and the human worlds. The lioness has been

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[206] Miller, 1977:259-65; Nappa, 1994:82-7; Coppola, 1997:227-33; Battistella, 2005:179-84; West, 2003:480-4.

interpreted, for example, as 'the emblem of a savage woman' in reference to the Euripidean Medea (Mastronarde, 2002:201). It has been also defined as 'the expression of non-humanity' (Di Benedetto, 2004:430) and as the reflection of 'perverted motherhood' (Susanetti, 2010:258) in relation to the Euripidean Agave. Konstantinou (2012:125-40) emphasises the bestial, wild and aggressive connotations assumed by the lioness in the depiction of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra and the Euripidean Medea. In order to interpret the tragic image of the lioness and reconstruct its development, she defines the gendered identity of the Homeric lion. As Konstantinou explains, in Homeric similes the lion shows its masculinity through 'strength, agility, swiftness of attack and persistence' (135). However, it can also assume a more vulnerable and protective role, like a lion(ess) in defence of its cubs. By specifically referring to the representation of Achilles after the death of Patroklos,[207] Konstantinou states that 'the lion goes in search of its lost children, with a feeling of anguish mixed with anger, growing to potential ferocity out of the failure to be protective' (128). From her perspective, the female traits of the Homeric lion are emphasised in the tragic image of the lioness to express the savagery of emotions and the transgressive behaviour of female avengers. Whereas the lion assumes 'positive connotations' in comparison with Homeric heroes, the lioness acquires a 'negative tone' in the characterisation of tragic heroines like Clytemnestra and Medea (126).

I agree with Konstantinou on several points: first, there is a strong literary connection between the Homeric lion and the tragic lioness; second, the Homeric lion is attributed both male and female traits on the battlefield; third, the tragic lioness is employed to empower female characters in revenge plots. However, the

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[207] Hom. *Il*. 18.316-22.

relationship between the Homeric lion and the tragic lioness should not be read in terms of opposition. Attic dramatists do not compare tragic heroines like Clytemnestra and Medea to the lioness simply to denounce 'the inappropriateness of power' (133), as Konstantinou argues. I argue that, adapted from the Homeric image of the lion, the tragic lioness rather reveals the human contradictions of the agency of female avengers. Both the male and female traits of the Homeric lion are merged in the image of the lioness to involve tragic mothers in intra-family vengeful dynamics. Through the combination of power, strength and violence, on the one hand, and protection, danger and bereavement, on the other, Attic dramatists stage the self-destruction of the house of the lion. The difference from the epic use of the lion image consists in fact in the reasons and implications of the vengeful response of the tragic lioness. Female vengeance is not committed against the enemies of the lion family, in order to preserve power and defend the cubs. It is rather caused by intra-family tensions and brings about loss and suffering. By relocating revenge from the battlefield to the household, Attic dramatists metaphorically transform female characters into lionesses turning against the members of their own family.

2. 1. 3   From the battlefield to the household

The metaphorical comparison of avenging mothers with tragic lionesses can be explained in terms of what has been diagnosed in modern times as 'combat trauma'. I consider classical studies where this concept has been applied, in order to clarify the relationship between the Homeric lion and the tragic lioness. The first scholar to apply the concept of combat trauma in the classical world is Shay

(1994). He identifies the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the Homeric depiction of Achilles. By comparing it with stories of Vietnam combat veterans, he pinpoints insomnia, hallucinations, mobilisation of the body for danger, survival skills and violence. Among the similarities between the veterans and Achilles, he specifically refers to the common experience of betrayal, the destruction of social trust and the grief at the death of a comrade. These are the causes that generally bring about what he defines as the 'berserk state' (77), when the boundaries between humanity and non-humanity blur. In their stories of explosive violence, the veterans describe themselves as beastlike. As Shay explains, their bestiality is caused by the fact that 'long-term obstruction of grief and failure to communalise grief can imprison a person in endless swinging between rage and emotional deadness as a permanent way of being in the world' (40). Just like the veterans, Achilles has suffered the loss of his friend Patroklos. Depicted through the lion figure, he reaches his berserk state in killing and dismembering his enemy Hector. He reveals a manic obsession with vengeance, through which he not only satisfies his anger, but also tries to alleviate his suffering. The bestialisation of his personality, through the lion metaphor, reveals the combat trauma of Achilles.

Building upon Shay's study, Meineck and Konstan (2014) collect a wide range of contributions on the concept of combat trauma in ancient literary sources. As Konstan (2014b:1) notes, it is easy to forget that warfare was an inescapable condition in ancient Greece. Since classical literature does not explicitly refer to this kind of pathology, it is difficult to assess whether it was considered as a universal or specific condition in the ancient Greek world. Tritle (2014:87-103) discusses the methodological implications of the reluctance of classical scholars

to apply the concept of combat trauma in antiquity. Since war has always affected the human body and mind, he concentrates on the traumatic memories that are repressed, removed or preserved. According to modern diagnoses, a traumatic event that has not been rationalised 'resists incorporation into the memory' and needs 'perpetual replay' (95), as he states. When the brain rejects traumatic memories, it produces flashbacks, hallucinations and violent reactions. Traces of traumatic memories can be specifically identified in the Homeric depiction of Achilles after the death of Patroklos. Taking issue with Shay's theory, Crowley (2014:105-30) argues that the responses to war have changed from ancient to modern times. He makes a comparison between two veterans and their respective environment to outline the differences between the experience of warfare in classical Greece and the post-traumatic disorder. He rejects the position of the universalists like Shay and argues that combat trauma is culturally and socially determined. Therefore, he considers the modern diagnoses of this psychological disease as retrospective and their application in antiquity anachronistic. Rabinowitz (2014b:185-216) specifically applies the concept of combat trauma to the condition of women in warfare. In agreement with Gaca (2011:73-88), who identifies sexual violence as one of the commonest conditions of female captives, she discusses the implications of war through the voice of its victims. As represented in the fifth-century Athenian theatre, the siege of a city was associated with the subsequent enslavement and subjugation of girls and women. I particularly build on Rabinowitz's gendered reading to identify the traces of combat trauma in tragic characterisation. From her perspective, both men and women, regardless of their role as combatant or non-combatant, were represented as physically and psychologically affected by war on the Attic stage.

The concept of combat trauma has been productively applied to identify both male and female cases in ancient Greek tragedy. For instance, Konstan (2014b:5) discusses the case of the Euripidean Heracles, who is affected by an uncontrolled rage that leads him to kill his wife and children. His madness conceals a sort of reason that can be associated with a traumatised status. When a traumatised person perceives someone as a threat, s/he reacts with violence. As a reversal of endurance on the battlefield, violence dramatically returns in the household. By altering the perception of mind, combat trauma leads to the misrecognition of friends and enemies and the tragic result is kin-killing. Traces of combat trauma have been identified not only in the depiction of avenging fathers, but also of avenging mothers. For instance, the concept of combat trauma has been applied to the characterisation of the Euripidean Medea. By adopting the universalist approach of Shay (1994), Lush (2014:25-57) recognises the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in her tragic depiction. Just like a combat veteran, Medea reacts with violence to the traumatic experience of betrayal caused by Jason. Lush argues that, split between maternal and military instincts, she suffers from a psychological injury. Through analysis of specific tragic passages where Medea presents herself as a warrior, he identifies 'the persistent combat mobilization and hyper-vigilance' (26). He also makes a comparison between the divided-self of Medea with the berserk state of combat veterans. Medea does not suffer for the death of a comrade, but she behaves like a widow after the betrayal of her husband. Jason is instead interpreted as a heartless, incompetent and uncompassionate general who provokes injuries to his soldiers. In order to explain the psychological dynamics in the conflict of Medea with Jason, Lush describes the symptoms of combat trauma in her dramatic

representation. These include a social form of disconnection, a suspicious behaviour in the house, beastlike and godlike aspirations, recklessness and cruelty after a traumatic experience. In the light of the parallels with the psychological status of combat veterans, Lush concludes that Medea commits the act of infanticide, because she is affected by combat trauma.

I argue that traces of combat trauma can be identified in the depiction of other avenging mothers like Medea who are compared to the lioness in ancient Greek tragedy. Through the metaphorical employment of the lioness, Attic dramatists give expression to the tragic state of mind that leads mothers to use violence against the members of their family. As a result of the Dionysiac empowerment of tragic heroines in intra-familial conflicts, the lioness would have provoked an effect of pathos in the fifth-century Athenian audience. By confusing the members of their family with their enemies, lioness-like heroines go through a psychological transformation that provokes the destruction of their own household. They demonstrate heroism, violence, courage and strength, but also suffering, disruption of family ties and vulnerability. Therefore, the lioness-woman metaphor should not be interpreted as a tragic symbol of non-humanity, savagery and wickedness in revenge plots. When tragic mothers perceive their own household as a battleground, they react with violence thereby causing suffering to their own family and inevitably to themselves. As I show in the following sections, the lioness is evoked to capture the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Tecmessa, and the Euripidean Medea, Clytemnestra and Agave in their metaphorical metamorphoses into avenging mothers.

2. 2   The metaphorical metamorphoses of avenging mothers

Classical scholars have widely discussed the gendered contradictions of the vengeful agency of female characters in ancient Greek tragedy. However, they have overlooked the dramatic significance of the lioness-woman metaphor in revenge plots. Through analysis of lioness imagery, I open up new perspectives on the reading of the controversial identity of tragic women who empower themselves to commit vengeance within and against their household. My argument is that Attic dramatists employ the image of the lioness to express the tragic humanity of the vengeful acts committed by mothers. The lioness metaphor displays the emotional contradictions of the tragic empowerment of avenging mothers in intra-familial conflicts. Split between suffering and anger, tragic heroines react vengefully to the injuries suffered but as a result they provoke the self-destruction of the household. Because of their vengeful acts, the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Tecmessa, and the Euripidean Medea, Clytemnestra and Agave are metaphorically compared to tragic lionesses.

Aeschylus evokes the lioness in comparison with Clytemnestra to represent her vengeful empowerment in the *Agamemnon*. Unlike in the epic tradition (Hom. *Od*. 11.385-434), she is represented as responsible not only for planning, but also for committing vengeance against her husband. The negative implications of the violent subversion of male power in her tragic depiction have been widely discussed in classical scholarship. Within the play, Clytemnestra is specifically defined ἀνδρόβουλος, 'man-minded' (Aesch. *Ag*. 11) by the Watcher, and as ἄρσενος φονεύς, 'man-slayer' (1231) by Cassandra. With particular reference to her masculine connotations, Winnington-Ingram (1948:130-47) states

that the vengeful act committed by Clytemnestra brings about the destruction of Agamemnon because she is jealous of him as a ruling man. Goldhill (1986:40) also offers a negative reading of the vengeful role of Clytemnestra, commenting upon her man-like behaviour as a 'monstrous reversal of the female role'. Despite her masculine connections, Clytemnestra has been recently rehabilitated as a mother and her vengeance read as a female reaction to patriarchal oppression and violence. As Hall (2005:53-76) says, she 'dominates the Aeschylean play named after her husband', not only as 'a murderer, an androgyne, a liar, an orator, and executor of a palace coup', but also as 'an avenging mother'. McHardy (2008:103-17) identifies multiple reasons behind the decision of Clytemnestra to kill Agamemnon. She argues that although Clytemnestra manifestly declares herself to have taken vengeance for the sacrifice of Iphigenia, she does so to hide her intention of gaining political and economic power in Argos. Whereas in the Homeric tradition she is depicted as an unfaithful wife led astray by Aegisthus, on the Attic stage she becomes a powerful leader and instigator of vengeance. The complexity of the vengeful identity of Clytemnestra reflects the tensions and conflicts in the House of Atreus.

Differently from Aeschylus, Sophocles employs the lioness metaphor in the depiction of Tecmessa. She does not commit any vengeful act in the *Ajax*, but rather she mediates the implications of the tragic death of her master. Classical scholars have generally interpreted Tecmessa as a minor character, because of her helpless status in the tragedy revolving around one of the most powerful Homeric heroes. According to Kitto (1939), the main role of Tecmessa is to prepare the scene for the suicide of Ajax. From his perspective, the tragic narrative reflects her emotional status between 'concern and distance, safe removal and shared

participation' (162). In contrast, Di Benedetto (1988:59) argues that the intensity showed by Tecmessa towards Ajax is impressive, despite her minor role. Similarly, Segal (1995) reads her characterisation as a partial perspective of the multi-faceted identity of Ajax. In his words, she is 'confined in Ajax's interior space as the helpless appendage to his doom, both witness and participant' (20). In agreement with Di Benedetto (1988), Medda (1997:195) argues that Tecmessa is aware of the real reason for Ajax' suicide. She attributes the responsibility of his death to the gods, by distancing herself from the violent world of the Argives, as he notes. Further considerations have been made regarding the active role of Tecmessa from a gender perspective. According to Synodinou (1987:99-107), Sophocles does not depict Tecmessa as a helpless character, despite her social position as a captive-concubine. From her perspective, Tecmessa rather tries with all her efforts first to prevent Ajax from the suicide and then to defend his corpse from the vengeful decision of the Atreides to forbid his burial.

Similarly to Aeschylus, Euripides makes use of the lioness metaphor to stage the vengeful response of Medea to the betrayal of her husband. Empowered in her conflict with Jason, she commits the most controversial act of vengeance staged in the fifth-century Athenian theatre. Previous classical scholars have hotly debated the gendered contradictions of the vengeful agency of Medea to either justify or condemn her act of infanticide. Through comparison with Sophoclean heroes, Knox (1979:295-322) argues that Euripides does not build up the character of Medea as a passive sufferer, but rather as a heroic figure. Assuming masculine traits, such as firmness, resistance and temper, Medea plans and commits vengeance within and against her own household. As Griffiths (2006) suggests, a wholly negative interpretation of Medea would underestimate her

dramatic complexity. By transgressing the socially established codes of behaviour, she is divided between maternal love and male power. With particular attention to her liminal status between the divine and the human worlds, Luschnig (2007) emphasises the positive aspects in the depiction of Medea. She reads, for example, her final departure on the chariot as a successful action that fulfils the will of her grandfather Helios.

Classical scholars have also questioned the psychological status of Medea between rationality and irrationality in committing the vengeful act of infanticide. After clarifying her motivation, namely the introduction of a second wife in her house, Medea deliberatively exacts vengeance to defend her honour. According to McHardy (2008:61-3), the vengeful reaction of Medea to Jason's decision of marrying another woman needs to be interpreted as the tragic result of a gender inversion. Medea acts violently in order to give her husband an equal punishment to her suffering and humiliation. Her act of infanticide cannot be read though as 'quintessentially masculine' (62), as McHardy notes. Although Medea presents masculine traits, such as sexual jealousy and the heroic defence of honour, she employs female instruments of vengeance, such as deceit, treachery and sorcery. Buxton (2010:25-38) also states that a one-dimensional perspective is not sufficient to capture Medea in her transformative changes. From his perspective, Euripides, moving repeatedly from one fragmented aspect of her character to another, depicts her revenge as 'the juxtaposition of the opposites' (25). By transcending natural and social boundaries, Medea is one of the most tragic mothers who commit vengeance within and against her family.

Meanwhile, Euripides evokes the lioness in the depiction of Clytemnestra not only to remind the audience of her revenge against Agamemnon, but also to

anticipate her punishment by her offspring's hands. Planned by Electra and committed by Orestes, the vengeful act of matricide is signalled by the image of the lioness at the end of the tragedy. According to Segal (1985:7-23), among the three dramatists who stage the myth of Electra, Euripides concentrates on the suffering of Clytemnestra. By reducing the effect of pathos created by Aeschylus and Sophocles, he emphasises the macabre details of her tragic death. He attributes to Clytemnestra a helpless and vulnerable role to create 'an atmosphere of internal doubt, guilt, self-pollution and self-disgust' (22), as Segal states. Similarly, Albini and Faggi (2007:32) argue that Euripides provides the most 'humanised' version of Clytemnestra. They suggest that Euripides emphasises the vengeful plan of Electra to provoke an effect of pity in his audience. The main difference from the other two tragedies consists in fact in the extraordinarily active participation of Electra in the act of matricide. Whereas in the Aeschylean *Choephoroi* and the Sophoclean *Electra*, Orestes is supported and assisted by his sister, in the Euripidean *Electra* he plays the role of her armed servant. Classical scholars have hotly discussed the vengeful characterisation of Electra either in terms of heroism[208] or anti-heroism.[209] By engaging with this debate, Mossman (2001:374-84) argues that the public and private speeches spoken by Electra reveal her contradictory gendered identity. She suggests that the central focus of the Euripidean tragedy is not Electra's heroism, but rather the fact that her heroic status 'is horribly misdirected' (377) towards the self-destruction of her household. She shows that Electra convinces Orestes to kill their mother not only

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[208] For a heroic interpretation of the Euripidean Electra see, for example, Zeitlin, 1970:645-69; Lloyd, 1986:1-19; Michelini, 1987:181-230.

[209] For an anti-heroic interpretation of the Euripidean Electra see, for example, Grube, 1941:297-314; Conacher, 1967:199-212; Knox, 1979:250-274.

to avenge the death of their father, but also to lay claim to her tragic role as a female avenger.

In the *Bacchae*, Euripides metaphorically compares the lioness to another tragic heroine who plays the role of avenging mother. He associates Agave with a lioness to stage her unconsciously vengeful act against her son. Classical scholars are divided over whether the slaughter of Pentheus by the hands of his mother was a Euripidean innovation. By attributing fr. 630 K to Aeschylus,[210] Di Benedetto (2004:36-40) argues that Euripides emphasises the death of Pentheus in the tragedy of the female worshippers of Dionysus. Despite the fragmentary state of the hypothetical Aeschylean *Pentheus*, it seems that Agave, unlike in the Euripidean tragedy, did not have any avenging role. By considering another Aeschylean (*Eum.* 25-6) reference to the Theban myth, where Pentheus is compared to a hare, Di Benedetto argues that Dionysus killed Pentheus without shedding of blood. Apart from the absence of the reference to the Dionysiac σπαραγμός, 'tearing', in the Aeschylean tragedy, it is relevant that Euripides gives a central role to Agave in the representation of the divine vengeance against Pentheus. The influence of the god in transforming Agave into an avenging mother has also raised questions regarding her psychological liminality. Unlike Medea, whose jealousy brings her into an emotional status of rational madness, Agave undergoes a divine form of madness. As McHardy (2005:129-50) argues, the tragic relationship between madness and filicide is a common motif in revenge plots. The Dionysiac context of dramatic festivals encouraged the representation of tragic heroines who in killing their male children bring about the destruction of

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[210] Di Benedetto specifically refers to the two fragments of the Pap. Hib 222 jointly published in *TrGF* II *Adespota*.

their own household. McHardy demonstrates that the language of madness strongly connotes Agave, whose depiction presents the tragic merging of maenadism and child-killing. Through the disruption of the relationship between Agave and Pentheus, Dionysus eventually establishes his cult in Thebes. According to Taxidou (2012:1-13), the fact that Agave misrecognises and kills Pentheus under divine madness shows nothing but the injustice in the world. The child-killing committed by Agave is not a recuperative or restorative form of justice, but it is violence embodied in the theatre of Dionysus.

Informed and influenced by the theory of the posthuman postulated by Braidotti (see Introduction, pp. 49-54), I shed fresh light on the controversial depiction of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Tecmessa, and the Euripidean Medea, Clytemnestra and Agave. Through analysis of the specific tragic passages, in which the lioness-woman metaphor occurs, I restructure the tragic boundaries of masculinity and femininity, humanity and animality, body and mind that blur in their metamorphic characterisation. By adopting the posthumanist concept of metamorphosis defined by Braidotti, I argue that Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides metaphorically transform their tragic heroines into lionesses to express the human contradictions of their vengeful acts. As I show in the following sections, Clytemnestra, Tecmessa, Medea, Clytemnestra and Agave are associated with the lioness in the dramaturgical passage from vengeance to loss. They are attributed the dangerous habitat, the hunting skills and the maternal role of the lioness, so that the Dionysiac self-destruction of the household can be staged. Through the reconstruction of the metaphorical metamorphoses enacted by the tragic heroines into lionesses, I

demonstrate that their vengeful acts would have triggered an effect of pathos in the fifth-century Athenian audience.

2. 2. 1   Dangerous habitat

I start by analysing the habitat of the lioness to illustrate the Dionysiac setting where tragic heroines are empowered to commit vengeance within and against their household. After a review of relevant literary references to this aspect, I argue that Euripides sets the vengeful acts of lioness-like female characters in a dangerous space, where the boundaries between the wild and the οἶκος ambiguously blur. Because of the lack of evidence, it is difficult to determine where the lion species actually dwelled in the ancient Greek world. According to Kenneth (2014:108-11), the lion might have corresponded to either the Nubian lion (*Panthera leo leo*) or the Asiatic lion (*Panthera leo persica*). The former existed in captivity until 1920 and the latter became extinct in the wild around 100 AD. It is the Asiatic lion that probably dwelled in northern Africa and Greece in antiquity, as Kenneth argues. However, the presence of lions in Greece is still hotly debated.[211] The depiction of lions on archaic and Attic pottery is not a proof that the ancient Greeks had the actual experience of seeing them. The accuracy of their representation has been mainly explained through eastern artistic influences. Through a study of the literary evidence, Hurwit (2006:121-36) argues that it is likely that the lion existed in northern Greece until the late fifth century BC. In Herodotus (7.125-6), lions are said to have attacked the Persian camels that

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[211] For discussion of the presence of lions in ancient Greece see, for example, Bloedow, 1992:295-305; Thomas, 1999: 297-312; Hurwit, 2002:1-22.

carried the provisions of Xerxes, during his march towards the Greek city Therma. Herodotus reports that lions were common in that area and locates them specifically between the rivers Nestus and Achelous. According to Hurwit, although it is not certain whether lions inhabited Greece, the ancient Greeks were aware of their presence.

The dangerous habitat of the lion is evidenced in the Homeric tradition. When the lion metaphorically appears on the battlefield, it is located between the thicket and the mountains. For example, Diomedes is compared to a lion that jumps over the fence (*Il.* 5.137) and assaults the cattle in the ξύλοχος, 'thicket' (162). Like a lion that increases its energy, although the shepherd has hurt it, he falls upon the Trojans. In Homer, the lion not only makes a dart for the thicket, but it is also reared in the mountains. For instance, the Cyclops is defined by Odysseus as a λέων ὀρεσίτροφος 'mountain-nurtured lion', because of his pitilessness in dismembering limb by limb his companions (*Od.* 9.292). In the description of the Cyclops, the adjective assumes the connotations of bestiality, cannibalism and endangerment. By operating outside the ancient Greek code of ξενία, the Cyclops is located in a wild and uncivilised world.

The habitat of the lion is evoked not only in the depiction of the Cyclops, but also of Odysseus. Compared to a mountain-nurtured lion (*Od.* 6.130), Odysseus is associated with the wild, because his eyes are fiercely burning despite rain and wind. The verb δαίω, which in the active form means 'I light up',[212] and in the passive 'I burn fiercely', connects the eyes of Odysseus with movement and fire. This metaphorical association shows the efforts of Odysseus to spy on the maidens, led by Nausicaa, playing with the ball on the river. He is worried about

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[212] Hom. *Il.* 5.4, 18.206; Aesch. *Ag.* 496, *Cho.* 864.

the violent reaction of the girls, who instead run scared because of his nakedness. The burning eyes can be a tragic symptom of madness or vengeance,[213] but in this Homeric passage they represent the wildness of Odysseus. From being hidden among the bushes, he unexpectedly enters into Nausicaa's world. Thus, the Homeric lion is described as violently and fiercely attacking in a dangerous environment. It arrives from the mountains to the countryside searching for food. This movement emphasises the distance between wild and ploughed territories in the Homeric descriptions of male combats. The strength and power of the heroes who are compared to the lion are challenged in situations of danger. The lion metaphor equips them with the energy to resist and react to the perils of the environment.

Euripides makes use of the habitat of the Homeric lion, with the aim of scenically locating the dangerous acts of avenging mothers. In the *Bacchae*, the movement of the lion from the mountains to the thicket is metaphorically evoked to stage the death of Pentheus. It is on Mount Kithairon that Agave under Bacchic possession kills her son, by confusing him with an ὀρέστερος λέων, 'mountain-dwelling lion' (1141-2). The setting of the scene is tragically connected to the Dionysiac cult, since the worshippers of the god celebrate rites and purifications in the mountains (76-7). They are stricken by the οἶστρος, 'sting', of madness (32-3, 119), which leads them to abandon their houses. The repetition of the expression εἰς ὄρος, 'to the hill' (164, 977, 986), accompanies the ritual dancing performed by the Bacchae under the leadership of Agave. As I have mentioned in the Introduction (p. 29), the lion is one of the animal shapes in the metamorphosis of Dionysus (1019). The god enacts this transformation during the ὀρειβασία, the

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[213] Cf. Eur. *Or.* 253, 837, 1266, 1317.

'wandering on mountains', where lions were believed to dwell. According to Dodds (1951:190-4), the metamorphosis of Dionysus was the reflection of a ritual practised in Delphi in springtime. Dancing madness, or mass hysteria, was canalised through rites that Seaford (1996b:228-9) interprets as actual cult practices linked to the transformations of Dionysus.

By creating a connection between the Dionysiac cult and the Homeric habitat of the lion, Euripides describes the dangerous setting of the vengeance committed by Agave. Unknowingly involved in the vengeful plan of Dionysus, Agave does not rear, but kills her son in the mountains. As a result, the body of Pentheus lies scattered like lion's prey ὑπὸ στύφλοις πέτραις, 'under rough rocks', and is hidden ὕλης ἐν βαθυξύλωι, 'in the deep-wooded foliage of the forest' (1138-9). With these words, the Messenger describes the death of Pentheus by the hands of the Bacchae (1133-6):

{Αγ.} […] ἔφερε δ' ἡ μὲν ὠλένην,

ἡ δ' ἴχνος αὐταῖς ἀρβύλαις, γυμνοῦντο δὲ

πλευραὶ σπαραγμοῖς, πᾶσα δ' ἡιματωμένη   1135

χεῖρας διεσφαίριζε σάρκα Πενθέως.[214]

In this passage, Euripides represents the result of the σπαραγμός, 'tearing', of Pentheus, by particularly referring to the Homeric image of the lion in the depiction of Odysseus (*Od.* 6.130). With tragic irony, Euripides transforms the

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[214] *Me.* […] One of them was carrying an elbow, another a foot with its shoe and his ribs were being bared by tearing, and each one with bloodied hands was throwing about like a ball the flesh of Pentheus.

ball game of the maidens led by Nausicaa into the macabre dance of the Bacchae led by Agave. Both Odysseus and Pentheus are associated with the lion, because of their intrusion into a private female context. Unlike Odysseus who scares the maidens, but eventually receives hospitality in the palace of Alcinous, Pentheus is captured and killed by his mother. At this point the lion allusions associated with Pentheus are replaced by ones linked to Agave, so that the tragic implications of her vengeful agency can be emphasised. Agave dramatically assumes the heroic attributes of the Homeric lion, by showing her violence, strength and courage in the mountains. She presents διάστροφοι, 'twisted' (1166), eyes, which recall the eyes of Odysseus among the bushes. The adjective probably develops from the noun διαστροφή, which literally means 'distortion' in reference to the sight,[215] but it can also assume the metaphorical meaning of 'perversion' or 'madness'.[216] In this passage, the adjective connotes the possession of Agave who violently reacts to the presence of the lion in the mountains.

The habitat of the lioness does not simply illustrate the bestiality, irrationality and pitiless of Agave. As I show later in the chapter, when Agave brings the lion from the mountains to the palace, she becomes aware that it is no longer the sign of her triumph, but the result of her violence against her own son. With these words, her father Kadmos tries to let her realise what she has actually done (1277-84):

{Κα.} τίνος πρόσωπον δῆτ' ἐν ἀγκάλαις ἔχεις;

{Αγ.} λέοντος, ὥ γ' ἔφασκον αἱ θηρώμεναι.

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[215] Arist. [*Pr.*] 958a6-7.

[216] Arist. *Eth. Eud.* 1227a21-22.

{Κα.} σκέψαι νυν ὀρθῶς· βραχὺς ὁ μόχθος εἰσιδεῖν.

{Αγ.} ἔα, τί λεύσσω; τί φέρομαι τόδ' ἐν χεροῖν;   1280

{Κα.} ἄθρησον αὐτὸ καὶ σαφέστερον μάθε.

{Αγ.} ὁρῶ μέγιστον ἄλγος ἡ τάλαιν' ἐγώ.

{Κα.} μῶν σοι λέοντι φαίνεται προσεικέναι;

{Αγ.} οὔκ, ἀλλὰ Πενθέως ἡ τάλαιν' ἔχω κάρα.[217]

The lioness metaphor loses its ambiguity when filicide is committed. The iteration of the interrogative pronouns and the stichomythic style emphasise the realisation of the psychological transformation of Agave into a vengeful lioness. The final dialogue with her father has the double function of reflecting the horror of her violent act, on the one hand, and provoking pathos because of the loss of her son, on the other. This transformative change in Agave's characterisation is also marked by another stage direction: the sky from being dark becomes clearer (1264-6). Agave's eyes are no longer burning in the dark, like those of Odysseus. She rather reveals, with the light of the day, the tragic humanity of her bestial act.

In the *Electra*, Euripides evokes the habitat of the Homeric lion in order to involve actively another tragic heroine in intra-familial vengeful dynamics. Through the lioness image, he anticipates the act of matricide planned and committed by Electra with the aid of Orestes. Recalling the memory of the slaughter of Agamemnon, the Chorus describe the dangerous place, where

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[217] *Ka*. Whose face do you have then in your arms? *Ag*. A lion's - as the hunting women said. *Ka*. Look properly then; looking will be a short task. *Ag*. Ah ah! What do I see? What is this I am carrying in my hands? *Ka*. Look at it closely and understand more clearly. *Ag*. I miserable see the greatest grief. *Ka*. It does not seem to you to resemble a lion, does it? *Ag*. No indeed, but miserable I have the head of Pentheus!

Clytemnestra will die. Her imminent death, set in the house of Electra, happens off-stage. Just like an ὀρεία λέαινα, 'mountain-lioness' (1163), Clytemnestra prowled in the meadowland to kill her husband. The Homeric image of the lion that arrives from the mountains in search for food is evoked to signal a key moment in the tragedy. With these words, the Chorus prepare the scene for the matricide (1163-5):

> {Χο.} ὀρεία τις ὡς λέαιν' ὀργάδων
>
> δρύοχα νεμομένα τάδε κατήνυσεν.
>
> {Κλ.} (ἔσωθεν) ὦ τέκνα, πρὸς θεῶν, μὴ κτάνητε μητέρα.[218]

The image of the lioness connotes the sexual behaviour of Clytemnestra with tragic irony. The use of the image evokes the metaphorical association of Aegisthus with the lion in the Aeschylean *Agamemnon*. As I discuss in the following section, Aegisthus is compared to a ἄναλκις λέων, 'cowardly lion' (1224), since he roams in the bed of the lioness. The metaphor reveals the lack of power and strength of Aegisthus, since he does not take an active part in the murder of Agamemnon. The Euripidean reference to this Aeschylean image justifies the matricide committed by Electra and Orestes. The Chorus sing that Clytemnestra deserves death, because she did not kill her husband to avenge her daughter Iphigenia, but because of her erotic desire for a new marriage-bed (1156). The movement of Clytemnestra in the bed with Aegisthus is also marked with the adjective διάδρομος, ον, which literally means 'running through or about,

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[218] *Ch*. Like a mountain-lioness prowling, through meadowland thickets, she accomplished it. *Cl.* (from inside) O children, by the gods, I beg you, do not kill your mother!

wandering', but in this passage specifically indicates the 'lawless' love of Clytemnestra. The image of the lioness does not merely convey the concept of violence and infidelity, but it also anticipates a situation of danger. The movement of Clytemnestra in the bed is linked to the μετάτροποι αὗραι, 'veering winds' (1147-8), which surrounded the house of Agamemnon at the moment of his death. By preserving the Homeric tradition and adapting the Aeschylean image, Euripides illustrates the turbulences within the lion family. The metaphor is in fact interrupted by the cries of Clytemnestra, who asks Electra and Orestes to spare her from death. In the Aeschylean tragedy, it is Agamemnon, the λέων εὐγενής, 'noble lion' (1259), who is heard from inside shouting before being killed by his wife. By creating a connection between the vengeful past and present in the House of Atreus, Euripides stages the tragic destiny of Clytemnestra. With these words, the Chorus comment on the matricide (1168-71):

> {Χο.} ὤιμωξα κἀγὼ πρὸς τέκνων χειρουμένης.
>
> νέμει τοι δίκαν θεός, ὅταν τύχηι.
>
> σχέτλια μὲν ἔπαθες, ἀνόσια δ' εἰργάσω,   1170
>
> τάλαιν', εὐνέταν.[219]

The link between the vengeance of Clytemnestra and the matricide committed by Electra and Orestes is mediated by the lioness image. Located in a dangerous space, the lioness is killed by its own male and female cubs. Through reference to

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[219] *Ch*. I also cry for the death of the woman killed by her children's hands. The god brings about justice, when destiny comes. You have suffered a terrible death, but you wretched gave unjust death to your husband.

the habitat of the Homeric lion, Euripides not only reminds the audience of the vengeful act of Clytemnestra, but he also stages her tragic punishment.

Apart from these two cases, the habitat of the lioness is not referred to in other tragedies. Euripides is the only dramatist who specifically refers to the Homeric tradition, in order to stage the vengeful acts of his tragic heroines. In the *Bacchae*, Agave does not rear but kills her cub in the mountains to fulfil Dionysus' revenge. By assuming the strength, power and wildness of the Homeric lion, she reacts with violence to the intrusion of Pentheus, whose corpse lies scattered in the meadowland. However, the attack of the lioness is not an external and wild force that threatens civilised spaces. In the passage from the mountains to her house, Agave recognises herself as the mother of the lion. In the *Electra*, Clytemnestra does not rear her cub in the mountains, but she prowls in the meadowland with her lover. The habitat of the lioness recalls the memory of the death of Agamemnon, on the one hand, and explains the reasons for the matricide committed by Electra and Orestes, on the other. The movement in the meadowland refers to Clytemnestra's sexual relationship with Aegisthus and prepares the scene for the vengeful attack of the lion cubs. Therefore, by blurring the boundaries between the wild and the οἶκος, Euripides creates a Dionysiac atmosphere of danger. He attributes to Agave and Clytemnestra the male traits of the Homeric lion, such as strength, power, violence, wildness and the burning eyes. However, when the tragic heroines are located in a dangerous environment, the result of their empowerment is suffering and loss. As I analyse in the next section, they vengefully act against the members of their own family by metaphorically employing the hunting skills of the lioness.

2.2.2 Hunting skills

I turn now to the analysis of the hunting skills of the lioness in order to show the Dionysiac modality through which tragic heroines commit vengeance within and against their household. After examining relevant literary references to this aspect, I argue that Aeschylus and Euripides confuse the boundaries between the hunter and the hunted to involve actively female characters in intra-family vengeful conflicts. Hunting scenes with lions are widely attested in ancient Greek literary and iconographic sources. As Xenophon states in his *Cynegeticus* (11.1, 1-5), it is possible to hunt lions 'in foreign countries, about Mount Pangaeus and Cittus beyond Macedonia, on Mysian Olympus and Pindus, on Nysa beyond Syria'. From an iconographic perspective, the male lion, which is recognisable by the presence of its mane, is generally depicted in hunting scenes. However, as Hurwit (2006:121-6) notices, it is striking that lions are attested in Greek geometric and seventh-century Proto-Corinthian pottery, but disappear in the archaic and classical periods. According to Barringer (2001:10-45), early Greek artistic production built on the tradition of the Near East, where hunting was one of the most socially empowering activities. In the classical age, the lion was replaced with animals closer to the Greek reality, like the hare, the boar and the deer, and then returned in Hellenistic art, where Alexander the Great is depicted as the lion hunter.[220] As in Near Eastern art, not only the lion is represented in confronting human adversaries, but also other wild animals, such as the bull. Another interesting iconographic detail is that the lioness, which can be recognised by the

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[220] See also Palagia (1998:25–8) for an iconographic interpretation of hunting scenes with lions in the Hellenistic age.

absence of the mane, is rarely depicted in hunting scenes, though it is considered as strong as the lion (Ael. *NA* 4.3). Its absence in ancient Greek art confirms the cultural association of hunting with masculinity. Hunting was an aristocratic activity, with initiatory function for the *ephebes* and used as military training.[221] According to Barringer (2001), its association with warfare is justified by the fact that hunting was the way through which the ancient Greeks could acquire 'discipline, endurance and courage' (12). Moreover, it is possible to distinguish two different forms of hunting: one implied the use of nets and trapping, the other consisted in physical confrontation with the animal (Pl. *Leg*. 823b824c). The latter was considered the more valiant for a warrior.

The connection between hunting and war is widely attested in ancient Greek literary and iconographic sources. According to Pindar (*Nem*. 3.43-52), Achilles is the best warrior, because he was able to capture a deer without using hounds or nets. This motif is also present in the case of Herakles, who wrestled with the Nemean lion, the mythological monster impervious to weapons.[222] The fierceness, strength and braveness of the lion were proverbial. In the Aesopic fable 264 H, a lion and a man are told to boast about their strength. In front of a gravestone, representing a man who defeats a lion, the man finds confirmation of his belief. The lion then replies: 'If lions were able to engrave, you would see more men defeated by lions' (7-9). Because of its strength, power and violence, the lion is the model of the best hunter-warrior in Homer. As Schnapp-Gourbeillon (1981:38-63) states, when a warrior is compared to a lion, he rarely

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[221] Pl. *Leg*. 763b; Xen. *Cyn*. 12.7–8. See also Vidal-Naquet (1986) for the association of hunting and warfare in the ancient Greek world.

[222] Hes. *Theog*. 327; cf. the hydria in Copenhagen, Thorvaldsens Museum H554.

loses. For instance, under the protection of Athena, Diomedes is described in his leonine attack against the Trojans (*Il*. 5.161). The warrior wins, by 'chasing down' his enemies from the chariot and depriving them of their horses. The verb θρῴσκω, in relation to Diomedes, indicates a quick movement but also a sudden attack. When used in the intransitive form, it can mean 'to leap, spring'[223] or 'rush, dart',[224] but followed by preposition it means 'leap upon, assault' someone (*Il*. 8.252). As possessed by a supernatural power, the Homeric heroes are characterised by a strong belief in their ἀλκή (*Il*. 5.299). The term can refer to the 'strength',[225] as displayed in action, but it can also mean 'strength to avert danger, defence'.[226] In tragic contexts, it generally denotes a 'battle, fight'.[227] Another adjective that connotes the Homeric heroes is κρατερός (*Il*. 5.143), which according to Schnapp-Gourbeillon (1981:96-7) can mean 'powerful' both in political and physical terms.

The hunting skills of the lion show not only the power, violence and swiftness of the Homeric heroes, but also their predatory and impious behaviour. Their prowess is joined with σθένος, 'bodily strength',[228] and μένος, which can indicate the 'fierceness' of animals,[229] but when used in reference to the soul denotes the 'battle-rage' of the warriors.[230] It probably develops from the verb

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[223] Hom. *Il*. 10.528, *Od*. 23.32.

[224] Pind. *Pyth*. 9.119; Eur. *Bacch*. 874.

[225] Hom. *Il*. 17.212, *Od*. 20.237; Hdt. 3.110, 7.

[226] Hom. *Il*. 15.490; *Od*. 12.120, 23.305; Aesch. *PV* 546; Soph. *Phil*. 1151; Eur. *Phoen*. 1098.

[227] Aesch. *Sept*. 498, 569, 878; Eur. *Med*. 264.

[228] Hom. *Il*. 17.329, 499, 20.361.

[229] Hom. *Il*. 5.136, 17.20.

[230] Hom. *Il*. 2.387, 18.64, *Od*. 1.321.

μαιμάω, 'I am very eager to', which expresses in Homeric scenes of male combats the vengeful desire of killing the enemy. Homeric heroes kill their enemies, like a lion that devours its prey. For instance, Achilles is metaphorically compared to a lion, when he mutilates Hector's body, without any form of respect and pity for the defeated (*Il*. 24.41). Also Agamemnon is described in his violence against Peisander and Hippolochos (*Il*. 11.126-53). Like a lion, he leaps down and kills them with his spear, after rejecting their supplications. The simile does not show just the physical strength of Agamemnon, but also his wild violence and pitilessness. Therefore, the military fury of the Homeric heroes is expressed through the hunting skills of the lion. Its ability of outrunning the prey is conferred to men but controlled by the gods. Like the best hunter-warrior, the Homeric lion conveys the concepts of physical strength, military honour, violent attack, courage, power, wildness and impiety. It generally illustrates the position of dominance of Homeric heroes over their enemies on the battlefield. They fight as if they hunted, by chasing down and killing their prey, in order to demonstrate their heroism.

I shall argue that Aeschylus and Euripides transfer the hunting skills of the Homeric lion to the lioness, in order to represent the tragic involvement of female characters in revenge plots. Just like Homeric warriors, tragic heroines show power, strength and violence in committing their vengeful acts. However, they do not metaphorically assume the hunting skills of the lioness to exact revenge against their ἐχθροί, but rather against their φίλοι. By confusing the roles of enemies and friends within the house of the lion, Aeschylus and Euripides empower tragic heroines to become avenging lionesses. The complex relationship between hunter and hunted has been widely discussed by classical scholars in the

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investigation of Dionysiac cult.[231] These scholars have specifically referred to the *Bacchae* to show the tragic connections between Dionysus and hunting. As explained in the *parodos* of the tragedy, the cult of Dionysus consists in hunting wild animals and eating raw meat in the mountains (135-9). The Bacchants feel the insane desire to run to the mountains, where the god provides them with milk, wine and nectar (142-3). Under Bacchic possession, they capture, kill and dismember Pentheus. The celebration of a human instead of an animal sacrifice justifies the establishment of the cult of Dionysus in Thebes.[232] Segal (1982) argues that cannibalistic acts need connecting with the Dionysiac context of tragic plays, where the dynamics of ritual sacrifices are inverted. As he states, by crossing the boundaries between the human and the animal worlds, Dionysus is the tragic personification of hunting in the form of 'beast-huntsman' (33). I build on these studies to demonstrate in the following textual analysis that Attic dramatists adapt the Homeric image of the hunting lion to the Dionysiac context, with the aim of transforming tragic heroines into powerful, violent and dangerous lionesses turning against their own family. As I argue, lioness-like women are depicted as transgressing the tragic distinctions between humanity and animality, masculinity and femininity, hunter and hunted in intra-family vengeful dynamics.

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[231] See, for example, Detienne (1979) for the relationship between hunting and sacrifice in the cult of Dionysus, Vidal-Naquet (1988:141-59) for the metaphorical association of hunting and sacrifice in ancient Greek tragedy, and Thumiger (2006:191-210) for the tragic motif of hunting in Euripides' *Bacchae*.

[232] See, for example, Detienne (1979:56-90) for the motif of cannibalism and the devouring of human flesh in the Dionysiac cult, Easterling (1988:87-109) for the relationship between Dionysiac rites and human sacrifice in ancient Greek tragedy, and Seaford (1994:369-71) for the tragic performance of perverted rites in honour of Dionysus.

The *Agamemnon* presents a traditionally Homeric version of the hunting skills of the lion to describe the vengeful act that Clytemnestra plans and commit against her husband. It is through the image of the net that the play confuses the roles of human hunter and hunted animal in the house of Agamemnon. Whereas Penelope weaves her tapestry as a combative response to the absence of Odysseus, Clytemnestra weaves a murderous net to attack Agamemnon on his return from the Trojan War. In the fifth episode, after killing Cassandra, with the sword in her hands, she confesses to having thrown the πημονῆς ἀρκύστατα, 'the net of calamity' (1375), upon her husband. The accusative plural neuter form of the adjective ἀρκύστατος, η, ον, which can be used as an abstract noun for denoting 'a place beset with nets',[233] in the play metonymically indicates the net itself. Moreover, Clytemnestra says that she has wrapped Agamemnon in the carpet, like a fish caught in an ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον (1382). The expression is composed of the adjective ἄπειρος, ον, which in reference to garments can mean 'without outlet', and the neuter noun ἀμφίβληστρον, which indicates a 'casting-net'. Finally, Clytemnestra is compared to another hunting animal, namely the spider, for having woven a ὕφασμα, 'woven robe', within the house of Agamemnon (1492, 1516).

The image of the net not only emphasises the aspect of treachery in Clytemnestra's vengeance, but also creates a connection with the hunting skills of Agamemnon during the Trojan War. With tragic irony, Aeschylus recalls the most treacherous act of the Greeks to destroy Troy. In the third episode, Agamemnon arrives the palace of Argos on the chariot and with these words proclaims the victory of the Greeks over the Trojans (821-8):

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[233] Aesch. *Eum*. 112; Soph. *El*. 1476.

{Αγ.}τούτων θεοῖσι χρὴ πολύμνηστον χάριν

τίνειν, ἐπείπερ χὰρπαγὰς ὑπερκόπους

ἐπραξάμεσθα καὶ γυναικὸς οὕνεκα

πόλιν διημάθυνεν Ἀργεῖον δάκος,

ἵππου νεοσσός, ἀσπιδηφόρος λεώς,   825

πήδημ' ὀρούσας ἀμφὶ Πλειάδων δύσιν·

ὑπερθορὼν δὲ πύργον ὠμηστὴς λέων

ᾄδην ἔλειξεν αἵματος τυραννικοῦ.[234]

In his speech, Agamemnon evokes the image of the ὠμηστής λέων, 'ravening lion' (827) to boast the superiority of the Greeks on the battlefield. The adjectival noun ὠμηστὴς, which literally means 'eating raw flesh' in reference to animals,[235] metaphorically conveys the concepts of savagery and brutality. In this passage, it refers to the treachery, violence and impiety of Agamemnon against the Trojans. The metaphorical reference to the savage lion specifically depicts the Greek army sacking Troy at the end of the war. To capture this triumphant moment, Aeschylus described the jumping of the Greek soldiers from the stomach-uterus of the Trojan Horse. Thanking the gods, Agamemnon justifies the leonine attack of the Greeks on Troy with the rape of Helen. Through the connection between hunting and ἔρως, Agamemnon reveals the violent implications of Helen's capture. In reaction

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[234] *Ag.* For this to the gods very mindful thanks should be paid, since an arrogant seizure we punished and it was for a woman that Troy was utterly destroyed by the Argives' beast, the offspring of the horse, an army of shield-bearers, launching their bound at the Pleiades' sunset. By springing over the tower, the ravening lion licked up its fill of royal blood.

[235] Hom. *Il*. 11.454, 22.67; Soph. *Ant*. 697.

to her ἁρπαγή, 'seizure' (822), the Greeks took vengeance against Paris by assaulting Troy. This metaphorical image intensifies the link between the hunting skills of Agamemnon during the Trojan War and the vengeful plan of Clytemnestra. By weaving a terrible net in the house of the lion, Clytemnestra assumes the strength, power and violence of her husband. Unlike Penelope who becomes a lion to defend her house from the suitors, she captures the lion with the net and directly attacks him with the sword.

By transferring the hunting skills of the Homeric lion to the tragic lioness, Aeschylus creates a confusion between the hunter and the hunted, the murderer and the murdered, and the man and the woman. In the fourth episode, Cassandra evokes the ἄρκυς, 'the hunting's net' (1116) of Hades, through which Clytemnestra will kill her husband. With this metaphorical image, she provides the audience with a further hint of the vengeful plan of the lioness. As I have noted in the previous section, Cassandra involves another member of the lion family to disclose the gendered identity of the murderer of Agamemnon. Because of his passive role in Clytemnestra's plan of vengeance, Aegisthus is compared by Cassandra to an ἄναλκις λέων, 'cowardly lion' (1224). The adjective ἄναλκις in reference to the behaviour of Aegisthus not only contradicts the epic description of the lion equipped with strength, violence and power, but also confirms the vengeful agency of the tragic lioness. Taking advantage of the absence of the λέων εὐγενής, 'noble lion' (1259), Aegisthus does nothing but roam in the marriage-bed of the lioness.[236] This metaphorical comparison reveals the vengeful identity of the actual ῥαφεύς, 'stitcher' (1604) of Agamemnon's murder. With

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[236] Cf. the depiction of Clytemnestra as a lioness roaming in the bed with Aegisthus in Eur. *El.* 1163.

these words, Cassandra anticipates her own death and that of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra's hands (1258-63):

> {Κα.} αὕτη δίπους λέαινα συγκοιμωμένη
>
> λύκῳ, λέοντος εὐγενοῦς ἀπουσίᾳ,
>
> κτενεῖ με τὴν τάλαιναν· ὡς δὲ φάρμακον   1260
>
> τεύχουσα κἀμοῦ μισθὸν ἐνθήσει κοτῷ·[237]
>
> ἐπεύχεται, θήγουσα φωτὶ φάσγανον,
>
> ἐμῆς ἀγωγῆς ἀντιτείσεσθαι φόνον.[238]

Aeschylus actively involves the lioness in the conflict between the lion and the wolf,[239] with the aim of revealing the complexity of Clytemnestra's vengeance. She is compared to a lioness by Cassandra in the light of her marital relationship with the powerful, noble and strong lion Agamemnon. Because of her sexual intercourse with the wolf Aegisthus, Clytemnestra is also depicted as a treacherous, impious and adulterous wife. In addition to her political and erotic desires, she shows her κότος, 'wrath' (1261), as the protective mother of the female cub Iphigenia. The noun, which can generally mean 'grudge, rancour, ill-

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[237] I preserve the *lectio* of the cod. T κοτῷ, by rejecting the conjecture ποτῷ, which is instead accepted by Fraenkel (1950) and Murray (1960).

[238] *Ca.* This two-footed lioness, bedding the wolf in the absence of the noble lion, will kill me, miserable that I am; as if preparing a drug, she will mix in her wrath my requital; she vows, after sharpening her sword against her husband, to take murderous vengeance for bringing me here.

[239] The conflict between the lion and the wolf was proverbial in the classical world (see for example the Aesopic fable 52 H).

will',[240] is frequent in the Aeschylean *lexis* to define the divine demand for vengeance.[241] In this passage, the term refers to the vengeful response of Clytemnestra to the homecoming of Agamemnon. She prepares a lethal potion, where she blends her anger for the sacrifice of her daughter with her jealousy for the arrival of the concubine of her husband. By dislocating vengeance from the Trojan War to the House of Atreus, Aeschylus empowers Clytemnestra to stage the death of Agamemnon.

Despite the consistency of Cassandra's imagery, the Chorus still appear uncertain about and puzzled by her prophecy. They have not grasped the hints suggested by her in tracking the moves of the female avenger. Because of the ambiguity of Cassandra's prophecy, the Chorus do not suspect that the misdeed will be committed by a woman. In fact, the Chorus ask Cassandra to reveal τίνος πρὸς ἀνδρός, 'by which man' (1251), the destruction of the house will be caused. The triumphant position of the lioness in her prophecy signals the imminent accomplishment of Clytemnestra's revenge. According to Fraenkel (1950:581), the expression δίπους λέαινα, 'the two-footed lioness' (1258), can be read as a poetic device used in riddles and oracles. Konstantinou (2012:130) argues that the position of Clytemnestra has a connection with the ancient Greek iconographic representation of the lion in 'the moment of overpowering another animal, usually a bull'. Through reference to a hunting-type scene, it anticipates the assault by Clytemnestra against her husband. Agamemnon is in fact compared by Cassandra to a bull, captured ἐν πέπλοισιν, 'in the woven nets' (1126). I argue that the two-footed position of the lioness not only foretells the attack of the huntress

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[240] Hom. *Il*. 1.82, 8.449, 16.449, *Od*. 11.102.

[241] Aesch. *Ag*. 635, 1211; *Supp*. 347.

Clytemnestra, but also humanises her vengeance against the hunted Agamemnon. By attributing a human posture to the lioness, Aeschylus embeds Clytemnestra in the chain of misdeed of the House of Atreus, where the roles of the hunter and the hunted dramatically blur.

Similarly to Aeschylus, Euripides evokes the hunting skills of the Homeric lion to empower Medea to take vengeance against her husband. However, unlike in the *Agamemnon*, where all the members of Clytemnestra's family are compared to the lion/ess, in the *Medea* the tragic heroine alone is lioness-like. By weaving a murderous net against her husband, Medea becomes the warrior-hunter of her own family. The adjective μιαίφονος, ον, 'bloody-thirsty' (266), in the comparative form, gives emphasis to the vengeful motivations of Medea. Pronounced at the end of her initial *rhesis* (263-6), it indicates her violent reaction to the introduction of a second wife into her family. After Jason's decision to marry the daughter of the king of Corinth, Medea manifests both her suffering and anger in animal terms. She is still offstage at the beginning of the tragedy, when she is heard invoking Themis and Artemis to witness the injustice she has to suffer and to demand vengeance (160). With these words, the Nurse describes the tragic state of her mistress to the Chorus (187-9):

{Τρ.} καίτοι τοκάδος δέργμα λεαίνης

ἀποταυροῦται δμωσίν, ὅταν τις

μῦθον προφέρων πέλας ὁρμηθῆι.[242]

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[242] *Nu.* And indeed, like a bull she casts the fierce glance of a lioness with cubs towards the slaves, whenever someone approaches to utter a word to her.

By perceiving the world surrounding her as a threat, Medea refuses to be helped and reacts with violence to her tragic condition. Through the hybrid image of the lioness and the bull, she reveals strength and fury, on the one hand, and suffering and loss, on the other. The Nurse has already used the metaphor ὄμμα ταυρουμένη, the 'bull's gaze' (92), in the prologue, to describe how Medea looks at her sons, anticipating that she will turn her anger against them. Concerned about the possible implications of the χόλος (172), 'wrath', of her mistress, she predicts her infanticidal act. The term is rarely used in physical sense, but it rather indicates the 'bile' (Hom. *Il*. 16.203). It can assume in metaphorical contexts the meaning of 'bitter anger',[243] especially towards or because of a person.[244] The Chorus also see Medea's ὀργή (176), 'rage', as a constraint to alleviate her suffering. The term indicates a natural impulse or propensity[245] and it specifically assumes the meaning of 'anger' in tragic contexts.[246] According to Mossman (2011:228), the infuriated state of Medea is specifically illustrated by the gaze of the bull. From her perspective, the animal needs connecting with the Dionysiac context of the Euripidean tragedy. Just like the lion, the bull is in fact one of the forms assumed by Dionysus in his metamorphoses (see Introduction, p. 29). Because of its association with the god, it symbolises masculine ferocity, savagery, determination and divine madness. When viewed alongside the lioness imagery, the bull intensifies the tragic theme of filicide.[247] As I discuss in the next section, the lioness does not protect its cubs from the potential attack of the

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[243] Hom. *Il*. 2.241, 15.122.

[244] Hom. *Il*. 6.335, 15.138.

[245] Hes. *Op*. 304; Pind. *Pyth*. 9.43; Aesch. *Supp*. 187.

[246] Soph. *OT* 1241; Eur. *Hel*. 80.

[247] Cf. Aesch. *Cho*. 275; Eur. *Bacch*. 922.

hunters. The situation of danger is inverted, since Medea will turn her anger, violence and fury against her own sons. In Konstantinou's (2012:131) words, the double image of the bull and the lioness displays the psychological conflicted identity of Medea as 'aggressor and victim, hunter and hunted'. However, I argue that Euripides does not metaphorically compare Medea to a bull-lioness, with the aim of dehumanising her, but rather to reveal the humanity behind her vengeful intentions. By playing the roles of both the bull and the lioness, Medea shows anger, strength and power, on the one hand, and suffering, loss and vulnerability, on the other, in her conflict with Jason.

Medea metaphorically assumes the hunting skills of the Homeric lion, so that she can deprive Jason of their sons. Split between suffering and anger, she commits the act of filicide off-stage. The fifth *stasimon*, the song that accompanies the tragic action, is composed of the lyric words of the Corinthian women and the cries of the children (1270-81). As I discuss in the next section, this scene would have recalled to the audience the initial lamentations of Medea, lying down like a lioness after delivery (187-189). Just as in the *parodos*, the Chorus listen to a βοή, 'loud cry' (1273), which comes from inside, without intervening. The Corinthian women not only raise a vain lament to dissuade Medea, but they appear hesitant to save the children from the ἀρκύων ξίφους, 'the net of the sword' (1278). This image specifically illustrates the instrument that Medea will use to take vengeance against her husband. Like the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, she weaves a murderous net to capture and kill her prey. However, the dramatic effect is enhanced by the fact that she demonstrates her heroism, courage, fury and power in killing with the sword her sons, instead of her husband. This transgressive behaviour is denounced by Jason after the realisation

of her infanticide. Thus, the deprived father reacts to Medea's vengeance (1338-43):

{Ια.} εὐνῆς ἕκατι καὶ λέχους σφ' ἀπώλεσας.

οὐκ ἔστιν ἥτις τοῦτ' ἂν Ἑλληνὶς γυνὴ

ἔτλη ποθ', ὧν γε πρόσθεν ἠξίουν ἐγὼ   1340

γῆμαι σέ, κῆδος ἐχθρὸν ὀλέθριόν τ' ἐμοί,

λέαιναν, οὐ γυναῖκα, τῆς Τυρσηνίδος

Σκύλλης ἔχουσαν ἀγριωτέραν φύσιν.[248]

In this passage, the lioness-woman metaphor assumes a negative connotation from Jason's perspective. Without admitting any responsibility in the infanticide, he denounces the bestiality of Medea. He calls her μῖσος (1324), a neuter noun indicating a 'hateful creature'. In the active form, the term can mean 'grudge' (Eur. *Or*. 432) and in reference to persons 'hateful object';[249] in the passive form, it assumes the meaning of 'hate felt against another' (Aesch. *Ag*. 1413). By showing resentment and disgust, Jason regrets having married Medea and brought her from a barbarian land to Greece. In his insulting words, he specifically mentions the Thyrsenian Scylla (1344), the multi-headed sea-beast that was said to threaten the sailors, probably in the Strait of Messina.[250] However, just like in

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[248] *Ja*. For the sake of sex and the marriage-bed you killed them. There is no Greek woman who would ever have dared to do this, instead of whom I thought worthy to marry you, a hateful and destructive union for me, a lioness not a woman with a more savage nature than Thyrsenian Scylla.

[249] Aesch. *Ag*. 1411, Soph. *Ant*. 760.

[250] Cf. Hom. *Od*. 12.85-100, 245-259.

the depiction of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra,[251] the mythological reference does not simply connote the savagery of Medea. It rather reveals the powerlessness, failure and inferiority of Jason in front of a dangerous woman. It is indeed the heroism of Medea that made his journey to Corinth successful. As a result of her transgression, Medea is connoted by the term θράσος (1345). The noun is a *vox media*: in positive terms it assumes the meaning of 'courage',[252] especially in war contexts, and in negative terms it can mean 'over-boldness'.[253] It is the same term that Medea uses at the beginning of the tragedy (469), to reproach Jason with ingratitude, cowardice and insolence. The ambiguity of the term emphasises here the tragic heroism, courage, power and violence of Medea in having hunted and killed her sons.

Another tragic heroine who is attributed the hunting skills of the Homeric lion is Agave in the Euripidean *Bacchae*. Throughout the tragedy, the roles of hunter and hunted blur. Just like in the Aeschylean *Agamemnon*, all the characters are involved in an ambiguous hunting game. The first to assume the apparent role of prey is Dionysus, who is defined as an ἄγρη, 'captured beast' (434), by the Slave. In the second episode, the god, considered a charlatan, is arrested and brought to his mortal cousin Pentheus. The second character who plays the role of prey in the tragedy is Agave. In the third episode, the Messenger narrates to Pentheus the reaction of the Thebans to the Dionysiac rites. One of them proposes to capture Agave, by pulling her out from the Bacchic crowd, to please the king (719-20). As the victim of the vengeful plan of the god, Pentheus is the third

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[251] Cf. the comparison of Clytemnestra to Scylla in Aesch. *Ag.* 1233-4.

[252] Hom. *Il*. 14.416; Aesch. *Pers*. 394; Pind. *Pyth*. 2.63.

[253] Aesch. *Ag*. 169; Eur. *Or*. 1568.

character compared to a prey caught in a βόλος, 'casting-net' (848). He would raise the weapons against the Bacchae, but Dionysus convinces him to desist and to participate instead in the celebration of the Dionysiac rites. However, the motif of the net does not merely depict the tragic characters as the prey of the hunting game of Dionysus. Euripides rather complicates the boundaries between hunter and hunted to transform Agave into an avenging lioness. Like the Aeschylean Clytemnestra and the Euripidean Medea, Agave is attributed the hunting skills of the Homeric lion, so that she can capture her prey. As the Messenger reports in the fifth episode, Agave urges the Bacchae to seize Pentheus, who is hidden in a tree. After several attempts to hit him with rocks and wooden branches, she incites her companions to overpower the intruder. In the fourth *stasimon*, when the king of Thebes follows Dionysus to Mount Kithairon, in order to spy on the Bacchae, the Chorus pray that the Maenads may be seized with madness with these words (977-91):

{Χο.} ἴτε θοαὶ Λύσσας κύνες, ἴτ' εἰς ὄρος,

θίασον ἔνθ' ἔχουσι Κάδμου κόραι·

ἀνοιστρήσατέ νιν

ἐπὶ τὸν ἐν γυναικομίμωι στολᾶι   980

λυσσώδη κατάσκοπον μαινάδων.

μάτηρ πρῶτά νιν λευρᾶς ἀπὸ πέτρας

†ἢ σκόλοπος† ὄψεται

δοκεύοντα, μαινάσιν δ' ἀπύσει·

Τίς ὅδ' ὀρειδρόμων μαστὴρ Καδμειᾶν   985

ἐς ὄρος ἐς ὄρος ἔμολ' ἔμολεν, ὦ βάκχαι;

τίς ἄρα νιν ἔτεκεν;

οὐ γὰρ ἐξ αἵματος

γυναικῶν ἔφυ, λεαίνας δέ τινος   990

ὅδ' ἢ Γοργόνων Λιβυσσᾶν γένος.[254]

The lioness is evoked by the Chorus to identify the mother of Pentheus. The Bacchae guess that the intruder could be either the cub of a lioness (989) or a monster descending from the Libyan Gorgon (991). By attributing the hunting skills of the lioness to Agave, Euripides anticipates the tragic act of filicide. It is Dionysus that convinces Pentheus to dress like a maenad and join the Dionysiac rites. The boundaries between hunter and hunted blur in the vengeful plan of the god: the Chorus identify Pentheus as a lion, hence his mother as a lioness. Like an animal hunter, Agave urges the Bacchae to capture the intruder without nets or javelins, but just with their hands. They perform a furious running like the Λύσσας κύνες, 'the hounds of Frenzy' (997). Lyssa, the personification of madness, leads Agave and her companions in a perverted form of ὀρειβασία, 'mountain dancing', to catch, kill and dismember Pentheus. The scene described in the fourth *stasimon* assumes dark connotations: the Chorus celebrate the power of Dionysus to anticipate the terrible act that Agave will commit against her own son.

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[254] *Ch*. Go quick hounds of Frenzy, go to the mountain, where the daughters of Cadmus have their thiasos; goad them to madness against the man dressed up as a woman, the frenzied spy on the maenads. His mother first from a smooth rock or pinnacle will see him watching, and will call to the maenads: Who is this searcher of the mountain-running Kadmeians, who has come, come to the mountain, to the mountain, o bacchants? Who then gave him birth? For he was not born from the blood of women, but from a lioness, or he is descended from Libyan Gorgons.

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Initiated into a perverted ὀρειβασία, Pentheus is the prey of the Bacchae led by the huntress Agave. Both mother and son are entrapped in the murderous net woven by Dionysus. With these words, Agave shows her satisfaction to the Chorus about her hunting skills (1189-99):

{Αγ.} ὁ Βάκχιος κυναγέτας

σοφὸς σοφῶς ἀνέπηλ' ἐπὶ θῆρα   1190

τόνδε μαινάδας.

{Χο.} ὁ γὰρ ἄναξ ἀγρεύς.

{Αγ.} ἐπαινεῖς; {Χο.} ἐπαινῶ.

{Αγ.} τάχα δὲ Καδμεῖοι ...

{Χο.} καὶ παῖς γε Πενθεύς ...

{Αγ.} ματέρ' ἐπαινέσεται,   1195

λαβοῦσαν ἄγραν τάνδε λεοντοφυᾶ.

{Χο.} περισσάν. {Αγ.} περισσῶς.

{Χο.} ἀγάλληι; {Αγ.} γέγηθα,

μεγάλα μεγάλα καὶ φανερὰ τᾶιδ' ἄγραι

κατειργασμένα.[255]

At this stage of the tragedy, the confusion between the lion and Pentheus provokes pity and terror in the dramatic representation of Agave. Through ironic

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[255] *Ag*. Bacchus, the hunter, clever, cleverly urged against this beast the maenads. *Ch*. For the lord is a hunter. *Ag*. Do you praise? *Ch*. I praise. *Ag*. And soon the Kadmeian… *Ch*. And indeed your son Pentheus… *Ag*. will praise his mother, for catching this lion-natured prey. *Ch*. An extraordinary one. *Ag*. In a extraordinary way. *Ch*. Do you exult? *Ag*. I rejoice, at having accomplished great things, great and manifest, by this hunt.

questions, Agave boasts her hunting skills without being able to recognise her son. She invokes Dionysus as the god κυναγέτας, 'the hunter' (1189), in order to justify the capture of her prey. The noun develops from the root κυναγ-, which refers to the 'hunt, chase'. Under the Dionysiac possession, Agave did not need weapons, such as ἀγκύλωτα στοχάσματα, 'missiles' (1205), δικτύοι, 'nets' (1206) and λογχοποιῶν ὄργανα, 'spears' (1208). Like Achilles and Heracles in their lion-like state on the battlefield, she rather captured and dismembered her prey with her own hands. In response to the triumphant words of Agave, the Chorus encourage her to show the sign of her victory (1200-15). The adjective νικηφόρος, ον, used as a noun for indicating Agave's prize (1200), generally means 'victorious' in war contexts. It assumes here a contradictory connotation, since the death of Pentheus is both the sign of Dionysus' triumph and Agave's filicide. Also, the verb νικηφορέω, 'I carry off as a prize, I win', whose object is δάκρυα, 'tears', creates a tragic reversal (1147). Agave will not fix the head of her prey on the wall as a memory of her victory, but she will cry the death of her son. Agave is the medium through which Dionysus can punish Pentheus for having forbidden his cult. Under the possession of the god, she shows her strength, courage and violence against her own son. In this way, Euripides has transformed Agave into the hunter and Pentheus into the hunted, in order to convey the complexity of Dionysus' vengeance against his own family.

In this way, Aeschylus and Euripides attribute the hunting skills of the lioness to female characters, who either willingly or unwillingly commit vengeful acts. In the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra weaves a murderous net to kill her husband. Her violence and treachery are the correspondent attributes of Agamemnon in the Trojan War. As the wife of the noble lion, she becomes a

powerful lioness able to capture her husband in a mortal trap. By playing both the roles of the human hunter and hunted animal, Clytemnestra kills the lion and will be killed by her cubs. Medea is depicted as a dangerous and courageous lioness, since she will kill her children to take vengeance against her husband. Through the combination of the leonine attack and the bull's gaze, Medea internalises her conflict with Jason. Wrath, rage and treachery are interwoven in the vengeful net, where her children will be caught. Agave metaphorically assumes the hunting skills of the Homeric lion for killing her son. Under the possession of Dionysus, she shows her violence in capturing and dismembering her prey. After boasting her physical strength, she will realise that her victory against the lion is just illusory. Involved in the hunting game of Dionysus, Agave is the medium through which the god defeats the lion. In all these cases, the tragic lioness, invested with the hunting skills of the Homeric lion, blurs the dichotomy of hunter and hunter in intra-familial vengeful conflicts. The metaphor does not convey the concepts of military power and success on the battlefield, but captures avenging mothers in their disrupted relationship with their sons. As I show in the next section, the tragic heroines are attributed the maternal role of the lioness, so that the Dionysiac self-destruction of the household can be staged.

2. 2. 3   Maternal role

The maternal role of the lioness is the last feature I analyse to show the Dionysiac implications of the tragic acts of vengeance accomplished by female characters in intra-familial conflicts. After considering relevant literary references to this aspect, I argue that Attic dramatists represent female characters assuming the

maternal role of the lioness to stage the self-destruction of the household. The lioness was associated with the courage and suffering of giving birth in the classical world. One of the first references to its maternal role is attested in Herodotus (3.108, 12), who states that the lioness, despite its strength, can bear just one cub. As soon as the cub grows in the womb of the lioness, it starts to damage it with its claws. The lioness after the delivery is constrained to renounce her uterus, which is torn apart and no longer useful. The anecdote is followed by a similar image: the viper kills the male species and is then devoured by its offspring. Although in the first anecdote the motif of vengeance is absent, lioness and viper share the same maternal destiny. Violence occurs in the womb and causes suffering. Plutarch in his *Amatorius* (771b9) describes the delivery of two boys, whose mother is compared to a lioness. The link is created on the basis of the fact that both women and lionesses suffer more than any other species in the action of ὠδίνειν, 'to be in travail'. In the Aesopic fable 167 H, the lioness is derided by the fox, since it can bear just one cub. After an extremely painful delivery, the lioness replies: ἀλλὰ λέοντα, 'it is a lion though' (3). The lioness justifies its suffering in travail with the nobility of birth of its offspring. The εὐγένεια, 'the nobility of birth', is one of the positive connotations attributed by Aristotle (*HA* 488b17) to the male lion. It develops from the root of the verb γίγνομαι, which means 'I come into being' and in reference to persons indicates 'I was born'.

Although the lioness was not actually involved in ritual contexts of childbirth, it could evoke the liminal status between life and death in labour. Childbirth was considered in fact as a violent struggle requiring courage, endurance, strength and power. Just like men had to face up to the danger of dying

on the battlefield, women associated marriage with potentially fatal childbearing.[256] As Medea says, 'I would prefer to stand in the front line of battle three times, rather than giving birth once' (Eur. *Med*. 250-1). According to Dillon (2001:178-230), in ancient Greece women undertook different rites to guarantee the safe delivery of their children. For example, a painted wooden plaque (National Archeological Museum Athens, 16464), discovered in the Peloponnese and dated between 540-20 BC, shows a pre-delivery rite.[257] Moreover, it seems that midwives, who had already had experience of childbearing, helped pregnant women in the process of delivery (Pl. *Tht*. 149d). Through drugs, incantations and spells, they tried to alleviate the labour pain of mothers. King (1988:51-62) argues that pain-killers were used just in the case of complicated deliveries. She distinguishes the word ὀδύνη, which was used for excessive forms of pain, from the word πόνος, which was referred instead to the pain of normal deliveries.

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[256] Although the question of Sparta is still debated, it seems that the funerary legislation promulgated by Lycurgus gave honour to Spartan women who died in childbirth. Demand (1994:140) argues that there is no evidence that the death of women in childbirth was considered as heroic as the death of men on the battlefield. In agreement with Loraux (1986), she affirms that the Spartan dichotomy war-procreation cannot be applied to Athens. The question remains controversial, as Dillon (2007:149-65) states, because the *Life of Lycurgus* presents some philological problems. As attested by Plutarch (27,1-3), no Spartan could have his name engraved, apart from soldiers who died on the battlefield and women while holding religious offices. On the basis of two inscriptions (*IG* V 1, 713-4), Dillon accepts the emendation of Latte λέχους, 'the marriage-bed', instead of reading ἱερῶν, 'religious affairs', in order to confirm the honour attributed to Spartan women who died after delivery.

[257] The pregnant woman leads the procession and pours libations to the nymphs. She carries a box probably containing ritual objects, such as a knife for the sacrifice. She is followed by a boy, leading a sheep, and other male figures, playing the double flute and the lyre.

Furthermore, women probably purified themselves from the contamination of childbirth in rites that involved sacrifices and the public announcement of the sex of the child.[258]

The concepts of violence, suffering, danger and protection evoked by the lioness in travails are evidenced in Homer. As I have discussed above, the Homeric lion assumes female traits on the battlefield, by feeling a sense of protectiveness after childbirth. Threatened by the attack of potential hunters, the lion(ess) reacts with violence after realising that its cubs have been captured. This gendered connotation is particularly evident in Homeric scenes of bereavement. The lion metaphor does not connote Homeric heroes solely in their powerful attack against their enemies. They also show a vulnerable side in the case of death of one of their friends. The nobility of birth of the lion implies the protection of the corpse and the realisation of a vengeful act in reaction to the loss. In the description of the death of Patroklos, Menelaus is compared to a λὶς ἠϋγένειος, 'well-maned lion', because of his protective and mourning role (*Il*. 17.109). The epic form of the adjective εὐγένειος, ον, by creating a connection between the mane of the lion and the nobility of birth, describes the respect of Menelaus for the corpse of Patroklos. Menelaus assumes a maternal role, by feeling πένθος ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν, 'suffering in his heart' (139). Split between grief and anger for the death of his companion, he urges Ajax to fight against the Trojans. Like a lion that defends its cubs from the attack of the hunters, Ajax protects Patroklos' corpse with his shield (*Il*. 17.132-7). Another similar image is the description of Achilles mourning Patroklos (*Il*. 18.316-22). The bereaved hero raises a lament to express

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[258] For discussion of the rites of ἀμφιδρόμια and δεκάτη see Hamilton, 1984:243-51; Patterson, 1985:103-23; Golden, 1990; Demand, 1994.

his grief, just like a lion realising that its cubs have been captured (318-9). The participle of the verb στενάχω, 'I lament', emphasises the female, protective and mourning role of Achilles after the death of Patroklos. In these Homeric examples, the lion does not display the male traits of fierce, courage and honour to fight against its enemies. Its violent attack is rather caused by the loss and deprivation of its cubs. By assuming female traits, the lion expresses the liminal position of Homeric heroes between life and death, danger and protection, suffering and anger on the battlefield. When the Greek heroes realise that one of their friends is dead, an instinct of protectiveness mixed with strength and violence become visible behind the lion mask they metaphorically wear.

Attic dramatists draw on the Homeric image of the lion(ess) to blur the tragic dichotomy between war and childbirth in the representation of female acts of vengeance. Whereas in Homeric descriptions the lion mourns for its captured cubs and manifests anger, due to the failure of protection, in certain tragic plays the lioness does not protect its cubs from the attack of the hunters. The tragic heroines who are metaphorically compared to the lioness rather assume the courage, violence and strength of the lion to destroy their own household. In the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra is attributed the maternal role of the lioness, so that she can take revenge against her husband for the death of Iphigenia. In the *parodos*, the Chorus remind the audience of the human sacrifice committed by Agamemnon (140-4):

> {Χο.} τόσον περ εὔφρων ἁ καλά,
>
> δρόσοις ἀέπτοις μαλερῶν λεόντων
>
> πάντων τ' ἀγρονόμων φιλομάστοις

θηρῶν ὀβρικάλοισι τερπνά,

τούτων αἰτεῖ ξύμβολα κρᾶναι.[259]

In their celebration of the Greek expedition to Troy, the Chorus define the sacrificial victim of Artemis as the cub of μαλερῶν λεόντων, 'ravening lions' (141). The Atreides had committed an impious act by hunting a mother hare with young in the womb. Despite Zeus' plan, Artemis, the goddess of childbirth and the patron of the hunters, interfered in the departure of the Greeks and demanded compensation. Because of the abortive attempts to sail to Troy, Agamemnon was therefore constrained to kill his daughter Iphigenia.[260] The adjective μαλερός, ά, όν, in reference to the lions, not only denounces the violent act committed by Agamemnon, but it also anticipates the vengeance of Clytemnestra. The term, which is used in Homer as an epithet of fire[261] and in the lyric tradition for describing the 'glowing' songs,[262] assumes the emotional connotation of 'terrible, violent, fierce' in ancient Greek tragedy. By invoking the healing god Apollo, brother of Artemis, the Chorus enter on stage to sing the original cause of Clytemnestra's vengeance. It is the death of Iphigenia by Agamemnon's hands that has caused her μῆνις, 'wrath' (155). The term, which can generally indicate the wrath of the gods,[263] of the dead worshipped as heroes,[264] and of suppliants,[265]

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[259] *Ch.* So kindly is the goddess to the helpless young of ravening lions, and delightful to the suckling young of all the hunting beasts of the wild; she asks that these omens will be fulfilled.

[260] For an interpretation of the Aeschylean representation of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, see for example Seaford, 1989: 87-95; Ferrari, 1997: 1-45 and Grethlein, 2013: 78-99.

[261] Hom. *Il.* 9.242, 20.316, 21.375.

[262] Pind. *Ol.* 9.22.

[263] Hom. *Il.* 5.34; Aesch. *Ag.* 701.

and specifically opens the epic on the wrath of Achilles,[266] is used here of injured parents. Connoted by the adjective τεκνόποινος, 'child-avenging' (155), it emphasises the tragic bond between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Iphigenia is the female cub that was killed by the former and will be avenged by the latter. As the daughter of the violent male and female lions, she represents one of the causes of the intra-familial conflicts in the House of Atreus.

The maternal bond of Clytemnestra with her cubs is also intensified in the aftermath of her vengeance. Entrapped in the circle of violence of the lion house, she will eventually be killed by her son. A reference to Orestes as a lion cub occurs in one of the most ambiguous tragic passages, where the μῆνις, 'vengeful temper' of the House of Atreus is illustrated. There is a debate among classical scholars regarding who is the tragic character compared to the lion's offspring. With prophetic words, the Chorus sing that he/she, reared distant from his/her mother, will return home to take vengeance against his/her family. Ambiguously playing with the gendered identity of the avenger, Aeschylus narrates the parable of the lion cub with these words (717-9, 727-36):

{Χο.} ἔθρεψεν δὲ λέοντος ἴ-
νιν δόμοις ἀγάλακτον οὕ-
τως ἀνὴρ φιλόμαστον,
[…]
χρονισθεὶς δ' ἀπέδειξεν ἦ-

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[264] Hdt. 7.134, cf. 137.

[265] Aesch. *Cho*. 294; *Eum*. 234.

[266] Hom. *Il*. 1.1.

θος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων· χάριν

γὰρ τροφεῦσιν ἀμείβων

μηλοφόνοισι μάταισιν   730

δαῖτ' ἀκέλευστος ἔτευξεν,

αἵματι δ' οἶκος ἐφύρθη,

ἄμαχον ἄλγος οἰκέταις,

μέγα σίνος πολυκτόνον.

ἐκ θεοῦ δ' ἱερεύς τις ἄ-   735

τας δόμοις προσεθρέφθη.[267]

Creating a confusion between the mythological past and the tragic future, the Chorus explain the hereditary guilt of the House of Atreus in this passage. According to Thomson (1938:21-2), the lion 'which is common on Lydian coins and still extant on the ancient gates of Mycenae was probably the emblem of the Lydian dynasty of Pelops'. According to Knox (1952:17-25), this does not justify the fact that all the members of the House of Atreus are compared to the lion/ess. Aeschylus might have been aware of the 'heraldic device' of the royal family, but instead he confuses the tragic relationships within the lion family in his tragedy. From Knox's perspective, the royal blood and the vengeful temper of each

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[267] *Ch*. Just so, a man once reared a lion's offspring in his house without milk and eager of the breast […] When he grew up, however, it showed the nature of its parents; repaying its rearers' favour with a foolish sheep-slaying, unbidden it made them a feast; the house was stained with blood, suffering without battle for the household, a great murderous ruin. A priest of doom by divine will was reared in the house.

member of the ruined house of Atreus are connected through the lion image. Through analysis of the verb τρέφω, 'I rear', I argue that the image of the lion cub is specifically referring to Orestes. The term, which introduces the parable (717), is also employed in the treacherous speech of Clytemnestra. She justifies to Agamemnon the absence of their son with the claim that a benevolent friend 'rears' him (*Ag*. 880). Moreover, the term occurs in the desperate words of Clytemnestra to persuade Orestes not to commit matricide. As I show in the next chapter (p. 308), Clytemnestra is compared to a snake when she uncovers her breast and ironically claims to have 'reared' him (*Cho*. 908). The verb τρέφω is also used in other tragedies staging the myth of Orestes. In the prologue of the Sophoclean *Electra* (13), Orestes is said to have been saved by his sister and 'reared' distant from home. In Euripides's *Electra*, the same verb is used in the prologue spoken by the farmer, to explain by whom Orestes was 'reared' (18). In the second episode, the old pedagogue claims to have 'reared' Orestes, and therefore will be able to recognise him (488, 507).

The metaphorical association of the lion cub with Clytemnestra's son in the Aeschylean parable is also confirmed by the fact that Orestes is compared to a lion in the *Choephoroi*. After the death of Clytemnestra, the Chorus celebrate the victory of Dike, through the image of the double lion (935-41):

> {Χο.} ἔμολε μὲν δίκα Πριαμίδαις χρόνῳ,
>
> βαρύδικος ποινά·
>
> ἔμολε δ' ἐς δόμον τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονος
>
> διπλοῦς λέων, διπλοῦς Ἄρης.
>
> ἔλαχε δ' ἐς τὸ πᾶν

ὁ πυθόχρηστος φυγὰς   940

θεόθεν εὖ φραδαῖσιν ὡρμημένος.[268]

The prophetic style of the third *stasimon* creates a connection with the *Agamemnon*, where all the members of the House of Atreus are compared to the lion. Garvie (1986:303-6) argues that despite the plural form the lion metaphor should be referred only to Orestes. He refuses to read in the metaphorical expression the support of Pylades in the matricide. In contrast, Nenci and Arata (1999:303) suggest that the double Dike corresponds to the arrival of Orestes and Pylades, by excluding the double slaughter of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. However, the image can be referred both to the slaughters of Agamemnon and Cassandra and to those of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Despite the different interpretative associations, the double lion is indeed evoked after the act of matricide by Orestes' hands. The offspring of the ravening lions demonstrate the vengeful temper of their parents. Taking vengeance against their mother for the death of their father, Orestes and Electra are entrapped in the circle of violence of the lion family. In their depiction, power, strength and courage converge in the destruction of their own household. Regardless of the controversial identification of the second lion with either Electra or Pylades, it is Orestes that will take the responsibility of having killed his mother.

Therefore, I argue that the lion cub in the Aeschylean parable is referring to Orestes. As the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, he displays the violence

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[268] *Ch*. There came eventually justice to Priam's children, heavy vengeful retribution; there came to Agamemnon's house a double lion, a double destruction; it definitely drove towards his exile, as Pythia prophesised, well urged by the will of the gods.

of the lion family to avenge the honour of the former against the crime of the latter. The image of the doubly-gendered lion reflects the disrupted relationship between Clytemnestra and her offspring. On the one hand, Clytemnestra plays the role as the protective mother of the female cub that has been sacrificed by the violent lion for propitiating the winds in the expedition against Troy. In this case, she assumes the maternal role of the lioness to express both her suffering and anger for the death of Iphigenia. On the other hand, she plays the role as the mother of the male cub that will come back home to take vengeance for the death of the lion. In this case, she claims instead the maternal role of the lioness to prevent her son from committing matricide. By blurring war and childbirth, danger and protection, life and death, Aeschylus gives expression to the circle of violence in the house of the lion.

Sophocles in his *Ajax* makes use of lioness imagery in a completely different way from Aeschylus. By preserving the Homeric tradition, he attributes the maternal role of the lioness to Tecmessa, although she does not commit vengeance within and against her family. As the concubine of Ajax and the mother of Eurysaces, she rather mediates the passage from the suicide to the burial of Ajax, in order to reflect on the vengeful implications of his death. Tecmessa in fact dominates the first part of the tragedy, by informing the Chorus about and guiding the audience towards the death of Ajax. However, she does not simply comprehend and report the reasons of the suicide of her master. She rather signals the liminal moment, where danger and protection, life and death, war and childbirth blur. In the passage from the first to the second part of the tragedy, Teucer, after realising that Ajax committed suicide, manifests his concern about

his nephew. With these words, he urges Tecmessa to go back to the tent and save Eurysaces (983-9):

{ΤΕΥ.} Φεῦ τάλας. Τί γὰρ τέκνον

τὸ τοῦδε; ποῦ μοι γῆς κυρεῖ τῆς Τρῳάδος;

{ΧΟ.} Μόνος παρὰ σκηναῖσιν –   985

{ΤΕΥ.} Οὐχ ὅσον τάχος

δῆτ' αὐτὸν ἄξεις δεῦρο, μή τις ὡς κενῆς

σκύμνον λεαίνης δυσμενῶν ἀναρπάσῃ;

Ἴθ', ἐγκόνει, σύγκαμνε· τοῖς θανοῦσί τοι

φιλοῦσι πάντες κειμένοις ἐπεγγελᾶν.[269]

Commentators have tended to read the lioness-woman metaphor as the representation of the helpless status of Tecmessa. They have particularly focused on the adjective κενός, ή, όν (986), referring to the lioness, to define her dramatic state after the death of Ajax. According to Pearson (1957: 150), the lioness is 'robbed' of her young. After searching for the lion, Tecmessa realises the danger of losing her son. Stanford (1963:186) reads the adjective in its contradictory valence of 'bereaved' and 'absent' mother. Tecmessa has already lost her husband, but she also risks losing her child. This is the same position taken by de Romilly (1976:92), who says that Tecmessa is a lioness without protection,

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[269] *Te*. Oh misery! Where is his child? In which part of the Troad is he? *Ch*. He is alone, in the tent! *Te*: Will not you fetch him here as soon as possible, so that none of our enemies can snatch away the cub of the bereaved lioness? Go, run, collaborate! Everybody likes laughing at the dead under the ground.

because she is actually bereaved of her husband and potentially of her son. Untersteiner (1999:187) argues that the simile is strange, because the lioness was imagined to be deprived by the hunters of its cubs, and not of its male counterpart.

I argue that the lioness-woman metaphor, which is the only occurrence in the Sophoclean extant tragedies, does not represent Tecmessa in her helpless state after the death of Ajax. By giving expression to the destruction of Ajax's house, she rather signals a turning point in the tragedy. The ambiguity of the lioness figure could intensify the expectations of the audience for a vengeful resolution. In order to save her child from the attack of possible hunters, Tecmessa instead leaves the stage to her brother-in-law. It is Teucer who will defend the cause of Ajax against the vengeful decision of the Greeks of forbidding his burial. Through the suggestion of the danger for the lion cub, Sophocles employs lioness imagery to anticipate the vengeance of the Atreides. The real danger is not the capture or the death of Eurysaces by the enemies of Ajax, but rather the prohibition of burying his corpse. Thus, Sophocles attributes a maternal role to Tecmessa, by preserving the Homeric image of the lion(ess). Tecmessa does not commit revenge, but she anticipates the vengeful intentions of the Atreides after the suicide of Ajax. In this way, Sophocles could shift his dramatic focus from the death of the lion to the consequences of its absence in the lioness' house.

In a similar way to Aeschylus, Euripides attributes the maternal role to Medea to stage her vengeful reaction to the betrayal of her husband. As I have discussed in the previous section, the Nurse compares Medea to a lioness in the *parodos* (187), in order to prepare the audience for her infanticide. Just like a lioness that has given birth, Medea threatens with furious eyes whoever attempts to approach her. However, the cubs will not be captured and killed by potential

hunters, but by their own mother. With a tragic reversal, Medea is a lioness that will not be able to protect her sons from her own vengeful fury. In contrast to Konstantinou (2012:133), who says that 'Euripides turns the tables on the image of the lioness, shifting from that of a protective mother to that of an aggressive, bestial and wild woman', I argue that Euripides does not deny, but rather emphasises the maternal role of, the Homeric lion(ess). Medea prevents her children from being raised by another woman, by killing them. This reversal from the Homeric tradition is evidenced throughout the tragedy by linguistic expressions, where the action of giving birth is associated with death. She constantly refers to her maternal role,[270] by bringing into memory the pain of labour (1029). The verb τίκτω, 'I bring into life', and the noun τέκνον, which indicates 'the young', are frequently used in threatening terms. After Medea weaves her vengeful plan, she says: 'I will kill my children; there is nobody that will deprive me of them' (792-3). Therefore, her declaration of revenge does not reveal the disruption of the maternal bond of Medea with her offspring, but rather an even more possessive sense of motherhood.

The dichotomy of war and childbirth is blurred by Euripides to stage the infanticidal act of Medea. As I have discussed in the previous section, the Chorus report the accomplishment of Medea's vengeance, through acoustic details. According to Hall (2006:70), Euripides 'certainly created a shocking (and probably new) effect with the offstage death cries of children interrupting a choral lyric in the *Medea* (1270-1)'. She suggests that Euripides was probably the first to substitute the death cries of a tragic character with 'the screams of a labouring woman'. I would add that, to stage the infanticide, the initial cries of Medea lying

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[270] Eur. *Med.* 930, 1247, 1280-1, 1311-2, 1063, 1249-50.

down like a lioness after delivery are being recalled. Defined by Jason as παιδολέτειρα, 'child-slaying' (849), Medea denies her maternal bond with her offspring in order paradoxically to affirm it. Her deliberative act is confirmed by the reference to the lioness (1358) spoken by Medea in response to Jason's insults. As Mossman (2011:360-1) argues in relation to the following passage, the speech of Medea is denoted by effectiveness and brevity, which implies a refusal to prolong the discussion with her husband. With these words, Medea admits and accepts her psychological transformation into an avenging lioness to defend her cause (1354-60):

{Mη.} σὺ δ' οὐκ ἔμελλες τἄμ' ἀτιμάσας λέχη

τερπνὸν διάξειν βίοτον ἐγγελῶν ἐμοὶ   1355

οὐδ' ἡ τύραννος, οὐδ' ὅ σοι προσθεὶς γάμους

Κρέων ἀνατεὶ τῆσδέ μ' ἐκβαλεῖν χθονός.

πρὸς ταῦτα καὶ λέαιναν, εἰ βούληι, κάλει

[καὶ Σκύλλαν ἢ Τυρσηνὸν ᾤκησεν πέδον]·

τῆς σῆς γὰρ ὡς χρῆν καρδίας ἀνθηψάμην.[271]

Medea does not react to Jason's insults, but, rather, she accepts the comparison to a lioness (1359). The lioness image justifies from the perspective of Medea her act of filicide. As a result of the way he has broken their marriage oaths and dishonoured her bed, she has willingly killed her sons to make the initial fears of

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[271] *Me*. You were not going to dishonour my bed and lead a joyful life laughing at me neither was the princess nor was Creon who arranged the marriage for you going to drive me out of this country without harm. Call me even a lioness in the face of this if you want [and Scylla who dwelt in the Tyrsenian plain] for I have got back at your heart as it was necessary.

Jason real (569-75). Medea has condemned him to live instead of dying, since getting old without children is even worse than death (1396). In Jason's words τεκοῦσα κἄμ' ἄπαιδ' ἀπώλεσας (1326), the antithetical verbs referring to the action of 'giving birth' and 'destroy' intensify the internal object 'childless'. By being able to procreate and kill, Medea has made her husband a bereaved father.

The Euripidean use of Homeric metaphor of the lion(ess) in the depiction of Medea is even clearer in the last words spoken by Jason. As Mossman (2011:368) argues, the speech of Jason expresses the failure of hope after Medea's infanticidal act. He has broken the oaths of the marriage with her and will not be saved by Zeus. Since the attempts to ask for protection are in vain, he insults her and denounces the bestiality of her vengeance. Thus, Euripides insists on the act of infanticide committed by Medea (1405-14):

> {Ια.} Ζεῦ, τάδ' ἀκούεις ὡς ἀπελαυνόμεθ'
>
> οἷά τε πάσχομεν ἐκ τῆς μυσαρᾶς
>
> καὶ παιδοφόνου τῆσδε λεαίνης;
>
> ἀλλ' ὁπόσον γοῦν πάρα καὶ δύναμαι
>
> τάδε καὶ θρηνῶ κἀπιθεάζω,
>
> μαρτυρόμενος δαίμονας ὥς μοι   1410
>
> τέκνα κτείνασ' ἀποκωλύεις
>
> ψαῦσαί τε χεροῖν θάψαι τε νεκρούς,
>
> οὓς μήποτ' ἐγὼ φύσας ὄφελον
>
> πρὸς σοῦ φθιμένους ἐπιδέσθαι.[272]

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[272] *Ja.* Zeus, do you hear this, how I am driven away and what I have suffered from this loathsome and child-killing lioness? Until in fact I can and I am able, I mourn these things and invoke with

As the last expression of his hatred towards Medea, Jason calls her μυσαρᾶς καὶ παιδοφόνου λεαίνης, 'child-killing lioness' (1407). The first adjective that captures Medea in her violence is μυσαρός, ά, όν, 'abominable'. The term can denote 'the blood of the mother' (Eur. *Or*. 1624), but it can be also referred to 'polluted' persons.[273] The other adjective that connotes the vengeful identity of Medea is παιδοφόνος, ον (1407). The term evidences the intertextual relationship between the tragic lioness and the Homeric image of the lion, where it is used by Priam to define Achilles as 'the slayer of his children (Hom. *Il*. 24.506).[274] In reference to Medea, the adjective expresses the tragic humanity of her violent reaction to the betrayal of Jason. By specifically referring to the lion-like depiction of Achilles,[275] Euripides gives emphasis to the human contradictions of Medea's act of infanticide. Through a reversal in the last mourning scene, violence is not committed after loss, but rather causes bereavement. Whereas Achilles after the funeral mourning for Patroclus kills and dismembers the corpse of Hector, Medea buries her children after killing them. The image of the lioness anticipates in fact the entrance of the *deus ex machina* through which she will fly away. Medea will drive the chariot of her grandfather Helios towards Athens to bury her sons on the acropolis of Corinth (1379). By blurring the boundaries

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imprecations the gods to witness that you killed my children and are preventing me from touching them with my hands and burying their bodies. Would I had never generated them, to have to see them killed by you.

[273] Eur. *El*. 1350; cf. Ar. *Lys*. 340.

[274] Cf. Eur. *HF* 1201, where it connotes 'the blood of slain children'.

[275] For the intertextual reference to the Homeric depiction of Achilles in this Euripidean, see for example Mastronarde, 2002:386 and Mossman, 2011:368-9.

between humanity and non-humanity, masculinity and femininity, hunting and childbirth, Medea enacts a metaphorical metamorphosis into a vengeful lioness to deprive her husband, and inevitably herself, of their sons.

Meanwhile, in the *Electra*, Euripides evokes the lioness in comparison with Clytemnestra to stage the matricide committed by Orestes with the aid of his sister. By drawing on the Homeric image of the lion(ess), he describes with tragic irony the maternal bond between Clytemnestra and her cubs. In the prologue, Electra laments that her mother, by letting Aegisthus dominate their house, dared abandon her offspring (60-3). She forgot about the children born from her previous union with Agamemnon, in giving children to her new husband. The frequent use of verbs referring to the action of τίκτω, 'I give birth', and the noun μῆτερ, 'mother', dramatises the relationship between Clytemnestra and her offspring.[276] In the initial dialogue with his sister, Orestes wonders how their mother can tolerate the poor conditions of Electra and her miserable life. Clytemnestra has forced her daughter to marry a man with humble origins in order to prevent her from giving birth to a noble male child. Specifically, the object of the verb τίκτω, 'I give birth' (267), is ποινάτωρ (268), 'avenger'. This noun is used in another tragic passage, which Euripides might have been alluding to. In the *Agamemnon*, before entering the palace, Cassandra foresees the arrival of Orestes. After taking off the woollen bands of the prophecy, she says that the μητροκτόνον, ποινάτωρ πατρός, 'the matricidal, the avenger of the father' (1281) will arrive to vindicate the House of Atreus. By referring to Aeschylus, Euripides attributes the vengeful temper of the lion cub to Electra. He emphasises the active

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[276] See the use of the verb τίκτω and of the noun μῆτερ in Eur. *El.* 964, 1055, 1058, 1061, 1183, 1185, 1304.

role of Clytemnestra's daughter in the matricide by playing with the maternal role of the lioness. It is Electra that weaves the vengeful plan against her mother, by pretending that she has just given birth. The expression λεχώ ἄρσενος τόκωι (652), 'the woman that has given birth to a boy', would have recalled the prophecy of Cassandra. In the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra is called by Cassandra as θῆλυς ἄρσενος φονεύς (1231), 'the woman that kills the man'. Through a tragic reversal, Electra assumes the maternal role of the lioness to condemn her mother to death.

By taking on the maternal role of the lioness, Electra not only pretends to have given birth to a male child, but she also asks her mother to help her with the celebration of the rites of childbirth. Initially, Clytemnestra refuses her maternal role, by saying that the nurse should be in charge of these (1128). As soon as she realises that her daughter has given birth without the help of any friend, she starts explaining how she should proceed. Because of the lack of evidence, it is difficult to say with any certainty how rituals surrounding childbirth were performed in ancient Greek tragedy or whether they were even staged in the first place. However, in the scene of the matricide, Electra mentions the δεκάτη σελήνη, 'tenth moon' (1126), after the feigned birth of her child, which might have alluded to the rite through which children were introduced in the family. Electra and the Chorus comment on the matricide as follows (1182-8):

{Ηλ.} δακρύτ' ἄγαν, ὦ σύγγον', αἰτία δ' ἐγώ.

διὰ πυρὸς ἔμολον ἁ τάλαινα ματρὶ τᾶιδ',

ἅ μ' ἔτικτε κούραν.

{<Χο.>} ἰὼ τύχας †σᾶς τύχας   1185

μᾶτερ τεκοῦσ'†

ἄλαστα μέλεα καὶ πέρα

παθοῦσα σῶν τέκνων ὑπαί.[277]

Through reference to the maternal role of the lioness, Euripides represents the
tragic bond between Clytemnestra and her daughter. Her maternal role, though
disrupted, is not denied, but rather reinforced by the vengeful nature of Electra.
The Chorus say, in fact, that Clytemnestra gave birth to and has to suffer because
of her children, who are defined as an ἄλαστα μέλεα, 'unforgettable horror'
(1187). The adjective ἄλαστος, ον, 'not to be forgotten, insufferable', in this
passage assumes a more complex connotation. It would have recalled the insults
of Achilles thrown against Hector before he kills him. When referring to persons,
the adjective can mean 'you whom I will never forget nor forgive' (*Il*. 22.261). By
drawing on the Homeric image of the lion, Euripides transfers the maternal role of
the lioness from Clytemnestra to Electra. As the cub of the violent, powerful and
vengeful lions, Electra convinces her brother and weaves a vengeful plan to kill
her mother. By blurring the dichotomies of life and death, danger and protection,
childbirth and violence, Euripides illustrates the tragic bond of Clytemnestra with
her cubs.

Euripides employs the lioness metaphor to depict another avenging
mother. In the *Bacchae*, Agave metaphorically takes on the maternal role of the
lioness to kill her son. By adapting the Homeric image of lion(ess) to the

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[277] *El*. Too many tears, o brother, I am the responsible. Due to my fury, I threw myself against my
mother, who gave me birth. *<Ch.>* O destiny, your destiny, mother you gave birth to horror, you
have to suffer an infinite unforgettable horror.

Dionysiac context of the play, Euripides evokes the lioness to illustrate the divine disruption of her relationship with Pentheus. As explained in the prologue, Dionysus arrives at Thebes not only to establish his cult against the decision of Pentheus to forbid his cult, but also to avenge his mortal and divine births. In the first lines of the tragedy, the god presents himself as the son of Zeus, but he specifies that it was Semele who gave him birth. The repeated uses of the noun μῆτερ, 'mother' (6, 9, 26, 41), and of the verb τίκτω, 'I give birth' (2, 42), emphasise the murderous intentions of Dionysus. With the aim of justifying his arrival to Thebes, the god tells the audience of the tragic death of his mother. As I have discussed in the Introduction (p. 27), Semele died in giving birth to Dionysus (3), and Zeus saved and sewed him in his own thigh. In the city of Semele's tomb, the daughters of Cadmus denied the divine intercourse of their sister with Zeus. In response to the disrespectful behaviour of his mortal aunts, Dionysus takes revenge, by disrupting the maternal role of Agave.

Through the image of the lioness (990) in the depiction of Agave, Euripides emphasises the tragic resemblance of her son to a lion cub. In the scene of transvestism, Dionysus convinces Pentheus to wear a κόμη, 'mane' (831), so that he can appear like a Maenad and join the Dionysiac rites. The attribute refers to the long hair that the worshippers of the god ἀμφιβάλλονται, 'throw around' (104). The female hair plays a tragic function, since it foreshadows the death of Pentheus by Agave's hands. As Dionysus says, before the beginning of the third *stasimon*, 'the ornament with which he will go to the underworld, after being slain by his mother, this ornament I will put on Pentheus' (857-8). Dionysus invites him to follow him and spy on the maenads, by saying: 'I am your guide and defence, but someone else will bring you back' (965-6). When Pentheus replies

with tragic irony: ἡ τεκοῦσά γε, 'yes, my mother will' (966), the god provides the first hint of his death.

By attributing the maternal role of the lioness to Agave, Euripides stages the accomplishment of Dionysus's revenge. The Messenger reports the slaughter of Pentheus by the hands of his mother, as follows (1131-3):

{Αγ.} […] ἦν δὲ πᾶσ' ὁμοῦ βοή,

ὁ μὲν στενάζων ὅσον ἐτύγχαν' ἐμπνέων,

αἱ δ' ὠλόλυζον. […][278]

In the fifth *stasimon*, the death of Pentheus is staged through acoustic details that confuse the boundaries between childbirth and war. During the ὀρειβασία, 'mountain dancing', a collective βοή (1131), 'shout', is raised. Without recognising her son, Agave incites the Bacchae to destroy the intruder. Before killing their prey, all cried together: Pentheus screamed with little breath and the women shrieked in triumph. The cry of the Bacchae is specifically defined as an ὀλολυγή (1133). The term, which means 'loud cry', could create a moment of suspense for the audience. According to Seaford (1996b:239), in ritual contexts it indicates the cry of women invoking a god (*Il*. 6.301), at the moment of the striking of the sacrificial victim. It is often a cry of triumph in war, but it is particularly used in reference to the maenads, both warriors and hunters. Euripides not only blends the cries of mother and son in the representation of the death of

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[278] *Me*. […] And all cried together, on the one hand he sighed until he could breathe and on the other they were raising the triumph-cry.

Pentheus, but also enriches the scene with the macabre details of the σπαραγμός, 'tearing'.

Playing with the image of the hair and the action of embracing, Euripides comments on the death of Pentheus. Agave is still unaware that the intruder they have caught and killed is her own son. With these words, she describes to the Chorus her prey (1185-8):

> {Αγ.} νέος ὁ μόσχος ἄρ-
>
> τι γένυν ὑπὸ κόρυθ' ἁπαλότριχα
>
> κατάκομον θάλλει.
>
> {Χο.} πρέπει γ' ὥστε θὴρ ἄγραυλος φόβαι.[279]

Since Agave's victory-prize is the head of the lion, she admires its haired crest, which the Chorus define as belonging to a θὴρ ἄγραυλος, 'beast dwelling in the field' (1188). According to Di Benedetto (2004:469-8), Euripides represents Agave carrying the head of the lion with tragic irony. From his perspective, the image would have recalled the representation of a mourning woman, who holds her dead offspring in her arms.[280] I argue that, by creating a confusion between the head of the lion and that of Pentheus, Euripides particularly refers to the maternal role of the Homeric lion(ess). The mane-beard of the lion cub does not convey the nobility of warriors, like Menelaus, Ajax and Achilles, in mourning scenes. It rather illustrates the Dionysiac disruption of the maternal bond of Agave with her

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[279] *Ag*. He is a young calf and just recently a beard has sprouted under his soft-haired crest. *Ch*. Yes he looks like a beast dwelling in the field, by his mane.

[280] Cf. Eur. *Supp*. 69-70, 276-7.

son. My argument concurs with Segal's (1982:180) reading. He argues that the detail of Pentheus' hair might have had an initiatory meaning in the *Bacchae*. In order to commemorate the birth of Dionysus, Agave prevents her son from ritually entering into the society of warriors. Her Dionysiac madness has made the head of Pentheus the sign of her vengeful act. However, the head of Pentheus in Agave's arms illustrates not only her violence in the scene of kin-killing. It also mediates the final scene of recognition, where Agave realises what she has done to her son.

The Bacchic possession of Agave terminates as soon as she enters the palace. Kadmos has arrived, followed by his attendants, with the dismembered corpse of Pentheus. At the beginning of the dialogue with her father, Agave is still unconscious and proud of her prey. The bereaved Kadmos, through a memory game, tries to make her see the head of the lion differently (1259-84). As soon as Agave recognises in her arms the head of Pentheus, she asks her father who actually killed him (1286). The suffering in realising that her son is dead reaches a tragic climax when she finds herself guilty. The recognition of her violent act is linguistically emphasised by the image of the lion cub. At the end of the tragedy, before Dionysus' prophecy, Kadmos calls Pentheus as an ἔρνος, 'young sprout' (1306). The term can mean 'shot up like a young plant',[281] and in the plural form it can also refer to the wreaths worn by victors in games.[282] In tragic contexts, the noun metaphorically indicates the 'offspring'.[283] As Seaford (1996b:245) argues, this metaphorical expression evokes the falling of men in battle, imagined as a

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[281] Hom. *Il*. 18.56, *Od*. 14.175.

[282] Pind. *Nem*. 11.29, *Isthm*. 1.29.

[283] Aesch. *Ag*. 1525, *Eum*. 661, 666; Soph. *OC* 1108.

tree struck down from the root (*Il*. 14.414-5). I would add that, by evoking the maternal role of the Homeric lion, Euripides shows the power, violence and protectiveness after childbirth of Agave. She does not react with violence against the hunters of her cub, but rather she catches and murders her son by bringing about loss and deprivation in her own family.

So, Attic dramatists metaphorically evoke the maternal role of the lioness to express the contradictory emotions behind the vengeful acts of their tragic heroines. By blurring the boundaries between protection and aggression, life and death, suffering and anger, they stage the Dionysiac self-destruction of the household. Aeschylus and Euripides draw on the image of the Homeric lion(ess), with the aim of representing the violent disruption of the relationship between avenging mothers with their offspring. The tragic lioness does not react to the loss of its cubs against the attack of potential hunters, but rather kills or abandons its cubs, by provoking the destruction of her family. In the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra is depicted as the mother of the female cub that the lion has sacrificed for the Trojan War. Split between suffering and anger for the death of Iphigenia, she kills her husband, thereby causing the return of Orestes. She is in fact also the mother of the male cub that commits matricide because of the vengeful temper of the House of Atreus. Unlike Aeschylus, Sophocles in his *Ajax* does not attribute the maternal role of the lioness to Tecmessa to transform her into a female avenger. By preserving the Homeric image of the lion(ess), he creates a dramaturgical moment of suspense, when Ajax is dead and the cub is endangered by the hunters. Tecmessa does not reveal violence and power to commit revenge, but she rather mediates the tragic passage from the suicide to the burial of Ajax. Similarly to Aeschylus, Euripides evokes the maternal role of the

lioness in the *Medea*. By referring to the Homeric tradition, he plays with the verbs of procreation and destruction in the depiction of Medea to stage her act of infanticide. With reference to the child-avenging fury of Achilles, he represents the tragic lioness in her disrupted relationship with her cubs. In his *Electra*, Euripides evokes the Homeric image of the lion(ess) to stage the matricide committed by Clytemnestra's cubs. Through a tragic reversal, Clytemnestra does not assume the maternal role of the lioness to commit vengeance. The feigned birth of Electra's son unfolds instead the tragic action towards the matricide. In the *Bacchae*, Agave confuses her son with a lion cub to commit kin-killing. Through the metaphorical association of the mane of the lion with the beard of Pentheus, Euripides illustrates the tragic passage from the misrecognition to the recognition of Agave as the mother of the lion cub. Employed as a dramaturgical device, the head of the lion represents the tragic disruption of the maternal bond of Agave in the fulfilment of Dionysus' vengeance.

2. 3   Conclusion

My analysis of the distinctive features of the lioness and its inherent contradictions has shed fresh light on the agency of avenging mothers in ancient Greek tragedy. When the tragic heroines are attributed the dangerous habitat, the hunting skills and the maternal role of the lioness, they are empowered to commit revenge within and against their household. By adapting the Homeric image of the lion to the Dionysiac context, Attic dramatists metaphorically transform tragic mothers into avenging lionesses. They mobilise metaphorical language and concepts, which create a sense of a constant tragic blurring of the motivational

drives that lead to female vengeance. Employed as a Dionysiac tool, the lioness-woman metaphor confuses the boundaries between the wild and the οἶκος, the hunter and the hunted, and war and childbirth in the tragic depiction of avenging mothers. As I have shown, the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Tecmessa, and the Euripidean Medea, Clytemnestra and Agave are captured linguistically and dramaturgically in their metaphorical metamorphoses into vengeful lionesses. Although Tecmessa does not commit vengeance, all the tragic heroines metaphorically assume the distinctive characteristics of the lioness. Its power, strength, courage, violence, on the one hand, and suffering, loss and protectiveness after childbirth, on the other, are combined to reveal the tragic humanity of their vengeful acts.

Clytemnestra is metaphorically transformed into a tragic lioness, because of her active avenging role in the House of Atreus. All the members of her family, namely Iphigenia (141), Orestes (717), Agamemnon (141, 827, 1259) and Aegisthus (1224), are compared to tragic lions in the *Agamemnon*. The lion, the lioness and the cubs are embedded in a murderous context, where intra-family vengeance occurs. Through the lioness image, Aeschylus could signal the dramatic passage from the sacrifice of Iphigenia to the death of Agamemnon. By assuming the violence, power, strength and the protectiveness of the Homeric lion, Clytemnestra dominates the *Agamemnon*. In order to emphasise the tragic contradictions behind her vengeful act, Aeschylus ambiguously plays with lioness imagery (1258). By starting with the sacrifice of the lion cub to the death of the lion, he confuses the boundaries between hunter and hunted, war and childbirth in key moments of the plot. The ambiguity of the metaphor could guide the audience towards Clytemnestra's vengeance, by creating a continuous sense of suspense.

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The lioness kills the lion because of the death of the female cub and is eventually killed by the male cub. By drawing on the Homeric image of the lion, Aeschylus does not invoke the dangerous habitat of the lioness. He rather locates Clytemnestra in the palace of Argos, where all the members of the lion family are involved in the vengeful chain of misdeeds. In order to avenge the death of Iphigenia and impose her political power with the support of Aegisthus, Clytemnestra metaphorically assumes the hunting skills of the lioness. Through the image of the net, Aeschylus creates a connection between all the members of the lion family involved in the pursuit of power, paternity issues and violence. The ambiguity of the lion metaphor reaches its apex in the prophecy of Cassandra. In her lamenting speech, she clearly reveals one of the two people responsible for Agamemnon's slaughter. By blurring the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, Aeschylus shifts the agency and power from the lion to the lioness. Clytemnestra shows the protectiveness after childbirth of the Homeric lion to justify her vengeful act with the sacrifice of Iphigenia. In the last episode of the tragedy, she responds to the accusations of the Chorus, by boasting about the fulfilment of her double vengeance against Agamemnon and Cassandra. Split between suffering and anger, she eventually kills her husband with the sword. The disruption of her maternal bond with her offspring is also evident in the parable of the lion cub that anticipates the arrival of Orestes. By revealing the vengeful temper of the male and female lion, the cub will come back home to commit the matricide. Thus, Clytemnestra enacting a metaphorical metamorphosis into a powerful, dangerous and violent lioness causes the destruction of her own household.

Sophocles employs the lioness-woman metaphor differently. In the *Ajax* (987), he metaphorically compares Tecmessa to a lioness, although she does not commit any act of revenge. However, Tecmessa plays a fundamental role in the tragedy revolving around the suicide of one of the most valiant Homeric heroes. She does not react to the suicide of Ajax, but rather she mediates the tragic implications of his death. By preserving the Homeric image of the lion(ess), Sophocles signals the dramaturgical passage from the first to the second part of the tragedy. He specifically attributes the maternal role of the lioness to Tecmessa, with the aim of creating a moment of suspense between the suicide of Ajax and the revenge of the Atreides. With the arrival of Teucer, Tecmessa realises the danger of having left her son alone. She shows the protectiveness after childbirth of the lioness, by leaving the stage and running to the tent. The lioness metaphor not only expresses the maternal bond of Tecmessa with Eurysaces, but also emphasises her bereavement and suffering after the death of Ajax. By blurring the boundaries between war and childbirth, Sophocles gives expression to the contradictory emotions behind the agency of Tecmessa. She shows her attachment to and compassion for Ajax, not only by understanding the real reasons of his suicide, but also by protecting his corpse from the Atreides. Thus, Sophocles entangles the image of the lioness and the lion cub in the tragedy of Ajax. Eurysaces does not play the role of avenger, but he supports his mother in the burial of his father. This image confirms that it is not the cub to be in danger, but it is the dead lion. Ajax is not compared to a lion, but the tragic implication of his death inevitably affects Tecmessa and Eurysaces. By metaphorically transforming Tecmessa into a lioness, Sophocles emphasises her mediating role in the passage from the death to the burial of Ajax.

In contrast, Euripides employs the lioness image in the depiction of Medea to stage her vengeance against Jason. By mediating the tragic contradictions of her vengeful behaviour, the lioness image occurs in four specific passages (*Med.* 187, 1342, 1358, 1407). Euripides draws on the Homeric image of the lion to illustrate the passage from the first intentions of Medea to kill her children to their burial. With particular attention to the reaction of Achilles to the death of Patroklos, he metaphorically transforms Medea into an avenging lioness. In her psychological transfiguration the boundaries between humanity and bestiality, masculinity and femininity, war and childbirth dramatically coincide. The lioness-woman metaphor is not activated by Euripides to denounce the bestiality, irrationality and cruelty of Medea's vengeance. Just as in the depiction of other avenging mothers, each reference to the lioness suggests a different perspective from which to analyse the psychological transformation enacted by Medea. From the perspective of the Nurse, she looks like a lioness that has just given birth and threatens with her gaze (187). The metaphor not only describes the dangerous environment of Jason's house, but it also anticipates the act of the infanticide. Split between suffering and anger, Medea weaves a vengeful plan against her husband, the new bride and the king of Corinth. The other references to the lioness occur at the end of the tragedy and are spoken by Jason and Medea. From the perspective of Jason she is a lioness who dared kill their children with the sword (1342, 1407). Medea has not satisfied her desire of vengeance, by killing Creon and Iole, through her magical powers. Her psychological metamorphosis into avenging lioness finds fulfilment just after the death of her sons. Assuming the hunting skills and the maternal role of the Homeric lion, Medea commits infanticide to make real the fears of Jason. In response to the insulting words of

her husband, she takes responsibility of the infanticide and admits her animal transformation. Before flying on the chariot of her grandfather towards Athens, she exults in being a vengeful lioness (1358). By revealing power, strength, violence, on the one hand, and loss, suffering and the protectiveness after childbirth, on the other, she accepts having killed her children. Thus, Euripides metaphorically evokes the lioness to humanise the transformation of Medea from the betrayal of Jason to the burial of her children.

Euripides metaphorically compares Clytemnestra to a lioness to transform her daughter into an avenging mother. After the death of Agamemnon, Electra weaves a vengeful plan and convinces Orestes to commit the matricide. The lioness-woman metaphor illustrates the reasons for Clytemnestra's revenge against Agamemnon, on the one hand, and her conflicting relationship with Electra, on the other. By confusing the boundaries between the wild and the οἶκος, the Chorus attribute the dangerous habitat of the lioness to Clytemnestra, in order to bring back to the memory the man-slaughter in the House of Atreus. Clytemnestra is depicted as a mountain lioness (*El.* 1162) that prowls in the meadowland, because of her extra-conjugal relationship with Aegisthus. By drawing on the Homeric image of the lion, Euripides emphasises the vengeful temper of Electra. She is represented as constantly condemning her mother for her erotic and political interests and considers the sacrifice of her sister Iphigenia just a pretext. In her monody, Electra recalls the death of her father by the hands of her mother. He fell to the vengeful plan woven by Clytemnestra with the support of Aegisthus. By referring to the Aeschylean version of the myth of Electra, Euripides does not employ the motif of the net to condemn the vengeance of Clytemnestra, but rather to anticipate her tragic death. By blurring the boundaries

between the hunter and the hunted, Euripides transfers the vengeful temper of Clytemnestra to her offspring. The contradictory aspect of the metaphor consists of confusing mother and daughter in their vengeful role. The former killed her husband to avenge the death of her daughter. The latter pretended to give birth, with the aim of killing her mother. Euripides metaphorically evokes the maternal role of the lioness, in order to emphasise the reversal between Clytemnestra and Electra in his play. Electra has been constrained to marry a man of humble origins, so that she could not give birth to a male avenger. In response to her limitations and constriction in her private life, she claims her identity as the daughter of the lion. By inviting her mother in her house, to celebrate the introduction of the infant, Electra reveals the vengeful temper of her parents. With a tragic reversal, Euripides gives agency and power to the female cub of the lioness.

In the *Bacchae*, Agave enacts a metaphorical metamorphosis into a tragic lioness to kill Pentheus and fulfil Dionysus' revenge. Through the lioness image, Euripides illustrates the tragic passage from the misrecognition to the recognition between mother and son. He adapts the Homeric image of the lion to the Dionysiac context, with the aim of revealing the tragic contradictions behind the unconscious act of kin-killing committed by Agave. It is Dionysus that unfolds the tragic action, by blurring the boundaries between the wild and the οἶκος, the hunter and the hunted, war and childbirth. As a form of punishment against his aunts who denied the sexual intercourse of his mother with Zeus, the god causes the self-destruction of his mortal family. The tragic confusion between the wild and the οἶκος is illustrated in the description of the dangerous habitat of the lioness, where female revenge is committed. Euripides particularly draws on the

Homeric habitat of the lion to stage the death of Pentheus. Located between the mountains and the meadowland, the lioness image displays the liminal position of Agave. She confuses her son with a mountain lion (1142), by urging the maenads to capture, kill and dismember him. As a result of the filicide, the body of Pentheus lies scattered in the meadowland (1138-1139). Through a tragic reversal, Agave reveals the power, strength and violence of the Homeric lion in situations of danger. However, because of the Dionysiac influence, she does not rear her cub in the mountains, but she rather confuses him with an intruder. Entrapped in the murderous net woven by Dionysus, Agave metaphorically assumes the hunting skills of the Homeric lion. She demonstrates her courage in the mountains, by capturing and killing Pentheus, without the aid of weapons, but only with her own hands. By blurring the dichotomies between war and childbirth, Euripides represents the disruption of the maternal bond of Agave with Pentheus. Employed as a dramaturgical device, the lioness metaphor leads the audience towards the final scene of recognition. It is Dionysus that gives long hair to Pentheus in order to resemble a maenad. By creating a connection between the mane of the lion and the head of Pentheus, Euripides emphasises the tragic madness of Agave. The head of the lion, which is the victory prize of Agave, plays a mediating function in the realisation of the filicide. Fixed on the thyrsus, the head of Pentheus is not a symbol of military power and strength in the depiction of Agave. Through a tragic reversal, it rather becomes the symbol of the self-destruction of her household.

From a posthumanist perspective, the lioness-woman metaphor is employed by Attic dramatists to express the tragic humanity of the agency of avenging mothers. When the lioness is metaphorically compared to tragic mothers, it does not univocally connote them with bestiality, irrationality and

cruelty. Adapted from the Homeric image of the lion, it rather empowers tragic mothers and reveals their contradictory gendered identity in revenge plots. Assuming both the female and male traits of the Homeric lion in key moments of tragic plays, avenging mothers are captured in their human contradictions. Through the lioness metaphor, Attic dramatists show their strength, power and violence, on the one hand, and suffering, loss and the protectiveness after childbirth, on the other, to provoke a tragic effect of pathos in the fifth-century Athenian audience. In fact, the lioness image does not give agency to female characters to fight against their enemies and defend their house. By enacting a metaphorical metamorphosis into vengeful lionesses, the tragic heroines dramatically bring about the self-destruction of their household. In the next chapter, I explore the metaphorical employment of the snake in the tragic depiction of female avengers. The image of the snake reveals the tragic contradictions of the deceptive behaviour of female characters in intra-familial conflicts. Attributed the secret habitat, the marauding skills and the kourotrophic role of the snake, tragic heroines are represented not only as committing but also as planning vengeance within and against their household.

CHAPTER 3

THE SNAKE

This chapter examines the metaphorical significance of the snake in the tragic depiction of deceitful avengers. Through analysis of snake imagery, I define the controversial identity of tragic women who make use of deceit to plan and commit vengeance within and against their household. My argument is that Attic dramatists metaphorically transform female characters into tragic snakes to express the human contradictions of their plans and acts of vengeance. This is evidenced in the metamorphic depiction of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Deianira and Ismene, and the Euripidean Hermione and Creusa. By playing the role of deceitful avengers, the tragic heroines are represented simultaneously as cunning, treacherous and fierce, and as guarding, vigilant and nurturing snakes. Employed as a Dionysiac device, the snake-woman metaphor signals the dramaturgical passage from the plotting to the punishment of vengeance in intra-familial conflicts.

3. 1   The deception of the tragic snake

The snake is one of the most deceptive animals employed metaphorically in the tragic depiction of female avengers. Whereas the lioness, as I have analysed in the previous chapter, captures tragic heroines in their vengeful empowerment, the snake is evoked as a deceitful image. Through the snake metaphor, Attic dramatists employ the motifs of ἀπάτη, 'guile', δόλος, 'treachery', and μῆτις,

'cunning',[284] to conceal and reveal female plans and acts of vengeance in their tragic plays. Mediated by the image of the snake, the tragic relationship between deception and vengeance needs explaining with the Dionysiac influence on female characterisation (see Introduction, pp. 35-6). Zeitlin (1992:76) argues that effective techniques were required to 'chart a path from ignorance to knowledge, deception to revelation, misunderstanding to recognition' in the theatre of Dionysus. She notes that the dramaturgical modes of 'entrapment and entanglement', through which tragic plots are successfully unfolded towards their resolution, were associated with the feminine Other. As Zeitlin states, 'women frequently control the plot and the activity of plotting, and manipulate the duplicities and illusions of the tragic world' (79). Provided with 'deviousness and duplicity' and the ability of 'weaving wiles and fabricating plots' (79), they play a fundamental role in displaying the ambiguities and tensions of the tragic self.

Referring to the Dionysiac context of tragic plays, Burnett (1998:XVII) argues that it is through 'plots, deceptions and disguises' that Attic dramatists could stage vengeful actions. From her perspective, they depict tragic characters as treacherous, double-dealing and violent, with the aim of creating suspense in a genre and society where revenge was not perceived as problematic. Through comparison between the Homeric and the tragic tradition, Burnett explains the dramatic productivity of deception in the depiction of vengeful characters. As she states, in the ritualised performances in honour of Dionysus, an avenger 'must use deception and in particular must wear some form of disguise' (4). By reversing the dynamics of vengeance, he/she employs deceitful skills to imitate the attack

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[284] On the semantics and significance of deception in classical Athens see, for instance, Vernant and Detienne, 1978; Hesk, 2000; Krentz, 2000:167-200.

once suffered and to become an agent of violence. However, Burnett does not see a clear distinction between the Homeric and the tragic representation of characters who through deception plot and commit vengeance. She specifically identifies Odysseus as the first literary example of the vengeful trickster. Defined πολύμητις, 'cunning in many ways', κερδαλέος, 'crafty', and ἐπίκλοπος, 'tricky',[285] Odysseus shows his deceptive nature in several Homeric episodes. For instance, he assumes the fallacious name Οὖτις, 'Nobody' (*Od.* 9.366), to deceive and take vengeance against Polyphemus. The final scene of Odysseus's vengeance against the suitors particularly 'presents elements of disguise, treachery, violence and recognition' (35), as Burnett says. From her point of view, the Homeric motifs of trickery, doubleness and destruction are adopted in the tragic characterisation of vengeful heroes/heroines, in conformity with the Dionysiac context of dramatic festivals. With particular attention to female characters, Burnett distinguishes heroic and anti-heroic cases of vengeance: whereas deception can lead cruel, selfish and guilty women towards death, it tricks innocent women into heroism (124).

In contrast to Burnett's reading, others have interpreted the deceptive behaviour of tragic heroines in revenge plots as problematic. As Foley (2001:330) states, deception, which was 'a standard negative characteristic of women in Attic thought', paradoxically assumes a positive valence in reference to female characters. She argues that because of its fictional potentiality female deception functioned as a dramaturgical device to stage both the accomplishment and the punishment of vengeance. According to McHardy (2008:61-3), the employment of the motifs of treachery, cunning and trickery in the tragic characterisation of

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[285] Hom. *Il*. 3.200-2; *Od*. 3.120-3, 9.19-20, 13.291-2.

female avengers is debatable. She notes that female characters are portrayed as being able to prevail, if they make use of deception or plot a vengeful plan in ancient Greek tragedy (37-42). Rosenbloom (2014b:268-70) also discusses the tragic employment of deceit, intrigue and cunning in female characterisation. By specifically referring to the depiction of Pandora (Hes. *Theog*. 588-9), he argues that women were considered to be deceitful by nature. As Rosenbloom states, this is confirmed by epic and tragic metaphors of 'weaving, the feminine activity *par excellence*, for treacherous plotting' (268). He explains that deception, in contrast to βία, 'force', 'enables physically weaker individuals and groups to defeat their physical superiors'. However, as a result of 'harsh reciprocity', deceit can lead tragic heroines towards a violent form of divine punishment. From his perspective, tricky-minded gods, such as Dionysus, Apollo and Athena, intervene to restore justice in vengeful dynamics.

By exploring the snake metaphor, I shed fresh light on the tragic depiction of deceitful avengers. The motif of deception should not be merely interpreted either as a positive or negative, masculine or feminine, heroic or anti-heroic instrument of vengeance in ancient Greek tragedy. Employed as a Dionysiac tool, the snake rather displays the contradictory nature of the deceptive behaviour of vengeful heroines. In the following sections, I combine classical studies on the snake species with gendered perspectives about myths of autochthony to determine the tragic effect triggered by the deceitful plans of female avengers in the theatre of Dionysus. I argue that, by drawing on dragon-slaying myths, Attic dramatists give expression to the contradictions between the causes and the effects of female vengeance in intra-familial intrigues. They attribute to avenging women

the double role of the slaying and the slain dragon to provoke a tragic effect of pathos in the fifth-century Athenian audience.

3. 1. 1   The gendered nature of the snake's deceit

I start exploring the dramatic significance of snake imagery in female characterisation by outlining its lexicon. Unlike the nightingale and the lioness, the snake is evoked through a range of names in ancient Greek tragedy. The terms denoting the tragic snake are ἑρπετόν, δράκων/δράκαινα, ὄφις, ἔχιδνα, ἀμφίσβαινα and ὕδρα. The variety of the terms which indicate the snake species needs justifying with its dangerous, frightening and aggressive nature. As Sancassano (1996:49-70) argues, the snake was never called through its real name, but rather through alternative periphrastic names. In correspondence with the Roman noun *serpens* (*DELL*, 619), the neuter noun ἑρπετόν, 'serpent', etymologically derives from the verb ἕρπω, which in Doric and Aeolic dialects connotes the slow movement of animals. In addition to its creeping and imperceptible movement, the etymology of the terms denoting the snake reveals its instruments of violence. For instance, the masculine noun δράκων, 'dragon', probably develops from the verb δέρκομαι,[286] which means 'I see clearly, I have sight',[287] but it can also refer to the 'flashing' fire of the eyes.[288] The feminine noun δράκαινα, 'she-dragon', is a derivative noun from the root of the masculine noun δράκων. According to Sancassano, just as in the formation of other feminine

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[286] *EM* 286,7; *EG* 151,55.

[287] Hom. *Il*. 17.675; Aesch. *Eum*. 34; Soph. *OT* 454; *El*. 66.

[288] Hom. *Od*. 19.446; Aesch. *Sept*. 53.

nouns like λέαινα, 'lioness', ὕαινα, 'hyena', ἀλεκτρύαινα, 'hen', and σύαινα, 'sow', the suffix –αινα connotes dangerous and uncanny animals.

Apart from its flashing gaze, the snake was considered as a dangerous, threatening and deadly animal because of its poisonous bite. In fact, the masculine noun ὄφις in the *Suda* (*o* 1007 A) is associated with ἰός, 'venom'. In Pollux's *Onomasticon* (7.120, 6) the term does not specifically indicate the 'snake', but related to the domestic cult and the protection of family means 'shelter'. The feminine noun ἔχιδνα, 'viper', which is a compound noun of ἔχω, 'I have', and ἰός, 'venom',[289] probably develops from the masculine noun ἔχις.[290] This is a correlative noun of ὄφις, because of the phonetic passage of the vowel /o/ into /ε/ and of the consonant /φ/ into /χ/ (*DELG*, 392). According to the *Suda* (*e* 415 A), the ἔχις is a serpent that gives birth to humans instead of eggs. Furthermore, the feminine noun ἀμφίσβαινα, as a compound of the epic adverb ἀμφίς, 'on both sides', and the verb βαίνω, 'I go', defines that snake species provided with a head on its tail.[291] The noun probably develops from the verb ἀμφιβαίνω, which has the general meaning of 'going around', but can also mean 'I protect' in the description of tutelary deities.[292] Finally, the feminine noun ὕδρα, which generally means 'water-serpent', specifically denotes the Lernaean monster slain by Heracles.[293]

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[289] *EM* 404,38.

[290] The masculine noun ἔχις, which corresponds to the male species of the viper, does not occur in ancient Greek extant tragedies.

[291] Aesch. *Ag*. 1233; Nic. *Ther*. 372.

[292] Hom. *Il*. 1.27; Aesch. *Sept*. 175.

[293] Hes. *Theog*. 313; Soph. *Trach*. 574, 836, 1094, Eur. *Heracl*. 950, *Phoen*. 1136.

This linguistic and etymological analysis implies that the snake was identified and named on the basis of its morphology and instruments of violence in ancient Greek tragedy. With only one exception, all the terms indicating the snake are employed in reference to both male and female characters who make use of deceit in tragic plays. The neuter noun ἑρπετόν, which generally means 'a beast which goes on all fours',[294] but specifically 'a creeping thing, reptile',[295] occurs only once in reference to an actual snake.[296] The masculine noun δράκων, which generally indicates the 'snake', but specifically a 'dragon', is mainly employed in male characterisation. It denotes tragic heroes,[297] but also decorative snakes.[298] In addition, the noun occurs in the description of mythological dragons,[299] the god Dionysus,[300] and the metamorphosis of Cadmus into a

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[294] Hom. *Il*. 17.447, *Od*. 4.418.

[295] Pind. *Pyth*. 1.25; Theoc. *Id*. 24.57.

[296] Eur. *Andr*. 269.

[297] The tragic heroes metaphorically associated with the δράκων are Aegisthus (Aesch. *Cho*. 1047), the Aegyptians (Aesch. *Supp*. 511), Hippomedon (Aesch. *Sept*. 503), Orestes (Aesch. *Cho*. 527, 549; Eur. *Or*. 479, 1424), Pylades (Eur. *Or*. 1406), the Thebans (Aesch. *Sept*. 291; Eur. *Phoen*. 1138; *Supp*. 579), Tydeus (Aesch. *Sept*. 381) and Xerxes (Aesch. *Pers*. 82).

[298] See the dragon on the shield of Adrastus (Eur. *Phoen*. 1315) and on Cadmus' vessel (Eur. *IA* 257).

[299] The mythological monsters associated with the dragon are: the river Achelous (Soph. *Trach*. 12), the dragon of Colchis slain by Jason (Eur. *Med*. 480), the dragon of Thebes slain by Cadmus (Soph. *Ant*. 126, 1125; Eur. *HF* 253; *Phoen*. 232, 657, 820, 935, 941, 1011, 1062; *Bacch*. 1026), Echion, the father of Pentheus (Eur. *Bacch*. 539, 1155), the guardians of the Hesperides slain by Heracles (Soph. *Trach*. 1100; Eur. *HF* 398), Typhon (Eur. *IT* 1245) and the snakes sent by Athena to protect Erichthonius (Eur. *Ion* 23).

[300] Eur. *Bacch*. 101, 1018.

snake.[301] The term is also applied to tragic heroines,[302] and denotes serpentine objects[303] and mythological monsters.[304] The feminine noun δράκαινα, which indicates the 'she-dragon', occurs only in female characterisation. It is specifically used in reference to Clytemnestra,[305] the Erinyes[306] and the metamorphosis enacted by Harmonia into a snake.[307] The masculine noun ὄφις, which generally indicates the species of the 'serpent', is employed in the depiction of tragic characters,[308] but also in reference to actual and decorative snakes,[309] and mythological monsters.[310] The term also occurs in female characterisation: it is used in reference to serpentine objects of tragic heroines,[311] but also in the

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[301] Eur. *Bacch*. 1330, 1358.

[302] The tragic heroines associated with the δράκων are Clytemnestra (Aesch. *Cho*. 1047) and Creusa (Eur. *Ion* 1263).

[303] See the snakes in the depiction of the Bacchae (Eur. *Bacch*. 768) and the serpentine pendant given by Creusa to Ion (Eur. *Ion* 1427).

[304] The mythological monsters associated with the dragon are: the Erinyes (Aesch. *Cho*. 1050; Eur. *El*. 1256, 1345, *Or*. 256), the Gorgon (Eur. *Ion* 1015) and Hydra (Soph. *Trach*. 834).

[305] Eur. *IT* 286.

[306] Aesch. *Eum*. 128.

[307] Eur. *Bacch*. 1358.

[308] The tragic heroes metaphorically compared to the ὄφις are the Egyptian herald (Aesch. *Supp*. 895), Orestes in the dream of Clytemnestra (Aesch. *Cho*. 544, 928) and Pentheus, as born from the anguiform Echion (Eur. *Bacch*. 1026).

[309] See the serpent of Crises that bit Philoctetes (Soph. *Phil*. 1328) and the snakes in the decoration of the shield of Hippomedon (Aesch. *Sept*. 495).

[310] The mythological monsters associated with the serpent are: the dragon of Thebes (Eur. *Supp*. 703) and the snakes sent by Hera to Heracles infant (Eur. *HF* 1266).

[311] See the snaky-belts of the Bacchants (Eur. *Bacch*. 698) and the serpentine necklace and the woven robe given by Creusa to Ion (Eur. *Ion* 25, 1423).

description of mythological monsters[312] and the metamorphosis of Harmonia.[313] The feminine noun ἔχιδνα, which generally indicates poisonous snakes, specifically corresponds to the female species of the 'viper'. The term is metaphorically applied to the Egyptian herald,[314] but it also denotes actual and decorative snakes,[315] and the mythological dragon of Thebes.[316] When it comes to the use of the noun ἔχιδνα in female characterisation, it occurs in comparison to tragic heroines,[317] but it also denotes the mythological monster Echidna slain by Heracles.[318] Furthermore, the feminine noun ἀμφίσβαινα, a snake species 'supposed to go either forwards or backwards', occurs only once in female characterisation.[319] Finally, the feminine noun ὕδρα, which generally indicates a 'water-serpent', is specifically employed in reference to the mythological monster Hydra slain by Heracles.[320]

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[312] The mythological monsters associated with the snake are: the Erinyes (Aesch. *Eum*. 181) and the Gorgon (Eur. *HF* 883).

[313] Eur. *Bacch*. 1331.

[314] Aesch. *Supp*. 896.

[315] See the serpent that bit Philoctetes (Soph. *Phil*. 267, 632), and the serpentine ornaments on the shield of Adrastus (Eur. *Phoen*. 1135) and around the aegis of Athena (Eur. *Ion* 993).

[316] Eur. *Phoen*. 1020.

[317] The tragic heroines associated with the ἔχιδνα are Clytemnestra (Aesch. *Cho*. 249, 994; Eur. *IT* 287), Deianira (Soph. *Trach*. 771), Ismene (Soph. *Ant*. 531), Hermione (Eur. *Andr*. 271), Creusa (Eur. *Ion* 1233, 1262) and the potential step-mother of Alcestis' sons (Eur. *Alc*. 310).

[318] Soph. *Trach*. 1099.

[319] The tragic heroine metaphorically compared to the ἀμφίσβαινα is Clytemnestra (Aesch. *Ag*. 1233).

[320] Soph. *Trach*. 836, 1094; Eur. *Heracl*. 950, *HF* 152, 421, 579, 1188, 1275, *Ion* 191, *Phoen*. 1136,

The polysemous identity and the gendered ambivalence of the snake make its employment in the tragic depiction of deceitful avengers significant. Applied to tragic characters who through deception plot and commit vengeance, the lexicon of the snake presents relevant differences from the Homeric tradition. First of all, whereas only the male species of the δράκων[321] is evoked in Homer, both male and female species of the snake, namely the δράκων/δράκαινα, the ὄφις, the ἔχιδνα, the ἀμφίσβαινα and the ὕδρα, occur in ancient Greek tragedy. Despite the grammatical gender of the terms denoting the snake, Attic dramatists employ various species in tragic characterisation. Secondly, whereas the Homeric snake occurs only in male characterisation, in ancient Greek tragedy the snake is used in reference to both male and female characters. As in the case of the lion/ess, Attic dramatists distinguish the female from the male species of the snake in tragic characterisation. Thirdly, whereas in Homer the she-snake never occurs, Attic dramatists introduce specific terms denoting the female counterpart of the snake, namely the ἔχιδνα, the δράκαινα, the ἀμφίσβαινα and the ὕδρα. With the exception of ἔχιδνα, which is also applied to tragic heroes, feminine nouns are specifically employed in female characterisation. Finally, whereas the Homeric snake is evoked to describe vengeful confrontations on the battlefield, the tragic snake occurs in the staging of intra-family cases of vengeance. Just like the lioness, the female snake is metaphorically involved in the vengeful dynamics of the house of the male snake. Transferred from the battlefield to the household, snake imagery gives expression to the cycle of violence, where both tragic heroes and heroines devise and enact violent acts of vengeance. I turn now to consider

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[321] Hom. *Il*. 2.308; 3.33, 11.26, 39; 12.202, 220; 22.93; *Od*. 4.457.

dragon-slaying myths to define the avenging role played by deceitful characters in ancient Greek tragedy.

3. 1. 2. Dragon-slaying myths

Previous scholars have identified metaliterary references to the Homeric tradition to explain the vengeful connotations of the snake in tragic characterisation. For instance, the representation of the sacrifice of Iphigenia in the *parodos* of the *Agamemnon* has been interpreted in the light of the Homeric prophecy of the snake eating the sparrows (*Il*. 2.308-16). According to Seaford (1989:87-95), through a tragic reversal, sacrifice and portent are merged to recall the act of kin-killing committed by Agamemnon. From his perspective, since in Homer cases of homicide within the family and animal sacrifices are absent, it is significant how Aeschylus represents the cycle of revenge in the House of Atreus. Seaford argues that, whereas in Homeric prophecies the snake assumes a 'positive role', in the *Oresteia* it foretells the 'negative' implications of the perverted sacrifice of Iphigenia (87). The connection between the Homeric and the tragic snake has been also identified in the representation of the dream of Clytemnestra in the *Choephoroi*. According to Whallon (1958:271-5), the serpent at the breast is 'a multivalent representation of love replaced by cruelty in the relationship between a mother and her child'. Particularly referring to the Homeric depiction of Hecuba, who uncovers her breast to express her maternal concerns before the confrontation of Hector with Achilles (*Il*. 22.82-3), he interprets the snake in the dream of Clytemnestra as a false omen.

In contrast, O'Neill (1998:221) argues that the dream of the serpent at the breast is an ironic image to depict Orestes as 'the unnatural child of a normal, i.e., human, mother'. He specifically compares the dream of Clytemnestra with the Homeric depiction of Hector before his duel with Achilles (*Il.* 22.92-7). Whereas the snake-like Hector waits to confront his enemy, who has threatened his father with death, Orestes confronts his mother to avenge the death of his father. Thus, O'Neill recasts the comparison between the Homeric and the tragic employment of the snake; Clytemnestra is not the correlative character of Hecuba, but she rather plays the role of Achilles in her conflicting relationship with Orestes. Heath (1999a:396-407) also identifies the connection between the Homeric and the tragic snake in the dream of Clytemnestra. From his perspective, Aeschylus employs the snake to represent 'the entanglement and ceaseless coils of the cursed house, of the old system of vengeful justice' (1999b:31). With particular attention to the final scene of the *Choephoroi*, he states that the snake could express 'the dangerous complexity of the intertwining of beast and human in the royal household'.

However, a comparison with the Homeric tradition is not sufficient to justify the vengeful nature of the she-snake in ancient Greek tragedy. Attic dramatists do not merely refer to the Homeric snake in order to connote tragic heroines with deception and violence in revenge plots. They rather draw on dragon-slaying myths to build up the tragic characterisation of deceitful avengers. Defined by Ogden (2013a:XVII) as a supernatural creature or under the control of supernatural powers, the δράκων is a 'large snake, huge, […] marauding, man-eating and fiery'. Odgen distinguishes 'anguiform' monsters, creatures 'wholly or partially of snake form or capable of manifesting' themselves in form of snake,

from 'anguipede' monsters, creatures that combine 'a humanoid upper half with serpentine lower half', such as snake tails or heads. As the snake was believed to come not only from the earth, but also from the sea, Odgen adds the species of the κῆτος, a 'sea monster, marine cousin to the δράκων'. For instance, Scylla, the sea-monster challenged by Odysseus and slain by Heracles, belongs to this category. Considered with Charybdis the most dangerous monster for sailors (Hom. *Od.* 12.112-25), it was imagined with fish-tail and serpentine body, flashing eyes and triple rows of teeth.

The categorisation provided by Odgen does not refer only to the physicality of anguiform monsters, but also provides details about their instruments of violence against their slayers. Equipped with fiery gaze, venomous blood and coiling moves, mythological dragons are involved in battles with gods, heroes and other monsters. Despite their strength, treachery, poisonousness and violence, they are eventually slain by mortal and divine masters/mistresses. As Ogden (2013b:178-83) states, dragon-slaying myths could serve as means of explanation for the institution of heroic cults and the foundation of cities in the classical world. These consist of a 'symmetrical battle' between a dragon defending a sacred territory, and a hero who wants to conquer it (215). After his/her death, the dragon leaves a 'memorial' or 'an act of compensation', which gives recognition to his/her slaying hero. Accompanied by a set of ritual traditions, the memorialisation of its slaughter casts the δράκων 'in the role of a slain hero'. By drawing on Odgen's analysis, I argue that Attic dramatists retell dragon-slaying myths in their tragic plays in order to give expression to the contradictory gendered identity of deceitful avengers. They attribute both the roles of the slaying and the slain dragon to female characters who through deceit

accomplish their plans of vengeance. Just like serpentine monsters, tragic heroines are represented, on the one hand, as treacherous and violent, and, on the other, as protective and nurturing in intra-familial vengeful conflicts.

3. 1. 3. From monstrosity to autochthony

My reading of the snake-woman metaphor is supported by gendered perspectives about myths of autochthony. The snake is tragically connected to Dionysus, whose Phrygian cult was probably included in Athenian religion in the classical period.[322] In Dionysiac rites, it was said that the Bacchants were trained to handle snakes in order to communicate with the god.[323] Moreover, as I have noted in the Introduction (p. 29), the snake is one of the animal forms that Dionysus assumes in his divine metamorphoses. In the *parodos* of the *Bacchae*, the Chorus narrate the birth of the god. Generated by the female womb of Semele and delivered through the divine thigh of Zeus, baby Dionysus was crowned with snakes (101-102). During the ὀρειβασία, 'mounting dance', the snake, as the medium between the god and the Bacchants, plays a significant role. It becomes part of the costumes worn by the worshippers of Dionysus, who are depicted with 'snaky belts' (698). Before starting their frantic dance, the Maenads pull out their hair and knot their dappled skins. The snakes are described as coiling from the waist of the Bacchants up to their cheeks and ears in sign of purification (768).

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[322] Plut. *Alex*. 2.9; Strab. 10.3, 15; Non. *Dion*. 9.11-4.

[323] For the connection of the snake with Dionysus see Dodds, 1951:335-6; Seaford, 1996b:160; Thumiger, 2006:195; Susanetti, 2010:169.

In the *Bacchae,* the snake is not only connected to the Dionysiac cult, but it also explains the mythological foundation of Thebes. As the Messenger reports in the fifth episode, Cadmus founded the city of the worshippers of Dionysus, by slaying the dragon of Ares (1026). The king of Thebes, who has forbidden the cult of the god, is also connected to the snake. Pentheus was born from the sexual union of Agave with Echion, a serpentine monster (539, 1155). His death is followed by the metamorphoses of Cadmus (1330, 1358) and Harmonia (1331, 1358) into snakes. As Seaford (1994:235-80) notes, Thebes is the city where maenadism leads to the self-destruction of the household. From his perspective, the chaos created by the sacrifice of the Theban family brings about the political recognition of the cult of Dionysus. I would add that the image of the snake justifies the vengeful dynamics of the mortal family of the god with the foundation of Thebes. By intertwining the animal, the human and the divine worlds, Euripides recalls the autochthonous origin of the Dionysiac city.

Meanwhile, the founding myth of Athens has been explained in the light of the connection between Athena and the anguiform heroes of Attica.[324] The anguipede king Cecrops helped Athena to win against Poseidon the patronage over Athens for having brought the olive tree. The earth-born Erichthonius was the result of the failed attempt of Hephaistus to rape Athena. After raising up the child from the earth, the goddess put him in a chest under the protection of two snakes and gave him to the daughters of Cecrops. This is the version that Euripides creates in the *Ion* to involve Athena in the explanation of the foundation

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[324] For the connection between Athena and the anguiform heroes of Attica, see Jerram, 1896; Powell, 1906; Owen, 1939; Mikalson, 1976:141-53; Rosivach, 1987:294-306; Zacharia, 2003; Pellegrino, 2004; Cole, 2008:313-15; Calame, 2011:1-19.

of the Ionian race. From Loraux's (1993) perspective, the goddess does not merely assume a procreative role in the birth of the city that takes her name, but she becomes the 'nurse, father and mother' of all the Athenians (8). As the guardians of the Acropolis, where the festival of the Panathenaea was celebrated in honour of Athena, the anguiform heroes Cecrops, Erichthonius and Erechtheus give evidence of the autochthonous origin of Athens. Shapiro (1998:127-52) discusses the concept of autochthony from the archaic to the classical age, by focusing on iconographic sources. He argues that in Athens the self-representation of aristocratic families was replaced by the celebration of the hegemony in the sea Aegeum, after the end of the Peisistrads' tyranny. From his perspective, the claim of autochthony, through which the Athenians could demonstrate their noble origin, is not though a political construction of the fifth century BC. The relationship between Athena and the heroes of Attica is attested since Homer.[325] The difference rather consists in the fact that Athena nurtures Erechtheus in the epic and Erichthonius in the tragic version of the origin of Athens. Despite the unclear relationship between Erechtheus and Erichthonius, Shapiro argues that the concept of autochthony was promoted in the classical period through the nurturing role of Athena.[326]

I argue that, in the passage from the Homeric to the tragic tradition, dragon-slaying myths were retold in a Dionysiac fashion. With the aim of celebrating the autochthonous origin of Athens, Attic dramatists actively involve snake-like deceitful heroines alongside mythological dragons and deities

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[325] Hom. *Il*. 2.547-9; see also Parker, 1987:187-214; Deacy, 2008:118.

[326] For a maternal interpretation of Athena's relationship with Erichthonius, see Deacy, 2008; 2010:56-64.

connected to anguiform heroes. They attribute to female characters both the role of the slaying and the slain dragon to provoke a tragic effect of pathos in the fifth-century Athenian audience. Therefore, the metaphorical employment of the tragic snake in female characterisation should not be merely read as a symbol of monstrosity, treachery and cruelty. It rather reveals the tragic implications of female deception in plays staging the self-destruction of the household. As I show in the following sections, the snake is evoked to capture the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Deianira and Ismene, and the Euripidean Hermione and Creusa in their metaphorical metamorphoses into deceitful avengers.

3. 2.   The metaphorical metamorphoses of deceitful avengers

Classical scholars have widely discussed the gendered contradictions of the deceptive behaviour of female avengers in ancient Greek tragedy. However, they have overlooked the dramatic significance of the snake-woman metaphor in revenge plots. Through analysis of snake imagery, I shed fresh light on the controversial identity of tragic women who through deceit plan and commit vengeance within and against their household. I argue that Attic dramatists evoke the snake in key moments of their plays to express the tragic humanity of the vengeful plans and acts of female characters. When tragic heroines are compared to deceitful snakes, they are imagined to entangle but to be eventually entangled in intra-family vengeful intrigues. Because of their deceiving plans of vengeance, the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Deianira and Ismene, and the Euripidean Hermione and Creusa are metaphorically compared to tragic snakes.

Aeschylus employs the snake metaphor to conceal and reveal the deceitful identity of Clytemnestra in the cycle of revenge of her household. As I have discussed in the previous chapter (p. 152), the motif of deception was not an Aeschylean innovation, when considering the Homeric depiction of Clytemnestra. In the dialogue with Odysseus in the underworld, Agamemnon defines his adulterous wife as δολόμητις, 'crafty of counsel' (*Od*. 11.422). By preserving the Homeric tradition, Aeschylus represents Clytemnestra as a deceitful avenger who plots with her lover against her husband in the *Agamemnon*. The gendered contradictions of the deceptive behaviour of Clytemnestra in the vengeful dynamics of the House of Atreus have been hotly debated. According to Goldhill (1986:37), she represents the transgression of the patriarchal system, because of her deceptive speeches, manipulative actions and sexual corruption. He defines the combination of these aspects as a 'monstrous reversal of the female role' (40). Focusing on the *Choephoroi,* Burnett (1998:113) reads the death of Clytemnestra as a tragic case of deception, disguise and divine help. Sanctioned by Apollo, the matricide committed by Orestes and Electra reveals the vengeful implications of the employment of deception in intra-family conflicts. As Foley (2001:230) states, 'Clytemnestra at once recognises the *talio* at work in the reciprocal exchange of deceit: she will die by a trick just as she killed through deception'. By transferring the motif of treachery from mother to son, Aeschylus stages the death of the former by the hands of the latter. Chesi (2014:186) rejects a negative interpretation of the deceitful identity of Clytemnestra and reconstructs instead her complex and multi-faceted representation. She argues that her portrayal as 'an adulterous wife, usurper of Agamemnon's male power' does not deny her 'maternal function of giving and nurturing life'. The act of matricide rather

intensifies the vengeful role of Clytemnestra, who sends the anguiform Erinyes to persecute Orestes in the *Eumenides*. By blurring the tragic dichotomies between humanity and non-humanity, masculinity and femininity, life and death, Clytemnestra plays the role of the deceiving and the deceived avenger of her own household.

Sophocles evokes the snake in the depiction of another tragic heroine who through deception devises and commits vengeance against her husband. In order to defend her marriage, Deianira sends a poisoned robe to Heracles by causing his death. The motif of deception in the *Trachiniae* has raised many questions about the gendered contradictions of her vengeful plan and act. Focusing on the semantics of knowledge, Di Benedetto (1988:141-60) argues that Deianira aims at the discovery of the truth as an innovative female figure. She does not protect her house in a traditionalist way, but violently reacts to her fears, uncertainty and concerns about her marriage. Hicks (1992:77-84) justifies the gendered ambivalence in the representation of Deianira's revenge with the dramatic rule of the three actors. The fact that the same actor might have been assigned both the roles of Deianira and Heracles explains the representation of their sexual conflict. Segal (1995:69) argues that the reversal of gender roles in the relationship between Heracles and Deianira needs connecting with a perverted form of ritual marriage. As he states, 'the transgression of the rights of the marriage bed turns back upon the transgressor, in this case Heracles, with a series of reversals that are symmetrical with his violations of the marriage'. Similarly, Bowman (1999:345-6) reads the conflict between Heracles and Deianira in terms of gender reversal. Deianira makes use of the magical potion of Nessus in the attempt to 'reassert over her husband the female sexual power she had at the time of her marriage'.

However, the story of the poisoned robe sent by Deianira to Heracles is not a Sophoclean innovation, when considering its epic and lyric versions. Rodighiero (2004:191-2) argues that in Hesiod (fr. 25,14-33 M-W) the blood of Nessus is defined as φάρμακον, 'drug', which excludes its magic properties in love affairs. Carawan (2000:189-237) suggests that the Sophoclean characterisation of Deianira developed not only from Hesiod, but also from Bacchylides (2). Through the interweaving of her 'innocent intentions with dubious knowledge' (227), Sophocles emphasises the tragic burden of Deianira after the death of her husband. By taking on the role of a treacherous, jealous and violent wife, Deianira weaves a vengeful plan that results destructive not only for her own family, but also for herself. When she realises the disastrous results of her vengeance, she takes responsibility by committing suicide.

Sophocles employs the snake-woman metaphor differently in the *Antigone*. Entangled in the vengeful intrigues of her household, Ismene is accused of conspiracy, treachery and transgession by Creon. Although she does not actually participate in the burial of Polynices, she is condemned to death like her sister. In order to defend his political power in the city of Thebes, Creon eventually causes and witnesses the destruction of his own household. The dramatic role of Ismene has been hotly debated regarding her participation in the vengeful act committed by Antigone. Her involvement in the burial of Polynices is affirmed for example by Whitehorn (1983:131), who states that Ismene helps Antigone to lift the corpse of their brother. By contrast, Rothaus (1990:209) argues that Ismene plays a minor role in the tragedy of Antigone. From his perspective, 'Ismene's complicity in the crime is desired, not actual'. Kirkpatrick (2011) identifies the gendered contradictions behind the unheroic weakness of

Ismene. As she states, the duplicitous character of Ismene consists in the 'undaring defiance that is timorously attuned to power […] and capable of cunning' (403). By focusing on her relationship with Antigone, Kirkpatrick argues that Ismene has 'strong incentives to act furtively' (402), because of her 'unmanly resistance' to the dynamics of power (404). She pretends to have participated in the crime to share the responsibility with her sister and to protect her from the punishment of their uncle. Whereas Antigone stands on the side of nature in her transgressive act against Creon, Ismene is aware of its political implications in the city of Thebes. By blurring the dichotomies between nature and culture, masculinity and femininity, heroism and anti-heroism, Ismene plays more than a minor role in mediating the consequences of the burial of Polynices.

Meanwhile, Euripides compares the snake to Hermione who employs deception to protect vengefully her household in the *Andromache*. Because of her helplessness, jealousy and anger, Hermione attempts to kill deceitfully Andromache and her stepson Molossus. Terrified by the reaction of her husband, she first shows her suicidal intentions and then escapes with Orestes. According to Boulter (1966:51-8), the treacherous characterisation of Hermione needs referring to the Homeric depiction of Helen. Her conflict with Andromache reveals the unity of the Euripidean tragedy that leads towards the death of Neoptolemus. Craik (1979:62-5) confirms the literary connection between Helen and Hermione, by commenting on the tragic employment of the pejorative adjective Λάκαινα, 'Laconian woman' (486). As she suggests, Euripides specifically refers to the manipulative, defiant and unfaithful nature of Helen to build up the vengeful characterisation of Hermione. Rejecting an anti-Spartan interpretation, Storey (1989:16-27) reads the depiction of Hermione as a tragic case of domestic

disharmony. With particular attention to the lexicon of the οἶκος, he illustrates the contrast between the Homeric marriage between Hector and Andromache, and the disrupted relationship between Hermione and Neoptolemus. By identifying Neoptolemus as the central character of the *Andromache*, Mossman (1996:148) argues that 'the destruction of the defendant's *oikos* and his dependents in the event of his conviction is made a prominent part of the plea'. With an '*oikos-focus*', she justifies the tragic role of Neoptolemus as the 'cause and centre of the quarrel' between Hermione and Andromache. Creating false expectations for the vengeful arrival of Neoptolemus, Euripides leads the audience towards his death by Orestes' hands. Kyriakou (1997:7-26) also sees family affairs like the conflict between wife and concubine as playing a unifying role in the *Andromache.* As she states, 'unable to establish a solid, affectionate relationship with her husband and so far proven barren, Hermione has remained a stranger to her new home' (11). Chong-Gossard (2003:209-31) identifies the gendered contradictions of the depiction of Hermione in her lyrical songs. He argues that the songs of resistance raised by Euripidean heroines like Hermione do not express orders, but rather 'slavery, exile, and near-death experiences' (209). With particular attention to the raving reaction of Hermione to the failure of her plan of revenge, he emphasises the tragic representation of her suicidal intentions. Rather than signifying a female lack of power, the lyrical songs of Hermione foretell the impending doom of Neoptolemus. Able to blur the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, suffering and anger, deception and truth, Hermione leads towards the recognition of the Molossian race.

Euripides evokes the snake in reference to another tragic heroine who through deception tries to commit vengeance against her stepson. By involving

Apollo in his version of the myth of the autochthony of Athens, he emphasises the maternal bond of Creusa with Ion. According to Burnett (1962:89-103), Creusa is given a positive role in contraposition with Apollo, who first rapes and convinces her to expose Ion, and then deceives her about Xuthos' paternity. Loraux (1993) interprets instead the ambivalent identity of Creusa with reference to Athena and her role in Athenian myths of autochthony. As she notes, among 'the children of Athena', the descendants of Erechtheus were all male, apart from the autochthonous Creusa, who is depicted as 'a woman acting like a man' (193) in the *Ion*. In contrast to Loraux' reading, Calame (2011:1-19) argues that Creusa is not the only autochthonous daughter of Erechtheus. With particular reference to the Euripidean fragmentary *Erechtheus*, he explores the role of Praxithea and her daughters in the construction of Athenian ideology. Just like Erechtheus' wife, Creusa is embedded in the mythological, political and religious context of fifth century Athens to celebrate its autochthonous origin. Depicted as παρθένος and γυνή, victim and aggressor, deceptive and deceived, she assumes a central role in the Euripidean version of the origin of the Ionian race.

Informed and influenced by the posthumanist perspective suggested by Braidotti (see Introduction, pp. 49-54), I open up new perspectives on the interpretation of the controversial depiction of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Deianira and Ismene, and the Euripidean Hermione and Creusa. Through analysis of the specific tragic passages, in which the snake-woman metaphor occurs, I restructure the tragic boundaries of masculinity and femininity, humanity and animality, body and mind that blur in their metamorphic characterisation. By adopting the posthumanist concept of metamorphosis defined by Braidotti, I argue that Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides metaphorically

transform their tragic heroines into snakes to express the human contradictions of their vengeful plans and acts. As I show in the following sections, Clytemnestra, Deianira, Ismene, Hermione and Creusa are compared to the snake in the dramaturgical passage from the plotting to the punishment of their vengeance. They are attributed the secret habitat, the marauding skills and the kourotrophic role of the snake, so that the tragic action can be unfolded towards the Dionysiac self-destruction of the household. Through the reconstruction of the metaphorical metamorphoses enacted by the tragic heroines into snakes, I demonstrate the effect of pathos that their vengeful plans and actions would have triggered in the theatre of Dionysus.

3. 2. 1   Secret habitat

I start by analysing the habitat of the snake in order to illustrate the Dionysiac setting where female characters are imagined to devise and accomplish revenge. After a review of relevant literary references to this aspect, I argue that Attic dramatists set the vengeful plans and acts of tragic heroines in a secret space, where the boundaries between οἶκος and πόλις, seen and unseen, sacred and profane blur. Because of the variety of its species, it is difficult to determine where the snake actually dwelled in the ancient Greek world. As Kitchell (2014) suggests, it is on the basis of its physicality and traits that a specific species of snake was identified and located. He states that the species of the δράκων, 'dragon' (61), for instance, was common in Ethiopia and Libya.[327] In agreement with Bodson (2005:459-60), who proposes the identification of this species with

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[327] Nic. *Ther*. 438-57; cf. the Libyan habitat of the ὄφις in Hdt. 4.191, 12.

the European grass snake (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*), Kitchell remarks on its resemblance to a young python. Belonging to the family of the giant snakes, the python (156) was believed to come from Africa or India. Hence, the δράκων has been associated either with the African rock python (*Python sebae*)[328] or with the Indian python (*Python molurus*).[329] As Kitchell notes, the ὄφις, 'serpent' (173-4), was believed to be absent in certain islands, such as Crete and Tenos, whose ancient name was Ophiusa.[330] The ἔχιδνα, 'viper' (63), which was thought to be more poisonous than its male counterpart, was instead present in many Greek and Asian localities.[331] Furthermore, the ἀμφίσβαινα, described as a venomous snake with two heads,[332] could correspond either to the Arabian sand boas (*Eryx jayakari*) or the European blind snake (*Typhlops vermicularis*) or the Malaysian coral snake (*Calliophis*). In agreement with West (2006:290-1), who rejects a mythical origin of the ἀμφίσβαινα, Kitchell states that the genus of sand boas 'would be the best candidate geographically' (2). Finally, the poisonous species of the ὕδρα, 'water snake' (166), was believed to come from the Indian Ocean. Thus, in the classical world each snake species was thought to dwell in a specific geographical area on the basis of its size and poisonous qualities. Unlike the viper, which was probably present in Greece, the other species of the snake were believed to abound in remote territories.

In order to outline the different places where the snake was located, I consider the statement of Servius (on Verg. *Aen*. 2.204), who distinguishes three

[328] Pitman, 1974:68-72.

[329] Walls, 1998:131-42.

[330] Diod. Sic. 4.17, 3.

[331] Nic. *Ther*. 209ff.

[332] Ibid. 372-83, 385.

different species: *angues*, 'water snakes', *serpentes*, 'land snakes', and *dracones*, 'temple snakes'. This distinction is confirmed by the description of the habitat of the snake species in ancient Greek literary sources. In the *Historia Animalium* (505b10, 708a1), the snake is said to come either from the earth or from the sea. Specifically, it is possible to find ὄφεις, 'serpents', hidden ἐν τῇ γῇ, 'under the earth', and ἔχιδναι, 'vipers', ὑπὸ τὰς πέτρας 'under the rocks'.[333] The secret habitat of the snake is also mentioned in the Aesopic tradition. In the fable 81 H, the ὄφις, 'serpent' is said to conceal itself ἐπὶ πέτρας, 'under the rocks'. Furthermore, Herodotus (1.78, 12), in reporting the reaction of Croesus, the king of Lydia, to the portent of a snake eating horses, gives credence to the origin of the ὄφις from the earth. Just like Asclepius, the god of medicine, who returns from death three times over, the serpent was thought to be able to enter the earth and return from it.[334] Through a metaphorical image, Plato (*Phd*. 112d8) emphasises instead the proximity of serpents to water sources: just like ὄφεις, springs whirl περὶ τὴν γῆν, 'around the earth'. In addition to the earth and rivers, the ὄφις was also connected to sacred spaces, such as the temple of Zeus in Thebes,[335] and the sacred precinct of the Acropolis, where the Athenians used to make their monthly offerings.[336] Thus, the variety of the snake species corresponded to the various representations of its secret habitat in the ancient Greek world. The snake was believed to come from the sea, to be hidden under the earth and to protect sacred territories.

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[333] [Arist.] *HA* 599b1, 612a16.

[334] Paus. 2.26, 4-8.

[335] Hdt. 2.74, 1.

[336] Ibid. 8.41, 8.

The habitat of the snake not only confirms the ancient Greek awareness of its dangerous, fearful and protective nature, but it also explains its mythological representation. Ogden (2013a:XIX-XX) defines the δράκων, 'dragon', as the guardian of water sources, the underworld and sacred groves. Among the anguiform guardians of water sources, he cites, for instance, Hydra, the mythological dragon reared in the Lernaean marshland, living in a cave nearby the springs of Anymone,[337] which was killed by Heracles.[338] He also takes into account the mythological dragon guarding the spring of Ares or Dirce, which was slain by Cadmus to found the city of Thebes.[339] As a chthonic animal, the dragon was located not only close to water sources, but also in the underworld. Ogden refers, for example, to Cerberus, the mythological guardian of Hades, imagined with the tail of a dragon, which was slain by Heracles,[340] and to the Erinyes, the mythological dwellers of the underworld with snaky hair, born from the blood of Uranus.[341] In addition, serpentine monsters were thought to be interred after defeat either under the earth or beneath a mount or in the underworld. Ogden particularly makes reference to the battle of Phlegra between Olympian and Chthonic gods. The Earth generated the Giants, and among these Typhon to overthrow the power of Zeus.[342] Other dragons born from the earth that Ogden analyses are Python, the mythological monster killed by Apollo at the Delphic

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[337] Paus. 2.37.

[338] Hes. *Theog.* 313; [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 2.5, 2; Diod. Sic. 4.11.

[339] Eur. *Phoen.* 647, 658, 826, 932, 1006; Non. *Dion.* 4.348-463; [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 3.4.

[340] [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 2.126, 5.

[341] Hom. *Il.* 19.259-60; Hes. *Theog.* 183-5, 472.

[342] [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 1.6, 1-5.

Oracle,[343] the Aegis-Gorgon killed by Athena,[344] and the anguiform heroes of Attica, namely Cecrops, Erechtheus and Erichthonius.[345] Dragons were thought to dwell also in sacred groves, such as the mythological dragon of Colchis guarding the Golden Fleece, which was slain by Medea and Jason.[346] This is specifically defined by Apollonius Rhodius (4.88, 1434) as a φρουρός ὄφις, where the adjective referring to the snake means 'watcher, guard'. Born from Gaia, the ἀθάνατος, 'immortal', and ἄυπνος, 'sleepless', serpent of Colchis is located ἐν κνημοῖσι, among the 'shoulders of a mountain'.[347] In fact it is said to come from the Caucasus, nearby the πέτρη, 'rock', of Typheus. Because of its guarding role, the dragon cannot rest and is represented as circling around the sacred grove of Ares.[348] From this analysis, it can be assessed that mythological dragons were depicted as the threatening guardians of water sources, the underworld and sacred spaces. Anguiform monsters were imagined in their dangerous, fearful and protective presence in secret places and spaces.

The habitat of the snake is metaphorically employed in the Homeric tradition to signal the presence of a vengeful, fierce and dreadful hero on the battlefield. The snake is evoked, for example, in the description of the armed confrontation between Paris and Menelaus. Paris is captured in his fearful reaction to the sight of Menealus, who is compared to a δράκων, 'dragon' (*Il.* 3.33). Just as in front of a snake that from being hidden unexpectedly comes into sight, he is

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[343] [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 1.22, 1-5; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.703-6.

[344] Diod. Sic. 3.70, 3-6.

[345] Hom. *Il.* 2.547; *Od.* 7.81; Thuc. 2.15.

[346] Pind. *Pyth.* 4.242-50; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.123-66.

[347] Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.1208-10.

[348] Ibid. 4.128.

terrified and makes a jump backwards. The expression οὔρεος ἐν βήσσῃς (34), 'in the mountain glens', indicates where the snake vengefully appears. The habitat of the snake not only captures Paris in his physical reaction to the threatening presence of his enemy, but it also illustrates the difference between the two heroes on the battlefield. Connoted by the adjective ἀρηΐφιλος (21), 'dear to Ares', Menelaus firmly stands in the first row of the army. Unlike Menelaus, Paris does not show his bellicose nature, but rather tries to hide among his companions in the back. Depicted as κατεπλήγη, 'panic-stricken' in his ἦτορ, 'heart' (31), feeling τρόμος, 'terror' in his γυῖα, 'limbs' (34), and ὦχρος, 'paleness', in his cheeks (35), Paris does not attack his enemy. As Hector says, despite his καλὸν εἶδος, 'divine beauty', he does not have the βίη, 'bodily strength', and the ἀλκή, 'prowess', to defeat Menelaus (45). At the end of the *Iliad* (22.93), it is Hector who is compared to a δράκων, 'dragon', since he remains stable and does not retreat from attacking Achilles. Just like a snake ὀρέστερος, 'dwelling in the mountains' (93), which waits for its prey, by showing its χόλος, 'rage' (94), Hector is ready to confront his enemy. Thus, in Homer the habitat of the snake is evoked to set the armed confrontations between the heroes on the battlefield. Located in a secret space, it metaphorically represents the fear, resistance and cunning of the heroes in front of the vengeful, fierce and threatening attack of their enemies.

Attic dramatists refer to the secret habitat of the snake in order to transform female avengers into the deceitful guardians of their own household. By blurring the tragic boundaries between οἶκος and πόλις, seen and unseen, sacred and profane, they stage the Dionysiac implications of female deception in intra-family vengeful dynamics. For instance, the Aeschylean Clytemnestra is depicted as the anguiform guardian of the palace of Argos from the plotting to the

punishment of her revenge against Agamemnon. Regardless of the possible political reasons behind the Aeschylean choice of setting,[349] it is relevant to notice the connection between Argos and the dragon. According to Davis (1953:33-8), the ancient Greek epithet Ἀργειφόντης, employed in reference to Hermes in the epic tradition,[350] does not specifically mean 'the slayer of Argos'. Through comparison of its use in relation to Apollo,[351] he deduces that the epithet could rather indicate any 'dragon-slayer' in the ancient Greek world. Like Hermes who slew Argos, the monster with multiple eyes, Apollo was also renowned as the slayer of the dragon Python. I argue that, by referring to these dragon-slaying myths, Aeschylus gives emphasis to the vengeful role of Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia*. As I show in the following textual analysis, in the *Agamemnon* Clytemnestra assumes the role of the slaying dragon, by plotting vengeance against her husband. In the *Choephoroi*, she plays the role of the slain dragon, as the victim of Orestes' vengeance. In the *Eumenides*, she acts both as a slaying and a slain dragon, by sending the vengeful Erinyes against her son. Taking on both the roles of the slaying and of the slain dragon, Clytemnestra acts as the vengeful, treacherous and dangerous guardian of the palace of Argos.

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[349] Regarding the Aeschylean setting of the *Agamemnon* see for example Del Corno, 2008:XXVI and Rosenbloom, 2014a:127-8. According to Del Corno, the setting of the tragedy is probably an Aeschylean innovation, in the light of the alliance between Argos and Athens few years before 458 BC. By contrast, Rosenbloom notes that in the *Iliad* (7.180, 11.46; cf. 9.44) Agamemnon is the 'king of Mycenae rich in gold', but also the lord of 'many islands and all Argos' (2.108). By building on Allen (1909:95-6), who argues that Argos should not be identified with the homonym polis, but rather with all Greece, Rosenbloom adds that this collective meaning is not a peculiar Homeric feature, but it also emerges in ancient Greek tragedy.

[350] Hom. *Il.* 2.103; *Od.* 1.38, 84; *Hom. Hymn Merc.* 1; Hes. *Op.* 68, 77.

[351] Soph. fr. 1024,11 R.

The habitat of the snake, which as I have previously discussed includes water sources and the earth, is evoked in the *Agamemnon* to conceal and reveal the vengeful plan of Clytemnestra. As the anguiform guardian of the House of Atreus, Clytemnestra announces the destruction of Troy with a 'triumphant cry of joy' (587). Raised in the second episode, the ὀλολυγμός acoustically captures Clytemnestra in her deceptive reaction to the arrival of her husband at the palace of Argos. With the Argive herald, she boasts about her fidelity and attachment to the house of Agamemnon and the sacrifices that she has constantly offered for propitiating his return (587-97). In the third episode, by confirming her guarding role, Clytemnestra gives her treacherous welcome to Agamemnon in front of the palace (895-913). She defines herself as a faithful and tearful wife that during his absence could not sleep by thinking about his travails. After calling Clytemnestra φύλαξ, 'guardian' (914), of his house, Agamemnon invites her to stop her alluring discourse and to not 'prostrate like a barbarian' (920). The expression χαμαιπετὲς βόαμα προσχάνῃς literally means 'do not open the mouth to a grovelling cry'. This image, by suggesting the movement of the snake on the ground and of its monstrous jaws, reveals the deceptive behaviour of Clytemnestra with her husband. Agamemnon is unaware that the enchanting speech of his wife conceals vengeful intentions. As a sleepless dragon, Clytemnestra has been waiting for her husband in the palace in order to avenge the sacrifice of Iphigenia and to take control over Argos with her lover Aegisthus. As a result of her vengeful guardianship, she is depicted as the slaying dragon of the House of Atreus.

The role of the slaying dragon played by Clytemnestra in the palace of Argos is explicitly denounced by Cassandra in her prophecy about the death of Agamemnon, as follows (1231-8):

{Κα.} τοιάδε τόλμα· θῆλυς ἄρσενος φονεύς·

ἔστιν – τί νιν καλοῦσα δυσφιλὲς δάκος

τύχοιμ' ἄν; ἀμφίσβαιναν, ἢ Σκύλλαν τινὰ

οἰκοῦσαν ἐν πέτραισι, ναυτίλων βλάβην,

θύουσαν Ἅιδου μητέρ' ἄσπονδόν τ' Ἄρη   1235

φίλοις πνέουσαν; ὡς δ' ἐπωλολύξατο

ἡ παντότολμος, ὥσπερ ἐν μάχης τροπῇ.

δοκεῖ δὲ χαίρειν νοστίμῳ σωτηρίᾳ.[352]

The habitat of the snake unveils the violent, threatening and treacherous nature of Clytemnestra. The negativity in the depiction of the female murderer is justified by the fact that Cassandra is aware that her own death and Agamemnon's are imminent. The τόλμα 'recklessness' of Clytemnestra is explained by the expression θῆλυς ἄρσενος φονεύς (1231). Through a gender reversal, 'the female becomes the murderer of the male'. The juxtaposition of θῆλυς and ἄρσην, giving emphasis to the noun φονεύς at the end of the verse, might have created an effect of suspense. Used hyperbolically, the adjective παντότολμος, 'completely shameless' (1237), reinforces the daring act of revenge that Clytemnestra has conceived and will commit. Moreover, Cassandra denounces the vengeful intentions of Clytemnestra through the expression δυσφιλὲς δάκος (1232). The adjective δυσφιλής, ές, 'hateful', connotes the neuter noun δάκος, which can

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[352] *Ca*. What audacity: a woman that kills a man. What can I call this hateful beast? Amphisbaena or Scylla, who lives in the rocks, destruction for sailor, a hellish mother raging and war-breathing against her own? How she cried in triumph, completely shameless, just as at a battle's turn! She seems to rejoice at the safe homecoming.

indicate an 'animal of which bite is dangerous'. The term is also employed by Agamemnon, as I have shown in the previous chapter (p. 174), in his boasting speech about the capture of Troy. The image of the 'noxious beast' (824) in this case is used in comparison with the Trojan Horse, from whose stomach sprang out the Argive warriors. By creating a connection with the homecoming of Agamemnon from the Trojan War, the snake metaphor captures Clytemnestra in her deceptive behaviour in the palace of Argos.

Cassandra specifically compares Clytemnestra to the poisonous snake called ἀμφίσβαινα, which was thought to 'go either forwards or backwards'. According to Fraenkel (1950:568), this reference does not require 'a zoological identification with a specific snake species', when considering the fabulous context of the metaphorical comparison. The fictionality of the context is confirmed by another snake image: like the Euripidean Medea (*Med.* 1342), Clytemnestra is compared to Scylla (1233), which was thought to prevent sailors from a safe homecoming. As Ogden (2013b:129) notes, the sea-serpent slain by Heracles and challenged by Odysseus is associated with the snake in iconographic but not literary sources, where it is called with its proper name. In the *Odyssey* (12.231), Scylla is located among the rocks in the sea. By adapting the Homeric habitat of the sea-serpent, Aeschylus transforms Clytemnestra into a dangerous and destructive monster of the earth. This is confirmed by the connection of the snake with the underworld, through the expression Ἅιδου μητέρα, 'hellish mother' (1135). The infernal maternal role of Clytemnestra has been explained either with her vengeance for the death of her daughter Iphigenia,[353] or with the

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[353] Denniston and Page, 1957:183.

vengeful return of her son Orestes. [354] I argue that Aeschylus compares Clytemnestra to a monstrous dragon of the underworld in order to create a link between the sacrifice of Iphigenia and the murder of Agamemnon. Just like an earth-born anguiform monster, Clytemnestra 'rages' (1235) and 'breathes' (1236) within and against her own household. The present participles of the verbs θύω and πνέω emphasise the causes and the effects of Clytemnestra's deception. The dative φίλοις, 'beloved' (1236), in emphatic position at the start of the verse, ambiguously refers to the victim of Clytemnestra's plan. Raising the ὀλολυγμός (1137), 'cry of joy', in her welcome to Agamemnon, Clytemnestra takes on the role of the slaying dragon of the palace of Argos. After the accomplishment of her revenge, the Chorus will ironically define Clytemnestra as the οἰκουρός, 'guardian of the house' (1626). The tragic irony consists in the representation of Clytemnestra as the anguiform guardian who instead of protecting the House of Atreus brings about its self-destruction.

The combination of water sources and the underworld, which characterises the habitat of the snake, is also employed in the *Choephoroi*. In order to stage the tragic act of matricide, Aeschylus attributes to Clytemnestra the role of the slain dragon and to Orestes the role of the slaying dragon. The tragedy, still set in Argos, but ten years after the death of Agamemnon, opens with the vengeful invocations raised by Orestes to the chthonic god Hermes. Orestes has returned home and offers on the tomb of his father a lock of hair to the river Inachos for its nourishment and a second lock in sign of mourning (6-7). By creating an atmosphere of funeral rite, these offerings anticipate the scene of recognition between Electra and Orestes. Both the female and male offspring of Agamemnon

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[354] Fraenkel, 1950:569.

plot a vengeful plan against the dragon that has generated them. Orestes pretends to be a foreigner, with the aim of announcing his own death, and asks Electra to be the guardian of the house (579), so that vengeance can be concealed without raising suspicions. Entrapped in a circle of deception, violence and pursuit of power, the offspring of the dragon succeed in slaying the monstrous guardians of the palace of Argos. The difference between Electra and Orestes consists in their vengeful involvement in the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Electra represents a non-snake-like guardianship by supporting her brother in his vengeful plan. Orestes instead undertakes a metaphorical transformation into a dragon in order to commit and take responsibility of the matricide. With these words, the Chorus comfort Orestes after the realisation of his plan of revenge (1044-50):

{Χο.} ἀλλ' εὖ γ' ἔπραξας, μηδ' ἐπιζευχθῇς στόμα

φήμῃ πονηρᾷ μηδ' ἐπιγλωσσῶ κακά.   1045

ἠλευθέρωσας πᾶσαν Ἀργείων πόλιν,

δυοῖν δρακόντοιν εὐπετῶς τεμὼν κάρα.

{Ορ.} ἆ, ἆ,

δμωαὶ γυναῖκες· αἵδε, Γοργόνων δίκην,

φαιοχίτωνες καὶ πεπλεκτανημέναι

πυκνοῖς δράκουσιν· οὐκέτ' ἂν μείναιμ' ἐγώ.[355]   1050

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[355] *Ch*. But you did well, do neither let your mouth be joined to grievous saying nor say cruel words. You liberated the whole city of Argos, by the two serpents, through cutting off easily their head. *Or*. Ah, Ah, these serving-women in the form of Gorgons, dark-robed and interlaced with numerous snakes. I will no longer stay here.

The serpents evoked in this passage are Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, because of the double tyranny that has afflicted the city of Argos. They are the two dragons that Orestes has slain, because of their abuse of power as the guardians of the House of Atreus. As Orestes argues, before achieving revenge, since Clytemnestra and Aegisthus shared their bed, they will also share the same tomb (894-5). By denouncing the adulterous, treacherous and bloody-thirsty nature of his mother, Orestes frees the house of his father from the double tyranny. Moreover, the metaphorical reference to the two serpents suggests the double modality of killing Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. It could have recalled the dragon-slaying myth either of Perseus, who cut off the head of the Gorgon,[356] or of baby Heracles, who killed the two snakes sent by Hera with his hands.[357] Despite the heroism of Orestes of having slain the two dragons of the palace of Argos, his act of matricide is dramatically followed by the appearance of the Erinyes. According to Brown (1983:13-34), the mythological monsters were neither depicted as fantasies in Orestes' mind nor as symbols of supernatural powers. The Erinyes were rather anthropomorphised to provoke reflections on the concepts of vengeance, retribution and kin-killing. Garvie (1986:343-8) argues that the reaction of Orestes to their sight and his exclamatory sounds suggest a gasp either of 'astonishment' or 'protest' or 'reproof' or 'madness'. I argue that the Erinyes were evoked by Orestes to express his fears and anxieties regarding the implications of his vengeful act. Imagined as anguiform and in dark clothes (1049-50), the Erinyes symbolise vengeance, death and mourning.

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[356] Thomson, 1938:186.

[357] Tucker, 1901:232.

Aeschylus does not locate the snake only close to water sources and in the underworld, but also in sacred spaces, in order to depict the aftermath of the slaughter of Clytemnestra. In the *Eumenides*, Clytemnestra takes on the vengeful role of the slaying and of the slain dragon, by sending the Erinyes to persecute Orestes. The matricide first finds protection in the temple of Apollo in Delphi and then moves to the image of Athena in Athens. Through a reversal of dragon-slaying stories, the Erinyes are not sleepless guardians, but monsters invited to the temple of Apollo. At the beginning of the tragedy, they are depicted as sleeping dogs that the protecting god of Orestes tries to distance from his temple. With prophetic terms, Apollo threatens them with a πετεινός, 'winged', and ἀργηστής, 'glancing', ὄφις, 'serpent' (181), which probably refers to his poisonous arrows. Associated with the Gorgons (48-9), the Erinyes are the furious, bloody-thirsty, vengeful and chthonic monsters who defend the cause of Clytemnestra. Thus, the Erinyes are urged to wake up, so that they can pursue Orestes (117-28):

{Χο.} (μυγμός.)

{Κλ.} μύζοιτ' ἄν, ἀνὴρ δ' οἴχεται φεύγων πρόσω·

† φίλοις γάρ εἰσιν οὐκ ἐμοῖς προσίκτορες.

{Χο.} (μυγμός.)   120

{Κλ.} ἄγαν ὑπνώσσεις κοὐ κατοικτίζεις πάθος·

φονεὺς δ' Ὀρέστης τῆσδε μητρὸς οἴχεται.

{Χο.} (ὠγμός.)

{Κλ.} ὤζεις, ὑπνώσσεις· οὐκ ἀναστήσῃ τάχος;

τί σοι πέπρωται πρᾶγμα πλὴν τεύχειν κακά;   125

{Χο.} (ὠγμός.)

{Κλ.} ὕπνος πόνος τε κύριοι συνωμόται

δεινῆς δρακαίνης ἐξεκήραναν μένος.[358]

The moaning and crying sounds emitted by the Erinyes, indicated by the hypothetical stage directions in the text, express the vengeful intentions of Clytemnestra against her son. As Thomson (1938:260) says, 'the vengeance of the dead, of which the Furies are embodiments, was conceived as being stirred up by reproaches, taunts of the indignities and shames that they had to suffer'. The vengeful temper of Clytemnestra is still vivid and operates through the persecution of Orestes by the Erinyes, who are defined δεινή δράκαινα, 'terrible she-dragon' (128). Emphasised by dog imagery (132), the adjective referring to the snake indicates indignation and contempt in ironical terms. The Erinyes assume the double form of dog and dragon, because of their chthonic role, in order to give expression to the powerful, sleepless and vengeful spirit of Clytemnestra. Specifically, their serpentine form emphasises the location of the slain dragon in the underworld. According to Sommerstein (1989), the name of Clytemnestra evokes the first appearance of the Erinyes. At the beginning of the tragedy, she 'tries to goad the Erinyes into waking by taunting them with the suggestion that they have become tired and feeble; and she succeeds at least in making them sleep more lightly and dream more vividly' (105-6). Thanks to the intervention of Athena, the Erinyes will be transformed into benign deities and

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[358] *Ch*. (moaning) *Cl*. You moan, while the man has run away; As suppliants you are protecting my family instead of me. *Ch*. (moaning) *Cl*. You are oversleeping and you do not cry my suffering. And Orestes the matricide has gone. *Ch*. (crying) *Cl*. You cry and sleep. Why do not you raise up? Is not your duty to provoke misdeed? *Ch*. (crying) *Cl*. Sleep and fatigue, powerful fellow-conspirators, have weakened the fury of the terrible snake.

invited to guarantee the fertility of the earth from being the anguiform embodiment of Clytemnestra's revenge, retribution and suffering. By playing both the roles of the slaying and the slain dragon, Clytemnestra is captured in her vengeful temper from the death of Agamemnon to the persecution of Orestes by the Erinyes.

Sophocles evokes the habitat of the snake in the *Trachiniae* to transform another deceitful heroine into the anguiform guardian of her household. By referring to mythological guardians of water sources, he prepares the scene for the vengeful plan of Deianira against her husband. Depicted both as the ally and the victim of anguiform monsters slain by Heracles, Deianira unconsciously causes the self-destruction of her own family. In the prologue, she starts to lament her past and present situation (1-21), by confirming the connection between anguiform monsters and water sources. When Deianira was still in the house of her father, before getting married, the river Achelous attempted to rape her (cf. 507-16). With these words, Deianira gives expression to her traumatic memory (9-14):

> {ΔΗ.} Μνηστὴρ γὰρ ἦν μοι ποταμός, Ἀχελῷον λέγω,
> ὅς μ' ἐν τρισὶν μορφαῖσιν ἐξῄτει πατρός,   10
> φοιτῶν ἐναργὴς ταῦρος, ἄλλοτ' αἰόλος
> δράκων ἑλικτός, ἄλλοτ' ἀνδρείῳ τύπῳ
> βούκρανος, ἐκ δὲ δασκίου γενειάδος
> κρουνοὶ διερραίνοντο κρηναίου ποτοῦ.[359]

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[359] *De*. The river was my suitor, I mean Achelous, who in three forms used to ask the permission of marrying me from my father, coming at one time in the form of a bull, at another time in the

Considered as the king of the rivers,[360] Achelous was thought to rise at the centre of Pindus, in Mount Lacmon, and to flow into the Ionian sea.[361] As Rodighiero (2004:147-8) comments upon this passage, whereas the actual river runs between Acharnania and Oetholia, the mythological figure was said to descend from Thetis and Ocean.[362] In the *Trachiniae*, Achelous is depicted as the monstrous wooer of Deianira, who is eventually slain by Heracles (19-20). He was able to present himself several times in different forms to ask her hand. By evoking the animal metamorphoses of Dionysus (see Introduction, p. 29), the river could enact a transformation into a bull, a snake and a goat. Despite the deceiving appearance of Achelous, Deianira always refused to approach to his bed. The transformative changes of the river convey the concepts of treachery and sexual violence in the episode narrated by Deianira. In contrast to the heroism of Heracles, who rescued and then married her, Achelous is specifically defined as an αἰόλος (11) and ἑλικτός (12) snake.

Encapsulated between the two adjectives, the noun δράκων, 'dragon' (12), indicates one of the metamorphoses enacted by the river Achelous. The adjective αἰόλος, η, ον assumes a double connotation of movement and colour in reference to the anguiform monster.[363] It can mean 'quick-moving, nimble',[364] but as an

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form of a nimble and twisted dragon, at another time in the form of a man with ox-head, from whose thick beard springs of water were sprinkling.

[360] Hom. *Il*. 21.194.

[361] For the geographical definition of Achelous, see Jebb, 1862:7-9.

[362] Hes. *Theog*. 340.

[363] Cf. the employment of the ancient Greek adjective αἰόλος in Soph. *Trach*. 94, 132, 834.

[364] Hom. *Il*. 19.404, 12.167, 208, 22.509; *Od*. 22.300.

epithet of armour it can also indicate the 'change of hue, glittering',[365] like the scales of the snake's skin. According to Williams and Dickerson (1978), the term implies 'swift mutability from inertia to motion, from darkness to light', and in association with destiny 'impermanence, unreliability and deception' (79). In connoting the river Achelous, I argue that it gives expression to the continuous sexual troubles of Deianira before and after the arrival of Heracles in her life. This is confirmed by the employment of the adjective ἑλικτός, ή, όν (12), referring to Achelous in her lamentation. The term, which literally means 'rolled, twisted, wreathed' and metaphorically 'tortuous, not straightforward', emphasises the oppressive and deceitful violence of Deianira's suitor.

The reference to the serpentine form of Achelous connects the past of sexual violence suffered by Deianira with the future destruction of her household. Evoking the guarding role of the mythological guardian of water sources, the violence, suffering and loss occurring in Heracles' family is anticipated. Deianira is represented as the anguiform guardian of the palace of Ceice in Trachis, where the family of Heracles has received hospitality. The tragedy opens with the lamenting words of Deianira, who feels the same fear of the sexual attack from her monstrous suitor Achelous. She is terrified by the fact that she has not had any news about Heracles for more than fifteen months (38-45). Unlike the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, she is sincerely worried about the return of her husband. Deianira is depicted in fact as a sleepless wife who attempts to defend her household with all her efforts (652). After the Chorus raise the ὀλολυγμός, 'cry of joy' (205), she is called φρουρά, a 'guard' (226), with staring gaze. It is the Chorus who attribute to Deianira the guardianship of her household, by fuelling her vengeful instincts.

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[365] Hom. *Il*. 5.295, 7.222, 16.107; Soph. *Aj*. 1025.

The insistence on the language of the sight (224-6), which evokes the threatening gaze of the dragon, accentuates the guarding role of Deianira. Through bacchic yells, <εὑοῖ> εὑοῖ (219), the Chorus ambiguously announce the homecoming of Heracles. Deianira is attracted by the procession of the slaves of Eurytus and among them she particularly notices Iole.

The scene of the arrival of Iole anticipates the vengeful act of Deianira. Through a dramatic reversal, she welcomes the concubine of her husband, by giving her freedom to enter the palace, as she preferred (329-31). When she realises that Iole is the new wife of Heracles, she decides to avenge the love of her husband. Deianira cannot stand the idea of sharing the same bed with another woman, by claiming her οἰκουρία, 'guardianship' (542), in the house of Heracles. As I show in the next section, Deianira decides to make use of a magical robe to protect her marriage. Depicted as the anguiform guardian of Heracles' house, she takes on the role of the ally of another mythological monster connected to water sources. The centaur, who 'used to make profit by carrying with his arms the walking people over the deep water of the Evenos' (559-60), actively participates in her vengeful plan. Before being slain by Heracles, Nessus carried Deianira over the river and attempted to rape her. He convinced her to collect his poisonous blood, by attributing to it magical powers in love affairs. Because of her self-deception and jealousy, Deianira becomes an anguiform monster that causes not only the death of her husband but also her own destruction. Thus, the habitat of the snake, and specifically its closeness to water sources, expresses the concepts of treachery, sexual violence and terror in the depiction of Deianira. By linking her past of sexual violence with the destruction of her marriage, it reveals the vengeful implications of her guardianship in Heracles' house.

Similarly to Aeschylus, Euripides evokes the secret habitat of the snake to stage the death of Clytemnestra and its dreadful consequences. In the *Iphigenia Taurica* (281-94) Orestes imagines Clytemnestra approaching him in the form of a Ἄιδου δράκαινα, 'hellish she-dragon' (286) with murderous intentions. Embodied by the anguiform Erinyes, the breathing-fire spirit of Clytemnestra psychologically persecutes Orestes, who wonders where he should escape. As Cropp (2000:193) states, the Erinyes, depicted through snake imagery and with the Gorgon as a model, represent from a psychological perspective the 'guilt-racked imagination' of Orestes. Also in the *Electra* (1256) the Erinyes, associated with the δράκων, 'dragon', are located both in the underworld and next to sacred territories. Unlike in Aeschylus, where the Erinyes are imagined with snaky hair, in Euripides they are connoted by the adjective χειροδράκοντες (1345), which means 'with serpentine hands or arms'. By suggesting a movement in performance, the fearful, dangerous and powerful attack of the Erinyes is emphasised. They are evoked at the end of the tragedy, when the Dioscuri prophesise that Orestes should go to Athens to ask protection from Athena. Euripides does not mention the temple of Apollo in Delphi, but rather connects the wooden statue of Athena Polias with the persecution of Orestes by the Erinyes. Whereas in Homer (*Od*. 3.307) Athens is the refuge of Orestes before his returning home, on the Attic stage the city becomes his shield of protection against the Erinyes after the matricide. Like Aeschylus, Euripides attributes the habitat of the snake to Clytemnestra in order to stage the accomplishment and the punishment of her revenge in the House of Atreus.

Euripides evokes the habitat of the snake, with the aim of transforming another tragic heroine into the vengeful guardian of her own household. The

reference to water sources, the earth and sacred spaces contextualises the deceitful plan of revenge devised by Creusa in the *Ion*. The variety of the habitat of the snake, which corresponds to the different dragon-slaying stories that Euripides might have alluded to, represents Creusa in her tragic distance from and proximity to her son. In the prologue, Hermes specifies the two cities the revenge plot will revolve around. Through continuous shifts of setting from Delphi to Athens, Euripides frustrates the recognition between mother and son. Defined as ὀμφαλός (5, 223), which literally means 'umbilicus', but metaphorically assumes the meaning of 'centre, middle point', Delphi is the city where Apollo slew the mythological dragon Python. In the ancient Greek world, this city was located in Phocis, on mount Parnassus, where three springs converged.[366] Because of the round stone in the Delphic temple, where the Pythian prophecies about the present and the future were uttered, the city was thought to be the middle point of earth.[367] Unlike Pindar (*Pyth*. 4.4) who refers to two golden eagles, in the *Ion* (224) Euripides explains that the ὀμφαλός of Delphi is protected by the anguiform Gorgons. At the beginning of the tragedy, the snake is specifically evoked to comment on the Gigantomachy represented on the frieze of the Delphic temple. The ἔκφρασις illustrates Athena with the gorgoneion shield and the frantic Dionysus with the thyrsus, both fighting against the Giants (205-18). The snake is associated not only with Delphi, because of its guarding role in the temple of Apollo, but also with Athens, the city developing its name from the goddess Athena. Founded and ruled by anguiform heroes, namely Cecrops, Erechtheus and Erichthonius, Athens is the city where Apollo had sexual intercourse with Creusa.

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[366] For a geographical definition of Delphi, see Albini, 2006:131.

[367] Pind. *Pyth*. 4.74; Bacchyl. 4.4; Aesch. *Eum*. 40, 166.

As Hermes narrates, the god sexually violated the daughter of Erechtheus ὑπ' ὄχθωι, 'under the hill' (12), in the rocky part of Attica, πρόσβορρος, 'exposed to the north wind' (11), which is called Macres (13, 283). Creusa gave birth to her child in the palace of her father, but then decided to expose him in the ἄντρον, 'cave' (17), where Apollo dishonoured her. Hence, the god asked his brother Hermes to go to Athens, bring back the child to Delphi and put him in front of the gate of his temple.

By evoking the habitat of the snake, Euripides contextualises the intra-family vengeful intrigues between Creusa, Apollo and Ion in his tragic re-retelling of the myth of the autochthonous Athens. He refers to water sources, the earth and sacred spaces in order to signal the passage from the plotting to the punishment of the vengeful plan of Creusa. In the first episode, accompanied by her slaves, Creusa arrives at the temple of Apollo, because her husband needs to consult the oracle. In response to Xuthos' question regarding the sterility of his family, Apollo prophesies that he will meet his son leaving the temple of Delphi. By giving a paraetymology of the name Ion, as 'the man who arrives' (661, 802), Xuthos claims his paternity. Nurtured in Delphi, Ion is invited by his new father to go to Athens as the heir of his political and economical patrimony (575-7). Unaware that the son of Xuthos is actually her own son, Creusa tries to kill Ion through the venom of the Gorgon, and caught in her vengeful plan is condemned to death. With these words Creusa is verbally attacked and physically threatened by Ion (1261-8):

{Ιω} ὦ ταυρόμορφον ὄμμα Κηφισοῦ πατρός,

οἵαν ἔχιδναν τήνδ' ἔφυσας ἢ πυρὸς

δράκοντ' ἀναβλέποντα φοινίαν φλόγα,

ἧι τόλμα πᾶσ' ἔνεστιν οὐδ' ἥσσων ἔφυ

Γοργοῦς σταλαγμῶν, οἷς ἔμελλέ με κτανεῖν.   1265

λάζυσθ', ἵν' αὐτῆς τοὺς ἀκηράτους πλόκους

κόμης καταξήνωσι Παρνασοῦ πλάκες,

ὅθεν πετραῖον ἅλμα δισκηθήσεται.[368]

In his denouncing words, Ion invokes Cephisus, the grandfather of Praxithea, the mother of Creusa, who was imagined as a bull like other rivers. By transferring the role of anguiform guardian from Cephisus to Creusa, he emphasises the concepts of treachery, violence and revenge in his own family. Creusa is metaphorically compared both to an ἔχιδνα, 'viper' (1262), and a δράκων, 'dragon' (1263), because of the vengeful plan she has devised. The poetic adjective φοίνιος, α, ον, referring to the 'lethal' gaze of the snake (1263), anticipates the tragic implications of Creusa's revenge. The term can literally mean either 'red like blood',[369] or 'blood-stained',[370] but it can also assume the metaphorical meaning of 'murderous'.[371] In this passage, Creusa is connoted by the adjective φοίνιος, because of her vengeful role as slaying dragon. From the perspective of Ion, she is an anguiform monster able to kill with her fiery gaze

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[368] *Io*. O father Cephisus, in the form of bull, look at the viper you generated, the dragon that launches his lethal gaze of fire. Able to commit any horror, she was born more poisonous that the drops of blood of the Gorgons, through which she attempted to kill me. Seize her, so that her untouched hair can be carded by the hills of the Parnassus, where she will be hurled on the rocks.

[369] Hom. *Od*. 18.97; Aesch. *Sept*. 737, *Ag*. 1390; Soph. *Phil*. 783, *Ant*. 1239.

[370] Aesch. *Ag*. 643; Soph. *Aj*. 772, *OT* 465, *Ant*. 601.

[371] Aesch. *Ag*. 1164, 1278, *Cho*. 613; Soph. *El*. 96, *Trach*. 770, *OT* 24.

and poisonous blood (1263-5). Since Creusa clings close to the altar to be spared, Ion orders his men to capture her and throw her down from the rocks of the Parnassus (1268). The etymological figure, consisting of the πλόκοι, 'hair' (1266), and the πλάκες, 'flat tops of a hill' (1267), reveals the tragic modality through which Ion aims at taking vengeance against Creusa. His intention of punishing his mother is specifically displayed by the verb καταξαίνω (1267), which can generally mean 'I card', but here specifically denotes the action of 'tearing in pieces'. By suggesting a Dionysiac form of σπαραγμός, Euripides attributes to Ion the role of slaying dragon and to Creusa that of slain dragon.

The etymological figure of the hair of Creusa, combed well by the hills of Mount Parnasus, has been interpreted in the light of the myth of the Gorgon. In agreement with duBois (1991a:124), Rabinowitz (1993:208) states that the feminisation of the vengeful plan of Creusa in Ion's speech intensifies the 'double, uncanny and gorgonish' nature of Creusa. I would add that the reference to the snaky-haired mythological monster could create a moment of tragic irony at this point of the revenge plot. Creusa will not die after her attempt to kill Ion, but she will be spared by her son, thanks to the intervention of Athena. Euripides does not in fact describe the punishment of Creusa, but by merely referring to the mythological Gorgon, this passage would have evoked other dragon-slaying myths, where tragic figures were hurled down from the mountains. Mirto (2009:315) argues that Euripides attributes to Creusa the monstrous traits of her ancestors in order to evoke the suicide of the daughters of Cecrops.[372] In the Euripidean version of the myth, the earth-born Erichthonius was raised and given by Athena to Aglauros, Herse and Pandrosus (*Ion* 23-24). Forbidden by Athena to

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[372] Cf. Paus. 1.2, 6.

look inside the chest, containing the baby king Erichthonius and protected by guarding snakes, the Cecropids transgressed the divine order. As a result of divine punishment, the daughters of Cecrops committed suicide, by throwing themselves from the Acropolis.[373] The relationship between the Cecropids and the slopes of the Acropolis is also emphasised in the first *stasimon* of the tragedy. The Chorus, addressing their prayers to Apollo, Athena and Pan, sing that the Cecropids used to dance next to the Μακραί (494). The 'Makres' not only refers to the mount dedicated to Cecrops, the first king of Athens, but also creates a link with the cave where Creusa was violated by Apollo and where she then exposed Ion.[374] Thus, the secret habitat of the snake, and specifically the mountains and sacred spaces, is evoked to capture Creusa from the plotting to the punishment of her deceitful plan of revenge. By giving emphasis to the place where Ion was given birth and then abandoned, Euripides evokes death, suffering and dangerousness in the anguiform depiction of Creusa.

So, Attic dramatists refer to the secret habitat of the snake in order to depict female avengers as the monstrous guardians of their own household. Metaphorically locating the tragic heroines Clytemnestra, Deianira and Creusa next to water sources, in the underworld and in sacred spaces, they conceal and reveal the Dionysiac implications of their plans of revenge. For instance, Aeschylus employs the secret habitat of the snake in order to capture Clytemnestra in her vengeful temper from the death of Agamemnon to the persecution of Orestes. In the *Agamemnon*, she is depicted as the anguiform guardian of the palace of Argos, where she prevents her husband from a safe

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[373] Eur. *Ion* 272-5; cf. Paus. 1.18, 2, 27, 1.

[374] Eur. *Ion* 13, 283, 937.

homecoming. The association of the snake with water sources and the earth is also confirmed in the *Choephoroi*, where Clytemnestra is killed by her own son. By revealing the vengeful temper of his mother, Orestes succeeds in slaying the two dragons of the House of Atreus, freeing Argos from tyranny. In the *Eumenides*, the snake is associated not only with the underworld, but also with sacred spaces. As the embodied form of Clytemnestra's vengeance, the Erinyes pursue Orestes from Argos to Delphi and from Delphi to Athens. Thanks to the intervention of Athena, violence terminates with the inclusion of the anguiform monsters among the Greek cults. In the *Trachiniae*, Sophocles evokes the secret habitat of the snake in order to stage the vengeful plan of Deianira from the arrival of Iole to the death of Heracles. The particular association of the snake with water sources in the depiction of the monstrous suitors of Deianira could give emphasis to the reasons and implications of her unwilling act of revenge. In reaction to terror, suffering and jealousy, she causes the death of her husband and the destruction of her own family. In the *Ion*, Euripides refers to the habitat of the snake in order to represent the conflicting relationship between Creusa and her son. By locating the snake close to water sources, the earth and sacred spaces, he develops the tragic plot from the violation of Creusa by Apollo to her vengeful plan against Ion. In order to lead the audience towards the scene of recognition between mother and son, Euripides preserves the mythological association of the snake with the cities of Delphi and Athens. Sexual violence, treachery and vengeance characterise the story of Creusa, who reveals the nature of her anguiform ancestors. However, as I show in the next section, female avengers are captured not only in their deceptive guardianship of the household. They are also attributed the marauding skills of the

snake, because of the violence, treachery and dangerousness of their instruments of vengeance.

3. 2. 2   Marauding skills

I turn now to the analysis of the skills of the snake in order to show the modality through which tragic heroines plot and commit vengeance in intra-familial intrigues. After examining relevant literary references to this aspect, I argue that Attic dramatists attribute to deceitful avengers the techniques of attack and defence of the snake to stage the Dionysiac self-destruction of household. Because of its marauding skills, the snake was considered as a treacherous, violent and dangerous animal in the ancient Greek world. As Kitchell (2014:62) states, it was provided with extraordinary strength in fighting against other animals. The specific species of the δράκων, 'dragon', was thought to be able, through its breath, to drag down birds from the sky.[375] For instance, its enmity with the eagle was proverbial.[376] When seized by the rapacious bird, the snake takes part in a battle between the sky and the earth. The species of the python and other giant snakes were imagined not only to attack flocks of birds, but also to fight against elephants, by falling down from the trees.[377]

In addition to its strength and unexpected attack, the ancient Greeks included among the marauding skills of the snake its hissing. The ὄφις, 'serpent', is described as provided with a particular tongue, through which it can produce a

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[375] Cf. Lucan. 9.728-730.

[376] Aes. 28 H; Plut. 981b5; [Arist.] *HA* 609a5, b13.

[377] Ael. *NA* 2.21, 6-7; Strab. 17.2, 2, 27-28.

συριγμός, 'hiss'.[378] Generally attributed to snakes, the term indicates a 'shrill piping sound'.[379] Furthermore, the snake was believed to attack its enemies through its coiling movement. As I have discussed in the previous section, Plato (*Phd*. 112d8) metaphorically compares the springs to the coils of the snake. Like ὄφεις, 'serpents', the rivers move κύκλῳ, 'in a circle', and περὶ τὴν γῆν, 'around the earth'. The compound verb περιελίσσω, referring to the rivers, can indicate 'a rapid motion around' in the active form and it can specifically denote the 'coiling' of the snake in the passive form. Finally, the δῆγμα, 'bite, sting', of the snake caused fear and terror as one of its instruments of danger.[380] From a medical perspective, the venom of the snake was attributed either toxic or antiseptic qualities.[381] Nicander in his *Theriaka* and *Alexipharmaka* outlines the deadly effects of and the remedies for its bite.[382] Thus, the snake was considered as the most threatening, fierce and treacherous animal of the wild. The ancient Greeks identified the specific actions of hissing, coiling and biting as its techniques of attack and defence.

The marauding skills of the snake are intensified in dragon-slaying myths. Ogden (2013a:XX-XXI) comments on the venom, breath, gaze, hissing and coiling of mythological dragons. He distinguishes the kinds of battles of dragons with their slayers on the basis of their instruments of violence. In 'the battles of fire', he particularly refers to the fiery gaze of Typhon, slain by Zeus,[383] and the fire

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[378] [Arist.] *HA* 536a6.

[379] Strab. 9.3, 10, 20.

[380] [Arist.] *HA* 612a16.

[381] Plut. 1065b10; [Arist.] *HA* 607a22.

[382] Nic. *Ther*. 120-7, 177-84, 326-39, 380-3, 520-3, 529-40, 700-2; *Alex*. 521-4.

[383] Hes. *Theog*. 820-80.

breathing of the Chimaera, slain by Bellerophon.[384] Among the dragons that deploy venom in the 'battles of liquids', Ogden cites, for instance, the Hydra, the serpentine monster slain by Heracles.[385] The Gorgon Euryale is included among the serpentine monsters of the 'battles of sound', because of her lamenting hiss after the head of her sister Medusa was cut off by Perseus.[386] All the giant dragons, such as Typhon, Python, the Hydra, Cerberus and the Gorgon, coil and constrict their victims in 'the battles of circles'.[387] The dragon of Colchis with its unsleeping eyes participates in the 'battle of sight and gaze'.[388] In Hellenistic epic, it is depicted in its dangerous attack against Jason and his companions. As soon as the dragon sees the heroes approaching, it starts to 'stretch out its long neck' and to 'hiss in a terrible way'.[389] The verb ῥοιζέω in reference to the sibilant sounds emitted by the dragon specifically means 'I hiss'. In reference to birds, it can also indicate the 'whirr through the air',[390] which evokes a blended effect of movement and sound. The dragon of Colchis hisses in a πελώριος, 'terrible', manner to threaten Jason and his crew and to defend the Golden Fleece. The epic adjective, which generally means 'monstrous, prodigious, huge', specifically connotes the hiss of snakes.[391] Finally, the dangerousness of the dragon is evoked through its

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[384] Hom. *Il.* 6.52-95.

[385] Hes. *Theog.* 313; [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 2.5, 2; Diod. Sic. 4.11.

[386] Pind. *Pyth.* 12.6-21.

[387] Hes. *Theog.* 270-336.

[388] Eur. *Med.* 480-2.

[389] Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.127-30.

[390] [Arist.] *HA* 535b27.

[391] Hom. *Il.* 12.202; Hes. *Theog.* 299.

μελάγχιμος ἰός, 'black venom', which leads humans to Hades.[392] Thus, in dragon-slaying stories, mythological monsters were equipped with the instruments of danger of the snake. Just like supernatural snakes, they were imagined to participate in mythological battles, by breathing out fire, spewing toxic venom, petrifying with their gaze, hissing at and coiling around their slayers.

In Homeric battle scenes, the marauding skills of the snake are evoked to anticipate the victory of the Greeks and the defeat of the Trojans. By representing the cruelty and violence of the winners, the snake assumes negative connotations in Trojan prophecies. In their attempt to attack the wall of the Greeks, Hector and his companions are blocked by a portentous image. An eagle, flying on the left hand side of the army, is seen carrying in its claws a πέλωρος, 'huge', and φοινήεις, 'blood-red', snake (*Il.* 12.202). Still alive, the snake resists without despairing and bites the breast of the eagle, aiming at its neck. The hurt eagle reacts to its bite, by renouncing its prey. The αἰόλος, 'nimble' (208), snake is thrown away and falls down among the warriors. Interpreted by Hector as a bad sign sent by Zeus, the image of the snake prevents the Trojans from their vengeful attack against the Greeks. As the eagle failed to bring its prey to the nest, the Trojans will not be able to defeat the Greeks after overcoming their wall. The victory of the Greeks is confirmed by the metaphorical comparison of Hector with a δράκων, 'dragon', at the end of the Trojan War (*Il.* 22.93). As I have discussed in the previous section, Hector is attributed the marauding skills of the snake in his final confrontation with Achilles. Just like a snake that waits for its prey, hidden in its secret cave, Hector shows his military fury and vengeful temper. He is compared to a snake that has eaten κακὰ φάρμακα, 'toxic herbs', and

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[392] Ap. Rhod. *Argon*. 4.1506-10.

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ἑλισσόμενος, 'coils', before springing up (94-5). However, through an ironic reversal, the monster that will attack and win is the Greek and not the Trojan dragon. Thus, in Homer, the aggressive and defensive skills of the snake are evoked with a prophetic function. Through its biting and coiling skills, the snake foretells the victory of the Greeks and the defeat of Trojan heroes. Fear, terror, courage and decision-making are conveyed by the portentous appearance of the snake on the battlefield.

Attic dramatists apply the marauding skills of the snake to deceitful heroines in order to emphasise the treachery, violence and dangerousness of their instruments of revenge. By blurring the boundaries between φίλος and ἄφιλος, predator and prey, murderer and murdered, they express the Dionysiac consequences of female deception in intra-family vengeful dynamics. In the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra is depicted as a slaying dragon because of her deception in the modality of killing her husband. Her threatening, vengeful and bloody-thirsty nature is described through the aggressive and defensive skills of the snake. The δῆγμα, 'bite' (791), of the snake is evoked by the Chorus to anticipate the suffering of their master. By creating a dramaturgical moment of suspense, Aeschylus leads the audience from the return of Agamemnon towards his death. As I have shown in the previous section, Clytemnestra plays the role of the anguiform guardian of the palace of Argos, where she welcomes her husband with treacherous words, just like a snake that coils on the ground and opens its jaws (920). The coiling movement of the snake is also evoked to represent the δῖναι, 'turmoils', in the heart of the Argives, worried about the future of their city (995-7). When Cassandra mentions the guilt of Paris in her prophecy, the Chorus are stung by the δῆγμα, 'bite', of the snake, which symbolises the misdeed that

will occur in the House of Atreus (1164). As she explains in rational terms, Clytemnestra after preparing a φάρμακον, 'venomous drink' (1260), will sharpen the φάσγανον, 'sword' (1262), against her husband. The Chorus in fact ask their queen τί κακόν […] ἐδανὸν ἢ ποτόν, 'which toxic food or drink' she had to commit such a vengeful misdeed (1406-7). In the hymn to the δαίμων of the House of Atreus, the Argives define Clytemnestra's violence as καρδιόδηκτος, 'gnawing the heart' (1471). The recurrent reference to the instruments of danger of the snake emphasises the fierceness, power and dangerousness of Clytemnestra. The dreadful effect of her biting and coiling skills in committing revenge are expressed through the emotional response of the Chorus to the death of Agamemnon.

In the *Choephoroi*, the marauding skills of the snake are evoked to represent Clytemnestra as the slain dragon of the House of Atreus. By assuming the treacherous, threatening and violent temper of his mother, Orestes returns home to avenge the death of Agamemnon. With these words, he reproaches Clytemnestra for having killed his father by anticipating the vengeful act of matricide (246-54):

> {Ορ.} Ζεῦ Ζεῦ, θεωρὸς τῶνδε πραγμάτων γενοῦ·
> ἰδοῦ δὲ γένναν εὖνιν αἰετοῦ πατρός,
> θανόντος ἐν πλεκταῖσι καὶ σπειράμασιν
> δεινῆς ἐχίδνης. τοὺς δ' ἀπωρφανισμένους
> νῆστις πιέζει λιμός· οὐ γὰρ ἐντελεῖς   250
> θήραν πατρῴαν προσφέρειν σκηνήμασιν.
> οὕτω δὲ κἀμὲ τήνδε τ', Ἠλέκτραν λέγω,

ἰδεῖν πάρεστί σοι, πατροστερῆ γόνον,

ἄμφω φυγὴν ἔχοντε τὴν αὐτὴν δόμων.[393]

At the beginning of the tragedy, Orestes arrives at the palace of Argos and witnesses the procession of the libation-bearers to the tomb of his father. By invoking Zeus as the spectator of the violence of his house, he specifically employs the metaphor of the eagle entangled by the viper to justify his vengeful intentions. According to Cohen (1986: 129-41), the image of the eagle, which also occurs in the *parodos* of the *Agamemnon* (138), connotes the moral agents of Zeus, whose justice is based on power, violence and retribution. The eagle, which is the king of the birds,[394] and Zeus' favourite,[395] is specifically related to Agamemnon in the *Choephoroi*. By referring to the Homeric prophecy of the eagle bitten by the snake (*Il*. 12.200-3), Aeschylus recalls the death of the king by Clytemnestra's hands. Whereas in Homer the image functions as a bad sign for the Trojans and prevents them from attacking the Greeks, on the Attic stage it does not lose its prophetic power, but it rather reveals the motives of Orestes in committing the matricide. As Fowler (2007:302-15) states, the metaphor of the viper represents the motif of φίλος/ἄφιλος in the household, as the reflection of intra-family vengeance. By blurring the boundaries between friend and enemy,

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[393] *Or.* Zeus, Zeus, spectator of the misdeeds of this family, look upon the bereaved offspring of the father eagle, who died in the coils and spires of the terrible viper. The orphans starving famine oppresses: they are not yet full grown to bring a quarry like their father's to the nest. Thus me and this, Electra I mean, it is possible for you to see, offspring without father, both exiles from our own home.

[394] Aesch. *Ag*. 114.

[395] Hom. *Il*. 24.311.

murder and murdered, slaying and slain, Aeschylus prepares the scene for Orestes' vengeance against Clytemnestra.

The image of the δεινή ἔχιδνα, 'terrible viper' (249), which dared to kill its male counterpart, does not merely illustrate the vengeful act committed by Clytemnestra against Agamemnon. Through a dramatic reversal, the metaphor of the eagle rather anticipates the violent act of revenge that Orestes has planned and will accomplish against his mother. According to McHardy (2008:103-17), the capture of the quarry symbolises Orestes' attempt to claim the wealth, power and patrimony of his father. As she implies, the focus of the metaphor shifts from the helpless status to the empowerment of the orphan offspring of the eagle. This is evident at the end of the tragedy, where Orestes justifies his murderous act as follows (991-6):

{Ορ.} ἥτις δ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ τοῦτ' ἐμήσατο στύγος,

ἐξ οὗ τέκνων ἤνεγχ' ὑπὸ ζώνην βάρος,

φίλον τέως, νῦν δ' ἐχθρόν, ὡς φαίνει, κακόν –

τί σοι δοκεῖ; μύραινά γ' εἴτ' ἔχιδν' ἔφυ

σήπειν θιγοῦσ' ἂν μᾶλλον οὐ δεδηγμένον   995

τόλμης ἕκατι κἀκδίκου φρονήματος.[396]

Just like a snake that coils around and kills its male counterpart, Clytemnestra entrapped Agamemnon in her vengeful plan. Without even biting her prey, she

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[396] *Or.* But this woman who planned this horror against the man, by whom she carried in her womb the burden of the children, once friendly, but now hateful, as she appears, what does she look like? She was born as a sea-serpent or a viper, able to make putrid someone without even biting him, but just touching him, due to her audacity and unjust mind.

was able to capture and destroy her husband. By recalling the prophecy uttered by Cassandra (*Ag.* 1131), which I have analysed in the previous section, Orestes condemns the boldness of his mother. In emphatic position at the start of the verse and in juxtaposition with the noun ἀνήρ, ἀνδρός, 'man', the feminine relative pronoun ἥτις is the subject of Orestes' denouncing words (991). The daring behaviour of Clytemnestra is expressed through the aorist of the verb μήδομαι, which generally means 'I intend'.[397] In epic contexts, the verb is mostly used in bad sense as 'I plan and do cunningly or skilfully'.[398] After Homer, it can assume the simple meaning of 'I contrive, invent'.[399] Referring to Clytemnestra, μήδομαι preserves its epic connotation in Orestes' words. In order to denounce the deceptive behaviour of his mother, Orestes specifically compares her to a μύραινα, 'sea-serpent', which was associated with the ἔχιδνα, 'viper', in the ancient Greek world. As Thompson (1947:163) says, this fish species was believed 'to come on land to mate with the male viper', and to share the same destiny of the female viper, which is killed by its offspring.[400] Garvie (1986:323-9) interprets the image of the viper as a symbol of 'shamelessness' and 'lawless temper', when considering the association of Clytemnestra with the ἀμφίσβαινα in the *Agamemnon* (1231). Similarly, Collard (2003:196-7) reads the comparison of Clytemnestra with a lethal viper as a reference to her adultery and sexual intercourse with Aegisthus. However, I argue that the image of the viper conveys more than her sexual infidelity. It is rather employed in the depiction of Clytemnestra, with the aim of revealing the dramatic implications of her vengeful

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[397] Hom. *Il*. 2.360, *Od*. 5.189.

[398] Hom. *Il*. 7.478, 10.52, *Od*. 24.96, 426.

[399] Pind. *Ol*. 1.31; Aesch. *PV* 477; Soph. *Trach*. 973; Eur. *Hipp*. 593; Ar. *Av*. 689.

[400] Cf. Ar. *Ran*. 473-5; Nic. *Ther*. 825f.

act in the house of Agamemnon. Through a tragic reversal, Orestes assumes the deceitful skills of his mother to avenge the death of his father, but he is then persecuted by the Erinyes.

As a result of the act of matricide committed by Orestes, the snake metaphor anticipates the vengeful arrival of the Erinyes. The anguiform monsters, as I have discussed in the previous section, persecute Orestes after his vengeful act in the *Eumenides*. When he arrives in Athens, Athena manifests her concern regarding their vengeful attack. The goddess particularly refers to the ἰός, 'venom' (478), they will spill out on the ground. The shedding of the blood in the House of Atreus will terminate just after the absolution of Orestes. During his trial, the Chorus defending the cause of Clytemnestra accuse him of having shed the blood of his mother on the ground (652-3). At the end of the tragedy, the Erinyes sing ἰὸν ἰὸν ἀντιπενθῆ μεθεῖσα, 'venom, venom as vengeance of my suffering' (812), before being convinced by Athena to desist. Thus, the marauding skills of the snake are employed in the *Oresteia* to depict Clytemnestra in her vengeful temper from the death of Agamemnon to the persecution of Orestes. Its biting and coiling skills are particularly evoked to express the violent and treacherous modality of Clytemnestra in killing her husband. Blood and venom, mixed and shed on the ground, do not merely represent though the violence and cruelty of the deceitful avenger. The aggressive and defensive techniques of the snake rather emphasise the retributive, dangerous and deceptive nature of Clytemnestra's vengeance within and against her own family.

Similarly to Aeschylus, Sophocles attributes the marauding skills of the snake to Deianira in order to stage her deceitful act of vengeance against her husband. As I have anticipated in the previous section, Deianira does not simply

function as the instrument of vengeance of the centaur Nessus slain by Heracles in the *Trachiniae*. She rather behaves like a slaying dragon in trying to protect her marital relationship. Because of the introduction of a second wife in her house, Deianira makes use of φίλτρα, 'love-charms' (584), and θελκτήρια, 'spells' (585). Convinced that the blood of the centaur Nessus has magic erotic properties, she imbues a regal robe with it and gives the special present in homage to her husband. The aggressive and defensive techniques of the snake play a fundamental role in the representation of the vengeful plan of Deianira. She is initially depicted as terrified by the possible implications of the magical potion she will use to defend her marriage. With these words, Deianira reveals to the Chorus the instrument of her vengeance (555-8, 568-77):

{ΔΗ.} Ἦν μοι παλαιὸν δῶρον ἀρχαίου ποτὲ   555

θηρός, λέβητι χαλκέῳ κεκρυμμένον,

ὃ παῖς ἔτ' οὖσα τοῦ δασυστέρνου παρὰ

Νέσσου φθίνοντος ἐκ φονῶν ἀνειλόμην,

[…] ἐκθνῄσκων δ' ὁ θὴρ

τοσοῦτον εἶπε· «Παῖ γέροντος Οἰνέως,

τοσόνδ' ὀνήσῃ τῶν ἐμῶν, ἐὰν πίθῃ,   570

πορθμῶν, ὁθούνεχ' ὑστάτην σ' ἔπεμψ' ἐγώ·

ἐὰν γὰρ ἀμφίθρεπτον αἷμα τῶν ἐμῶν

σφαγῶν ἐνέγκῃ χερσὶν ᾗ μελαγχόλους

ἔβαψεν ἰοὺς θρέμμα Λερναίας ὕδρας,

ἔσται φρενός σοι τοῦτο κηλητήριον   575

τῆς Ἡρακλείας, ὥστε μήτιν' εἰσιδὼν

280

στέρξει γυναῖκα κεῖνος ἀντὶ σοῦ πλέον.»[401]

Deianira collected with her own hands the ἀμφίθρεπτον αἷμα, 'the blood clotted' (572), around the wounds of the Centaur Nessus slain by Heracles. As I show in the next section, the image can be compared to the θρόμβον, 'clot', described in the dream of Clytemnestra, in reference to the suckling Orestes.[402] In this passage, it represents the wounds of the centaur, hit by the poisonous arrows of Heracles. In his second labour, he had tinged his arrows with the venom of the serpentine monster Hydra.[403] Through a dramatic reversal, Deianira imbues the regal robe with the blood of Nessus, causing the death of her husband. The parallel between the marauding skills of Deianira and Heracles is confirmed by the use of the verb βάπτω (574, cf. 580). The verb, which can generally mean either 'I dip',[404] or 'I dye',[405] is used of slaughter in tragic contexts.[406] In the *Trachiniae*, it specifically means 'I dip in poison', by specifying the cause of death both of Nessus and Heracles. Defined by Davies (1991:162) as a 'sinister repetition', the verb is

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[401] *De.* It is long time I have kept the gift of the old beast, hidden in a cauldron of bronze, which I took when I was young from the blood of the shaggy-breasted dying Nessus. [...] About dying, the beast told me such words: 'Daughter of the old Oeneus, as you are the last I will carry over, if you listen to me, you will benefit from my ferrying. If you collect the blood clotted around my wounds with your hands, where the monster Hydra of Laerna dipped the arrows in black bile, you will have this charm for Heracles' heart, so that he will not love any woman in front of his eyes more than you'.

[402] Aesch. *Cho.* 533.

[403] For the poisonous blood of Hydra, see Soph. *Trach.* 714-8, 770-1; cf. Hes. *Theog.* 313-8.

[404] Hom. *Od.* 9.392.

[405] Aesch. *Cho.* 1011; Hdt. 7.67, 4; Pl. *Resp.* 429d5.

[406] Aesch. *PV* 863; Soph. *Aj.* 95; Eur. *Phoen.* 1578.

constructed with two different objects: ἰούς, the 'arrows' (574) of Heracles, and χιτῶνα, the 'robe' (580) of Deianira. According to Hogan (1991:247-9), the image of the poisonous blood of Hydra is not employed to intensify the cruelty of Deianira. She cannot be blamed for her vengeful plan, as she acts for claiming the love of her husband. Unlike Medea, who intends to give poisonous gifts to the new wife of Jason,[407] Deianira does not want to harm either Iole or Heracles. She desires to be the first woman in the heart of her husband, although she is aware she should not make use of magic charms (583-5). Her hesitation before behaving like other women demonstrates the absence of murderous intentions in the vengeful plan of Deianira, on the one hand, and gives expression to the negative implications of her jealousy, on the other. She shares the fears about her vengeful plan with the Chorus, who do not prevent her from committing what she has in mind, but rather encourage her to act. As a new tragic version of dragon-slaying stories, the poisonous blood of Hydra becomes the instrument of vengeance of Deianira against Heracles.

Heracles dies because of the vengeance planned by the centaur Nessus but executed by Deianira. The oracle according to which Zeus' son will be slain by an inhabitant of the underworld (1162-3) finds its accomplishment when the poisonous blood of Hydra, clotted around the wounds of Nessus, becomes effective. The fatal robe that Deianira sends to her husband ironically collaborates with the vengeance of the anguiform monster slain by Heracles during his second labour. The fears, jealousy and recrimination of Deianira, who is unsure about the effects of the magic potion, are projected onto the monstrosity of her gift. As a tragic result of the vengeful guardianship of Deianira, the death of Heracles is

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[407] Eur. *Med*. 784-9.

anticipated by an ἄφραστον, 'unutterable', and ἀξύμβλητον 'incomprehensible' phenomenon (693-4). It is relevant to notice that the process of knowledge of Deianira begins when her concerns about the magical robe reach their apex. Although she has followed step by step all the instructions of the centaur Nessus, such as the custody of the blood away from the fire, something strange has occurred (685-7). As Deianira reports, the piece of wool she used to imbue the regal robe of Heracles with the blood of Nessus has disappeared. In the exact point where she threw it away, θρομβώδεις, 'clots of blood' (703), boil, as if Dionysiac wine was shed on the ground. Anticipating a tragic resolution in the house of Heracles, the image prepares the scene for the entrance of Hyllos. Through the words of her son, Deianira realises the tragic consequences of her vengeful action against her husband, as follows (763-71):

{ΥΛ.} Καὶ πρῶτα μὲν δείλαιος ἵλεῳ φρενὶ

κόσμῳ τε χαίρων καὶ στολῇ κατηύχετο·

ὅπως δὲ σεμνῶν ὀργίων ἐδαίετο   765

φλὸξ αἱματηρὰ κἀπὸ πιείρας δρυός,

ἱδρὼς ἀνῄει χρωτὶ καὶ προσπτύσσετο

πλευραῖσιν ἀρτίκολλος, ὥστε τέκτονος,

χιτὼν ἅπαν κατ' ἄρθρον· ἦλθε δ' ὀστέων

ὀδαγμὸς ἀντίσπαστος· εἶτα φοινίας   770

ἐχθρᾶς ἐχίδνης ἰὸς ὣς ἐδαίνυτο.[408]

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[408] *Hy*. And in the beginning the wretched man was kindly praying, glad of his new dress. But when from the ritual offerings and from the resinous wood burst out the bloody flame, sweat started to abound on his skin and the vest to cling close to his side, as if made by an artist, close-

As soon as Heracles wears the fatal robe, the effects of the blood of Nessus started to become visible. The expression φλὸξ αἱματηρά, 'bloody flame' (766), signals the beginning of the suffering of the victim of Deianira's vengeance. According to Easterling (1982:167-9), the image indicates the blood of the sacrifice actually celebrated by Heracles. More than reading it as a metaphorical form of human sacrifice, I argue that it could create confusion between the effects of the venomous blood of Nessus and the blood vengeance of Deianira. Venom and blood are mixed to stage the dreadful effects of Deianira's accomplishment of Nessus' vengeance. This is confirmed by the meaning of the adjective αἱματηρός, ά, όν, in reference to the φλόξ, 'flame', of Heracles' sacrifice. It can mean 'blood-stained' when referring to a weapon[409] or 'bloodshot'[410] in the case of eyes, but it can also assume the metaphorical meaning of 'murderous'.[411] Its connection with blood emphasises the dramatic implications of the self-deception and jealousy of Deianira. The effects of the venomous blood of Nessus, which are described with vivid realism, are abundant sweat (767), inflammatory fever (770) and spasmodic cramps (786-7). The plasticity of the body of Heracles, who suffers in all his limbs, is recreated through the comparison with a craftsman. By evoking the coiling of the snake, the pain provoked by the vest is described as clinging close to the body (768).

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glued to all his limbs; through his bones a convulsive irritation went, and then it seemed that the venom of a murderous and hateful viper devoured him.

[409] Soph. *Ant*. 975; Eur. *Phoen*. 625.

[410] Eur. *IA* 381.

[411] Aesch. *Ag*. 815, *Eum*. 137, 859; Soph. *OC* 552.

As Easterling (1982:167-9) argues, the interpretation of the similitude can be threefold: firstly, Heracles is stuck in the fatal robe, like the statue of an artist; secondly, the robe is attached to the body of Heracles, like the folds of the statue of an artist; thirdly, the pain affects the body of Heracles, like a tightly-fitting vest of a statue made by an artist. Hogan (1991:253) argues that the image evokes the artistic technique of the sculptor in joining the robe to the skin of the sculptured figure. However, I offer a different reading of the image that represents the sinister forces in Heracles' wearing of the serpentine robe. By yelling to the mountains, Heracles is consumed by an atrocious suffering, as if a viper has not only poisoned but also entrapped him. The ἔχιδνα, 'viper' (771), which was considered to coil around and kill its male counterpart, is evoked to describe the agony of Heracles. The snake is connoted by the adjectives φοίνιος, 'murderous' (770) and ἐχθρός, 'hateful' (771), which in combination intensify the dangerous, petrifying and lethal attack of Daianira against her victim. Just like a statue with a robe stuck, but in movement, on its skin, Heracles is captured wearing his serpentine vest. By employing the coiling and biting skills of the snake, Sophocles gives expression to the dramatic implications of the blood vengeance of Deianira, who unconsciously causes the suffering and the death of Heracles.

In the *Andromache*, Euripides evokes the marauding skills of the snake in order to reveal the causes and the effects of the vengeance of another tragic heroine. By playing the role as the deceitful guardian of her own household, Hermione enters into conflict with the slave of her husband. Andromache is terrified by the fact that the son she gave birth by Neoptolemus has caused the jealousy, resentment and hatred of Hermione. In the prologue (8-15, 29-31), she laments that, at the end of the Trojan War, Achilles' son enslaved her and then

married Helen's daughter. As a slave-girl reports, Hermione with the aid of her father Menelaus δεινὰ γὰρ βουλεύεται, 'is planning in fact terrible misdeeds' (62). To Andromache's question ποίας μηχανὰς πλέκουσιν, 'which plans they are weaving' (66), the slave-girl reveals the danger for Molossus. To avoid death, Andromache has hidden her son and has taken refuge in the temple of Thetis. Clinging to the altar, she is threatened by Hermione with these words (266-73):

> {Ερ.} κάθησ' ἑδραία· καὶ γὰρ εἰ πέριξ σ' ἔχοι
>
> τηκτὸς μόλυβδος, ἐξαναστήσω σ' ἐγὼ
>
> πρὶν ὧι πέποιθας παῖδ' Ἀχιλλέως μολεῖν.
>
> {Αν.} πέποιθα. δεινὸν δ' ἑρπετῶν μὲν ἀγρίων
>
> ἄκη βροτοῖσι θεῶν καταστῆσαί τινα,   270
>
> ὃ δ' ἔστ' ἐχίδνης καὶ πυρὸς περαιτέρω
>
> οὐδεὶς γυναικὸς φάρμακ' ἐξηύρηκέ πω
>
> [κακῆς· τοσοῦτόν ἐσμεν ἀνθρώποις κακόν].[412]

As Stevens (1971:126-7) states, the viper symbolises domestic treachery from the perspective of Andromache. In the depiction of Hermione, it indicates the perfidy, betrayal and disloyalty within Neoptolemus' household. Lloyd (1994:121) argues that it functions instead as a symbol of misogyny, when considering that the species of the viper was believed to kill the mate during copulation. Although a remedy was found for the venom of vipers, paradoxically there is no cure against

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[412] *He.* Keep sitting there. And in fact even if all around a molten plumbago held you, I will drive you away, before the child of Achilles on whom you rely arrives. *An.* I rely on him. It is terrible that a god gave to the mortals remedies against wild snakes, but no one has found cures against a bad woman, who is worse than a viper and the fire. [We are such an evil for mankind].

the female kind. From my perspective, the metaphorical reference to the ἔχιδνα, 'viper' (271), conveys more than a misogynist view. Reinforced by the image of the πῦρ, 'fire', it rather gives expression to the vengeful dynamics within Neoptolemus' house.

The poisonous bite of the viper ambiguously connects the accusation of Hermione to the defence of Andromache. Used here as a synonym of ἄκη, 'remedies' (270), in reference to women, the neuter noun φάρμακα is employed to justify Hermione's vengeful intentions. She thinks that Andromache has made her ἄπαιδα καὶ πόσει μισουμένην, 'sterile and hateful to [her] husband' (33), through the use of 'secret philtres'. The dative φαρμάκοις κεκρυμμένοις (32) not only indicates Andromache's instrument of defence from the perspective of Hermione, but it explains the cause of Hermione's jealousy and anger against her stepson (157-8). As I show later in this section in reference to Creusa, the metaphorical association of the hatred of stepmothers with the venom of the viper is a recurrent motif in Euripidean tragedies. For instance, in the *Alcestis*, Admetus is asked by his wife to not get married to another woman. Before dying, Alcestis does not simply demand fidelity from her husband, but rather she is worried about the violence of a potential stepmother against her sons (308-10). Through the metaphor of the ἔχιδνα, 'viper' (310), she confirms the negative consequences of the introduction of an ἐχθρός, 'hateful' (309), new wife into her house. According to Susanetti (2001:199-200), the prestige of an Athenian wife consisted in guaranteeing the continuity of the male line and the transmission of the property and wealth. Therefore, women hated the presence of the sons had by their husbands in a previous relationship. I argue that that in the *Andromache* the viper metaphor emphasises not only the vengeful reaction of Hermione to the presence

of Andromache in her house, but also its tragic implications. Hermione does not know that assuming the role of slaying dragon in the house of Neoptolemus will not accomplish her vengeance, but will provoke instead the destruction of her own household.

By evoking the coiling movement of the snake, Euripides illustrates the instruments of vengeance employed by Hermione against Andromache and Molossus. In the first episode, Hermione declares her use of δόλος, 'treachery' (435) in order to capture and kill mother and son. By threatening Andromache with the life of Molossus, she has convinced her to leave the altar dedicated to Thetis. Instead of directly attacking Hermione, Andromache denounces the deceptive nature of the Spartans. She defines the inhabitants of Sparta ἔχθιστοι βροτῶν, 'the most hateful mortals' (445), because of their ability of δόλια βουλευτήρια, 'giving treacherous advice' (446). Furthermore, the chiastic expression ψευδῶν ἄνακτες, μηχανορράφοι κακῶν, 'of deceits masters, craftsmen of evil plots' (447), denotes the double-dealing behaviour of the Spartans. Their ambiguity is emphasised by the enjambement of the participle φρονοῦντες, 'counselling' (449), which is constructed with the accusative plural form of the adjective ἑλικτός, ή, όν, 'tortuous', and the adverb πέριξ, 'circuitously' (448). Suggesting the coiling movement of the snake to entrap and kill their victims, the depiction of the Spartans reflects the deceptive nature of Hermione. The Chorus respond to the blaming words of Andromache that a man should love and respect his legitimate wife. With these words, they defend and support the cause of Hermione against Andromache (465-70):

{Χο.} οὐδέποτε δίδυμα λέκτρ' ἐπαινέσω βροτῶν

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οὐδ' ἀμφιμάτορας κόρους,

†ἔριδας† οἴκων δυσμενεῖς τε λύπας·

μίαν μοι στεργέτω πόσις †γάμοις

ἀκοινώνητον ἀνδρὸς† εὐνάν.[413]   470

Despite the vengeful intentions of Hermione, Andromache and her son are rescued by Peleus in the third episode. For the fear that Neoptolemus will repudiate her, once she has acknowledged her deceiving plan of revenge against his son, Hermione tries to commit suicide, as the nurse reports (802-19). The failed attempt of suicide is interpreted by the Chorus as evidence of her grief for having planned such a terrible misdeed. The doubtful nurse asks Hermione: ἀλγεῖς φόνον ῥάψασα συγγάμωι σέθεν;, 'do you suffer because you devised death against your marriage rival?' (836). The verb ῥάπτω, which as I have shown in the previous chapter (p. 175) can generally mean 'I stitch', specifically denotes treacherous behaviour. In the *Andromache*, the verb ῥάπτω, which denotes the deceitful nature of Hermione, is employed not only by the nurse, but also by Orestes. When he arrives at Neoptolemus' house, he asks Hermione: μῶν ἐς γυναῖκ' ἔρραψας οἷα δὴ γυνή;, 'have you plotted like woman against woman?' (911). To justify her vengeful intentions, Hermione responds that a clever husband should not allow his wife to be visited by women, who are evil creatures (945-6). Some women destroy the marriage-bed to make profit, others want to be sick together for a misdeed, many act because of wantonness (947-9). The last is

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[413] *Ch*. I will never approve either double marriages among the mortals or brothers or sisters by different mothers, which cause domestic conflicts and hostile grief. The husband should love one marriage-bed, without sharing it with other women.

the motivational drive that has paradoxically led Hermione towards a new marriage-bed. Unaware that Neoptolemus has been deceived and killed by Orestes, she decides to run away from the palace with him. Thus, the marauding skills of the snake are evoked to represent Hermione simultaneously as an entangling and entangled wife in the vengeful intrigues of her own household. By assuming the biting and coiling skills of the snake, she initially asserts her marital status, but eventually participates in the recognition of Neoptolemus' son as the king of the Molossian land.

Meanwhile, in the *Ion*, Euripides attributes the marauding skills of the snake to Creusa, who through deception unwittingly attempts to kill her own son. Through the specific reference to the biting and coiling of the snake, he transforms Creusa into the slaying dragon of her household. When Ion finds out that his father is Xuthos, as Apollo has prophesised, he becomes aware of the dangers he will face going to Athens. His introduction in the house of Creusa will be perceived as alien, threatening and distressing. By manifesting his fears and anxieties, Ion reminds Xuthos of the many slaughters committed by women through the use of φάρμακα, 'charms', and θανάσιμα, 'poisons' (616). Illustrated by the snake metaphor, the motif of the hate between stepmother and stepson is recurrent in the tragedy,[414] in order to confuse the bond ties between Creusa and her son. Initially, Ion feels pity and fear for Creusa. He sympathises with her childless status and imagines that with his arrival she will be no longer able to share her suffering with her husband (607-10). However, Creusa reveals to the old man her jealousy and anger at the introduction of Ion into her house. Convinced that he is the fruit of a previous or extra-conjugal relationship of Xuthos (815-6),

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[414] Cf. Eur. *Ion* 1025, 1270, 1330.

she desires taking vengeance. The old man with whom she shares her discontent fuels her vengeful temper, by inferring that Xuthos has lied and will bring into her house the son of a slave. Without questioning the oracle of Apollo, he reminds Creusa of her Athenian birth and of the foreign origin of her husband. Through a tragic reversal, the old man attributes the coiling skills of the snake to Xuthos, who descended from the γένος of Aeolus and Dorus has λάθραι, 'furtively' (816), woven a web around her. Through the etymological figure ἔπλεκεν πλοκάς (826), the old man suggests she should therefore 'devise a web of deceit' to vindicate her marital status. He encourages Creusa to make use either of the ξίφος, 'sword', or of a δόλος, 'trick', or of φάρμακα, 'poisonous philtres' (844-5). To prevent from being killed, she needs to kill her husband and stepson, because, as the old man says, 'when two enemies live in the same house, one eventually succumbs to the other' (848-9). After listening to the suggestions of the old man, which are to set on fire the temple of Apollo (974), to kill Xuthos (976) and to get rid of Ion (978), Creusa comes up with a treacherous idea.

As the daughter of Erechtheus, Creusa has inherited two drops of the Gorgon's blood, which Athena gave to Erichthonius. By connecting the myth of autochthony of Athens with the Gigantomachy, she discloses her deceitful instrument of vengeance. She asks the old man if he knows about the battle of Phlegra, when the Earth produced the monster Gorgon to help the Giants against the Olympians (987-97). Athena is said to slay the earth-born monster and put its skin on her breast. This is the explanation of the origin of the αἰγίς, 'aegis', provided by Euripides. The term can literally mean 'goatskin', worn as a garment,[415] and specifically denote the shield of Zeus,[416] lent both to Athena[417]

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[415] Hdt. 4.189, 1.

and to Apollo.[418] It can also assume the meaning of 'rushing storm, hurricane',[419] because of its connection with the terrible sound provoked by the shaken aegis. In the Homeric representation of battle scenes, the aegis functions as the ὅπλον, 'weapon', of Zeus.[420] For instance, when the Trojans wound Menelaus, Agamemnon asks Zeus to 'shake his dark aegis', so that the Trojans will be punished for their deceitful attack.[421] Also in association with Apollo and Athena, the aegis assumes a military function, by empowering the Trojans and the Greeks on the battlefield. Defined as δεινή, 'terrible',[422] and σμερδαλέα, 'fearful',[423] the aegis incites the heroes to war and equips them with strength, violence and fury. However, in a few examples, the aegis assumes more than a destructive role on the battlefield. When used to cover the head or the body of a warrior, it assumes a protective role in Homer. For example, at the end of the *Iliad*, Apollo covers the corpse of Hector with his golden aegis, so that Achilles cannot 'tear or drag' him.[424] Athena also uses the aegis to cover and protect the head of Achilles, so that he can scare the enemies and become invulnerable.[425]

Whereas in Homer the aegis is held by Zeus and then lent to his offspring, in Euripides it becomes a specific attribute of Athena. As described in the *Ion*

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[416] Hom. *Il*. 5.738.

[417] Ibid. 2.447.

[418] Hom. *Il*. 15.318.

[419] Aesch. *Cho*. 592.

[420] *Schol. ad* Hom. *Il*. 4.166, 15.229.

[421] Hom. *Il*. 4.167.

[422] Hom. *Il*. 5.738, 15.308,

[423] Ibid. 21.400

[424] Ibid. 24.20.

[425] Ibid. 18.204.

(210, 993), the aegis is the robe of the goddess, adorned with the Gorgon's head in the middle and fringed with coiling snakes.[426] By providing his paraetymology of the αἰγίς, Euripides interprets the term as developing from the verb ἀΐσσω, 'I dart', rather than from the noun αἴξ, 'goat'. As Creusa says, the aegis is called in this way because of its 'darting upon the gods' (997). Through a tragic reversal, she is metaphorically equipped with the αἰγίς of Athena to attack Ion. By using the Gorgon's blood, Creusa does not protect but rather attempts to kill her own son. As follows, she reveals to the old man her deceitful instrument of vengeance (1010-7):

{Πρ.} πῶς οὖν κέκρανται δίπτυχον δῶρον θεᾶς;

{Κρ.} κοίλης μὲν ὅστις φλεβὸς ἀπέσταξεν φόνος

{Πρ.} τί τῶιδε χρῆσθαι; δύναμιν ἐκφέρει τίνα;

{Κρ.} νόσους ἀπείργει καὶ τροφὰς ἔχει βίου.

{Πρ.} ὁ δεύτερος δ' ἀριθμὸς ὢν λέγεις τί δρᾶι;

{Κρ.} κτείνει, δρακόντων ἰὸς ὢν τῶν Γοργόνος.   1015

{Πρ.} ἐς ἓν δὲ κραθέντ' αὐτὸν ἢ χωρὶς φορεῖς;

{Κρ.} χωρίς· κακῶι γὰρ ἐσθλὸν οὐ συμμείγνυται.[427]

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[426] Cf. Aesch. *Eum*. 404.

[427] *Ol*. But why has Athena's gift double power? *Cr*. One drop comes from the blood of the veins of the monster… *Ol*. What is it for? What power can it have? *Cr*. It prevents diseases and has the seed of life. *Ol*. And what about the other drop? *Cr*. It kills: it is the venom of the snakes of the Gorgon. *Ol*. Are the drops mixed together or separated? *Cr*. Separated. It is not possible to mix good with bad.

According to Mirto (2009:294-6), the agency of Creusa in plotting vengeance against Ion is not denied, despite the divine intervention of Apollo and his prophecy. She rather makes use of the typical violent stratagems of stepmothers against their stepsons to defend her household. By asking the collaboration of the old man, Creusa wants him to hide the poison of the Gorgon's snakes among the folds of his dress and to pour it in the glass of Ion, during the banquet celebrated in Delphi in his honour (1029-38). However, the plan fails, since sinister voices arrive to the ears of Ion, who promptly changes his glass, before realising himself to be in danger. During the libations for Dionysus, an extraordinary event occurs: a flying swallow, after drinking some of the wine shed by Ion on the floor, starts to shake its wings and body, as if possessed by bacchic frenzy, and eventually dies (1202-6). The effects of the venom, employed as an instrument of revenge by Creusa, are projected on the swallow, in order to provoke fear and terror among the hosts of the banquet. With the φοινικοσκελεῖς χηλαί, 'bloodstained talons', completely stretched out, the bird is captured in its cries of suffering (1204-7). The cruel image of the swallow gives confirmation of the vengeful plan of Creusa to Ion, who, after asking the old man who is his killer, yells: 'A foreign woman, from the family of Erechtheus, has tried to poison me' (1220-1).

After the failure of her vengeful plan, Creusa is condemned to death by the magistrates of Delphi, as the slave reports in the fourth episode. Paradoxically, Ion before the start of the banquet had fixed at the gate a tapestry, which shows Cecrops as coiling in his spires of snakes and surrounded by his daughters (1163-5). Caught in her vengeful intentions by Ion, Creusa deserves punishment for having used the Gorgon's blood. With these words, the slaves of Creusa express

their fear and suffering after the accusations against their mistress in the fourth *stasimon* (1229-40):

{Χο.} οὐκ ἔστ' οὐκ ἔστιν θανάτου

παρατροπὰ μελέαι μοι·   1230

φανερὰ φανερὰ τάδ' ἤδη

†σπονδὰς ἐκ Διονύσου

βοτρύων θοᾶς ἐχίδνας

σταγόσι μειγνυμένας φόνωι†.

φανερὰ θύματα νερτέρων,   1235

συμφοραὶ μὲν ἐμῶι βίωι,

λεύσιμοι δὲ καταφθοραὶ δεσποίναι.

τίνα φυγὰν πτερόεσσαν ἢ

χθονὸς ὑπὸ σκοτίους μυχοὺς πορευθῶ,

θανάτου λεύσιμον ἄταν   1240

ἀποφεύγουσα […].[428]

The Chorus compare Creusa to an ἐχίδνα, 'viper' (1233), when her vengeful plan against Ion has been detected. As Albini (2006:225) states, the reptile is connoted by the adjective θοός, ή, όν, 'swift', because of the quick effect of its poison in its volatile victim. I argue that the metaphor does not intensify the cruelty of Creusa,

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[428] *Ch*. There is no means of averting death for us unhappy, it is clear, it is clear by this time that the libations from the grapes of Dionysus were mixed with the blood of the quick viper to kill. The victims of the underworld are visible, misdeeds for our life, death by stoning for our mistress. We should either fly away or hide under the ground, in the shadow, but avoid the horror of death by stoning.

but it rather expresses the fears of the Chorus. The slaves of Creusa evoke the ability of the snake to attack birds in the sky and to hide under the earth, with the aim of commenting on the common situation of danger into which they have fallen. By adapting the marauding skills of the snake to the Dionysiac context of the banquet, Euripides captures Creusa in the passage from the accomplishment to the punishment of her vengeance. In reaction to the introduction of Ion into her house, she employs the poisonous blood of the Gorgon, which was given by Athena to her ancestor Erichthonius. She is not possessed by any form of divine madness or frantic irrationality, but moved by jealousy and anger she unconsciously tries to kill her own son. In the dialogue with Ion, she responds to his reproaches by saying that he represents an enemy for her family (1291). Although Creusa assumes the aggressive techniques of the snake, she fails in her vengeful plan. Through a dramatic reversal, she does not assume the petrifying role of the anguiform Gorgon, but she risks being stoned because of her murderous intentions against Ion.

So, Attic dramatists apply the marauding skills of the snake to deceitful heroines, in order to stage the tragic effects of their vengeful plans and actions. With particular reference to the biting and coiling skills of the snake, the dangerousness, deception and violence of the instruments of revenge deployed by tragic heroines are revealed in intra-family vengeful dynamics. The *Oresteia* evokes the aggressive and defensive techniques of the snake in the depiction of Clytemnestra to express her vengeful temper from the return of Agamemnon to the persecution of Orestes. The female avenger, compared to different real and mythological snakes, is depicted as opening her jaws to and coiling around her husband. As the climax of her deceptive behaviour, she entraps and slays

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Agamemnon, through an unexpected and violent attack. The metaphorical association of the snake with Clytemnestra is confirmed by the vengeful arrival of the Erinyes. The snake metaphor not only justifies the act of matricide, but it also intensifies the violent relationship between mother and son. In the *Trachiniae*, the marauding skills of the snake are used to stage the death of Heracles. The tragedy specifically evokes the coiling and the biting skills of the snake in the representation of the vengeful act of Deianira. In addition to the involvement of the centaur Nessus in her vengeful plan, her jealous reaction to the arrival of Iole brings about the self-destruction of her household. As if entrapped and bitten by a viper, Heracles manifests his suffering in consequence of the vengeful act of his wife. The *Andromache* evokes the marauding skills of the snake to reveal the vengeful intentions of Hermione against the concubine of her husband and her stepson. By specifically referring to the poisonous bite of the viper and its coiling movement, Euripides unfolds the tragic action from the plotting to the punishment of Hermione's plan of vengeance. Despite her role as the slaying dragon of Neoptolemus' house, she fails and therefore escapes with Orestes. The *Ion* attributes the marauding skills of the snake to stage the vengeful attempt of Creusa against her son. Convinced that Ion is the fruit of an extra-conjugal relationship of her husband, Creusa reacts with violence to his entrance into her house. By specifically referring to the venomous bite and the coiling of the snake, Euripides frustrates the recognition between mother and son. Supported and fuelled by the old man, Creusa decides to use the venomous blood of the Gorgon, inherited by her father Erechtheus, in order to destroy the intruder of her house. However, the deceptive, violent and powerful skills of the snake in attacking its enemy fail in the anguiform depiction of Creusa. She does not succeed in killing

her son, through the venom of the Gorgon, but caught in her murderous intentions is instead condemned to death. As I show in the next section, the tragic heroines are not only captured in their dangerous, aggressive and deceptive behaviour, but also in their nurturing, protective and mourning role.

3. 2. 3   Kourotrophic role

The kourotrophic role of the snake, the last aspect that I analyse, displays the Dionysiac causes and the effects of female deception in intra-family vengeful dynamics. After considering relevant literary references to this aspect, I argue that Attic dramatists represent tragic heroines as nourished by loss, suffering and jealousy to plan vengeance within and against their own household. In the ancient Greek world, the snake was thought to be violent, aggressive and cruel not only against its enemies, but also within its own species. Violence characterises the entire process of reproduction of the snake from the moment of copulation to that of delivery. Through the combination of coiling and biting, the species of the ἔχιδνα, 'viper', was said to kill its male counterpart during copulation. As I have anticipated in the previous chapter (p. 188), Herodotus (3.109) describes the mating of the viper as a violent and aggressive act. When the male species ejaculates its seed, the female species seizes it and bites its neck. By sharing the same destiny of the lioness, the viper is then punished in the act of giving birth. As if they took vengeance for the death of their father, the young gnaw the womb of their mother and come into life by eating its intestines. In the pseudo-Aristotelian *Mirabilium auscultationes* (846b18), the mating of the ἔχιδνα with the ἔχις is also described in violent terms. During the copulation, the viper cuts off

the head of its male counterpart and then is devoured by its offspring that are still in the womb.[429] As in the case of the lioness, it is difficult to assess though to what extent the snake participated in rites surrounding childbirth in the ancient Greek world. Ogden (2013b:310-7) specifically refers to the fertility cures in Epidaurus, which involved the participation of snakes and generally brought about multiple or abnormal births.[430] By referring to Pausanias (6.20, 2-6), he also mentions the temple of Eileithyia (348), the goddess of childbirth and labour pains, in connection with the cult of the Sosipolis dragon in Elea.

Provided with a procreative and destructive role, the dragon takes part in mythological battles for the defence of a sacred territory. Specifically in aetiological myths of city foundations, the teeth of the dragon are imagined as procreative seeds. One example is the dragon of Ares slain by Cadmus to found the city of Thebes. Under the suggestion of Athena, Cadmus slaughters the anguiform monster and sows its teeth in the ground, from which the Σπαρτοί, 'Sown Men', sprout up.[431] In the narration of the labours of Jason at the palace of Aetes, Apollonius Rhodius (*Argon*. 3.414) also gives a procreative role to the teeth of the δεινός ὄφις, 'terrible snake'. He says that from the jaws of the dragon will spring up 'earthborn armoured men' (415). Jason needs to sow the teeth of the dragon in the sacred land of Ares to obtain the Golden Fleece (1028, 1045). According to duBois (1991b), the action of sowing the ground reflects the masculine idea of the female body as a passive medium for childbirth. This instrumental vision does not deny the 'parthenogenetic role of the earth', but

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[429] Cf. Nic. *Ther*. 128-40.

[430] Cf. Demand, 1996:91-4; Dasen, 1997:49-63.

[431] Pind. *Isthm*. 1.30, 7.10.

rather testifies the male claim of dominance in the process of reproduction (28). By departing from duBois, I argue that the metaphorical connection between agricultural and human reproduction rather conveys the concepts of danger and protection in dragon-slaying myths. Symbolised by the snake, the combination of sexuality and violence is specifically evident in mythological stories of child-exposure.[432] Ogden (2013a:46) mentions, for example, the pair of snakes sent by Hera to baby Heracles. Driven by jealousy and vengeance, the goddess tried to kill Heracles, by inserting two snakes in his shield-chest.[433] Eventually Heracles slays the snakes by clutching their throats with each hand. In this case, the animal does not assume a procreative role, but threatens the life of the baby hero.

In other child-exposure myths, the snake does not lose its powerful, dangerous and threatening power, but it specifically assumes a kourotrophic role. Among the patterns outlined by Huys (1995:90), 'illicit or unusual sexual intercourse, mostly of a god with a mortal princess', is the cause of the exposure of a child. Exposed to the perils of the wild, he is generally fed by animals and with divine support eventually survives. For instance, Pindar (*Ol.* 6.39-44) narrates the myth of Evadne, who after her intercourse with Apollo gave birth and exposed her child in the meadow.[434] Abandoned among the reeds, Evadne's son was not fed with the milk of his mother but with the ἀμεμφεῖ ἰῷ μελισσᾶν, 'the harmless venom of honeybees' (46). Two snakes were sent by the gods as the

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[432] See, for example, Van Hook, 1920:134-45; Bolkestein, 1922:222-39; Viljoen, 1959:58-69; Engels, 1980:112-20; Golden, 1981:316-31; Harris, 1982:114-6; Patterson, 1985:103-23; Ogden, 1994:85-102; Ingalls, 2002:246-54.

[433] Pind. *Nem*. 1.33-59.

[434] For discussion of the mythological relationship between rape and meadow see Deacy, 2013:395-413.

guardians of the chest of Iamos. Thanks to the divine intervention, the child was protected among the violets. The name of the baby hero, from which the Iamides descend, etymologically oscillates between the terms ἰός, 'venom', and ἴον, 'violet'.[435] Furthermore, the nurturing, protective and threatening function of the snake is used in reference to the anguiform heroes of Attica. Just like his predecessors, Cecrops and Erechtheus, Erichthonius was generated by the Earth and was associated with the snake. As I have noted above, Athena assumes a kourotrophic role in the *Ion*: she is said to have taken up the baby Erichthonius from the ground and, after putting him in a basket, protected by two snakes, to have given him in custody to the daughters of Cecrops.[436]

In the Homeric tradition, the snake is evoked to emphasise the metaphorical relationship between violence and sexuality on the battlefield. Foretelling the result of the Trojan War, it is imagined in its destructive power as the predator of the offspring of other animal species. In this way, the snake gives expression to the violence, cruelty and victory of the winners, on the one hand, and the suffering, loss and helplessness of the defeated, on the other. At the beginning of the Trojan War, the Greeks witness the portentous attack of a δράκων, 'dragon', against eight young birds and their mother (*Il.* 2.308-20). Sent by Zeus, the prodigious snake, which is described as δαφοινός, 'tawny', in its back (308), and σμερδαλέος, 'terrible to look at' (309), darts from under the altar, where the Greeks are making offerings. It captures the birds, hidden on the highest branch of a tree, among the leaves, to devour them. While the mother-bird

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[435] See Irwin, 1996:385-95 for a chromatic analysis of the name of Iamos in the myth of Evadne in the sixth *Olympian* of Pindar.

[436] On the kourotrophic role of Athena in the autochthonous myth of Athens, see for instance Hadzistelliou-Price, 1978:101-32.

lamenting the death of its offspring flies around, the snake hits its wing. After the completion of its pitiless and wild meal, Zeus transforms the snake into a stone. In response to the astonished and terrified Greeks, Calchas explains that the portent is a good sign regarding the end of the war. Just like the snake eating eight birds and their mother, the Greek heroes will fight against the Trojans for nine years and win on the tenth. To urge the Greeks to the battle, the capture of Troy is anticipated through the image of a snake that attacks and devours nine birds. The acoustic details of this portentous image represent the lamentation of the Trojans at the end of the war. Defined as a ἐλεεινός, 'pitiful', image, the young are devoured while τετριγῶτες, 'uttering a shrill cry' (314). The epic perfect participle of the verb τρίζω, which can indicate creaking, hissing or crackling sounds, specifically connotes sounds uttered by animals. Accompanying the wail of its young, the mother-bird is also depicted raising lamenting sounds. The irregular participle form ἀμφιαχυῖα (316), which in relation to birds specifically means 'flying about and shrieking', conveys a sensorial combination of movement and sound. In this prophetic image, the verb ἐλελίζω, which is referred to the snake in the action of devouring the mother bird and its offspring, also assumes a double meaning. Through the merging of the 'coiling' of the snake and the 'lamenting' sounds of its victims (see also p. 123), the suffering of the Trojans and the cruelty of the Greeks were expressed in Homeric prophecies.

Attic dramatists attribute the kourotrophic role of the snake to deceitful heroines in order to unveil the tragic consequences of their vengeful plans and actions in intra-familial intrigues. By blurring the boundaries between τοκεύς and τροφεύς, danger and protection, life and death, they unfold the tragic action towards the Dionysiac self-destruction of the household. The nourishing role of

the snake is, for example, attributed to Clytemnestra in the *Choephoroi*. Depicted simultaneously as a procreative and a destructive dragon, Clytemnestra is the mother of the offspring that will kill her. Sexuality and violence are blended in the dream of Clytemnestra, as narrated by the Chorus to Orestes (523-32):

{Χο.} οἶδ', ὦ τέκνον, παρῆ γάρ· ἔκ τ' ὀνειράτων

καὶ νυκτιπλάγκτων δειμάτων πεπαλμένη

χοὰς ἔπεμψε τάσδε δύσθεος γυνή.   525

{Ορ.} ἦ καὶ πέπυσθε τοὔναρ, ὥστ' ὀρθῶς φράσαι;

{Χο.} τεκεῖν δράκοντ' ἔδοξεν, ὡς αὐτὴ λέγει.

{Ορ.} καὶ ποῖ τελευτᾷ καὶ καρανοῦται λόγος;

{Χο.} ἐν σπαργάνοισι παιδὸς ὁρμίσαι δίκην.

{Ορ.} τίνος βορᾶς χρῄζοντα, νεογενὲς δάκος;

{Χο.} αὐτὴ προσέσχε μαστὸν ἐν τὠνείρατι.   530

{Ορ.} καὶ πῶς ἄτρωτον οὖθαρ ἦν ὑπὸ στύγους;

{Χο.} ὥστ' ἐν γάλακτι θρόμβον αἵματος σπάσαι.[437]

The Chorus report that Clytemnestra has dreamt to give birth to a δράκων, 'dragon' (527), to wrap it ἐν σπαργάνοισι, 'in swaddling-clothes' (528), and to feed it with her μαστός, 'breast' (530). Creating confusion between blood and

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[437] *Ch*. I know my dear, I was there. By dreams and nocturnal terrors quivered, the godless woman sent these libations. *Or*. Do you know which dream, to narrate it truly? *Ch*. She seemed to give birth to a dragon, as she says. *Or*. And how does the story begin and end? *Ch*. She wrapped it safely in swaddling-clothes like a child. *Or*. And which kind of food does the new-born beast need? *Ch*. She offered her breast in the dream. *Or*. And how could her breast remain unwounded by that horror? *Ch*. To suck a clot of blood in the milk.

milk, Aeschylus emphasises the kourotrophic role assumed by Clytemnestra in the tragedy revolving around her death. As I have noted in the previous section, the θρόμβος αἵματος, 'clot of blood' (532), foretells the consequences of the vengeful plan devised and accomplished by Clytemnestra. By deceit Orestes will kill her with the aid of Electra to avenge the death of Agamemnon. In Stesichorus too, the dream of the snake represents the cycle of vengeance in the House of Atreus. In his fragmentary *Oresteia*, 'a serpent with the top of its blood-stained head seemed to approach to her and out of it the Pleisthenid king appeared' (fr. 42 *PMG*). According to Devereux (1976:176), the snake represents the spirit of the dead Agamemnon. Depicted as a chthonic monster in Stesichorus, the slain hero had his head cut off and therefore was castrated by his wife. Whereas Stesichorus gives emphasis to the vengeful spirit of Agamemnon after Clytemenstra's revenge, Aeschylus rather anticipates the vengeful act of matricide committed by Orestes. The ὀνείρατα and δείματα (524) are the 'dreams' and the consequent 'terrors' that have tormented Clytemnestra. Through this expression, Aeschylus justifies her quivering with the vengeful arrival of Orestes. The image of the dragon mother and baby dragon in her dream gives expression to the curse of the House of Atreus from the return of Agamemnon to that of Orestes. Through a dramatic reversal, Orestes is defined as δάκος, 'noxious beast' (530), nourished by the desire of blood vengeance. As I have discussed above, Cassandra calls Clytemnestra δάκος (*Ag.* 1232) to announce the death of Agamemnon. By impersonating the vengeful spirit of his father, Orestes becomes the new dragon in the *Choephoroi* to fulfil his deceitful plan. Hence, the dream of Clytemnestra expresses not only the fears and anxieties of the dragon mother, but also the

vengeful intentions of the baby dragon. After listening the report of the Chorus, Orestes interprets the dream of his mother with these words (540-50):

{Ορ.} ἀλλ' εὔχομαι γῇ τῇδε καὶ πατρὸς τάφῳ

τοὔνειρον εἶναι τοῦτ' ἐμοὶ τελεσφόρον.

κρίνω δέ τοί νιν ὥστε συγκόλλως ἔχειν.

εἰ γὰρ τὸν αὐτὸν χῶρον ἐκλιπὼν ἐμοὶ

οὖφις ἐπ' ἀμὰ σπάργαν' † ἠπλείζετο,

καὶ μαστὸν ἀμφέχασκ' ἐμὸν θρεπτήριον,   545

θρόμβῳ τ' ἔμειξεν αἵματος φίλον γάλα,

ἡ δ' ἀμφὶ τάρβει τῷδ' ἐπώμωξεν πάθει,

δεῖ τοί νιν, ὡς ἔθρεψεν ἔκπαγλον τέρας,

θανεῖν βιαίως· ἐκδρακοντωθεὶς δ' ἐγὼ

κτείνω νιν, ὡς τοὔνειρον ἐννέπει τόδε.[438]

The verb ἐκδρακοντόομαι, 'I enact a metamorphosis into snake' (549), dramatically signals the apex of violence in the House of Atreus. Through the mixture of blood and milk, Clytemnestra has transmitted her vengeful temper to her son, who 'opens the jaws' to her breast (545). The verb ἀμφιχάσκω, which can mean 'I gape for', specifically in reference to ravening monsters,[439] could create

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[438] *Or*. But I pray for this earth and my father's tomb that this dream will be fulfilled in my favour. I interpret it to agree. If in fact leaving for me the same space the serpent was wrapped in swathing bands, and bit the breast that fed me, and mixed the sweet milk with the clot of blood, by terror she lamented over this event. It is necessary indeed, because she nurtured the terrible monster, to kill violently: by enacting a transformation into a snake I will kill her, as this dream has said.

[439] Hom. *Il*. 23.79; Soph. *Ant*. 118.

suspense for the audience. As I have discussed earlier, Clytemnestra, metaphorically opening her jaws, gives her treacherous welcome to her husband in the *Agamemnon* (920). Moreover, the adjective θρεπτήριος, ον, 'feeding' (545), referred to Clytemnestra's breast, is used by Orestes in reference to the river Inachos at the beginning of the *Choephoroi* (6). The tragic irony in the dream of Clytemnestra consists in the fact that the baby dragon has been generated but not actually nourished with the milk of his mother. It was Kilissa, Orestes' nurse, who fed him and washed his swaddling bands, when Clytemnestra was woken up by his nocturnal calls (750). Whereas in the past Clytemnestra could not stand the crying of her hungry child and gave him to the nurse, now she cannot sleep and raises a cry after dreaming of nurturing him. It is the symbolism of the naked breast that explains the link between motherhood and vengeance. The nurturing role of the snake is evoked by Aeschylus to represent the disruption of the maternal bond of Clytemnestra with Orestes. Through a dramatic reversal, the motif of nurturance emphasises the implications of Clytemnestra's vengeful plan and act in the House of Atreus.

In the scene of matricide, Clytemnestra pretends to assume the kourotrophic role of the snake, with the aim of deceiving her son before being slain. By creating a strong connection with the dream reported by the Chorus and interpreted by Orestes at the beginning of the *Choephoroi*, Aeschylus depicts Clytemnestra as showing her breast, so that her son can be moved to pity. By adopting the Homeric image, where Hecuba shows to Hector her breast in order to disclose her maternal concerns (*Il.* 22.82-5), Aeschylus intensifies the treacherous nature of Clytemnestra. Before blood is shed in the House of Atreus, the confrontation between mother and son is staged as follows (896-9):

{Κλ.} ἐπίσχες, ὦ παῖ, τόνδε δ' αἴδεσαι, τέκνον,

μαστόν, πρὸς ᾧ σὺ πολλὰ δὴ βρίζων ἅμα

οὔλοισιν ἐξήμελξας εὐτραφὲς γάλα.

{Ορ.} Πυλάδη, τί δράσω; μητέρ' αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν;[440]

Clytemnestra claims her kourotrophic role, with treacherous intentions, in order to be spared from death. According to Garvie (1986:293-303), the insistence on the terminology of son and child, although it might have not moved the audience emotionally, confirms the maternal feelings of Clytemnestra. I argue that the vocative forms of the nouns παῖς, 'child', and τέκνον, 'son' (896), are used in a climactic way to emphasise the disruption of her nurturing role in the upbringing of Orestes. In the attempt to provoke pity in him, she addresses the treacherous words: ἐγώ σ' ἔθρεψα, σὺν δὲ γηράναι θέλω, 'I nurtured you and with you I want to get older' (908). This expression creates a moment of suspense before the accomplishment of the act of matricide. By calling Clytemnestra μήτηρ, 'mother' (899), for the first time, Orestes shows his insecurity, reverence, fear and anxiety in taking vengeance against her. Clytemnestra does not lose her powerful and violent nature, but acts the nurturing role of the dragon in a deceptive manner. After few lines she starts to blame Agamemnon to justify her vengeance and even threatens her son with the arrival of the Erinyes. Before being killed, Clytemnestra raises her mourning cry and admits: οἲ 'γὼ τεκοῦσα τόνδ' ὄφιν

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[440] *Cl*. Stop please, child, have piety, son, of this breast, where you many times fell asleep, suckling in your gums the nurturing milk. *Or*. What shall I do, Pylades? Shall I be ashamed to kill my mother?

ἐθρεψάμην, 'I gave birth and nurtured this serpent' (928). Her dream has reached its fulfilment and prepares the scene for the arrival of the Erinyes in the *Eumenides*.

After the vengeful act devised and committed against his mother, Orestes is given the kourotrophic role of the snake in the persecution of the anguiform Erinyes.[441] The Chorus define themselves as thirsty of the ἐρυθρός πέλανος, 'red drink' (*Eum*. 265). This is the blood they desire to suck from the still living matricide. The image is a dramatic reversal of the dream of Clytemnestra, in which Orestes was depicted as drowsy, because deprived of the milk of his mother. It is the duty of the Erinyes to vindicate the cause of Clytemnestra, by asking blood for blood (359). As explained in the final trial, Orestes is guilty of kin-killing. Although he refuses to share the blood of his mother, since she did not nurture him (606-8), he is accused by the Erinyes. In favour of the son who spilled τὸ μητρὸς αἷμα, 'the blood of the mother' (653), Apollo gives his vision of divine, human, animal and agricultural reproduction, as follows (658-66):

> {Απ.} οὐκ ἔστι μήτηρ ἡ κεκλημένη τέκνου
>
> τοκεύς, τροφὸς δὲ κύματος νεοσπόρου·
>
> τίκτει δ' ὁ θρῴσκων, ἡ δ' ἅπερ ξένῳ ξένη   660
>
> ἔσωσεν ἔρνος, οἷσι μὴ βλάψῃ θεός.
>
> τεκμήριον δὲ τοῦδέ σοι δείξω λόγου·
>
> πατὴρ μὲν ἂν γείναιτ' ἄνευ μητρός· πέλας
>
> μάρτυς πάρεστι παῖς Ὀλυμπίου Διός,   664

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[441] For an analysis of the ritual function of the Eumenides see for example Brown, 1984:260-81; Mitchell-Boyask, 2009; Rynearson, 2013:1-22.

. . . .

οὐδ' ἐν σκότοισι νηδύος τεθραμμένη,   665

ἀλλ' οἷον ἔρνος οὔτις ἂν τέκοι θεά.[442]

At the end of the *Eumenides*, it is Athena, the patroness of Athens, who decides to acquit Orestes and to relocate the Erinyes in the democratic polis. By solving the tragic antinomies between Olympian and Chthonic gods, Apollo and the Erinyes, man-slaughter and matricide, patriarchy and matriarchy, she reveals her ambivalent gendered identity. According to Goldhill (1986), 'the clashing of competing obligations that has characterised the human action in the tragedy is mirrored on the divine level' (80). As a divine moral agent, Athena troubles and re-establishes at the same time the institutions of the patriarchal system. Zeitlin (1996) also states that in the *Eumenides* 'juridical and theological concerns are fully identified with male-female dichotomies' (87). From her perspective, the concept of civilisation, which is 'the ultimate product of conflict between opposing forces', is achieved through the re-establishment of a gendered hierarchy. As Deacy (1997) argues, Athena's 'relation with civic norms is fluctuating between deviating from norms, endorsing them and being harnessed to them' (159). In order to defend the cause of the father in the marriage, Athena

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[442] *Ap*. It is not the mother who is called the child's generator, but rather the nourishment of the seed sown in her body. Who impregnates gives birth, and, like female foreigner with male foreigner, she will rescue the seed, unless a god has already destroyed it. I will give you proof of this argument: the father can exist even without a mother. Here, next to you, as witness, the daughter of Olympian Zeus, not nourished in the darkness of a womb, but like the shoot that no goddess could generate.

says: μήτηρ γὰρ οὔτις ἔστιν ἥ μ' ἐγείνατο, 'in fact nobody is the mother who generated me' (734-41).

Whereas the trial reflects the clash of competing obligations between mother and father, it is the persuasion of Athena, in encouraging the Erinyes to abandon their rage and be reasonable (864-9), which ends the tragic tensions. The anguiform deities are asked to not spill their blood that destroys the procreative seeds, and to become benign goddesses, guarantors of the fertility of the earth (800-4). According to Grethlein (2013), 'the play closes with a procession which leads the Erinyes, called μετοῖκοι, to their new home' (93). The colour of the costumes worn by the Chorus might have evoked the 'procession of the Panathenaea in which the metics wore red'. As he implies, linking the mythological past of the House of Atreus with the contemporary ritual festivals of Athens, the transformation of the Erinyes was used to celebrate Athena's restoration of order. I would add that the Erinyes are depicted as serpentine monsters to emphasise the divine intervention of Athena in intra-family vengeful conflicts. By evoking the kourotrophic role of the snake, Aeschylus represents the end of the cycle of revenge within the House of Atreus as a divine result of the agency of Athena.

Meanwhile, in the *Trachiniae*, Sophocles evokes the kourotrophic role of the snake to depict the tragic implications of the deceitful plan of vengeance accomplished by Deianira. As the ally and the victim of the centaur Nessus, Deianira has nurtured her vengeful intentions against her husband, by paradoxically causing his death. In the prologue, she laments the absence of Heracles, who, just like a farmer who has a distant land, has no time for their children (31-5). It is in fact Hyllos who announces the death of his father by

accusing his mother of murder in the third episode. After witnessing the lethal effects of the poisonous vest, he refuses the blood kinship with Deianira, responsible for the death of Heracles (734-7). Hyllos denies the 'nurturing' role of his mother, expressed through the present infinite of τρέφω (817), to condemn her to the punishment of the Erinyes. After he leaves the scene, the Chorus in the third *stasimon* recall the prophecy according to which Zeus' son will go towards his apotheosis after his last labour. With these words, the women of Trachis sing the oncoming death of Heracles (831-41):

{ΧΟ.} Εἰ γάρ σφε Κενταύρου φονίᾳ νεφέλᾳ

χρίει δολοποιὸς ἀνάγκα

πλευρά, προστακέντος ἰοῦ,

ὃν τέκετο θάνατος, ἔτρεφε δ' αἰόλος δράκων,

πῶς ὅδ' ἂν ἀέλιον ἕτερον ἢ τανῦν ἴδοι,   835

δεινοτάτῳ μὲν ὕδρας   838

προστετακὼς φάσματι,

μελαγχαίτα τ' ἄμμιγά νιν αἰκίζει   840

φόνια δολιόμυθα κέντρ' ἐπιζέσαντα;[443]

The *stasimon* assumes pathetic connotations to prepare the scene for the death of Heracles. The Chorus are aware that their master once killed the terrible Hydra,

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[443] *Ch*. If in a cloud of blood the treacherous violence of the Centaur rubs his sides, by infecting him with venom, which death generated and the shimmering snake nurtured, how can he see another sun after today, entrapped in the horrible web of the Hydra, while the deadly tortures of the deceitful black-haired beast boiling confusedly damage him?

but now is devoured by its venom. Because of the vengeful plan of Nessus and the jealousy of Deianira, Heracles is imagined as entrapped in a serpentine web. Kamerbeek (1959: 180) defines the φόνια νεφέλη, 'murderous cloud' (831), of Nessus as the 'fraud-contriving constraint' of Heracles. Caught in the vengeful plan of the centaur, he suffers the tragic implications of the jealousy of his wife. In emphatic position at the start of the verse, the verb χρίω, 'I rub' (832) displays the reaction of Heracles' body to the venom used by Deianira to defend her marriage. It can generally mean 'I touch the surface of a body slightly', but specifically 'anoint with scented unguents'. According to Rodighiero (2004:207-9), the verb is ambiguously employed to create confusion between the language of love and that of death. The tragic irony consists in the fact that Deianira used the venom as a love charm to imbue the lethal robe of Heracles. As Easterling (1982:144-86) comments, the verb, which in positive terms can mean 'I anoint', here can be translated as 'I sting'. The magical philtre given by Nessus to Deianira will bring about nothing but Heracles' death and will lead her towards suicide. The venom through which Deianira causes the ruin of her own house was in fact generated by θάνατος, 'death', and nurtured by the δράκων, 'dragon' (834). I would add that the syntactical parallelism between the verb τίκτω, 'I give birth', and τρέφω, 'I nurture', emphasises the kourotrophic role of the snake. The connection between sexuality and violence is confirmed by the employment of the adjective αἰόλος, η, ον, (834), which connotes the colour and the movement of the snake. As I have shown above, Sophocles employs the term to connote the river Achelous, the monstrous suitor of Deianira (11). As Rodighiero (2004) states, in reference to Hydra, the adjective reveals its 'shimmering and dangerous nature'

(208). By creating a link between the violence of Nessus and the jealousy of Deianira, it represents the self-destruction of Heracles' family.

In the intra-familial intrigues of Heracles' house, it is Hyllos who leads Deianira to suicide with his reproaches and accuses. When he realises that behind the death of his father there was the vengeful plan of Nessus and his mother was just another victim of the centaur, it is too late. Coming back to his father, he finds him in agony and expressing his anger as follows (1062-5):

{HP.} γυνὴ δέ, θῆλυς οὖσα κοὐκ ἀνδρὸς φύσιν,

μόνη με δὴ καθεῖλε φασγάνου δίχα.

Ὦ παῖ, γενοῦ μοι παῖς ἐτήτυμος γεγώς,

καὶ μὴ τὸ μητρὸς ὄνομα πρεσβεύσῃς πλέον.[444]

Still unaware that behind his oncoming death there is the participation of the centaur Nessus, Heracles recalls Hyllos' insults. As I have analysed in the previous section, Hyllos compares his mother to an ἔχιδνα, 'viper' (771), because of her deceitful plan of revenge. Considered as the snake species that specifically kills its mate and is then devoured by its offspring, the viper is implicitly evoked by Heracles before dying. The wrong conviction of Heracles regarding his wife is expressed through various stylistic devices, namely the emphatic position of γυνή, 'woman', the tautological use of θῆλυς, 'female', and the litotes οὐκ ἀνδρὸς φύσιν, 'not of male nature' (1062). By creating a dramaturgical moment of

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[444] *He*. It is a woman who, as a woman and not of male nature, alone, has destroyed me without a sword. Oh my son, demonstrate to be really my son, and do not be reverent towards someone who has just the name of mother.

pathetic irony, Sophocles suggests the prophetic words of Cassandra regarding Clytemnestra θῆλυς ἄρσενος φονεύς, 'the female who murders the male' (1231), which I have discussed in the previous section. However, unlike Clytemnestra, Deianira has caused the death of her husband without even touching him or using a φάσγανον, 'sword' (1063). This term is also used by Cassandra to indicate the weapon through which Clytemnestra will accomplish her vengeful plan (*Ag.* 1262). From the perspective of Heracles, Deianira instead lacks male temper and does not deserve the respect of her son. Informed then by Hyllos about the death of his wife, Heracles expresses his last desires. Before his apotheosis, he asks his son to stop his pain and to marry Iole, so that the plan of Zeus can be fulfilled. Thus, the kourotrophic role of the snake is employed to depict the destruction of Heracles' family by the double revenge of the centaur Nessus and his wife Deianira. Alongside the disruption of the relationship of Deianira with Heracles, the snake represents the loss, suffering and fear of the orphaned Hyllos.

In the *Antigone*, Sophocles evokes the kourotrophic role of the snake to conceal and reveal the tragic entanglement of another female character in the vengeful intrigues of her household. Ismene belongs to the cursed family that reigns over Thebes, whose inhabitants were said to descend from Cadmus. As also attested in Euripidean tragedies,[445] the foundation of the city of Thebes is aetiologically explained with the battle between Cadmus and the dragon of Ares. With these words, the Chorus entering on stage contextualise the Theban tragedy (117-26):

{ΧΟ.} Στὰς δ' ὑπὲρ μελάθρων φονώ-

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[445] Eur. *Bacch*. 1026, *Phoen*. 657-75.

σαισιν ἀμφιχανὼν κύκλῳ

λόγχαις ἑπτάπυλον στόμα,

ἔβα πρίν ποθ' ἁμετέρων   120

αἱμάτων γένυσιν πλησθῆ-

ναί <τε> καὶ στεφάνωμα πύργων

πευκάενθ' Ἥφαιστον ἑλεῖν.

Τοῖος ἀμφὶ νῶτ' ἐτάθη

πάταγος Ἄρεος, ἀντιπάλου   125

δυσχείρωμα δράκοντος.[446]

In the *parodos*, the Chorus raise a hymn to celebrate the foundation of Thebes.
Before the entrance of Creon, they sing that it is Dionysus who ἐλελίχθων,
'whirling around' (154), the land of Thebes, leads their dances. By connecting the
mythological past with the tragic present of the royal family of the Dionysiac city,
their choral hymn specifically evokes the δράκων, 'dragon' (126). This is
captured in its conflict with the eagle by the adjective ἀντίπαλος, 'enemy' (125),
and the neuter noun δυσχείρωμα, 'hard conquest' (126). The battle between the
dragon and the eagle, which as I have shown in the previous section characterises
Homeric prophecies, recalls the tragic duel between Eteocles and Polynices.
Connoted by the aorist participle ἀμφιχανών (118), the eagle seizes and captures
the dragon that biting its neck eventually escapes. The verb ἀμφιχάσκω, which
means 'I gape for, around', does not merely represent the eagerness of the eagle

[446] *Ch.* Raising from the roofs and opening its mouth to the murderous lances, round about the
seven gates, (the eagle) left before being filled in with the jaws of our blood and Hephaestus put
the crown of the towers to the torch. Such-like the clash of Ares spred around its side, a hard
conquest for the enemy of the dragon.

for the blood of its enemy. Reinforced by the employment of the verb πίμπλημι, 'fill full' (121-2), and the nouns στόμα, 'mouth' (119), and γένυς, 'jaw' (121), it rather suggests the kourotrophic role of the dragon. As I have shown earlier in this section, ἀμφιχάσκω is used in reference to the dragon that gapes for the breast of Clytemnestra in the prophecy about Orestes' matricide.[447] By conveying the concepts of danger, violence and kin-killing, the image of the nurturing dragon contextualises the Theban myth. Whereas the mythological death of the dragon brought into life the city of Thebes, its re-birth will cause the destruction of its royal family.

The Chorus refer to the dragon-slaying myth of the foundation of Thebes, with the aim of displaying the vengeful dynamics of the family of Oedipus. His sons Eteocles and Polynices have killed each other, and his daughters Antigone and Ismene have been given in custody to Creon. His brother-in-law has become the tyrant of Thebes and has prohibited the burial of Polynices, because of his traitorous behaviour. In the prologue, the vengeful dynamics within the household of Creon are emphasised by the constant employment of dual forms, personal and possessive pronouns, compound nouns of the reflexive pronoun αὐτός and compound verbs of the preposition σύν, 'with'.[448] In order to defend their φίλοι against their ἐχθροί (10), Antigone demands the collaboration of Ismene, who instead refuses to participate in her plan of revenge. By reminding her sister of the impossibility for women to prevail over men (58-64), Ismene tries unsuccessfully to dissuade her from burying their brother. When the sentry enters on stage to announce that the corpse of Polynices has been buried, Creon asks him τίς ἀνδρῶν

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[447] Aesch. *Cho*. 545.

[448] Soph. *Ant*. 1, 3, 6, 13, 21, 41, 48, 50, 51, 52, 55, 56, 66.

ἦν ὁ τολμήσας τάδε; (248). Thinking that 'a man has dared' to transgress his edict for either political or economical reasons, he orders the sentry to find out who is the αὐτόχειρ, the male 'responsible' (306). In the second episode, Creon realises that it is Antigone who has buried Polynices in the light of the ἄγραπτα νόμιμα, 'unwritten laws' (454-455). With the expression Ἦ νῦν ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἀνήρ, αὕτη δ' ἀνήρ, 'I am not the man, she is the man' (484), Creon denounces the gender reversal in his own household. He reacts to the identification of the traitor who has buried the corpse of Polynices, as follows (486-92):

{KP.} Ἀλλ' εἴτ' ἀδελφῆς εἴθ' ὁμαιμονεστέρα

τοῦ παντὸς ἡμῖν Ζηνὸς Ἑρκείου κυρεῖ,

αὐτή τε χἠ ξύναιμος οὐκ ἀλύξετον

μόρου κακίστου· καὶ γὰρ οὖν κείνην ἴσον

ἐπαιτιῶμαι τοῦδε βουλεῦσαι τάφου.   490

Καί νιν καλεῖτ'· ἔσω γὰρ εἶδον ἀρτίως

λυσσῶσαν αὐτὴν οὐδ' ἐπήβολον φρενῶν.[449]

Creon thinks that Ismene has actively participated in the plan of vengeance accomplished by Antigone. Her guilt consists of having kept secret the intentions of her sister (84-5) rather than having devised the burial of Polynices. Nevertheless, she is depicted as a deceitful avenger through the aorist infinitive of the verb βουλεύω (490), which generally means 'I take counsel, deliberate', but

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[449] *Cr*. Although she is the daughter of my sister and more near akin than those who worship Zeus Guardian of the household in my house, neither she nor her sister will free from a terrible death; and in fact I blame the latter in the same way, because she devised the burial. And now call her! I have just seen her outside raving and without any control of her mind.

here can be translated as 'I plot'. Moreover, Creon interprets the frantic behaviour of Ismene as a proof of her treacherous, doubly-minded and violent behaviour. Connoted by the present participle of the verb λυσσάω, 'I rave' (492), and the litotes οὐδ' ἐπήβολον φρενῶν, 'without control of the mind', Ismene is accused by her uncle for the transgressive act committed by her sister.

The accusations of Creon can be explained with the Dionysiac relationship between madness and conspiracy. As Mills (2014) states, 'violence and paranoia are characteristic of tyrants in Athenian democratic ideology' (250-1). By acting as the tyrant of Thebes, Creon accuses the members of his own οἶκος to defend his position in the πόλις. With these words, he blames Ismene for conspiracy in the presence of the Chorus and Antigone (531-9):

{ΚΡ.} Σὺ δ', ἢ κατ' οἴκους ὡς ἔχιδν' ὑφειμένη

λήθουσά μ' ἐξέπινες, οὐδ' ἐμάνθανον

τρέφων δύ' ἄτα κἀπαναστάσεις θρόνων,

φέρ', εἰπὲ δή μοι, καὶ σὺ τοῦδε τοῦ τάφου

φήσεις μετασχεῖν, ἢ 'ξομῇ τὸ μὴ εἰδέναι;   535

{ΙΣ.} Δέδρακα τοὔργον, εἴπερ ἥδ' ὁμορροθεῖ,

καὶ ξυμμετίσχω καὶ φέρω τῆς αἰτίας.

{ΑΝ.} Ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐάσει τοῦτό γ' ἡ Δίκη σ', ἐπεὶ

οὔτ' ἠθέλησας οὔτ' ἐγὼ 'κοινωσάμην.[450]

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[450] *Cr.* You, who lurking in my house like a viper and escaping notice have suckled my blood, I did not know to have nurtured two ruins and subverters of my throne. Come and tell me whether you will confess to have participated in this burial or you will swear to know nothing? *Is.* I have committed this act, if she agrees, and I partake and bear the guilt. *An.* But Justice will not allow this, because you were unwilling and I did not consult you.

Sophocles evokes the kourotrophic role of the snake to stage the domestic trial between Creon and his nieces. The creeping movement of the ἔχιδνα, 'viper' (531), which is expressed through the perfect participle ὑφειμένη, 'lurking', represents the vengeful intrigues in the family of Oedipus. According to Jebb (1888), the verb ὑφίημι suggests 'a contrast between Antigone's bolder nature and the submissive demeanour of Ismene' (129). Griffith (1999:213-4) argues that the verb, which can mean either 'lying down' or 'secretely introduced' or 'put to the breast', emphasises the blood ties between Creon and Ismene. I argue that it is the concept of domestic treachery that Sophocles conveys through the image of the creeping viper in the denouncing words of Creon against Ismene. The furtivity, deceit and disguise of the viper are intensified by the present participle λήθουσα, 'escaping notice' (532). By confusing the dichotomy of οἶκος and πόλις, the image reveals the violent reaction of Creon to the conspiracy of Ismene and Antigone. The two sisters are defined as ἄτα, 'ruins' (533), in the light of their dangerous, transgressive and treacherous behaviour the house and the city. The dual form explains the double reason why Creon has decided to condemn his nieces to death. Like Antigone, Ismene has tried secretly to drink his blood and to subvert his political power.

Through a tragic reversal, the kourotrophic role of the snake is attributed to Creon, who claims his paternal role with his nieces. The use of the verb τρέφω, 'I bring up, rear' (533), dramatically signals the apex of his inquisitorial dialogue with Ismene and Antigone. The former admits her involvement in the burial of Polynices to share the responsibility, and the latter invokes Justice as witness of

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the act that she has committed by herself. By commenting on the discussion between Ismene and Antigone, Creon says that both are out of their minds, but the former has shown now her insanity, the latter from her birth (561-2). The use of the dual τὼ παῖδε, 'children' (561), in contrast to ἄτα, 'ruins' (533), displays the disruption of the blood ties between Creon and his adopted daughters. By calling them both ἄνους, 'silly, without wit' (562), he unconsciously foretells the self-destruction of his own household. As a result of his decision of killing Antigone, his son Haemon and his wife Eurydice will commit suicide. Before the entrance of the messenger, who informs Creon about the double death within his family, the Chorus invoke Dionysus as the patron of Thebes with these words (1121-5):

{ΧΟ.} […] ὦ Βακχεῦ,

Βακχᾶν ματρόπολιν Θήβαν

ναιετῶν παρ' ὑγρόν <τ'>

Ἰσμηνοῦ ῥέεθρον, ἀγρίου τ'

ἐπὶ σπορᾷ δράκοντος·[451]

By referring to the dragon-slaying myth on the foundation of the Dionysiac city, the Chorus prepare the scene for the revelation of the self-deception of Creon. With the arrival of Tiresias, he realises the tragic implications of his stubborness, inflexibility and violence. Assuming the kourotrophic role of the dragon, he provokes nothing but the self-destruction of his household to protect the city of Thebes.

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[451] *Ch.* […] O Dionysus, in Thebes, the mother-city of the Bacchants, you dwell, next to the streams of the river Ismenus, in the field sown by the dragon.

In the *Ion*, Euripides evokes the kourotrophic role of the snake differently from Aeschylus and Sophocles, to direct the audience towards a happy resolution. By connecting the myth of autochthony of Athens with the story of the exposure of Ion, he employs the image of the nurturing snake to stage the tragic scene of recognition between Creusa and her son. In the prologue, by referring to Creusa's past of sexual violence, Hermes explicates the background of the tragedy with these words (15-26):

{Ερ.} […] ὡς δ' ἦλθεν χρόνος,

τεκοῦσ' ἐν οἴκοις παῖδ' ἀπήνεγκεν βρέφος

ἐς ταὐτὸν ἄντρον οὗπερ ηὐνάσθη θεῶι

Κρέουσα, κἀκτίθησιν ὡς θανούμενον

κοίλης ἐν ἀντίπηγος εὐτρόχωι κύκλωι,

προγόνων νόμον σώιζουσα τοῦ τε γηγενοῦς   20

Ἐριχθονίου. κείνωι γὰρ ἡ Διὸς κόρη

φρουρὼ παραζεύξασα φύλακε σώματος

δισσὼ δράκοντε, παρθένοις Ἀγλαυρίσιν

δίδωσι σώιζειν· ὅθεν Ἐρεχθείδαις ἐκεῖ

νόμος τις ἔστιν ὄφεσιν ἐν χρυσηλάτοις   25

τρέφειν τέκν' […].[452]

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[452] *He.* When it was the right time, Creusa gave birth in her house and brought the newborn child in the same cave where she slept with the god; she exposed him to death, in the well-wheeled circle of an empty cradle, by following the tradition of her ancestors and of the earth-born Erichthonius. Around the latter Zeus' daughter set as protective bodyguards two snakes, and to the virgin Aglaurides she handed him over. So, in Erechtheus' family there is a tradition according to which children are nurtured by snakes of beaten gold […].

After being violated by Apollo, Creusa put Ion in a circle chest, by exposing him to death (18-9). The verb that indicates the exposure of the newborn child is ἐκτίθημι, which literally means 'I place outside'.[453] According to Huys (1989:190-7), it needs distinguishing from the verb ἀποτίθημι, 'I put away'. From his perspective, whereas the ἔκθεσις probably referred to the exposure of children for economical or social reasons, the ἀπόθεσις was connected with the elimination of deformed children for religious ones. Despite the controversies over the meaning of the prepositions, I argue that in both cases the murderous intentions cannot be denied. In the Euripidean description of the exposure of Ion, ἐκτίθημι (18) specifies that the child was abandoned in a chest. The motif of the chest, whose circular shape evokes the ὀμφαλός of Delphi, is linked to the tradition of the anguiform heroes of Attica. Generated by the Earth, Erichthonius, the ancestor of Creusa, was raised by Athena and given to the daughters of Cecrops (23). The chest, where the child was exposed, was specifically protected by two snakes, which are defined by Hermes as φρουρώ, 'watcher', and φύλακε σώματος, 'bodyguards' (22). Because of the identification of the γένος of the Erechtheids with the earth-born Erichthonius, in the family of Creusa there was the custom of providing newborns with serpentine jewellery.

By evoking the kourotrophic role of the snake, Euripides connects the exposure of Erichthonius with that of Ion. The difference consists in the replacement of the real snakes protecting and nurturing Erichthonius with serpentine ornaments. As Mirto (2009:217-9) says, the prologue spoken by Hermes follows the model of the virgin raped by a god and punished with the

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[453] Cf. Eur. *Ion* 345.

exposure of the child. The protective and dangerous power of the snakes, which guarded the chest of Erichthonius and scared the daughters of Cecrops, is transferred into the tragedy of Ion. Adorned with serpentine jewellery, he was exposed by Creusa, but thanks to the intervention of his divine father he was rescued from death. Sent to Athens with the aim of fetching the child, Hermes left him in front of the temple of Apollo. The σπάργανα, 'swathing bands' (32), and the chest of Ion were then found by the Pythia, the priestess of the Delphic temple, who initially thought to get rid of the child. Convinced that he was the fruit of an illegitimate intercourse, she eventually decided to keep the child and τρέφειν, 'nurture', him (49). She conserved the objects connected to his exposure and made Ion the χρυσοφύλαξ, 'guardian of the sacred treasure' (54).

The serpentine necklace given by Creusa to Ion not only creates a parallel with the upbringing of Erichthonius, but it also functions as a token of recognition in dramatic terms. Snaky-objects, such as the bands, the jewelry and the tokens, play a mediating role in the scene of recognition between mother and son. By employing the kourotrophic role of the snake, Euripides develops the revenge plot of his tragedy around the misrecognition of mother and son. He offers different perspectives from which to reconstruct the story of Ion, with the aim of leading his audience towards the final scene of recognition. The tragedy opens with the monologue of Ion, aware of not having a father and thanking Apollo for feeding him (109-11). He defines the god as his γενέτωρ πατήρ (136), 'the father that generated' him, because of his nurturing role (137). In the first episode of the tragedy, Creusa, worried about her sterile relationship with Xuthos, asks Ion about his origin and with tragic irony says she is envious of his mother (308). Ion admits to not knowing who is the woman who ἔτεκεν, 'gave him birth', and the father

from whom he ἔφυν, 'was generated' (313). Brought up without the milk of his mother, he lived in the temple of Apollo, where the priestess of the oracle ἔθρεψε, 'nurtured', him (320). The presentation of Ion is followed by the story of Creusa, who, instead of using the first person, narrates her sexual intercourse with Apollo and the exposure of her son, as if it happened to one of her friends. The woman in her narration is said to have given birth λάθραι, 'furtively' (340). Due to the shame of her delivery, she was then constrained to expose her child, who probably died devoured by wild animals (345-8). The adverb λάθραι, which suggests the creeping movement of the snake, emphasises the modality through which virgins were imagined to give birth after being possessed by deceiving gods. As I have explained in the previous section, it is also used by the old man in reference to Xuthos' deceitful behaviour with Creusa (816).

Although he denies being interested, Ion reacts with anger to Creusa's story. By launching his reproaches at Apollo, he cannot accept that the god violates mortal women, by letting them give birth secretly and abandoning their children, who are eventually exposed to death (437-41). In the second episode, Xuthos, by confirming the nurturing role of Apollo (531), claims his paternity over Ion, but ignores who is his mother. In the third episode, the Chorus report to Creusa the oracle of Apollo, by saying that she will never embrace her own child and nurture him with her milk (760-2). Through a lamentation of her past of sexual violence and the exposure of her child, Creusa reacts to the news with suffering and anger. She recalls the loss of her son, who probably died because of the perils in the wild (887-906). She also admits her guilt to the old man in pathetic terms, before planning vengeance against Xuthos. She had the courage to wrap her son in the folds of her dress and abandon him in the cave, where she was

violated by Apollo (954-60). She remembers in tears having left her child, still raising his arms and searching for her breast. Unaware that Ion is the son she exposed, she attempts to kill him with the poisonous blood of the Gorgon in order to take vengeance against her husband. In the fifth episode, the Pythia arrives to prevent Ion from punishing Creusa with death for her murderous intentions. Welcomed by Ion with the name of μήτηρ, 'mother' (1324), the priestess suggests he should leave Delphi and go to Athens. By confirming her nurturing role, she eventually shows to Ion the chest where she found him and his swathing bands (1337-9). The Pythia gives him back the objects of his exposure, which anticipates the final scene of recognition and solves the conflict between mother and son.

Euripides emphasises the kourotrophic role of the snake in the child-exposure story of Creusa to stage the final scene of recognition. When Creusa sees the chest in Ion's hands, she cannot keep silent and discloses her identity. Defined by Ion as θεομανής, 'maddened by the god' (1402), she leaves the altar. Creusa does not ask pity or reverence with treachery to her son, but rather abandons her refuge. Unlike the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, who refused to nurture her child and shows her breast to be spared, she is sincerely happy to have met her son. Creusa attempts to convince Ion about her innocence and maternal bond as follows (1417-23, 1427-9):

> {Κρ.} σκέψασθ' ὃ παῖς ποτ' οὖσ' ὕφασμ' ὕφην' ἐγώ.
>
> {Ιων} ποῖόν τι; πολλὰ παρθένων ὑφάσματα.
>
> {Κρ.} οὐ τέλεον, οἷον δ' ἐκδίδαγμα κερκίδος.
>
> {Ιων} μορφὴν ἔχον τίν'; ὥς με μὴ ταύτηι λάβηις.   1420

{Κρ.} Γοργὼν μὲν ἐν μέσοισιν ἠτρίοις πέπλων.

{Ιων} ὦ Ζεῦ, τίς ἡμᾶς ἐκκυνηγετεῖ πότμος;

{Κρ.} κεκρασπέδωται δ' ὄφεσιν αἰγίδος τρόπον.

[…]

{Κρ.} δράκοντε μαρμαίροντε πάγχρυσον γένυν,

δώρημ' Ἀθάνας, οἷς τέκν' ἐντρέφειν λέγει,

Ἐριχθονίου γε τοῦ πάλαι μιμήματα.[454]

Ion questions Creusa, by asking her to describe the objects of his exposure. Among the tokens of recognition, Euripides includes a woven robe with the Gorgon in the middle and a serpentine golden pendant. As Lee (1997:307) states, the items conserved by the Pythia do not refer only to the 'patronage of Athena', but they are fundamental signs of the autochthonous birth of Ion. Through the climax of φίλος (1407), παῖς (1409) and τέκνον (1411), Euripides gives emphasis to the recognition between Creusa and her 'son'. Employed as a dramaturgical device, the snake is the medium through which the scene of recognition is staged. According to Pellegrino (2004:324), the use of exposure-objects might have been an innovation introduced by Euripides, when considering its influence on New Comedy.[455] In my view, Euripides connects the autochthonous birth of the

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[454] *Cr.* Look at the robe I wove when I was young. *Io.* Which one? Many are the robes woven by virgins. *Cr.* It was not perfect, as I was still learning how to use the shuttle. *Io.* What does it represent? You will not entrap me! *Cr.* There is a Gorgon, right in the middle of the robe. *Io.* O Zeus, what a destiny is chasing me! *Cr.* It is fringed with snakes, like an aegis. […] *Cr.* There is also a golden pendant with gleaming snakes, the gift of Athena, which is said to nurture noble children, in memory of the ancestor Erichthonius.

[455] See for example Men. *Epit.* 384-390, *Pk.* 756-773, 815-823.

anguiform ancestors of Creusa with the serpentine motif in the objects of exposure of Ion to provide his version of the origin of the Ionian race. As Hermes explains in the prologue, Apollo will make his son the founder of the γένος of the Ionians (74). Owen (1939:154-5) notices that Ion is not referred to in early Greek mythology, but becomes in the Euripidean version the eponym of the Ionian race. He interprets the name of Ion as developing either from the verb ἰαίνω, which can mean 'I heal, save', as a peculiar power of Apollo, or from the noun ἰός, 'venom', through which Creusa tries to kill him. Despite these different etymological considerations, the name of Ion justifies the autochthony of Athens through the maternal bond of Creusa. This is confirmed by the intervention of the *deus ex machina* Athena at the end of the play, who gives credibility to the narration of Creusa. The goddess confirms that Apollo sent his brother Hermes to fetch Ion, so that he could be nurtured in Delphi (1595-600). With his oracle, Apollo wanted to guarantee a noble family for his son, in order to found the Ionian race. Under the aegis of Athena, the glorious Ionians will descend from the family of Erechtheus. The kourotrophic role of the snake in the story of Creusa is the only example where vengeance brings about the preservation rather than the destruction of the household.

So, Attic dramatists refer to the kourotrophic role of the snake to represent the Dionysiac disruption of the relationship between mother and son. By blurring the boundaries between sexuality and violence, protection and danger, birth and exposure, they show the retributive nature of female deception in intra-family vengeful dynamics. Aeschylus attributes the nurturing role of the snake to Clytemnestra in the *Choephoroi*, with the aim of disclosing her deceitful role in the cycle of revenge of the House of Atreus. Whereas in her past she refused to

nurture her son, at the beginning of the tragedy she dreams of it anticipating her own death. With treacherous intentions, she unveils her breast to provoke pity in her son and to be spared in the final scene of matricide. However, Clytemnestra realises she has actually generated and nourished a slaying dragon. Suckling the blood of vengeance from her breast, Orestes fulfils the dream of Clytemnestra, who is eventually transformed into a slain dragon. In the *Eumenides*, her vengeful spirit persecutes the matricide through the Erinyes, eager to drink his blood. Only with the intervention of Athena, who defends the cause of the father and attributes to the mother only a nourishing role, is Orestes absolved from his condemnation. Renouncing his persecution, the anguiform monsters become kourotrophic goddesses and are included in Athens. Sophocles attributes the nurturing role of the snake to Deianira in the *Trachiniae*, in order to explain the double nature of her vengeful plan. As a result of her jealousy and of her alliance with Nessus, Deianira's revenge brings about the destruction of Heracles' house. Convinced that behind the death of his father there is the vengeful intervention of his mother, Hyllos becomes the orphaned offspring of the viper. In the *Antigone* too, Sophocles evokes the kourotrophic role of the snake to reveal and conceal the tragic entanglement of Ismene in the vengeful intrigues of her family. By admitting her responsibility in the burial of Polynices, despite the edict of Creon, Ismene takes on the deceitful role of the ally of the avenger Antigone. Accused by her uncle of having tried to suckle his blood and deserting his throne, she is initially condemned, but eventually spared from death. In the *Ion*, Euripides refers to the kourotrophic role of the snake to anticipate and stage the scene of recognition of Creusa with her son. This creates confusion among the characters involved in the upbringing of Ion and eventually reveals the identity of Creusa.

Thanks to the snaky tokens returned by the Pythia and the intervention of Athena, mother and son can embrace each other again.

3. 3. Conclusion

Through analysis of the peculiar features of the snake, I have shown the Dionysiac contradictions of the deceptive behaviour of female avengers. When tragic heroines are attributed its secret habitat, marauding skills and kourotrophic role, they plot vengeful plans within and against their household. By specifically drawing on mythological representation of monstrous dragons, Attic dramatists transform female characters into deceitful avengers. In their tragic versions of dragon-slaying myths, they employ the motif of deception to stage both the realisation and the punishment of female vengeance. Taking on both the roles of the slaying and the slain dragon, tragic heroines are captured in their entanglement in intra-family vengeful intrigues. As I have shown, the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Deianira and Ismene, and the Euripidean Andromache and Creusa enact a metaphorical metamorphosis into tragic snakes to plot and commit vengeance through deceit. In their metamorphic depiction, the image of the snake displays the motivational drives and the tragic implications of their vengeful plans and actions. Metaphorically given the characteristics of the snake, deceitful avengers reveal their tragic humanity in causing the destruction of their family. Apart from Creusa, whose plan of vengeance fails by preserving her household, the other tragic heroines are eventually punished with death.

Aeschylus metaphorically transforms Clytemnestra into a snake to represent both the realisation and the punishment of her revenge in the House of

Atreus. Through the snake image, he captures Clytemnestra in her deceptive behaviour from Agamemnon's return to Orestes's persecution. In the *Agamemnon*, she is metaphorically compared to a snake (920, 1233), because she deceives and kills Agamemnon with the help of Aegisthus. Whereas the king of Argos confuses her serpentine moves with a submissive reaction to his return, Cassandra referring to the snake foretells the accomplishment of her vengeful plan. In the *Choephoroi*, Clytemnestra is associated with the snake (249, 994, 1047), not only because of her deception in accomplishing her vengeful plan, but also in the light of her imminent death by Orestes' hands. Reported by the Chorus and interpreted by Orestes, the dream of Clytemnestra reflects her fears for the serpent she gave birth, on the one hand, and anticipates the final scene of the matricide, on the other. Orestes evokes the snake to denounce the deceptive behaviour of his mother and to justify his vengeful return. By assuming the deceitful and violent nature of Clytemnestra, Orestes enacts a metaphorical metamorphosis into a snake (527, 544, 928). At the end of the *Choephoroi* (1050) and in the *Eumenides* (128), the snake is employed to depict the Erinyes as the embodied forms of Clytemnestra's revenge against Orestes. Unlike Deianira and Creusa, who become allies of mythological dragons to accomplish their vengeance, Clytemnestra invokes the Erinyes after being killed. The involvement of the anguiform monsters between the matricide and the process of Orestes intensifies the vengeful nature of Clytemnestra. Through the snake metaphor, Aeschylus represents the human contradictions of her deceptive behaviour in the cycle of revenge of the House of Atreus.

As the deceitful avenger of the House of Atreus, Clytemnestra takes on both the roles of the slaying and the slain dragon in the *Oresteia*. Aeschylus

specifically refers to the distinctive attributes of the snake in her depiction, with the aim of concealing and disclosing the vengeful intrigues within her family. In the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra takes on the role of the slaying dragon in order to accomplish her deceptive revenge against her husband. By evoking the secret habitat of the snake, Aeschylus transforms Clytemnestra into the anguiform guardian of the palace of Argos. Metaphorically located close to water sources, the earth and sacred spaces, she deceitfully prevents Agamemnon from a safe homecoming. Clytemnestra assumes also the marauding skills of the snake, such as its creeping movement and poisonous bite to deceive and kill Agamemnon. With the support of Aegisthus, she entraps her husband in her spires and coils, for killing him with the sword at the end of the tragedy. In consequence of her vengeful plan and act against Agamemnon, Clytemnestra takes on the role of the slain dragon in the *Choephoroi*. The secret habitat of the snake, specifically its association with the earth, connects the death of the king of Argos with the matricide. By cutting off the head of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and claiming the property of his father, Orestes becomes the new dragon of the palace of Argos. The marauding skills of Clytemnestra, such as her coiling and biting skills, through which Agamemnon died, are condemned by her offspring. By referring to the Homeric image of the snake that attacks the eagle, Aeschylus illustrates not only the tragic modality of Agamemnon's death, but also the orphaned status of Orestes and Electra. Clytemnestra pretends to assume the kourotrophic role of the snake, by displaying her breast to be spared from death, but she is eventually slain by her offspring. The act of matricide reflects the accomplishment of Clytemnestra's dream of nurturing a dragon at her breast, as reported at the beginning of the tragedy. Fed by a mixture of blood and milk, Orestes kills his

mother and becomes the victim of the anguiform Erinyes. Because of the involvement of the vengeful monsters in the persecution of Orestes, Clytemnestra takes on both the roles of the slaying and the slain dragon in the *Eumenides*. Aeschylus refers to the secret habitat of the snake to stage the arrival of the anguiform monsters in search of the matricide. As the embodiment of the vengeful temper of Clytemnestra, the chthonic and bloody-thirsty monsters pursue Orestes from Delphi to Athens. The marauding skills of the snake are also attributed to the Erinyes, who ask compensation for the matricide committed by Orestes. The nurturing role of the snake is evoked in the depiction of the Erinyes, who search for the blood of the matricide in defence of the cause of Clytemnestra. By assuming the kourotrophic role of the snake, Athena eventually transforms the Erinyes into benign goddesses and convinces them to be the guarantors of the fertility of Earth. Thus, Aeschylus metaphorically transforms Clytemnestra into a deceptive avenger, by giving expression to her double role of slaying and slain dragon in the palace of Argos. Through the deceptive skills of the snake, he stages the tragic contradictions between the accomplishment and the punishment of Clytemnestra's revenge within and against the House of Atreus.

Similarly to Aeschylus, Sophocles metaphorically transforms Deianira into a snake to represent the vengeful causes and effects of her deception. She deceives her husband, through sending him a lethal robe, and herself about the magical properties of her gift. Through the motif of the double deception, the death of Heracles and the consequent suicide of Deianira are staged in the *Trachiniae*. The active involvement of the mythological monsters slain by Heracles expresses the complexity of Deianira's revenge. Moved by jealousy, she decides to use the magical philtre of Nessus in order to defend her marriage.

However, she does not know that the blood of the centaur mixed with the venom of Hydra will cause the destruction of her family. When she realises the tragic result of her vengeful plan, after being reproached by Hyllos, she commits suicide. In the dramaturgical passage from the realisation to the punishment of her plan of vengeance, she enacts a metaphorical metamorphosis into a snake. The tragic humanity of Deianira is expressed through the representation of her vengeful act committed through deceit. By employing the magical potion, consisting of the blood of Nessus and the venom of Hydra, Deianira destroys instead of protecting her household. The tragic irony reaches its apex when Hyllos after bearing witness to the death of his father blames his mother. He metaphorically evokes a viper (771) to describe the suffering of Heracles wearing the poisonous tunic. This is the only occurrence of the snake in the tragic depiction of Deianira. The other occurrences of the snake are applied to the mythological monsters Achelous (12) and Hydra (834). From the perspective of Heracles' son, unaware of the deceitful participation of Nessus in the death of his father, his mother is a cruel, violent and treacherous viper. By taking on both the roles of the slaying and the slain dragon, Deianira is depicted as the treacherous, protective and violent wife of Heracles, who commits suicide after the realisation of her act of revenge.

Sophocles evokes the distinctive characteristics of the snake in the depiction of Deianira, namely its secret habitat, marauding skills and kourotrophic role, in the passage from the plotting of her vengeful plan to the realisation of her suicide. Initially, she is located close to water sources, which evoke her past of sexual violence and the future destruction of her family. At the beginning of the tragedy, she narrates the episode of the river Achelous, who after his attempts to

get her in marriage, was slain by Heracles. This memory prepares the scene for the vengeful plan of Deianira, who encouraged by the Chorus becomes the anguiform guardian of her household. The fears of her sexual past are transferred to the present, as Deianira is worried about the absence of her husband. Unaware that the slave she has welcomed is the new wife of Heracles, she decides to claim her marital rights, by assuming the marauding skills of the snake. Convinced that the blood of Nessus, another mythological monster associated with water sources, has magic properties, she takes on the role of the slaying dragon of Heracles. By unconsciously collaborating with the vengeance of the centaur, she imbues a vest with the poisonous blood of Hydra and sends it in homage to Heracles. The effects of the poisonous vest are depicted with vivid realism, as if he was entrapped in the coils of a viper. When Deianira realises what she has done, she kills herself, after being condemned by her son. As Hyllos reports in his narration, Heracles was killed by the venom generated by death and nurtured by the serpentine monster. The nurturing role of the snake is attributed to the mythological dragon Hydra, whose venom caused Heracles' death. Through the snake image, Sophocles signals the dramatic passage from Deianira's initial memories about her past of sexual violence to her self-destruction. By specifically referring to the snake, he gives expression to the vengeful motivations and implications of Deianira's deception. Deceived by mythological monsters, she deceives and kills Heracles, and as result she kills herself.

In the *Antigone*, Sophocles metaphorically transforms into a snake another tragic heroine who is entangled in the vengeful intrigues of her family. Despite the edict of Creon, Antigone intends to bury the corpse of Polynices after his tragic duel with Eteoles. By playing the role of the ally of Antigone, Ismene uses

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deception to conceal and reveal her revenge. She initially tries to dissuade her sister from transgressing the edict of Creon, but then pretends to have taken part in her vengeful act. The tragic relation between deception and revenge is mediated by the snake imagery in the Theban tragedy. As soon as Creon realises that Antigone has buried the corpse of Polynices, he condemns Ismene to death too. Although she has not actually participated in the transgressive act of her sister, Ismene is accused by her uncle of conspiracy. Creon metaphorically compares her to a viper (531), with the aim of denouncing her daring act. From his perspective, Ismene has devised the plan that Antigone has committed. She has tried to suckle his blood and subvert the power of his crown. By specifically evoking the kourotrophic role of the snake, Sophocles shifts the motif of deception from Ismene to Creon. He is the actual snake that has nurtured the ruins of his own household. Because of his stubberness and fierceness, Creon will witness the suicides of his niece Antigone, his son Haemon and his wife Eurydice. The tragic relationships between the members of Oedipus' family are mediated by the snake imagery in the light of the mythological origin of Thebes. As the Chorus sing at the beginning and the end of the tragedy, the Dionysiac city was founded by Cadmus after the slaughter of the dragon (126, 1125). By creating a connection between the mythological past and the tragic present, Sophocles entangles Ismene in the vengeful dynamics of her family.

Meanwhile, Euripides transforms Hermione into a snake to reveal and conceal the causes and the effects of her vengeful plan in the *Andromache*. As the deceitful guardian of her own household, Hermione attempts to kill the slave of her husband and her stepson. The relationship between Neoptolemus and Andromache has caused her jealousy, resentment and hatred. By threatening the

life of Molossus, Hermione convinces Andromache to leave the altar of Thetis where she has found protection. However, with the arrival of Peleus who eventually rescues mother and son, her plan of revenge fails. Fearing the punishment of her vengeful intentions, Hermione first tries to commit suicide and then escapes with Orestes who has deceived and killed Neoptolemus. Her tragic humanity consists in ignoring the fact that her husband has already died by her new lover's hands. By enacting a metaphorical metamorphosis into a snake, she asserts her marital status, but causes the destruction of her own household. The snake metaphor blurs the dichotomies between friendship and enmity, attack and defence, life and death, to mediate the tragic implications of Hermione's revenge. In response to the accusation of having used magical potions to make her marriage sterile, Andromache metaphorically compares Hermione to a viper (271). This is the only reference to the snake in the vengeful depiction of Hermione who deceives the enemies of her family, but eventually deceives herself. By specifically referring to the marauding skills of the snake, Euripides captures Hermione in the dramatic passage from the plotting to the punishment of her vengeful intentions. Intensified by the fire imagery, the viper is evoked to express treachery, anger and violence, on the one hand, and suffering, loss and protection, on the other. The poisonous bite and the coiling moves of the snake represent the instruments of violence of Hermione, whose failed plan of revenge leads towards the recognition of her stepson as the king of the Molossian land.

In the *Ion*, Euripides metaphorically transforms another tragic heroine into a snake to stage the causes and the effects of her plan of revenge. Unlike Clytemnestra and Deianira, Creusa does not use deception to harm directly her husband, but to get rid of her stepson. By employing the venomous drop of the

Gorgon's blood, she tries to deceive and kill Ion. Unlike Deianira, she is aware of the lethal properties of her instrument of revenge; she rather is ignorant of the fact that the victim of her vengeful plan is actually her own son. Deceived by the oracle of Apollo regarding the paternity of Xuthos, she defends her household from the introduction of Ion. However, the deception of Creusa does not bring about either the realisation or the punishment of her revenge. Like Andromache, she does not accomplish her deceptive plan, but caught in her vengeful intentions she is first threatened with and then spared from death. Through the final recognition between mother and son, Euripides explains the mythological origin of the Ionian race. In his tragic re-telling of the myth of the autochthony of Athens, he transforms Creusa into the deceitful avenger of her own household. By inventing a new version of the autochthonous origin of Athens, he gives expression to the tragic contradictions of Creusa's attempt of revenge against her own son. Taking on both the roles of the slaying and the slain dragon, she contributes to the foundation of the Ionian race.

In her metaphorical metamorphosis into a snake, Creusa is captured in the dramaturgical passage from Apollo's oracle to Ion's recognition. Through the snake metaphor, Euripides represents the contradictory causes and effects of her deception in attempting vengefully to kill Ion. He specifically evokes the snake in the depiction of Creusa three times (1233, 1262, 1263), with the aim of emphasising her vengeful nature. The Chorus refer to the viper in order to lament the tragic consequences of Creusa's vengeance. Ion instead compares his mother to a snake to denounce the monstrosity of her vengeful plan. The other references to the snake occur in the depiction of the mythological monsters and deities involved in Creusa's revenge. Euripides refers to the snakes sent by Athena to

protect Erichthonius (23) and to the blood of the Gorgon, given by the goddess to her foster child (1015). The snake metaphor reinforces the relationship between Ion and Creusa, in the light of the mythological bond between Athena and Erichthonius. Just as Athena protected Erichthonius with two snakes as the guardians of his chest, Creusa exposed Ion with a serpentine necklace and pendant, and a woven robe with the Gorgon in the middle (25, 1423, 1427). These are employed as the token of recognition in the final scene of the tragedy where Creusa can finally embrace her son.

Creusa enacts a metaphorical metamorphosis into a snake, by assuming its secret setting, marauding skills and kourotrophic role. Located between Delphi and Athens, she is attributed the secret habitat of the snake, by creating confusion between the mortal and divine members of her family. The proximity and the distance between mother, father and son delays the final scene of recognition. As Hermes explains in the prologue, Creusa was violated by Apollo and constrained to expose her child in the cave of their sexual intercourse. Rescued by Apollo's brother, Ion was brought to Delphi and nurtured by the Pythia. Convinced that Ion is the fruit of an extra-conjugal relationship of her husband, Creusa assumes also the marauding skills of the snake to kill her own son. Supported in her vengeful plan by the old man, she uses as instrument of violence the poisonous blood of the Gorgon. By connecting the Gigantomachy with her Athenian origin, Creusa becomes the slaying dragon of her own family. However, her attempt to poison her stepson is in vain, since sinister voices arrive to Ion's ears. The effects of venom are rather projected on a swallow that after drinking the venomous wine starts to shake and eventually dies. Through a dramatic reversal, Ion becomes the slayer of the dragon, by condemning his mother to death. Thanks to the arrival of

the Pythia and the consignment of the objects of exposure, he renounces his vengeful intentions. Finally, Creusa assumes the kourotrophic role of the snake to convince her son about her innocence and identity. She describes the woven robe with the Gorgon in its middle, the serpentine pendants and the crown of olive that Ion has found in the chest where he was exposed. By linking the birth of Ion with the autochthony of the anguiform heroes of Attica, Euripides stages the final scene of recognition. Through the mimesis of the nurturing role of Athena towards the earth-born Erichthonius, he transforms Creusa into the serpentine mother of Ion, the father of the Ionians.

From a posthumanist perspective, the snake-woman metaphor reveals the tragic humanity of female deception in revenge plots. As I have demonstrated, Attic dramatists do not compare female avengers to the snake merely to denounce their monstrosity, cruelty and transgression, but rather to give expression to the human contradictions of their deceptive behaviour. By drawing on dragon-slaying myths, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides stage both the realisation and the punishment of female revenge in intra-family intrigues. With particular reference to mythological monsters with serpentine form, they build up the characterisation of deceptive avengers. Taking on both the roles of the slaying and the slain dragon, vengeful heroines deceive but are eventually deceived by the members of their own family. Female avengers like Clytemnestra, Deianira, Ismene, Andromache and Creusa are transformed into deceitful snakes. By blurring the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, humanity and animality, and body and mind, they act as the vengeful guardians of their own household. Performed in honour of Dionysus, their metaphorical metamorphoses into

treacherous and violent, dangerous and protective snakes could celebrate the birth of the democratic polis.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has provided new insight into the tragic association of female avengers with wild animals in the theatre of Dionysus. Through a close reading of the tragic passages, in which the nightingale, the lioness and the snake metaphorically occur, I have shed fresh light on the controversial identity of vengeful heroines. My textual analysis has rejected the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic views that previous classical scholars have adopted in their philological and linguistic commentaries. By combining gendered perspectives, animal studies and posthumanism, I have argued that the employment of the animal-woman metaphor in revenge plots could question the human concepts of retribution, violence and justice. Far from being an expression of non-humanity, wild animals are evoked in tragic plays to display the human contradictions of the female voice, agency and deception in intra-familial vengeful dynamics. Considered particularly fitting for tragic productions at the festival of Dionysus, the nightingale, the lioness and the snake capture female characters in the dramaturgical passage from suffering to vengeance.

My interpretation of animal metaphors in the tragic depiction of female avengers has been informed and influenced by the theory of the posthuman postulated by Braidotti. As a result of the combination of women's studies and animal studies, her posthumanist discourse has framed and supported my interdisciplinary methodology. Through merging gendered perspectives on the classical world with classical studies of animals, I have investigated the metaphorical significance of the nightingale, the lioness and the snake in tragic

plays staging female vengeance. I have specifically adopted the posthumanist concept of metamorphosis defined by Braidotti to explain the comparison of female characters with wild animals in revenge plots. Her interpretation of the complex, transitional and changing nature of human identity has proved valuable for my reconstruction of the metaphorical metamorphoses enacted by tragic women into vengeful animals. I have applied her non-dualistic understanding of humanity to restructure the tragic dichotomies of masculinity and femininity, humanity and animality, mind and body that blur in the metamorphic depiction of female avengers. By building on the posthuman theory of Braidotti, I have demonstrated the effect of pathos that Attic dramatists would have triggered through the employment of the nightingale, the lioness and the snake in female characterisation. Employed as Dionysiac tools, animal metaphors reveal the tragic humanity of female characters who plan, incite and commit vengeance within and against their household.

Chapter 1 reconstructed the metaphorical metamorphoses enacted by mourning avengers into tragic nightingales. Through analysis of the nightingale image, I have opened up new perspectives to interpret the vengeful laments performed by tragic heroines on the Attic stage. In the light of the posthumanist perspective of Braidotti, I have interwoven classical studies on the nightingale species with gendered perspectives about lamentation and vengeance, to outline the discordant acoustic effects created by the female voice in the theatre of Dionysus. As I have argued, through a reversal in the mythological metamorphosis of Procne, Attic dramatists represent tragic women as modulating the lamenting song of the nightingale to anticipate a vengeful resolution. This has been evidenced in the metamorphic depiction of the Aeschylean Danaids and

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Cassandra, the Sophoclean Electra, and the Euripidean Polyxena and Helen. When the tragic heroines are metaphorically transformed into nightingales, they signal a dramaturgical moment of suspense in the passage from lamentation to vengeance. Because of their vengeful laments, they are attributed the liminal habitat, the musical skills and the prophetic role of the tragic nightingale. The habitat of the nightingale, which consists of verdant places and blood-stained banks, is evoked to set the metaphorical metamorphoses of the Danaids, Cassandra and Helen. By blurring the dichotomies between homeland and foreign land, marriage and war, life and death, the vengeful laments of the tragic heroines are performed in a liminal space. The vocal techniques of the nightingale are attributed to the Danaids, Cassandra, Electra, Polyxena and Helen, who raise a lamenting song before vengeance is committed. Their vengeful laments are metaphorically reproduced through shrill, weeping and disturbing sounds. The prophetic role of the nightingale is employed in the depiction of the Danaids, Cassandra and Electra to foreshadow the vengeful implications of their tragic laments. Through the nightingale image, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides stage female lamentation to announce the self-destruction of the household.

Chapter 2 reconstructed the metaphorical metamorphoses enacted by avenging mothers into tragic lionesses. My analysis of the lioness image has shed fresh light on the tragic depiction of mothers who, through strength and protectiveness, commit vengeful acts. In the light of the theory of the posthuman postulated by Braidotti, I have combined classical studies on the lion species and gendered perspectives about war and childbirth, to show the tragic contradictions of female agency in the theatre of Dionysus. As I have argued, Attic dramatists merge both the masculine and feminine traits of the Homeric lion to empower

tragic women in the vengeful conflicts of their household. This has been evidenced in the metamorphic depiction of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Tecmessa, and the Euripidean Medea, Clytemnestra and Agave. When the tragic heroines are metaphorically transformed into lionesses, they are captured in the dramaturgical passage from vengeance to bereavement. Because of their vengeful acts, they are attributed the dangerous habitat, the hunting skills and the maternal role of the lioness in key moments of tragic plays. The movement of the lioness from the mountains to the thicket is evoked as the setting for the metaphorical metamorphoses of Agave and Clytemnestra. Through the blurring of the dichotomies between the wild and the οἶκος, Euripides locates the vengeful acts of his tragic heroines in a dangerous space. The hunting skills of the lioness are attributed to Clytemnestra, Medea and Agave who, either willingly or unwillingly, commit vengeance within and against their household. By confusing the hunter with the hunted, the murderer with the murdered, and man with woman, Aeschylus and Euripides stage acts of vengeance committed by their tragic heroines. The maternal role of the lioness is employed in the depiction of Clytemnestra, Tecmessa, Medea and Agave. Although Tecmessa does not commit vengeance, the tragic heroines are represented lioness-like because of their disrupted relationship with their cubs. Through the lioness image, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides stage the tragic implications of female vengeance in intra-familial conflicts.

Chapter 3 reconstructed the metaphorical metamorphoses enacted by deceitful avengers into tragic snakes. Through analysis of the snake image, I have offered a new way of understanding the representation of tragic heroines who plan and commit vengeance by deceit. In the light of the posthuman theory of

Braidotti, I have interwoven classical studies on the snake species with gendered perspectives about myths of autochthony, to show the tragic contradictions of the deceptive behaviour of female characters in the theatre of Dionysus. As I have argued, Attic dramatists draw on dragon-slaying myths to represent the intra-familial vengeful intrigues in which tragic heroines entangle but are eventually entangled. This has been evidenced in the metamorphic depiction of the Aeschoclean Clytemnestra, the Sophoclean Deianira and Ismene, and the Euripidean Hermione and Creusa. When the tragic heroines are metaphorically transformed into snakes, they are captured in the dramaturgical passage from the plotting to the punishment of their vengeance. Because of their vengeful plans and actions, they are attributed the secret habitat, the marauding skills and the kourotrophic role of the tragic snake. The secret habitat of the snake, which includes water sources, the underworld and sacred spaces, is evoked to set the plans of vengeance devised and accomplished by Clytemnestra, Deianira and Creusa. By blurring the dichotomies between οἶκος and πόλις, seen and unseen, sacred and profane, the tragic heroines are depicted as the monstrous guardians of their household. Attic dramatists attribute the techniques of attack and defence of the snake to Clytemnestra, Deianira, Hermione and Creusa to represent the deceptive instruments of their vengeance. Through the biting and coiling skills of the snake, the tragic heroines either consciously or unconsciously take part in the vengeful intrigues of their own household. The kourotrophic role of the snake is applied to Clytemnestra, Deianira, Ismene and Creusa to merge sexuality and violence, protection and danger, birth and exposure in their tragic depiction. Through the snake image, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides show the retributive nature of female deception in intra-familial vengeful dynamics.

The application of the posthumanist perspective suggested by Braidotti has demonstrated the significance of animal metaphors in the tragic characterisation of female avengers. The images of the nightingale, the lioness and the snake express the tragic humanity of female characters whose vengeance brings about the self-destruction of the household. As I have argued, the human contradictions of their vengeful intentions, plans and acts would have provoked a tragic effect of pathos linked to the blending of attributes in the fifth-century Athenian audience. When tragic heroines enact a metaphorical metamorphosis into vengeful animals, they cause suffering to their family and inevitably to themselves. This thesis has explained the complex use of the images of the nightingale, the lioness and the snake in the tragic depiction of female avengers, and shown the potential of a posthumanist approach to be applied to other aspects of the theatre of Dionysus.

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                     286), ἔχιδνα (Aesch. *Cho*. 249, 994; Eur. *IT*

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Ismene   ἔχιδνα (Soph. *Ant*. 531)

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