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**‘The Gender of Female Suicide in Greek Myth:
Divine, *Amēchanon*, Monstrous.’**

Marina Galetaki

“A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts”

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Seventy-eight thousand
one hundred and one words

ABSTRACT

This thesis takes as its starting point the widespread scholarly assumption about an affinity in Greek thought between suicide by hanging and women, and proceeds to argue that in certain contexts the network of associations between the two enables the formation of subversive gender identities. The Greek material, which comprises textual variants of Greek myths from 8th century BCE–2nd century CE, is approached from a perspective informed by Butler’s theoretical work on gender. Within this framework, gender is understood both as performance and as the cultural means that institute sex as a natural, prediscursive category. As a result, the observations on the available conceptualisations of gender in Greek antiquity bring together evidence ranging from the social roles of men and women to ideas about sexual difference and attitudes towards sexual desire and practice.

The nexus of connections between suicide by hanging and women is traced in diverse areas of thought and activity, prominent among which is Hippocratic medicine. The gynaecological treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus offer a model of female physiology and pathology within which suicide by hanging becomes connected to both specifically female pathological conditions and distorted versions of normal female reproductive functions. Within certain narrative contexts, these associations, combined with those suicide by hanging develops in other areas, render this mode of dying a site for the convergence, conflict, and parodic recirculation of conventionally female roles. As a consequence, a space is created for the redeployment of these associations towards gender configurations that subvert norms and exceed the descriptive abilities of existing categories. The discussion of a wide range of instances of women’s suicide by hanging in Greek myths demonstrates the variety of ways in which such a subversive gender identity may be performed, and offers new ways of understanding Greek ideas about gender.

DEDICATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents, Michalis and Nike:
ὦς οὐδὲν γλύκιον ἦς πατρίδος οὐδὲ τοκίων
γίγνεται, εἴ περ καί τις ἀπόπροθι πίονα οἶκον
γαίη ἐν ἀλλοδαπῇ ναίει ἀπάνευθε τοκίων.
(Hom. *Od.* 9.34–36)

This thesis bears my name as its author, but it would not have been possible without the energy and time of many others. Throughout my PhD I have benefited from the expertise and advice of many people in the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Bristol: I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my excellent supervisors, Dr Vanda Zajko and Dr Lyndsay Coo, who have encouraged, inspired, and guided me at every turn. To Dr Zajko for her enthusiasm and commitment to the project, her constructive comments, and for providing me with many wonderful teaching opportunities, which allowed me to apply my knowledge in a class setting. To Dr Coo, for the attention with which she has always read my work, her many helpful suggestions, and for going above and beyond to help me with every aspect of the PhD. To both, for their efforts to ensure I develop my potential, and for their invaluable support when personal circumstances made the PhD journey a particularly difficult one. It has been an honour and a pleasure to work with them. Particular thanks should also go to the examiners of my PhD thesis, Prof. Richard Buxton (Emeritus Professor, University of Bristol) and Prof. Lesley Dean-Jones (University of Texas at Austin), for the energy and time they dedicated in minute examination of my work, their robust, insightful interrogation of my arguments, and their suggested corrections, which helped outline my argument more clearly and improve the overall quality of my thesis.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: **DATE:**

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A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Unless otherwise indicated, the translations for the Greek passages are those published in the Loeb series. Translations of passages from Conon are from Brown 2002 and those for Parthenius can be found in Lightfoot 1999 (full details can be found in the bibliography). The abbreviations used are those found in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

INTRODUCTION

A Lycian marble relief from an early-5th-century pillar tomb at Xanthos depicts a Harpy cradling an infant-sized dead man as she transports him away from the world of the living.¹ Such associations between female figures and death are well-documented in the field of ancient Greek thanatology, and constitute one of the many aspects of the relationship between death and gender that have fruitfully been explored over the last forty years.² As well as shedding light on the related phenomenon of conceptual connections between the female and the impurity of death,³ research in the field has expanded our understanding of male and female roles in funerary rituals of different periods and of the ways in which wider political and societal shifts occasioned changes in the gendered participation in such practices.⁴

Compared to the richness of this output, research on gendered modes of dying, though not entirely lacking, appears underdeveloped and sporadic. Undoubtedly, this is in large part due to the immensity of the area to be covered: here we encounter not only real phenomena such as death in battle or as the result of disease, but also symbolic representations, for instance myths of human sacrifice. Faced with the challenge of addressing a very wide range of material, it is useful to begin filling the lacuna by focusing on a specific subfield where the question of gendered modes of dying may be answered in some detail. Suicide appears as a particularly appropriate area for such an exploration: on the one hand, and despite the issues surrounding Greek conceptualisations of responsibility and agency, self-killing introduces a measure of conscious action in the interaction between death and gender; on the other, ancient Greek suicide constitutes the area where most of the work on gendered modes of dying has focused, work which must be expanded and re-evaluated before its insights can be applied to non-suicidal deaths. For the purposes of this thesis I will be focusing specifically on suicide in Greek myth for reasons that will be elaborated later but may be summarised as the ability of myth to reflect, participate in, and shape cultural discourses on suicide.

Unsurprisingly, the preservation of much mythical material in later sources and otherwise marginal accounts means that critical attention has focused primarily on suicide cases dramatized in extant Attic tragedy. Three key observations may be made with regard to the tragic material and its treatment. First, the distribution of cases and methods is uneven between genders, with women dying in higher numbers and with a greater variety of methods. Second, and partly as a result of the above,

¹ London B287, Pryce 1928: 122–24. Pryce himself identifies the dead figure as female, but Vermeule (1979: 170) maintains it is that of a man.

² See for example Vermeule 1979: 145–78; Vernant 1991: 95–110.

³ Parker 1983: 100–101; Shapiro 1991: 634–35. However, this association has been heavily qualified and revised by Stears 1998: 117–18. For the connection between women and dirt more broadly see Carson 1999.

⁴ See for example Garland 1989: 1–15; Foley 1990; Stears 1998; Sourvinou-Inwood 2004; Loraux 2006: 53–54, 79–84; Mirto 2012: 72–81, 148–54.

female suicide has tended to be the primary (though not the exclusive) locus for work on the gendered aspects of self-killing, although other elements of male suicide continue to garner significant attention. Finally, repeated throughout literature on the topic is the assertion of a conceptual polarity between suicide by the sword, which has strong connotations of masculinity, and suicide by hanging, which is coded as feminine. Clearly, these observations are not independent of each other. Proper consideration of their relationship and of what it can reveal about our current approaches to suicide in Greek myth is therefore necessary to determine the focus of this study.

Male suicide in Greek tragedy and its treatment are a good point from which to start shedding some light on these points. In fully extant plays, cases of male suicide comprise only three out of a total of ten instances of self-killing, and are invariably committed by the sword.⁵ The similarity of this suicide method to death on the battlefield helps to explain the close conceptual link between suicide by the sword and masculinity. It also accounts for the relative lack of curiosity around the gendered aspects of male suicide in tragedy, which appears all the more marked in the light of the steady stream of publications on other aspects of the topic.⁶ By contrast, the larger number of female suicides, and more importantly the wider variety of methods deployed, demand an explanation, and have encouraged closer examination of gender as one of the factors that can explain the observed disparity. However, the operation of the conceptual schema that contrasts masculine suicide by the sword to feminine suicide by hanging has had the effect of concentrating attention on those female suicides that either upset the dichotomy, like Deianeira's suicide by the sword, or that fall outside it altogether, like Evadne's leap into a fire.⁷ And although it has resulted in some attentive and insightful analyses of cases such as the above, this contrast has also had the twofold effect of conditioning what is being said about the gendered aspects of suicide methods and of side-lining male and female suicides that confirm the schema. It is therefore clear that if we are to expand and nuance our understanding of the implications of suicide methods for gender we need to start by interrogating the fundamental

⁵ These are Ajax (Soph. *Aj.* 898–99), Haemon (Soph. *Ant.* 1235–36), and Menoeceus (Eur. *Phoen.* 1090–92).

⁶ Considering the comparative rarity of male suicide in tragedy the amount of critical attention lavished on it appears disproportionately large. The main culprit behind this state of affairs is the Sophoclean Ajax. Although he is but one among several tragic protagonists that kill themselves, the scholarship around his death rivals in volume the total of what has been said on female suicides. As well as several articles and book chapters (see for example Cohen 1978; Gardiner 1979; Mills 1980–81; March 1991–93; Garrison 1995: 46–53; Instone 2007; Keyser 2008–09; Fletcher 2013; Davidson 2018; Hiscock 2018: 17–19) his suicide is also the subject of an entire edited collection dedicated primarily, but not exclusively, to the staging of the act (Most and Ozbek 2015). Remarkably, the question of gender is all but non-existent in these analyses, which tend to cluster around the 'deception speech', staging, and heroic codes. It remains true that scholarship on the remaining two tragic male suicides, Haemon and Menoeceus is much more modest in scope and volume, which would seem to suggest that Ajax is an exceptional case. Nevertheless, these young men constitute secondary characters in their respective dramas, and as such their treatment should be compared with that reserved for female suicides of equivalent importance. Viewed in this light, their suicides do not appear significantly underappreciated.

⁷ For a brief analysis of Deianeira's suicide and relevant bibliography see pp. 75–82 with notes. For Evadne see pp. 66–68 with notes.

assumptions held: what ideas underpin the sword/noose, male/female scheme, to what extent is it supported by the evidence, and how stable is it?

Of the two elements of the polarity, the identification of suicide by the sword as masculine appears the more stable, but also the one more amenable to qualification. On the one hand, it is premised on the proximity of this suicide method to death in battle, whose association with men and masculinity has a pedigree extending from the ‘beautiful death’ of the Homeric warrior to the hoplitic ideal of the city-state. This assimilation of the two types of death and their gendered inflections is often borne out by the evidence, as the case of the Sophoclean Ajax demonstrates: the framing of Ajax’ sword, the agent of his destruction, as a hated gift from the enemy encourages an interpretation of his suicide as the conclusion of his discontinued fight with Hector, and of his solitary, shame-fuelled self-killing as heroic death in battle.⁸ On the other hand, suicide by the sword is also employed by no small number of mythic women, and often in contexts where it enables, rather than contradicts, the assumption of a female identity by the victim. Critical literature on Deianeira’s suicide in the *Trachiniae*, for example, often interprets the significance of the weapon she uses in the context of her desire for a sexual union with Heracles in death, and therefore highlights its role as a penetrating agent that symbolically deflowers Deianeira rather than its connotations of masculine valour.⁹ Instances such as this have helped bring out some of the feminine or feminising associations of this suicide method, which may in turn be brought to bear on male cases where the narrative context so permits. For example, after decades of being considered a straightforward case of male suicide, Haemon’s death in Sophocles’ *Antigone* has recently been interpreted as potentially gender-destabilising.¹⁰ At the same time, the resemblance of Menoeceus’ self-sacrificial throat-cutting in Euripides’ *Phoenissae* to the sacrifice of *parthenoi* often staged in tragedy has been repeatedly noted, even if the implications of this similarity for Menoeceus’ gender have not been fully pursued.¹¹ *Pace* Loraux, it would appear that in tragic suicide the male is allowed to play—indeed, to embody—the female.¹²

⁸ Cohen 1978: 32; March 1991–93: 16.

⁹ For some examples of approaches that pay little or no attention to the masculine connotations of Deianeira’s suicide by the sword see Easterling 1968: 66; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 81 and n. 28; Segal 1981: 77; Davies 1991: 217; Foley 2001: 119.

¹⁰ Miller 2014. For a discussion of approaches to Haemon’s death and relevant literature see Chapter 3, pp. 154–59.

¹¹ This aspect of Menoeceus’ sacrifice has best been analysed by Loraux (1987: 35–36, 41–42). Nevertheless, she attempts to soften the impact of replacing a *parthenos* with a young man as a sacrificial victim by emphasising the need for a man to wield the sacrificial knife and the impossibility of providing a female descendant of the Spartoi for the purpose. More recently, Menoeceus’ similarity to young girls has been noted by Mastronarde 1994: 419, Lamari 2007: 19–21, and Swift 2009: 70–71, who also notes the presence of the ‘marriage to death’ motif. Most of the scholarship on Menoeceus’ suicide/self-sacrifice has focused on the role of the scene in the play. For a positive assessment of his act see Rawson 1970: 118–26; Papadodima 2016: 47–48. For Menoeceus’ death as problematising values and themes of the play see Foley 1985: 106–112, 132–36; O’Connor-Visser 1987: 82–87; Garrison 1995: 138–44; Lamari 2010: 88–90; de Cremoux 2012: 308–14.

¹² Loraux 1987: 17: ‘The woman in tragedy is more entitled to play the man in her death than the man is to assume any aspect of woman’s conduct, even in his manner of death.’

Contrary to the partly justified and somewhat flexible association of suicide by the sword with masculinity, the connection between suicide by hanging and femininity appears both less soundly constructed and more recalcitrant. Occurring exclusively among women, not only in tragedy but in the entire range of mythic sources considered here, this suicide method has come to be viewed as at once appropriate to women and feminising for its victims.¹³ It is not difficult to see the almost circular logic through which these two assumptions reinforce each other. If only women hang themselves, this must be by reason of their special affinity for this suicide method; conversely, a woman who hangs herself, regardless of other indications about her gender, is perforce returned to conventional femaleness. To outline the problematic character of this view of suicide by hanging is not to deny the existence of underlying reasons for its exclusive association with mythic women; nevertheless, as will be discussed in the Literature Review, such reasons are rarely explored in detail, and where adduced to support the identification of suicide by hanging as feminine, this is often done in a superficial and unsatisfactory manner. It is therefore necessary to begin the re-evaluation of the gendered aspects of suicide methods by re-examining this most suspect of the assumptions currently held, the feminine and feminising character of suicide by hanging.

The present thesis is positioned as a response to this need for a renewed encounter with the gendered aspect of suicide by hanging. It aims to initiate a discussion that will move critics towards more nuanced interpretations of the dynamic relationship between suicide and gender, as well as of its potential to enrich our understanding of the ancient world and its paradigmatic use for the present. The exploration of this relationship in the following chapters takes place within a theoretical framework derived from Judith Butler's critical work on gender, which, as will be demonstrated below, is particularly well-suited to the present enquiry. Within this framework, gender is understood as a cultural apparatus that produces the concept of sex as a pre-existing biological reality to which culture ascribes meaning; it is also conceptualised as performative, that is, as a series of gestures, styles, behaviours etc. repeated through time within a regulatory framework, with the result that they produce the illusion of an abiding substance or essence. Such an understanding of gender removes the difficulties posed by approaches that seek to map ancient evidence onto a sex/gender dichotomy, while also enabling us to view suicide as an act that participates in and potentially alters the repetitions that are constitutive of gender. Moreover, it allows us to detect in these suicides a type of agency that, though determined by the discourses forming the gendered subject, is also generated through the conflicting demands of these discourses and can disrupt their hegemony.

The advantages of this theoretical background for an exploration of the relationship between gender and suicide by hanging become clearer once we consider the gender connotations that cluster around this mode of death as the result of its embeddedness in multiple discourses—religious, social, and

¹³ The most powerful formulation remains that by Loraux 1987: 9.

medical. As I will show in Chapter 1, suicide by hanging becomes an act that simultaneously evokes various aspects of a female identity, as well as pathological, abnormal, or otherwise distorted versions of these aspects. It achieves this multivalence through association with functions of the female body, as well as through popular ideas on female nature and temperament—that is, by becoming involved in the discourses that the concept of gender outlined above encompasses. The evocation of multiple and often conflicting female roles generates tensions and ambiguities that may be capitalised on to affect an aberrant repetition disruptive of gender norms. Though suicide by hanging carries a variety of associations, not all of them are present in every narrative context. Narrative is the space where the disruptive potential of suicide by hanging becomes materialised as an aberrant repetition of norms and where agency may be exercised. Surrounding events, language, imagery, and details of plot isolate a certain number of connotations and relate them to the gender identity of the suicidal woman as that has been shaped thus far, thus positioning the suicide either as a disruption of the established gender or yet another in a series of acts that have been forming a non-normative gender identity.

The overall aim of the exploration undertaken in the following chapters will be to meaningfully employ these modern critical insights into questions of gender to argue that the same ideological underpinnings that have made suicide by hanging synonymous with conventional femaleness can in fact support interpretations whereby a conventional female identity is reconfigured into a non-normative one. In the process, I intend to expose the selective character of existing readings of the relationship between women and suicide by hanging and to interrogate one of the most pervasive assumptions arising from these readings—namely, that suicide by hanging is a mode of dying that inevitably assigns to women suicides a normative female identity. Instead, I will demonstrate that despite—or rather precisely because of—its nexus of connections to what is traditionally considered female or denotative of femaleness, suicide by hanging can expose the artificiality of the category of woman and enable the articulation of non-normative gender identities. The focus of the chapters that follow will be precisely those mythic cases of women’s suicide by hanging that realise the potential of this mode of self-killing to disrupt gender norms and give rise to identities impossible to contain within existing categories.

Literature review

The type of enquiry proposed here comes at an opportune moment. The recurrence in scholarly output of a limited number of observations on the relationship between death and gender has started to render conspicuous our dependence on a restricted number of older interpretative models. Having shed light on the complex ways in which certain modes of dying became associated in Greek thinking with the female, these seminal studies have since become the default way of interpreting women’s suicides. As a result, many critics are content to rehash—often in an oversimplified form—the insights gained

from these studies, or to pass over in silence the connection between gender and modes of dying, effectively closing down any discussion that could revise our understanding of these suicides and their contexts. This tendency is especially pronounced when the suicide in question is achieved by hanging, as this method has an established reputation for being the quintessentially female way of dying. Given the current state of affairs, it is crucial to map out the main approaches to the study of ancient female suicide by hanging, and point out the ways in which the research proposed here builds and expands on previous concerns.

Generally speaking, the literature on death in ancient Greece offers little more than a cursory glance at suicide, and tends to prioritise attitudes towards and moral evaluations of the act. Studies of this broad a scope remain indispensable for the study of suicide, however, insofar as they provide a larger context of customs, practices, ideas, and attitudes towards the universal phenomenon of death.¹⁴ In certain cases, as with Garland's lucid and informed study of the subject in *The Greek Way of Death*, this type of work also provides a corrective to generalisations commonly repeated, such as the supposed blanket revulsion of the Greeks towards suicide by hanging.¹⁵ Nevertheless, as these studies rarely have occasion to touch upon the connection between suicide and gender, they do little to move that discussion forward, and must therefore be seen as complementary to more specialised research on the topic.

The relationship between gender and suicide does not fare better in critical work concentrating on one or more aspects of ancient suicide. Even in the most comprehensive treatments of the subject in the English language gender does not feature prominently among the research questions. It is true that van Hooff, whose work remains one of the most extensive examinations of suicide in the Greek and Roman worlds, displays throughout an awareness of gender as a contributing factor to motives and methods: the suicides of young and old women form separate groups, while each type of suicide or motivation is usually accompanied by brief comments on its relevance for men and women respectively.¹⁶ Nevertheless, for the most part this awareness is instantiated in generalising—and therefore often inaccurate—statements on the prevalence of grief and sexual humiliation as motives among women, or the disrepute that attached to suicide by hanging.¹⁷ The section on this mode of suicide in particular hardly offers new insights, comprising mostly an assortment of mythic and

¹⁴ Some important studies in the field are Vermeule 1979; Humphreys and King 1981; Morris 1992; Sourvinou-Inwood 1995; Noy 2009; Håland 2014.

¹⁵ Garland 2001: 95–99. For such assertions see King 1983: 119; Loraux 1987: 9, 71 n. 8 (see n. 28 for discussion of her view on suicide by hanging and the examples she provides); van Hooff 1990: 56–72.

¹⁶ See for example van Hooff 1990: 49–50 for the significance of women's use of weapons as a means of self-killing, or pp. 126–29 for the different meaning that devotion as a motive assumes for men and women.

¹⁷ van Hooff 1990: 56–72 (suicide by hanging), 99–105 (grief), 116–120 (sexual humiliation), and 237 (percentages).

historic cases and a set of assertions not always supported by the material.¹⁸ More generally, van Hooff's study remains of limited usefulness for an in-depth understanding of the values attached to suicide by hanging and the ways in which it participates in the construction of gender owing to the heavy reliance on Roman historiographical material and the tendency to treat together diverse cases without due attention to context.

The pitfalls of such approaches are largely avoided in studies more narrowly focused on suicide in a specific historical or literary context; nevertheless, these, too, often betray little interest in the dynamics of the relationship between gender and suicide. Even though her research treats some of the most prominent cases of female suicide by hanging in myth, Garrison, in her study of attitudes towards suicide in Greek drama, generally avoids addressing the role of gender in determining the character of the suicides she examines. The cases of Antigone, Polyxena, and Iphigeneia, where the marriage-to-death motif is too prominent to be omitted, garner some attention, and there are some brief comments on the sexual imagery underlying the suicides of Deianeira and Evadne;¹⁹ all the same, these comments form an aside to the main argument, and the discussion remains limited to a recapitulation of points already established in the literature. Moreover, in the rare instances where a gender-oriented interpretation is mentioned, its dismissal is often predicated on a misunderstanding of the arguments behind it and of the conclusions it has reached.

Shorter studies that address a specific problem related to suicide or its representation are likely to display the same inattention to gender as a determining factor in motivation, method, and implications. Katsouris' article on the suicide motif in ancient drama is a good example of an approach that, by treating suicide in broad terms and arranging the dramatic instances into easily perceivable patterns, overlooks the particularities of each case, including gender.²⁰ A variant of this type of approach is one that views female suicide as a uniform category distinct from that of male suicide, and connects it with certain types of motivation and/or suicide methods without exploring the underlying logic dictating these associations. It is thus that Walcot presents female suicide as aiming to prevent sexual assault and thus serving a specifically female brand of honour, without considering the often complex character of these motives or the methods chosen by the suicidal women.²¹

¹⁸ The claim, for example, that the actual figures for suicide by hanging must have been much higher due to the prevalence of this method in pre-industrial societies, is based on a comparison with data from African countries in the 1950s. Similarly, the—otherwise correct—observation that myth does not seem to share the sentiment that hanging was a dishonourable way to die is not predicated on convincing evidence that such an attitude was prevalent in the first place (1990: 68). In the relevant chapter (1990: 64–72) the evidence for feelings of revulsion towards hanging comes from Roman sources; on the Greek side, the only supporting evidence is a brief allusion to a rhetorical speech (1990: 67–68).

¹⁹ Garrison 1995: 63–64 (Deianeira), 122–23 (Evadne), 134–38 (Antigone), 151–52 (Iphigeneia), 158–61 (Polyxena).

²⁰ Katsouris 1976.

²¹ Walcot 1986.

The overall neglect of female suicide in the literature on Greek death is not entirely compensated for by a small number of studies that focus on individual mythic cases, and especially those in Greek drama. Although the often pivotal role in plot development and characterisation of these suicides means they are better placed to attract critical attention, they seldom elicit remarks that address the implications of the act for the woman's gender identity. Even so, around some of the high-profile suicides of drama a small body of critical work has developed, which has revised our understanding of the relevant texts and which may serve as a guide to map current interpretive approaches. Broadly speaking, these studies fall into three categories that reflect the assumptions guiding their treatment and the conclusions that they tend to draw. Representing the bulk of the relevant literature, the first group is distinguished by the overarching tendency to assert that suicide by hanging establishes the dead woman's femaleness. That is not to say that critical approaches do not occasionally vary considerably, especially when contextual information is taken into consideration; for instance, where Singh contends that the Sophoclean Antigone's suicide condemns her to the silence appropriate to women, Goff argues that Euripides' Phaedra chooses this mode of dying to exploit its embeddedness in narratives of rape.²² For all their difference in focus and perspective, however, the interpretations falling under this category invariably converge at the same end point—namely, the firm re-establishment of the suicidal woman as indisputably female.

An alternative to the well-beaten track described above is offered by a body of work that views suicide as the natural end of a career that destabilises the normative construction of gender. These interpretations have clustered primarily around Sophocles' Antigone, who is sometimes viewed as the representative of an order that cannot be adequately described within a traditional gender framework.²³ Her suicide in the cave, though not always accorded much attention, is nevertheless considered consonant with the rest of her actions, and borrows from their destabilising force.

Finally, Zeitlin's essays on some of the tragedies featuring female suicide by hanging arguably constitute a distinct category in their own right. Running through her work is the argument that Greek drama represents actual or would-be women suicides as typically female, and female nature as quintessentially ambiguous and divided within itself. In her treatments of the Danaids and the Euripidean Phaedra she maps the different instantiations of these pervasive Greek assumptions and sheds light on the ways in which the threatened or executed suicide by hanging reflects the tensions women experience within themselves.²⁴ For Phaedra as for the Danaids, suicide by hanging is another manifestation of the internal tension that defines female nature, a nature that remains inalienably their own regardless of the extremes to which it may be pushed. Where other critics have detected

²² Singh 2010: 10; Goff 1990: 38.

²³ Jacobs 1996; Johnston 2006.

²⁴ Zeitlin 1990; 1996.

unsanctioned forays into the male realm or glimpsed an alternative order, Zeitlin sees instances of the internal dissonance that defines women.

The critical approaches briefly outlined above have contributed significantly to the development of models for understanding the relationship between suicide by hanging and gender, yet are also subject to criticisms that expose their limitations. The interpretations are often premised on assumptions that must be interrogated, while at other times they fail to flesh out an interesting premise. The former is the case with the majority of the literature on the subject, especially those studies presenting female suicide as a definitive return to femaleness. These drawbacks are removed when the approach adopted is open to intimations of alternative gender configurations, or at least alert to the suicide's potential to reinforce the same transgressive gender identity the dead women had been occupying throughout the drama. Studies of this type, which were identified above as a distinct group, challenge established readings and offer a more complex image of the interaction between suicide and gender, yet present issues of their own. In Johnston's analysis, for example, Antigone's choice to hang herself draws its destabilising force from the negation of Creon's positive action—his immurement of his niece in the cave. Its significance for her gender is thus limited to the connection with Creon's intention to enforce on Antigone a traditional female identity.²⁵ Most other analyses, however, like the one by Jacobs,²⁶ seem to suffer more from a lack of adequate attention to the suicide, which remains peripheral to the argument. As a result, the role of the suicide in sustaining or subverting the image painted of the heroine is relegated to obscurity.

With Zeitlin's work one encounters a different set of challenges; her excellent analysis of the contradictions inherent in female nature as that has been conceptualised in Greek thinking around gender, has shed light on the numerous subtle ways in which suicide by hanging responds to and reinforces these contradictions. Nevertheless, broadening the concept of the female to embrace behaviours elsewhere considered as trespassing on male territory comes at the expense of challenging the gender binary and thinking beyond its restrictive terms. Even when the performance, on the part of a woman, of a multiplicity of male and female roles is explicitly acknowledged, the obvious aberration is quickly rehabilitated and excused as an experience of otherness congenial to the female nature, which is accustomed to feeling divided within itself. Instead of pursuing the implications of the transgressions of gender norms, the analysis retreats to a concept of the female that essentially conforms to conventional ideas on female nature. Within this schema, the destabilisation of established gender categories is a possibility that can never materialise. This concern with ascribing aberrant behaviour to typical femaleness marks the limits of Zeitlin's approach, and signals its

²⁵ Johnston 2006: 182–84.

²⁶ Jacobs 1996.

unsuitability for developing the potential of suicide by hanging to give rise to non-normative gender identities.

The limitations of the existing interpretations are largely a result of the specific methodological frameworks applied in each case. However, many of their drawbacks can be accounted for by the fact that most approaches can trace their fundamental assumptions back to a limited number of seminal studies on the connection between suicide by hanging and femaleness. The appearance of these studies set the parameters within which the topic is examined and their widespread influence has meant that the basic contours of the field have remained virtually unchanged over the last thirty years. Given their landmark position and the influence they continue to exert, it is imperative that the arguments these studies developed be examined anew, with an eye towards both exposing their limitations and identifying the elements that can re-launch the discussion and steer it towards new directions.

Nicole Loraux's 1987 *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* holds a prominent place in this body of literature, and its brief but stimulating treatment of its topic continues to provide critics with their default position when confronted with an instance of female suicide in tragedy. Having identified tragedy as the only space in 5th-century Athens where the silence and privacy surrounding women's death yields to vivid, detailed descriptions, she sets out to examine the modes of dying available to women in this genre and the cultural assumptions about gender that they reflect and reinforce. Focusing primarily on suicide and sacrifice, which tragedy prefers to bestow more often on its female than its male characters, Loraux's analysis sheds light on what turns out to be the highly codified character of female tragic death. In its instantiation as hanging, suicide has an intensely feminising effect; the congruence, in the concept of the noose, of unheroic cunning intelligence, the female activity of weaving, and the imagery of trapped prey, renders this mode of death appropriate for the most feminine of tragedy's suicidal women, and more specifically for wives. That its effectiveness depends on the ability of the noose to restrict the throat, which Loraux has identified as a symbol of feminine allure and vulnerability, seems to confirm the aptness of this method for the excessively feminine women of tragedy.²⁷

This is a powerful analysis whose remarkable insights come from minute attention to the texts and the nuances of the language they employ. Yet the argument put forward is not unassailable: some claims emphatically repeated seem to be based on scant or ambiguous evidence, and certain interpretations of the material appear unconvincing. The assumed dishonour associated with hanging, for example, cannot be adequately justified on the basis of the passages adduced,²⁸ and it requires special pleading

²⁷ Loraux 1987: 50–53.

²⁸ Loraux 1987: 9, 71 n. 8. As the examples she provides are limited in number, I will attempt to address each of them separately. The passage from Plato's *Laws* (9.873e) only alludes to suicide, and even so concerns itself

to assert that it is ‘the law of femininity’ to resort to hanging specifically as an escape from extreme misery.²⁹ The element, however, that renders the overarching argument vulnerable to criticism is arguably also one of the study’s most significant contributions: namely, the contention that tragedy, for all its delight in confusing gender boundaries and creating anomalous situations for the female figures it kills, eventually draws them back into the orbit of traditional femaleness.³⁰ In the case of suicide by hanging, however, even this temporary challenge elsewhere mounted against gender norms remains resolutely out of reach, and the possibility for anything but a conventional, if excessively female, identity goes unacknowledged. That this is problematic is first indicated by Loraux’s own summary and unconvincing attempt to explain away the hanging of Antigone, which raises valid questions about the affinity of this type of suicide only with wives and the universality of its feminising effects.³¹ More importantly, surmising from the number of tragic wives who hang themselves that this mode of death renders one a wife, Loraux overlooks numerous other connotations attested for hanging, and risks a reading that is too narrow and suspiciously tailored to the rope/sword dichotomy underlying her study. All in all, what is a thought-provoking and insightful study of female death in Greek tragedy fails to push the limits it tentatively traces, and leaves unrealised the potential to prove tragedy’s construction of gender much more nuanced and imaginative.

Some of the questions raised by this brief study are answered in the more sustained treatment of the topic in *The Experiences of Tiresias*.³² As part of an attempt to penetrate the silence of Greek texts around death and the methods employed to inflict it, Loraux launches a detailed investigation into the associations of (the language of) suicide by hanging, and her elaboration of the connection between this suicide method and women leads her into the territory of Hippocratic medicine. This turn to the physicians’ assumptions about the female physiology, previously rejected as an interpretive model for tragic suicide, not only constitutes a major contribution of her analysis, but also showcases its

with the treatment of the object used, not the suicidal person him/herself. In the realm of tragedy, the references to Leda’s suicide in Euripides’ *Helen* (134–36, 200–02, 687–88) do not prove that hanging was itself shameful, but merely that it constituted one among many ways to end a life tainted by disreputable actions (and it bears noting that these actions are Helen’s, not Leda’s). Finally, the use of *λωβᾶται* and *μίασμα* in association with suicide by hanging in Sophocles’ *Antigone* (54) and Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* (473) respectively does not necessarily reflect on the manner of self-killing, but rather on the overall circumstances and result of such an act. Arguably, to kill oneself is to commit outrage against one’s life, while for Pelasgus the suicide of the Danaids would indeed incur *miasma*, as it would make use of the gods’ effigies (463–65). The only unequivocal rejection of hanging comes from Helen, who comments on the ugliness of the method (Eur. *Hel.* 299–300). However, there are reasons for not considering this as a sincere expression of revulsion, including Helen’s knowledge of Leda’s death in precisely that manner, and her deliberation between hanging and suicide by the sword some lines later (353–356; but see Loraux 1987: 16 for the possibility of an implicit rejection of hanging here). See Dale 1967: 86–87; Allan 2008: 183.

²⁹ Loraux 1987: 8. For a refutation of this point see the review by Cockburn 1989: 398.

³⁰ Loraux 1987, esp. 24, 26, 28–30.

³¹ Loraux 1987: 31–32, 38.

³² Loraux 1995.

connection with the other major group of studies that have shaped our understanding of female suicide by hanging.

This other strand of critical work, whose main preoccupation is the construction of the female body in ancient Greek medical literature, is best represented by Helen King's influential essay 'Bound to Bleed: Artemis and Greek Women'.³³ Understanding the often conflicting representations of women in Greek thought as indicative of the inherent ambiguity of the concept of woman, King exposes the way in which Hippocratic medicine participates in the shaping of this concept through dividing the category of woman on the basis of the healthy functioning of her reproductive system. The gynaecological treatise that she chooses to illustrate this tendency, a short Hippocratic text detailing the symptoms displayed by non-menstruating *parthenoi*, mentions among others the desire for hanging that grips these afflicted girls. This suicidal wish, and its differential treatment by the physician and the lay people, becomes the focus of the essay, which brings together evidence from myth, ritual, and social practices to map a dense nexus of connections between hanging and the stages of female maturation. What emerges over the course of this in-depth examination is that suicide by hanging is not only omnipresent as a reality and metaphor for the female experience of crucial stages in life, but also that it shares in and reflects the contradictions in the representation of women. To put it differently, suicide by hanging displays all those ambiguities that the physicians attempted to dispel by dividing the positive and negative aspects of the female reproductive system into the norms that govern it and the maladies that disrupt its proper function. Where this otherwise masterful analysis may be argued to fall short is that King views the female body's vacillation between health and illness, and the always-present threat of disruptions in the process of female maturation, as definitive of female nature, at least as our predominantly male-authored sources present it.

Despite their different focus and objectives, the approaches outlined above are united by their shared understanding of suicide by hanging as inextricably tied to the experience of femaleness. Even when the tensions and contradictions that female nature, an amalgam of lived experience, social norms, and male fantasies and fears, inevitably contains are thrown into relief, the discussion never seems to envision the possibility of a radical reinterpretation whereby these tensions are reconfigured in a gender identity that does not sit comfortably within the gender binary. This thesis aims to develop this new interpretive approach and move the discussion beyond the boundaries that have traditionally circumscribed it. Building on current models, it positions itself not so much in opposition to existing analyses, but as an exploration of the implications of their observations on the contradictory character of female identity. More specifically, it proposes to view these ambiguities not as the mark of the

³³ King 1983. King's analysis builds on preceding studies on the gynaecological treatises of the Hippocratic corpus (see for example Fasbender 1897; Manuli 1980; Rousselle 1980). Her work is singled out here because of its explicit concern with and success at mapping these observations on other areas of Greek life and thought. For more on the Hippocratic representation of the female body and its connection to prevalent norms and popular ideas see Sissa 1990a; Hanson 1990; Dean-Jones 1991; King 1998.

female, but as a potential, inherent in the construction of female identity, to destabilise said identity. Instead of seeking to accommodate the tensions between the often contradictory roles comprising the category of woman, the present analysis will highlight their irreconcilability in order to expose the artificiality of the category itself and point out the necessity and possibility for a different configuration and conceptualisation of the gender identities of suicidal women. In this process, suicide by hanging will be shown to be the catalyst that activates the inherent potential, the point where the multiplicity of female aspects become concentrated, clash, and result in the fragmentation of the supposedly unitary female identity. Participating, as King showed,³⁴ in the same tensions underlying femaleness, this mode of death concentrates and focuses them, and foregrounds those most appropriate to the narrative context. In this way, and by virtue of standing at the end of the female life cycle, suicide by hanging becomes the point at which the woman's gender is re-examined, and the outcomes of this re-examination established beyond the possibility of recall.

However, before the methodological framework of this thesis is developed in detail, it is necessary to explicate the theoretical background of the project, and answer some questions pertaining to its terminology, scope, and aims. I will then provide a working definition of myth alongside the reasons dictating this choice, and offer some remarks on the nature of the sources examined, their limitations, and my proposed treatment of them.

Theoretical framework

The challenges of attempting to make sense of ancient Greek ideas on sexual difference, gendered categories, and sexual desire and practices in terms that would relate those ideas to modern notions have been well documented, and a rehearsal of the various analyses far exceeds the scope of this Introduction.³⁵ Instead, I propose to develop the theoretical framework most congenial to the type of work undertaken in this thesis, and demonstrate its suitability and advantages. An enquiry that places ancient conceptualisations of gender centre stage requires a working definition of gender that is unencumbered by the slipperiness of the boundaries, in Greek thinking on gender, between nature and culture, biology and habituation, or other such binary divisions. An example will suffice to illustrate the point: in classical, and increasingly in imperial, Greece, masculinity is presented as a cultural achievement, a state that demands for its upholding constant practice and vigilance on the part of the man.³⁶ At the same time, any indication that too much effort is required to maintain the standards of masculinity is likely to be considered proof of an inherent deficiency in it. The result is a contradictory conceptualisation of masculinity as both the result of habituation and a quality possessed by birth. As well as navigating these challenges, the understanding of gender employed must involve an account of the relationship between, on the one hand, all those elements that

³⁴ King 1983, esp. 110–13.

³⁵ For a detailed and informative summary of past discussions and the current state of affairs see Holmes 2012.

³⁶ Gleason 1990: 399–411.

constitute subjects as male or female, masculine or feminine, and on the other, sexual desire and practice. The indispensability of this task is easily perceived if we consider how often in our sources the manner of participation in sexual courtship and/or acts is tied up with the individual's gender.³⁷ Finally, if it is to be a useful category, the concept of gender used in this exploration must bear some relation to modern categories, and help relate ancient phenomena to modern experiences and their understanding.

The theoretical model that most successfully meets these criteria is the one developed by Judith Butler in her 1988 essay 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' and her 1990 ground-breaking study *Gender Trouble*.³⁸ In these texts, Butler draws on existing theoretical work that argues for the impossibility of acting outside of culture/discourse, and builds on it to provide two complementary definitions of gender. According to the first one, 'gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.'³⁹ Gender is, then, performative, in the sense that it has no ontological status outside of the acts that constitute it; the repetition of acts, gestures, and desires creates the identity these acts are purported to express. The second definition seeks to expose the ways in which hegemonic discourse casts sex as a category outside culture: 'Gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts' (emphasis in the original).⁴⁰ Sex is not a factic datum of the body, awaiting the inscription of meaning by culture. On the contrary, the sedimentation of gender norms within a regulatory frame produces so many 'styles of the flesh',⁴¹ which then appear as 'the natural configuration of bodies into sexes that exist in a binary relationship to one another'.⁴² Sex is always already gender, because bodies are not perceptible, do not come into being, except through their gendering.

If the distinction between sex and gender proves to be no distinction at all, what about the relationship of these terms to sexuality? Indeed, it is precisely this relationship—or a specific aspect of it—that *Gender Trouble* sets out to address: 'The text asks, how do non-normative sexual practices call into question the stability of gender as a category of analysis?'.⁴³ It thus becomes clear from the beginning that sexuality and gender are treated as distinct cultural apparatuses, although the functions they

³⁷ For example, the most vehement criticism of male homoerotic relations is articulated in terms of sexually using oneself or another man like a woman: Pl. *Leg.* 836e; Plut. *Mor. Amat.* 751d–e; Hyp. fr. 215.

³⁸ In all the following references I refer to the second edition of 1999, which features a second preface by the author.

³⁹ Butler 1999: 45.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 90.

⁴² *Ibid.*: 191.

⁴³ *Ibid.*: xi.

perform partially overlap, and they often serve the same or mutually reinforcing strategic aims. In defining sexuality, Butler largely adopts the conclusions of Foucault's genealogical investigation into the term, according to which sexuality is an apparatus created at a specific moment in history and deployed to construct the body as an object of knowledge and an element in relations of power. Rather than a universal drive that power attempts to control, sexuality is the result of a specific organisation of power, discourses, and the pleasures and sensations of the body. In this understanding, the deployment of sexuality produced the idea of sex as an essence external to power, 'the anchorage point that supports the manifestations of sexuality'. In other words, sex, which in this account is an effect of sexuality, came to posture as a separate entity, the source from which various sexualities spring. The reversal of the relation between sex and sexuality, which results in a conception of sex as an inherent energy and autonomous agency, is part of the strategy with which power is concealed and therefore perpetuated.

That sex is produced by the deployment of sexuality as an entity outside of relations of power, and by the apparatus of gender as a natural and politically neutral fact, attests both to the constructed character of sex and to the often 'mutual fortification of gender and sexuality'.⁴⁴ Sex, in its guise as a natural fact, mediates the relationship between gender, in its popular meaning as a culturally designated sense of self, and sexuality. It should then be obvious that sexuality participates in the formation of gender. However, as Butler herself cautions, that is not to say that sexual practices produce certain genders; rather, it means that 'under conditions of normative heterosexuality, policing gender is sometime used as a way of securing heterosexuality'.⁴⁵ Within the normative framework of heterosexuality, a hegemonic discursive model is created that produces intelligible genders and dictates which genders cannot 'exist'. According to this model, designated by Butler as the heterosexual matrix, for genders to possess internal coherence and be intelligible, sex (as anatomical facticity) must be understood to necessitate both gender—the cultural twin of sex—and desire, a desire that is directed towards the opposite gender and that differentiates itself precisely through this oppositional relationship. Compulsory heterosexuality produces the internal coherence of each gender and the univocity of each gendered term within a binary gender system.⁴⁶ Insofar as heterosexuality demands a working definition of sex as natural, binary, and the cause of sexuality, it is in its interests to foster a production of gender as similarly binary, derived from sex, and both reflective and expressive of desire.

What becomes obvious from this elaboration of the relationship between sexuality and gender is that the way in which the two apparatuses interact is not entirely symmetrical. Disruptions at the level of

⁴⁴ This phrase has been adapted from Butler's (1999: xi) articulation of her ideas around sexuality and gender: 'The idea that sexual practice has the power to destabilise gender [...] sought to establish that normative sexuality fortifies normative gender.'

⁴⁵ Butler 1999: xii.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: 30–31.

gender need not necessarily subvert hegemonic heterosexuality, or may even work to maintain and support it. On the contrary, the role of sexual desire and practice as constitutive elements of gender means that the destabilisation of normative sexuality inevitably disrupts the normative formation of gender. That is possible because the normative status of heterosexuality rests on the perpetuation of certain sexual practices, whereas the formation of culturally intelligible genders demands that a stable sex is expressed through a stable gender and defined against an opposite gender through heterosexual desire. Non-heterosexual desire destabilises the univocity of each of these terms—sex, gender, desire—and mobilises new possibilities of gender formation.

Application of the theoretical framework

How does the theoretical model elaborated above address the challenges of an investigation into ancient Greek ideas around gendered beings, their roles, and desires? To begin with, understanding that the posturing of sex as natural is an effect of discourse, and that sex is therefore indistinguishable from gender, obviates the need to identify distinct ancient categories under which to list gendered features. Applied to the example used above, this expanded concept of gender shows the paradox of masculinity as both an inherent feature and the outcome of practice to be no paradox at all: both conceptualisations of masculinity are the product of discourse, of the cultural apparatus dubbed gender. Acknowledging that a distinction between nature and culture or similar categories is both unhelpful and unnecessary shifts the focus towards representations of gendered beings in their totality, and enables an exploration into the ways in which changes at any level destabilise the normative formation of gendered subjects, allowing the emergence of subversive identities.

Similarly, the reconceptualisation of sex as a product of the deployment of sexuality, as well as a mediating term in the relationship between gender and sexuality, has provided a coherent way of articulating the role of sexual desire and sexual practices in the formation of gender in antiquity. For our purposes, this means that instances of sexual behaviour transgressive of gender norms should be considered as affecting the overall gender configuration of the subject. An instance of such behaviours that will feature prominently in the following chapters is the formation of incestuous relationships. Incest confuses and destabilises positions in the family by violating the rules governing sexual/generational relationships. By relating the sexual transgression instantiated in incest to the individual's gender, we acquire a clearer view of the overlap between family positions and gender roles. Indeed, to be a wife or a mother is not merely to exist in a relationship to others; these terms also describe a set of highly gendered norms to which the person occupying the relevant position is expected to conform. The contribution of the proposed framework in this instance consists precisely in highlighting the gendered aspect of parts of a subject's identity that may otherwise be overlooked. In other occasions, it helps integrate the clearly gendered connotations of specific sexual practices into the configuration of gender. Sexual pursuit, for example, or penetrative sexual acts often map the masculine/feminine polarity onto the active and passive roles assumed in these activities; as a result,

changes in the manner of expressing erotic desire or of participating in sexual acts has immediate implications for the gender identity of the participants.

However, the most important contribution of Butler's theorisation of gender to this study remains the concept of gender's performativity. Each of the narratives explored here offers (part of) a performance of gender in the description of the mythical protagonists' social and familial positions, their actions, emotions, relations, and thoughts, as well as in the narrative commentary on these. All these elements take shape within an imagined world where the formation of gender identity is governed by specific discourses partially reflecting those operating outside the narrative. As an act committed by gendered subjects, but also as one carrying its own set of gendered connotations, suicide participates in this performance: it may comply with it, falling in place as yet another in a series of repetitions, or it may form a break with what has come before, thereby occurring as an aberrant repetition. Its potential to do either is predicated on its position as a space for the exercise of agency on the gendered subject's part.

Clearly, the question of agency—that is, of the conditions under which it may be exercised and of the limitations imposed on it—is of paramount importance for a project focusing on suicide as potentially subversive of hegemonic discourses on gender. The approach adopted here is again drawn from Butler's proposed understanding of the way in which the performativity of gender generates opportunities for aberrant repetitions of gender norms. In this framework, agency is not contingent on the existence of a pre-discursive 'I', which, mired though it may be in culture and discourse, is formed outside and before it. Butler builds on strands of philosophical thought that, in arguing for a socially constituted subject, locate the question of subjectivity within a problematic of signification, asking how the subject comes to be recognised as such, and what possibilities exist for the articulation of alternative subjectivities not legitimised by the rules governing the structure of signification. This shift eliminates the ontological distance between the subject and its surroundings without condemning it to cultural determinism. The culturally constituted subject is not determined by the rules of its production, because signification, 'the rules that determine the legitimate or illegitimate invocation of that pronoun [i.e. "I"]',⁴⁷ is not a founding act, but rather 'a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantialising effects'.⁴⁸ In other words, identity is not founded by the rules governing its constitution, but is constituted through repeated conformity to these rules through time. The corollary of this conceptualisation of identity formation is, first, that the rules determining legitimate and illegitimate identities inevitably offer up the latter as alternatives, and second, that a variation in repetition can generate identities previously rendered unintelligible.

⁴⁷ Ibid.: 196.

⁴⁸ Ibid.: 198.

The argument for the possibility of a different repetition presupposes that culture/discourse will offer an opening for the normative repetition to become aberrant. This is possible because ‘the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes’,⁴⁹ which in their convergence—and often in their clash—create the space for a reconfiguration of the subject. Agency, therefore, does not presuppose a pre-discursive subject, which enters culture but is not fully constituted by it. Instead, the repetitive signifying through which identity is continuously constituted itself enables a different repetition. In Butler’s words: ‘There is no self [...] who maintains “integrity” prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of tools where they lie, where the very “taking up” is enabled by the tool lying there.’⁵⁰ The acts of self-killing featured in this thesis constitute such points of convergence for the various discourses contributing to the injunction to be a woman. As will be shown in Chapter 1, suicide by hanging becomes the meeting point of symbolic representations of various constitutive elements of femaleness, throwing into relief the fundamental incompatibility of some, or the unexpected results of uncompromising conformity to others. As sites where discursive routes for the formation of the female gender coincide and compete, instances of women’s suicide by hanging become spaces for the manifestation of agency. In that moment of crisis, when the rules governing the formation of gender clash and are exposed as culturally constructed, the opportunity arises for a different sort of adherence to them.

This is not to say that suicide constitutes the only site for the exercise of agency. In terms of the theoretical model explored here, suicide is not considered a foundational act in the constitution of non-normative gender identities. As well as contradicting the fundamental assumptions of this theoretical framework, such a treatment of suicide would also separate the act of self-killing from the narrative contexts—and indeed, the larger mythological tradition—to which it belongs. Instead, acts of self-killing are approached here as the last space for the emergence of agency in the context of a gender performance already taking place in the narrative. In many of the cases examined, suicide concludes an already aberrant repetition of gender norms. Contrary to some analyses, I do not view these instances of self-killing as a break in the subversive performance of gender, which would realign the heroine’s gender with the rules governing the formation of intelligible identities, but as a confirmation of the destabilising effect generated by the consistent thwarting of these rules. Even when the events preceding a suicide offer little evidence of a deviance from gender norms, the emphasis on suicide as a space for potential transgression need not imply its status as a founding act. As a site that enables the exercise of agency, suicide may be viewed as the first, but not the founding, act in an aberrant repetition of gender norms that is cut short by the suicide itself. In that sense, suicide by hanging constitutes the only instance of a subversive behaviour that cannot be extended past this first act. What would have been a sustained repetition through time is condensed to a single

⁴⁹ Ibid.: 199.

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 199.

act that becomes representative of the repetition's import, but that does not hold a privileged position as constitutive. Indeed, in more than one case we have occasion to confirm this function of suicide by observing its residual effect on events that involve the dead woman but take place after her suicide.

However, a subversive performance of gender is not guaranteed by the role of suicide as a site for the exercise of agency. Whether the opportunity offered will be taken up to maintain a normative repetition or enact an aberrant one is the question to which each narrative is called to provide an answer. Moreover, the precise shape that the subversive performance, if occurring, will take, is also a matter to be determined by narrative context. The character of identity as a 'social temporality'⁵¹ — that is, a performance that has a public as well as a temporal dimension—means that the outcome of the repetition enacted in those 'open' spaces will be co-determined by the public perception of its character. In practice, that entails the admission that the context of a suicide may generate an impression of its import that differs from the perpetrator's intended effect, and that the gender identity that emerges as a result of suicide may exceed the boundaries both of individual intent and of the constraints of public perception within a normative framework. Such an admission does not diminish the significance of the transformative effect of these suicides, but it renders more explicit the restrictions to which agency is subject and the dynamics of its relation to the structures that render it possible.

Gender and language

With the theoretical framework now in place, we must turn to the challenges of detecting and articulating non-conforming identities in a recalcitrant linguistic medium. Two questions in particular must be addressed: First, does Greek offer the tools necessary for the articulation of such identities in language? Second, if this is not the case, should we conclude that these gender identities are inconceivable, or at least considered illegitimate and unviable to the degree that they exceed the possibilities of expression afforded by language?

Starting with this latter question, it is important to bear in mind that the presence of terms that would designate unambiguously what is considered transgressive or abnormal is not a necessary condition for the conceptualisation of such qualities. Indeed, it is often the case that the very strain of language in its effort to convey the ineffable betrays the existence, on the level of concepts, of something out of the ordinary. Consider, for example, the loaded and difficult to translate phrase that the chorus of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* employs to describe the uncanny combination of male and female qualities they detect in Clytemnestra: γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ (11). Nor is this the only example of striking and unusual language in the play in connection to Clytemnestra and her gender identity.⁵² What, precisely, that identity is, the text never lays out in plain terms—and that may well be part of

⁵¹ Ibid.: 191.

⁵² Aesch. *Ag.* 348–351, 592–96, 1231–32, 1236–37.

the play's strategy—but the fact that she does not conform to conventional gender categories is clearly felt.

Even this twisting of language, however, is not always necessary to signal that non-normative gender identities were within the grasp of the ancient Greek mind. The divine beings that populate our sources routinely violate the boundaries of genders, and the language in which these extraordinary acts are couched, though inevitably gendered, nonetheless conveys clearly the impression of movement across boundaries.⁵³ Moreover, this disregard for the norms governing human behaviour is implicitly sanctioned when projected onto the gods: the births of Athena and Dionysus are an eloquent celebration of Zeus' power rather than a display of degrading effeminacy,⁵⁴ while Athena's function as a patron goddess of female crafts does not appear to contrast with or undercut her warrior status. The all-important distinction between mortals and immortals must be operating here, allowing the gods to perform acts unavailable to humans; nevertheless, the abundance of similar instances of gender-bending or other boundary-defying acts and characteristics testifies to the ability of the Greek imagination to conceive of gender identities differently constituted.

Nor is this ability restricted to the level of concepts without corresponding expression in language. A closer look reveals that non-normative gender identities could, on occasion, be described with greater consistency and accuracy. The κίναϊδος constitutes just such an example, signifying the effeminate man who freely and without constraint indulges his various appetites.⁵⁵ Another term to be considered

⁵³ Consider, for example, Zeus' transformation into Artemis in order to seduce Callisto in *Apollodorus' Bibliotheca* 3.8.2, or the several instances of Athena's transformation into Mentor in the *Odyssey* (2.268, 401, 22.206, 24.503). The description of the transformation as a likening in form and voice (Μέντορι εἰδομένη ἡμὲν δέμας ἠδὲ καὶ αὐδὴν) may create the impression that Athena retains her gender along with her divine nature when she takes Mentor's form, and that her transformation consists only in appearances. Note, however, the use of similar language when she takes the form of a woman (*Od.* 20. 31): δέμας δ' ἦϊκτο γυναικί. Taking the form of a woman is no more natural than taking the form of a man; we must accept either that she becomes a man or a woman in a more physical sense than we may initially assume, or that she is beyond gender constraints. In either case, we have here evidence of gender transformations or configurations ordinarily not possible for mortals to imitate but nonetheless possible to imagine.

⁵⁴ Hes. fr. 343 10–12: ἦ δ' αὐτίκα Παλλάδ' Ἀθήνην | κύσατο: τὴν μὲν ἔτικτε πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε | παρ κορυφῆν Τρίτωνος ἐπ' ὄχθησιν ποταμοῖο; Eur. *Bacch.* 99–100 ἔτεκεν δ', ἀνίκα Μοῖραι | τέλεσαν, ταυρόκερων θεῶν. Note that the verb used is τίκτω, denoting childbirth and usually reserved for women. For the use of τίκτω and γεννάω for men and women see Leitao 2012: 281–84. However, he explicitly excludes the instances discussed here, because he locates these myths in debates not centred around gender identities (2012: 58–99, 153–57, 163–73).

⁵⁵ Although critics are usually careful to distinguish between the κίναϊδος and the modern homosexual, there is a widespread tendency to define the former as a man habitually assuming the passive role in a homoerotic relationship. However, the κίναϊδος is a more complex figure, and much less widespread a category than often assumed. Among the few Greek texts of the archaic and classical period where it is attested (Pl. *Grg.* 494e; Aeschin. 1.181; 2.88, 151; Arist. [*Phgn.*] 810a, 813a), only a fragment of Archilochus (fr. 183) explicitly associates the κίναϊδος with anal penetration by men. However, this characteristic forms only a small part of the figure of the κίναϊδος, who is consistently presented in terms of his unbridled appetites—sexual and other—and his effeminacy. (For the appetites and lack of self-control of the κίναϊδος see Pl. *Grg.* 494e; Aeschin. 1.26, 42, 43, 75, 96, 154; 2.299; Lear 2014: 115. For the effeminacy of the κίναϊδος see Arist. [*Phgn.*] 810a, 813a, 813b; Aeschin. 1.181; 2.151; Arr. *Epict. Diss.* 3.1.32–34; Diog. Laert. 2.76.5; Σ Ar. *Nub.* 680; Σ Aeschin. 1.71; Ps.-Luc. *Cyn.* 17). In fact, his lack of self-control, manifesting as an excessive desire for sex with both men and

is the adjective ἀνδρόγυνος, which, as well as being broadly used, is also taken up by medical literature to describe the man who is born effeminate due to the conditions of his conception.⁵⁶ Finally, in Caelius Aurelianus' Latin translation of Soranus' *On Chronic Diseases* one encounters the term *tribades* as a designation of women who 'pursue both kinds of love' and, when they pursue women, do so with 'with almost masculine jealousy'.⁵⁷

However, we should not conclude from the existence of such terms that their presence is the only reliable criterion for detecting non-normative gender identities. This also means that when these terms do not appear, grammatical gender cannot be considered an indication that such identities are absent. An example of the use of grammatical gender as a guide to the conceptualisation of a person's gender is provided by Holmes, and more recently by King, in their respective discussions of the cases of Nanno and Phaethousa in the Hippocratic *Epidemics* (vi.8.32). The Hippocratic author's use of the feminine participle βιώσασα and the pronoun ταύτη is considered proof that, as far as the physician was concerned, the appearance of masculine physical characteristics on the bodies of these ill women failed to push them over the boundary that demarcates their essential femaleness.⁵⁸ What Holmes and King do not address, however, is how the designation of non-conforming characteristics as pathological not only constitutes an indication as to the nature and content of the norm, but also one way in which the norm inevitably produces its opposite. The insertion of gendered features into a narrative of disease is an attempt to isolate and delegitimise them because their presence threatens the normative construction of gender. However, the very act by which they are ostracised also inevitably constructs these elements as alternatives to the norm, and opens the door to viewing diseased bodies as bodies that do not conform. It is in this context that the choice of grammatical gender must be viewed, and it must be interpreted both as an unavoidable practical necessity and as another attempt to reclaim the aberrant being as properly male or female. What is designated as pathological, disruptive, or abnormal is by definition non-normative, and it is this conceptual designation that must guide the interpretation of grammatical gender.

women (Plut. *Mor. De tuenda sanitate praecepta* 122b–137e; Ath. 12.20) as well as for other bodily pleasures, may be viewed as yet another demonstration of his dangerous proximity with the feminine, habitually associated with absence of self-mastery and insatiable sexual appetite. The κίναϊδος represents an aberration in terms of gender, a 'systematic inversion of historically specific ideals of masculinity' (Holmes 2012: 97), and his desire to be penetrated—where that desire is clearly and unambiguously associated with the κίναϊδος—must be read within this context of gender subversion.

⁵⁶ Hippoc. *Vict.* vi.502.19.

⁵⁷ Caelius Aurelianus, *Tardae Passiones*, 4.9.132. See also the ἐταιρίστριαι who, according to Aristophanes in Pl. *Symp.* 191e, are the women derived from the original double-woman, and only desire other women. Homosexual desire and a manly appearance characterise the ἐταιρίστρια of Lucian's *Dial. meretr.* 5.2. The Suda, Hesychius and Photius gloss ἐταιρίστρια as τριβάδες.

⁵⁸ Holmes 2012: 15; King 2013: 128; 2015: 257. King (2015: 256) acknowledges that the non-menstruating, bearded Phaethousa is in a 'no man's/no-woman's-land', but maintains that 'death ends her liminal status', and that, for the doctor at least, she never ceased to be a woman.

New gender identities: new categories?

As demonstrated above, the theoretical model proposed for this thesis addresses many of the challenges presented by an exploration of ancient concepts of gender. However, in setting out the conditions for the reconfiguration of existing gender norms, it also generates questions regarding the number and variety of the genders that can emerge, as well as the possibility of applying a set of organising principles for their categorisation. A starting point in answering these questions is incorporated in the framework itself; at the beginning of *Gender Trouble*, Butler follows previous feminist critiques in criticising the unitarian goals of most feminist movements, the exclusions these goals enact, and the structures of hierarchy and oppression they perpetuate or generate. She then warns against the impulse to create or maintain unified categories that are subsequently filled with various qualifying components so as to encompass the diverse gender identities they purport to represent.⁵⁹ It is easy to see that this warning can extend to any tendency to impose definitional closure on gender categories; the acknowledgement and legitimisation of non-conforming gender identities must not become the premise for a new set of norms that determine which gender configurations can legitimately constitute an identity. With this caveat in mind, we may attempt to answer the questions about identification and categorisation raised above within the specific context of this thesis.

Generally speaking, the embeddedness of cases of suicide by hanging in diverse, often highly specific, narrative contexts means that inevitably, suicide by hanging produces a wide range of distinct gender identities. Nevertheless, a categorisation may be attempted on the basis of two criteria, each of which applies to a different type of textual source. Short, obscure, or marginal mythic accounts usually contain brief, relatively straightforward narratives with few details; as a result, the gender configurations that emerge in these narratives are somewhat broader and less individualised, thus permitting a categorisation according to overall type. For example, in many of these cases, despite the often different circumstances surrounding each suicide, the suicidal woman emerges exclusively as a mother, a role she assumes at the expense of others. However, extant narratives, with which this thesis is primarily concerned, do not lend themselves to this approach, as it cannot accurately represent the complexity of the gender identities that emerge in a detailed and nuanced narrative context.

To preserve the nuances of the material it is therefore preferable to substitute manner of transgression for type of gender identity as the organising criterion. Focusing on the way in which mythic female figures challenge, destabilise, or supersede gender norms through their suicides presents marked advantages. Over the course of the analysis it emerges that suicide by hanging generates deviant gender identities by operating in a relatively limited number of ways, which are not difficult to identify and designate as organising categories: it either brings together two or more contradictory,

⁵⁹ Butler 1999: 5–8, 18–22.

irreconcilable female roles, or isolates a single role that becomes excessive and distorted. Examples of the former function are found, among others, in Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Sophocles' *Antigone*; Iocasta's suicide in *Oedipus Tyrannus* is an instance of the latter. This shift from end result to process, while satisfying the need to organise the material in recognisable patterns, does not restrict the generative potential of suicide by hanging. Refusing to group the emerging gender identities under descriptive labels may come at the expense of articulating a coherent gender system, but it also ensures that the existing gender binary is not merely supplanted by a greater number of equally rigidly defined gender identities. Emphasis on the process allows the individual manifestations of non-conforming gender identities to exist as such and prioritises their plurality and the possibility of their proliferation over and against attempts to subsume them under unifying categories. In this way, it promotes a methodological approach that stands at a distance from other critical approaches, and that can offer a new perspective from which to view challenging material.

Greek myth

In the preceding discussion, mythic narratives have been repeatedly singled out as the material of the present study, yet no explanation of the understanding underlying the use of the term has been offered. A detailed overview of the issues surrounding this most problematic of terms, myth, and of current approaches in its interpretation is not possible within the limits of this Introduction;⁶⁰ I would, however, like to briefly outline the concept of Greek myth that guides this thesis, as well as its implications for the type of enquiry undertaken.

At the risk of starting from the end, we may propose a working definition combining elements more or less accepted by most scholars working on the topic:⁶¹ Myths are traditional stories taking place in identifiable locations and a distant past, and featuring the deeds of divinities and heroes—that is, people who appear as objects of cult, or city founders, or creators of institutions, or illustrious ancestors of families or tribes. These stories command authority and are of cultural importance to one or more social groups. This definition may be supplanted by part of Edmunds' own in the Introduction to *Approaches to Greek Myth*: 'A Greek myth is a set of multiforms or variants of the same story, which exist either as written texts, prose or verse, or in oral form, or in both written and oral form, or in vase painting or plastic art as well or independently. [...] Each retelling or application produces a new variant, which stands in some degree of antagonistic relation to other variants or other myths and thus takes its place in a system constituted by the proliferation of such relations' (emphasis my

⁶⁰ A detailed overview of the history of approaches to Greek myth may be found in Graf 1993: 1–56. For a more in-depth discussion of current interpretations see Csapo 2005. Stimulating discussions of the issues encountered in the study of Greek myth and of the ways in which they may be addressed can be found in Buxton 1994: 1–63, 169–218.

⁶¹ The assumption that myths are traditional stories of cultural importance is reflected more or less explicitly in, for example, Burkert: 1979: 2; Bremmer 1987: 7; Vernant 1988: 214–219; Buxton 1994: 14.

own).⁶² Before exploring in more detail each of the above elements, two issues must be addressed: first, we must establish whether this—or any—definition of Greek myth corresponds to an equivalent category in Greek thought, if not terminology; and second, we must clarify its relation to an understanding of myth broadly defined as a cross-cultural category.

To start with the second consideration, the problems surrounding the assumption of the existence of a transcultural category of myth that applies equally well to cultures separated both in time and space have been well documented. Quite apart from the implicitly Eurocentric bias of such a supposedly universal concept of myth, there exists the problem of elevating what is a useful tool when applied carefully in specific contexts to a mode of thinking or an essence.⁶³ In what follows, therefore, all observations pertain strictly to Greek myth, with no pretensions to universal or cross-cultural validity, although points of contact with stories of other cultures may well exist. This brings us to the other issue mentioned—namely, the possibility of identifying a taxonomy of Greek stories that would justify the definition proposed above. As surveys of the use of what we call Greek myths have clearly demonstrated, the conceptual boundaries of Greek myth were hardly fixed; the same stories that formed the material of the *Iliad* could well find themselves incorporated in an account of Greek history extending to the author's present. To further confound the issue, the Greek term from which 'myth' is derived, *muthos*, is far from a reliable guide to indigenous categorisations of stories, and the putative opposition between *muthos* and *logos*, though operative in some contexts in late antiquity, for the most part does not correspond to an—in any case problematic—myth-reason binary.⁶⁴ In modern scholarship, the most serious objection to the assumption of the existence of a category of myth in ancient Greece has been articulated by Calame, who traces the concept back to the mythographers' practice of reducing complex discursive manifestations to mere plot outlines.⁶⁵ According to Calame, the narratives we call 'myths' were embedded in specific cultural contexts, artistic forms, and enunciative situations, and cannot be viewed in isolation without fundamentally distorting their character.⁶⁶ However, this line of argument leads us to further problems. His approach offers little guidance for determining which narratives could be considered such discursive manifestations; Calame himself implicitly complies with traditional definitions of myth in selecting the examples he studies. Moreover, emphasis on original context, if pursued too rigorously, risks negating the very

⁶² Edmunds 1990: 15. The part of Edmunds' definition I have omitted concerns the content of these stories: 'The story concerns the divine or the supernatural or the heroic or animals or paradigmatic humans living in a time undefinable by human chronology.' The variety of contents identified here is rather too broad, opening the door for stories that could be considered fables (e.g. Aesop's fables, which feature animals and convey a moral) or folktales (e.g. stories about bogeyman figures such as the Lamia). Admittedly, the divisions between stories on the basis of content are fraught with difficulties, no less due to lack of hard evidence for such indigenous categorisations; nevertheless, I hope that the following discussion will render clear the reasons for restricting the content to divinities and heroes (in the broad, rather than cultic, sense).

⁶³ See for example Calame 2003: 1–4; 2009: 2–7.

⁶⁴ Buxton 1994: 12–13; Calame 2003: 12–26.

⁶⁵ Calame 2003: 25–26, 29; 2009: 5–6.

⁶⁶ Calame 2003: 28–30; 2009: 48–52.

possibility of interpretation and understanding, processes that always involve some degree of de- and re-contextualisation.

Yet the more robust rebuttal to a rejection of the category of myth may be offered by the Greek stories themselves, which were sometimes felt by the Greeks to be distinguished along the lines set out in the above definition. The dialogue between Philocleon and Bdelycleon in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (1164–70) is often summoned to support this thesis. After Philocleon has offered up stories about Lamia and an otherwise unknown Cardopion's incestuous relation with his mother, Bdelycleon rejects them as μῦθοι inappropriate for a banquet and demands something τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων | οἷους λέγομεν μάλιστα τοὺς κατ' οἰκίαν (1179–80 'stories with human interest, the sort we most often tell, the ones we tell at home'). Admittedly, Philocleon's proposed stories appear rather as folktale or anecdotes; yet Bdelycleon's increasing refinement in the types of stories he expects, and the examples Philocleon offers, convey at the very least the impression that not all stories were considered the same, and moreover, that there was a category, broad as it may have been, that could be opposed to the ἀνθρώπινα—that is, to accounts of one's performance of civic duties, youthful achievements, or military or hunting exploits (Ar. *Vesp.* 1186–87, 1190–94, 1198–99, 1202–04). Another insight into the tentative taxonomy of Greek stories is offered in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1453a), where the best tragedies are said to be not those that admit stories of any kind, as was previously the poets' practice, but the ones that 'are composed about only a few families, such as Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, and as many others as have suffered or perpetrated terrible things'. Although the stories of these figures do not exhaust the category of myth as outlined, they very clearly fall under it; and indeed, Athenian tragedy for the most part draws its plots from myth, though it may occasionally thematise material we would consider historical (e.g. Aeschylus' *Persians*), or non-traditional, though it may be fictional (e.g. Agathon's *Antheus*).⁶⁷ Clearly, some distinction was felt between the stories we call myths and stories of other types; and though the boundaries were far from fixed, these intimations as to the existence of a category more or less co-extensive with the definition of myth proposed render myth a legitimate area of exploration.

With a category of Greek stories identified as corresponding in content to our understanding of myth, we may now turn to the other qualifications comprising the proposed definition. The traditional character of myths, understood as their transmission across generations and the lack of an identifiable originator, is generally accepted. However, it does not follow from this that all versions of a myth survived the process of transmission, or entertained equal acceptance; different variants gained currency under different circumstances, and the survival of a story in only one version does not disqualify it from being considered a myth.⁶⁸ Yet this understanding of myths as traditional stories, itself hardly contested, has resulted in widely different and often opposing approaches to not only the

⁶⁷ For the latter see Arist. *Poet.* 1451b.

⁶⁸ Buxton 1994: 16.

role of variants but also the conceptualisation of myth itself. A few examples of interpretations currently in use will suffice to illustrate the point. Broadly speaking, historically oriented approaches, such as those employed in the field of philology, tend to concentrate their energies on tracing the successive transformation of a myth across time, seeking variously to establish the earliest attested variant, the historical events behind a myth, or the ‘original’ version depending on the specific line of enquiry followed; in this they may be viewed as heirs to earlier approaches’ preoccupation with origins. On the opposite end of the spectrum stand synchronic approaches, and most notably structuralist ones. As applied to the study of Greek myth, structuralist interpretations have shifted the focus from the surface narrative of myths to the underlying structures, and identified the latter as the mental categories of the society within which the myths were produced.⁶⁹ Treated as fundamentally compatible, the different variants are mined for the structural elements of a myth that is gradually reconstituted and assumed to have an independent existence. More recently, a return to a contextualised appreciation of individual narratives has been proposed, drawing attention to the extratextual aspects of the phenomena we call myths and the pitfalls of reducing them to what often amounts to reified plot summaries.⁷⁰

The approach adopted here, summarised in the working definition of myth, represents an attempt to navigate the contrasting demands of acknowledging the individuality of variants while maintaining some coherence in the concept of myth. Insofar as myths exist only in the various versions, which, moreover, constitute the products of specific cultural contexts, it is reductionist to posit an essence of myth outside the variants. On the other hand, we must acknowledge that certain narratives belong closer together by virtue of being versions of ‘a’ myth that does not have independent existence. This tension between variation and similarity is a characteristic of the traditional character of myths, which are in need of a point of reference from which to draw authority and against which to innovate in the pursuit of specific purposes. The result is a system of interconnected variants that represent and instantiate a myth dependent upon them for its existence. Applied to the present thesis, this understanding necessitates exploration of all variants of myths featuring female suicide by hanging that fall within the chronological limits framing the investigation. Nevertheless, the isolation, here, of *textual* variants should not be understood as an implicit equation of myths with verbal narrative, nor allowed to obscure the degree to which questions of medium are integral to conceptualisations of Greek myth. Although myth variants in diverse forms of art such as, for instance, vase-painting, sculpture, or architecture do not constitute narratives in the same way verbal variants do, dismissing the importance of their participation in the creation and transmission of myths would be to deprive ourselves of important strands of otherwise unattested traditions, and impoverish our understanding of the social and cultural dynamics that influenced the production and disseminations of specific

⁶⁹ See most notably Vernant 1988: 223–25, 253–55.

⁷⁰ This appears in its most emphatic form in Calame 2003 and 2009.

variants. In the light of this, the present choice to focus on textual sources is dictated partly by practical considerations of space, and partly by the conviction that an exploration of mythic variants in the same medium will facilitate identification of differences indicative of changes in thinking about gender.

Yet the question of the variants' treatment would perhaps not be so pressing if it was not inextricably tied up with the overall understanding of the function of myths, or, as stated in the definition, their 'cultural importance'. To argue for the importance of variants as narratives is to implicitly accept that there is a dynamic relationship between myths and the societies in which they circulate, as well as that changes in the latter may find a mediated expression in the former. The nature of the relationship between myths and the world inhabited by those who tell them can be argued to motivate the entire enterprise of the study and interpretation of myth, and it is no surprise that the answers proposed have been as numerous as they are varied. The variety of the functions some myths have demonstrably performed in specific historical and local contexts certainly justify the multiplicity of approaches. Myths may be used to explain and legitimise the present, by offering, for example, a vision of the creation of the world and the configuration of the relationships between gods and between gods and humans, or an explanation of the origin and function of a ritual;⁷¹ they may serve to articulate a civic or other identity, or legitimise and bolster claims to political power.⁷² They may perform a paradigmatic function by articulating examples of behaviour to imitate and avoid;⁷³ or they may seek to expose ambiguities and tensions in the societies in which they are told, explore the limits of norms and values, and pursue the implications of transgressive behaviours.⁷⁴ In all these instances, the function of myths may be best described as ideological—that is, informed by and operating on the basis of a particular set of beliefs.

A conceptualisation of myths as ideological narratives has several advantages; not only does it encompass the variety of functions myths are called upon to perform, but also represents a mediation between some of the most influential current interpretations of myths, which applied on their own are beset with considerable drawbacks. It can accommodate the relationship, posited by structuralist approaches, between the structure of myths and the concepts organising Greek thought and understanding of the world, and account for the presence, in some myths at least, of narrative patterns resembling those elemental biological or cultural processes termed 'programmes of action' by Burkert.⁷⁵ The codification of anxieties, fears, and desires that orients approaches informed by

⁷¹ The most illustrious examples of the former are Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*; an instance of the latter function is *Hymn Hom. Dem.*

⁷² For a discussion of some study cases see Hall 2007.

⁷³ See for example Achilles' use of the example of the grieving Niobe to persuade Priam to accept food in *Iliad* 24.602–13.

⁷⁴ This function is most notably pursued by Athenian tragedy.

⁷⁵ Burkert 1979: 14–18, 56–57.

psychoanalysis may be detected in some myths' exploration of actions transgressive of norms and taboos, while the pragmatic effect of myths on the reality from which they arise forms part of its ideological function, as the examples offered above make clear. Yet if the conceptualisation of myth as ideology clears many of the obstacles presented by other approaches, it nevertheless raises questions regarding the boundaries of Greek myth in time and space. Understood as stories instantiated in variants participating in an ever-expanding system of interrelationships, and performing a variety of functions determined by the particular context of the myths' circulation, Greek myths can be seen to form an unbroken tradition extending to the present and gradually involving cultures increasingly different from, for example, archaic or classical Greece. The exponential growth of the Greek mythic tradition is in agreement with—indeed, necessitated—the approach developed here, but it also demands a justification of the chronological boundaries imposed on the material, as well as the exclusion of, for instance, Latin sources falling this side of the chosen *terminus ante quem*. The considerations are once again of a practical nature; extending the chronological limit to the second century CE permits the inclusion of variants elsewhere unattested, expanding the source material and enabling the tracing of more complex and subtle patterns in the relation between gender and suicide by hanging. Conversely, restriction of the material to Greek sources represents an attempt to maintain some conviction in the coherence of attitudes and ways of thinking that would have to be entirely forfeited if the present investigation endeavoured to account for myths' variants in cultural contexts too distinct to be incorporated.

By now some of the implications of the understanding of myth developed above for the present project have begun to emerge, but they merit further elaboration. To paraphrase an apt formulation by Zajko, 'the way the category of myth itself is conceptualised has a direct bearing on what it is perceived to be able to say "about gender"'.⁷⁶ What renders Greek myth a privileged area for an enquiry into the relationship between suicide by hanging and gender is its twofold function, itself a corollary of myth's ideological character, as a participant in various cultural discourses as well as a site for the convergence of such discourses. We saw previously that myths may be called upon to lend authority to an institution or cultural norm, and in certain cases that certainly involved demarcating the boundaries between genders and the spheres appropriate to them; one need only think of Apollo's justification of Orestes' matricide in *Eumenides*, where the devaluation of the mother's role in conception chime suspiciously with democratic Athens' organisation around bonds between males within the family as much as without. However, not all myths, and not in every occasion, were employed to this end; their adaptability to different contexts and purposes opens up the possibility of detecting in some variants articulations on gender not geared towards reinforcing specific norms. This is not to say that in these cases we are afforded a window into the reality of available gender configurations; it does mean, however, that a greater variety of ways of thinking about gender are

⁷⁶ Zajko 2007: 387–88. I have replaced 'about women' of the original quote with 'about gender'.

available to us, and were also available to those among whom these myths circulated.⁷⁷ In other words, the plurality of myths' ideological functions results in a plurality of representations of gender that, considered together, afford a fuller image of the scope of Greek thinking about gender than, say, the examination of more explicitly prescriptive sources. If the participation of myths in various discourses may be said to represent the future-oriented side of their ideological function, in that it pertains to the myths' pragmatic effect on their environment, one must not neglect the prerequisite for the achievement of this effect—namely, the need for myths to be informed by the social context in which they circulate. It is in this relationship to their cultural environment that myths are rendered sites of convergence of multiple discourses on gender, thereby permitting an exploration of the various discursive routes through which the injunction to be a certain gender is enacted, and the spaces for deviant and subversive gender formations that open up when these discourses clash.

Summary of chapters

Chapter 1 sets out to map some of these discourses operating in Greek myths, and more specifically those in which a relationship between women and suicide by hanging is articulated. It emerges that a particularly privileged site for investigating this link are the gynaecological treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus, which locate suicide by hanging within a complex model of female physiology and pathology. Within this context, (a desire for) suicide by hanging becomes a symptom of the diseased condition of the reproductive apparatus, itself identifiable as the defining feature of women. The logic according to which suicide by hanging comes to signify a pathological condition is one where openness and closure are essential but not exclusively positive states of the female body, and that posits a correspondence between the neck and mouth of the uterus with the respective parts of the upper body. This chapter focuses on these aspects of Hippocratic gynaecological discourse and removes them from their immediate context to ask not only which other female conditions they can be argued to at least partially underlay, but more importantly, what are the implications of applying them to situations that seem to invite this logic but which are not explained in these terms within the Hippocratic Corpus itself. As a result of this treatment of the gynaecological material, it emerges that suicide by hanging, when encountered outside Hippocratic contexts, can evoke various conditions of the female body as well as the female roles with which they are associated; the rest of the Chapter details these associations by attempting to understand specific cases of suicide by hanging in myth through a Hippocratic lens. Over the course of this investigation, it will emerge that this type of death can introduce connotations of eternal *partheneia*, marital devotion, or pregnancy without birth, but also that it distorts and exaggerates the conditions it evokes. Moreover, the narrative context in which such suicides are embedded may activate more than one of the available associations, exposing

⁷⁷ This conviction is not shared by all critics engaging in gender-oriented or feminist readings of Greek myth, which can vary from detecting a liberating potential in the space afforded by these stories to highlighting their role in legitimising and perpetuating patriarchal structures. For an insightful and nuanced discussion of feminist uses of myth see Zajko 2007.

contradictions and tensions at the heart of normative femaleness, or it may introduce elements that further complicate the process of gender formation. The suitability of this framework for the study of female suicide by hanging as well as its incommensurability with the features of other methods of suicide are further illustrated through brief comparisons with Deianeira's suicide by stabbing in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and Evadne's self-immolation in Euripides' *Supplices*.

Some of the ways in which suicide by hanging is shown to operate in Chapter 1 are explored in greater detail in Chapters 2 to 4, where the focus shifts to figures of Greek myths whose suicides are attested in at least one extant source. Chapter 2 comprises analyses of the surviving sources for Phaedra's suicide by hanging, ranging from Euripides' *Hippolytus* to the variants encountered in Asklepiades (Σ V Hom. *Od.* 11.321), Diodorus Siculus (4.62.1–4), and Apollodorus (*Ep.* 1.18–19). In the Euripidean play, Phaedra's suicide is instrumental in realising her ideal of *eukleia* as shaped under the experience of illegitimate desire, while also paving the way for a more complex identity connected with her implicit assimilation to divinities. The Hippocratic framework allows us to view the physical manifestations of her resistance to illicit *erōs* in terms of functions of the female body, therefore placing her suicide, which evokes these same functions, within the context of Phaedra's efforts to maintain her virtue and good name. When the revelation of her false accusation threatens to compromise that effort, it is her suicide that stands as a guarantee of the sincerity of her resolve and renders possible her establishment in Hippolytus' cult as a woman both chaste and desiring. The other three variants of the myth, contrasting sharply with the length and level of detail of the Euripidean play, provide an opportunity to gauge the applicability of the Hippocratic framework in recalcitrant narratives and compare the gender configurations emerging there with that yielded by the exploration of the Euripidean Phaedra.

In Chapter 3 we turn to Sophocles' *Antigone*, the only source that records the titular heroine's suicide by hanging. Right from the beginning of the play, Antigone is possessed by an *erōs amēchanon*, manifesting as a desire to bury Polyneices despite the death penalty attached to such an action. In fact, the death by public stoning decreed for anyone who undertakes the burial is a type of death accepted, even consciously sought out by Antigone, as its various associations with defloration and childbirth and its implication in the sphere of political power will enable Antigone to attain an identity in which her ties with her dead family will be restored. When Creon decides to modify the penalty to counter the *amēchania* of Antigone's identity, suicide by hanging emerges as the only available type of death that can perform the functions of the penalty Antigone originally expected, and result in a gender configuration so complex, contradictory, and expansive that it can only be greeted as an *amēchanon* in its own right.

Chapter 4 takes a step back in mythological time to explore the tradition for Iocasta's suicide by hanging, a tradition that stretches from Homer's *Odyssey* (11.271–80, where she appears under the

name Epicaste), to Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* (3.5.7–9). In the *Nekyia*'s account, Epicaste's suicide becomes the means to separate the roles of mother and wife that were conflated in her relation to Oedipus, dividing them along a life/death or visibility/invisibility axis. At the same time, it is the act that enables her encounter with Odysseus and the narration of her career, which effects the reconstitution of her conflicting gender identity and its establishment in song. This represents a markedly different treatment of Epicaste's confused, incestuous identity from that reserved for Iocasta in Sophocles' *OT*. Forced to renounce her incestuous relationship to Oedipus after its widespread revelation, the Sophoclean Iocasta chooses a type of death that purges marital relations of their sexual element, thus removing the source of her problematic identity. In the process, however, she becomes figured into a wife so chaste that she threatens generational continuity, and who utilises the connotations of chastity to maintain her status as Oedipus', as well as Laius', wife. Her whole career, both before and at her death, parallels that of the Sphinx, figured in the play both as rapacious and maiden-like, a threatening sexual being that is also called κόρα and παρθένος. Further details provided by Apollodorus' account in the *Bibliotheca* make visible the similarities in their respective deaths that reinforce the connection between Iocasta and the Sphinx, and render the latter a magnified version of Iocasta's own distorted identity.

CHAPTER 1 – INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK AND ITS APPLICATION

The Hippocratic Corpus as context

The aim of the present chapter is to develop an interpretative framework that can be usefully applied to the study of female suicide by hanging in Greek myth. This framework will comprise a range of diverse, often complementary, and sometimes contradictory ideas around this mode of dying as they can be detected in various areas of thought and action. My intention is not to assert the existence of direct links between mythical instances of suicide by hanging and the specific notions surrounding this type of death, but rather to marshal this nexus of associations to nuance our understanding of the relationship between suicide by hanging and women. I will therefore first map a set of ideas within the Hippocratic Corpus which seem to underpin its treatment of hanging as a mode of female suicide, and will then review some more familiar material from areas such as religion, cult, and poetry. The model that will emerge from these explorations will subsequently be applied to a preliminary study of some lesser-known myths and myth variants that, although not all equally amenable to such a treatment, nevertheless offer an opportunity to detect some salient aspects of the relationship between suicide by hanging and gender. To better illustrate the character of this framework as an approach tailored to the interpretation of suicide by hanging I will also briefly discuss some well-known cases of female self-killing through other methods. The comparative material will help render clearer both the limitations of the model as a tool for the interpretation of female suicide in general and its contribution to our understanding of the particular sub-set that forms the focus of this thesis.

The turn to the Hippocratic Corpus to furnish much of the material for this interpretative model requires some explanation. It should be stated from the beginning that I am not intending to use the Hippocratic material to diagnose, as it were, the diseases afflicting mythic women who commit suicide by hanging, or to assert the presence in mythic sources of direct engagement with medical treatises. Rather, I am interested in the way Hippocratic gynaecology frames suicide by hanging as a symptom of a specifically female affliction, the broader logic that enables this association, and how some aspects of this logic may slip from the authors' control to suggest possibilities not envisioned within the Corpus. There is a recurrent sense that some assumptions underlying the association of suicide by hanging with *parthenoi* in *De virginibus morbis* (viii.468.9–16) are also operative elsewhere in the description of the behaviour of women's bodies in illness and in health, and that these assumptions are governed by a logic that is not present in all instances where it could conceivably apply. Among these assumptions, two are of crucial importance for my argument and will be discussed in detail below: first, that there exists a sympathetic relation, almost an analogy, between upper and lower regions of the female body, and second, that the female reproductive system defines women as being women.

Within the gynaecological treatises themselves, these assumptions, where detected, are often accompanied by qualifications specific to the case under consideration, which mitigates the impression of their widespread operation. For instance, although there are numerous descriptions of fertility tests that plainly support the idea that an analogy between upper and lower passages and orifices is operative in Hippocratic gynaecology, passages also exist where this sympathetic relationship is qualified. Such is the case in *De sterilibus* (viii.422.23–424.13), where the physician explains that the test for determining whether sufficient cleaning has taken place will only work on a woman who has already given birth, and will be useless for all other categories of women. These are restrictions that must be taken into consideration when working within the precise, technical discourse that the Hippocratic texts claim to articulate; however, my interest lies less in arguing with the grain of the texts, and more in identifying the logic behind expositions on female physiology and pathology and developing it beyond the point to which Hippocratic physicians are prepared to take it. What happens if we take the up-and-down analogy and apply it in contexts where it seems to fit, but from which it is absent—for example in pregnancy, where closure of the womb does not entail suffocation or a desire for hanging for the pregnant woman? Such a move would be inadmissible within the Hippocratic context, but it can be very useful if applied to a type of discourse not bound by the same restrictions. By taking an assumption underlying the connection between young women and suicide by hanging in a specific passage of the Hippocratic corpus and applying it to other cases where there is closure of the upper or lower orifices/passages but not necessarily of both at the same time, suicide by hanging acquires a range of associations. Because the places where this logic can be applied are places that concern the ability of women to fulfil or transition between roles that are also always social (such as *parthenos*, wife, mother etc.), suicide by hanging acquires associations with elements recognisable within Greek thought more generally as constitutive of femaleness itself.

This brings us to the second crucial assumption identified above, namely that the female reproductive system defines women as such. The passages in the Hippocratic Corpus that indicate this will be discussed below, but it is important to offer here an overview of the implications of such an assumption. Briefly, the identification of the female reproductive system as the defining feature of women could mean that anything that threatens its healthy function can also undermine the femaleness of which it is the guarantor. In turn, this means that when the logic of the up-and-down analogy does find an application in pathological conditions, the resulting association of pathology with suicide by hanging renders the latter a space where the femaleness of its victims is threatened. However, some of the places where this analogy can be applied to connect female reproductive functions with suicide by hanging are descriptions of healthy situations, such as conception and pregnancy. The association of both normal and pathological conditions with this mode of dying helps to explain the unique contribution that such an approach to the Hippocratic corpus can make to the interpretation of mythic instances of suicide by hanging. Under the proposed treatment, Hippocratic

gynaecological treatises offer up female roles that within mythological narrative contexts can be evoked by suicide by hanging and distorted or combined to give rise to alternative gender configurations. On the other hand, some of these female roles or ‘markers’ already offer glimpses of alternative gender configurations themselves. If, as proposed above, female reproductive health is to pathology what normative femaleness is to aberrations, then the connotation, for instance, of ‘sterile wife’ that suicide by hanging acquires within the proposed approach already constitutes an abnormal iteration of femaleness, regardless of whether it is then combined with other roles in the context of a myth.

This double operation of the gender roles traced within the Hippocratic Corpus raises the question of the relationship of such ‘proto’-alternative gender identities to the non-normative genders emerging in myths, as well as of the originary or authoritative status of the former vis-à-vis the latter. To the extent that the female roles, normative and otherwise, offered up by the Hippocratic texts consistently form aspects of the gender configurations that emerge in myths in connection to suicide by hanging, they must be considered as assuming a certain priority. Moreover, the argument, crucial for this thesis, that female pathology becomes synonymous with non-normative gender configurations is rooted in the Hippocratic Corpus, and although it resonates with other cultural ideas around gender, cannot be so clearly traced in other discourses. However, it is also true that the priority of ‘Hippocratic’ alternative genders is not due to their emergence exclusively in the Hippocratic Corpus. Although they result in large part from what must be much original thinking specific to Hippocratic medicine, they are almost inevitably indebted to prior and contemporary concepts around gender, too.⁷⁸ In this light, the move *from* the Hippocratic Corpus *to* mythic discourse is not to be viewed as asserting a hierarchy of discourses, but as a wider attempt to marshal a nexus of cultural ideas around women and suicide by hanging in order to shed light on this type of death in contexts where its implications have not been greatly explored.

In what follows, I will discuss the Hippocratic passages supporting the contention that the female reproductive system becomes a shorthand for femaleness itself, and will elaborate on the implications I believe this has for the relationship between gender and health. I will also discuss the contexts in which the analogy between upper and lower regions of the female body is detected, as well as some additional passages where its operation is not immediately obvious. Although for the purposes of this research I am interested in how this logic may be further elaborated rather than in how the texts

⁷⁸ Almost all studies addressing this issue include a discussion of women’s own role—or lack thereof—in shaping Hippocratic views of the female body. Two of the earliest scholars exploring Hippocratic gynaecology, Rousselle and Manuli, hold diametrically opposed views on the subject: Rousselle (1980) argues that male physicians accepted women’s knowledge of their bodies and took over a female medical tradition, while Manuli (1980; 1983) sees the Hippocratic views as indicative of patriarchal attitudes. Dean-Jones (1994: 26–31, 37–40) provides a more nuanced and balanced approach. See also Lloyd 1983: 58–94; Hanson 1990: 309–38 (although the argument for a seal closing the virgin’s genitals has been refuted by Sissa 1990a, 1990b, and 2013); 1992: 31–71; von Staden 1992: 7–30.

themselves expound it, I will demonstrate that already within the Hippocratic Corpus there exist passages that gesture towards the direction I will be following. These may not be particularly widespread, but they do constitute evidence that the approach I propose is not entirely alien to Hippocratic discourse itself.

With few exceptions, the gynaecological texts are unanimous in their presentation of suffocation or a desire for hanging as the result of a malfunction of the reproductive system, and more specifically of the uterus.⁷⁹ Even though in Hippocratic medicine the uterus is not the primary mark of sexual difference, it is nevertheless necessitated by it. As the writer of *De mulierum affectibus* (viii.12.17–23) explains, the spongier, looser texture of (mature) female flesh enables the female body to absorb a greater amount of blood from its nutriment than the male body, and the excess thus accumulated must be regularly evacuated to avoid illness:⁸⁰

Οὕτω δὲ καὶ ἡ γυνή, ἅτε ἀραιότερη ἐοῦσα, εἴλκυσε πλέον ἀπὸ τῆς κοιλίης τῶ σώματι τῆς ἰκμάδος καὶ θᾶσσον ἢ ὁ ἀνὴρ, καὶ ἅτε ἀπαλοσάρκῳ ἐούση τῇ γυναικί, ἐπὴν πλησθῆ τοῦ αἵματος τὸ σῶμα, ἦν μὴ ἀποχωρήσῃ ἀπὸ αὐτοῦ, πληρευμένων τῶν σαρκῶν καὶ θερμαινομένων, πόνος γίνεται· [...] ἦν δὲ τὸ πλεῖον ἐπιγενόμενον ἀποχωρήῃ, οὐ γίνεται ὁ πόνος πρὸς τοῦ αἵματος.

In the same way, a woman, being more porous, will draw into her body more of what is being exhaled from her cavity, and more quickly, than a man does. Also, because a woman's flesh is softer, when her body fills up with blood, unless the blood is then discharged from her body, the filling and warming of her tissues that ensue will provoke pain: [...] If, however, most of the blood that was added is subsequently discharged, no pain will arise from it.

The uterus provides the apparatus for discharging the excess blood at the same time as it serves the purpose of human reproduction. As a result of this twofold function, female health, inextricably tied in Hippocratic medicine to the particularity of the female body, becomes reduced to the healthy functioning of the reproductive system. This move from a perception of health as dependent on a more diffuse sexual difference to the identification of female health with uterine health can be witnessed in two passages addressing the particularity of female diseases.

ἅμα δὲ καὶ οἱ ἰητροὶ ἀμαρτάνουσιν, οὐκ ἀτρεκέως πυνθανόμενοι τὴν πρόφασιν τῆς νούσου, ἀλλ' ὡς τὰ ἀνδρικὰ νοσήματα ἰώμενοι· καὶ πολλὰς εἶδον διεφθαρμένας ἤδη ὑπὸ τοιούτων παθημάτων. ἀλλὰ χρὴ ἀνερωτᾶν αὐτίκα ἀτρεκέως τὸ αἴτιον· διαφέρει γὰρ ἢ ἴησις πολλὸν τῶν γυναικείων νοσημάτων καὶ τῶν ἀνδρείων.

⁷⁹ For some examples see the passages discussed in pp. 46–51, 54 and the references in n. 99.

⁸⁰ Dean-Jones 1991: 114–16, 119, 129; 1994: 55–59, 63–64; King 1998: 28–29, 33.

(Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.126.14–19)

Furthermore, physicians too may err in not inquiring carefully about a disease's cause, and in treating them like diseases in men: indeed, I have seen many women perish in such cases. Rather you must question a patient immediately and in detail about the cause; for there is a great difference in the treatment of women's diseases and those of men.

Τὰ γυναικεῖα νοσεύματα καλούμενα· αἱ ὑστέραι πάντων τῶν νοσημάτων αἰτιαί εἰσιν· αὐταὶ γὰρ ὅπη ἂν ἐκ τῆς φύσεως μετακινήθωσι, νούσους παρέχουσιν, ἢν τε προέλθωσιν, ἢν τε παραχωρήσωσιν.

(Hippoc. *Loc. hom.* vi.344.3–4)

Diseases of women, as they are called. The uterus is the cause of all these diseases; for however it changes from its normal position—whether it moves forward, or whether it withdraws—it produces diseases.

Where the author of *De mulierum affectibus* warns against applying the same principles in the treatment of male and female patients, *Loci in homine* attributes the diseases that are specific to women to uterine displacement.⁸¹ If, then, female nature can be identified with the reproductive system by way of the texture of female flesh, and if suffocation or a desire for hanging signals a disruption of the normal functioning of this system, then these symptoms threaten to destabilise the very femaleness of the women who exhibit them. The female body, which would appear to trap a woman in her female identity, can become the means to interrogate and fragment this identity. By defining as woman the *healthy* woman and setting up criteria for distinguishing health from pathology, the Hippocratic physicians cast pathological female bodies as bodies that do not conform to gender norms. Viewed in this light, these bodies appear as neither pathological nor female; they are not pathological *because* they are not female. Failure to perform according to medical standards of female health is transformed from an indication of illness to an intimation of the emergence of alternative gender configurations.

This understanding of the relationship between female health and gender in the Hippocratic Corpus breaks away from established approaches, which view the female body's proneness to illness as a *sine qua non* of the experience of being female, and see the tension between health and diseases, normal function and refusal to comply, as of a piece with popular thinking about the contradictions inherent in women.⁸² According to this line of thinking, the preoccupation of Hippocratic gynaecology with

⁸¹ King (1998: 12) is right to point out that 'the second quotation [*Loc. hom.*] is less radical than the first, since it concentrates the difference into one organ'. Nevertheless, it remains important that these statements—and the explanations of female pathology they implied—could not only co-exist, but also work together to promote certain ideas on the source of female illnesses and the cures appropriate to them.

⁸² King 1983: 111–13; Dean-Jones 1994: 135–36.

treating conditions that threaten to disrupt the fulfilment of women's social roles is in line with other strategies that aim to control the wild and threatening aspects of female nature. However, I would argue that Hippocratic medicine can be seen to safeguard gender boundaries and police female behaviour by taking this logic a step further and implicitly rejecting as non-female all those elements that prevent women from fulfilling their culturally prescribed roles. Within the Hippocratic Corpus, these threatening elements take the form of various female diseases. Although they describe conditions different from those concerning us here, the cases of Phaethousa and Nanno in the sixth book of *De morbis popularibus* (v.356.4–15) can nonetheless lend support to this proposition. The bodies of these patients, previously healthy and fertile, stop menstruating (τὰ γυναικεῖα ἀπελήφθη χρόνον πούλων) and start exhibiting male traits (τό τε σῶμα ἠνδρώθη, καὶ ἐδασύνθη πάντα, καὶ πώγωνα ἔφυσε, καὶ φωνὴ τρηχέη ἐγενήθη) after their husbands have been absent for some time. The physicians attending them recognise the danger posed to the lives of these women and attempt to bring back their menses, the absence of which is presumed to have engendered the attendant symptoms. The phrasing of the passage describing these efforts in the case of Nanno is revealing; the return to health—already dependent on that most characteristically female sign, menstruation—is identical to a ‘re-feminisation’, a return to the female gender: ἐδόκει δὲ πᾶσι τοῖσιν ἰητροῖσιν οἷσι κἀγὼ ἐνέτυχον μία ἐλπὶς εἶναι τοῦ γυναικωθῆναι, εἰ τὰ κατὰ φύσιν ἔλθοι.⁸³ These cases have often been taken to indicate that there is a gender boundary that cannot be crossed, even in the extreme situation of the body's apparent masculinisation;⁸⁴ however, they may equally well demonstrate the tendency to relegate to pathology any behaviour of the body that does not comply with the perceived norms. The grim conclusion of these cases, which end with the patients' deaths, offers a sinister suggestion: the transgression of gender norms is a disease so grave as to make staying alive unviable. This is borne out quite literally in the Hippocratic Corpus, but it may well suggest the cultural-societal unviability of the gender configurations that arise when bodies refuse to comply with norms.

Considering the importance for this research of suffocation/strangulation as signifiers of non-conventional gender identities, it is necessary to explore in which medical contexts these symptoms arise and which specific conditions they signal. The image underlying expositions on female physiology and women's ailments in the gynaecological treatises is that of the female body, and in particular of the uterus, as a container alternatingly open and closed. Neither of these representations is particularly new; the association and identification of women with containers is well documented and extensively discussed, and the frequent exhortations to silence and chastity as virtues particularly

⁸³ The corresponding description for Phaethousa (Hippoc. *Epid.* v.356.8–10) reads: καὶ πάντα πραγματευσαμένων ἡμέων ὅσα ἦν πρὸς τὸ τὰ γυναικεῖα κατασπάσαι οὐκ ἦλθεν, ἀλλ' ἀπέθανεν οὐ πολλὸν μετέπειτα χρόνον βιώσασα. Here the connection between becoming a woman and becoming healthy is not as pronounced, but is betrayed by the presence of γυναικεῖα ('women's things' or 'things appropriate to women'), a common Hippocratic term for menstruation.

⁸⁴ King 2013: 128–29, 139–40; 2015: 256–60; Holmes 2012: 15.

appropriate to women testify to the positive evaluation of a closed female body.⁸⁵ One need only consider Hesiod's *Works and Days*, where the story of Pandora and her *pithos* is placed alongside an elaborate discussion of household economy and a diatribe against the ravenous bellies of women, who consume a man's wealth.⁸⁶

The Hippocratic Corpus' innovation consists not only in extending the familiar association of women with containers, but more importantly, in reversing the asymmetrical evaluation of the concepts of openness and closure, which are also vested with greater ambiguity.⁸⁷ Throughout the gynaecological treatises, the open and closed body are constantly contrasted, with openness more likely to represent health. The ideal female body is that of the mother, whose softer, looser flesh and wider vessels are the result of the successive processes of intercourse, pregnancy, birth, and lactation.⁸⁸ The superiority of this type of body over other, more compact ones, as well as the situations under which the female body may close are discussed in two closely related contexts: fertility and pregnancy, and the evacuation of menstrual blood and afterbirth.

Discussions on the causes of infertility and practical advice on maximising the chances of pregnancy consistently identify as the premise of conception the female body's ability to alternate between openness and closure. The uterus must be open to receive the male seed, but must subsequently close to retain it and allow for the process of mixing and solidifying.⁸⁹ An experienced woman, we are told, could tell that a pregnancy was about to start if after intercourse she could feel the mouth of her uterus closing.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, this is a time-sensitive operation; not only will the female body have to open again to allow the birth of the child, but also, a uterine mouth closed prior to intercourse is one of the most frequently cited causes of infertility.⁹¹ That openness was the default state of the uterus is further evidenced by statements where illnesses are caused by the mouth of the womb gaping more than

⁸⁵ Women and containers: Sissa 1990a: 153–64; Reeder 1995: 195–99; Zeitlin 1996: 64–68. Women and silence: Sissa 1990a: 53–58.

⁸⁶ Hes. *Op.* 299–301 (a wish for a full storehouse), 472–76 (the satisfaction from a rich crop that fills the bins inside the house), 373–74 (a woman who coaxes with wily words is after a man's barn), 703–04 (a bad wife is δευπνολόγη, 'fishing for invitations to dinner, parasitic' (LSJ *s.v.*)). Sissa 1990a: 154–56; Zeitlin 1996: 58–68; King 1998: 26.

⁸⁷ The uterus as a container in the Hippocratic Corpus: *VM* i.626.22–628.4 (σικύαι, 'cupping vessels'); *Ep.* v.318.15 (ἄγγος, 'vessel', 'pitcher'); *Gen.* vii.482.15–16 (ἄρυστήρα, 'cup'), 482.17 (ἄγγος); *Mul.* viii.78.4–5 (λήκυθον, 'oil-flask'), 124.21 (ἄσκῶ, 'wineskin'), 350.17 (ἄσκοῦ). Sissa 1990a: 154–72 (*pithos*); Hanson 1990: 317, 324–30 (upside-down jug); 1992: 36–37 (upside-down jar, doctor's cupping vessel); King 1998: 26 (jar) and 34–35 (where ἄγγος, λήκυθος, and ἄρυστήρ are all noted). Dean-Jones (1994: 65) makes a convincing case for the ἄσκός as the image underlying Hippocratic representations of uterine anatomy based on its texture and its capacity to expand. A similar image is proposed by Sissa 2013: 94 ('a lively and springy pouch').

⁸⁸ See the opening statement of *De mulierum affectibus* (viii.10.1–12.5).

⁸⁹ Openness for reception of the man's seed: *Mul.* viii.64.1–3 (also implied when a closed mouth impedes conception; see n. 91 below). Closure after sex necessary for conception: *Aph.* iv.550.7–8; *Gen.* vii.476.19–23.

⁹⁰ *Hippoc. Gen.* vii.476.23–25.

⁹¹ *Hippoc. Mul.* viii.40.15–42.1, 50.13–16, 56.3–5, 322.3–6, 330.19–21, 338.14–16; *Steril.* viii.408.8–9; *Superf.* viii.494.4–17.

usual.⁹² Closure, then, is appropriate only when occupying a specific place in the order of events leading to pregnancy and childbirth.

If conception necessitates a positive evaluation of the closed female body, in the context of menstruation and lochial cleaning it can only denote a pathological condition: closure of the uterine mouth is most often diagnosed as the cause behind absence of the menses.⁹³ The number and detail of the treatments proposed for rectifying the situation is not surprising; if not evacuated, menstrual or lochial blood can accumulate, compromising the woman's fertility and even presenting a serious threat to her life. It is precisely in the description of such a life-threatening instance of menstrual retention that an explicit connection between hanging and the pathological female body is created. The author of *De virginibus morbis*, describing the symptoms of menstrual retention in a young unmarried girl upon menarche, notes that she might have an urge to hang herself:⁹⁴

ἐχόντων δὲ τούτων ὧδε [...] ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς περὶ τὴν καρδίην πιέξις ἀγχόνας κραινοῦσιν, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς κακίης τοῦ αἵματος ἀλύων καὶ ἀδημονέων ὁ θυμὸς κακὸν ἐφέλκεται. ἕτερον δὲ καὶ φοβερὰ ὀνομάζει καὶ κελεύουσιν ἄλλεσθαι καὶ καταπίπτειν ἐς φρέατα ἢ ἄγχεσθαι, ἅτε ἀμείνονά τε ἔόντα καὶ χρεῖν ἔχοντα παντοίην.

(Hippoc. *Virg.* viii.468.9–16)

When the situation is such [...] from the compression around their heart they are desirous of throttling themselves, and from the bad state of the blood the mind, being distraught and dismayed, tempts them to evil. She names strange and frightful things, and these urge her to take a leap and throw themselves down wells, or to hang themselves, as being better and in every way advantageous.⁹⁵

⁹² Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* vii.330.12–15; *Mul.* viii.52.5–7, 64.17–66.4, 94.21–96.5. Sissa (1990a: 122–23, 170–71; 2013: 95) maintains that the female genitalia would resume their closure after opening to release blood or to give birth. This understanding of the body's opening and closing may derive from the conflation, in her analysis, of internal and external genitalia and the representation of the latter as lips resembling the lips of the mouth. However, it is clear that in Hippocratic gynaecology a closed *uterine* mouth outside pregnancy is a sign of pathology.

⁹³ Menstrual retention: *Loc. hom.* vi.344.8–12; *Nat. mul.* vii.404.5; *Mul.* viii.14.8–12, 322.3–4, 330.19–20, 332.9–11, 338.14–19, 342.12–14, 23; *Steril.* viii.408.10–12; *Superf.* viii.494.4–11. Retention of the lochia: *Mul.* 84.11–14, 92.14–16. See also King 1998: 26.

⁹⁴ I have translated as 'young unmarried woman' the Greek word *παρθένος*. The understanding underlying the use of this term throughout this study is that developed by Sissa (1990a and 2013), whereby *παρθένος* encompasses both a social status (unmarried) and a specifically sexual condition (not having engaged in penetrative sex). However, whereas the former can be easily verified, the latter cannot be ascertained unless there is conclusive evidence to the contrary: 'A *parthenos* is a woman whose marital status (non-married) is patent, but whose required sexual condition (until she becomes pregnant, and until pregnancy becomes evident) remains uncertain (Sissa 2013: 86).

⁹⁵ Potter's translation provides 'women' as the subject of the infinitives following *κελεύουσι* (*ἄλλεσθαι*, *καταπίπτειν* and *ἄγχεσθαι*), although the passage is discussing *parthenoi*. I have replaced 'women' with 'her' (i.e. the girl), which follows naturally from the previous sentence and makes sense within the context.

Nor is blockage of the airflow or a desire for it restricted to *parthenoi* unable to menstruate for the first time. At the very end of this treatise, the author adds that ‘among married women, the barren ones suffer these things more’ (*Virg.* viii.470.1–2 τῶν δὲ ἡνδρωμένων γυναικῶν αἱ στεῖραι μᾶλλον ταῦτα πάσχουσιν).⁹⁶ Clearly, mature women are not exempt from the same suffering, although the therapeutic power attributed to pregnancy means that those who have experienced it are less prone to such afflictions. The category of women liable to display the same symptoms as a non-menstruating *parthenos* is expanded in *De mulierum affectibus* to include those whose lochial cleaning is diverted elsewhere:

Εἰ δ’ ὀρμηθεῖη γυναικὶ λοχείη κάθαρσις ὡς ἐς κεφαλὴν, θώρηκά τε καὶ πλεύμονα, γίνεται γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο, θνήσκουσιν ἐν ταχεῖ, ἢν ἴσχηται· εἰ δὲ χωρέοι κατὰ στόμα ἢ ῥῖνας καλῶς, ἐξάντης γίνεται· εἰ δὲ ὀλίγον ἢ νοῦσος χρονιωτέρη γένοιτο καὶ πάσχοι ἂν ἡ γυνὴ ὅποια εἴρηται ἀμφὶ τῆς παρθένου, ἢ τὰ ἐπιφαινόμενα πρῶτα ὄρουσεν ἄνω· ἡ δὲ γυνὴ πλέονα χρόνον περιέσται τῆς παρθένου, καὶ βληγρότερα τὰ παθήματα ἔσται οἱ, μέχρις οὗ ὁ πλεύμων διάπτωσις γένηται.

(Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.98.6–13)

If a woman’s lochial cleaning rushes in the direction of her head, thorax and lung—for this too happens—such women quickly succumb if the flux is retained, but if it passes well through her mouth or nostrils, such a woman escapes danger. If the disease is extended for a little longer time, a woman will suffer what is described as happening in a girl (sc. whose menses) rush upward for the first time:⁹⁷ the woman will survive for a longer time than the girl, however, and her disease will be milder until her lung begins to suppurate.

More often, when mature women experience menstrual retention in conjunction with impediments to breathing, these tend to take the form of suffocation rather than a desire for the noose:

Ἐν δὲ τοῖσι τρίτοισιν ἄριστα μὲν πείσεται, ἢν οἱ κατελθόντα ἐξαγάγη τὰ προὑπάρχοντα· εἰ δὲ μὴ, πείσεται τάδε ἡ γυνὴ· πνίξις τε οἱ ἄλλοτε καὶ ἄλλοτε συμπεσεῖται, καὶ πῦρ λήψεται ἄλλοτε καὶ ἄλλοτε καὶ φρίκη καὶ ὀσφύος ἄλγημα.

(Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.16.2–6)

⁹⁶ Here I deviate from Potter’s translation because the text he prints reads τῶν δὲ ἡνδρωμένων γυναικῶν στεῖραι ταῦτα πάσχουσιν.

⁹⁷ Perhaps it is better to understand τὰ ἐπιφαινόμενα πρῶτα ὄρουσεν ἄνω as ‘the first-time menses rush upward’, which is more in line with what is said of virgins in *Virg.* viii.466.10–17. The issue there does not seem to be the repeated turn of the menses upwards, the first occurrence of which the author then goes on to describe, but the retention and movement upwards of the blood at menarche. For a discussion and justification of this reading of the two passages see King 1983: 125–26 n. 10.

Over three cycles, it will be best for a woman if what moves down draws out what has arrived there before; if this does not happen, she will suffer the following: suffocation will befall her from time to time, as will fever along with shivering and pain of the lower back.

The passage goes on to describe the symptoms displayed by the woman afflicted in this way should her menses fail to appear for an additional period of three months; at each stage, the signs displayed at the three-month mark are said to continue, with further symptoms adding to her suffering.⁹⁸

Passages such as the above, where closure of a mature woman's uterus, prevention of the lochial or menstrual flow, and difficulties in breathing are causally connected are admittedly rare. Uterine closure and menstrual or lochial retention usually form a type of affliction treated separately from suffocation, which is more often caused by the pressure the wandering womb exerts on some internal organ.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, when the gynaecological treatises are viewed in their entirety, and some of the common assumptions on which they rest are identified, it becomes possible to demonstrate that subtle links connecting the two types of disease are more widespread than initially thought. Indeed, as evidence of connections accumulates, it becomes possible to argue that the relation among uterine closure, menstrual retention, and suffocation is not restricted to the one occasion discussed above, but rather underlies many diagnostic and therapeutic approaches encountered in the Hippocratic Corpus.

We may begin by examining some other instances where these conditions arise simultaneously or appear to be closely connected. *De natura muliebri* presents a situation where suffocation, caused by movement of the womb, follows closely upon cessation of the menses:

Ὅκοταν τὰ ἐπιμήνια κρυφθῆ, ὀδύνη ἴσχει τὴν νεύαιραν γαστέρα, καὶ δοκεῖ ἐπικεῖσθαι βάρως, καὶ τὰς ἰξύας πονέει καὶ τοὺς κενεῶνας· ὅκοταν δὲ πρὸς τὰ ὑποχόνδρια προσπέσωσι, πνίγουσι.

(Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* vii.338.3–6)

When a woman's menses disappear, pain then seizes her lower abdomen, she feels a heaviness, and her loins and flanks are sore. When it (i.e., the uterus) falls against her hypochondrium, it causes suffocation.

Although occlusion of the menses and suffocation are not conflated, their collocation does not appear to be merely a coincidence, as indicated by the proposed treatment. Before offering instructions on how to soften and open the mouth of the womb—which will presumably enable the flow of the menses—the physician sees fit to provide a treatment for restoring the uterus to its accustomed place.

⁹⁸ Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.16.7–9 ἐν δὲ τοῖσι τετάρτοισιν, ἦν μὴ οἱ ἐξίη τοῖσι τε προτέροισιν ἔξοδον ποιήσῃ, τὰ τέ μιν τρίτα πονήματα πάντα μάλιστα πονήσῃ; 16.16–18 ἐν δὲ τοῖσιν ἕκτοισιν ἤδη ἀνίητος ἔσται. καὶ τὰ μὲν πρότερον σημεῖα μᾶλλον πονήσῃ.

⁹⁹ Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* vii.338.5–6 (same in *Mul.* viii.268.9, 274.11–12), 358.21–360.1; *Mul.* viii. 32.10–11, 384.12–13, 386.14. See also passages on p. 54.

That these treatments appear together, and in reverse order from that in which the conditions they address were presented, suggests that on occasion, suffocation may be expected to follow menstrual retention.

A similar suggestion is made in a passage of *De mulierum affectibus*:

Ἦν δὲ τὸ στόμα τῶν μητρέων ζυμύση, γίνεται ἰσχυρὸν ὡς ἐρινέος· καὶ ἦν ἐπαφήσης τῷ δακτύλῳ, ὄψει καὶ σκληρὸν καὶ ζυνιλλόμενον, καὶ τὸν δάκτυλον οὐκ ἐσίησι· καὶ τὰ ἐπιμήνια κεκρύφαται, καὶ τὴν γονὴν οὐ δέχονται τούτου τοῦ χρόνου, καὶ ὀδύνη ἴσχει τὴν νειαίρην γαστέρα καὶ τὴν ὀσφὺν καὶ τοὺς κενεῶνας· ἔστι δ' ὅτε καὶ ἄνω προσίσταται καὶ πνίγει.

(Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.342.16–17)

If the mouth of a woman's uterus closes, it will become tough like a wild fig, and if you palpate her with your finger, you will see that it is hard and compressed, and your finger will not go in. The menses disappear, and the uterus will not take up the (sc. male) seed at this time; pain occupies the lower belly and back, and the flanks; sometimes it is also felt higher up and causes suffocation.

Here, the temporal-causal link among uterine closure, menstrual retention, and suffocation is more clearly articulated, though somewhat obscured by the translation. Potter takes ὀδύνη as the implied subject of προσίσταται, which he then translates with ἄνω as 'it [i.e. the pain] is felt higher up'. However, although pain may indeed move upwards (e.g. *Nat. mul.* vii.328.14–15), there is no other instance in which suffocation is caused by pain. It is possible that the subject of προσίσταται is the ἐπιμήνια, which are likely to move upwards upon occlusion, as in *Mul.* viii.36.1 (οἷα τῆς καθάρσιος ἄνω στελλομένης καὶ ἀνιούσης) and *Mul.* viii.98.10–11 (τὰ ἐπιφαινόμενα πρῶτα ὄρουσεν ἄνω). If the proposed syntax is accepted, then what the passage describes is a situation where closure of the uterus prevents the flow of the menses, which may sometimes move upwards and cause the woman to suffocate.

The same treatises also record a case, repeated almost verbatim, where suffocation and menstrual retention are symptoms of one and the same disease:¹⁰⁰

Ἦν πρησθῶσιν αἱ μήτραι, ἢ τε γαστήρ αἴρεται καὶ φουσᾶται [...] καὶ ἡ χροὴ δὲ ἀειδῆς γίνεται, καὶ τὰ ἐπιμήνια οὐ γίνεται, καὶ ἡ γονὴ οὐκ ἐγγίνεται τούτου τοῦ χρόνου· [...] πολλάκις δὲ καὶ πνίγεται.

¹⁰⁰ Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.328.15–330.3 adds more symptoms to the litany of the passage above. Suffocation, too, appears now as a regular symptom in line with all the others rather than as a frequent, but not necessary, occurrence (στένει τε καὶ ἀθυμεί μᾶλλον ἢ πρὶν φαγεῖν, καὶ πνίγεται, καὶ τὰ νεῦρα ἔλκεται, καὶ αἱ μήτραι καὶ αἱ κύστιες ἀλγέουσι, καὶ οὐκ ἔστι ψαῦσαι τῇ χειρὶ· οὐδὲ τὸ οὔρον προίενται, οὐδὲ τὴν γονὴν δέχονται).

(Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* vii.384.17–23)

If a woman's uterus becomes inflated, her abdomen will be raised and filled with air [...] Her skin becomes unsightly, her menses are absent, and she does not become pregnant during this time. [...] Often she also feels suffocated.

Although the cause is inflation of the uterus, symptoms such as disappearance of menstrual blood and inability to retain the male seed are elsewhere typical of uterine closure,¹⁰¹ and would seem to suggest that the disease has resulted in some kind of obstruction in the uterus or the passages leading from it. Interestingly, the proposed treatment includes odour therapy, typically used to persuade the womb to return to its proper position.¹⁰² Although the connection is not made explicit, the co-existence of symptoms belonging to uterine closure (absence of menses, inability to retain the seed) with suffocation and a treatment recommended for womb movement suggest that the distinction between conditions is far from clear-cut.

The differentiation between suffocation and menstrual retention as afflictions arising from different causes is further undermined by those cases where movement of the uterus against an organ, usually resulting in suffocation, prevents the evacuation of menstrual blood:

Ἦν αἰ μήτραι πρὸς τὰς πλευρὰς προσπέσωσι, βῆξι ἴσχει καὶ ὀδύνη ὑπὸ τὸ πλευρὸν [...] καὶ τὰ ἐπιμήνια ὄλως οὐ προφαίνεται· ἐνήησι δὲ προφανέντα οἴχεται, τοτὲ δὲ γενόμενα ἀσθενέα τε καὶ ὀλίγα καὶ κακίω ἢ πρὸ τοῦ· καὶ ἡ γονὴ οὐ γίνεται τούτου τοῦ χρόνου.

(Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* vii.380.17–22)

If the uterus falls against the sides, cough and pain set in below the side [...] and her menses disappear altogether. In some cases, the menses reappear, only to be lost again, and at times they are weak, scanty, and of worse quality than before; the woman does not become pregnant during this time.

The implications of this association between uterine movement and cessation of the menses are more fully appreciated when due attention is paid to the use of *προσπίπτειν* instead of *στρέφεισθαι*. *στρέφεισθαι* is the verb of preference to describe the 'turning away' of the womb, which, though often causing occlusion of the menses, is never adequate on its own to result in suffocation.¹⁰³ *προσπίπτειν*, on the other hand, is habitually employed when the uterus or the uterine mouth falls against an organ,

¹⁰¹ For inability to retain the male seed and menstrual retention as a result of uterine closure, see nn. 91 and 93 respectively.

¹⁰² See n. 117 below.

¹⁰³ The womb turns away ((ἀπο)στρέφεισθαι) and prevents the release of the menses: Hippoc. *Loc. hom.* vi.346.9–10, 348.7–8; *Mul.* viii.14.8–16.1; *Steril.* viii.408.10–11.

and it is in situations like these that womb displacement may provoke suffocation.¹⁰⁴ Although such a symptom is not present here, the use of *προσπίπτειν* marks the uterine movement described above as of the same type as that elsewhere causing suffocation.

Although there are few instances in the Hippocratic Corpus where retention of lochial cleaning or the menses, when resulting from closure of the body, explicitly leads to a desire for hanging or suffocation, the passages discussed above cumulatively build a case for arguing that such instances are not exceptional situations. We saw that a wandering womb may be behind menstrual retention as well as suffocation, while these symptoms may still be expected to appear together even when attributed to different types of pathological uterine behaviour. Moreover, they can arise simultaneously as a result of afflictions that, though not originating from uterine closure, do seem to involve some form of blockage. Unless the deviations among the assumptions underlying the various gynaecological treatises of the Corpus are much more substantial than is usually accepted, the evidence explored so far would seem to form a sound enough base for concluding that uterine closure can indeed lead to cessation of the menses or of the lochial flow and result in suffocation.

To what extent can suffocation, experienced by mature women, be considered equivalent to the desire for hanging which seizes the diseases *parthenoi* of *De virginibus morbis*? More generally, what is the degree of overlap between the bodies of older women and those of young, unmarried ones in terms of constitution, susceptibility to specific afflictions, and symptomatology? To start from the latter point, it is true that the Hippocratic Corpus attributes great importance to the physiological changes brought about by experiences such as sexual intercourse, pregnancy, birth, and lochial cleaning. These are considered to soften the compact bodies of young women, widen the vessels, and enable the body to bear the excess blood with less chance of severe illness. Nevertheless, the gap separating women from *parthenoi* is not as wide as this initial assessment suggests. In addition to some cases already discussed, where mature women partake of the *parthenoi*'s suffering,¹⁰⁵ we also encounter passages that explicitly assimilate the two categories of female bodies by pointing out that the symptoms and outcomes of specific conditions are the same for both:

τοῦτο δὲ γίνεται τὸ νόσημα μᾶλλον τῆσιν ἀνάνδροισιν· εἰ δὲ ἐμπειροτόκων ταῦτα τὰ νοσήματα προσπέσοι τὰ εἰρημένα ἢ ἄσσα μέλλει εἰρήσεσθαι, πολυχρονιώτερά τε ἔσται καὶ ἧσσον ἐπίπονα· τὰ δὲ σημεῖα ταῦτα καὶ τελευταὶ αἱ αὐταὶ γίνονται τῆ τε ἀτόκῳ καὶ τῆ λοχίων ἐμπείρῳ, ἣν μὴ θεραπεύονται· χρὴ δὲ αὐτίκα τὴν θεραπείην ποιέεσθαι· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἐπιφαίνεται τὰ νοσήματα.

(Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.28.2–8)

¹⁰⁴ Suffocation arises as a result of the uterus' move (*προσπίπτειν*) against an organ: Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* vii.338.5–6 (same in *Mul.* viii.268.9 and 274.11–12), 358.21–360.1.

¹⁰⁵ See Hippoc. *Virg.* viii.470.1–2 and *Mul.* viii.98.6–13 discussed above.

This disease occurs more often in unmarried women: if on the other hand the diseases which have been, or are about to be described befall women who have borne children, they will be of longer duration but less troublesome. The same signs and outcomes pertain both to a woman who has not borne children and to one who has experienced the lochia, if they go untreated. Treatment must be applied immediately: if not, the diseases will become manifest.

The disease to which the first line refers has been described as the gradual accumulation of menses due to inadequate evacuation over a few cycles, a situation arising from the narrowing of the uterine mouth or a slight misalignment with the vagina. Although, as elsewhere, unmarried girls are at higher risk of suffering from such afflictions, mature women are far from immune; the differences are located at the level of the severity and length of the disease, but are elided when the focus shifts to the symptoms displayed and the likely after-effects if treatment is not provided.

Mature women and *parthenoi* may also differ with respect to their bodies' reaction to the accumulation of menstrual blood. While *parthenoi* are more likely to experience the build-up that urges them to take their lives, it is often the case that in older, sexually active women, retained menses break forth spontaneously, or suppurate and create an exit for themselves in another part of the body.¹⁰⁶ Here, too, the impression of a marked divergence is softened when we consider those instances where a common condition prompts the author to bring together the two categories of women:

ἔστιν ἥσι καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἕδρην, ὥσπερ μοι εἴρηται ἐν τῆσι Παρθενίησι Νούσοισι, καὶ σημεῖα καὶ πόνοὺς τοὺς αὐτοὺς δείκνυσι τοῖσι κείθι εἰρημένοισιν· ἥσσον δὲ ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν ποιέεται τὰ ἐπιμήνια τῆσι γυναιξίν ἢ τῆσι παρθένοισιν.

(Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.22.1–4)

There are also women in whom they pass through the anus, as described in Diseases of Girls,¹⁰⁷ and these women display the same signs and sufferings as described there: this route is taken by the menses less often in women than in girls.

As usual, pathological conditions are not equally shared by all the different groups of female patients; nevertheless, the common ground which emerges now and again serves as an important reminder of their participation in what is, essentially, a common model of female physiology and pathology.

Can such similarities in the way mature female bodies and the bodies of *parthenoi* behave also justify equating the impediments to breathing each category may experience as a result of disease? The

¹⁰⁶ Hippoc. *Nat. puer.* vii.496.3–7; *Mul.* viii.20.22–24, 24.5–7.

¹⁰⁷ This route for the retained menses is not mentioned in *De virginibus morbis* as it survives. It is unclear whether the author refers here to a different or extended version known to him. The flow of the menses through a mature woman's rectum is mentioned again in *Steril.* viii.414.7–8.

equivalence of suffocation and hanging suggested here may seem ill-advised in the context of a study explicitly focused on suicide by hanging. As King has pointed out, the use of (ἀπ)άγχω in the description of the *parthenoi*'s affliction seems to set their symptoms apart, placing the emphasis on the pressure applied on the neck and therefore reinforcing the idea that the tendency to self-harm is connected to a closed lower mouth.¹⁰⁸ However, I would like to counter this objection with evidence suggesting that, within the framework of associated ideas built here, the two symptoms, though not identical, can be treated as equivalent.

If often (ἀπ)άγχομαι and πνίξ-related words suggest distinct ways to impede breathing, in the Hippocratic corpus the common semantic ground they occupy is decidedly enlarged. Occasionally, suffocation in mature women is accompanied by pain in or around the throat, a combination of symptoms that moves their experience closer to the restriction desired by diseased *parthenoi*:

ἦν δὲ μὴ θεραπεύηται καὶ ὁ χρόνος προΐη, πάντα μὲν μᾶλλον πονήσει τὰ πρόσθεν εἰρημένα, καὶ ὀδύνη λήψεται τοτὲ μὲν τῆς γαστρὸς τὸ κάτω τοῦ ὀμφαλοῦ [...] τοτὲ δὲ τὸν τράχηλον, τοτὲ δὲ πνίξ προσπυεῖται ἰσχυρή, καὶ πρὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ζόφος ἔσται οἱ καὶ δῖνος, οἷα τῆς καθάρσιος ἄνω στελλομένης καὶ ἀνιούσης.

(Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.34.18–36.1)

If the patient is treated, she will soon recover, but if she is not treated and time goes on, she will suffer everything that was described above and more severely: Pain will seize her at one time in the belly below the navel [...] and at another in the neck, and at another time powerful suffocation will befall her and there will be darkness before her eyes with vertigo because the (sc. menstrual) cleaning has turned upward and is moving in that direction.

Elsewhere, it is the accumulation of the menses that elicits this type of pain, inviting a comparison with the blood-filled bodies of the *parthenoi* who wish to hang themselves:

ἦν δὲ ῥόος μὴ γίνηται, ἔσται ὥστε δοκέειν ἐγκύμονα εἶναι [...] καὶ πόνος ἴσχει ἄλλοτε καὶ ἄλλοτε τῆς γαστρὸς τὸ κάτω τοῦ ὀμφαλοῦ, τὸν τε τράχηλον καὶ τοὺς βουβῶνας καὶ τὴν ὀσφῦν.

(Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.22.12–18)

If no flux follows, the woman will appear to be pregnant [...] and pain from time to time occupies her belly down from the navel, as well as her neck, her groin and her lower back.

Whether actually accompanied by suffocation or appearing among other symptoms, pain in the throat area as a result of menstrual or lochial retention supports the idea that πνίξ experienced under such

¹⁰⁸ King 1998: 80.

circumstances is more akin to a painful, restrictive closure of the throat than, for example, a feeling of oppressive heat.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, when suffocation is mentioned outside the gynaecological treatises, it often pertains to the throat and is sometimes directly related to obstruction of the airflow, as is the case with the suffocating patients of *De morbo sacro*.¹¹⁰

Conversely, the origin of the non-menstruating *parthenoi*'s urge to hang themselves is revealed upon closer inspection to have more in common with the cause of suffocation in mature women than originally assumed. Before claiming that such young women are ordered to kill themselves by the φοβερὰ things that they name in their deranged condition, the author of *De virginibus morbis* launches a detailed explanation of the physiological processes triggered by menstrual retention. It emerges that the desire of *parthenoi* for the noose is caused not by the accumulated blood itself, but by the pressure it exerts on their heart: ὑπό δὲ τῆς περὶ τὴν καρδίην πιέξιτος ἀγγόνας κραίνουσιν (*Virg.* viii.468.11–12). This forms a striking parallel to several instances elsewhere in the Corpus where women experience suffocation as a result of the displaced womb's pressure on the very same organ:

Ἦν πρὸς τὴν καρδίην προσπεσοῦσαι ὑστέραι πνίγωσι. [...]¹¹¹

(Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* vii.358.21–360.2)

If the uterus falls upon the heart and causes suffocation [...]

Ἦν πρὸς τὴν καρδίην προσιστάμεναι πνίγωσιν αἱ ὑστέραι καὶ μὴ ἀφιστῶνται [...]

(Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* vii.400.3–4)

If a woman's uterus pressing against her heart causes her to suffocate, and it fails to recede [...]

Ἦν δὲ πρὸς τὴν καρδίην προσιστάμεναι πνίγωσιν αἱ ὑστέραι [...]

(Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.266.20–268.1)

Although none of these cases mention blood retention, the mechanics by which suffocation is provoked are too similar to what *De virginibus morbis* describes to dismiss as mere coincidence. Suffocation and a desire for hanging are therefore alike not only in their outcome, which is the obstruction of airflow, but also in some of their causes—namely, pressure on the heart.

¹⁰⁹ For the rationale behind this explanation and the overlap between the two sensations see King 1998: 80.

¹¹⁰ Hippoc. *Prorrh.* v.532.4–5; 540.8–542.1; *Aff.* vi.212.8, 16. In some of these and other similar passages, suffocation is clearly the result of obstruction of the airway due to a swollen uvula. Although such a condition is clearly not identical to the restriction effected by ἀγγόνας, it is nevertheless more similar to closure of the throat than to covering of the mouth and nose, which is sometimes considered a more accurate way to think about suffocation.

¹¹¹ In this and the following passages the description of the condition is followed by recipes that would presumably address the problem.

The proximity of the two is reinforced by the uses of *πνίγω* and its derivatives outside the Hippocratic Corpus. In a passage of Aristophanes' *Nubes* (1385–1389), *πνιγόμενος* follows closely after *ἀπάγχων* as an alternative description of the callous treatment the elderly father suffers, while in Plutarch's account of Agis' fate (*Ag.* 19.6), *ἀποπνίγοντες* denotes death by hanging, as the phrase *ἐπὶ τὴν στραγγάλην πορευόμενος* (20) renders clear.¹¹² If such usages blur the distinction between *πνίγω* and (*ἀπ*)*ἄγχω*, occurrences of *πνίξ*-words in contexts where the meaning 'drown' is at issue throw into relief yet another way in which the bodies of virgins and those of mature women are alike.¹¹³ Against a model of the female body defined by the ability to absorb excess fluids, this meaning of *πνίγω* invites an association of the ill *parthenoi* who jump into wells due to the accumulated blood with the suffocating women who cannot release their menses.¹¹⁴ The same abundance of fluids in younger and older women prompts similar bodily reactions: in young girls, the urge to choose the noose (*ἀπάγγεσθαι*) or the well (drowning); in mature women the *πνίξ* that spans the distance between pain, breath-taking heat, and drowning. When prevented from releasing excess blood, the female body threatens to mirror this closure by preventing the flow of air.

The persistent association of a closed lower body with restriction of the airflow reveals another image that is crucial for unpacking the relationship between suicide by hanging and gender. For the authors of the gynaecological treatises there seems to exist an analogy, almost an identification, between the passages and orifices of the lower and upper parts of the female body. Linguistic usage certainly seems to support this suggestion; *στόμα* designates both the mouth as well as the opening of the uterus (and occasionally of the vagina), while *αὐχὴν* and *τράχηλος*, ordinarily meaning 'neck', are also used for the womb's neck.¹¹⁵ The image of the body as traversed by numerous passageways that allow the flow of humours is a common one in the Hippocratic Corpus, and is used for the representation of bodies of either sex.¹¹⁶ What is unique in the representation of women in these terms is first, the assumption of a symmetry between upper and lower passages and second, the extent to which these thoroughfares came to underlie explanations of female physiology and pathology, as well as the logic of the proposed treatments. Fertility tests, and to a lesser extent, odour therapies, are premised on the

¹¹² See also Antiph. 4.1.6 (where *πνίγων* means 'throttling'); Ar. *Ran.* 120–22 (where hanging is deemed *πνιγηράν* as a way to die).

¹¹³ Drowning: Xen. *An.* 5.7.25; Plut. *Mor. De lib. educ.* 9b.

¹¹⁴ For the association between the diseased *parthenoi*'s jump into wells and the wet nature of female flesh see Hoffmann 1992: 307.

¹¹⁵ Uterine *στόμα*: Hippoc. *Aph.* iv.552.4 (τὸ στόμα τῶν ὑστερέων); *Mul.* viii.14.9–10 (τῶν μητρέων τὸ στόμα), 42.5–6 (τῆς ὑστέρας τὸ στόμα), 92.15 (τῶν μητρέων στενοστόμων ἐουσῶν), 94.22 (αἶ τε μήτραι εὐρύστομοι). Mouth of the vagina: Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.84.23–86.1 (ὁ στόμαχος τοῦ αἰδοίου), 96.8 (τὸ στόμα τοῦ αἰδοίου). *Αὐχὴν* of the uterus: Hippoc. *Nat. Mul.* vii.340.10; *Steril.* viii.438.10; *Mul.* viii.14.14, 320.1, 338.5. *Τράχηλος*: Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.348.7. Sissa 1990a: 36, 53–70, 166–68; Hanson 1990: 326–29; King 1998: 27–28, 35, 68–69, 80.

¹¹⁶ Indiscriminately in men and women: Hippoc. *Ep.* v.76.17–78.13 (the references specifically to flows from the uterus and flows to the testicles confirm that the passages and exits already discussed are present in both men's and women's bodies); *Morb.* vii.562.6–19 (the uterus is not numbered among the body's exits). In a man: Hippoc. *Gen.* vii.470.5–6.

assumption that the passages in a female body provide an uninterrupted way extending from top to bottom.¹¹⁷ On the basis of this evidence, Manuli has hypothesised the existence, in Hippocratic imagination, of a central ‘tube’ (*hodos*) that connected nostrils and mouth to the uterus and vagina, and that would also account for the mobility of the uterus.¹¹⁸ Whether female bodies were indeed thought to possess such a *hodos* or merely the central alimentary and breathing tube common to men and women, the significance of the interconnectedness of their thoroughfares is plainly visible in every aspect of the gynaecological treatises.¹¹⁹

With this image of twin, connected passages in mind, we can argue that suffocation or a desire for hanging is intimately connected to processes and conditions specific to the female body. On several occasions, obstruction of the airflow becomes the counterpart of obstruction of the uterus and its passageways, a sympathetic response to the closure of the lower body. On the other hand, it is clear that such a response is not elicited by all and any circumstances under which the womb may close or open. The absence of a universal application of the up-and-down analogy in the Hippocratic gynaecological treatises marks the limits of what these texts can tell us about the relation of suicide by hanging to the female body. Nevertheless, this logic, limited in its operation within Hippocratic discourse, can be elaborated if transferred to the realm of Greek myth. There, the up-and-down analogy can be applied to a specific instance of upper closure—suicide by hanging—and bring together around it all the various situations in which the womb would close. As will become apparent in the exploration of specific cases from myth, expanding this logic enables the association of suicide by hanging with the various female roles, both normative and distorted, that are signalled by the body’s closure. Narrative context determines which of these roles will be highlighted and brought to bear on the gender of the hanged woman.

¹¹⁷ Fertility tests: Hippoc. *Aph.* iv.554.3–6; *Nat. mul.* vii.412.19–414.3; *Mul.* viii.332.10–13; *Steril.* viii.414.20–22, 416.3–5, 424.6–13; *Superf.* viii.488.19–490.2. Hanson (1991: 86) maintains that failure of the odours to penetrate is due to a closed uterine mouth. Even though that is sometimes the case (*Mul.* viii.322.12–14; *Steril.* viii.440.12–14), some of the passages Hanson cites (*Steril.* viii. 414.20–416.2; *Superf.* viii.488.19–490.2) support Dean-Jones’ (1994: 73 n. 104) argument that such tests often operated on the assumption that sterility could be caused by obstructed passages preventing the female seed from reaching the uterus. Odour therapies (to restore the womb to its proper location): Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* vii.316.16–17, 338.8–11, 342.18–20; *Mul.* viii.266.17–18, 268.13–17, 272.18–20, 460.11.

¹¹⁸ Manuli 1983: 157. Hanson (1991: 85–86), Dean-Jones (1994: 69–74), and King (1998: 27–28, 36–37, 72–74) all subscribe, with varying degrees of conviction, to the idea, but differ in the role they ascribe to the tube in uterine displacement. Whereas Dean-Jones and King consider the uterus capable of moving above the diaphragm, Hanson cites the proximity of passages describing movement to the head and legs respectively (*Nat. mul.* vii.392.9–20) as evidence to the contrary. However, as King (1998: 36) has pointed out, whether or not the womb did reach the head, the effects of its upward movement could be felt there (Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.266.11–14).

¹¹⁹ Dean-Jones’ (1994: 69–74) explanation of uterine movement partially obviates the need for a central tube from nostrils to vagina; she points out that those most likely to suffer from uterine displacement were women whose passages would have been widened by birth (mothers), intercourse (young widows) or long years of menstruation (older women), thus allowing the uterus to travel along the body.

Under the sign of Artemis

The above associations between hanging/suffocation and a threat to the normative idea of femaleness form a core part of the interpretative framework developed here; nevertheless, these must be complemented with evidence from other areas of thought in order to test their validity and expand the framework's applicability. As it happens, already within the Hippocratic Corpus the pathological conditions connected to hanging and suffocation are placed in a different context, one that broadens the range of interpretative possibilities and highlights the gender-subversive potential of suicide by hanging. The physician who so authoritatively prescribes marriage and pregnancy as the cure for the frenzied, suicidal *parthenoi*, also mentions what was presumably a popular rival treatment, the dedication of the cured girl's clothes to Artemis:

φρονεούσης δὲ τῆς ἀνθρώπου, τῇ Ἀρτέμιδι αἱ γυναῖκες ἄλλα τε πολλὰ καὶ τὰ ἰμάτια τὰ πολυτελέστατα καθιεροῦσι τῶν γυναικείων, κελεύόντων τῶν μάντεων ἐξαπατεώμεναι.

(Hippoc. *Virg.* viii.468.17–20)

When there is a return to the senses, women dedicate many different things to Artemis, including the most costly cloaks of the female sort, being deceived by the bidding of seers.

It is under the sign of this eternally virgin goddess that this and other images connected to suicide by hanging operate.

One such image is that of binding and loosening, which King has explored in depth in her now classical study on Artemis and Greek women.¹²⁰ As King points out, across a number of textual sources the loosening of a woman's girdle signifies sexual union (especially a virgin's defloration) and birth, both moments accompanied by the shedding of blood and presided over by Artemis.¹²¹ This is a deity whose nature teems with contradictions; she is the virgin goddess that as Artemis *Lysizōnos* or Artemis *Lochia* assists women in labour, and the nurturing figure who guides young girls to sexual maturity even as she ruthlessly punishes her companions for their sexual affairs.¹²² The paradoxical nature of Artemis inevitably impacts the outcome of these transitions, when women's status—and often their life, too—is subject to change. It is thus that some women loosen their girdle not to bleed, but to bind it around their neck, halting the process that would confirm and reinforce their female identity. In a sense, these women are assimilating themselves to the eternally paradoxical and

¹²⁰ King 1983: 109–27. See also Loraux 1995: 29.

¹²¹ King 1983: 117, 120. See also Guthrie 1950: 102–03; Burkert 1985: 150–51.

¹²² Loraux 1995: 253 n. 18: 'Is it by chance that Plato describes Artemis, the chaste goddess superintending childbirth, as *alokhos*, playing on the two values of the prefix a- (*sm 'together', a- privative)?'.

ambiguously gendered Artemis, whose connection with hanging is betrayed in the title Artemis *Apanchomenē*.¹²³

The association of Artemis with binding and loosening and women's affinity with suicide by hanging resurface in an aspect of this imagery not included in King's analysis. As poetry across a wide range of genres testifies, the loosening of the body is also the effect of two of the greatest forces that shape human life, death and *erōs*. When in the battle-ridden world of the *Iliad* 'to loosen one's limbs' is 'to cut down one's opponent', the thread connecting the limb-relaxing effect and heroic, masculine death is easy to follow.¹²⁴ In an interesting note, Loraux remarks on the frequency with which the vocabulary of knots and binding connects battle and birth scenes. According to this reading, the knot of a brutal fight in the *Iliad* resembles the sometimes evil bonds of Eileithyia that prevent childbirth; conversely, the soldier who falls on his knees once he has been overcome recalls images of women in labour, who give birth on their knees.¹²⁵

These intriguing parallels, though seemingly tracing a connection between the world of warfare and female labour, in fact serve to reinforce the present argument: to bind is to block, to prevent an act, be it childbirth or the resolution of a fight. The bound body of the hanged woman can recall pregnancy, but not birth, and in this suspended state it can never be equated to the warrior whose life ends with loosened limbs. The heroic mode of dying has no place in the women's realm, nor in the domain of a goddess defined by her status as huntress.¹²⁶ This is the space for hanging, which in binding the body preserves its integrity. Similarly, the ἔρος λυσιμελής that makes Sappho 'tremble yet again' (fr. 130 PL) is not only shunned by a deity sworn to virginity, but also very often located at the heart of the problems that mythic women seek to eliminate by resorting to the noose.¹²⁷ Against an undesirable

¹²³ Paus. 8.23.6–7. The women of Caphyae give birth to stillborn babies after the elders of the city have stoned to death the children that tied a rope around Artemis' effigy and proclaimed her strangled. The plight of the women, as well as the exoneration of the children by Pythia's oracle, create a link between Artemis, hanging, and denial of motherhood. The goddess must be acknowledged as a perpetual virgin that does not give birth, and in this case this is tantamount to her establishment in cult as *Apankhomenē*. Note that the children tie the rope around the τράχηλος of the effigy—a word denoting both the 'upper' neck and the neck of the uterus (see n. 115 above), reinforcing the link between Artemis' virginity and the symbolic hanging of her effigy. See King 1983: 118–20.

¹²⁴ For death as the loosening of the limbs: Hom. *Il.* 4.469, 5.176, 7.16, 22.335.

¹²⁵ Loraux 1995: 256–267 n. 74.

¹²⁶ Loraux (1995: 25) traces the etymological connection between the epithet *alokhos* attributed to Artemis by Plato (*Tht.* 149b) and the term *lokhos*, which can denote labour as well as 'an ambush, or an armed troop', in order to bolster her argument for childbirth as a feminine war. However, Artemis is not a goddess connected with warfare, as Loraux claims (1995: 30 n. 57); in fact, in the *Iliad*, the goddess' involvement in the Trojan War is minimal, and her unsuitability for battle is demonstrated in her humiliating confrontation with Hera (*Il.* 21.479–486). That she appears next to Ares might be coincidental, or even due to these deities' peculiar relationship with women. Ares occupied a rather marginal position in the Greek pantheon, and in Hartog's analysis (1988: 192) that might explain the custom among Spartan women of sacrificing a man in his honour.

¹²⁷ Other examples of *erōs* that loosens the limbs: Archil. fr. 195 West *IE*²; Hes. *Th.* 910–911. The translation of Sappho is from Balmer 1992: 32. For an overview of the uses of λύειν in tragedy (specifically Sophocles) that includes the connotations of death and *erōs*, see Goldhill 2012: 13–25, esp. 22–25.

and threatening force that loosens the body, women bind theirs to resist.¹²⁸ By the same token, those who, having sworn to keep their girdles and their bodies bound and tight, fail to uphold their oath, might find themselves at the extreme end of physical loosening. When Achilles Tatius (8.12) recounts the origin story of the spring Styx, he not only draws together the loosening of the erstwhile girl's girdle—and virginity (τὴν παρθενίαν ἔλυσε)—in the arms of her lover with her subsequent liquification by Artemis (εἰς ὕδωρ λύει), but invites us to overlay these images with the loose flesh of a sexually active woman and the limb-loosening desire driving her.¹²⁹

The noose that kills without infringing on the boundaries of the body, the rope that circles the neck like a hunter's snare but that requires a woman's skill at weaving, places hanging at the intersection of these two activities, as Loraux has convincingly demonstrated.¹³⁰ This peculiarity of the noose reinforces the potential of hanging as a gender-destabilising act even as it roots it more firmly in the sphere of women and their roles. Hunting is an ambiguous realm; standing in stark contrast to heroic valour and face-to-face confrontation, the hunter's stealth and cunning are methods of dubious honour. The noose, in its variations as snare or net, is always represented as an anomalous weapon, with connotations of cowardice and betrayal.¹³¹ That hunting is the realm of doubtful masculinity and treachery accords well with its position in initiation rituals that mark the entry of youths to adult life and assign to them gendered roles and status.¹³² As such, hunting becomes symbolic of transitions and in-between states, and it is no surprise that Artemis, who presides over such transitions, is the huntress par excellence.¹³³ At the other end of this spectrum of associations, we find an image of the noose as emblematic of female life. Fashioned from the clothes and other accoutrements of female dress, it is then placed around the neck, the source of female beauty and vulnerability.¹³⁴ From Antigone's σινδών (Soph. *Ant.* 1222) to the girdles of the Danaids (Aesch. *Supp.* 457) and Byblis (Conon, *Narr.* 2; Parth. *Amat. narr.* 11), nooses are woven by women, for women, with recourse to the very

¹²⁸ But see Zeitlin 1996: 219–84 (esp. 225–36) for *erōs* as a force that binds people together.

¹²⁹ Sissa (1990a: 85, 205 n. 65) briefly discusses this story in the context of ordeals involving sexuality.

¹³⁰ Loraux 1995: 109–11.

¹³¹ The use of the noose in war in the form of a lasso is described by Herodotus (7.85), but his account does not seem to have negative undertones. In tragedy, on the contrary, a snare or net is the preferred means of those relying on deception: in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the robe with which Clytemestra renders Agamemnon incapable of defending himself is described as an ἀμφίβληστρον ('casting net') (Ag. 1382; *Cho.* 492), a δίκτυον ('fishing net' or 'hunting net') (Ag. 1115; *Cho.* 999) and an ἄρκυς ('hunter's net') (Ag. 1116; *Cho.* 1000), while in Euripides' *Andromache* Orestes reassures Hermione that there is a snare awaiting Neoptolemus (995–96 μηχανὴ πεπλεγμένη | βρόχοις ἀκινήτοισιν ἔστηκεν φόνου, 'cunningly wrought trap, its snare fixed and immovable').

¹³² Vidal-Naquet 1986: 118–22.

¹³³ The epithet *chryselakatos* sometimes ascribed to Artemis (Hom. *Il.* 20.70; *Od.* 4.122; Bacchyl. 11.38; Soph. *Trach.* 636) can be translated as either 'with the gold arrow' or 'with the gold shuttle'. (Note that LSJ rejects the meaning 'with the gold arrow', citing as support the use of the epithet for other deities, such as Leto (Pind. *Nem.* 5.36) and Amphitrite (Pind. *Ol.* 6.104)). This ambivalence in meaning is only to be expected when the goddess to whom the epithet is ascribed occupies a position between the male and female realms, but it also reinforces Artemis' connection with hanging and the in-between state of the latter. The noose is a combination of weaving and hunting, and thus naturally associated with a goddess concerned with both. For Artemis, the hunt, and frontiers, see Vernant 1991: 198.

¹³⁴ Loraux 1987: 50–53.

materials that announce their femininity. A hunter's snare, a product of the feminine art of weaving, and often, an article of female clothing, the noose confirms the character of hanging as a specifically female death that nevertheless undermines conventional gender identities.¹³⁵

Connotations of suicide by hanging 1: mirroring and exaggeration

The different threads we have been following have brought to light the range of concepts underpinning the relationship between suicide by hanging and elements constitutive of the notion of femaleness. Removed, however, from their original context, and brought together to form a single, if multi-faceted, interpretative framework, these ideas inevitably undergo changes. The logic that underlies each of the connections we have traced between suicide by hanging and femaleness is developed in new directions and leads to outcomes that often transgress the boundaries of the original contexts. This is especially the case with the Hippocratic material, but also applies to the other areas of thought identified above. As we will see in the preliminary exploration of some instances of mythic suicide by hanging, in their transfer to mythic discourse these ideas are not simply mirrored, but more often exaggerated, distorted, and pushed to the limit of their logic.

It will quickly become obvious that the readings available within the proposed framework vary in the degree of conviction they carry. To a great extent, this is owing to the nature of the textual sources themselves: narratives occupying no more than a few lines in a mythographic compendium are unlikely to offer the openings for any but the most surface-level interpretative efforts. The speculative character of the conclusions reached in such situations is therefore not necessarily an indication of the limitations of the interpretative framework, but largely a consequence of the recalcitrance of the texts under consideration. A more reliable way to gauge the applicability of the model will be provided by the introduction of comparative material in the form of brief discussions on the suicides of Evadne (Eur. *Suppl.*) and Deianeira (Soph. *Trach.*). On the one hand, the encounter between the interpretative framework and other types of suicide will clearly delimit the range of its applicability; on the other hand, this patent incompatibility will encourage a better appreciation of the possibilities of this model when applied specifically to the study of suicide by hanging.

Unsurprisingly, these interpretative possibilities manifest most clearly when the proposed approach is used for longer, detailed narratives. As well as providing more footholds, as it were, they are often embedded in a cultural context that justifies the impression of these texts' engagement with many of the ideas informing the interpretative framework. There are, for example, good reasons to believe that the authors of the surviving extant Attic tragedies were familiar with contemporary medical ideas and

¹³⁵ Another virgin Olympian, Athena, is connected with weaving as patroness of this female craft: Hom. *Od.* 16.158, 20.72; Ar. *Av.* 826–31; *Gr. Anth.* 11.324. Although she seeks out the battles of men, she is, significantly, as cunning as her father and the man she champions throughout the *Odyssey* (Hom. *Od.* 13.296–97, 298–99; *Hymn. Hom. Min.* 2).

drew upon them in shaping their material.¹³⁶ This does not automatically validate the use of a model relying heavily on concepts encountered in the Hippocratic corpus, nor does it mean that the applicability of the framework is dependent on the playwrights' awareness of medical discourse; it does, however strengthen the impression that these texts are more amenable to a treatment of the type proposed here.

Despite this disparity between the sources, however, there is still much to be gained by exploring the entire range of mythic cases of female suicide by hanging that fall within the limits, chronological and other, of this thesis. Although the depth and complexity of some analyses will be limited, large numbers still allow for the emergence of patterns, which in turn serve as a backdrop to more complex individual case studies. Similarly, testing the applicability of the interpretative framework on a diverse assemblage of texts allows us to gain an understanding of the ways in which the multiple contexts—generic, chronological, etc.—in which each text is embedded enable some readings while discouraging others. At the same time, the presence of comparative cases will help maintain a balanced and rounded view of the framework's potential and provide a helpful counterpoint against which to measure the success of the framework in interpreting cases of suicide by hanging. In what follows, I will attempt to indicate the possible uses of the proposed model while highlighting the ways in which its constitutive ideas, and specifically the Hippocratic element, may be applied, and what changes they may undergo in the process.

The ambivalence, in the Hippocratic Corpus, of a closed female body, as well as the asymmetrical relationship between openness and closure, are of crucial importance when approaching individual mythic cases from the proposed perspective. Sealing the body from above, hanging can signify the inviolate body of a *parthenos* who refuses to shed the blood of defloration and childbirth. By definition, *partheneia* made permanent in death is an anomalous situation in which to find oneself; as

¹³⁶ There exists an abundance of scholarship on the relationship between Attic tragedy and contemporary medical ideas. For tragedy and medicine in general Miller's (1944) and Collinge's (1962) articles represent an early attempt at mapping the relationship of each tragedian to the medical ideas of their time. Guardasole (2000) provides detailed analyses of terminology encountered in medicine and surviving tragedies and of the possible influence of medical theory and practices on the tragedians. See also Jouanna 2012a for an exploration of the two genres' portrayal of disease and for points of contact, as well as 2012b for the more specific depiction of disease as wild and devouring in both the Hippocratics and the tragedians. The engagement of individual playwrights with the development of medical ideas has also attracted a great deal of attention. For Euripides, consult Craik 2001, whose identification of the issues inherent in such explorations is as valuable as the answers she offers, as well as Kosak 2004, who frames the points of contact between Euripides and medicine also as a window into shared 5th-century ideas on suffering and disease. Holmes (2010: 228–74) proposes to view the symptom—defined as a disruption of the self—as a node for the meeting of different, often competing interpretative frameworks in Euripides' representation of responsibility and causality. For Sophocles, see Craik 2003; Ceschi 2009; and more recently Allan 2014, who demonstrates the indispensability of disease as part of the characterisation of the suffering Sophoclean heroes. For Aeschylus, for whom the chronology of the Hippocratic corpus presents an issue, see Dumortier 1935 (whose analysis is, however, held to be largely unconvincing) and Miller (1941–42). There also exist a large number of studies focusing on individual plays, but as none of these dramas are discussed here, I have omitted the relevant scholarship from this overview of the literature on the topic.

a period of female maturity and womanly potential yet untapped by male-centred society, it is meant to be a transitional stage of short duration, quickly superseded by mature womanhood. Yet the type of *partheneia* evoked by this specific mode of dying is anomalous in another respect, too—namely, in introducing the image of a virginal body that does not menstruate. A hanged *parthenos* not only remains suspended in a liminal stage of female life, but also refuses to display the external sign of the body's ripeness for transition to adulthood. In this light, the *partheneia* of hanged women is reminiscent of the pathological condition recorded in *De virginibus morbis*, where an alarming absence of blood is explicitly paired with delayed marriage. Two cases from myth can be introduced to illustrate these connotations of suicide by hanging from different angles: for Erigone, *partheneia* in death can be interpreted as corresponding to the prospect of permanent *partheneia* in life; Arsippe's story, on the other hand, demonstrates the ability of this mode of self-killing to reinstate a condition that may be otherwise thought lost.

In the only text that preserves her story (Ap. *Bibl.* 3.147), Erigone, the daughter of Icarius, who first received the gift of wine from Dionysus, commits suicide after she discovers her father's dead body. The narrative is extremely brief, but we may attempt a closer look by cautiously articulating some reasonable hypotheses. As a young unmarried woman, Erigone must be subject to her father's authority; her dependence on him will only be replaced by dependence on another *kyrios* upon her marriage. Icarius' death can therefore be said to create a gap in the chain of men who would regulate Erigone's passage to adulthood, threatening her with prolonged or even life-long *partheneia*.¹³⁷ It is at this point that Erigone's choice to yield to grief—the text is clear at least on this—and follow her father in death could be interpreted as a confirmation of her status as *parthenos* and a proclamation of eternal loyalty to the only *kyrios* she has known, a commitment which forecloses the possibility of marriage and motherhood. However, insofar as this act of loyalty also places her forever outside the society of the mature and tamed married women, it also acquires an anomalous and threatening aspect.¹³⁸ Even in the context of a story of filial loyalty, suicide by hanging may still insinuate the spectre of the diseased *parthenoi*.

The account of the death of Arsippe (Plut. *De Fluviiis* 7.5), on the other hand, lends itself more easily to a reading within the proposed framework, as the associations of suicide by hanging and the overall thrust of the narrative seem to form a relationship of mutual reinforcement. The text presents Arsippe as a companion of Artemis, and unless she is unique among the goddess' typical followers, she may also be imagined as sharing with her youthfulness, desirability, and more importantly, an unyielding attitude towards the preservation of *partheneia*. While in the company of Artemis, Arsippe attracts the amorous attentions of Tmolus, who pursues and rapes her in the sanctuary of the goddess herself.

¹³⁷ For male intervention in women's transitions from one life-stage to another see King 1983: 111–13; 1998: 76–77.

¹³⁸ For the vocabulary of taming and ripening as used to describe female maturation see King 1998: 76–77.

Arsippe is thus inserted into a long tradition of virgin followers of Artemis who attract the unsolicited attention of a man and eventually succumb to his desire, losing their status as virgins and companions of the goddess. Contrary to these other maidens, however, Arsippe immediately takes action and hangs herself (ἡ δὲ ἄθυμία συσχεθεῖσα βρόχῳ τὸν βίον περιέγραψεν). The contrast between the noose that strangles her neck and the flow of blood in the unwanted defloration is easy enough to perceive; yet as a manner of death associated with Artemis in cult, suicide by hanging may in this context also suggest the reconciliation of the violated *parthenos* with her patron deity. The language in which the act itself is couched is quite suggestive: could we read the despondence (ἄθυμία) by which Arsippe is constrained (συσχεθεῖσα) as also being the force that holds her together (συνέχειν), preventing the complete disintegration of her identity as *παρθένος*? The text indicates that this ἄθυμία impels her to ‘draw a line around her life with a noose’; this is a literal description of the means with which Arsippe ends her life, but it can also convey the employment of a remedy that will counter the effects of rape. Faced with the loss of her *partheneia*, Arsippe draws a line (περιγράφειν),¹³⁹ a defined boundary, around the life she has led so far (βίος) through an analogous action, the placement of a looped line (a noose) around her neck. The fact that Artemis brutally punishes Tmolus rather than disavow her companion as she is wont to do in such situations similarly leaves open the possibility that Arsippe’s suicide intended, and to an extent succeeded in, the restoration of lost *partheneia*.¹⁴⁰ Hanging therefore appears as the appropriate manner of death to not only counteract (symbolically) the unwanted defloration, but also to render Arsippe a perpetual *parthenos* that, like Artemis, sheds no blood.

If suicide by hanging can recall the diseased *partheneia* of which it is a symptom, it can also operate in subtler ways to evoke a closing of the body that in Hippocratic contexts does not result in suffocation or strangulation. More specifically, hanging can introduce connotations of motherhood, as the restriction of the neck mirrors the closing of the uterus around the mingled seed of the parents. We may attempt to trace this operation by looking first at instances of suicide by hanging embedded in stories where motherhood is already a prominent concern. As a response to the real or presumed death of their respective sons, Anticleia and Althaea similarly resort to the noose. Real maternal grief is the obvious motive, yet we may mine this grief for further significance. Both women are now mothers without children, possessed of a reproductive ability without visual proof.¹⁴¹ From this angle, their

¹³⁹ Συνέχω can also mean ‘hold together’, or ‘contain’ (LSJ *s.v.*).

¹⁴⁰ The language of the text leaves the precise cause of Artemis’ displeasure unclear; the general term *πραχθεῖσιν* can refer either to the rape or the defilement of the sanctuary, or both. However, since Arsippe has taken refuge there, Tmolus’ punishment can by extension avenge the violation of her body as well as that of the sacred space. Artemis tends to abandon her followers even when the fault for the loss of *partheneia* does not lie with them, which suggests that Arsippe’s suicide was the catalyst in prompting Artemis to punish Tmolus.

¹⁴¹ Anticleia: Σ *Od.* 11.197 οὐχ ὡς οἱ νεώτεροι, ὅτι ἑαυτὴν ἀνήρτησε Ναυπλίου ψευδῶς μνηύσαντος θάνατον Ὀδυσσέως; Σ *Od.* 11.202 ὅτι οὐχ ὡς οἱ νεώτεροί φασιν αὐτὴν ἀπάξασθαι παρὰ Ναυπλίου πεπυσμένην τὴν Ὀδυσσέως τελευτήν. Althaea: Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.8.3 μετὰ δὲ τὸν Μελεάγρου θάνατον Ἀλθαία καὶ Κλεοπάτρα

suicides could also appear as a response to this unnatural situation: their sealed bodies can recall the closed pregnant bodies that marked them as mothers, providing an appropriate, if subtle, visual reminder of the reason behind their deaths.¹⁴²

However, it is important to note that transplanting this nexus of ideas from Hippocratic medicine to the context of mythic suicides does not occur without changes in the way it operates. I would like to suggest that rather than a harmless reiteration of the conditions for motherhood, suicide by hanging more easily lends itself to the role of a twofold attack on it. In resembling the neck of the uterus, the neck that is encircled by the rope evokes a blocked passage that does not allow the reception of the man's seed. Moreover, the permanence of this state implies a pregnancy without birth—an interminable closing of the body that is ultimately sterile and unproductive, because it precludes the future life-giving opening that is accompanied by the shedding of blood. From this perspective, the connotations of maternity traced in the suicides of Anticleia and Althaea can potentially become perverted. As a commitment to the sons they have lost, their suicides do not so much emphasise their condition as mothers (which would include the possibility for future motherhood) as it does their self-identification as the mothers of these specific sons. Their sealed bodies are a reminder of the trials and tribulations of pregnancy, but will never repeat the actions that brought forth their now dead children.

Partheneia and motherhood, both capable of being evoked in specific cases of suicide by hanging, stand at opposite ends of the female life cycle. Between the two emerges the figure of the wife, who, now as a widow and now as a sterile woman, partakes in the pathology of the female body. In Hippocratic gynaecology, the widow, understood as one who has not re-married, only ever appears in the company of older *parthenoi*, with whom she shares the suffering arising from uterine movement against the liver.¹⁴³ The grounds for this pairing are never made explicit, but a clue is furnished by the physician's recommendations for alleviating their gynaecological complaints—pregnancy for the widows and cohabitation for the older *parthenoi*.¹⁴⁴ Such exhortations are hardly surprising; both sex and pregnancy were thought to reduce the likelihood of uterine displacement, although the mechanics

ἐαντὰς ἀνήρησαν. One may go as far as to argue that Anticleia and Althaea assimilate *parthenoi* in their childlessness. As Sissa (1990a: 90–93; 2013: 70–87) has convincingly argued, *partheneia* was not a state that could be confirmed through the examination of specific physical signifiers. The only sure proof that a woman was no longer a virgin, save for being caught in the act, was pregnancy. For Anticleia and Althaea, who have long crossed the threshold to motherhood, the loss of their sons creates a curious situation with perverted connotations of *partheneia*.

¹⁴² It is worth noting that the status of Anticleia and Althaea as wives of Laertes and Oeneus respectively is omitted in these accounts of their deaths. The *Odyssey* itself hardly ever reminds us that Anticleia is Laertes' wife (*Od.* 15.356–57 being a notable exception); as for Althaea, both Apollodorus and Diodorus place centre stage her relationship to Meleager.

¹⁴³ Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* vii.314.14–18 (repeated in very similar terms in *Mul.* viii.272.9–13): Ἦν αἱ μήτραι πρὸς τὸ ἦπαρ ἔλωσιν [...] γίνεται δὲ τὸ τοιοῦτον πάθος παρθένοισι μάλιστα παλαιήσιν ἐούσησι καὶ χήρησιν, αἱ νέαι ἐούσαι καὶ τοκήεσσαι χηρεύουσιν.

¹⁴⁴ Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* vii.316.4–6 (found again in *Mul.* viii.274.4–5): ταῦτα ποιέειν τὴν χήρην, ἄριστον δ' ἐν γαστρὶ σχεῖν· τὴν δὲ παρθένον πεῖθειν ζυνοικῆσαι ἀνδρὶ.

through which that outcome was achieved differed somewhat in each case.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the collocation of the two groups of women, as well as the fact that pregnancy would also necessitate a new husband, allow us to deduce that for widows, too, the problem can ultimately be traced back to the fact that they have failed to engage in sexual relations at the appropriate time.

This realisation is crucial, because it allows us to insert the widow into a broader category of Hippocratic patients for whom uterine move against the liver is explicitly said to provoke suffocation. The crucial passage is found in *De mulierum affectibus*:

Ἦν δὲ πνίξι προστῆ ἐξαπίνης, γίνεται δὲ μάλιστα τῆσι μὴ συνούσησιν ἀνδράσι καὶ τῆσι γεραιτέρησι μᾶλλον ἢ τῆσι νέησι· [...] ἐπὶν κενεαγγήση καὶ ταλαιπωρήση πλέονα τῆς μαθήσιος, θερμανθεῖσαι αἱ μήτραι ὑπὸ τῆς ταλαιπωρίας στρέφονται, ἅτε κεναὶ ἐοῦσαι καὶ κοῦφαι· [...] στρεφόμεναι δὲ ἐπιβάλλουσι τῷ ἥπατι, καὶ ὁμοῦ γίνονται, καὶ ἐς τὰ ὑποχόνδρια ἐμβάλλουσι· [...] ἐπὶν δὲ ἐπιβάλωσι τῷ ἥπατι, πνίγα ποιέουσιν ἐξαπίνης ἐπιλαμβάνουσαι τὸν διάπνοον τὸν περὶ τὴν κοιλίην. [...] ἐπὶν δὲ πρὸς τῷ ἥπατι ἔωσιν αἱ μήτραι καὶ τοῖσιν ὑποχονδρίοισι, καὶ πνίγωσι, τὰ λευκὰ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἀναβάλλει [...] ἦν δὲ χρονίσωσιν αἱ μήτραι πρὸς τῷ ἥπατι καὶ τοῖσιν ὑποχονδρίοισιν, ἀποπνίγεται ἡ γυνή.

(Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.32.1–25)

If suffocation suddenly occurs, this happens mainly in women that are not having intercourse with men, and more in older women than in younger ones. [...] When a woman has empty vessels and exerts herself more than she is used to, as her uterus is warmed by the exertion, it turns to the side because it is empty and light. [...] In turning to the side (sc. the uterus) falls against the liver and comes into contact with it, and then it falls against the hypochondria. [...] On falling against the liver, the uterus immediately produces suffocation by occupying the air space around the cavity. [...] When the uterus is lying against the liver and the hypochondrium, and thereby provoking suffocation, the patient turns the whites of her eyes up [...] If a woman's uterus stays against her liver and hypochondria for a longer time, she chokes to death.

In women who, like the widows and the older *parthenoi*, are not having intercourse (τῆσι μὴ συνούσησιν ἀνδράσι), movement of the womb against the liver results in suffocation. Viewed in this light, both the predicament of the widows and the Hippocratic exhortations to become pregnant acquire added significance. Delaying the continuation of sexual relations past the appropriate time

¹⁴⁵ Male seed can prevent the uterus from wandering, as it provides the moisture the womb may be otherwise compelled to seek by attaching itself to other organs: Hippoc. *Gen.* vii.476.10–12; *Mul.* viii.14.14–16.2; Hanson 1991: 84. Given that an empty womb was more likely to turn away and move towards another part of the body (Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.14.21–16.1, 32.5–6), pregnancy could help keep it anchored in place. See also Dean-Jones 1994: 70–71; King 2013: 61–62.

risks illness, and possibly death. Underlying the prima facie medical treatment is the suggestion, more societal norm and less conscious reproach, that attachment to a dead husband can be dangerous, and therefore undesirable. This is a sentiment echoed in much of the evidence, prescriptive and otherwise, about the life of widows in various ancient Greek cities, and may also be detected in some myths figuring the deaths of women who have been deprived of a husband, either by death or by abandonment.

Let us consider the cases of Cleopatra, Meleager's wife (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.8.3), and Antigone (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.13.3), who preceded Thetis as Peleus' wife. Cleopatra resorts to the noose after Meleager's death, while Antigone's suicide is a reaction to the false news of Peleus' impending marriage to another woman. Both accounts are quite brief, making it difficult to ascertain a meaning for the women's deaths other than a display of wifely devotion; for the same reason, the contribution of the means of their suicide to that impression is hard to delineate with precision. We may nevertheless conjecture that as a reaction to scenarios of separation, suicide by hanging can draw attention to the specificity of the marriage bond: eternal closure of the body brings home the point that death makes—namely, that these women will never allow other men to access their bodies. Both the extraordinary dedication and their status (literal or virtual) as widows are subtly reinforced by the manner of death chosen. The privileging of the bond with the dead or absent husband at the expense of any other role, present or future, is perhaps better illustrated by the case of Aison's wife, Polymede. In Apollodorus' version of the myth (*Bibl.* 1.9.27), the choice to hang herself after Aison's death is framed as the other side of a decision to abandon her infant son, thus casting widowhood and motherhood as mutually exclusive roles.¹⁴⁶ The preservation of the body for the dead husband on occasion necessitates renunciation of other roles, including existing mother-child relations. One may well recall here Loraux's contention that women who choose to hang themselves are first and foremost portrayed as wives.¹⁴⁷ Although her claim is made with connection to Athenian tragedy, it seems well suited for some of the suicidal woman outside its boundaries, especially those faced with the crisis of widowhood or abandonment.

In cases such as the above, the Hippocratic framework contrives to present the woman's suicide not as a general gesture of devotion, but specifically as a concrete enactment of wifely loyalty in the form of the preservation of the wife's body for the husband. This function of the model may be brought out more clearly through a brief comparison with the case of a devoted widow who resorts to a very different suicide method. In Euripides' *Supplikes*, Evadne, the wife of Capaneus, who was among the seven generals that attacked Thebes, emerges on the scene just as her dead husband's body is

¹⁴⁶ The story goes as follows: While Jason is engaged in the quest for the Golden Fleece, Pelias, king of Iolcus and Jason's uncle, decides to put his brother Aison to death. Aison asks to be allowed to take his own life, and his wife Polymede follows him in death. The couple's orphaned son Polemarchus is subsequently killed by Pelias.

¹⁴⁷ Loraux 1987: 15, 24.

commended to the funeral pyre. After a monody, in which she recalls the happiness of her wedding day (990–999) and reveals her plan for self-immolation (1000–1029), and an exchange with her elderly father (1045–71), Evadne jumps from a rock into the fire consuming Capaneus’ corpse. Several factors contribute to render this specific case of female suicide a useful comparandum in the present context.¹⁴⁸ Evadne is a widow, and like Cleopatra in Apollodorus’ *Bibliotheca* (1.8.3), she too has lost her husband in battle; her suicide is similarly framed as the outcome of this loss (1006–07, 1040), and is attended by claims to masculine-type glory similar to those articulated in some suicides by hanging, most notably those of Cleite and Phaedra.¹⁴⁹ More importantly, however, Evadne’s death is framed in terms familiar from cases of suicide by hanging, which would seem to encourage the application of an interpretative model informed by Hippocratic gynaecology. Nevertheless, the combination of these terms with a very different self-killing method derails such an approach, demonstrating in the process how the pertinence of the proposed model for suicide by hanging also makes it unsuitable for interpreting other types of female self-killing.

To begin with, although Evadne will, strictly speaking, die in the fire lit for Capaneus, in her description of the act she foregrounds the preliminary act of jumping. What is more, she does so in terms that do not help to distinguish this leap from the one required for hanging.¹⁵⁰ In fact, at 1047 she goes so far as to characterise her impending leap a δύστηνον αιώρημα, which elsewhere signifies hanging.¹⁵¹ A further invitation to apply the Hippocratic framework developed for suicide by hanging is issued by the implicit framing of Evadne as a *parthenos* following Capaneus’ death. It is not merely that she has returned to the paternal home, or that Iphis is concerned with controlling the movements and sexuality of his widowed daughter in a manner reminiscent of real and mythic fathers of young virgins, although these elements have been enough for some to detect a ‘re-virginisation’ of

¹⁴⁸ It is also interesting that while suicide by hanging, when committed by a widow, is not always acknowledged as a sign of problematic attachment to the dead husband, Evadne’s suicide by fire certainly is: Foley 2001: 84; Toher 2001: 339; Mendelsohn 2002: 200; Frade 2006: 250, 252.

¹⁴⁹ I have omitted from the present discussion Evadne’s claim to *kleos* in association with her suicide in order to maintain focus on the applicability or not of the Hippocratic framework. A comparison with hanged women who articulate similar claims could shed more light on the connection between glory and the manner of death chosen, but is a question that cannot be answered here. It is nonetheless interesting that Evadne disappears from the play as if she never existed, while Phaedra (whose glory is by no means unanimously acknowledged by critics of the play) is awarded a measure of γενναιότης (Eur. *Hipp.* 1301), the very quality Evadne thought appropriate to herself (Eur. *Supp.* 1030 γενναίας ἀλόχοιο). For discussions of Evadne’s εὐκλεία see Montiglio 2000: 224–25; Mendelsohn 2002: 203–11; Chong-Gossard 2008: 215–16, 220–27. Some critics have also drawn attention to the way in which Evadne’s appropriation of male glory continues the problematisation of the concept already playing out in the criticism of the Seven’s expedition and of Capaneus’ hubristic behaviour: Smith 1967: 164–65; Garrison 1995: 123–25; Foley 2001: 42; Frade 2006: 250–51; Nápoli 2011: 122.

¹⁵⁰ Eur. *Supp.* 1014 ποδὸς ἄλματι (though ἄλματι is Hermann’s emendation), 1017 πηδήσασα, 1039 βέβηκε πηδήσασα, 1065 ἄσσω. Compare Eur. *Hipp.* 829 πῆδημα ἐξ Ἄδου κραιπνόν (Theseus’ description of Phaedra’s suicide by hanging), as well as the reference to the suicidal woman in each case as a bird (*Hipp.* 828 ὄρνις γὰρ ὧς τις; *Supp.* 1046 ὄρνις τις ὡσεῖ). It is true, however, that in most cases it is the act of tying a noose rather than the preliminary jump that receives emphasis in descriptions of suicide by hanging. For the relationship between the two types of leap see Loraux 1987: 18–19.

¹⁵¹ Eur. *Hel.* 353 φόνιον αιώρημα. See also the etymological connection with Iocasta’s πλεκταῖσιν αιώραισιν in Soph. *OT* 1264.

Evadne.¹⁵² More important for our present purposes is the resemblance Evadne bears to the diseased Hippocratic *parthenoi*, most notably in her derangement (1001 ἐκβαχυσσάμενα), her *erōs* for death (1040 θανεῖν ἐρῶσα), and her evident desire to hurl herself from a height (1014–18, 1065).¹⁵³

However, the direction towards which these elements are developed in the narrative thwarts any attempt at interpreting them through the framework employed so far. Leading not to a sealed body but to its complete annihilation, Evadne's leap entirely discards the opposition, so useful in cases of suicide by hanging, between the opening and the closing of the female body. Similarly, the resolution of her *partheneia* in a fiery death rather than a noose or a watery grave renders inapplicable the analogy between upper and lower regions of the body and demands an evaluation of her suicide in a different context. In effect, Evadne's jump into the fire reconciles in a single act of wifely devotion the two frameworks that suicide by hanging would keep in a state of tension: Evadne as a devoted widow and as a (diseased) *parthenos*. Instead of signifying wifely loyalty by guarding her body against invasion, Evadne mobilises the proximity of her widowhood to a renewed state of *partheneia* to re-enact her marriage, the renewed consummation of which finds expression in the language of proximity, mixing, and fusion manifest in the repeated presence of συν- composites.¹⁵⁴ In a very real sense, Evadne's suicide takes elements central in myths of suicide by hanging and turns them on their head: rather than establish her body's boundaries against the loosening force of *erōs*, her jump leads her to surrender her *partheneia* by indulging in the literal, as well as metaphorical, melting of love. At the same time, this leap becomes the means for the fiery consummation of a marriage prized above any that could come after, painting Evadne as a devoted widow. By diverting the interpretative potential of these elements towards an outcome similar, but not identical, to that of the suicides of hanged widows, Evadne's death demonstrates above all the specificity of the relationship between the Hippocratic framework and suicide by hanging. This specificity does not lie only in the fact that, in the absence of hanging itself, the presence of other clues does not suffice to usher in a Hippocratic model; it also consists in the distinct ways in which different mythical figures come to be portrayed as devoted widows. If in Evadne's case devotion takes the form of a repetition of the marriage, in instances of suicide by hanging it manifests as the preservation of that marriage through prohibiting other men's access to the wife's body.

¹⁵² Mendelsohn 2002: 201, and 200–02, 206–07. See also Dee 2015: 277.

¹⁵³ Derangement: Hippoc. *Virg.* viii.466.18–19 παράνοια ἔλαβεν. *Erōs* for death: Hippoc. *Virg.* viii.468.16–17 ἐρᾷ τοῦ θανάτου. Desire to jump: Hippoc. *Virg.* viii.468.14–15 καὶ κελεύουσιν ἄλλεσθαι καὶ καταπίπτειν ἐς τὰ φρέατα.

¹⁵⁴ Eur. *Supp.* 1030 συμμείζασσα, 1029 συντηχθείς, 1071 συμπυρουμένω. Evadne's suicide as a re-enactment of marriage has been discussed extensively: Seaford 1987: 121–22; Rehm 1994: 112–13; Garrison 1995: 122–23; Chong-Gossard 2008: 214–15; Dee 2015: 265–66. Some critics of the play see in Evadne's overtly erotic language a subversion of the ideals of marriage and procreation: Mendelsohn 2002: 200–02, 206–07; Frade 2006: 249–51.

If the widow hangs herself and turns her body's sterile closure to a sign of wifely devotion, she is not the only guise under which the wife appears among diseased women. The sterile women of the Hippocratic corpus suffer from a closure of the uterine mouth or the body's passageways that prevents them from taking up the man's seed despite regular intercourse.¹⁵⁵ Although these women are sometimes said to still be able to menstruate, the reference to sterile women alongside diseased *parthenoi* in *De virginibus morbis* spells out clearly the potential repercussions of their condition.¹⁵⁶ The common assumption, shared between Hippocratic medicine and societal norms, that under normal circumstances sex always leads to pregnancy, makes this refusal of *mixis* on the woman's part highly anomalous.¹⁵⁷ By preventing the mixing of her and the man's seed, she can be said to negate the sexual act that forms its precondition.¹⁵⁸ The hanged wife who is not widowed or abandoned thus effects a subtle separation of roles that are usually compressed if not exactly co-extensive, and divorces her status as married woman from that of mother. Nominally available and devoted to her husband, she closes her body to prevent pregnancy, and by extension, the sexual relations necessitating it. It is often as such chaste wives that suicidal women appear, as the case of Sophocles' Iocasta in Chapter 4 will demonstrate.

Examined within the framework outlined at the beginning of this chapter, mythical instances of female suicide by hanging are often seen to inflect the gender of the suicidal women with connotations of *partheneia*, motherhood, or wifely devotion. However, the move from the discourses in which these associations are traced to myth and its literary instantiations is not straightforward. These ideas, and especially the Hippocratic material, are developed in ways suggested by but not made available in their original contexts; the result is that the aspects of femaleness evoked by suicide by hanging frequently appear in an exaggerated or distorted form, threatening to undermine the very female identity they are supposed to guarantee. The destabilising potential of these associations is further demonstrated when more than one set of connotations become relevant, or when the implications of isolating one role are pushed to the limit of their logic. The following case studies help illustrate some tensions between roles and demonstrate the tentative emergence of alternative gender configurations. As previously, they are variously open to the present interpretative model, but can be particularly instructive when embedded in narrative contexts that invite its application.

¹⁵⁵ See n. 91 above.

¹⁵⁶ *Virg.* viii.470.1–2 τῶν δὲ ἡνδρωμένων γυναικῶν στεῖραι ταῦτα πάσχουσιν ('among married women, some barren ones suffer these things').

¹⁵⁷ Hom. *Od.* 11.248–50; Theocr. *Id.* 27.65–66. The various diagnoses of pathological conditions as the cause for the absence of pregnancy after intercourse exemplify the causal link between sex and conception in Hippocratic medicine. See also: Sissa 1990a: 118; Hanson 1991: 46; Sissa 2013: 72, 103–07, 115–16.

¹⁵⁸ Note that μείγνυμαι is used both for intercourse (Hippoc. *Gen.* vii. 476.9, 17, 478.9; *Mul.* viii.63.21) and for the mixing of male and female seed that creates the embryo (*Gen.* vii. 476.22–23; *Nat. puer.* vii.486.2; *Mul.* viii.63.21).

Connotations of suicide by hanging 2: conflicts

When context encourages the activation of more than one aspect of femaleness, interpretation of the resulting gender configuration is contingent on negotiating the simultaneous presence of various roles, which may appear in their traditional guise or in distorted form. Often, the issue turns on addressing the conflicts that arise owing to the fundamental incompatibility between elements of femaleness, as is the case with *partheneia* and motherhood.

A helpful case study is that of Althaea, previously encountered as an example of attachment to one's son and of the maternal status to which such attachment enables access. However, already in that context (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.8.3), and especially in the tradition recorded by Diodorus Siculus (4.34.6–7), the events leading up to Meleager's death generate a tension between Althaea's obvious role as a mother and the connotations of *partheneia* attending suicide by hanging.¹⁵⁹ In both versions, Meleager ignites his mother's hostility when he kills her brothers in a row over the Calydonian boar's hide.¹⁶⁰ Her resentment, which leads her to curse Meleager in one version and end his life in the other, indicates conflicting allegiances, as both her natal family and the *oikos* into which she has married claim her loyalty.¹⁶¹ As a mother, Althaea would probably have been considered a fully incorporated member of her new family; nevertheless, in the moment of crisis she prioritises the ties with her paternal home, embodied in this instance in her brothers. The obligations of a mother clash with a duty of loyalty normally incumbent upon an unmarried *parthenos*, and momentarily the latter triumph. And yet, Althaea only kills herself once her son is dead. The description of the death itself, succinct and unaccompanied by further explanations, seems to contribute little towards a more in-depth understanding of the texts. However, if we recall that as a bloodless death suicide by hanging can close the body in a perverse imitation of *partheneia* or even pregnancy, then there is some additional support for the argument that conflict is at the heart of the story. In this light, the generality of the term *πεπραγμένοις* that Diodorus uses to describe the reason behind Althaea's prolonged grief (4.34.7

¹⁵⁹ The interpretation of Apollodorus' version proposed here does not contradict the conclusions reached previously; however, I am arguing that awareness of the range of associations of suicide by hanging and attention to overall context can reveal a more complex picture.

¹⁶⁰ Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.8.3 ἐξελθόντος δὲ Μελεάγρου καὶ τινὰς τῶν Θεστίου παίδων φονεύσαντος Ἀλθαίαν ἀράσασθαι κατ' αὐτοῦ ('and when Meleager had sallied out and slain some of the sons of Thestius, Althaea cursed him'); Diod. Sic. 4.34.7 ὕστερον δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ φόνοῦ τῶν ἀδελφῶν παροξυνθεῖσαν κατακαῦσαι τὸν δαυλὸν καὶ τῷ Μελεάγρῳ τῆς τελευτῆς αἰτίαν καταστήναι ('afterward, however, being deeply distressed at the murder of her brothers, she burned the brand and so made herself the cause of the death of Meleager')

¹⁶¹ For Murnaghan (1992), Althaea is one of the mythic mothers who represent the archaic belief of a mother's responsibility for her son's mortality. In that light, putting the brand that is tied to Meleager's life in the fire is an act that mirrors birth and fortifies Althaea's maternal status. However, although otherwise brilliant, Murnaghan's study overlooks the motivation behind Althaea's actions and the impact of Meleager's death on her maternal status, both of which undermine her claims to motherhood. Perhaps Vernant's comment (1983: 134) on stories featuring a firebrand is more appropriate to the present situation. If, as he argues, the presence of such elements aims to render the mother redundant by envisioning the birth of a son out of a spark from the paternal hearth, Althaea's maternity is compromised from the beginning. Burning the brand may thus be viewed as an attempt to reclaim the maternal role, while at the same time the ambivalence of hanging keeps alive the threat of its deprivation.

ἀεὶ δὲ μᾶλλον ἐπὶ τοῖς πεπραγμένοις λυπουμένη) and eventual death is perhaps not without significance. Vague as it is, it would be a rather clumsy way to describe a specific event in the narrative and leaves open the possibility that it is the combination of these events—the murder of Althaea’s brothers and the condemnation of Meleager—that eventually prompts Althaea to take her life. If such an interpretation is possible, then her suicide becomes almost a balancing act that maintains, instead of resolving, the tension between the loyalty of an unmarried daughter and the grief of a mother.

Further examples of unresolved tensions are furnished by myths where we can detect an abortive transition from *parthenos* to wife. Plutarch is our source for two mythic women who attempt this transition, Ariadne (*Th.* 20) and Callirrhoe (*Para.* 311b–c). In their broad outline, the myths are remarkably similar: rejection or abandonment by their respective lovers prompts the heroines to end their lives by hanging themselves.¹⁶² The resemblance of this situation to the narrative of the loyal wife who follows her husband in death is obvious, and partially casts Ariadne and Callirrhoe in the same mould. Nevertheless, the similarities end there. Neither woman appears to be holding the position of legitimate wife: Ariadne has likely sailed away without Minos’ approval, and Callirrhoe’s generous offer of help to Diomedes has failed to secure his affections. Their situation is closer to the hidden *gamoi* in which Sissa has demonstrated unmarried women secretly engaged, while keeping the external appearance of a *parthenos*.¹⁶³ If the relationships of Ariadne and Callirrhoe are indeed following the pattern of these illicit pre-marital sexual encounters, then upon abandonment the young women are caught in a no man’s land, unable to call themselves wives, yet no longer truly *parthenoi*. As was the case with Althaea, the almost epigrammatic statement of their self-inflicted deaths resists attempts at bringing their suicides to bear on the import of the narrative or the reasons for the women’s distressing situation. To the extent, however, that both *partheneia* and wifely loyalty are within the range of meanings hanging can evoke, it emerges as an appropriate suicide method that quietly mirrors the roles these women failed to reconcile.

Althaea, Ariadne, and Callirrhoe indicate some of the tensions that can arise when incompatible female roles are simultaneously evoked and brought to bear on the gender of the hanged woman. The cases of Deianeira and Oenone, on the other hand, offer a glimpse of the disquieting effects that pursuing to the extreme one role may have. Poised as stories of disastrous possessive love, they pair

¹⁶² The account of Ariadne’s death is very succinct, and constitutes yet another variation on the events connected to Theseus’ career. It is therefore difficult to establish whether her suicide occurred after she and Theseus had sailed from Crete together (19.1), or after Theseus had successfully beaten a Cretan general in an athletic competition (19.3); it could have been mentioned independently of either. Only the immediately obvious motive can be ascertained—namely, desertion by her lover. Callirrhoe was, according to Ps.-Plutarch, the daughter of the king of Libya, where Diomedes landed after the sack of Troy. Callirrhoe fell in love with him and helped him escape, frustrating her father’s plan to sacrifice Diomedes to Ares. Diomedes showed himself ungrateful by sailing away, at which point Callirrhoe hanged herself.

¹⁶³ Sissa 1990a: 93–99.

wifely devotion with female vengefulness, and end with the demise of both husband and wife. In doing so, however, they inadvertently bestow a measure of success on the betrayed women, insofar as their wayward husbands pay with their lives for their infidelity. The wifely devotion displayed by Deianeira and Oenone is so extreme as to, quite paradoxically, make similar demands on the part of the husband, eventually casting doubt on the potential of fidelity to act as a marker of the female within the context of these narratives. It is this insistence on the status of wife and the unexpected results to which it may lead that the chosen mode of death for Deianeira and Oenone can be seen to highlight.

The accounts of Oenone's suicide (Conon, *Narr.* 23.1–3; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.12.6) and the single surviving record of Deianeira's hanging (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.7.7) concur that the events leading up to their deaths are set in motion by their respective husbands' infidelity.¹⁶⁴ Where Deianeira is apprehensive of Iole and Heracles' fascination with her, Oenone has already been replaced by Helen as Paris' wife. This display of disloyalty is met either with withdrawal of the assistance a wife is expected to provide (Oenone) or with an attempt to override the husband's will in order to secure his love (Deianeira).

ὔστερον δ' Ἀλέξανδρος ἐν τῇ πρὸς Ἀχαιοὺς ὑπὲρ Τροίας μάχῃ τρωθεὶς ὑπὸ Φιλοκτῆτου καὶ δεινῶς ἔχων δι' ἀπήνης ἐκομίζετο πρὸς τὴν Ἴδην· καὶ προεκπέμψας κήρυκα ἐδεῖτο Οἰνῶνης· ἡ δὲ ὑβριστικῶς μάλα τὸν κήρυκα διωσαμένη πρὸς Ἑλένην ἰέναι Ἀλέξανδρον ἐξωνείδιζε. καὶ Ἀλέξανδρος μὲν κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ τραύματος τελευτᾷ.

(Conon, *Narr.* 23.3)

Later Alexandros was wounded by Philoctetes in the battle against the Achaeans for Troy and being in critical condition was brought by wagon to Mt. Ida, and sending ahead a herald entreated Oinone. But she very arrogantly rebuffed the herald and cast it in Alexandros' teeth that he should go to Helen. And Alexandros dies of his wounds on the road.

τὸν δὲ Ἑλένην ἐκ Σπάρτης ἀρπάσαι, πολεμουμένης δὲ Τροίας τοξευθέντα [...] πρὸς Οἰνῶνην ἐπανελεῖν εἰς Ἴδην. ἡ δὲ μνησικακοῦσα θεραπεύσειν οὐκ ἔφη.

(Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.12.6)

When he had carried off Helen from Sparta and Troy was besieged, he was shot [...] and went back to Oenone on Ida. But she, nursing her grievance, refused to heal him.

¹⁶⁴ The version of Oenone's story found in Parthenius follows these two accounts very closely, but does not specify the manner of Oenone's suicide (*Narr.* 4.7 διεχρήσατο ἑαυτήν, 'put an end to her own life').

παρὰ δὲ τούτου τὰ περὶ τὴν Ἰόλην Δηϊάνειρα πυθομένη, καὶ δείσασα μὴ ἐκείνην μᾶλλον ἀγαπήσει, νομίσασα ταῖς ἀληθείαις φίλτρον εἶναι τὸ ῥυὲν αἷμα Νέσσου, τούτῳ τὸν χιτῶνα ἔχρισεν. ἐνδύς δὲ Ἡρακλῆς ἔθυσεν.

(Apollo. *Bibl.* 2.7.7)

From him Deianeira learned about Iole, and fearing that Hercules might love that damsel more than herself, she supposed that the spilt blood of Nessus was in truth a love-charm, and with it she smeared the tunic. So Hercules put it on and proceeded to offer sacrifice.

Both actions are motivated by a sense of betrayal arising from unremitting, unrequited marital love, but are also partially underlaid by what such devotion may generate—namely, an implicit assumption that fidelity is also a duty to, and not only of, the wife. Deianeira's reaction to the events and Oenone's change of heart suggest that eventually, wifely devotion overrides such a desire for mutual loyalty and continues to operate as a marker of gender. However, if we can imagine for a moment that the sequence of events is not simply dictated by the desire for a straightforward narrative, but contributes something to the meaning, then it may be seen to undermine this certainty: regret comes too late, forcing Paris and Heracles to undergo the experiences specifically intended to redress the imbalance in loyalty within the couples.

τὴν δὲ μήπω πεπυσμένην τὴν τελευτὴν μετὰμελος ὁμως δεινὸς εἶχε, καὶ δραναμένη τῆς πόας ἔθει φθάσαι ἐπειγομένη. ὥς δ' ἔμαθε παρὰ τοῦ κήρυκος ὅτι τεθνήκοι καὶ ὅτι αὐτὴ αὐτὸν ἀνήρηκεν [...] τῷ δὲ Ἀλεξάνδρου νεκρῷ περιχυθεῖσα καὶ πολλὰ τὸν κοινὸν αμφοῖν καταμεμγαμένη δαίμονα ἑαυτὴν ἀνήρτησε τῇ ζώνῃ.

(Conon, *Narr.* 23.3)

But she, not yet having learned of his end, was seized by a terrible feeling of regret, and after plucking a herb raced to arrive in time. When she learned from the herald that he was dead and that she herself had killed him [...] embracing Alexandros' corpse and blaming their common misfortune at length, she hanged herself with her belt.

Ἀλέξανδρος μὲν οὖν εἰς Τροίαν κοιμζόμενος ἐτελεύτα, Οἰνώνη δὲ μετανοήσασα τὰ πρὸς θεραπείαν φάρμακα ἔφερε, καὶ καταλαβοῦσα αὐτὸν νεκρὸν ἑαυτὴν ἀνήρτησεν.

(Apollo. *Bibl.* 3.12.6)

So Alexander was carried to Troy and died. But Oenone repented, and brought the healing drugs; and finding him dead she hanged herself.

ὥς δὲ θερμανθέντος τοῦ χιτῶνος ὁ τῆς ὕδρας ἰὸς τὸν χρῶτα ἔσηπε τὸν μὲν Λίχαν τῶν ποδῶν ἀράμενος κατηκόντισεν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰβοιωτίας, τὸν δὲ χιτῶνα ἀπέσπα προσπεφυκότα τῷ σώματι:

συναπεσπῶντο δὲ καὶ αἱ σάρκες αὐτοῦ. τοιαύτη συμφορᾶ κατασχεθεὶς εἰς Τραχίνα ἐπὶ νεῶς κομίζεται. Δηιάνειρα δὲ αἰσθομένη τὸ γεγονός ἐαυτὴν ἀνήρτησεν.

(Apollo. *Bibl.* 2.7.7)

But no sooner was the tunic warmed than the poison of the hydra began to corrode his skin; and on that he lifted Lichas by the feet, hurled him down from the headland, and tore off the tunic, which clung to his body, so that his flesh was torn away with it. In such a sad plight he was carried on shipboard to Trachis: and Deianeira, on learning what had happened, hanged herself.

In this light, Deianeira's and Oenone's deaths, which highlight their status as devoted widows, could also introduce doubts as to the suitability of such an appellation for them.¹⁶⁵ Over the course of the narratives, the role of marital fidelity as a feature of wifeness comes to be questioned, and cannot be entirely depended upon to signify a clearly designated female identity. Their suicides, though not radically reconfiguring their gender, destabilise one of the main features of normative femaleness even as they bring it to the forefront.

If this destabilisation is the result of actions not entirely intentional, Deianeira's narrative could potentially also be approached from an angle that highlights the possibility of conscious manipulation of some of hanging's connotations. Such an interpretation rests on unpicking a series of assumptions that the narrative does not immediately invite us to question; nevertheless, it can at least be accommodated within its boundaries, even if concrete evidence in its support is not furnished by the text. The parallel reading of Oenone's and Deianeira's stories was premised on accepting that the γεγονός that Deianeira apprehends before committing suicide is the harm she inflicted on Heracles, as well as the assumption that this γεγονός causes her grief and regret. Γεγονός is a common term, appropriate to the present context, and it is therefore hard to argue that its use is intended to introduce deliberate ambiguity. By the same token, however, it cannot be rid of a certain vagueness, which, inadvertently or not, casts doubt on Deianeira's presentation as a devoted, if misguided, wife. Heracles' suffering in the poisoned χιτών, his murder of the herald that conveyed it, and his impending return to Trachis are three events each of which could be designated as the γεγονός Deianeira learned. Each of these alternatives would be more likely to generate fear rather than sorrow,

¹⁶⁵ Conon devotes a substantial part of his account to Oenone's and Paris' son, Corythus (23.1–2). He was sent by his mother to attend Helen and arouse the jealousy of Paris, who subsequently killed him. Even though his death is explicitly mentioned as one of Oenone's motives in cursing Paris, her suicide only occurs after the latter's death. The phrase πολλά τὸν κοινὸν ἀμφοῖν καταμειψαμένη δαίμονα potentially allows Corythus' demise to be admitted as a consideration; Paris' own death would then signify for Oenone the loss of the last intelligible position in life. If this interpretation is accepted, connotations of motherhood must be present in Oenone's suicide, but her status as wife seems to receive precedence (note also the temporal clause ὡς δ' ἔμαθε παρὰ τοῦ κήρυκος ὅτι τεθνήκει καὶ ὅτι αὐτὴ αὐτὸν ἀνήρτηκεν ἐκεῖνον before the statement ἐαυτὴν ἀνήρτησε τῆ ζώνῃ).

and even more so if all of them were encompassed under the single label of ‘what had happened’. If Deianeira’s motivation is fear, then her suicide becomes a flight from punishment and the husband who has the power to administer it. Could the import of her suicide shift to accommodate such a scenario? To the extent that it is associated with both aspects of the diseased Hippocratic wife (widow and sterile wife), hanging may conspire to support Deianeira’s self-presentation as a devoted widow who is, in reality, unavailable to the husband she wishes to escape, and thus more like the sterile woman. Such an approach to the narrative would admittedly require reading against the grain of the text, which is in any case too short to encourage any line of interpretation that depends on secure textual indications. Insofar as the ambiguity remains, Deianeira’s motives and the significance of her suicide must by necessity also remain open to speculation.

The tentativeness, echoed elsewhere, with which the observations on Deianeira’s gender are articulated, viewed alongside the application of the interpretative model to a range of sources, may create an impression of the proposed framework as a rather bland tool that offers some insights but cannot interrogate the narratives further. A useful way in which to demonstrate both its suitability for approaching suicide by hanging and its limitations as an explanatory model for the phenomenon of female self-killing in general is to turn to cases where other suicide methods are employed. The case of Deianeira is particularly appropriate for introducing such comparative material, as the canonical version of the myth, which presents many similarities with the plot outlined in Apollodorus, dictates that she die by the sword. I will therefore briefly discuss Deianeira’s suicide by stabbing in Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* to demonstrate the inability of the present framework to uncover its gendered implications, and will offer a necessarily incomplete, but instructive, interpretation of her death drawing on a different approach.

The primary obstacle to using the present framework for another type of suicide is that this model is premised on the fact that, in myth, hanging is an *exclusively female* suicide method. Starting from this exclusive affiliation, it brings together many of the cultural ideas that may have enabled and consolidated that connection. By contrast, suicide by stabbing, despite its uneven distribution between mythical men and women,¹⁶⁶ is employed by both; its gendered connotations, such as they may be, must be sought further afield, and their pertinence will need to be evaluated in conjunction with other elements of the narrative. We may attempt to establish some of these connotations by turning first to the type of death most resembling suicide by stabbing—namely, death on the battlefield. The masculine veneer that this connection lends to suicide by stabbing is arguably also present in

¹⁶⁶ Calculations based on the data gathered by Garrison in her catalogues of mythic male (2001) and female (2000) suicides show that men are indeed over-represented in this mode of dying, but only barely: among 21 cases of male suicide, 6 are unequivocally perpetuated by cutting or stabbing (28.5%), whereas for women, this method accounts for 10 out of 36 cases (27.7%). The percentages have been calculated on the basis of the assumption that different versions of a figure’s death count as different cases, whereas multiple accounts of the same suicide method for the same mythic man or woman constitute one and the same case.

Deianeira's death. On the lexical level, the Nurse's description of herself as παραστάτις (889) to her suicidal mistress, and the use of the phrase ἐξ ἀκινήτου ποδός (875) for Deianeira's exit from life strongly suggest, as Loraux has already noted, an image of Deianeira as a hoplite who dies while standing her ground in battle.¹⁶⁷ Within the broader framework of the play, this impression is reinforced by the marked contrast between the feminising effect of Heracles' suffering, which he admits himself,¹⁶⁸ and Deianeira's choice of a sword to dispose of her life, the very instrument which Heracles sees fit to put a noble end to his torture.¹⁶⁹ The exclusive association with distorted female roles that suicide by hanging displayed has given way to a no less transgressive, but qualitatively different, blending of femaleness with masculine traits.

This connection between suicide by stabbing and death in battle has already made clear that certain key elements of the framework applied to suicide by hanging are incompatible with Deianeira's death in the *Trachiniae*. In the world of hoplite battle and its values, neither the female cunning associated with traps and nets nor Artemis have a place. What about the Hippocratic material, however? Can other aspects of suicide by stabbing render the Hippocratic ideas utilised so far relevant to Deianeira's suicide? The first problem one encounters is the absence, in the Hippocratic Corpus, of suicide by stabbing as an occurrence attributable to gendered bodily functions. Two brief mentions of instances where people have cut their throats (*Carn.* viii.608.16–17 and *Epid.* v.230.4–5) are devoid of information on the motives or surrounding circumstances, and the discussions on wounds inflicted by weapons, mostly in the treatise *De capitis vulneribus*, at best simply corroborate their connection with the principally masculine realm of violent conflict.¹⁷⁰ The closest parallels to be found are the discussions on the open, bleeding bodies of women in the gynaecological treatises, where the situations involved include defloration, menstruation, and childbirth, as well as the various pathological red fluxes.¹⁷¹

The possibility that a different, albeit related, portion of the Corpus' gynaecological material could be brought to bear on the interpretation of suicide by stabbing should be examined with caution. To

¹⁶⁷ Loraux 1987: 20; 1995: 41, 264 n. 168. However, in her analysis (1995: 28–41) the analogy between childbirth and battle for which she argues qualifies the masculine character of Deianeira's death, as does the infliction of the wound on the left, the feminine side, of the body (1987: 55). The impression that this suicide method is more appropriate to men is also conveyed by the Chorus's surprised question to the Nurse: 898 καὶ ταῦτ' ἔτλη τις χεῖρ γυναικεία κτίσαι; See also Garrison 1995: 62–63. For an expression of the hoplite ideal as standing one's ground in battle see for example Tyrtaeus fr. 10 West *IE*².

¹⁶⁸ Soph. *Trach.* 1071–72 ὅστις ὅστε παρθένος | βέβρυχα κλαίων, 1075 νῦν δ' ἐκ τοιούτου θῆλυς ἠῶρημαι τάλας. See also the scene of revelation that is evocative of the bride's ἀνακαλυπτήρια: 1078–79 δείξω γὰρ τάδ' ἐκ καλυμμάτων. | ἰδοῦ, θεᾶσθε πάντες ἄθλιον δέμας. Sorum 1978: 65–66; Pozzi 1994: 584; Segal 1995: 85; Cuny 2002: 73; López Férez 2007: 137; Hernández Muñoz 2014: 64–65. But see Segal 1995: 74–75 for the shared femininity of Deianeira's and Heracles' deaths.

¹⁶⁹ Soph. *Trach.* 1032–34.

¹⁷⁰ See for example Hippoc. *VC* iii.212.6–11, 214.17–216.5.

¹⁷¹ For a discussion of Hippocratic explanations for the appearance of blood upon a girl's first sexual encounter see Dean-Jones 1994: 50–53. The lochial flow was considered as consisting of the menstrual blood not consumed by the foetus during the early stages of pregnancy. See Dean-Jones 1994: 213–14; King 1998: 90.

begin with, there is clearly a difference between the ‘natural’ flow of blood from the ordinarily open female body and the bleeding occasioned by a violation of the body’s boundaries.¹⁷² In addition, the analogy between upper and lower areas of the female body, which was instrumental for connecting suicide by hanging with the roles and conditions signalled by the opening and closing of the womb, is inapplicable here. Deianeira stabs herself *πλευρὰν ὑφ’ ἧπαρ καὶ φρένας* (931), and although the part of the body chosen for delivering the deathly blow can be telling, it nevertheless renders the up-and-down analogy useless. In fact, in cases of suicide by stabbing it is perhaps more useful to avoid tying to Hippocratic discourse the situations where female blood may flow, the evocation of which may fare better outside Hippocratic boundaries: connotations of defloration, for example, are premised on a presumed analogy between the penetration of the skin by the sword and the breach of the female body. Such an analogy could be impaired by Hippocratic thinking, in which the hymen is not an ordinary occurrence, but rather a pathological growth.¹⁷³

What are the implications of these limitations for an interpretation of Deianeira’s suicide in the *Trachiniae*? I would argue that as well as the association with death in battle, some of the elements connecting suicide by stabbing with functions of the female body may also be of use in this specific occasion. These associations need not be viewed as derived from specifically Hippocratic contexts, but rather as being easily available to popular imagination. Partly as a result of this, the situations evoked are not necessarily pathological or distorted, but may simply signify normative aspects of femaleness. This is not to say that these associations are always present as part of a network of ideas

¹⁷² A point of contact between the two otherwise distinct types of bleeding is presented by sacrifice. Apart from the obvious similarities in the use of swords/daggers and the flow of blood, suicide by stabbing also approaches sacrifice through the use of *σφάζω* and its derivatives (see Loraux 1987: 13–14). For their part, the gynaecological treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus occasionally assimilate menstrual blood or the lochial flow to the blood of sacrificed animals (*Mul.* viii.30.16–17, 152.6; see King 1998: 88–98 for an excellent detailed analysis of the connections between female anatomy and physiology and sacrifice.) However, the *Trachiniae* does not appear to make use of such connections: Deianeira’s death is not at any point cast as a sacrificial act, nor does the text mention the blood flowing from her wound. Carawan’s (2000: 219 and n. 76) contention that Deianeira ‘makes of herself a sacrifice for vindication’ is based on the fact that she calls on her *daimôn* some time before her suicide, an act he considers similar to Ajax’s invocation of various deities in *Soph. Ajax* 831–44. However, it is hard to see how Deianeira calling upon her daemon as she roams the house (*Soph. Trach.* 910) is equivalent to Ajax’s specific and detailed pleas to Zeus, Hermes, and the Erinyes.

¹⁷³ The images and vocabulary from literature that Hanson (1990: 309–38) identifies as evidencing a concept of the *parthenos*’ body in possession of a ‘stopper’ serve to illustrate this point rather than support the contention that the Hippocratics entertained the idea of a hymen. However, the analogy between the two types of penetration discussed above may be maintained if we consider that, in Hippocratic thinking, the body of a *parthenos*, being more compact and possessing narrower passages than that of a mature woman, would be ‘broken down’, its flesh softened and its passages widened, by a series of processes among which sexual intercourse was the first. For the hymen as a pathological growth see *Hippoc. Nat. mul.* vii.402.6–8; *Mul.* viii.58.15–17; *Steril.* viii.432.4–5. In these passages, however, the membrane is supposed to be located at the entrance of the uterus, and would therefore not be involved in defloration in any case. Perhaps more indicative of Hippocratic beliefs around the hymen is a passage in *De superfetatione* (viii.504.20–506.4), where the cure for alleviating a *parthenos*’ problems at menarche involves an invasive process that would have been impossible if a vaginal membrane was considered a natural part of the *parthenos*’ body. For a rigorous examination of Hippocratic ideas around *partheueia* and the (absence of) the hymen, see Sissa 1990a: 115–17, 121–23; 1990b; 2013.

surrounding suicide by stabbing; existing as they do at a greater remove from this mode of dying than, for instance, death in battle, they may not always be pertinent to the specific case at hand.

Nevertheless, as I will show below, the framing of Deianeira's death in the *Trachiniae* invites the introduction of these associations, which help render more clearly the gendered implications of her suicide.

We have already established that Deianeira dies a masculine death; however, the outcome of her suicide and the rationale behind it strongly suggest that, paradoxically, this masculine death enables her to recover conventional female roles. Briefly stated, Deianeira's motives for killing herself may be summarised as a desire to reinstate herself in the positions of wife and mother from which Hyllus' accusations have ejected her.¹⁷⁴ Although her desire to be a wife is the more widely acknowledged of the two,¹⁷⁵ the success of this endeavour is also highly debated; after all, the spouses die in separate beds, and Heracles has no words of recognition, let alone of affection, for Deianeira, even after being informed of her tragic circumstances.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, this aspect of her suicide merits further consideration, not only because the rift that remains between the spouses does not negate the intent of Deianeira's suicide, but also because, as we will see below, the appearance of Hyllus in the bedchamber provides the unconventional means for Deianeira's restoration to her position as wife.

Having been stripped of this role after Hyllus' denunciations, Deianeira cannot reclaim it merely by behaving in the manner of a devoted wife—and she certainly does;¹⁷⁷ she must also re-enact the key event that marked her ascension to that status—namely, the wedding night. It is worth remembering here that for Deianeira, marriage and sexuality have been inextricably entwined; the threat Iole presented to her marriage was articulated in terms of the young girl's participation in the sexual life of the married couple.¹⁷⁸ Viewed in this light, the actions of Deianeira before and during her suicide

¹⁷⁴ Deianeira's motives for killing herself have been variously interpreted. Many commentators attribute her suicide to love for Heracles and overwhelming guilt or sorrow at having caused his death: Kirkwood 1941: 205–07; Musurillo 1961: 381–82; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 80; Segal 1981: 78; Ryzman 1991: 396. However, some critics have, I believe rightly, identified Hyllus' accusations as at least a contributing factor, if not the main motive, for Deianeira's suicide: Loraux 1987: 23; 1995: 42; Scott 1997: 47; Carawan 2000: 216–17; Hernández Muñoz 2014: 60–61. Hyllus denounces Deianeira as his mother (733–35, 817–19), but is motivated to do so because she has maltreated his father (e.g. 739–40, 806–07) (see also Lawrence 1978: 299). The obvious implication is that she is not worthy to be his mother because she has been a bad wife, but there is more to it. As will be discussed below (pp. 80–81) Hyllus consistently refers to Heracles and Deianeira in terms of his relationship to them, even when the context would warrant a focus on the relationship of the spouses. It is as if he is incapable of articulating their marriage in a way that would not be mediated through his role as their son. Perhaps this is an inescapable result of Hyllus' position as the only member of his family that speaks both to Heracles and Deianeira and that forms a link between the two spouses. See Hernández Muñoz 2014: 56, 58.

¹⁷⁵ Musurillo 1961: 380; Easterling 1968: 66–67; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 80–81, 81 n. 28; Garrison 1995: 63–64; Hernández Muñoz 2014: 60.

¹⁷⁶ Segal 1981: 102; Seaford 1986: 58; Loraux 1987: 25.

¹⁷⁷ Kirkwood 1941: 207. The resemblance of her behaviour in the palace to that of Alcestis before her death has not gone unnoticed: Davies 1991: 213–15; Carawan 2000: 218; Morwood 2008: 29.

¹⁷⁸ The precise nature of the threat that Deianeira perceives Iole to pose to her and her marriage is somewhat debated. Most critics of the play acknowledge that Deianeira must be experiencing a mixture of sexual jealousy

acquire added significance: the address to the Heracles' bed as λέχη τε καὶ νυμφεῖ[α] (920), the evocative undressing of the body (924 λύει τὸν αὐτῆς πέπλον) and the penetration by the sword (930–31 ἀμφιπλήγι φασγάνῳ [...] πεπληγμένην) are not suggestive merely of a sexual union with Heracles, but more specifically evocative of defloration.¹⁷⁹ The loaded act is accomplished in a room and on a couch emphatically said to belong to Heracles alone (913 τὸν Ἡράκλειον θάλαμον, 915–16 δεμνίσις | τοῖς Ἡρακλείοις)—that is, to the master of the house prior to the introduction of the wife that will share them. Other elements preceding the retreat to the bedchamber, such as the allusion, effected by ἐρήμη (905), to Deianeira's past status as an unmarried girl (530 ὥστε πόρτις ἐρήμα), or the repetition, later, of βρυχᾶτο (904) for Heracles qua *parthenos* (1072 βέβρυχα), strengthen the impression that the suicide as a sexual act becomes specifically the consummation of a marriage.¹⁸⁰ This Deianeira is very different from Apollodorus' one, who rushes to close her body in a display of devotion or fear. The Deianeira of Sophocles has been expelled from her previous position as wife, and must therefore enter this state anew; with its associations of sterility and closure, hanging can preserve the wife's status when that has already been achieved, but is of no use to a woman who, as is the case in *Trachiniae*, seeks entry into the role.

If Deianeira must strive to become Heracles' wife once more, she must also become worthy of the name of mother, of which Hyllus would have her deprived.¹⁸¹ Can her suicide serve that end? Here we encounter again the importance of the region of the body attacked, as well as the unsuitability of a model premised on the sympathetic relation between neck and womb. When Deianeira stabs herself, she strikes her side, underneath the diaphragm and the liver. The πλευρά is a frequent target for suicides,¹⁸² but for our purposes the significance lies with the liver, or, more specifically, the place beneath it, where, as the mothers comprising the Chorus of Euripides' *Supplikes* bewail, they carried

and indignation at the blatant disregard of the rights of the wife in her own house, but can vary in the degree of importance they allocate to each. For an emphasis on Deianeira's concern with her position in the house see Carawan 2000. For *erōs* for Heracles and sexual jealousy see Easterling 1968: 66; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 80; Foley 2001: 94–95. For approaches that attribute more or less equal importance to both elements see Garrison 1995: 62; Scott 1997: 35–36; López Férez 2007: 108, 110–11. I would argue for an approach to the issue of Deianeira's reaction to Iole's introduction that does not treat the two concerns identified above as distinct. The recurrence of terms in connection to Iole that suggest marriage (428 and 429 δάμαρτα, 536 ἐξευγμένην, 551 ἀνήρ (the juxtaposition with πόσις may be intended to highlight the equivalence of their positions, but see Davies 1991: 154–55 for a different position and a summary of interpretations)), combined with the situations that Deianeira's imagination paints (539–40, 545–46), indicate that the problem cannot be viewed in terms of sexual jealousy *or* preoccupation with the status of wife. Rather, it lies with the fact that the young woman will be sharing with Deianeira the role of wife by participating specifically in the sexual aspect of her marriage. The sexual relationship between Iole and Heracles will be of precisely the same type, indeed a part of, the one between Heracles and his legitimate wife, Deianeira. A similar understanding has been advanced by Segal 1981: 75–76.

¹⁷⁹ Segal 1981: 77 explicitly calls it a 're-enactment of her wedding night'. See also Segal 1995: 74–75; Hernández Muñoz 2014: 60.

¹⁸⁰ For these points see Seaford 1986: 58. His approach justifies the preference for the transmitted ἐρήμη (905) over Nauck's emendation to ἐρήμοι.

¹⁸¹ Soph. *Trach.* 733–36, 817–19.

¹⁸² Both Ajax and Haemon choose that site to plunge their swords. For the significance of the word πλευρά in the *Trachiniae* see Easterling 1968: 67; Loraux 1995: 263 n. 157; Esposito 1997: 27–28.

their now dead children.¹⁸³ Deianeira opens her body precisely at that point, and shortly afterwards, her son emerges into the room, remorseful and readily admitting her back into his affections. The sequence is suggestive; her suicide restores her relationship with Hyllus, who as a result is willing to be her son again.¹⁸⁴

However, upon closer inspection the roles of wife and mother start merging uncomfortably. By opening her body Deianeira is not only attempting to reclaim her role as wife, but also indicating her readiness to be given over to another *kyrios* as per Heracles' wishes. It is the same obedient resignation she displayed when she mentioned Heracles' arrangements for her dowry should he fail to return (161–62). Indeed, Heracles' successor soon appears, and it is none other than Hyllus, the son who will subsequently step into his father's place. The semi-incestuous character of Hyllus' actions over his mother's body has already been noted,¹⁸⁵ and the impression that a marriage/sexual union is hinted at is compounded by the fact that Hyllus will be commanded to wed Heracles' other (intended) wife, Iole.¹⁸⁶ If Deianeira's suicide was not enough to regain the affection and acknowledgement of her husband, it has at least summoned to her side—literally and metaphorically—the man who is his heir and who lies next to her on the couch he will inherit.

The spilling over of motherhood into marriage and vice versa is not, however, as in suicide by hanging, a possibility always lurking in the background when suicide by stabbing is at issue. In the *Trachiniae*, it is the outcome of a persistent articulation throughout of marriage in the language of motherhood, and of an exploration of the relationship between father and son. Hyllus' accusations against Deianeira are consistently framed in terms of her failure to act the part of a mother, the result being that Deianeira is almost painted as Heracles' mother, too.¹⁸⁷ This effect is felt most strongly in the concluding lines of Hyllus' tirade: 817–18 ὄγκον γὰρ ἄλλως ὀνόματος τί δεῖ τρέφειν/ μητρῶον, ἥτις μηδὲν ὡς τεκοῦσα δρᾷ;. It would appear that by inadvertently killing Heracles Deianeira has

¹⁸³ Eur. *Supp.* 918–20. Loraux (1995: 29–30, 255 nn. 55–56) notes that the liver is a vital place, attacked in battle and often involved in gynaecological complaints. That is true, but if, as she urges, we pay close attention to what the text says, then the distinction between a wound *to* the liver and one *beneath* it becomes crucial. As it is, the phrase it draws attention to the maternal connotations; it is worth remembering that Eurydice, too, strikes herself there after being informed of her son's death (Soph. *Ant.* 1315 παίσασ' ὑφ' ἥπαρ).

¹⁸⁴ Hernández Muñoz 2014: 61.

¹⁸⁵ Segal 1981: 82; Minadeo 1993: 170; Foley 2001: 97; Hernández Muñoz 2014: 61. It should, however, be noted that the parallel with Eur. *Alc.* 403 frames at least one aspect of this scene, the kisses with which Hyllus covers Deianeira, as an acceptable form of expressing filial affection.

¹⁸⁶ For the endogamous character of the transfer of Iole see Segal 1995: 86, 89–90. MacKinnon 1971 has argued that Iole is intended to be Hyllus' concubine rather than legitimate wife, but this proposition has been thoroughly disproved by Segal 1994.

¹⁸⁷ This tendency is especially pronounced at the beginning and end of their confrontation scene (734–36 and 817–20), but also resurfaces when Hyllus, seemingly unsatisfied with stating Deianeira's crime in the starkest terms possible as murder of her husband, feels compelled to add his own relationship to Heracles (739–40 τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν σὸν ἴσθι, τὸν δ' ἐμὸν λέγω | πατέρα κατακτείνασα τῆδ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ). It is as if Hyllus cannot conceive of Deianeira's and Heracles' marital relationship except through the terms of his own kinship with them. Sorum (1978: 72) has also noted the abundance of Hyllus' references to Deianeira as his mother, but interprets this as an indication of his in-between position with regard to Heracles and Deianeira.

failed in her motherly, rather than wifely, duties, an impression that Heracles' own references to Deianeira as *σὰ μάτηρ* (1036) do not help dispel.¹⁸⁸ To a certain extent, this is a way for Hyllus to disavow the mother that deprived him of his father; it is also a way to say that Deianeira, having killed his father, has transgressed her duties as Heracles' wife (which she is by virtue of being Hyllus' mother). Yet the presentation, in which Hyllus participates, of marriage as a mother-child relationship has a strong precedent in the drama. The fears and concerns attending Deianeira's married life are often expressed in vocabulary evocative of childbirth and nursing,¹⁸⁹ while the status of Iole as a bedmate of Heracles and the consequences of her introduction in his household are also framed as a metaphorical pregnancy and childbirth.¹⁹⁰ Time and again, motherhood appears in places where we would expect to find references to wifedom.¹⁹¹

The converse of this move, whereby the intergenerational difference between parents and children is erased, is encountered in the interactions between Heracles and Hyllus.¹⁹² The nature of Heracles' commands to his son and the unquestioning obedience with which he expects them to be carried out indicate that the relationship of substitution already operative in a patriarchal household is pushed to its limits; Hyllus is treated almost as another self, an heir that through obedience can and must replicate his dying father.¹⁹³ For the two men's relationships with Deianeira, this means that Hyllus

¹⁸⁸ Soph. *Trach.* 1065 μητρός, 1067 τὴν τεκοῦσαν, 1125 τῆς πατροφόνου μητρός. Heracles refers to her in other terms, too, but nowhere does he acknowledge her as his wife: 1050 ἡ δολῶπις Οἰνέως κόρη, 1062 γυνὴ δέ, θῆλυς φῦσα κοῦκ ἀνδρὸς φύσιν (here γυνὴ seems to emphasise her gender, which is naturally timid (as the elaboration indicates), not Deianeira's status as Heracles' wife).

¹⁸⁹ At the beginning of the play, Deianeira paints an image of life with Heracles in which fear predominates, and pain comes and goes. The terms she uses for her suffering, evocative of birthing (30 πόνοϋς) and nursing (28 τρέφω), the coincidence of the arrival and departure of that pain with the night (29–30 νῦξ γὰρ εἰσάγει | καὶ νῦξ ἀποθεῖ διαδεγεμένη πόνον), and the immediately following reference to the birth of children in the marriage (31 κάφύσαμεν δὴ παῖδας) conspire to paint her concerns for and because of Heracles as a succession of pregnancies and childbirths. It is the same image her exposition on women's lot puts forward: the transition from *partheneia* to the status of wife is effected in the course of a single night (148–50), and the ensuing concerns are for husband and children alike, as if neither time nor role can qualitatively distinguish them. Similarly, the pain she felt at Heracles' most recent departure is conveyed with ὠδῖνας (42), the term *par excellence* for the pangs of childbirth.

¹⁹⁰ For Deianeira, τεκνοῦσσα (308) is the only alternative to ἄνδρος (308), the former standing in for the role of wife. For her part, Iole, who turns out to be not ἄνδρος (308) or κόρη (536), but ἐξευγμένη (536), is also in a sense pregnant with pain for the disaster Heracles wrought (325 ἀλλ' αἰὲν ὠδίνουσα), and gives metaphorical birth to disaster in the house (893–95 ἔτεκ' ἔτεκε μέγαν | ἀνέορτος ἄδε νόμφα | δόμοισι τοῖσδ' Ἐρπύνην). Segal (1995: 75–76) sees all these contradictory life-stages—*parthenos*, wife, mother, even widow (as ἄνδρος)—as co-existing in Iole's status, but overlooks the fact that the contradictory stages of *parthenos* and wife are articulated as opposites, as alternatives among which to choose the appropriate designation, and not as descriptions that are simultaneously valid.

¹⁹¹ For an excellent analysis of these elements see Loraux 1995: 39, 261 nn. 144, 145. Scott (1997: 26) also notices the maternal overtones but interprets them within a psychoanalytic framework that sees Deianeira as unwilling to face her aggression.

¹⁹² The exchange between father and son in the last third of the play is often considered to offer a deeply unflattering image of Heracles and of the type of relationship he pursues with Hyllus: Kirkwood 1941: 209; Ryzman 1993: 73–79. Some identify in the contrast of perspectives between the two men a distinction between divine plans and human concerns, or point out some redeeming features of Heracles' behaviour: Easterling 1968: 67; Mccall 1972: 159–61; Sorum 1978: 67–71; Fuqua 1980: 57–61; Minadeo 1993: 170–73; Segal 1995: 51, 63–64.

¹⁹³ Sorum 1978: 69; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 84–85.

now occupies the place not simply of Deianeira's *kyrios* (which he would do anyway as the eldest son), but more specifically of her husband. Deianeira, it is true, had remained unacknowledged as his wife by Heracles; however, the previous semi-erotic behaviour of Hyllus by her corpse allows the present identification between father and son to become the means through which Deianeira becomes the wife of Hyllus but also, finally, of Heracles. It is against this background of interlocking marital and blood relationships that Deianeira's roles as wife and mother run the danger of merging and becoming transposed.

The assumption of normative female roles by Deianeira through a suicidal act with strong masculine overtones and the contrast between this gender configuration and that of her counterpart in Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* are instructive when assessing the uses and limitations of the model developed in this thesis. Clearly, the fact that suicide by stabbing is not gender-specific means that a model premised on the affinity between women and suicide by hanging will be ill-suited to the interpretative task. Even when some aspects of the logic underlying the treatment of the latter type of suicide may seem of use for an analysis of the former—for example, the situations under which the open female body may release blood—the potential of the Hippocratic material is greatly diminished. Similarly, the gendered associations of activities affiliated to hanging—hunting or weaving, for example—are only useful insofar as they offer a clue to the gendered import of those activities to which they are conceptually opposed (i.e. hoplite battle). Conversely, the exploration of the Sophoclean version of Deianeira's death has helped render clearer the contribution of the present framework in cases of suicide by hanging, even when the material is not particularly forthcoming. In Apollodorus, we encounter a Deianeira who displays and expects marital love and loyalty, and commits suicide after unwittingly destroying her husband. The interpretations furnished by the interpretative model support the impression of her as a devoted wife denying her body to all other men, while also opening up possibilities that the text, if it cannot confirm, at the very least allows. The Sophoclean Deianeira, on the other hand, is a figure motivated by different concerns, and these are reflected in her manner of suicide. To reclaim her roles as wife and mother she must imitate the opening of the body and the flow of blood attending transition to these roles; the fact that here, too, we seem to encounter gender trouble should not obscure the differences from suicide by hanging. In the *Trachiniae*, Deianeira's femaleness becomes undermined due to the instrument used, while the incipient conflation of her positions as wife and mother is a consequence of the surrounding narrative context and the elaborations on the relationship between Heracles and Hyllus. The fact that the two different approaches employed for the *Bibliotheca* and the *Trachiniae* shed light on the suicide methods employed and result in interpretations that complement, or are at least accommodated by, the respective narratives, illustrates the suitability of adopting different frameworks guided by the ideas surrounding each manner of death.

For Apollodorus' Deianeira and for Oenone, suicide by hanging evokes primarily the status of wife, whose role as an anchor to a normative female identity becomes attenuated within the context of their respective narratives. Within a different setting, however, commitment to the role of wife can undermine the gender norms it is intended to uphold by confusing gender boundaries and introducing intimations of divinity. Although this potential is better illustrated in Chapter 2, we can tentatively trace such a trajectory in the story of Cleite, wife of Cyzicus, as recounted by Apollonius Rhodius in the first book of his *Argonautica*. Cyzicus, king of the Dolians, is killed by the Argonauts in a night-time battle where the two sides fail to realise they are fighting against friends. His death is followed by Cleite's suicide:

οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδ' ἄλοχος Κλείτη φθιμένοιο λέλειπτο
οὐ πόσιος μετόπισθε· κακῶ δ' ἐπὶ κύντερον ἄλλο
ἦνυσεν, ἀψαμένη βρόχον ἀγένηι. τὴν δὲ καὶ αὐταὶ 1065
νύμφαι ἀποφθιμένην ἀλσηίδες ὠδύραντο·
καὶ οἱ ἀπὸ βλεφάρων ὅσα δάκρυα χεῦαν ἔραζε,
πάντα τὰ γε κρήνην τεῦξαν θεαί, ἦν καλέουσιν
Κλείτην, δυστήνοιο περικλεῆς οὔνομα νύμφης.

(Apoll. Rh. *Ar.* 1.1063–69)

Nor indeed did his wife Cleite stay behind after her husband died, but, adding to the woe, she carried out a more horrible deed by fastening a noose around her neck. Even the woodland nymphs themselves lamented her death, and from all the tears they shed for her from their eyes to the ground, the goddesses made a spring, which they call Cleite, the famous name of the unfortunate bride.

The initial impression is of Cleite as another example of a devoted widow, but it is gradually qualified as the events following her suicide are brought to bear on its meaning.¹⁹⁴ The fountain that commemorates her death raises a range of interesting possibilities. Bodies of water connected to female figures are a common occurrence in Greek myth, and they often signify a type of continued existence for the eponymous woman, the preservation, as it were, of part of her identity beyond the boundaries of human mortality. Continuing to exist in a plane distinct from that of mortals, such female figures may be considered less tightly bound by the strict gender classification employed in the human world. Cleite is not herself turned into a fountain; rather, her name is given to the spring created by the tears of nymphs. She is therefore not a precise fit for the pattern traced above, although such a pattern is arguably relevant to her case. At the very least, the emergence of the fountain means

¹⁹⁴ On the contrary, the story told by Parthenius (*Amat. narr.* 28.1–2) presents Cleite precisely in this light.

that Cleite's name has escaped the silence often surrounding female deaths, and is gesturing towards the kind of male heroic glory which the adjective *περικλεές* clearly evokes. This intimation of *kleos* is perhaps prefigured in the description of her suicide as a deed even more horrible than the king's death: is there an implication that at the moment of her death Cleite has assumed priority over the husband whom her death is supposed to commemorate? That the *περικλεές οὔνομα* attaches to her in her capacity as *νόμφη* would seem to support the suggestion that there exist latent tensions and confusions in Cleite's gender identity as presented in the text. In its sociological sense as a newly-married but childless woman, *νόμφη* qualifies Cleite's wifely devotion and prevents her suicide from being entirely subsumed under this rubric.¹⁹⁵ As the name shared by Cleite and the divinities who shed tears for her, it reintroduces the possibility that Cleite-as-fountain somehow participates in their divine nature, enjoying a form of afterlife in a plane that can accommodate the tensions between femaleness and masculine glory, between the devoted wife and her closed body. If Cleite is an inconsolable widow, she is also a famous one, and comes to attain a status loftier—and qualitatively different—from that of her royal husband.

Intimations of immortality, such as the naming of a fountain, can also reconcile tensions between different female roles. The versions of Byblis' death provided by Conon and Parthenius constitute an instructive example of this operation: navigating her incestuous desire for an unattainable lover, Byblis oscillates between the status of *parthenos* and the position of wife. Her story also brings us full circle to some of the first cases examined in this section, the deaths of Ariadne and Callirrhoe, and provides a different outcome that demonstrates the significance of narrative context for determining the operation of suicide by hanging.

In both accounts Byblis, the daughter of Miletus, develops an incestuous desire for her brother Caunus. After his departure from the paternal home and having despaired of fulfilling her desire, Byblis uses an item of clothing as a makeshift noose and hangs herself from a tree:

Καύνῳ δ' ἔρωσ ἐγείρεται ἀμήχανος τῆς ἀδελφῆς Βυβλίδος. ὡς δὲ ἀπετύγχανε πολλὰ κινήσας, ἔξεισι τῆς γῆς ἐκείνης. καὶ ἀφανισθέντος μυρίῳ ἄζει κατεχομένη ἡ Βυβλίς ἐκλείπει καὶ αὐτὴ τὴν πατρῶα οἰκίαν. καὶ πολλὴν ἐρημίαν πλανηθεῖσα καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἀτελεῖς ἡμέρους ἀπαγορεύουσα βρόχον τὴν ζώνην τινὸς καρυᾶς καθάψασα ἑαυτὴν ἀνήρτησεν. Ἐνθα δὴ κλαιούσης αὐτῆς ἐρρῦν τὰ δάκρυα καὶ κρήνην ἀνῆκε, Βυβλίδα τοῖς ἐπιχωρίοις ὄνομα.

(Conon, *Narr.* 2)

There arose in Caunus an impossible love for his sister Byblis, and when he had tried many things without success, he left the country. After he disappeared Byblis was utterly

¹⁹⁵ When first introduced to Cleite we are, in fact, told that Cyzicus has only married her recently and has not yet had children with her (Apoll. *Ar.* 1.973–77).

disconsolate, and she too left her father's house, wandering through a great wilderness, and despairing of her unsatisfied passions, she fastened her belt as a noose to a walnut tree and hanged herself. There as she wept her tears poured down and created a spring, known to the local inhabitants as Byblis.

Τὴν δὲ ἄρα, ὑπὸ τοῦ πάθους μὴ ἀνιεμένην, πρὸς δὲ καὶ δοκοῦσαν αἰτίαν γεγονέναι Καύνῳ τῆς ἀπαλλαγῆς, ἀναψαμένην ἀπὸ τινος δρυὸς τὴν μίτραν ἐνθεῖναι τὸν τράχηλον· (4) λέγεται δὲ καὶ παρ' ἡμῶν οὕτως·

ἢ δ' ὅτε δὴ <ρ'> ὀλοοῖτο κασιγνήτου νόον ἔγνω,
κλαῖεν ἀ<η>δονίδων θαμινώτερον, αἶ τ' ἐνὶ βήσσης
Σιθονίῳ κούρῳ πέρι μυρίον αἰάζουσιν·
καὶ ῥα κατὰ στυφελοῖο σαρωνίδος αὐτίκα μίτραν
ἀψαμένη δειρὴν ἐνεθήκατο, ταὶ δ' ἐπ' ἐκείνη 5
βεῦδεα παρθενικαὶ Μιλησίδες ἐρρήξαντο.

(Parth. *Amat. narr.* 11)

But as for her, her passion did not abate; and in addition, when she considered that she was the reason for Caunus' departure, she fastened her girdle to an oak and put her neck in it. Here is my own version of the story:

And once she knew her cruel brother's mind,
Her shrieks came thicker than then nightingales'
In woods, who ever mourn the Thracian lad.
Her girdle to a rugged oak she tied,
And laid her neck within. And over her
Milesian maidens rent their lovely robes.

In their broad outline, both variants seem to gesture towards the same conclusion: having failed to initiate the transition towards adulthood, Byblis' sealed body becomes reminiscent of those of the diseased Hippocratic *parthenoi*, whose delay in getting married causes trouble at menarche and prompts them to hang themselves. This eternal *partheneia*, anomalous in itself, is further complicated by Byblis' incestuous desire. If realised, such a desire would conflate the roles of sister and wife, erasing the distinction between natal and marital home. The fact that Byblis proposes to confound the two means that her transition to womanhood, for which she indicates willingness, will inevitably be abortive. Byblis thus appears as an unwilling *parthenos* and a devoted, but failed, wife, reminiscent of Callirrhoe. As instantiated here, *partheneia* and wifely devotion amount to the same thing—a closed,

virginal body, devoted to a single man. Byblis' suicide serves to sustain this impression: if she will not loosen her girdle for Caunus, she will use it to close her body against all other men. A *partheneia* held against one's will, a wifehood impeded: in this paradoxical state of affairs, Byblis' heroisation either by establishment in cult or by the naming of a fountain possibly opens up a different way to navigate these contractions. Pronounced unviable when judged against the norms of human society, her identity and the conflicts constitutive of it may find a place in a realm more hospitable to unconventional gender configurations.

Although they concur on the overall presentation of Byblis, the individual texts merit further consideration, as they offer the space for detecting different emphases in their respective constructions of Byblis' gender identity. In Conon's account, Byblis' actions would seem to acquire their significance partly against those of Caunus, as the siblings respond differently to what the text implies is a mutual desire. Caunus leaves the paternal home and follows a trajectory common among mythic heroes: he marries a semi-divine woman and becomes king of a new land. Upon his departure Byblis embarks on her own journey in a quest for the lost brother that, considered against the backdrop of her incestuous *eros*, may not be devoid of echoes of the bridal transfer to the husband's house. Even so, such a scenario of normative female transition becomes undercut by the apparent reversal of roles, whereby Byblis pursues a seemingly resisting object of desire. Abandoned by Caunus but incapable of finding him, she is indeed possessed of ἀτελεῖς desires—'unfulfilled' (passive), but also, 'not accomplishing anything' (active). It is this articulation of her thwarted desire as a pursuit ending in failure but not in resolution that her suicide can be seen to reflect, casting Byblis in the role of a hunter caught in her own trap and left, literally and metaphorically, in a suspended state.

If Conon highlights the dead end to which unwanted *partheneia* leads when paired with prohibited desire, Parthenius' account alludes to the confusion that can be engendered by incestuous desire by allowing that hanging may simultaneously evoke the positions of *parthenos*, wife, and mother. Here, Byblis' abandonment, though more acutely felt because it results from the open rejection of her advances by Caunus, does not result in desperate perambulations. Her conflicted identity is instead signalled by her stay at home, where she remains like a *parthenos* awaiting marriage or a faithful wife expecting the return of her husband. However, the sorrow Caunus' departure causes is not couched in these terms, but conveyed, instead, through the image of the weeping nightingale. The nightingale is a frequent shorthand for intense mourning, but the aetiological myth attaching to it evokes maternal loss, unexpectedly lending a maternal veneer to Byblis' feelings for Caunus. The simultaneous presence of these incompatible roles is also felt in the language of Byblis' suicide, which forgoes the often-encountered ἐαυτὴν ἀνήρτησεν for an accurate description of the noose's placement around the neck. Surrounded by the girdle/headband, Byblis' τράχηλος doubles as the τράχηλος of the uterus, ushering in the images of the diseased *parthenos*, the widow or sterile wife, and the pregnant woman, all of whom experience such a closure. Although not participating in Byblis' gender to the same

extent, the simultaneous presence of these roles in her identity has a destabilising effect. Any one role is continually displaced to make room for another, generating uneasiness as to the proper characterisation of Byblis' gender. Her establishment in cult, and the ritual actions involved, continue to communicate the co-existence of these contradictions even outside the human world. The ritual rending of clothes by the *parthenoi* of Miletus is primarily a display of mourning, but readily evokes connotations of a self-inflicted sexual aggression that does not, however, threaten their virginal status. The similarities between cultic practice and Byblis' actions seem to confirm the conflicted nature of Byblis' gender, while also pointing towards the negotiation of tensions in the mediated realm of ritual.

Conclusions

In the gynaecological treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus, suffocation and (a desire for) hanging are inserted into a narrative of specifically female diseases. Although these symptoms are not precisely equivalent, the conditions underlying them are often identical or very similar, and the categories of women they affect tend to overlap. Through a chain of assumptions about sexual difference, women's nature becomes reduced to their reproductive system, and female health dependent on its unencumbered functioning. In this light, the opposition between female health and disease can be viewed as a way to articulate and safeguard the norms that regulate the normative construction of femaleness. As a result, the women who, due to a gynaecological complaint, experience suffocation or a desire to hang themselves, threaten with the aberrant behaviour of their bodies the very foundations of the concept of woman.

However, when removed from the immediate context of Hippocratic medicine and further probed, the logic that renders these behaviours indications of pathology also opens up the possibility of a more complex and subtle relation between hanging, the workings of the female body, and the female roles which these signify. The assumption of a parallelism between upper and lower neck and mouth can be pushed, in mythic discourse, to enable suicide by hanging not only to subsume suffocation and its associations under its remit, but also to forge connections with situations where the closure of the female body is desirable and even necessary. As a result of this move of de- and re-contextualising certain aspects of the logic underlying Hippocratic medicine, suicide by hanging takes on a wider variety of meanings. As an instance of closure of the upper body, it can evoke all situations, healthy and pathological, under which the lower body may close. But because these situations have implications for the successful performance of their roles by women, suicide by hanging becomes the point of meeting both for the traditionally female roles and for the subversions that result when illness interferes with their fulfilment.

The associations presented in the Hippocratic corpus between open and closed, and upper and lower in connection with the female body often resonate with entrenched cultural ideas on female nature and women's life cycle. Opposed to the 'limb-loosening' power of heroic death in battle and of *erōs*, the

noose that binds the neck belongs to the ambiguous world of the hunt and those who repudiate sexual desire—and the latter are often found to inhabit the former. This dense nexus of ideas that cluster around suicide by hanging render this mode of death highly suggestive but also highly ambivalent. In the application of this framework to specific narratives, the connotations that have clustered around this type of death are not only reorganised and configured in specific combinations but also, made to unfold their logic in ways not envisioned within the original contexts in which they were traced. The outcome of these processes is that suicide by hanging does not merely affirm its affinity with elements traditionally contributing to the idea of femaleness, but can exploit this relationship to expose the latter's constructed status, to destabilise it, and open up the space for the emergence of non-normative gender identities.

The chapters that follow illustrate this potential of suicide by hanging by focusing on rich mythic narratives where female suicide occupies a prominent position. Some of the gender configurations, and certainly some of the manners in which context contrives to activate specific connotations of suicide by hanging, will already be familiar from the preliminary examination undertaken in this chapter. Phaedra's lying letter, in which she casts herself as the innocent victim of sexual violation, draws its persuasive power precisely from the ability of hanging to symbolically restore lost sexual chastity, while Antigone's lurking incestuous desire for her brother(s) elaborates, among others, on the issues raised by Byblis' conflation of the roles of wife and sister in her pursuit of Caunus. Nevertheless, the cases that will be explored present their own unique elaborations on the destabilising potential of suicide by hanging, and arrive through a complex process of gender performance in highly distinct gender configurations that cannot be adequately described under the rubrics available for the diseased Hippocratic bodies. In these cases, more so than in the previous ones, we witness the flexibility of the interpretative framework proposed, the open-endedness of myth, and the possibility for aberrant repetitions of the gender norms that seek to circumscribe and regulate the construction of gender.

CHAPTER 2—PHAEDRA

Introduction

In his *Theseus*, Plutarch summarises Phaedra's part in the life of the titular hero as follows (28.2):

τὰς δὲ περὶ ταύτην καὶ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ δυστυχίας, ἐπεὶ μηδὲν ἀντιπίπτει παρὰ τῶν ἱστορικῶν τοῖς τραγικοῖς, οὕτως ἔχειν θετέον ὡς ἐκεῖνοι πεποιήκασιν ἅπαντες.

As for the calamities which befell Phaedra and the son of Theseus by Antiope, since there is no conflict here between historians and tragic poets, we must suppose that they happened as represented by the poets uniformly.

Plutarch's statement is misleading; although surviving accounts of Phaedra's *erōs* for Hippolytus and its outcome appear very similar in their broad outline, upon closer inspection it emerges that neither the tragic poets—as far as we can tell—nor the historians faithfully reproduce a single version of the events. In this chapter, I propose to examine Greek sources recording Phaedra's suicide by hanging to illustrate the significance of narrative context, and individual plot elements in particular, for any interpretation of the relationship between Phaedra's death and her gender. As well as illustrating the ways in which variations in motivation, the presentation of Phaedra's *erōs*, and the timing of her suicide highlight or eliminate from view specific connotations of this manner of self-killing, this comparative reading will offer a better view of the type of source material that can benefit the most from an exploration within the interpretative framework developed in Chapter 1. The outcome of this study will be a set of interpretations of Phaedra's suicide that move beyond current approaches and that demonstrate how best the proposed model can develop our understanding of much-studied myths.

The variants that form the material of the present study cover a wide chronological span; Euripides' extant *Hippolytus* will be the primary focus of the chapter, not only because the detailed narrative enables a more nuanced discussion, but also because, as it will be shown, the play's themes, language, and imagery invite an interpretative approach informed by Hippocratic gynaecology. The remaining sources—Asclepiades (found in Σ V Hom. *Od.* 11.321), Diodorus Siculus (4.62.1–4), and Apollodorus (*Ep.* 1.18–19)—will be examined together in order to bring out the elements that set these later accounts apart from Euripides' version, and to better demonstrate the varied usefulness of the shared interpretative framework.

Phaedra in Euripides' *Hippolytus*

The aim of this section is to demonstrate that Phaedra's suicide in Euripides' *Hippolytus* transforms Phaedra's gender in two stages: as a means to eliminate her shameful *erōs*, it reshapes her identity to encompass the distorted female roles embodied by the diseased Hippocratic women; as a necessary step towards the acquisition of a highly idiosyncratic ideal of εὐκλεία, it enables the emergence of a more complex, non-normative gender in which these roles are embedded and that belongs properly to the more-than-human realm of cult and ritual. I will also argue that her suicide's role in shaping her gender can only be fully appreciated if viewed in conjunction with Phaedra's unrelenting pursuit of εὐκλεία throughout the play. As shaped by the experience of illicit desire, Phaedra's ideal of εὐκλεία becomes dependent for its fulfilment on her gender, demanding a highly specific configuration of multiple, often conflicting, gender roles. Within this context, suicide by hanging simultaneously participates in shaping Phaedra's gender and enables the developments that will complete her gender transformation, thereby allowing her to achieve her ideal of εὐκλεία. The parallels that the drama encourages us to draw between this ideal and divine reverence, as well as the installation of Phaedra's *erōs* in a ritual song belonging to Hippolytus' hero cult, suggest that Phaedra is elevated to more than human status. Her non-normative gender identity is thus implicitly presented as a condition for this transcendence of human limitations, and becomes rehabilitated in a realm not bound by them.

Treated in pairs or in isolation, the key topics of Phaedra's gender, suicide, and desire for good repute have attracted varying degrees of scholarly attention. By far the most ubiquitous in the play's literature is the issue of Phaedra's εὐκλεία; most critics concur that Phaedra's concern for her reputation is the driving force behind her actions, although there is some disagreement regarding whether, and to what degree, she succeeds in acquiring εὐκλεία.¹⁹⁶ Still more varied are their assessments of such a concern and its prominence in Phaedra's considerations as appropriate to a person of her gender and social status.¹⁹⁷ Such discussions often touch upon Phaedra's suicide and gender as areas related to the question of εὐκλεία, but a sustained exploration of the connection between her mode of death, her gender identity, and her concern for εὐκλεία is to be found only in a small number of studies.¹⁹⁸ This body of critical work has significantly advanced our understanding of Phaedra's hanging as a vital means for articulating the play's concerns and an element interacting with and sustaining its central themes. Meanwhile, the attempt to foreground the gender dynamics in

¹⁹⁶ Knox 1952: 9, 17–18; Winnington-Ingram 1960: 179–81; Conacher 1967 (esp. pp. 30, 41–42); Frischer 1970: 94–95; Segal 1970; Reckford 1974 (esp. pp. 308–09, 316, 327); Gilula 1981; Kovacs 1987: 25; McClure 1999; Garrison 1995: 65–66, 69; Rabinowitz 1993: 161, 165; Mueller 2011, esp. pp. 150–51 (with n. 9), 162, 174.

¹⁹⁷ For Phaedra's concern with *eukleia* as consonant with her status, or at least indicative of an aristocratic way of thinking: Knox 1952: 17; Segal 1965: 139–40; Gilula 1981: 125–26. Though admitting that Phaedra's is an aristocratic position, Reckford (1974: 315) views its character as such as a weakness. This concern has also been viewed as an anomalous desire (Goff 1990: 15) or a negative trait (McClure 1999: 117–20).

¹⁹⁸ Loraux 1987: 8–11, 13–21, and esp. 17–19, 23–24, 29–30; 1995: 109–14, esp. 110–11; Goff 1990; Zeitlin 1996: 219–84.

the play and their centrality in orchestrating the drama's movement has focused attention on Phaedra's gender and its changing contours throughout the play.¹⁹⁹

Nevertheless, and despite the sheer volume of the literature on the *Hippolytus*, scholarship on the key areas identified above has tended to reach largely similar conclusions. Although certain critics are more charitable in their evaluation of Phaedra's character and her concern with reputation than others, very few are prepared to concede that she may have attained her ideal.²⁰⁰ Similarly, the studies exploring Phaedra's suicide and its connections to her gender may be remarkably attuned to the subtleties of that relation, but seem constrained to relegate Phaedra back to the domain of conventional femininity after showcasing the complexities of her gender.²⁰¹ More importantly, there seems to be no sustained study of the relationship between (a desire for) εὐκλεία, suicide as a means to achieve it, and the gender identity that emerges when the demands of a good reputation meet the connotations of suicide by hanging. In this chapter, I interpret Phaedra's suicide by situating it within a three-way relationship between death, gender, and the pursuit of good repute. By virtue of its position in this triangle, suicide by hanging contributes to the gender configuration demanded by Phaedra's concept of εὐκλεία. This contribution may be conceived of as twofold: on the one hand, Phaedra's suicide foregrounds the salient elements of her gender identity; on the other, it creates the necessary conditions for the emergence of a fuller, more complex identity that must embrace a wider range of roles.

The argument may be broadly sketched as follows. The intrusion of illicit desire occasions a mental and physical dissonance in Phaedra whereby a previously unified female identity becomes polarised around the two extremes of chastity and adultery. At the same time, this experience reshapes Phaedra's ideal of εὐκλεία as public acknowledgement of her resistance to the demands of unsanctioned *erōs*. Within the text, Phaedra's dissonance is elaborated in the images of childbirth and delayed menarche—that is, functions of the female body that constitute struggles in their own right,

¹⁹⁹ Zeitlin 1996: 219–84.

²⁰⁰ Frischer 1970: 94–95; Burnett 1986: 175–76; McDermott 2000: 256; Mueller 2011, esp. pp. 150, 151 (with n. 9), 162, 174. The vast majority of critics, however, deny Phaedra the attainment of a good reputation: Dodds 1925: 103; Knox 1952: 17–18; Winnington-Ingram 1960: 180–81; Conacher 1967: 41 n. 19; Segal 1970: 281; Reckford 1974: 308–09, 316, 327; McClure 1999: 118, 156–57; Rabinowitz 1993: 161, 165.

²⁰¹ Loraux 1987: 19–20, 29–30; Rabinowitz 1993: 155. Goff (1990) notes at several points the dissolution of differences between genders (63–64, 67–68, 105). However, it is Hippolytus' feminisation (59–67) that seems to reduce the distance between him and Phaedra rather than an equivalent masculinisation of Phaedra. Also, the argument for a movement towards normalisation at the end, whereby the brides' song promotes the containment of sexual desire in marriage, implies that despite her challenge to norms in the play, Phaedra cannot escape the limits of normative femaleness (113–17). Zeitlin (1996: 284) seems to admit at the end of her analysis that Phaedra has come to encompass a wide range of conflicting roles: 'In desiring and desiring to be desired in turn, yet also desiring to not desire, she plays all the roles at once—herself (now woman, once virgin), Aphrodite, Hippolytos, and Artemis (the eternal *parthenos*)'. Already in this formulation Phaedra is properly a woman, merely playing other roles as required; more importantly, the emphasis throughout is on Phaedra's story as a plot for Hippolytus to imitate, and on the consequent assumption by Hippolytus of female positions. Moreover, by arguing that the play portrays women as inherently split within themselves, Zeitlin ensures that however disruptive Phaedra's actions may seem, they conform to the play's supposed conception of women.

and that offer their different possible outcomes as a recoding of the alternative outcomes of Phaedra's situation. Careful examination of the imagery of childbirth and delayed menarche reveals that containment of unlawful *erōs*, a precondition for the acquisition of εὐκλεία, is implicitly identified with unproductive labour and menstrual retention. Suicide by hanging, with its potential to recall these conditions of the female body, thus emerges as the appropriate means to counter the impulses of illicit desire. It cannot, however, offer Phaedra the full measure of the εὐκλεία to which she aspires, because the subjugation of desire is recast in the accompanying letter as resistance to an *external* force. Only the revelation of the truth by Artemis can restore to Phaedra her *erōs* as well as her victory over it, and allow the immortalisation of her noble struggle in ritual song. Revelation of Phaedra's shameful desire resurrects the spectre of the adulterous woman, but the intervention of Artemis confirms that Phaedra's suicide marked her victory over *erōs*. Phaedra now encompasses the roles on either side of her original dissonance, and it is precisely this contradiction that the immortalisation of her *erōs* in song celebrates and perpetuates. Indeed, at the end of this section I will argue that Phaedra's place in ritual removes her from the human sphere, and that the gender configuration that enabled this type of εὐκλεία must therefore be considered an attribute of and precondition for this semi-divine identity.

The imagery of *erōs*-engendered dissonance: labour and menstruation

As mentioned above, the experience of illicit desire creates a division within Phaedra, as her wish to abide by established moral standards encounters the impulse to commit adultery. This conflict, primarily one between faithful wife and adulteress, assumes in the text the guise of specifically female bodily struggles, namely childbirth and menarche.²⁰² Casting Phaedra as a pregnant woman in the throes of labour or as a non-menstruating *parthenos* resisting menarche, this imagery associates wifely chastity with indefinite pregnancy and permanent *partheneia*, and locates the distorted female identity resulting from this alliance on one side of Phaedra's struggle. In other words, the intrusion of excessive, unsanctioned *erōs* not only engenders internal conflict, but also necessitates a polarisation of attitudes that removes the possibility of returning to a normative gender identity. Indeed, as will be shown, Phaedra's resistance to desire has rendered her an extremely chaste wife, who is nominally available to her husband but whose body is, in fact, closed. The association between marital fidelity, *partheneia*, and pregnancy that results in this distortion can be traced in two key passages in the play: the parodos (121–75), and Phaedra's first entrance on stage, where she delivers her delirious speech (198–249).

²⁰² My point of departure here has been Zeitlin's (1996: 240) observation that 'in entering into the woman [...] as the agent of illegal and unspeakable desire, the goddess transforms the "natural" dissonant unity of woman's body in pregnancy and childbirth into a cognitive dissonance within the self'. However, where she views the two as parallel but clearly distinct (241), I interpret Phaedra's physical dissonance as inextricable from her cognitive one. For more on the women's δύστροπος ἀρμονία see n. 206 below.

Women's nature is an uneasy harmony, and with it is wont to dwell the painful unhappy helplessness of birth pangs and of delirium. Through my womb also has this breath darted. But I called on the heavenly easer of travail, Artemis, mistress of arrows, and she is always—the gods be praised—my much-envied visitor.²⁰⁵

In this striking description of the female constitution, women are portrayed as inherently predisposed to the experience of dissonance, which occurs as one of two clearly defined conditions: ὠδίνες and ἀφοσύνα.²⁰⁶ By assimilating Phaedra's condition to instances of dissonance rooted in the biological realities of the female body, the Chorus not only show remarkable perspicacity in identifying the type of suffering Phaedra experiences (i.e. dissonance), but also offer alternative ways of construing Phaedra's internal struggle and its implications for her gender. To put it differently, if Phaedra's condition is, at least in the eyes of an audience not privy to Aphrodite's prologue, no different from that of women experiencing the ἀμηχανία ὠδίνων τε καὶ ἀφοσύνας, then what insights can these types of dissonance offer into the nature of Phaedra's experience?

As an ἀμηχανία ὠδίνων, Phaedra's effort to contain her illicit desire becomes interchangeable with the self-rending process of childbirth. The image turns out to be quite apt: Phaedra's pull between an overwhelming need to reveal her secret and the inhuman effort to prevent it from exiting the boundaries of her body in speech or action are not too far removed from the struggle of labour. Like an unborn child, the desire that has been growing and taking shape inside Phaedra is still contained within her body, but now constantly threatens to escape its confines. The surrounding language and imagery, rife with references to pregnancy and labour, help sustain and reinforce the impression.

Although explicitly mentioned for the first time here, the similarity of Phaedra's condition to childbirth was tentatively suggested by the Chorus much earlier. In their first attempt to describe

²⁰⁵ Here I have changed Kovacs' 'their' before delirium to 'of', to reflect my understanding of the construction of the phrase in Greek.

²⁰⁶ Most interpretations of ὠδίνων τε καὶ ἀφοσύνας subsume ἀφοσύνας to ὠδίνων, and interpret it as an attendant symptom of labour (Barrett 1964: 192; Kovacs 1987: 39; Halleran 1995: 164; Zeitlin 1996: 237 and 241, where it is implied that ἀφοσύνα is the response to the labour pains). Loraux (1995: 33–34) has introduced other instances in tragedy where the pangs of labour and madness appear together, and these may form a more concrete basis on which to view the two as connected; nevertheless, she does not develop those, and at least one, that of the frenzied Io, lends itself more to an interpretation of madness as the ἀφοσύνα of a *parthenos* that resists *erōs*. In our play, the syntax at least of 162–64 clearly demands that we view each genitive as a distinct type of ἀμηχανία. There is no reason to assume with Barrett (1964: 193) that the genitives are here connected loosely, except as a reason to reduce the two types of ἀμηχανία put forward by the Chorus to a single guess about pregnancy. Some more recent treatments of the play do demonstrate an understanding similar to mine, and have taken a wider view of the type of female suffering to which these lines refer. Goff (1990: 5–6, and 6 n. 8) speaks more generally of the uneasy relationship between women and their interior space, the womb, and refers the reader to, among others, the Hippocratic treatise *De virginibus morbis*. McClure (1999: 124) has taken a different direction, pointing out the relevance of ἀφοσύνα to Phaedra's sexual desire. Although I will be arguing it is also to be understood as related to biological processes of the female body, she is right to argue for an interpretation that matches the real cause of Phaedra's suffering. For other reasons in favour of understanding ὠδίνων and ἀφοσύνας as separate see n. 216 below.

terms of loosening, can potentially be viewed in conjunction with the Hippocratic's conceptualisation of the changes that women's bodies undergo during labour and lactation. According to the author of *De Mulierum Affectibus* (viii.10.3–8), lochial cleansing and the flow of milk widen the body's passageways, in the process breaking down women's flesh to render it softer and more absorbent. Nor is this the only instance of Hippocratic theory and practice collaborating with popular ideas to uphold the image of Phaedra as parturient: the attendants whom Phaedra implores to take hold of her hands re-emerge in *De exsectione foetus* (514.17–516.7) as the physician's assistants, where they must hold the pregnant woman while the physician performs the necessary actions to facilitate childbirth. Against this background, the earlier mention of Phaedra's ψυχά as εὐνάια δέδετα may not simply describe the physical exhaustion and confinement of a pregnant woman, but also recall the Hippocratic practice of tying a pregnant woman to her bed as a preliminary to the violent movements that will enable the exit of the foetus (*Mul.* viii.142.20–144.16).

Phaedra's condition then, both before and during her entry on stage, is repeatedly framed in terms that, while illustrating the waste *erōs* has laid to her body and mind, also activate the image of an imminent, difficult childbirth. Two extra-dramatic pieces of information reveal the hold of this image of Phaedra's affliction on the popular imagination.²¹⁰ Pausanias cites the authority of Athenian women for his claim that Phaedra had brought with her from Crete two statues of Eileithyia, while a funerary relief from Thasos has been shown to convey the suffering of the dead woman by recalling both other reliefs that show the agony of a woman in childbirth and Phaedra's suffering in Euripides' play.²¹¹ The substitution of labour for the struggle against *erōs* should not, however, be treated merely as an attempt at description through recourse to metaphor. The terms in which this substitution occurs not only contrive to keep the opposition between Phaedra's impulses present throughout, but also effect the interlocking and interpenetration of the two images. It has been observed that elsewhere in the play the language of sexuality and childbirth largely overlap;²¹² this comment, made in reference to Hippolytus' appearance after the fateful accident, has particular valency for Phaedra's first appearance on stage. It is not simply that Hippolytus' agony harks back to this image of an ill, helpless Phaedra,²¹³ but also that, as Goff has eloquently put it, Phaedra's 'physical loosening can be seen as first and foremost a manifestation of the power of *erōs* as *lusimelēs*'.²¹⁴ Within this context of limb-loosening *erōs* and open birthing bodies, the removal of Phaedra's headdress becomes the action that concentrates the relationship between her internal struggle and childbirth: the loosening of the

²¹⁰ Loraux 1995: 34.

²¹¹ Paus. 1.18.5; Devambez 1955: 123–24, 127, 132–34. He argues for a date of immediately after 300 BCE for the stele.

²¹² Zeitlin 1996: 231–32 n. 32, 237, 247–48.

²¹³ Goff 1990: 67; Zeitlin 1996: 234.

²¹⁴ Goff 1990: 7. See also Rabinowitz 1993: 162; Halleran 1995: 168–69; Zeitlin 1996: 226; McClure 1999: 125–26 (for the removal of the veil as also hinting at *erōs lusimelēs*).

hair, standing in for childbirth, is preceded by the removal of the visual sign of Phaedra's status as a respectable wife.²¹⁵ Capitulation to the demands of illicit *erōs* and childbirth become conflated in representing the forces that menace Phaedra, with the result that labour and its role in defining a woman's identity become integral for understanding the implications of Phaedra's struggle for her gender.

However, childbirth is not the only type of dissonance capable of accounting for Phaedra's suffering; the Chorus also talk of an ἀμηχανία ἀφροσύνας. Although the precise content of the term is not immediately obvious, its position in the immediate vicinity of ὠδίνων and in the context of comments on female nature strongly suggests an interpretation in the direction of female bodily functions.²¹⁶ Within the Hippocratic Corpus, the term itself does not occur as a symptom of specifically female diseases; nevertheless, textual clues as to the character of this ἀφροσύνα indicate the possibility of at least a partial identification with the παράνοια that takes hold of non-menstruating *parthenoi* in *De Virginibus Morbis*. Phaedra's refusal to externalise her desire and the resulting suffering would then be framed as the refusal of a *parthenos*' body to release the blood that has been accumulating inside her and is now causing her physical and mental distress. Certain similarities of Phaedra's affliction to the symptoms displayed by a diseased *parthenos*, though not alone sufficient to confirm such an interpretation, usher it in as a possible model with which to make sense of her condition:

Ἐχόντων δὲ τουτέων ὧδε, ὑπὸ μὲν τῆς ὀξυφλεγμοσῆς μαίνεται, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς σηπεδόνοσ φονᾶ,
 ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦ ζοφεροῦ φοβέεται καὶ δέδοικεν, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆσ περὶ τὴν καρδίην πιέξιοσ ἀγχόνασ
 κραινοῦσιν, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆσ κακίησ τοῦ αἵματοσ ἀλύων καὶ ἀδημονέων ὁ θυμὸσ κακὸν ἐφέλκεται·
 ἔτερον δὲ καὶ φοβερὰ ὀνομάζει· καὶ κελεύουσιν ἄλλεσθαι καὶ καταπίπτειν ἐσ τὰ φρέατα καὶ
 ἄγγεσθαι, ἅτε ἀμείνονά τε ἐόντα καὶ χρεῖην ἔχοντα παντοίην· ὁκότε δὲ ἄνευ φαντασμάτων,
 ἠδονὴ τισ, ἀφ' ἧσ ἐρᾶ τοῦ θανάτου ὥσπερ τινοσ ἀγαθοῦ.

(Hipp. *Virg.* viii.466.9–17)

When the situation is such, from the acute inflammation the woman *rages*, from the putrefaction she becomes murderous, from the darkness she is frightened and afraid, from the

²¹⁵ Halleran 1995: 169; McClure 1999: 125–26. But see Cairns 2002 for women's veiling as a sign of their permanent liminality vis-à-vis society.

²¹⁶ The epithet εὐλοχον attributed to Artemis immediately after the reference to ἀμηχανία ὠδίνων τε καὶ ἀφροσύνας is usually considered an indication that the Chorus' comments on female nature refer specifically to pregnancy and childbirth. However, this function of Artemis is part of a network of roles that involve her in female life and need not limit the range of potential meanings for ἀφροσύνας. For the role of Artemis in women's life cycle see King 1983: 117–23. Moreover, there is no clear reason why αὔρα should denote pregnancy and/or childbirth. According to Collard's (1975) comment on Eur. *Supp.* 1028–30, αὔρα is used figuratively to describe any 'disposition or impulse, of the reason or emotions'. This would seem to support my argument for interpreting ὠδίνων and ἀφροσύνας as separate (since αὔρα may describe the ἀφροσύνα of Phaedra), and would remove the puzzling quality which Barrett (1964: 193) detects in the use of this metaphor.

compression around their heart they are *desirous of throttling themselves*, and from the bad state of the blood the mind, being distraught and dismayed, *tempts them to evil*. She names *strange and frightful things*, and these urge women to take a leap and to throw themselves down wells, or *to hang themselves*, as being better and in every way advantageous. When there are no visions, there is a pleasure from which *the woman loves death as some kind of good*.²¹⁷

μανία, appearing elsewhere in the same treatise as παράνοια and παραφροσύνη, becomes a recurrent feature of Phaedra's behaviour in the scenes immediately following the parodos. Acknowledged by Phaedra herself (241) and castigated by the Nurse (214, 232),²¹⁸ it is articulated in terms that create verbal as well as conceptual echoes of the Hippocratic passage.²¹⁹ Imitating the effect of the diseased *parthenoi*'s speech, Phaedra draws horrified reactions with her delirious speech and subsequent confession of adulterous desire, both of which are greeted by her audience as φοβερά (353–55, 361–63).²²⁰ Her desire for death is, at this point, well-established, and specifically designated by Phaedra as an ἀγαθόν (402 κράτιστον [...] βουλευμάτων, 'the best of plans'), although suicide by hanging remains yet to be revealed as the ultimate solution.²²¹ The mention of Artemis directly after the reference to ἀμηχανία ὠδίνων τε καὶ ἀφροσύνας neatly concludes the presentation of Phaedra as a non-menstruating *parthenos*: the goddess who presides over transitions during the female life cycle, she is also the one who, much to the indignation of the author of *De Virginibus Morbis*, receives offerings once the afflicted *parthenos* has regained her senses (viii.468.17–20).

²¹⁷ Emphasis in both original and translation is mine.

²¹⁸ Knox (1952: 6) argues that μανία has a different sense for each of the two characters: 'meaningless speech' for the Nurse, 'passion' for Phaedra. However, there is no reason to uphold the distinction; Phaedra's μανία is both, and she must be aware of it, as her self-chastisement comes right after her delirious speech.

²¹⁹ Hippoc. *Virg.* viii.468.7 μανίην, παραφροσύνη, 468.10 μαίνεται. Eur. *Hipp.* 214 μανίας, 232 παράφρων, 241 ἐμάνην, 248 μαινόμενον. The Hippocratic treatise also uses ἐμωρώθη (viii.466.17) and μωρώσιως (viii.466.18) to describe the stupefaction/numbness of the heart as a result of the pressure the accumulated blood exerts. The same pressure is later presented as the cause of the desire for ἀγχόνη (viii.468.11–12). In Eur. *Tr.* 989–90 μωρία is connected to ἀφροσύνη, enabling us to trace a link on the lexical level between Phaedra's ἀφροσύνα and the condition of the diseased *parthenoi*: τὰ μῶρα γὰρ πάντ' ἐστὶν Ἀφροδίτη βροτοῖς, | καὶ τοῦνομ' ὀρθῶς ἀφροσύνης ἄρχει θεᾶς. The fact that in that text, the link between μωρία and ἀφροσύνη occurs in the context of sexual incontinence does not undermine the value of the connection for the present case. Indeed, Phaedra's ἀφροσύνα denotes her powerful desire as much as her resistance to it. Another way to bring together the different meanings ἀφροσύνα and μωρία accumulate in these different contexts is to postulate an analogy between the containment of blood which leads to stupefaction and a desire for hanging and Phaedra's containment of her desire which intensifies her *erōs*.

²²⁰ See Barrett (1964: 224) specifically for the use of τί λέξεις (353) in Euripides for the listener's reaction to something that has violently disturbed them.

²²¹ One may add that another symptom in the list, the murderous tendencies (φονᾶ), will be displayed only later, when Phaedra expresses a wish to exact vengeance on Hippolytus. However, as Mueller (2011, esp. 149–50, 157, 169) has convincingly argued, a desire to physically harm Hippolytus might never have been entertained by Phaedra, whose revenge is centred on inhibiting Hippolytus' speech and teaching him σωφροσύνη.

As was the case with the representation of Phaedra’s dissonance in terms of childbirth, the significance of her assimilation to non-menstruating *parthenoi* exceeds the limits of a merely metaphorical description in the interests of elucidating her agony. However, where the ἀμηχανία ὠδίνων conveyed the interlocking of childbirth and Phaedra’s struggle through language and imagery that continuously bounced back and forth between the two types of dissonance, the affliction of diseased *parthenoi* is linked to Phaedra’s internal conflict through the multivalence of ἀφροσύνα, which brings together delayed menarche and *erōs* in the figure of madness. The experience of *erōs* as a type of madness is a common literary trope;²²² paired here with resistance to menarche as madness, it makes ἀφροσύνα express simultaneously illicit desire and the experience of those who, in resisting the first step towards maturity, implicitly also reject the demands of *erōs*. In the choice between *erōs* and resistance to it, one type of ἀφροσύνα is exchanged for another. Thumiger has summarised this in a comment about the nature of tragic *erōs*: ‘Resistance to *erōs* is as insane as the abandonment to it’.²²³ As a result of overlaying these images onto each other, the diseased *parthenos* who suffers the ἀφροσύνα of menstrual retention becomes assimilated to the chaste wife who resists illicit desire. Conversely, for Phaedra to reject the demands of *erōs* will be to cast herself in the role of the young women of *De virginibus morbis*.

It should now be clear that the treatment of childbirth and delayed menarche as types of dissonance that convey Phaedra’s internal conflict and its relationship to her gender is borne out by the play’s text. Nevertheless, it is worth considering these observations in the light of Phaedra’s delirium scene, which follows shortly after the end of the parodos. As the first appearance of the queen on stage, it can reasonably be expected provide to a response to the preceding speculations about Phaedra’s condition, and may serve to correct, confirm, or contradict them. I shall suggest that Phaedra’s speech in 198–238 in fact illustrates her dissonance on multiple levels. The very nature of these unconventional and, to its dramatic audience, unintelligible wishes is itself a manifestation of the pull between the forces that engendered them.²²⁴ The question that remains to be answered is whether, and to what extent, that dissonance is also expressed in terms reminiscent of the conditions of female bodies. The first lines uttered by Phaedra, addressed to her attendants, have already been discussed above as a space where Phaedra’s dissonance and that of childbirth become melded. The delirium scene proper is, as I will argue, a discourse that identifies Phaedra’s pull between desire and its denial with a tension between maturation and eternal *partheneia*.

²²² See for example: Anac. fr. 428 *PMG*; Prodicus DK B7; Pl. *Phdr.* 265b; and in our play 1174–75.

²²³ Thumiger 2013: 35; see also 32. This seems to have been acknowledged in the first *Hippolytus* as well, though we do not know in what context the relevant fragment operated (fr. 428 *TrGF*): οἱ γὰρ Κύπριν φεύγοντες ἀνθρώπων ἄγαν | νοσοῦσι ὁμοίως τοῖς ἄγαν θηρωμένοις.

²²⁴ Knox 1952: 6–7; Winnington-Ingram 1960: 178–79; Conacher 1967: 34; Goff 1990: 31–32; Zeitlin 1996: 241, 283–84; McClure 1999: 126.

The obvious similarities of the locations and activities populating Phaedra's imagination to those with which Hippolytus is preoccupied provide the key to this map of Phaedra's dissonance. Intimately associated with what Hippolytus considers to be the defining elements of his life, the images of mountain and stream, hunting and horse-taming not only succeed in communicating the object of Phaedra's *erōs*, but also furnish a detailed image of the figure she must emulate in order to conquer her desire—a sexually chaste *parthenos* who wishes 'to end his life as he has begun it' (87). In fact, Phaedra has already appeared as just such a *parthenos* by inserting herself in the scene of Hippolytus' haunts and pastimes, appropriating, as it were, his very identity.²²⁵ But just as for Hippolytus the invocation of lush meadows inadvertently introduces the threat of sexual violation, so Phaedra's description of such locations is already contaminated by allusions to sexuality, which stands simultaneously as a promise of maturity and a threat to chastity.²²⁶ That it is Phaedra herself who inserts these allusions recapitulates her ambivalent position: the delights of *erōs* that maturation and sexuality promise are opposed to the eternal, unchanging *partheneia* of Hippolytus and the followers of Artemis. For the moment, Phaedra is still caught between the two, entertaining the possibility of *erōs* in a pure Artemisian space.

It is thus that her delirious speech enriches and recapitulates the portrayal of her *erōs*-engendered dissonance as an ἀμηχανία ὠδίνων τε καὶ ἀφροσύνας, a tension between resisting and yielding to desire that is replicated in the processes of childbirth and menstrual retention. Rooted in the functions of women's bodies, these types of dissonance also offer us glimpses of the gender configurations that will emerge as Phaedra takes steps to break the tie between the demands of morality and those of desire. Crucially, framing Phaedra's conflict in terms of childbirth and delayed menarche also indicates the courses of action available for a resolution of the situation, and it is to Phaedra's choice among these solutions that we will now turn.

Phaedra's response: suicide by ἀβρωσία

Phaedra's solution in the face of the *erōs*-engendered crisis is to die by starvation.²²⁷ Death will terminate her struggle by removing the very conditions for the existence of illicit desire—namely, her life. However, the annihilating force of death of any kind does not diminish the significance of preferring starvation over other modes of self-killing. This is especially so in our case because Phaedra, by her own admission, has been searching for some means that will enable her to bear or prevail upon her desire (392–401). Ultimately, death by starvation will prove to be an inadequate

²²⁵ Goff 1995: 33–34.

²²⁶ Knox 1952: 6 n. 8; Segal 1965: 124–25; Frischer 1970: 89–90; Bremmer 1975: 278; McClure 1999: 126.

²²⁷ The term ἀβρωσία which Diggle prints and on which I base my interpretation is Hartung's conjecture. For a discussion of the difficulties posed by the manuscripts' reading and the advantage of ἀβρωσία see Barrett 1964: 187–88.

solution; it fails to satisfy her desire for εὐκλεία, and allows time for intervention and the reversal of the situation. Nevertheless, it is important to examine the way in which ἀβρωσία is intended to respond to Phaedra's dissonance in order to envision a truly effective solution and to assess the suitability of hanging for the role.

The idea of starvation as a force that can curb illicit desire is established early in the play. Placed alongside Phaedra's seclusion and silence as a sign of suffering, starvation partakes in their function as manifestations of Phaedra's determination to remain a faithful wife by concealing her desire.²²⁸ This shared function is underlaid by an essential similarity in the effect of these types of behaviour: they prevent communication between interior and exterior spaces by utilising a boundary that is usually permeable. Silence, seclusion, and ἀβρωσία appear therefore as interchangeable and overlapping attitudes. However, in the context of Phaedra's dissonance as childbirth or delayed menarche, abstention from food not only subsumes the other two under its function, but also emerges as a possible permanent solution to the crisis. We can trace the desired effects of starvation as a counter to *erōs* in the parodos and the delirium scene, where the dissonance is most clearly articulated and played out in terms of conditions of the female body.

As a quite literal closure of the body, refusal of food runs counter to bodily functions that demand it open, including childbirth. In Phaedra's case, where the threat of illicit *erōs* resides in the articulation of desire and is figured as the opening of the body to deliver a well-contained secret, the closing of the body in ἀβρωσία entails silence, and activates the analogy between blocked upper and lower orifices. The parallel between starvation and pregnancy without labour is subtly articulated in the play: while her starvation is a prominent concern for the Chorus (135–38), Phaedra, though still full with her secret, is described as lying on her bed (131). It is only later, in the company of women who would urge her to confess and end her struggle, that she starts tossing and turning, running the risk to come undone (198–202).²²⁹ Approached from a specifically Hippocratic point of view, Phaedra's resistance to food and her altered appearance, marked primarily by her physical wasting and changed skin colour (175, 274, 280), are appropriate for a pregnant woman, but not for one in labour.²³⁰ Indeed, the

²²⁸ Rabinowitz 1993: 159–60; Halleran 1995: 162. Zeitlin (1996: 243 and n. 54), on the other hand, views Phaedra's fasting as an indication of the presence of sexual desire, rather than of the attempt to restrain it. To support this claim, she points out that Demeter, as goddess of marriage, is appropriately absent in the present context of illegitimate desire, and that one of the goddess' mysteries (those at Eleusis) where the occasion for the onset of Phaedra's *erōs*. Barrett's (1964: 187) reading of 138 as 'she keeps (withholds) her pure body from Demeter's grain' would significantly weaken the above interpretations, as it would render more tenuous the link between purity and fasting; there is, however, no intrinsic reason why this reading should be preferred over the more common 'she keeps (maintains) her body pure from Demeter's grain'.

²²⁹ In reality, among the women who belong to Phaedra's household only the Nurse urges her to speak and end her suffering. However, the position of Phaedra's attendants as suggested by her commands to them readily paint them in the role of women assisting a parturient.

²³⁰ Hippoc. *Aph.* iv.554.10 (ἄσαι, 'attacks of nausea', as a sign of pregnancy); *Mul.* viii.78.11, 14–16 (a pregnant woman can become pale (χλωρή) and weaker (ἀσθενέστερη)).

Chorus' remarks on Phaedra's appearance, which frame the scene of delirium, are uttered while Phaedra is still maintaining a—tenuous—control over her desire.

If ἀβρωσία can stall this metaphorical labour by closing an aperture with a sympathetic relationship to the womb, then by the same principle it can also replicate the non-menstruating *parthenoi*'s desire for hanging. Hidden desire and hidden blood become analogous, and resistance to the sexual act that would release both eventually necessitates total closure of the body. As a sign of extreme *partheneia*, however, Phaedra's ἀβρωσία is also open to another reading: as an overall denial of sustenance, it stands in opposition to her desire to 'draw a drink of pure water from a dewy spring' (208–09), and in that capacity attempts to eliminate one of the elements suggesting the intrusion of sexual desire in seemingly pure spaces. The connection between starvation and chastity is confirmed on the lexical level, where ἀγνόν as a description of Phaedra's body in its fasting state explicitly recalls Hippolytus' own, emphatically sexual, purity (102 πρόσωθεν αὐτὴν ἀγνὸς ὄν ἀσπάζομαι).²³¹ It is not insignificant that, among the features he ridicules in his tirade against Hippolytus, Theseus includes his son's supposed vegetarian diet. Ironically, Hippolytus has already been shown to have a healthy appetite for meat (109–10); but if mention of unusual dietary habits seems to Theseus of a piece with Hippolytus' cultivated image of himself as sexually chaste, then Phaedra's wholesale denial of food points all the more strongly to an equally wholesale denial of sex.²³²

In fact, as Sissa has brilliantly shown, alimentary and sexual codes were often superimposed, with the result that a woman's status could be deduced from her attitude towards food.²³³ Although the court case on which Sissa comments focuses on the social aspect of dining, the relation between self-restraint towards food and the status of respectable wife is borne out by our text.²³⁴ Not only is Phaedra's ἀβρωσία a means employed in her battle against the desire that threatens her marital loyalty, but it is also described in terms that recall the festivals of married women. The slightly elaborate phrase Δάματρος ἀκτᾶς δέμας ἀγνὸν ἴσχειν (138) employed by the Chorus evokes a complex nexus of associations organised around Demeter and her role in women's lives. Abstention from the product with whose introduction to mankind Demeter was credited helps cast Phaedra as one of the married women who were the exclusive participants in one of the goddess's festivals, the Thesmophoria.²³⁵ That sexual abstinence for several days was also a prerequisite for participation

²³¹ Segal 1969: 300.

²³² Winnington-Ingram (1960: 173) views the combination, in Hippolytus' case, of sexual chastity with consumption of meat as preparing for the contrast between Phaedra's abstention from food and her wish to indulge in illegitimate *erōs*. For Segal (1969: 298) and Halleran (1995: 159) the contrast between sexual purity and an almost gluttonous appetite for meat operates within the context of Hippolytus' pure way of life and of Theseus' later accusations.

²³³ Sissa 1990a: 57–58.

²³⁴ Isae. *On the Estate of Pyrrhus* 13–14.

²³⁵ Fasting was part of the second day of the festival of the Thesmophoria, at least in Athens. See Barrett 1964: 187; Burkert 1985: 243.

reinforces the links between ἀβρωσία, resistance to desire, and the status of wife.²³⁶ However, by the same token Phaedra is presented as veering towards an extreme of purity; her fasting is total and endangers her life, while the sexual purity it connotes threatens to remove her from the realm of sexuality altogether. Not only does Phaedra's starvation-unto-death imply extreme chastity, but is also implicitly located in the context of a festival that, despite its association with married women, nevertheless enacted a reversal of gender norms.²³⁷

As a response to Phaedra's dissonance, ἀβρωσία replicates in its effects the articulation of Phaedra's conflict in terms of childbirth and delayed menarche. In order to remain a faithful wife, she must contain her secret in a pregnancy without childbirth and let it build inside her like the retained menses of diseased *parthenoi*. Yet in this pursuit she risks not only assimilating a pregnant woman or eternal *parthenos*, but also becoming the sterile wife who resembles these more than she does the conventionally chaste wife. Be that as it may, abstinence from food as a means to end Phaedra's life fails. Under the combined pressure of her own desire to confess and act on her *erōs* and the Nurse's urgent pleas, Phaedra's determination starts to waver. Had it been allowed to continue, ἀβρωσία would have successfully quelled Phaedra's desire; as it is, the only gradual manifestation of its effects allows the Nurse to intervene and reverse the situation just enough to make Phaedra susceptible to suggestions of a different solution. More importantly, ἀβρωσία as a response to the *erōs*-engendered crisis fails to satisfy Phaedra's principal motivation in committing suicide—the acquisition of εὔκλεια.²³⁸ In order to understand the precise content of Phaedra's conceptualisation of εὔκλεια and appreciate the ways in which hanging, as a form of self-killing similar to but not identical with ἀβρωσία, might facilitate its attainment, it is necessary to examine the concerns informing Phaedra's decision to die.

As expressed by the queen herself, these concerns may be summarised as follows: she wishes to bear the burden of her desire without yielding to it (392–401), bequeath to her children the παρρησία and εὔκλεια that will allow them to thrive in Athens (421–25), avoid being caught shaming Theseus (321, 419–20), and earn for herself a good reputation (403–04). These motives are clearly interrelated, but they do not simply constitute permutations of a single overarching consideration. Both her children's social status and her position vis-à-vis Theseus may be salvaged if she dies without having yielded to desire, but acquisition of εὔκλεια is not necessarily coextensive with success in this endeavour. If Phaedra persisted in her ἀβρωσία to the point of death, her reputation, to the extent one could plausibly say she would have one, would consist merely in the absence of remarks about her conduct during life. However, the language in which Phaedra's concern with her reputation is couched

²³⁶ Parker 1983: 81–83; Burkert 1985: 243–44.

²³⁷ Burkert 1985: 234; Demand: 1994: 115–20.

²³⁸ Garrison 1995: 65.

emphasises visibility and scrutiny by one's environment, revealing that Phaedra is preoccupied with her image in the public sphere.²³⁹ This is not the realm of women's intimate conversations and female camaraderie; it is rather a sphere comprised by the *polis* and its leader who, in addition to being Phaedra's husband, also embodies the highest political authority.²⁴⁰ Phaedra realises quite early in the play that this ideal of εὐκλεία depends on public acknowledgement not only of her wifely virtue, but also of the illicit desire against which this virtue reaches heights worthy of praise. This is the much-commented upon paradox of Phaedra's εὐκλεία:²⁴¹ in order to receive the glory merited by her containment of *erōs* she has to let her desire escape her tight control, instantly defeating the very premises of her claim to εὐκλεία. At this stage in the drama, no exit from this paradoxical situation is envisioned that does not entail a fatal compromise on Phaedra's part; yet it is clear enough that starvation, followed by death, cannot fulfil that role either.

The solution that will eventually emerge must therefore address the shortcomings of ἀβρωσία as a response to the crisis, but it must also replicate its effects on Phaedra's body and her unlawful *erōs*. It will have to be quick and immediately effective where starvation admitted intervention, and allow Phaedra to prevail upon her *erōs* without relinquishing her claim to good reputation in the public realm. That suicide by hanging might be just such a solution is suggested by the similarity of its connotations to those of ἀβρωσία, but also implied in the *parodos* and the delirious speech, where we first encountered the images of Phaedra's dissonance.²⁴²

²³⁹ Phaedra's concern with her image in the eyes of others has generated much critical heat. Traditionally, it has been viewed either as a character flaw, a preoccupation with the appearance of virtue rather than virtue itself (Knox 1952: 17; Willink 1968: 25; Segal 1970: 281–92; Reckford 1974: 314–15), or as a legitimate, even noble, aim (Kovacs 1987: 25, 60), which however leads her to morally ambiguous acts (Conacher 1967: 30, 41–42; Frischer 1970: 94–96; Zeitlin 1996: 220–22; McDermott 2000: 247, 256–57). McClure (1999: 118, 156) perceives Phaedra's desire for εὐκλεία as a transgressive wish for masculine κλέος that can only result in ψόγος. My view is closer to that expressed by Gilula (1981: 124–26), who carefully argues that Phaedra, though concerned with others' view of her, rejects double standards in judging private life and public image. See also n. 200 above.

²⁴⁰ It is for this reason that Phaedra, even after her confession to the Nurse and Chorus, can still look forward to and lament the absence of acknowledgement of her noble fight. Communications among women constitute, from a male citizen's point of view, silence (see Goff 1990: 1). The Nurse had already hinted at this when she encouraged Phaedra to confess to the women present an illness otherwise considered τὶ τῶν ἀπορρήτων κακῶν, because it may not be revealed to men (293–94). Phaedra's struggle is precisely such an ἀπόρρητον: to confess it to the women of her circle is to keep her secret concealed, and risk neither praise nor rebuke. For the view that Phaedra's confession signals a 'true' revelation, see Knox 1952: 9; Kovacs 1987: 43; Winnington-Ingram 1960: 179–80, 185.

²⁴¹ Knox 1952: 9; Gilula 1981: 126–28; Goff 1990: 15; Winnington-Ingram 1960: 179; Rabinowitz 1993: 160–61; Rademaker 2005: 170–71.

²⁴² Garrison (1995: 70) considers Phaedra's preoccupation with *eukleia* as a social concern that takes priority over her personal wants, and on the basis of this argues that 'suicide becomes a duty, a sacrifice imposed by society for the continued well-being of itself'. Such a statement, however, ignores the extent to which the suicide serves to corroborate Phaedra's false accusation and leads to further disruption of social relations. Moreover, it postulates too clear-cut a divide between personal wants and social obligations, ignoring the extent to which desire for *eukleia* is also a personal want of Phaedra.

Suicide by hanging: an alternative to ἀβρωσία

As previously discussed, the Chorus' comments on Phaedra's rumoured illness have been variously related to her predicament, its causes, and its eventual outcome, but an interpretation that would treat the parodos as an integral part of the play's construction of Phaedra's suffering is still missing. I suggest that the questions in lines 141–60 belong to the same line of thought that becomes crystallised in the diagnosis of Phaedra's condition as labour or delayed menarche:

†σύ γὰρ† ἔνθεος, ὦ κούρα,
εἴτ' ἐκ Πανὸς εἴθ' Ἑκάτας
ἢ σεμνῶν Κορυβάντων φοι-
τᾶς ἢ ματρὸς ὀρείας;
†σὺ δ'† ἀμφὶ τὰν πολύθη- 145
ρον Δίκτυνναν ἀμπλακίαις
ἀνίερος ἀθύτων πελάνων τρύχη;
φοιτᾶ γὰρ καὶ διὰ λί-
μνας χέρσον θ' ὑπὲρ πελάγους
δίνας ἐν νοτίαις ἄλμας. 150

ἢ πόσιν, τὸν Ἐρεχθειδᾶν
ἀρχαγόν, τὸν εὐπατρίδαν,
ποιμαίνει τις ἐν οἴκοις κρυ-
πτᾶ κοίτᾳ λεχέων σῶν;
ἢ ναυβάτας τις ἔπλευ- 155
σεν Κρήτας ἔξορμος ἀνήρ
λιμένα τὸν εὐξεινότατον ναύταις
φήμαν πέμπων βασιλεί-
α, λύπα δ' ὑπὲρ παθέων
εὐναία δέδεται ψυχά; 160

(Eur. *Hipp.* 141–60)

Has some god, Pan or Hecate, possessed you, dear girl? Do your wits wander under the spell of the august Corybantes or the mountain mother? Are you being worn down for some fault against Dictynna of the wild beasts, having failed to offer her the holy batter? For she also haunts the Lake and passes over the dry land in the sea, that stands in the eddies of the surf.

Or is it your husband, the nobly born king of Erechtheus' folk? Does some other woman rule his passion, someone in the palace, making secret love to him apart from your bed? Or has some mariner from Crete put in at that harbor most hospitable to sailors bearing news to the queen, so that her soul is bound bedfast in grief over her misfortunes?

Rather than being treated as conjectures on the aetiology of Phaedra's suffering, these questions may be better understood as elements of the *phenomenology* of Phaedra's fight against *erōs*. In what follows, I will argue that the Chorus' questions in strophe and antistrophe b not only contribute to Phaedra's presentation as a pregnant woman or diseased *parthenos*, but in doing so also recommend suicide by hanging as the appropriate solution to the crisis.

The Chorus begin their attempt to interpret Phaedra's condition by assessing its similarity to instances of divine possession. Although the Troezenian women do not make clear the principle behind the selection of deities they name, it is nevertheless significant that they have the capacity to illustrate Phaedra's dissonance in its various guises. Three of the deities initially listed—Pan, the Corybantes, and the Mountain Mother—are all known to induce or experience themselves a type of madness²⁴³ that, predicated as it is on the dissolution of boundaries and the loss of self, demonstrates remarkable similarities with the ἀφοροσύνα of *erōs*.²⁴⁴ It is true that the frenzy caused by Pan, as opposed to the madness the Mountain Mother inspires in the Corybantes and in her mortal followers, does not occur in a ritual context; nevertheless, the ease with which his cult became combined with that of Dionysus is an indication of the extent to which their respective effect on mortals was thought to overlap.²⁴⁵

If mention of these gods reinforces the presence in this play of the well-known identification between *erōs* and madness, the involvement of Hecate and Dictynna invites a different understanding of Phaedra's disease. Identified early on as a courotrophic deity, Hecate later also develops a connection to childbirth, probably as a result of her gradual identification with Artemis.²⁴⁶ Phaedra's dissonance, then, is framed as labour both in the ἀμηχανία ὠδίνων that Artemis is called upon to supervise and as a function of Hecate's influence. The last deity on which the Chorus dwell, Dictynna, capitalises on the insinuation of Artemis in the list to develop the connection with the goddess in a different direction. The attribution of Phaedra's suffering to the neglect of customary offerings to Dictynna

²⁴³ Barrett 1964: 189; Burkert 1985: 178–79 (Mountain Mother and Corybantes); Borgeaud 1988: 102–04, 120–21 (Pan); Halleran 1995: 163; Bowden 2010: 91 (Corybantes). See also Ar. *Vesp.* 8 where παραφρονεῖς and κορυβαντιᾶς are presented as equivalent descriptions of what Xanthias perceives to be Sosias' absurd, irrational behaviour.

²⁴⁴ See Thumiger 2013: 28, 31.

²⁴⁵ For this and other similarities between Dionysus and Pan, see Borgeaud 1988: 111–12.

²⁴⁶ Hecate as a courotrophic deity: Hes. *Theog.* 450; Orph. *Hymn* 1.8. Artemis characterised as Hecate in association with childbirth: Aesch. *Supp.* 676: Ἄρτεμιν δ' Ἐκάταν γυναικῶν λόχους ἐφορεύειν. On this line see: Friis Johansen and Whittle 1980: 41–43.

implicitly casts the queen as a non-menstruating *parthenos* by recalling the connection, mentioned in *De Virginitibus Morbis* (viii.468.17–20), between the recovery of the diseased *parthenoi* and the dedication of clothes to Artemis.

Clearly, the presentation of Phaedra's dissonance as ἀμηχανία ὠδίνων τε καὶ ἀφοροσύνας has been insinuating itself in the language and imagery of the play for some time before the Chorus deliver the phrase that crystallises it. At the same time as they develop an interpretation of her condition, however, the words uttered by the Chorus also allude to the future course of action that will ensure Phaedra's victory over her desire. Most of the gods listed as a potential cause of suffering carry a nexus of associations that, if probed further, can be shown to prefigure and necessitate Phaedra's hanging. At some stage of their development, the Mountain Mother, Hecate, and Dictynna all become associated or identified with Artemis herself, although the strength and degree of their identification may vary considerably across time and space.²⁴⁷ The association of these deities with Artemis and her contradictory functions as *parthenos* and birth-goddess prompts a specific configuration of the ideas they have come to represent within the ode: to prevent the release of her secret and resist the madness of *erōs*, Phaedra must embrace the ἀφοροσύνα of non-menstruating *parthenoi* and seal her body in death.²⁴⁸ She can never make offerings to Dictynna-Artemis for the return of her senses, because to subdue her desire she must emulate the diseased *parthenoi* who do not recover and are driven to suicide by hanging.

Yet Dictynna's role in alluding to suicide by hanging as the solution to the *erōs*-engendered crisis is not limited to her function as a stand-in for Artemis. As rendered by Callimachus in his *Hymn to Artemis* (189–205), Dictynna's career arguably appears as a blueprint for Phaedra's course of action: initially a Cretan nymph in Artemis' entourage, Dictynna, then called Britomartis, evades Minos'

²⁴⁷ Dictynna and Artemis: Diod. Sic. 2.76.3–4 (Diodorus dismisses Callimachus' version of the Britomartis story); Ar. *Ran.* 1359; Farnell 1896: II, 476–480; Guthrie 1950: 105. Hecate and Artemis: Aesch. *Supp.* 676–77; Eur. *Phoen.* 109–110; *IG* 13.383.125–27 (Athens, 429/8 BC), 42.499 (Epidaurus, Imperial Period), 12.8.359 (Thasos, c.450 BC); Farnell 1896: II, 504–519; Friis Johansen and Whittle 1980: 41–43; West 1990: 177–78. Artemis (especially the Ephesian Artemis) and the Mountain Mother/Mother of the Gods/Cybele: Farnell 1896: II, 480–482; Burkert 1985: 149; Brenk 1998; Larson 2007: 109. See also: Barrett 1964: 189–90; Willink 1998: 716–17.

²⁴⁸ In other words, these deities represent both Phaedra's dissonance and the solution she will adopt. Artemis presides over childbirth, but also represents the type of eternal *partheneia* which, when emulated by human girls, eventually leads them to hanging. Similarly, Hecate, often associated with the rearing of the young, also came to be connected to hanging. Harpocration (*s.v.* ὄξυθύμια) informs us that the pieces of wood from which some people hang themselves, known as ὄξυθύμια, were often left in front of cult images of Hecate (Ἐκαταῖα) at forks in the road. Even Dictynna, who, as is explained below, possesses her own network of associations with jumping and hanging, has some tenuous connection to childbirth. In Orphic *Hymn* 8, where her name is one of the many by which the deity invoked is addressed (3), she is acknowledged as κούροτρόφος (8) and bringer of quick childbirth (3–4, 8). Another way in which the ideas introduced by the gods are developed is through the use of φοιτᾶν. Employed, as we saw above, to designate Phaedra's mental wandering under the influence of Pan, the Mountain Mother, or the Corybantes, it is also applied to Artemis-Dictynna, who is associated with hanging. To resist the madness of erotic desire, Phaedra must φοιτᾶν like Artemis, and hang herself.

sexual pursuit for nine months, until finally, in a desperate bid to escape, she jumps into the sea from the top of a cliff and lands in fishermen's nets. This protracted struggle becomes recast as an internal conflict in the case of Phaedra, who shares Britomartis' resistance to desire even as she experiences the unlawful *erōs* embodied by her father Minos. The myth's denouement is unambiguous regarding the means for conquering desire and its implications for Phaedra's gender: escape from *erōs* demands the use of woven ropes, now fashioned as a noose rather than nets, and a fatal leap. In doing so, it assimilates Phaedra to both the sex-averse Dictynna and the diseased *parthenoi* who perform their own rendition of the myth when they jump into wells or hang themselves.

The assimilation of Phaedra's disease to divine possession and the strategic choice on the part of the dramatist of deities whose influence would match her symptoms serve to introduce, first, the idea of Phaedra's dissonance as labour or delayed menarche, and second, the solution to the crisis.

Antistrophe b, though moving away from this representation of Phaedra's struggle, continues the ode's twofold operation as explanation and preparation for future developments. Here, the Chorus provide interpretations that, as well as being convincing explanations of Phaedra's condition, are also very close to the actual cause of it; they thus demonstrate the acuity of their perception of the situation, both here and elsewhere in the ode. These conjectures are also thematically connected to Phaedra's future actions, namely the act of hanging itself and its surrounding circumstances.

In assimilating Phaedra to a wife competing with another woman for her husband's affections, the Chorus alight on the right cause for her suffering—illegitimate desire—but attribute it to the wrong member of the royal couple. They are also correct to detect in Phaedra a desire for what is not—or is no longer—available to her as an object of love; the Nurse already indicated this is a key element of Phaedra's condition when she complained that οὐδέ σ' ἀρέσκει τὸ παρόν, τὸ δ' ἄπὸν | φίλτερον ἤγῃ (184–85). Yet the Chorus' words may well be of further significance: they prefigure Phaedra's later plan to attribute her own adulterous desire to another, keeping for herself the role of its victim. In a manner similar to that in which the Chorus employ the paradigm of the cheated wife to communicate their understanding of Phaedra's condition, Phaedra will have to make use of an intelligible cultural narrative to lend authority to her re-ordering of reality. One such narrative in wide circulation is that of the violated woman who reclaims her honour by committing suicide; by embedding herself in it, Phaedra capitalises on the conviction it commands to sustain her self-presentation.

Following upon the suggestion of illicit *erōs*, the mention of suffering as a result of distressing news from one's family also acquires its significance by operating as an available narrative, albeit in a different way than previously explored. The 'rumour/word' (158 φήμαν) that has reached Phaedra can be construed not as new information, but as her own recollection of her family's ill-conceived desires and the danger of following a similar trajectory. In this instance, however, family legacy becomes a

narrative to be actively shunned or resisted.²⁴⁹ Knowledge of the family history causes distress that ‘binds her soul to her bed’, and eventually prompts her to bind her body in her bedchamber to avoid betraying her marriage bed. Phaedra’s preoccupation with her family and its reputation, as well as her determination to defeat her *erōs*, coalesce in a mode of death that casts her as a *parthenos* attached to the natal family. In an ironic twist of events, however, this *parthenos* who recalls with pain and fondness the paternal home commits herself to a course of action that starkly contrasts with family tradition.

The delirium scene also promotes this image of inviolate *parthenēia* as a gender configuration that, if achieved, will assist Phaedra in her fight against *erōs*. Viewed against the images of Phaedra’s dissonance developed above, her speech in this scene, itself a manifestation of the tension between revealing and concealing, clearly aligns verbal containment with the physical closure of pregnancy and menstrual retention. Yet the content of the scene also suggests more specifically that suicide by hanging is the appropriate course of action by elaborating on the image of the eternal *parthenos*. As previously discussed, the imagery of Phaedra’s speech communicates both the encroachment of sexuality on purity and purity itself. If purging these locations and activities of their sexual components is a precondition for eliminating *erōs*, then the resulting imagery is but a description of Hippolytus’ lifestyle, and Phaedra merges with him in the figure of the eternally chaste *parthenos*. The precise means by which the purging of *erōs* must occur and Phaedra’s status as *parthenos* be achieved are suggested in the imagery of hunting and the shape it assumes when divested of sexuality. Within the context of the speech, this traditional activity of the youthful huntress also operates in its capacity as a metaphor for erotic pursuit.²⁵⁰ Phaedra can attempt to divest it of sexual connotations by refashioning it in the mode of the adolescent’s hunt, conducted with nets and traps rather than javelins. However, when this image too is appropriated by *erōs* to denote homoerotic paederastic courtship, Phaedra can only hope to contain desire by turning the accoutrements of adolescent hunting against herself, becoming the innocent victim of her woven trap.²⁵¹ Eloquently demonstrating

²⁴⁹ See Halleran 1995: 40, 177. For most critics, however, Phaedra’s actions conform to the family tradition of sexual deviance, which contributes to—or prefigures—her failure to act nobly: Winnington-Ingram 1960: 175–76; Goff 1990: 81; Goldhill 1986: 127; Rabinowitz 1993: 160.

²⁵⁰ Cairns 1997: 172 n. 21; Barringer 2001: 70–124 (see 86–88 for literary sources).

²⁵¹ Barringer (2001) demonstrates that hunting through entrapment was acceptable as a metaphor for homoerotic pursuit (86–87, 117–19) but argues, without explicitly referring to the hunting method, that the roles of hunter and hunted could be reversed (104–11). On the contrary, such a reversal was disapproved of in heterosexual amatory hunting (103, 109, 112). Perhaps Phaedra’s entrapment in her noose helps explain the statement, made during the announcement of her plan to kill herself, that *πικροῦ δ’ ἔρωτος ἡσσηθήσομαι* (727). Eros, too, can set traps (see Barringer 2001: 87 for sources); however, rather than a capitulation to her desire, Phaedra’s willing entrapment becomes a means to contain the *erōs*, to prevent it from being acted upon. She does, of course, end up involving Hippolytus through the false accusation, but at no point does she actually pursue him. In fact, her hanging makes Hippolytus appear as the amorous hunter—and this may perhaps better explain her admission of defeat at the hands of love: she will *appear* to have been defeated by (another’s) desire. In this light, it is especially ironic, as Barringer (2001: 87) notes, that according to Oppian (*Cyn.* 2.25) Hippolytus was the inventor of the net.

Phaedra's dissonance, the imagery of hunting dictates that Phaedra become the chaste victim to her own *erōs* in order to safely contain it.

Both before and during Phaedra's first appearance on stage, the language and imagery mobilised to convey her suffering allow the simultaneous framing of her fight against illegitimate *erōs* in terms of labour and delayed menarche, implicitly aligning the successful containment of desire with a pathological outcome for these conditions. At the same time, elements of these scenes double as veiled references to the suitability of suicide by hanging as the appropriate means to contain illicit *erōs*, thereby creating an impression of the play as subtly but inexorably pushing Phaedra to hang herself. After the failure of ἀβρωσία and the Nurse's encounter with Hippolytus, Phaedra will indeed decide to hang herself, but the implications of this act must be explored in context before the measure of its success in defeating desire can be assessed.

Phaedra's suicide

As will emerge during the following discussion, Phaedra's suicide succeeds in both containing her *erōs* and satisfying her desire for εὐκλεία. The Chorus are the first to venture such an appraisal of her act;²⁵² their remarks on her liberation from *erōs* (774–75) and her preference for a glorious reputation must, at least in part, be inspired by their sympathy for the queen, but are also premised on knowledge of her confessed motives and aspirations. At the very least, the narrative will in due course appear to validate their estimation: not only will it facilitate the simultaneous activation of connotations of eternal *partheneia*, indefinite pregnancy, and extreme wifely chastity, but it will also represent this anomalous female identity as sufficient to isolate and contain *erōs*. At the same time, this victory vindicates Phaedra's claims to a good reputation, and the subsequent revelation of her *erōs*, far from overshadowing her successful resistance, brings into higher relief the immensity of her achievement.

Although Phaedra's suicide is imagined by the Chorus in 768–75 and confirmed by the Nurse in the dialogue of 776–89, its contribution towards Phaedra's presentation as an eternal *parthenos* does not emerge until Theseus has read the accompanying letter. The narrative contained therein creates the conditions for activating the connotations of *partheneia* inherent in suicide by hanging. Confronted with the prospect of Hippolytus' revelation of her *erōs* without an accompanying acknowledgement of her desire to resist it, Phaedra is compelled to overcompensate by foregrounding precisely that aspect of her struggle. To that effect, she contrives the mutually reinforcing narratives of suicide and letter to divide her dissonance between herself and Hippolytus and project her illegitimate desire onto him.²⁵³

²⁵² Burnett (1986: 175) also observes that the ode ends on this positive note of Phaedra's surviving honour.

²⁵³ Rabinowitz 1993: 164: 'She thus reassigns the desire that the playwright through the goddess assigned to her.'

This artificial division is itself suggestive of a role reversal whereby Hippolytus unwittingly becomes the subject of illegitimate desire, allowing Phaedra to usurp his own identity as chaste victim of that *erōs*. Buttressing Phaedra's self-presentation in these terms, the mode of her suicide and the verbal communication contained in the letter embed her in the tradition of violated *parthenoi* who hang themselves to counteract the infringement of the body's boundaries. Picking up the hints contained in the *parodos* and pursuing her own desire to inflict no shame on the natal family that still commands her loyalty (719), Phaedra chooses the ἀφροσύνα of diseased *parthenoi* and its implications over the ἀφροσύνα of *erōs*.

As well as countering the madness of *erōs* with claims to eternal *partheneia*, Phaedra's suicide forecloses the revelation of her secret by deploying the connections between hanged and pregnant bodies. The physical and verbal loosening that threatened an eruption of *erōs* into the public realm is brought to a halt by this binding of the body, which firmly re-establishes its boundaries and seals its apertures. In fact, so securely is the secret contained, that even those characters who know and can speak of it are rendered mute. For all his desperate hints at unspoken and unspeakable events (1021–24, 1032–33, 1060–62, 1071–75), Hippolytus feels constrained to maintain his oath of silence, and any allusions to desire are restricted to assertions of his own well-known aversion to sex (1002–06). The Chorus, at this point the only character in the drama capable of restoring the truth, plead ignorance in an almost extravagant fashion. They are, of course, bound by their promise to Phaedra, but the conviction with which they deny all knowledge and the pitiful language in which they wonder about Phaedra's motives (811–16) go beyond the demands of this promise, and can better be explained as a strategy for conveying Phaedra's success in hiding her secret. The letter, it is true, has revealed desire as the cause of the present disaster, but the mechanism by which it divorces *erōs* from its true subject ensures that the truth of Phaedra's condition will remain secret. With Phaedra's suicide and the assistance of the *deutos*, the *erōs* threatening to spread beyond the confines of Phaedra's inner circle and into the city is reabsorbed, as it were, entirely within Phaedra's body.

The resolution of Phaedra's dissonance in the twin directions of pregnancy and *partheneia* marks her victory over unlawful desire, thereby securing her status as faithful wife. That the preservation of marital fidelity has been the objective all along is evidenced by the context in which the narrative of violation is placed and the adaptations to its traditional form: purportedly responding to an assault that violates her marriage as much as her virtue, Phaedra attaches her noose to the beams of her marriage chamber (767–69) to recall the institution that defines her and the husband on whom she depends.²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the connotations imported by hanging are also a reminder of the polarisation that

²⁵⁴ Loraux 1987: 24. See also Burnett (1986: 176) for the presentation of Phaedra's death in the second stasimon as an attempt to rescue what she can from her marriage.

Phaedra's *erōs* occasioned and the impossibility of returning to a normative female identity. Enclosed within noose and house, Phaedra builds the appearance of the virtuous wife who preserves her body for her husband. When Theseus returns, however, this body proves remarkably hard to access: the palace refuses to admit him (792–93), and Theseus must ask his servants to take apart the locks and joints that fasten the doors in order to see Phaedra (808–10). Even then, his attempts to reach and understand her are foiled at every turn. His speculation that the letter pertains to his future conduct is wide of the mark (858–61), and even when the *deltos* obediently unravels in his hands to reveal Phaedra's thoughts, the message it delivers widens the distance between her true self and his understanding. Not only does he accept a fabrication as an unalloyed confession of the truth, but also, and quite ironically, the narrative that asserts Phaedra's fidelity is the same that informs Theseus he has been robbed of exclusive rights to her body. True to her word, Phaedra will not face Theseus after shameful deeds—not only because she has not, in fact, yielded to desire but also, because she ensures she will be absent from the scene of confrontation. Phaedra's determination to remain faithful in the face of illicit *erōs* moves her to the extreme of wifely chastity and renders her, like the sterile Hippocratic women, a wife virtually unavailable to her husband.

As a mode of death that within the context of the play attributes to Phaedra the roles of perpetual *parthenos*, indefinitely pregnant woman, and sterile wife, suicide by hanging emerges as the appropriate means to defeat illegitimate desire and its loosening effects on the queen's body. In that respect, it appears as an amplified version of the first suicide attempt by starvation; but instead of merely intensifying the already desirable effects of ἀβρωσία on the body, hanging also succeeds in securing the type of εὐκλεία towards which Phaedra has been aspiring. This is eventually vouchsafed by Artemis' proclamations, but Phaedra's death and the conditions it creates initiate and facilitate this development.

Phaedra's εὐκλεία: approaching the divine

During the exploration of Phaedra's resolve to die and the motivations behind it, it emerged that her ideal of εὐκλεία deviates from conventional ideas on women's reputation, and demands acknowledgment of her staunch resistance to *erōs*. Arguably, within the version of reality created by Phaedra's suicide and note, Phaedra manages to achieve at least a measure of this type of εὐκλεία. Although unable to claim mastery over a passion she knows she cannot confess, she is nevertheless elevated above run-of-the-mill wives by casting her internal struggle as resistance to a purely external illegitimate *erōs*. Her reward for such devotion to her husband is to escape the obscurity that would otherwise envelop her. Her virtue is spoken of in the public realm by no less an authority than

Theseus himself, the content as well as the audience of whose praise for Phaedra explicitly place the queen outside the house (848–51): ²⁵⁵

<αἰᾶ ἰαῖ,> ἔλιπες ἔλιπες, ὦ φίλα
 γυναικῶν ἀρίστα θ' ὀπόσας ὀρᾶ
 φέγγος θ' ἀλίιοιο καὶ νυκτὸς ἀ- 850
 στερωπὸν σέλας.

<Alas, alas,> you have left them, dear wife, best of women looked on by the brightness of the sun and the starry gleam of night.

This is not merely an elaborate way of designating Phaedra as the best among all women, although it arguably performs this function, too.²⁵⁶ It advances a specific reading of the presence of Phaedra's dead body outside the confines of the *oikos*:²⁵⁷ it fulfils the body's demand for public acknowledgement of the virtue of which the body itself constitutes visual proof. For a few moments, the suicide and the narrative of external erotic violence are enough to secure for Phaedra a glorious name as faithful wife among the king and his subjects.

Nevertheless, acquisition of this type of εὐκλεία remains unsatisfying on several fronts. Premised on an artificial separation of *erōs* from its true subject, it represents a mismatch between the nature of Phaedra's achievement and the acclaim she wins. It is true that the narrative that generates this somewhat lacklustre type of εὐκλεία is engineered by Phaedra herself; yet nowhere in the play is it suggested that her suicide plan constitutes a solution to the paradox of her ideal of εὐκλεία. Unable to fathom a situation that would allow her to own her desire without incurring shame, and confronted

²⁵⁵ See also Knox 1952: 23: 'Even in his mourning for Phaedra he is conscious of his public stature, ἔπαθον ὦ πόλις (817)'. His remark, however, is dependent on accepting the reading πόλις over the τάλας preferred by Diggle. Later on, the Messenger that will announce Hippolytus' accident will call Theseus by his title (1153 γῆς ἄνακτα), stressing the political dimension of the familial tragedy (Segal 1965: 142). There is no reason why the same quality cannot be attributed to this first disaster, the death of the queen, especially considering the theatrical revelation of her dead body before internal and external audiences.

²⁵⁶ The Chorus of Euripides' *Alcestis* praise the dead queen in very similar terms: 150–51 ἴστω νυν εὐκλεῆς γε κατθανομένη | γυνή τ' ἀρίστη τῶν ὑφ' ἡλίῳ μακρῷ (cf. 442 πολὺ δὴ πολὺ δὴ γυναικ' ἀρίσταν). The simultaneous assertion of Alcestis' εὐκλεία offers support to my suggestion that Theseus' words here acknowledge and acquiesce to Phaedra's claim for a good reputation. Further similarities in the description of these two Euripidean heroines will emerge later, again in the context of εὐκλεία and its premises. See p. 117 and n. 268.

²⁵⁷ Hippolytus' angry rant against women, in which he laments the creation of women by Zeus 'in the light of the sun' (617) has already pointed up the anomaly of women's presence in the open (Goff 1990: 19). Although Hippolytus means to condemn the very creation of women, it is easy to see that the problems which their belated appearance supposedly caused can be more powerfully articulated if women are explicitly presented as transgressing the boundaries of gendered spaces. Hippolytus himself is a passionate advocate for women's seclusion in the house without means of communicating with the outside world (645–50). For the complications which the first woman introduced in the human perception of the world see Zeitlin 1996: 239–40.

with the threat of Hippolytus' revelation, Phaedra resolves on an action that will at least elevate her above the ranks of ordinary wives. The play, however, has not precluded the possibility of true εὐκλεια for Phaedra just yet.²⁵⁸ To begin with, the pending revelation of the truth suggests that Phaedra's self-presentation so far, and the εὐκλεια premised on it, will not remain unchallenged. More importantly, the fulfilment of Phaedra's concept of a good reputation has been guaranteed by Aphrodite herself, whose pronouncements in the prologue provide the backbone of the drama's plot. Right after informing the audience of her intention to reveal Phaedra's infatuation to Theseus (42), Aphrodite confirms that Phaedra will nonetheless remain εὐκλεής (47). The first articulation of what we will later recognise as Phaedra's conceptualisation of εὐκλεια—good reputation in spite or because of knowledge of her *erōs*—appears as a divine dispensation, and must therefore be realised.

The realisation that Phaedra may still acquire her ideal of εὐκλεια raises questions regarding the way in which this outcome will be effected, and in particular the type of speech that will be summoned to guarantee it. It was previously mentioned in passing that none of the mortal characters who know of Phaedra's dissonance appears to envision a resolution to the constitutive paradox of her concept of εὐκλεια. The female audience that receives Phaedra's confession is able to commend her noble fight, but their approbation is not identical to the public praise to which Phaedra aspires. It has been suggested by Gilula that only death can persuade public opinion of Phaedra's honour, as it would remove the possibility of her yielding to desire.²⁵⁹ The play, however, problematises the idea of death as a hard and fast solution to Phaedra's conundrum. If that were the case, Phaedra could conceivably have asked the Chorus and her Nurse to safeguard her secret while she was still alive, and proceed to reveal her fight after her death, securing for her a glorious reputation. The fact that none of the characters raises this possibility strongly suggests that human speech—and perhaps specifically *female* human speech—can never be entirely trusted to convey the truth.²⁶⁰ Such a hypothetical report by the Nurse or the Chorus would carry no more authority than its audience would be willing to acknowledge, and could be accepted or rejected at will by the other characters. This is especially so because their explanation of Phaedra's death would contradict the widespread belief about women's sexual incontinence and their readiness to commit adultery.²⁶¹ The situation calls for authoritative

²⁵⁸ In taking this view I differ from Rabinowitz (1993: 156), who reads the paradox of Phaedra's εὐκλεια as the play's proposed model for women: 'Either passive and virtuous but denied the rewards of the culture (in this case, fame), or active and malicious but denied the rewards just the same.'

²⁵⁹ Gilula 1981: 127–28.

²⁶⁰ One may wonder why Phaedra is certain her (written) account will convince Theseus, if female speech is implicitly understood by the characters themselves to be unreliable. Part of the response is that Phaedra embeds her speech in already established narratives that carry significant persuasive force. However, the very fact of Phaedra's persuasion of Theseus with a plausible lie and the devastation wrought by this act ironically confirm the universal untrustworthiness of female speech. For more on the association of female speech with deceit in the *Hippolytus* see McClure 1999: 112–57.

²⁶¹ For this stereotype on female nature in the play see: Eur. *Hipp.* 406–07; Barrett 1964: 233–34; Zeitlin 1996: 252.

speech of a kind neither Phaedra nor her female attendants possess, a kind of speech that does not merely convey information about reality, but determines the nature of reality itself.

I would argue that within the play, this type of speech can—and is—wielded only by the gods. The question of the authority of divine pronouncements is part of a larger critical concern with the divine frame and its role in the *Hippolytus*, and does not admit an easy answer.²⁶² The scope of the present enquiry does not permit a detailed analysis of the various approaches to the issue; nevertheless, and regardless of the view one takes on the character and purpose of Euripidean gods, I believe it is still possible to assert that divine speech forms the mainstay of the truth in a play deeply concerned with appearances, reality, and opposing points of view. Though often fulfilled in a different order and in unexpected ways, the predictions, promises, and threats made by the divine actors are all, to the extent of our knowledge, borne out in the drama; and if we feel that mortal transgressions and divine punishment are misaligned, or that the gods are callous and unjust, this impression similarly stems from an understanding that their speech determines reality, incomprehensible and incompatible with our experience of the drama as this reality may be. If, then, the gods of the *Hippolytus* can be depended upon to pronounce the truth, and if Phaedra, the Nurse, and the Chorus are incapable of devising a means to fulfil Aphrodite's prediction about Phaedra's εὐκλεία, we must depend on another instance of divine speech to bring about that result. This is one of the functions that Artemis will perform with her epiphany, and it is to her role in shaping Phaedra's reputation that we will now turn.

Artemis' revelations and dispensations at the end of the play will have far-reaching implications for Phaedra's εὐκλεία. In the first instance, restoration of the truth will reconfigure Phaedra's gender, which will now come to encompass the roles and aspects previously rejected as part of her resistance to *erōs*. Although acknowledgement of her unlawful desire does not undermine her victory over it, it nevertheless changes the terms of her relationship to *erōs*, and as such demands a reconsideration of her reputation and its premises. Having thus articulated Phaedra's εὐκλεία as premised on the experience of and containment of illicit *erōs*, Artemis will ensure the survival of her reputation beyond the immediate setting by weaving it into the fabric of ritual song. Situating Phaedra's εὐκλεία,

²⁶² The question of the authority of divine speech is often treated alongside the issue of the gods' morality, but here I am primarily concerned with their capacity to present events as truth. Indicatively, some of the critics who accept the words of the gods as truthful, if often not immediately clear, are: Barrett 1964, esp. 164–65, 399; Halleran 1995, esp. 41–42, 145–46, 151, 257–58; Garrison 1995: 67. McClure (1999) also stresses the dependence of the human characters on divine revelation to uncover the truth (153, 157), but assigns the capacity for unambiguous speech only to the virgin goddess Artemis, detecting in Aphrodite's words a duplicity characteristic of the whole female sex (121, 153). For Winnington-Ingram (1960: 182) and Reckford (1974: 309) Artemis in her pronouncement offers a simplified version of the events. Goff (1990: 81–95, 105–13) provides the most sustained analysis of the problematic character of divine speech in the play, with relevant bibliography. She argues persuasively that the speech of the gods seems to replicate, instead of resolving, the ambiguities inherent in the human use of key terms (see also Segal 1970: 292). However, I would object—and I will do below—that at least as far as Phaedra's reputation is concerned, Artemis' pronouncement is far from an admission of uncertainty (87).

and the gender on which it is premised, in the realm of cult, Artemis elevates Phaedra to a more-than-human position, and presents her gender as precondition and feature of this semi-divine status.

We may follow this chain of developments by first mapping the consequences of the truth's restoration on Phaedra's gender. By assigning back to Phaedra the desire she had projected onto Hippolytus, Artemis foregrounds Phaedra's dissonance and reintroduces the roles that hanging, as the resolution to the crisis, had excluded. The posthumous return of desire resurrects the complex of roles and identities that Phaedra had to negotiate while alive, allowing them to co-exist. However, the re-emergence of the adulterous woman, who would open her body in imitation of childbirth and menstruation, expands the identity Phaedra attained upon her death without overtaking it. It is not simply that Phaedra did, eventually prevail upon her desire, and is no longer in danger of succumbing to its pressure; her success is also vouchsafed by Artemis, who encapsulates the relationship between *erōs*, resistance to its demands, and Phaedra's εὐκλεία, in her description of Phaedra's actions as οἷστρον ἢ τρόπον τινὰ | γενναιότητα (1300–01). The function of this somewhat cryptic phrase as a favourable verdict on both Phaedra's conduct and the type of reputation to which it entitles her is rendered clear when it is examined in context. In the immediately preceding lines (1298–99), Artemis states that the other item she has come to reveal is Hippolytus' φρένα δικάία, the explicit purpose of the revelation being to ensure he dies ὑπ' εὐκλείας. Isolating this trait of Hippolytus as the basis for his εὐκλεία, Artemis leads us to assume that her judgement on Phaedra's reputation will be similarly indicated by her comments on her character or behaviour. However, although Artemis does proceed to describe Phaedra's ethos as οἷστρον ἢ τρόπον τινὰ | γενναιότητα, she does not elaborate on the implications of this judgement for the afterlife of Phaedra's name.²⁶³ We must therefore reconstruct the reputation assigned to Phaedra on the basis of the divine statement on which it depends.

The construction of Artemis' phrase as a set of alternative or mutually exclusive descriptions juxtaposed by means of the disjunctive ἢ may create the impression of uncertainty as to the upright character of Phaedra's behaviour, or even lead to the conclusion that the goddess is dismissive of Phaedra's concern with her reputation.²⁶⁴ As I aim to show, however, this construction functions instead as a device that not only focuses attention on Phaedra's dissonance, but also establishes the priority of her resistance to *erōs* over the experience of desire itself at the core of her posthumous reputation. As a term that has come to encompass under the meaning of sting or smarting pain the experiences of intense desire, madness, and frenzy, οἷστρος is clearly a fit description of Phaedra's *erōs* in its familiar guise as ἀφοσύνα.²⁶⁵ Already in the prologue, her suffering is described by

²⁶³ For Knox (1952: 18) and Halleran (1995: 43) the absence of a similar clarification for Phaedra means that Artemis is concerned with Hippolytus' reputation.

²⁶⁴ Uncertainty: Goff 1990: 26, 87, 108. Dismissal: Knox 1952: 17–18 (see also the rebuttal in Gilula 1981: 127).

²⁶⁵ For these meanings of οἷστρος see LSJ s.v. with relevant examples.

Aphrodite as provoked by the κέντροις ἔρωτος (39), and the image of stinging *erōs* is sustained throughout the play through the association of the bee with Aphrodite (563–64) and the image of a shaft-wielding Eros (530–32).²⁶⁶ Juxtaposed with οἴστρος, γενναιότητα appears to designate Phaedra’s noble resistance to desire—and her success.²⁶⁷ It is the same quality that the Nurse urges upon Phaedra as a means of resistance when *erōs* is loosening her body, causing her to toss and turn: 205–06 ῥῆον δὲ νόσον μετὰ θ’ ἠσυχίας | καὶ γενναίου λήματος οἴσεις. It is also the only description deemed by the Chorus of *Alcestis* sufficient to convey the depth of dedication that led the heroine to voluntary death (*Alc.* 993–94 γενναιοτάταν δὲ πασᾶν | ἐξεύξω κλισίαις ἄκοιτιν).²⁶⁸ That in its application to Phaedra it appears qualified as γενναιότητα ‘in a way’ should not surprise us. If the γενναιότης of tragic women is the mark of a wifely devotion defiant of death, then Artemis, if she is to do justice to Phaedra’s commitment to marital fidelity as well as to the anomalous identity that results from that commitment, must indicate Phaedra’s exceptional status in her language. Phaedra is neither an ordinary wife nor just a wife, and the γενναιότης attributed to her by the goddess duly acknowledges this fact.

Yet the relationship between these terms is not exhausted in its function as a shorthand for Phaedra’s victory over *erōs*. If we attempt a reading informed by Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* and Euripides’ *Iphigeneia Among the Taurians*, where οἴστρος and its cognates denote alternately a literal sting, madness, and the roaming of the afflicted person, we may understand οἴστρος and γενναιότητα as sequentially related rather than conceptually opposed.²⁶⁹ Against the uses of οἴστρος evidenced in these plays, Phaedra’s οἴστρος may come to denote not only her *erōs*, but also some aspects of the dissonance she experiences in resisting desire. Although Phaedra’s particular brand of madness does not result in the literal wanderings of Orestes and Io (in fact, her physical movements on stage are quite restricted), the experience of dissonance activates her imagination and carries her to locations far from the domestic setting of the palace, into the wild and liminal places frequented by Artemis and Hippolytus. For the Chorus, too, Phaedra’s condition naturally suggests wild roaming, as indicated by their use of φοιτᾶς (144) to describe her suffering. Applied throughout the play to Aphrodite’s (447–48) as well as Dictynna’s perambulations (148–50), and to Artemis’ visitation in a context where madness may well occur (169–70), φοιτᾶν also denotes specifically the roamings of Pan, whose

²⁶⁶ See Frischer 1980: 89.

²⁶⁷ Barrett (1964: 339) and Halleran (1995: 259) view Artemis’ phrase strictly as a juxtaposition of opposite aspects of Phaedra (desire and the fight against it), neither of which is prioritised over the other or admits of a different interpretation. Most critics are only willing to concede a measure of nobility to Phaedra, assuming that τρόπον τινα γενναιότητα is a heavily qualified acknowledgement of her resistance, and therefore, an indication of her defeat: Reckford 1974: 308, 327; Rabinowitz 1993: 165; McClure 1999: 153.

²⁶⁸ See Rademaker 2005: 160 for comments on Alcestis’s exceptionality being framed in terms of σωφροσύνη. Given the parallels already noted between Phaedra and Alcestis, the latter’s σωφροσύνη, manifesting in her willingness to die for her husband, could help shed more light on Hippolytus’ comment regarding his and his stepmother’s use of this quality (1034–35).

²⁶⁹ Aesch. *PV.* 566–73, 680–82, 836–37; Eur. *IT.* 1455–56.

approach can cause frenzy.²⁷⁰ As a frenzied wandering occasioned by a clash between desire and its denial, Phaedra's οἶστρος can have one of two outcomes: it can end with *erōs*, as it is predicted to end for Io in *Prometheus Bound* (848–49), or with a religious gesture of devotion to Artemis, which Orestes performs to end the Erinyes' pursuit (979–81, 1453–57). When Phaedra chooses to banish her unlawful *erōs* with a mode of death variously associated with Artemis, it is no wonder that the goddess herself would describe her behaviour as τρόπον τινα γενναιότητα: γενναιότητα, because Phaedra acted in a manner consistent with the nature of Artemis and bound to induce her approval; τρόπον τινά, because this is a highly specific and idiosyncratic manifestation of γενναιότης, one virtually inapplicable to any other set of circumstances.

One may carry the association between οἶστρος and γενναιότης further still: with οἶστρος, Artemis may not be referring to erotic desire at all, but to that other ἀφροσύνα, the παράνοια of the Hippocratic *parthenoi* that Phaedra embraced when she chose to seal her body in death. Applied now to the specific act of suicide, οἶστρος and γενναιότης approach each other along the lines of meaning to emerge as alternative, almost interchangeable designations both of Phaedra's motives (the madness of resisting *erōs* and the wish to remain a faithful wife) and of her suicide's results (connotations of eternal *partheneia* and wifely chastity). Far from indicating divine condemnation or uncertainty regarding the moral evaluation of Phaedra's actions, then, οἶστρον ἢ τρόπον τινα | γενναιότητα constitutes a uniquely condensed description of the entirety of Phaedra's career. Denoting the opposites of *erōs* and its denunciation, the terms articulate not merely the opposition, but the interdependence of the two impulses; as a description of the dissonance and its outcome, they summarise the crisis and its resolution in a triumph over illicit desire; and as an articulation of the ἀφροσύνα Phaedra preferred over the madness of *erōs*, and of the nobility of her choice, they dispel any doubt regarding Phaedra's achievement.

Evaluating Phaedra's conduct even as it summarises it, Artemis' divine pronouncement is crucial for understanding the type of reputation that the commemoration of Phaedra's love in cultic song entails. To begin with, if Phaedra's εὐκλεία is to assume the desired shape, the narrative of resistance that she has projected with her suicide and note must be accompanied by public acknowledgement of the *erōs*; this missing piece, moved from Phaedra to Hippolytus, is now firmly installed in public consciousness. Yet the establishment of *erōs* as the theme of the ritual song is meant to evoke the entirety of events it sparked: just as οἶστρος can denote not just desire, but also the struggle it generated and the madness that helped defeat it—in other words, Phaedra's γενναιότης—so *erōs*, located as it is in the cult of the person most representative of its renunciation, cannot but also recall the eventual outcome of this divinely-inspired passion. *Erōs* has been the starting point, the greatest

²⁷⁰ Borgeaud 1988: 233–34, n. 75.

challenge, and the defeated enemy, and it is only reasonable that Phaedra's εὐκλεία will be premised on the perpetuation of its memory.

Having thus addressed the issue of isolating *erōs* as the focus of ritual song, I will now explore in more detail the contribution of this specific type of memorialisation to Phaedra's reputation, as well as, and perhaps more importantly, the role of her gender in shaping and maintaining that reputation. As discussed previously, the complex gender identity that emerges upon the revelation of Phaedra's *erōs* is inextricably tied to her εὐκλεία, premised as they both are on the acknowledgement of desire as well as its successful containment. The provisions made by Artemis for the memorialisation of Phaedra and Hippolytus not only place the former's gender squarely at the centre of her claim to fame, but also implicitly affirm and incorporate into the *polis* her non-normative identity. The song relating Phaedra's *erōs* will be performed by prospective brides, young women poised at the cusp of a transition between mutually exclusive roles, and embodying opposing attitudes to *erōs* and sexuality. Significantly, this partial identification of young brides and Phaedra occurs within a space simultaneously demarcated from and belonging to the *polis* and its institutions. That Phaedra's story should be the concern of women who experience, if only fleetingly, some of the contradictions in her own identity, and that they do so in their capacity as members of the community, strongly suggests that this identity, anomalous as it may be, is not only accommodated, but regularly re-articulated and celebrated.²⁷¹ It is this cyclical repetition through time that eventually ensures that Phaedra's reputation exceeds the boundaries of the familial tragedy and becomes true *kleos*: the *erōs* that evokes her noble resistance and gives Phaedra her glorious reputation will be in the mind of future generations, generating perpetual εὐκλεία for Phaedra in the realm of the *polis* and its citizens.²⁷²

²⁷¹ Such a positive view of Phaedra's story is not common among approaches to the brides' song. For some critics, like McClure (1999: 153–57), the role of the young women as participants in a city-controlled rite of initiation into sexuality entails the reassertion of a masculine subject position, from which Phaedra is viewed as a counter-example. At best, their ambivalent status vis-à-vis the *polis*, which both relies on them as providers of citizens and relegates them to the margin, replicates the similarly contradictory position of Phaedra, who could provide her sons with *parrhesia* and Theseus' *oikos*, though herself possessing neither (Goff 1990: 117). More often, it is Hippolytus rather than Phaedra who is considered a paradigm for the brides: Even Zeitlin (1996: 234, 276), who elaborates on the imitative processes that render Phaedra's actions the blueprint for those of Hippolytus, seems careful not to draw a connection between this original paradigm, Phaedra, and the brides for whom the example is Hippolytus. Among the few for whom Phaedra does stand to offer a positive example are Burnett (1986: 177), who sees Phaedra's resistance to *erōs* as an exhortation for the brides to expunge their lust before entering into marriage. Cairns' (1997: 69 n. 88) interpretation points rather to the opposite direction, positing Phaedra's inclusion in the song as a reminder that Aphrodite's power must be respected. Nowhere is the possibility raised of Phaedra's presence in song as a celebration of her entire career rather than a cautionary tale for the future. For a detailed discussion of the various aspects of the cult and song and its implications for the play at last see Goff (1990: 94, 105–29).

²⁷² According to McClure (1999: 118–20) what Phaedra achieves with her immortalisation in song is the opposite of *kleos*; women can only be spoken of in public in negative terms. It is curious that Zeitlin (1996: 267–68), who rightly acknowledges the immortalising function of the song and the *kleos* it confers, restricts its relevance to Hippolytus only—unless the focus is due Hippolytus' own wish for an unchanging life.

Nevertheless, and despite the place Phaedra assumes in civic life, Artemis' dispensations clearly preclude the possibility of complete rehabilitation of Phaedra's gender in the human society whose norms it contravenes. Instead, they indicate Phaedra's transition to a realm beyond the sphere of human life, and suggest her transformation into a suprahuman—heroic or semi-divine—being. The place of the narrative of her *erōs* in the cult of Hippolytus, whose heroisation is practically guaranteed, is the first indication of such a change in Phaedra's status. Although the play does not grant her the future receipt of cultic offerings like Hippolytus, her association with him and her presence in the rituals performed in his honour is reminiscent of a frequent phenomenon in antiquity, the simultaneous presence of a male and female hero figure when the two are connected by a family relationship.²⁷³ Indeed, according to Pausanias (2.32.4), Phaedra's tomb in Troezen was located close to that of Hippolytus. Yet the most convincing evidence in favour of Phaedra's ascent to a more-than-human status is the network of similarities that the play has steadily woven between the queen and the female deities that frame the drama's action.²⁷⁴

Braund has observed that Phaedra's preoccupation with εὐκλεία may indicate a preoccupation with Artemis, who was also identified with Eukleia in Athens and other Greek cities of the fifth and subsequent centuries.²⁷⁵ This association, which has since been noted only as an aside, becomes all the more apparent if we consider the information, provided by Plutarch, that the statue and altar of Artemis Eukleia were located in the *agora*, and that the goddess received offerings from prospective brides and bridegrooms.²⁷⁶ There are obvious similarities with Phaedra's wish to establish a reputation in the public realm, as well as with her position in a cultic song performed by brides, but the assimilation of Phaedra to Artemis is also supported by the former's actions throughout the play. As we have seen, Phaedra's desires in the delirium scene convey a wish to assume the lifestyle of Hippolytus and his patron goddess, and prompt the Chorus to assume the queen is 'wandering' under the influence of Artemis in her many guises. More importantly, Phaedra successfully resists the allure of unlawful *erōs* by succumbing to the madness of eternal *parthenoi* and sealing her body in the bloodless death associated with Artemis. Phaedra's career may have been set in motion by an impossible and morally appalling love, but has become a process of approximating the goddess most inimical to *erōs*.²⁷⁷

²⁷³ See Larson 1995: 59, 79 for the connection between Hippolytus' and Phaedra's tombs, and especially 181 n. 12 for evidence of a potential cult of Phaedra in Troezen.

²⁷⁴ Zeitlin 1986: 183–84 offers a brief comment on the multiple roles Phaedra comes to occupy in the play, among which are those of Artemis and Aphrodite.

²⁷⁵ Braund 1980.

²⁷⁶ Plut. *Arist.* 20.6. See Braund 1980: 184.

²⁷⁷ For some ways in which Phaedra—fleetingly—resembles or imitates Artemis see Braund 1970: 181; Frischer 1970: 89–90; Glenn 1976: 440.

Perhaps in a further display of the contradictions constitutive of Phaedra's identity, the intimations of heroisation or deification outlined so far are also supported by the verbal echoes and conceptual similarities between Phaedra and Aphrodite.²⁷⁸ The language with which Artemis describes the commemoration of Phaedra's *erōs* is telling: the phrase *κοῦκ ἀνόνομος πεσὼν | ἔρωσ ὁ Φαίδρα* (1429–30) readily recalls Aphrodite's introduction in the very first line of the prologue, where the goddess announces her divine status in terms of naming and reputation.²⁷⁹ Hippolytus' rejection of Aphrodite is synonymous with a refusal to acknowledge her status and admit her in his regard, and the goddess rightfully insists on naming as an indication of reverence.²⁸⁰ The preoccupation, shared by gods and mortals, with public acknowledgment and an established reputation has led Frischer to identify Phaedra's concern with *εὐκλεία* as a traditional form of *ὁμοίωσις θεῶ*.²⁸¹ Although his claim about the precise content and motivation of Phaedra's desire for *εὐκλεία* admits criticism,²⁸² he is right in highlighting the parallel between mortal and divine realms in this respect, and his point has particular valency for Phaedra and Aphrodite. In the end, both the goddess and her human instrument achieve their aims: Hippolytus finally acknowledges the divinity that wrought his destruction (1401), while Phaedra's noble struggle becomes a story shared among the community and passed down the generations.

Possessing a city-wide reputation transmitted through the centuries, and placed in a realm mediating between the mortal and divine realms, Phaedra is implicitly presented as transcending the limitations of normal human existence. Yet the achievement of her self-contradictory concept of *εὐκλεία* and the assimilation to a heroic or divine figure would not have been possible without the *erōs*-engendered dissonance and the resolution of the crisis in the direction of *partheneia*, pregnancy, and extreme wifely chastity. Phaedra's suicide and the identity with which it vested her necessitate the divine epiphany that restores the truth, setting in motion the processes that result in a fuller, more complex identity and a place in the realm of cult and ritual. In this space where norms may temporarily become suspended, the tensions and contradictions in Phaedra's gender may be accommodated without becoming reconciled, and provide the basis and substance for Phaedra's divinely sanctioned *εὐκλεία*.

Phaedra in other sources: Asclepiades, Diodorus Siculus, Apollodorus

In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, the presentation of Phaedra's dissonance in terms of labour or delayed menarche invited the use of a model informed by Hippocratic ideas to advance our understanding of

²⁷⁸ Implicitly in McClure 1999: 119–20, 125. Zeitlin 1996: 281 n. 117 provides a perspective on the similarity between Aphrodite and Phaedra premised on the possible evolution of the myth.

²⁷⁹ Frischer 1970: 94–95.

²⁸⁰ Frischer 1970: 94.

²⁸¹ Frischer 1970: 94–95.

²⁸² For example, his claim that Phaedra's struggle towards honour is 'a struggle against all that is basely human, towards all that is truly divine' gives too idealistic an impression of Phaedra's motives, side-lining the very real social concerns that regulate her behaviour.

Phaedra's decision-making process and its implications for her gender. When we turn to the other three surviving accounts of Phaedra's suicide by hanging, it emerges that these are not equally receptive to the same treatment. The brevity of the narratives and subsequent dearth of details also mean that opportunities for grounding the proposed framework in the texts are drastically reduced. Nevertheless, the inclusion of these accounts here is not simply an exercise in exhaustive analysis. More so than in the case studies of the preceding chapter, this is an opportunity to demonstrate clearly which types of material lend themselves to this interpretative framework, and the reasons for that disparity. Moreover, these narratives form an interesting counterpoint to the version encountered in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, and demonstrate the importance of narrative context for determining the import of suicide by hanging in more concrete terms. Finally, despite the overall recalcitrance of these texts, there are still a few interesting points to be made if they are considered against the nexus of ideas brought together here; such observations are indeed of a rather speculative nature, but may be of some value for texts that, broadly speaking, have attracted little critical attention.

To better illustrate these points, it is helpful to establish a set of shared features that appear virtually unchanged in the accounts of Asclepiades (Σ V Hom. *Od.* 11.321), Diodorus Siculus (4.62.1–4), and Apollodorus (*Ep.* 1.18–19). In all three narratives, Phaedra conceives an erotic desire for Hippolytus, which she attempts to fulfil by propositioning him. After her advances have been rebuffed, Phaedra, motivated either by fear of an accusation by Hippolytus or sheer indignation, accuses him to Theseus of sexual assault. As a result, Hippolytus dies and Phaedra hangs herself, although the precise timing of the events varies among the accounts. Invariably, the truth—either of Phaedra's *erōs* or of her false accusation, or both—comes to light. This outline, and especially the lack of equivocation on Phaedra's part, leave little room for viewing her as anything other than a straightforward case of an adulterous wife. Nevertheless, there remain a few elements in each account that may allow us to understand her suicide as more than an escape act.

In Asclepiades, the grip of erotic desire on Phaedra is conveyed through the use of the participle *τηκομένη*, which harks back to the traditional image of *erōs* as melting.²⁸³ Behind this obvious connotation a second, less overt meaning may be detected if we consider that the term is also used in the Hippocratic Corpus for, among other things, the body's wasting as a result of prolonged illness.²⁸⁴ Phaedra's passion may thus be figured as a pathological, and therefore undesirable, condition that forces her body to melt, loosen, and open up to engage in illegitimate relations. Even though the implicit presentation of *erōs* as a disease is unique to Asclepiades among the versions examined here, medical undertones could perhaps be detected in the association of the open female body with adultery in Diodorus Siculus. Both in her proposition to Hippolytus and her accusation to Theseus,

²⁸³ For *erōs* as melting see: Alc. fr. 3 *PMG*; *Anth. Lyr. Graec.* 5.359.7–8, 16.80.6.

²⁸⁴ *Hippoc. Morb.* vi.162.12–13, 174.19; *Aff.* vi.236.8–9; *Int.* vii.214.16.

Phaedra conveys the adulterous act with the verb μιγῆναι. This is an appropriate term for denoting sexual congress and is widely used both in common language and in medical discourse; however, within the vocabulary of the latter, μείγνυμι and its derivatives also describe the mixing of the partners' seeds, which can only succeed if nothing obstructs the female body's passageways.²⁸⁵ Ideally engaged in by a faithful and fertile wife in the conjugal bed, the act of μίξις Phaedra proposes does not only intimate the illicit sexual act, but also articulates a further threat to her marriage: the introduction of illegitimate children through the mixing of her and Hippolytus' seeds. Such subtle associations between adultery and the openness of the female body are at once starker and at a greater remove from medical contexts in Apollodorus' *Epitome*. To corroborate her claims of sexual violence suffered at Hippolytus' hand, Phaedra rends both the doors of her θάλαμος and her own clothes. Transgression into the exclusive space of the married couple, penetration through the layers, physical and symbolic, protecting the wife's body, convey a sense of violation that can be considered metonymic of penetration into the wife's body itself. Once again, the openness that the wife ideally displays within the boundaries of the conjugal relationship become the means to undermine it.

To some extent, all three accounts illustrate Phaedra's *erōs* by elaborating on the threat to legitimate marriage posed by an open female body. To determine whether these narratives, having started from a common premise, offer a different conclusion, we need to turn to the framing of Phaedra's suicide, and its connection to the framing of her desire. Broadly speaking, the texts seem to agree in situating Phaedra's suicide as a response to an accomplished or imminent revelation of the truth. If we accept that the phrases φανεραῖς γενομένης τῆς διαβολῆς (Asclepiades) and γενομένου δὲ τοῦ ἔρωτος περιφανοῦς (Apollodorus) communicate the coming to light of the entirety of Phaedra's actions (both the propositioning and the accusation), and that it is this revelation that Phaedra fears will result from the ἐξετασμός intended by Theseus (Diodorus Siculus), then her suicide appears uniformly as an attempt to exchange her now unacceptable, if not strictly speaking unintelligible, position with the image of a faithful wife.

Could the attempt to counter an identity characterised by excessive sexuality swing Phaedra towards the opposite extreme, as her body becomes closed to all men? Sexual chastity is indeed one of the connotations suicide by hanging can evoke, but as we lack secure textual grounds on which to argue this scenario is borne out, it must remain a possibility among others. Different interpretations are suggested if the statements describing the revelation of the truth in Asclepiades and Diodorus are more closely scrutinised. Described strictly in terms of an uncovering of her calumny, the revelation of Phaedra's διαβολή need not involve a further discovery of her advances towards Hippolytus. In such a scenario, like in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, her suicide appears more like a culturally available

²⁸⁵ See n. 158.

narrative into which she inscribes herself to lend strength to her disputed accusation. Similarly, if Diodorus' Phaedra has not yet despaired of prevailing upon Theseus, her suicide before Hippolytus' cross-examination may be viewed as an attempt to reinforce her accusation and avoid submitting to questioning.

A possible criterion for determining more securely the potential implications of Phaedra's suicide in each narrative may be sought in the relation between the interpretations already outlined and the framing of Phaedra's adultery by each author. In Asclepiades, suicide by hanging could assume the role of a countermeasure to the melting of *erōs*, creating an impression of Phaedra as concerned not only with her public image, but also with managing a desire that can no longer be fulfilled. Now that the loosening of *erōs* cannot be indulged through the opening of the body, the only viable option remains to banish desire entirely by actively resisting the urge to come undone. The presentation of her desire in the *Epitome*, on the other hand, at best reinforces the impression of her death as an act oriented towards her public image. Her accusation towards Hippolytus was rendered visible through the physical marks his supposed assault left on Phaedra; her attempt to rehabilitate her image in the public eye is similarly premised on actions whose effects on her body are equally clear to see and carry connotations of chastity.

The relative brevity of these narratives and the attendant lack of detail, as well as the overall similarities in key moments of the story clearly restrict the possibility for variation in the interpretations advanced. In the absence of language and imagery that would consistently draw upon the associations between the female body and hanging, the contribution of the interpretative framework is less generous than it may have otherwise been. Where invoked, the connotations of this mode of self-killing revolve around the opposition between the excessively open body of the adulteress and the hermetically sealed one of the chaste and unavailable wife. The emergence of some nuances specific to the handling of the material in each version, and particularly in Asclepiades' account, simultaneously corroborates and qualifies this impression of the applicability of the model: although recalcitrant material will resist this approach no less than other interpretations, there exist moments in the texts that can yield some unexpected, if tentative, insights if so approached. It remains for longer, more detailed narratives such as Euripides' *Hippolytus* to fully demonstrate the benefits that can be derived from the combination of diverse ideas on the relationship between suicide by hanging and gender.

Conclusions

Over her career as a central figure in no fewer than four different Greek mythic narratives that record her suicide by hanging, Phaedra has assumed a wide range of gender roles, configured in an equally

wide range of identities. This is not an observation that would appear self-evident when first engaging with the textual sources: application of an interpretive model premised on the associations of hanging with functions and conditions of the female body in various areas of Greek thought has made available a different perspective from which to approach the subject of Phaedra's death and the mythic events that motivated it. Conversely, the texts have helped map more precisely the potential of this model, the degree of its interaction with dominant themes, and the conditions under which it may be usefully introduced to enrich interpretation. Both these outcomes are amply illustrated in the results of the explorations undertaken over the course of this chapter.

In part because of its acknowledged departure from previous portrayals of Phaedra, and in part due to the themes it dramatises, Euripides' *Hippolytus* provides a particularly rich field for this approach to Phaedra's suicide. The presentation of Phaedra's pull between opposing impulses in terms that evoke functions of the female body invites the application of a scheme that points up the contradictions experienced and the implications of either choice for Phaedra's identity. The centrality of Phaedra's struggle in the play and its connection with her overarching preoccupation with εὐκλεία enlarged the field of application for the proposed model, enabling it to contribute towards the overall understanding of Phaedra's portrayal. The outcome of these processes was a re-evaluation, and in many occasions the complete overturning, of long-held assumptions about the significance of Phaedra's suicide, its reflection on her identity, and the type of afterlife it secures for her within the world of the play. Indeed, in place of the betrayed and vengeful queen or the honourable woman who fails to uphold her own moral standards emerged a semi-heroic, semi-divine figure whose gender encompasses multiple and contradictory female roles representative of her desire and her eventual victory over it.

The narratives of Asclepiades, Diodorus Siculus, and Apollodorus emerge largely as a counterpoint to this rich interpretative endeavour. In these texts, the dynamics between the narrative and the interpretative framework are differently configured, and the effects of this change are reflected in the narrower understanding of Phaedra's suicide. Her death appears as an attempt to rehabilitate her image, and the added connotation of extreme wifely chastity remains available only as part of the wider network of associations latent behind suicide by hanging. The impression of these accounts as largely identical iterations of the myth is nevertheless mitigated by the emergence of nuances once the points admitting of the approach adopted here have been more carefully explored.

These appear more as isolated glimpses of possible readings rather than coherent alternative interpretations, but are valuable insofar as they demonstrate the possibilities of this methodological approach.

Undoubtedly, Phaedra's metamorphoses will not end with her image as a chaste wife, eternal *parthenos*, and indefinitely pregnant woman shadowed by the spectre of the adulterous wife, nor will the significance of her hanging always turn on the opposition of closed and open body. However, her presentation in those terms is variously supported by the sources, and can lead to a renewed appreciation not only of the literary character of Phaedra, but also of the gendered aspects of mythic suicide and the destabilising potential of pathological bodies.

CHAPTER 3—ANTIGONE

Introduction

Contrary to the deaths of other tragic heroines, which are often summarily treated, Antigone's death in the eponymous Sophoclean drama does not suffer so much from a lack of scholarly attention, as from a disproportionate focus on what constitutes, upon closer examination, only a preliminary step to her demise. The punishment Creon devises for his niece, as well as—or precisely because of—the rich marriage imagery and language for which it provides the occasion have been the focus of many an insightful analysis. However, perhaps influenced by the suitability of this mode of death to serve the drama's development, these analyses often seem to harmonise Antigone's immurement with the events surrounding it, thus glossing over the crucial fact that the entombment has come as a complete surprise to the heroine.²⁸⁶ When Antigone decides to bury Polyneices in spite of Creon's edict, she does so expecting to be executed by public stoning, and it is against this expectation that her reasoning, arguments, and sentiments on the desirability of death must be construed. Even more importantly, the emphasis on the entombment detracts from the significance of the real cause of death, hanging. Indeed, the text offers little by way of explanation for Antigone's suicide, and this silence has led most critics to offer tentative speculations at best.²⁸⁷ Yet the mere fact of her suicide as a reaction to the enforced sentence may be sufficient to link this mode of death to the punishment Antigone had expected and accepted, and raises the question whether the suicide does not act as a corrective measure that will allow Antigone to stay true to the motives that first spurred her to action.²⁸⁸

The almost exclusive focus on entombment as the conclusion of Antigone's story has, perhaps unsurprisingly, rendered the 'marriage to death' motif permeating the relevant scenes of the play a reference point for many of the attempts at interpreting Antigone's gender. The result is that even varied and often nuanced discussions of this issue all too soon close down and return to a view of Antigone as first and foremost a woman. She may be the representative of an alternative order that opposes the patriarchal values enshrined by Creon, a maiden striving to untangle the hopelessly complicated kinship lines of her family, or a woman illustrating the catastrophic consequences of overvaluing blood bonds over institutional ones, but in any case she must descend to the cave as a

²⁸⁶ Segal 1981: 177–83; Ormand 1999: 90–98.

²⁸⁷ Griffith (1999: 334) views Antigone's suicide as a natural enough decision to hasten the inevitable, especially given her independence and her sense of abandonment by all. In her chosen mode of death he rightly discerns an emphasis on her status as virgin. The most comprehensive effort at interpreting Antigone's suicide has been made by Loraux (1987: 31–32), who advances two complementary justifications: Antigone has contrived her own death, following in the tradition of other Sophoclean heroines who demonstrate their independence in the same way, and has polluted what Loraux perceives as Creon's sacrifice of his niece to the gods below. Her other claim—namely, that in choosing the death preferred by tragic wives Antigone has found a femininity denied in life—will be discussed and qualified later in this chapter.

²⁸⁸ Garrison (1995: 132) indirectly makes this connection.

woman, and die as one.²⁸⁹ Some more recent scholarship that has turned to Antigone in order to furnish a paradigm for feminist activism or political action offers more promising interpretations. Most notably, Butler's Antigone in *Antigone's Claim* emerges as a figure that questions and expands the limits of the human, and though 'not quite a queer heroine', she does represent a certain fatality for heterosexuality.²⁹⁰ Yet in Butler, as in other thinkers who have discerned in Antigone a potential for embodying opposition to oppressive norms and regimes, the heroine's actual death is never examined on its own terms, and only operates at the margins of the argument by virtue of being the future towards that Antigone's actions look.

The limitations of these interpretative approaches may well be symptomatic of the strangeness of Sophocles' heroine, a brand of inscrutability that has at times been viewed not as indicative of the frustration attending any attempt to accurately pin down her gender, but as a discerning feature of certain Sophoclean heroes. Knox's seminal study on what he terms the 'heroic temper' of a number of Sophoclean characters indeed isolates many of the more perplexing characteristics of Antigone as features of such a temper, which distinguishes between heroes and ordinary humans rather than between men and women.²⁹¹ Even in this approach, however, Antigone remains for Knox a female character bent on defending the values of the family (or merely her own family), and as such is closer to conventional femininity than the heroic temper would suggest.²⁹² Worman's similar attempt at drawing the distinctions on a level other than gender appears far more promising. Contrary to the general tendency of tragic drama to mark sullied, compromised bodies as feminine, Sophoclean plays present such bodies as deeply ambiguous and heroic, poised at the edge of the human, their gender inflections absent or closer to the masculine than the feminine.²⁹³ Nevertheless, the salient deviations from the established constellation of features in the case of Antigone cast doubt on the applicability of the schema to her; not only must she share in Polyneices' abject body to qualify, but, more importantly, her gender is an issue to which the play persistently returns.²⁹⁴

I would like to suggest that, rather than dismissing the proliferation of gender references as a mere indication of Antigone's inscrutability, it is more productive to view them as *generating* her inscrutability. Over the course of the play *Antigone*, sometimes successively and often simultaneously, occupies various gender roles that she alters and perverts in the act of performing. The motivating force propelling Antigone into assuming those roles is her *erōs* for the ἀμήχανα, a

²⁸⁹ Respectively: Jacobs: 1996; Mader 2010; Murnaghan 1986.

²⁹⁰ Butler 2000: 72.

²⁹¹ Knox 1964: 9–27, 62–68.

²⁹² Knox 1964: 91, 103–04, 106–07.

²⁹³ Worman 2012: 352–53, 363.

²⁹⁴ Worman 2012: 360, 361–62.

desire for impossible things, which in turn transforms the heroine herself into an ἀμήχανον.²⁹⁵ The last of Antigone’s deaths—and the only realised—constitutes the last manifestation of this *erōs*, and is therefore instrumental for outlining with precision the contours of Antigone’s gender identity as that has developed over the course of the drama. As a deliberate act and reaction to the sentence of entombment, hanging harks back to Antigone’s choice and acceptance of the initial punishment; a better understanding of the implications of stoning is, then, crucial if one is to unearth the motivations and intentions behind Antigone’s dying act. First, however, one must understand this *erōs* for the ἀμήχανα that motivates Antigone, as well as the various forms it assumes in the play.

***Erōs* ἀμηχάνων**

In its first occurrence in the play—and in fact the only time in the play it is directly applied to a person—ἀμήχανος appears, perhaps surprisingly, as a self-description of Ismene. Defending her refusal to participate in Polyneices’ burial, Ismene objects that τὸ δὲ | βία πολιτῶν δρᾶν ἔφην ἀμήχανος (78–79). What is this ἀμηχανία of Ismene, and how does it relate to Antigone’s *erōs* ἀμηχάνων? I submit that Ismene’s use of the word here provides it both with a specific referent and with a narrower definition, which serve as an interpretative lens through which to view Antigone’s subsequent actions. By setting up herself as by nature ‘incapable of acting against the citizens’ will’, but also as ‘impossible with regards to acting against the citizens’ will’,²⁹⁶ Ismene articulates the conditions under which action is possible for people sharing her φύσις—that is, for people like her, and as she believes, like Antigone. She thus defines the ἀμήχανον as that which contravenes the authority of the polis and its ruler, instantiated in the specific context as Polyneices’ burial. The limit that places these acts beyond the realm of the possible has already been elaborated on by Ismene: just a few lines before, she had attempted to dissuade Antigone from the daunting task by reminding her of the horrific deaths of their family members and urging her to consider their own miserable demise should they disobey Creon (49–60). Within the specific circumstances that their brothers’ deaths and Creon’s edict have created, the limit of the possible is that which invites death, and it is this limit that Antigone intends to breach.²⁹⁷ As if to dispel any doubt about Antigone’s aspiration to the impossible,

²⁹⁵ McNeill 2011 also singles out Antigone’s *erōs* for ἀμήχανα as the driving force behind the heroine’s actions, but his understanding of the nature of these ἀμήχανα differs significantly from my own. For McNeill, the duty of burying Polyneices is one manifestation of Antigone’s moral obligation to her own as ends in themselves, regardless of their changing identity and personal history while alive (2011: 415, 417). However, because in referring to Polyneices Antigone cannot help reintroducing the personal history she intends to erase, it seems that she is seeking what is impossible (2011: 420–21).

²⁹⁶ This translation, clunky as it is, helps illustrate the transformative power of the act of Polyneices’ burial. By adopting here, as in 90 and 92, a passive meaning for ἀμήχανος (thus the translation ‘impossible’), we can perceive more clearly why Antigone’s violation of the edict is the beginning of a process that will render her into an ἀμήχανον.

²⁹⁷ For the demands of life as setting the limits of the possible and for *erōs* ἀμηχάνων as the fundamental conflict between the sisters, see McNeill 2011: 418–19.

Ismene twice accuses her sister of seeking it: 90 ἀλλ' ἀμηχάνων ἐρᾶς, and 92 ἀρχὴν δὲ θηρᾶν οὐ πρέπει τὰμήχανα.²⁹⁸

It is clear, then, that against the background of Creon's prohibition Antigone's desire for the ἀμήχανον that is Polyneices' burial easily translates into an *erōs* for death.²⁹⁹ Indeed, the text is littered with Antigone's own assertions that death is welcome and even sought after, and the Chorus implicitly—and unknowingly—confirm this, when they equate a possible defiance of Creon's decree with a love for death.³⁰⁰ Yet such a desire, powerfully expressed as it is by a young, unmarried woman, can combine with traces of other symptoms discernible in the text to invite a comparison of Antigone with the diseased Hippocratic *parthenoi*, suffocated by their own bodies and cloaked in extreme *partheneia*.³⁰¹ Indeed, Antigone is often accused of the derangement that such ill *parthenoi* exhibit,³⁰² and her bold, provocative statements are often met with horror or disbelief by her interlocutors.³⁰³ Whether these similarities are sufficient to summon the spectre of the diseased *parthenos* or not, however, there is one aspect in which Antigone still resists this assimilation. Contrary to these young girls, her *erōs* for death has not yet taken the shape of an impulse to throw herself down wells or a desire for hanging;³⁰⁴ in fact, Antigone yearns at this point for death of a particular kind, as two of her statements on the desirability of death indicate: 96–97 πείσομαι γὰρ οὖν

²⁹⁸ Segal (1981: 198), interpreting the third stasimon ('ode on *erōs*') as partly pertaining to Antigone, correctly identifies Antigone's *erōs* as the dangerous, unreachable type mentioned in Pindar's *Nemean* 11.48 (ἀπροσίκτων δ' ἐρώτων ὀξύτεραι μανίαι). Bowra (1944: 80) provides an even more apt parallel from Pindar—Coronis, who died because she ἤρατο τῶν ἀπέδντων (*Pyth.* 3.20). It seems that a female desire for the impossible is closely attended by death, both within and outside the tragic universe. For Bowra, that is the fate of women who 'aspire above their position', but it is also the condition for these women's exceptional status.

²⁹⁹ McNeill (2011: 421, 428–29) understands this identification of *erōs* for ἀμήχανα with *erōs* for death as premised on the realisation that the incomparable moral worth that Antigone honours in her brother and seeks to attain for herself cannot be realised while one is alive. It is thus that he explains Antigone's suicide, as the realisation that one cannot be an end in oneself as a living being, and as a choice of herself as defined by her obligation to her own (2011: 435–36).

³⁰⁰ Antigone: 72, 461–66, 555, 559–60. Chorus: 220.

³⁰¹ Desire for death: Hipp. *Virg.* viii.468.16–17.

³⁰² Soph. *Ant.* 99 ἄνους, 220 μῶρος, 383 ἀπροσύνη, 562 ἄνουν, 602 λόγου τ' ἄνοια καὶ φρενῶν ἐρινύς, and 790 μέμηνεν, applicable to Antigone if we accept that the ode to *erōs* can also refer to her own *erōs* for ἀμήχανα. In the Hippocratic treatises: Hipp. *Virg.* viii.466.18–19, 468.7–8, 10. For connections between the words employed in the play and the language of madness in Hipp. *Virg.* see Chapter 2, p. 71 n. 165. See also Sourvinou-Inwood 1989b: 140–41; Thumiger 2013: 37 n. 32. If Segal (1981: 198) is right that Antigone's *erōs* resembles the impossible desire of *Nemean* 11.48, then we may accept that the μανίαι Pindar associates with such unattainable desires (ἀπροσίκτων δ' ἐρώτων ὀξύτεραι μανίαι) also characterise Antigone's *erōs* ἀμηχάνων. The accusations of madness hurled against Antigone by other characters in the play are variously interpreted as either an acknowledgement (usually by the Chorus) of the hereditary ἄτη working in Antigone (Bowra 1944: 88; Hester 1971: 31) or as attributions of moral guilt (Hester 1971:31). For the purposes of my argument, however, it is enough that Antigone displays what is consistently characterized as madness or folly, regardless of its origin.

³⁰³ Soph. *Ant.* 47, 49, 82, 449. In the Hippocratic treatises: Hipp. *Virg.* viii.468.13–14.

³⁰⁴ Hipp. *Virg.* viii.468.12, 14–15. Singh (2003: 11), despite her detailed exploration of the interpretative potential of Hippocratic gynaecology in the present context, wrongly assumes that the heroine is looking forward to her hanging all along. The false diagnosis of Antigone as an exemplary case of suffocating *parthenos* seriously misconstrues the relation of her entombment to her actions. Singh also confuses suffocation of the uterus due to accumulation of menstrual blood with the wandering womb (2003: 12) and treats the closed female body as unequivocally healthy (2003: 11).

| τοσοῦτον οὐδὲν ὥστε μὴ οὐ καλῶς θανεῖν and 465–66 οὕτως ἔμοιγε τοῦδε τοῦ μόρου τυχεῖν | παρ’ οὐδὲν ἄλλος. In the context of the information provided by the play so far, there can only be one mode of dying that Antigone can be expecting and judging as neither dishonourable nor painful, and that is the death by public stoning publicly proclaimed as the penalty for anyone who undertakes the task she contemplates.

A death of this kind, assessed, accepted, even willingly chosen, has significant repercussions for the conceptualisation of Antigone’s gender, because it inflects her words and actions prior to the change of punishment in a particular way. Its similarities to the demise not only of Polyneices, but also of Eteocles and even Oedipus’ self-blinding bring Antigone in a relationship of proximity and even identification with her closest male relatives, vesting her in the process with male roles and traits.³⁰⁵ Considering that stoning was often the enforced penalty for treason, for Antigone to suffer such a death is to share even more closely in Polyneices’ status as traitor, a risk she had already undertaken through a burial that in Creon’s eyes condoned Polyneices’ hostile actions and abetted treason.³⁰⁶ More importantly, the penalty expected by Antigone does not only demand the shedding of blood in a public space, but also follows from involvement in an issue of political importance and of direct interest to the community. It is hard to miss the resemblance to the deaths of Polyneices and Eteocles, who killed each other in full view of Thebes in a bid for political power. Moreover, the paradoxical character, in this case, of stoning as a death simultaneously chosen and externally imposed has a close parallel in a mutual fratricide that assimilates suicide, and perhaps also recalls Oedipus’ self-inflicted mutilation.³⁰⁷ Antigone herself is not insensitive to the character of her death as an identification with her brothers; her belief that the greatest glory can be won only through Polyneices’ burial has been, I think correctly, interpreted as a hint at the possibility of replacing Polyneices: 502–04 καίτοι πόθεν κλέος γ’ ἂν εὐκλεέστερον | κατέσχον ἢ τὸν ἀυτάδελφον ἐν τάφῳ | τιθεῖσα;³⁰⁸ It is not only that the ἐν τάφῳ τιθεῖσα is ambiguous enough to also denote victory over an opponent in a heroic battle; as Whitehorne has pointed out, burial of kin can operate as an indication, if not a guarantee, of succession in power.³⁰⁹ In this respect, Antigone’s single-minded devotion to the task and her calm,

³⁰⁵ Other ways in which Antigone identifies with her brother(s) are the use of bird imagery as a metaphor for her (424–25) and for Polyneices (112–13) (Segal 1978: 1172–73, 1175–76), as well as the bitter break with Ismene, which mirrors the break between the brothers (Neuberg 1990: 71). Since these do not depend as much on the mode of Antigone’s death, they are left out of the present discussion.

³⁰⁶ Bowra 1944: 76. For stoning as a form of punishment in the Greek and Roman worlds and the contexts in which it occurred, see Pease 1907.

³⁰⁷ Soph. *Ant.* 12–14, 55–56. The consistent use of the dual for the two brothers and the interplay between ‘one’ and ‘two’ contribute towards the impression of an identification so close that their mutual fratricide (διπλῆ χερσί) almost merges into suicide (αὐτοκτονοῦντε). For more on the use of the dual and the slippage between self and kin see Knox 1964: 79–80; Segal 1981: 185–86; Cavarero 2010: 50–51; Goldhill 2012: 240–41.

³⁰⁸ Butler 2000: 11.

³⁰⁹ Whitehorne 1983: 137. He mentions this function of burial in relation to Antigone’s defiance of Creon’s authority. For this aspect of the burial, see pp. 112–13.

even eager acceptance of the death that is sure to follow may be considered further evidence of her identification with the male relative she buries.

The somewhat masculinising effect of the burial and, even more so, of the punishment that it incurs does not, however, entirely preclude the incorporation of specifically female roles in Antigone's gender. Because this type of death opens the body and sheds its blood, it maintains a link, however tenuous, with other processes that can have the same effects on the female body, namely defloration and childbirth.³¹⁰ Yet insofar as this penalty can be argued to evoke a sexual union, its enforcement by the community as a whole does not allow for an individual to be singled out as the sexual aggressor. The only candidate for this role is Antigone herself, who, opting to perform the burial, also chose the attending punishment, turning it into a form of suicide. A split appears in Antigone's gender, which is thus required to accommodate roles usually distinct and identified with separate individuals of clearly defined genders: the deflowered virgin, the penetrating male. However, it might be possible to identify another actor for this role, and in doing so shed light on another ἀμήχανον that Antigone pursues. It has often been pointed out that the expressions of devotion towards Polyneices have erotic undertones, perhaps revealing an incestuous desire that underlies Antigone's actions and ties her more firmly to the family to which she pledges her loyalty:³¹¹ 73 φίλη μετ' αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα,³¹² 80–81 ἐγὼ δὲ δὴ τάφον | χάσσοις' ἀδελφῶ φιλάτω πορεύσομαι. From here, it could be suggested that Antigone imagines her bloody death as an erotic union with Polyneices, her love for whom is consummated in death. Her expressions lend credence to such a supposition, but they also proliferate the potential candidates for sexual partners in death. Φίλου is sufficiently ambiguous to refer to any dead man dear to her that she might wish to join in death, while the term ἀδελφῶ, which attempts to specify the relationship of the dead person to Antigone, is no more helpful in the context of kinship relations as overdetermined as hers. As is the case in almost every other occurrence of words meaning 'brother', the reference can persuasively be made to point towards Polyneices as well as the absent brothers—Eteocles and Oedipus.³¹³ The *erōs* for ἀμήχανα that propels Antigone towards a forbidden

³¹⁰ Loraux 1987: 15: 'A suicide that shed blood was associated with maternity'.

³¹¹ Winnington-Ingram 1980: 130; Oudemans and Lardinois 1987: 172; Seaford 1990: 78; Rehm 1994: 59; Thumiger 2013: 37 n. 32. Non-incestuous love: Bowra 1944: 91.

³¹² Here I follow Jebb (1990 ad loc.): 'I shall rest with him, loved one with loved one'. The translation provided by Lloyd-Jones for these lines ('I am his own and I shall lie with him who is my own') does not, to my mind, accurately convey the ambiguity of Antigone's *philia* for her brother. For the ambiguity of *philia* in Antigone, which can denote both kinship and affection, see Winnington-Ingram 1980: 129–30. In Antigone's case the ambiguity is particularly appropriate, not only because the application of the term *philos* is a contested topic between Creon and Antigone (522–23; Segal 1981: 185), but also because *philos* is used to refer to family members that could turn into love interests, following in the footsteps of Oedipus and Iocasta.

³¹³ Significantly, only twice, once at the beginning and once in her last speech, does Antigone refer to Polyneices by name as the brother she intends to bury—or has buried (902–03). In every other instance, she uses a term of kinship that cannot help but constantly re-introduce the other two brothers as well. See also Butler (2000: 67–68, 77).

act and certain death also manifests itself in the form of an *erōs* for the dead male members of her family.³¹⁴

If the shedding of blood from a violently opened body can summon connotations of defloration, then by the same token death by stoning may be said to also highlight Antigone's maternal aspect.³¹⁵ That Antigone repeatedly names her brother(s) as such through recourse to the language of maternal filiation³¹⁶ certainly belies Butler's assertion that 'the mother remains almost unspeakable',³¹⁷ nor does such an acknowledgement of the maternal origin of her consanguineous relationship with Polyneices require, as Cavarero would have it, that Antigone only act as daughter and sister.³¹⁸ The text certainly paints, if only fleetingly, Antigone as mother of Polyneices in a figure employed by the Guard as he recounts the circumstances of her apprehension. Upon discovery of Polyneices' newly naked body, Antigone 'cried out bitterly, with a sound like the piercing note of a bird when she sees her empty nest robbed of her young' (423–25).³¹⁹ Antigone's loss is the loss of Polyneices as a person who is her brother. The thin film of dust that covered him in place of a proper tomb was Antigone's performance of her relationship to him, the sprinkling an act that rendered the corpse-as-food-for-animals into a specific individual with a specific relation to Antigone.³²⁰ To use Butler's words, 'when she [Antigone] buries her brother, it is not simply that she acts from kinship [...] but that her action is the action of kinship'.³²¹ But the figure of the empty nest evokes the idea of real maternal loss much more readily than the notion of motherhood denied for the sake of sisterly devotion.³²² Insofar as Antigone preserves and restores Polyneices to his humanity and specific identity, she essentially gives

³¹⁴ This permutation of Antigone's *erōs* has perhaps already been foreshadowed by Ismene's *θηρᾶν* (92). Denoting eager pursuit (LSJ *s.v.*), it is well suited to describe both Antigone's determination to bury Polyneices and the implicit erotic pursuit of her brother(s). The appearance of a form of the verb in the guard's description of Antigone's apprehension (432–33 *σὺν δέ νιν | θηρώμεθ' εὐθύς*) has also been interpreted (Ormand 1999: 91) in the context of erotic pursuit (of Antigone this time), lending further support to an interpretation of *θηρᾶν* along similar lines.

³¹⁵ Rehm (1994: 66–68) and Segal (1978: 1180–81) have also drawn attention to parallels between Antigone and Eurydice as maternal figures, suggesting a doubling of Antigone in the older woman.

³¹⁶ Segal 1981: 183–86; Sorum 1982: 205–06.

³¹⁷ Butler 2000: 79.

³¹⁸ Cavarero 2010: 51. See also Rehm 1994: 70. There is no reason to assume that Antigone cannot perform other female roles over a course of action that, for Cavarero, is dictated by Antigone's status as daughter and sister.

³¹⁹ For Antigone as a mother on the basis of this image: Segal 1981: 155; Jacobs 1996: 904–05; Ormand 1999: 91. For Ormand, the vocabulary of the bird imagery readily paints Antigone both as a mother and a *parthenos* who must be caught and tamed. Yet *λέχος* and *εὐνής*, with their strong sexual connotations, also support the argument for an imagined erotic union between Antigone and her brother, in whose naked, disgraced body she sees a bed empty of the partner she desires and tries to preserve.

³²⁰ McNeill 2011: 415, 417, 421. Segal (1981: 157) emphasises the dehumanizing effect of Creon's denial of burial. In an approach informed by Antigone's proximity to the natural world and her position outside the sphere of politics, Cavarero (2010: 54) argues that though inhuman, the feasting of animals on Polyneices' body does not mark for Antigone 'the coincidence of the animal and the inhuman'. For a well-argued case for Ismene as the perpetrator of the first burial see Honig 2011: 29–68, esp. 34–51.

³²¹ Butler 2000: 58.

³²² Cavarero (2010: 54) argues that Antigone earns a bed empty of children as a result of her decision to bury her brother.

birth to him, brings him from the realm of mere matter where Creon consigned him back to his humanity and his position in a set of familial relationships. And while the shedding of her blood as a consequence of his burial may be viewed as a mark of his successful re-birth as human, it also brings Antigone into her own name. By giving birth to someone by her own definition irreplaceable and irreproducible, Antigone fulfils the double destiny encoded in her name: Anti-gone, ‘in place of a mother’, but also ‘against generation’, she assumes the double function of mother and non-mother, and by doing so symbolically gives birth to the self foreshadowed by her name.³²³

In light of the complications it introduces into Antigone’s gender, stoning becomes for her a means to unite her *partheneia*, in reality maintained and dangerously close to the condition of the suffocating patients in *De Virginibus Morbis*, with a symbolic transition to womanhood. Her situation is then figured as a return to the natal family through an erotic union with one or more of its members, as well as the birth of a son who is an irreplaceable brother. Meanwhile, Antigone becomes more and more self-contained, absorbing the role of lover and loved, mother and child, turning into a figure impossible to accurately describe in conventional terms. In its guise as *erōs* for death, Antigone’s desire for ἀμήχανα has complicated her identity so much as to render her almost an ἀμήχανον herself.

A similar effect of strangeness and inscrutability is the result of Antigone’s pursuit of ἀμήχανα in their more concrete instantiations. Defiance of Creon’s authority, deemed by Ismene as just such an ἀμήχανον, places Antigone in an uneasy relationship with the political that cannot be reduced either to mere trespass into male territory or to unproblematic participation.³²⁴ Creon has made his proclamation to the entirety of Thebes (7 πανδήμῳ πόλει), yet it appears that the only part of the edict that also addresses women as members of this community is the one outlining the Thebans’ *expected* behaviour. It is perhaps not without significance that the first mention of a punishment for disobeying Creon’s order (35–36) occurs only after Antigone has emphasised the applicability of the edict to her and Ismene (31–32 τοιαῦτά φασι τὸν ἀγαθὸν Κρέοντα σοὶ | κάμοί, λέγω γὰρ κάμέ, κηρύξαντ’ ἔχειν).³²⁵ More importantly, Creon, as his irate question makes obvious, does not expect—or indeed consider it possible—for a woman to attempt the burial: 248 τίς ἀνδρῶν ἦν ὁ τολμήσας τάδε; (‘What man has dared to do this?’).³²⁶ It is not only that the act of burial was, in Athenian eyes at least, that

³²³ Goldhill 1986: 102; Zeitlin 1992: 153; Jacobs 1996: 907; McNeill 2011: 427.

³²⁴ See also Bowra 1944: 101.

³²⁵ Bowra (1944: 80) and Foley (2001: 181) make a similar point, arguing that Creon’s and Ismene’s stance on the issue of obedience to authority illustrates and capitalises on the already widespread ideas of female virtue as consisting in submission to male authority (see also Arist. *Pol.* 1260a23).

³²⁶ Segal 1978: 1174; 1981: 159; Ormand 1999: 89–90. Chesi (2013: 229 n. 20) adduces more sources and other occurrences of the word in the play to argue that ἄνδρες often designates the citizens in Sophoclean plays. Although she does not explicitly include women in this category, her analysis of the political character of Antigone’s disobedience often seems to depend on it (229–30). I believe, however, that the use of ἄνδρες, even if meant to address specifically citizens (as opposed to, for example, slaves), cannot be stretched to include a category that is linguistically marked as the opposite of ἄνδρες and whose participation in politics, even of fictional Thebes, is doubtful at best.

part of the funerary ritual performed by male kin;³²⁷ burying someone in a position of power was also a powerful proclamation of the intention to succeed that person and a strong claim to power.³²⁸ It is perhaps no accident that Creon is ready to see political insubordination behind the defiance of his decree and interprets the burial as an attempt by his opponents to undermine his authority (289–94). Creon has performed the customary burial rituals for Eteocles, who ruled Thebes before him; the burial of Polyneices, who contested his brother’s right to the throne, seems an appropriate way to articulate a rival claim to power. Yet in all this, Creon never ceases to restrict his scope to the male citizens of Thebes (248, 289–90), the only ones that he considers legitimate candidates for the role of political opposition. Antigone disregards these gendered limits, and the impression generated of her as ἀμήχανον expands and intensifies over her defence of the burial. In her tense exchanges with Creon Antigone appropriates his discourse and employs its key terms to different ends and with different content, creating a situation where a dialogue conducted ostensibly in the same terms continuously slips from Creon’s control.³²⁹ The result is a breakdown of communication that places Antigone at a distance from Creon’s power, which from the beginning rests heavily on the reach of his words.³³⁰ Antigone thus emerges as an ἀμήχανον, impossible to imagine and impossible to control, confounding Creon’s neat ordering of the world and escaping categorisation.

In truth, however, this status of Antigone has already been alluded to in the description of the first burial and the Chorus’ remarks on the agents involved. The absence of signs of human activity and the integrity of the body despite the negligible protection against animals afforded by the dust leave room, to the Chorus’ mind, only for divine intervention.³³¹ And even though Antigone is not a deity,

³²⁷ Sourvinou-Inwood 1989b: 140. Foley (2001: 180) justifies Antigone’s action by arguing that the absence of male kin would be in Athenian eyes a valid reason for a daughter to undertake the task of burial. That does not, however, seem to colour Creon’s—or any other character’s—perception of Antigone’s deed. Even the citizens of Thebes, who, if Haemon is to be believed, consider Antigone worthy of praise, do nothing to legitimise her act on those grounds.

³²⁸ Whitehorne 1983: 137.

³²⁹ Although the subtly different use of the same language by Creon and Antigone occurs throughout the play, many of the key terms are again encountered and more or less directly contested in the confrontation between the two. See for example κήρυγμα (Segal 1981: 163) and κηρύσσω (Chesi 2013: 229), νόμος (Bowra 1944: 98; Segal 1981: 168–70; Ostwald 1986: 149–61; Blundell 1989: 127–30). By far the most hotly debated terms are φίλος and ἐχθρός; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 128–36; Segal 1981: 185–86; Goldhill 1986: 90–106; Porter 1987: 66–69; Blundell 1989: 106–27; Foley 2001: 173–74. For a detailed analysis of Antigone’s appropriation of Creon’s language of sovereignty see Butler 2000: 10–11, 28.

³³⁰ Segal 1981: 163.

³³¹ Although they reject the possibility of exclusively divine agency in the first burial, most critics admit that the suggestion is significant for our perception of the act and of the play as a whole (for exceptions see Hester 1971: 25 who agrees with Ronnet 1969: 148); Segal 1978: 1175; 1981: 159–61; Whitehorne 1983: 132. Oudemans and Lardinois (1987: 176) pair the emphasis on the divine in the first burial with that on nature in the second to argue for ‘the ambiguous nature, both divine and untamed, of Antigone’s actions’. (For Antigone’s alliance with nature, see also Jacobs 1996: 902–03). Jacobs (1996: 899–900) makes the ingenious suggestion that the lack of signs on the earth links the first burial specifically with the female. In the first stasimon, the use of tools was associated with *man*’s agricultural activities, thus inviting us to connect the absence of such tools with a *woman*’s deed. In this light, I would argue, one can view Antigone as emulating the divine through committing a man’s crime (burial of Polyneices) in a female way.

upon emergence onto the stage she is greeted by the Chorus as a δαιμόνιον τέρας (376), a god-sent portent or even a non-human entity beyond human comprehension. Later on, Antigone's more-than-human status will receive further confirmation in the ode to *erōs*, usually considered a dark commentary on the destructive potential of Haemon's love for his fiancée.³³² Echoing Creon's previous words on the evils of disobedience,³³³ which were uttered in justification of his decision to punish Antigone, the *stasimon* acquires relevance beyond its immediate context, and becomes an exposition on the overpowering effects of *erōs* ἀμηχάνων that possesses Antigone: This *erōs*, which 'spend[s] the night upon the soft cheeks of a girl' (783–84), is indeed first given voice by Antigone in the darkness before dawn, and its manifestation renders Antigone mad in the eyes of those who do not participate in it (790 ὁ δ' ἔχων μέμνηεν).³³⁴ Although against the prevailing notions of justice it paints Antigone as a criminal (791–92 σὺ καὶ δικαίων ἀδίκους | φρένας παρασπᾶς ἐπὶ λώβῃ), it has been raised to the status of an equally legitimate order of legality (797–98 τῶν μεγάλων πάρεδρος ἐν ἀρχαῖς | θεσμῶν).³³⁵ And as the animosity between Creon and Haemon confirms its divisive force, so can one expect that this *erōs* will emerge victorious against any attempts at restraining it (795–97 νικᾷ δ' ἐναργῆς βλεφάρων | ἕμερος εὐλέκτρον | νόμφας), a power that neither god nor human can evade (787–89 καὶ σ' οὐτ' ἀθανάτων φύξιμος οὐδεὶς | οὐθ' ἀμερίων σέ γ' ἀν- | θρώπων). Antigone is transformed by her *erōs* into something of an order other than human, and even other than god.

The exceptional status attained by Antigone is implicitly acknowledged by Creon, and it is as an attempt to control this proliferation of ἀμήχανα that we must explain the change of punishment, a change for which he advances only a weak justification.³³⁶ His anxiously gendered expressions³³⁷ betray his confusion in the face of a situation that so blatantly disrupts the rigid framework of the binary gender system within which he operates; for, while he initially asserts that Antigone's deed, if

³³² For the ode's *erōs* as referring to marriage see: Rehm 1994: 63 (tension between exogamous marriage and kinship); Ormand 1999: 91–92 (destructive power of *erōs* even within marriage). Seeking to expand the relevance of the ode to the play as a whole, other critics maintain that other characters too experience some form of *erōs*: Winnington-Ingram (1980: 97) and Segal (1981: 198–99) argue Creon too will come to feel the power of this destructive force that he opposes. For Oudemans and Lardinois (1987: 180–81) only Haemon can truly embody this Eros which they see as a separate cosmological category; Creon's and Antigone's *erōs* is 'opposite to that of Haemon'.

³³³ See the resemblance between the effects of anarchy (673–75) and *erōs* (782, 791–94).

³³⁴ See also n. 248.

³³⁵ Segal (1981: 168–70) views Antigone's and Creon's claims to justice as contrasting and equally partial conceptions of law, justice, and legality. For Bowra (1944: 97), on the other hand, by the end of the play there can be no doubt that it is Antigone who represents a true notion of legality.

³³⁶ The most persuasive explanation of Creon's choice of punishment (though not of the change of mind itself) is offered by Johnston (2006: 182–83). Bringing together the scant literary evidence for immurement as punishment and the guardian-charge relationship between Creon and Antigone, she correctly identifies Antigone's entombment as an attempt at controlling her sexuality. For interpretations that consider Creon's explanation as more or less sincere: Oudemans and Lardinois 1978: 185; Segal 1981: 174; Griffith 1999: 253–54. For other motives behind Creon's decision: Knox 1964: 72 (Antigone has time to surrender; fear that Thebans will refuse to stone her); Bowra 1944: 103 (confusion due to conflictual desires and obligations); Hester 1971: 33 (change attributed to dramatic needs); Rehm 1994: 61 (Creon's misogyny).

³³⁷ Bowra 1944: 76; Segal 1981: 183.

unpunished, will render her a man (484–85), he later implies that such leniency would be tantamount to defeat by a woman (677–78). The apparent contradiction between these assessments of the situation is resolved if due attention is paid to the specific gender terms employed. The pairs ‘man-not a man’ (484 ἢ νῦν ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἀνὴρ, αὕτη δ’ ἀνὴρ) and ‘women-less than women’ (680 κοῦκ ἄν γυναικῶν ἥσσορες καλοῖμεθ’ ἄν), which we encounter in place of the expected binary ‘man-woman’, reveal that Creon is in fact articulating in gender terms the power imbalance that would result from a victory for Antigone, and his own inferiority vis-à-vis his niece in such a situation. The only way in which Creon can secure his masculinity is to punish Antigone, thereby securing the superior position of man and protecting it from the challenge that a defeat would represent—be it in the hands of a man or a woman.³³⁸ But if punishing Antigone is enough to alleviate Creon’s gender anxiety, it leaves Antigone’s own gender dangerously vague. This ambiguity, also reflected in Creon’s irate statements, is in fact a function of what can be called Antigone’s double ἀμήχανον: not only did she break the law, but she did so when her perceived femaleness would seem to rule out that possibility. It is at this point that the significance of the precise type of punishment chosen for Antigone emerges.

Antigone’s entombment: Creon

Antigone’s defiance has created a conundrum for Creon: to enforce the penalty implicitly intended only for male dissidents³³⁹ is to admit either that Antigone is a man, or that actions crossing into the political sphere are not a privilege, and consequently not a mark, of the male.³⁴⁰ Either option has severe consequences for Creon’s model of political participation, social hierarchies, and gender roles. To circumvent this problem, Creon devises a new punishment that will address Antigone’s specific crime while simultaneously marking her as female. Entombment fulfills both of these purposes in an almost uncanny way: it addresses the circumstances that made Antigone’s defiance possible by stripping away her freedom and mobility (774, 885–86), and removes any traces of her presence in the public eye by placing her out of sight and away from the city itself (773–74, 887). Because, however, these features of imprisonment in a cave are also associated with the prescribed behaviour for women and their sphere of life, it emerges that the new penalty forces Antigone to perform a conventional

³³⁸ Creon’s statement in 679–80 in fact envisions not one, but two situations where he may be defeated: at the hands of a woman, which as he implies will be the case if Antigone goes unpunished, and at the hands of a man. This latter situation is preferable only when compared to the former, and would still entail the destabilisation of Creon’s position as a man. By punishing Antigone, whose gender at this point represents a conundrum, Creon pre-empts both possibilities and secures his position.

³³⁹ Note also that as a sentence for treason, stoning would both acknowledge the political character of Antigone’s action and connect her even more closely in people’s mind to the traitor Polyneices. The change of punishment avoids these unwelcome associations.

³⁴⁰ Foley (2001: 180) argues that Antigone has chosen to act, in absence of male relatives, as an honorary male, and that Creon’s willingness to hold her responsible for the burial and enforce the prescribed punishment silently confirms this status. I would argue that the opposite is true; Creon is concerned with denying Antigone both agency and any claim to masculine power, and the change of punishment is ample proof that even in Antigone’s peculiar familial circumstances her act was out of bounds for a woman.

female identity.³⁴¹ The feminising character of the punishment is highlighted in the figuration of the cave as a dwelling in which Antigone might live (888), as well as in the type of death it assigns to her: not unlike the women that end their days quietly and unseen inside the houses they entered while alive, Antigone will be subjected to a slow, invisible death inside the house/tomb.³⁴² This association between the two functions of the entombment (confinement and feminisation) is best expressed in Creon's words to his attendants: 578–79 ἐκ δὲ τοῦδε χρῆ | γυναικας εἶναι τάσδε μηδ' ἀνειμένας. While the order for the removal of Ismene and Antigone is in compliance with their position as women, the construction of the phrase allows for a refiguration of the causal relationship into one of complementarity. Indeed, Antigone must not roam, *and* she must be a woman.

For Creon, then, entombment is the most expedient way to ensure that the gender identities and hierarchies that Antigone's act has threatened to upend are securely fixed in place. It is worth noting that though couched in language brimming with references to a perverted marriage ritual, Antigone's descent to the cave is not presented by Creon himself as a substitute marriage in/to death.³⁴³ His expressed sentiments on the intended outcomes of the newly devised punishment, which can be roughly summarised as 'death or (unlikely) survival', offer little to no ground for an interpretation that is, in fact, the product of an amalgamation of the perspectives on the topic offered by other characters.³⁴⁴ Disentangling these perspectives and examining them in the context of their articulation is crucial for establishing the appropriate connections between Antigone's suicide and the preceding events. It also allows for a better appreciation of Antigone's act as one that is consonant with her status as an ἀμήχανον and with the autonomy of which she is accused.

Antigone's entombment: Antigone

By far the most wide-ranging of these interpretations is offered by Antigone herself, whose perception of the immurement is elaborated in her lamentations on the way to the cave. Although proximity to death provides a highly appropriate context for the singing of the dirge, further reasons must be adduced for its emergence at this point in the drama and its specific content. As Winnigton-Ingram has observed, the change of punishment, of which Antigone has only just become aware, may go

³⁴¹ Johnston (2006: 183) argues that in fact Creon imposes a contradictory death on Antigone, figured both as a marriage to/in death and as an act that forcibly constrains her sexuality. The latter may be true as an effect of the entombment, but Creon never indicates that it is Antigone's reproductive potential that concerns him. For the marriage to death motif as introduced by characters other than Creon, see discussion below and n. 343.

³⁴² This also deprives her from a death that in its public character and its shedding of blood would imitate the demise of Polyneices.

³⁴³ Marriage and death are only mentioned together in comments made in the context of the termination of Antigone's betrothal to Haemon: 575 Ἄιδης ὁ παύσων τοῦσδε τοὺς γάμους ἐμοί, 653–54 ἀποπτύσας οὖν ὥστε δυσμενῆ μέθεξ | τὴν παῖδ' ἐν Ἄιδου τήνδε νυμφεύειν τινί, 750 ταύτην ποτ' οὐκ ἔσθ' ὡς ἔτι ζῶσαν γαμεῖς. Although they probably pave the way for the strong marriage imagery to follow, their purpose does not seem to be to foreground the idea of marriage to death. See also Sourvinou-Inwood 1989a: 146. For approaches that read in Creon's intentions a (perverted) marriage for Antigone see Goheen 1951: 40; Seaford 1990: 76; Rehm 1994: 61; Garrison 1995: 137.

³⁴⁴ Soph. *Ant.* 777–80, 887–88.

some way towards illuminating the circumstances of the lament's articulation and the issues on which it touches.³⁴⁵

The content of Antigone's grievances is varied, but points of contact between her and Creon's perception of the situation are not entirely lacking. A recurring theme throughout the lamentations is the paradox—and callousness—of her confinement in a tomb while she is still alive.³⁴⁶ Encapsulated in the poignant use of the term μέτοικος, this life-in-death is for Antigone a perpetuation of the initial anomalous situation, which she pointedly summarised as ἡ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πάλαι | τέθνηκεν (559–60).³⁴⁷ Caught in a living death, Antigone sought to reconcile the contradiction inherent in her situation through an act that would place her unambiguously on one side of the life-death divide. When Creon denies her this resolution and reinstates her in an in-between position, he virtually erases Polyneices' burial,³⁴⁸ the performance of which should guarantee certain and unconditional death.³⁴⁹ As we saw earlier, eradicating any traces of Antigone's defiance and its uncomfortable consequences was the foremost of Creon's concerns when deciding Antigone's fate, and it is this deliberate erasure of her ἀμήχανα that Antigone partly laments when she draws attention to the confusion between life and death.

Moreover, though not explicitly stated, this is a type of death that prevents Antigone from identifying with her brother(s). Quite clearly, she is no longer destined to suffer a traitor's death for the unlawful burial of another traitor, and the implicit effacement of the political character of her defiance distances her even further from Polyneices. Her invocation of the sun's light on the way to the cave, as well as

³⁴⁵ Winnington-Ingram 1980: 138–139, 140.

³⁴⁶ *Soph. Ant.* 810–12, 850–52, 920. For Antigone as a Kore figure see Segal 1981: 179–80; Ormand 1999: 93–95.

³⁴⁷ Griffith 1999: 272; Ormand 1999: 95.

³⁴⁸ Such an approach helps explain the difficulties surrounding the status and validity of Antigone's act of burial. In her address to the dead, Antigone seems to think that she has rendered her brother the burial rites owed to him (902–04), yet in Teiresias' speech it emerges that Polyneices' body is still polluting the land (1016–22). Oudemans and Lardinois (1987: 177) and Foley (2001: 198) consider the burial a failure, albeit for different reasons. Hester (1971: 29) suggests that Antigone may have been interrupted the second time, or that the dust may once again have been removed from the body, a possibility also considered likely by Foley. However, we would expect a renewed exposure of the body to be mentioned as part of Creon's vaunting over Antigone, while Antigone herself is no longer agonising over the lack of burial rites for Polyneices. Jacobs (1996: 901) reconciles Antigone's actions with the nakedness of Polyneices' corpse by locating his burial in an ambiguous position between being covered and exposed, visible but removed from sight. Antigone's act is not intelligible to those around her, because it does not follow the cultural norms of a patriarchal society. However, that does not explain why the gods, whom Antigone is certain she has pleased, are offended by what can only be explained as Polyneices' exposed state. If we view, as I suggest, Antigone's burial as initially successful and her punishment as a denial of this act, then it is possible to reconcile her sense of having performed her duty with the later revelation that the body is a source of pollution. After Antigone has been immured, her act is cancelled, and Polyneices is in a very real sense exposed again. For Antigone's suicide as a response to this see pp. 126–27.

³⁴⁹ Creon betrays his awareness of the in-between position Antigone already occupied when he declares that μετοικίας δ' οὐδ' ἄν τῆς ἀποστερήσεται (890). He must, then, be alert to the callousness of inflicting a punishment that will render Antigone a μέτοικος even among the dead. For an interpretation of this statement in strictly political terms see Knox 1964: 114.

her repeated calls to the citizens of Thebes to see and acknowledge her plight, cast her imminent immurement as a removal not just from open air, but also from the public space it denotes.³⁵⁰ Antigone's slow, bloodless, and invisible death constitutes almost the mirror opposite of her brothers' bloodshed in a war waged precisely in and for that public space. When Antigone asks the Chorus to identify her as the τὴν βασιλειδῶν μούνην λοιπήν (941), her staggering refusal to include Ismene in the family is more than a confirmation of the irreparable break between the sisters.³⁵¹ It is also a last effort to preserve the political character of her deed that this punishment is designed to erase, and that partly consists of Antigone's implicit claim to replace and succeed Polyneices in the line of royal power. Though probably unaware of Antigone's desire to partake of her brothers' identity, Creon is nevertheless conscious of the possible implications of awarding Antigone a man's death, and with this reasoning he is led to a drastic modification of the penalty for Polyneices' burial. The immurement to which Antigone is sentenced may carry different connotations for victim and perpetrator, but even so some of its repercussions for the status and identity of Antigone and Creon are felt by both.

That it is the particular type of death that gives rise to Antigone's complaints receives further confirmation in her recollection of Niobe's fate and the language in which the latter's death finds expression. Rather than an instantaneous transformation into a rock, Niobe's fate is represented as a gradual submission to the encroaching stone (826–27), thus approximating Antigone's impending death with uncanny closeness and bringing it under the category of 'a saddest death' (823–24).³⁵² Resentment of the entombment also helps to explain why Antigone rebukes the Chorus with accusations of mockery when their words only appear to offer some measure of comfort.³⁵³ Once Antigone's dirge is understood as arising in response to the change of sentence, its content, with its intense focus on the conflation of marriage and death, the lack of proper ritual observances and the thwarted future can be made intelligible in a new context—that of a contrast between the transformative potential of the connotations of stoning and its foreclosing by the current punishment.

Generally speaking, Antigone's various references to her unmarried status and the impending marriage to Hades are indiscriminately treated as elaborating on the motif of marriage to death and its

³⁵⁰ Soph. *Ant.* 806–10, 842–46, 879–80. See Winnington-Ingram 1980: 141; Chesi 2013: 230.

³⁵¹ Griffith 1999: 283; Goldhill 2012: 242 (although he refers to the earlier exchanges between the sisters).

³⁵² Garrison 1995: 137; Griffith 1999: 268. For Hester (1971: 34) the link between Antigone and Niobe is the former's supposed perception of herself as a victim of divine injustice. Katz (1994: 94–95) rightly draws attention to Niobe's maternal status as an element that further complicates Antigone's image in front of the Thebans. Immurement works to deprive Antigone of her surrogate maternity of Polyneices, just as it punished Niobe for taking too much pride in motherhood.

³⁵³ In response to Antigone's parallelism of her situation with Niobe's fate, the Chorus assure her that it is indeed a great thing to suffer a fate equal to that of an ἰσόθεος figure (836–38). Antigone's interpretation of their words as mockery (838 γελῶμαι, 840 ὑβρίζεις) can only result from her perception of the entombment as an unequivocally undesirable death that no precedents can cast in a different light. See also Winnington-Ingram 1980: 140–41. Knox (1964: 66) attributes Antigone's reaction to her need for the consolation of a kind of immortality like Niobe's, but Antigone has hardly drawn attention to that aspect of Niobe's fate.

particular configuration in Antigone's case.³⁵⁴ Though invaluable for a nuanced understanding of the dirge and of Antigone's tragedy in its proper dimensions, such interpretations fail to notice finer distinctions between Antigone's various articulations on the topic, thus missing the opportunity to delineate more clearly the precise cause of Antigone's lamentations. To begin with, the majority of the expressions that provide the grounds for the marriage to/in death motif specifically address the lack of proper ritual observances in the form of marriage songs: 813–15 οὐθ' ὑμεναίων | ἔγκληρον, οὐτ' ἐπὶ νυμφεῖοις πῶ μέ τις ὕμνος ὕ- | μνησεν, 876–77 ἀνυμέναι- | ος, 917 ἀνυμέναιον. As has been observed, Antigone's descent to the tomb while alive momentarily configures her marriage to death as a real wedding that involves merely a symbolic death for the bride.³⁵⁵ Yet insofar as Antigone's experience is a real wedding, it is a highly problematic one, lacking in ritual wedding songs and maintaining only elements of the totality of marriage rituals.³⁵⁶ It is not, then, her unmarried status that Antigone bemoans, but the perversion and mockery of the wedding she is forced to undergo.

Consideration of other statements designating Antigone as an unmarried, childless woman buttresses this observation on her attitude towards marriage. Significantly, these components of her lamentation betray a preoccupation with the lack of sexual union implied in marriage rather than with marriage as an institution: 867 ἄγαμος, 917 ἄλεκτρον, 917–18 οὔτε του γάμου | μέρος λαχοῦσαν οὔτε παιδείου τροφῆς.³⁵⁷ It is worth pointing out that stoning, which Antigone was anticipating, would stand in place of an actual erotic union with her brother(s) and would cast her as Polyneices' mother without, however, introducing any connotations of marriage. The immurement that looms ahead removes these possibilities that are dependent on the presence of blood, and replaces them with an incomplete—and unwanted—marriage ritual. Moreover, despite the fact that its ostensible purpose is to restore Antigone to a conventional female identity, the entombment does not register Antigone's femaleness

³⁵⁴ Goheen 1951: 38; Rehm 1994: 63–64; Ormand 1999: 93–97; Griffith 1999: 52, 267, 269, 270. Garrison (1995: 136) views Antigone's ἀλλ' Ἀχέροντι νυμφεύσω (816) at the beginning of the *kommos* as a reference to her future suicide, at a point when 'the imagery of death becomes specifically the imagery of suicide'. She interprets in the same light lines 858ff, noting that the Chorus completely miss her subtly stated intentions. Such a possibility cannot be ruled out, but to suggest that Antigone only refers to her suicide instead of the imminent immurement would require a strained interpretation of Antigone's words, especially her own lamentations over her entombment (848–49).

³⁵⁵ Seaford 1990: 77–78; Ormand 1999: 93–94.

³⁵⁶ Johnston (2006: 185 n. 13) correctly points out that Antigone's references to an impending 'marriage to death' expose the falseness of this image, but she separates these instances from what she considers as sincere laments over her unmarried status. The ritual elements have been isolated and analysed by Rehm 1994: 63–64. The mirror image of this incomplete ritual is the corresponding absence of lamentations by Antigone's *philoï*, of which the heroine complains (847, 876, 881–82). Neither wedding nor funerary rituals are properly observed.

³⁵⁷ Λέκτρον recalls the marriage bed specifically (LSJ *s.v.*), while γάμος can signify an erotic union that falls outside marriage (LSJ *s.v.*; in Aesch. *Supp.* 143, ἄγαμος is paired with ἀδάματος in the context of avoiding εὐνάς ἀνδρῶν). Note also that Antigone calls herself ἄγαμος in a stanza dedicated to the marriages of her family members as destructive sexual unions (863–66). The meaning is intensified if the brother whose marriage she bemoans towards the end is Oedipus (869–71, now addressed as brother instead of father) rather than Polyneices (whose marriage was disastrous only in that it secured the alliance of the Argives). For arguments in support of either option see Honig 2009: 32–33 n. 9. However, Honig also argues that both Polyneices' and Oedipus' marriages 'snuffed out her life', and that therefore this phrase cannot help us decide between the available interpretations.

in terms other than vague ones. Her body is enclosed, but its confinement and suffocation is not on a par with that experienced by the extreme Hippocratic *parthenoi*, while her identity as wife has been irreparably corrupted by the sterility of the marriage and the insufficiency of the marriage rituals. The productivity of stoning is replaced by the multiple failures of immurement, and that is also reflected in the reconfiguration of Antigone's relationship to her family. Significantly, in the first part of the play Antigone refers to her dead family only implicitly under the umbrella term of 'the dead'.³⁵⁸ Her focus is on the erotic union with her brother(s), which features as a move forward rather than merely a retrogressive step. On the contrary, in her dirge her dead family are referred to explicitly by their relationship to her and even by name, as her bloodless death mandates a return to her origins that is both unsuccessful and unproductive.³⁵⁹ Insofar as Antigone has undergone a form of marriage, she cannot be re-integrated in her family as a *parthenos* still at the centre of the paternal hearth;³⁶⁰ nor can this marriage, bloodless and sterile as it is, fulfil her incestuous *erōs* and restore her to her family through the union of common blood.³⁶¹ In Antigone's eyes, imprisonment in the cave attempts to stifle her desire for Polyneices' burial, her *erōs* for death by stoning, and her movement towards a specific identity—in other words, her *erōs ἀμηχάνων*.

Antigone's entombment: The Chorus

Creon and Antigone furnish different but partially overlapping perspectives on the entombment. The Chorus' exchanges with Antigone as she is led to the cave and the stasimon that follows offer yet another approach to the events, but also fulfil a further function. Read on a second level, they can be seen to outline a course of action that will allow Antigone to fulfil her *erōs ἀμηχάνων*. As I will discuss below, what appears in these passages as appraisals of the present situation and its causes also doubles as suggestions for future action, thereby preparing the ground for Antigone's suicide. This is not to argue that the Chorus consciously push Antigone towards self-killing; the point is that the situations they paint before Antigone's eyes, when viewed as a commentary on her pursuit of *ἀμήχανα*, may only be realised through suicide by hanging. Creon and Antigone have rendered clear the adverse effects of immurement on Antigone's *erōs ἀμηχάνων* and the contrast of this penalty with

³⁵⁸ Soph. *Ant.* 75 τοῖς κάτω, 89 οἷς μάλισθ' ἄδειν με χρῆ, 560 τοῖς θανοῦσιν. When she does refer by name to family members, it is either to emphasise the differential treatment of the two brothers (22 Ἐτεοκλέα μὲν, 26 τὸν δ[ὲ] [...] Πολυνείκουσ νέκυν) or to name Oedipus as the source of their familial curse (2).

³⁵⁹ Soph. *Ant.* 863–65, 870, 893, 898–99, 902–03. Griffith (1999: 276) thinks that Polyneices, here addressed as κασίγνητον κάρα, concludes the tricolon of 898–99 as Antigone's 'quasi-marriage partner'. Yet following on from references to relationships of *philia* between Antigone and her parents, this address seems to designate Polyneices as a family member rather than a partner.

³⁶⁰ Seaford 1990: 79.

³⁶¹ Bowra (1944: 104) is the only one to detect that Antigone's new punishment extinguishes any hopes she had to see Polyneices again, and thus makes the satisfaction of her love for him impossible. I agree that the entombment prevents Antigone from fulfilling her particular kind of love for Polyneices, but there is no reason to assume that she will not see him in death; indeed she addresses him three times in the context of an encounter with her dead family (899, 902, 915).

death by public stoning; the Chorus will now become the vehicle for dramatic allusions to the future solution to the problem Antigone faces.

The first few stanzas of the Chorus' interactions with Antigone after the change of punishment, though less puzzling than the stasimon that follows, are far from straightforward. Rather than rehearse the most common approaches, I would like to suggest an alternative interpretation of the Chorus' lines as performing, among other functions, the service of introducing the possibility of further action, which if followed by Antigone will help her counter the effects of imprisonment and assume control of her death. Although Antigone's replies betray no acknowledgment of such a meaning in the Chorus' words, the correspondence between what may be detected there and Antigone's actions in the cave at the very least renders such an interpretation of the choral pronouncements possible.

The Chorus begin by countering Antigone's lamentations with what at first glance appears as an observation on her image in the public eye as she departs (817–18). However, two points serve to vest this statement with further significance. First, the relevant sentence, which in the codices starts with the adverb οὐκοῦν, may be articulated as a question,³⁶² thereby inviting its addressee—Antigone—to consider, even briefly, the conditions under which she may assent to its content. Second, the immediately following lines (819–22), which touch on the manner of Antigone's death, contain an assertion that Antigone retains her autonomy even as she is led to a death she did not choose (821–22 ἀλλ' αὐτόνομος ζῶσα μόνη δὴ | θνητῶν Αἴδην καταβήσει).³⁶³ Moreover, the position of lines 819–22 seems to invite an association with what came before—that is, they appear partly as a justification for the praise and glory Antigone has supposedly won. What the Chorus seems to be suggesting is that Antigone, being led to the cave alive, is in a unique position to exercise her autonomy in order to frustrate Creon's plans for her and earn praise and glory. Antigone, it is true, has never been concerned with the acquisition of a glorious reputation;³⁶⁴ however, insofar as such a reputation, whether willed or not, is premised on Antigone's act of devotion to Polyneices, it implies acknowledgement of the burial in direct contradiction of Creon's intentions. Condemned to life-in-death, Antigone may still be a 'law-unto-herself' and reassert her will against Creon, securing the survival of the burial he would deny.

Antigone's response to the Chorus picks up the theme of her descent to Hades alive, but develops it in a different direction, using the example of Niobe to underscore the slow and inexorable extinguishing of her life in the rocky cave (823–33).³⁶⁵ The Chorus' elaboration on the mythical exemplum chosen

³⁶² The OCT edition by Lloyd-Jones and Wilson indeed prints Denniston's emendation to οὐκοῦν and punctuates with a question mark at the end of 818.

³⁶³ Here I adopt the understanding of αὐτόνομος evidenced in translations such as 'by her own law' (Knox 1964: 66), 'under her own law' (Goldhill 1986: 103), 'a law unto herself' (Blundell: 1989 128). For Antigone's autonomy see McNeill 2011. A different understanding is offered by Pozzi 1989: 504.

³⁶⁴ For the opposite view see Blundell 1989: 109–11.

³⁶⁵ Griffith 1999: 268; McNeill 2011: 424.

by Antigone seems to centre once again on the possibility of a different outcome for Antigone's situation. The contrast they set up between Niobe as a divine figure and Antigone as a mortal (834–35) is not, I would argue, intended exclusively, or even primarily, as a chastisement, provoked by Antigone's supposed aspiration to divine status, but a reminder that the fate ordained for those equal to the gods may yet be avoided by the mortal heroine.³⁶⁶ Yet if Antigone is determined to view her situation through the lens of a semi-divine precedent, there is another way, the Chorus' words imply, in which the assimilation to Niobe may be achieved. In pointing out that Antigone could share the same lot with Niobe despite their different positions vis-à-vis the divine (836–38), the Chorus provide two crucial pieces of information: First, they indicate that Antigone has already been partaking of Niobe's lot while alive; second, they set up a clear-cut distinction, especially crucial at this point, between life and death.³⁶⁷ In what way should we imagine Antigone as τοῖς ἰσοθέοις ἔγκληρα λαχεῖν | ζῶσαν (836–37)? Like Niobe, Antigone has lost nearly all of her family members, but the similarities end there; nor would the fact of that loss alone be enough to warrant Antigone's participation in a similar fate. I suggest that Antigone's claim to such participation is grounded in her character as ἀμήχανον, which, not unlike the nature of gods, defies easy categorisation and escapes the limits of human understanding.³⁶⁸ If this interpretation is correct, then the Chorus' reference to a share in the fate of the godlike in death, as in life, indicates that Antigone may maintain her disconcerting status as ἀμήχανον if she can frustrate Creon's attempts to the opposite. Under the circumstances, that would translate into reclaiming control over her death and reinstating the temporal order between life and death that the entombment threatens to upend: ζῶσαν καὶ ἔπειτα θανοῦσαν (838).

The underlying suggestion in the Chorus' words does not, however, register with Antigone, in whose eyes the comments on her fate are in such contrast with her perception of the situation that they amount to outright ridicule (839–43). When, at the conclusion of her lines, she once again bewails her liminal position between life and death (850–51), the Chorus' response raises the possibility of another type of death by mobilising, as Pozzi has shown, the metaphor of sacrifice.³⁶⁹ Presenting Antigone as having fallen on her knees in front of the altar of Dike, the Chorus evoke the sacrificial character of the heroine's past pledges of her life to the dead. This reminder may in turn motivate Antigone to adopt a course of action that will similarly honour her family and counteract the immurement.³⁷⁰ Her determination to fulfil her obligations towards her family had been presented by

³⁶⁶ McNeill 2011: 423.

³⁶⁷ Pozzi 1989: 504: 'The contrast between her imprisonment in the cave and a proper sacrifice that does not confuse life and death explains Sophocles' variation on a traditional formula at 838.'

³⁶⁸ Sorum (1982: 207) points to something similar when she explains Antigone's non-mortal status as based on the absence of family members, her ambiguous gender, and the lack of a place in either polis or family.

³⁶⁹ Pozzi 1989.

³⁷⁰ I have here followed Pozzi both in her editing of lines 853–56 (1989: 502) and her understanding of προσπίπτειν as denoting one's lowering of oneself to the ground in a gesture of self-sacrifice (2011: 502–03). Pozzi deviates from Lloyd-Jones' and Wilson's OCT edition by maintaining L's πολύν in 855 and eliminating δ' in 856.

Antigone herself as in compliance with the demands of ἡ ξύνοικος τῶν κάτω θεῶν Δίκη (451), while the sacrificial connotations of her act of devotion towards Polyneices were reinforced by the prospect of bloodshed by public stoning. As discussed earlier, this punishment would also serve to unite Antigone with her dead brother(s) by inserting her into a tradition of bloody deaths and insinuating a quasi-sexual union in line with her family's incestuous origins. The change of punishment not only stripped Antigone's death of the connotations of self-sacrifice, but also attempted to erase the burial that would secure for her the means for a reunion with her family. In this light, the double meaning of the Chorus' words does not come as a surprise as great as it may initially appear. In response to Antigone's agony, they hold out the possibility of self-sacrifice, even in the confines of her underground prison; in response to her apparent resignation to her immurement, they offer a reminder of what is at stake—an undertaking literally and metaphorically coming from her father, a brother whose burial must be upheld, and a reunion with her self-generating family.³⁷¹

Reference to Antigone's paternal inheritance prompts an outburst of pity and recrimination over the union of her parents, which ends in a diagnosis of her imminent death as a result of her brother(s)'s marriage (869–71). This statement is contradicted by the Chorus who, in their last direct exchange with Antigone, attribute her destruction to her 'self-knowing' temper (875 σὲ δ' αὐτόγνωτος ὄλεσ' ὀργά)—a cause specific to Antigone that, emphatic as it is, has nothing of the vagueness and generality of the preceding lines.³⁷² This admittedly difficult compound, whose constituents bring together self, knowledge, and kin,³⁷³ aptly summarises the forces that have been driving Antigone to a desired death and that can still deliver it for her. The awareness of her embeddedness in convoluted familial relations, and her desire to return to her dead brother(s) as sister, daughter, mother, and bride, first led Antigone to seek death by stoning, and can help guide her in manipulating her imprisonment to prove herself truly αὐτόνομος and an ἀμήχανον beyond Creon's control.

If so far the interactions between the Chorus and Antigone have only served to highlight a breakdown of communication, the stasimon that follows moves the two closer, as the Chorus start to comment on Antigone's entombment in terms already familiar from her own lamentations. Perspectives that previously remained restricted to each interlocutor now converge upon one main theme, the presentation of the entombment as a form of marriage. Before Antigone addresses her tomb as νυμφεῖον (891), the Chorus have already recognised it as a θάλαμος (804), and this implicit equation of tomb and marriage chamber provides the starting point for the Chorus' lengthiest and most detailed

³⁷¹ Most commentators take πατρῶον ἐκτίνεις τιν' ἄθλον (856) to mean that Antigone is paying the price for family crimes and translate accordingly (see for example: Jebb 1900; Lloyd-Jones 1994; Griffiths 1999: 272). However, the meaning of ἄθλος as contest would seem to also suggest that through her defiant actions Antigone is willingly participating in and completing a course of action initiated by her ancestors. Such a course of action would at least partially consist of family introversion, and would therefore entail for Antigone the duty to perform her brother's burial and by doing so become even more entrenched in complex family relations.

³⁷² For lines 872–74 see Griffiths 1999: 273.

³⁷³ For an analysis of αὐτόγνωτος along these lines see McNeill 2011: 430.

exposition on the immurement. The fourth stasimon, with its condensed and cryptic allusions to well-known myths, has proven resistant to attempts at a convincing and coherent interpretation. The most persuasive among them illustrate the ode's preoccupation with themes central to the play and draw connections between the individual mythical exempla and events that have occurred or will shortly take place.³⁷⁴ Yet given the position of the stasimon after a scene focused on the misery of Antigone's punishment, it may also be understood as providing a response, no matter how cryptic or indirect, to what has transpired.³⁷⁵ If viewed as such a response, the ode truly becomes a selection of exempla, in that it offers Antigone implicit guidance for the future in the form of alternative scripts on the outcomes of imprisonment.

The first exemplum put forward by the Chorus follows organically from the prominence of the marriage in/to death motif, and is easily related to Antigone's situation.³⁷⁶ Providing an obvious model of interpretation for Antigone's punishment, Danae's imprisonment is explicitly figured as a sentence that transforms her from an unmarried maiden to a wedded woman.³⁷⁷ Yet the full significance of the exemplum emerges after the introduction by *καίτοι* of additional remarks (949–50), which appear as an important counterpoint to the initial statement. Danae's impregnation in her confinement marks a crucial departure from Antigone's anticipated fate, but also illuminates a way for Antigone to influence the outcome of her immurement towards a similar direction. In presenting a story with a well-known happy outcome, where Danae's imprisonment is cast as a positive alternative to Antigone's sterile confinement, the Chorus do not seem so much to emphasise the bleakness of Antigone's future as to develop a scenario that the embattled heroine may follow.³⁷⁸ That is not to say that Antigone can expect to be impregnated by Zeus; she can, however, assume control over her

³⁷⁴ Winnington-Ingram 1980: 98–109; Segal 1981: 182–83; Sourvinou-Inwood 1989a; Ormand 1999: 98–103. Seaford 1990 locates his discussion of these mythical exempla in the wider context of the associations in Greek myth between the imprisonment of women, darkness, incest, and control by the natal family. For a detailed bibliography on the fourth stasimon up to that point, see Hester 1971: 38.

³⁷⁵ Bowra 1944: 105 comes closest to my own perspective on the ode, which in his view offers different interpretations of the entombment and suggests that any one of them may be correct. I prefer to see the mythical exempla as possible scenarios for the future rather than attempts to make sense of the present.

³⁷⁶ For suppression of a young woman's sexuality as the link between Antigone's and Danae's stories see Winnington-Ingram 1980: 101; Ormand 1999: 99; Griffith 1999: 288.

³⁷⁷ Seaford 1990: 77; Ormand: 1999: 99; Griffith 1999: 288. Sourvinou-Inwood 1989a: 143 sees in these lines a reference to erotic union rather than marriage, and Winnington-Ingram (1980: 101) treats the two as interchangeable. However, given that Danae's impregnation by Zeus is introduced immediately afterwards with the adversarial *καίτοι*, I suggest we view *κατεζεύχθη* as a reference to marriage rather than the union occurring in its context.

³⁷⁸ The contrast between Danae's and Antigone's future: Segal 1981: 182; Sourvinou-Inwood 1989a: 145. Danae's fate presaging Antigone's: Bowra 1944: 105. Danae as a paradigm of the good wife: Ormand 1999: 99. Seaford (1990: 77) does not distinguish between the different outcomes of the stories of Danae and Antigone, and instead equates Danae's impregnation by Zeus with Haemon's entrance in Antigone's cave. However, as will become apparent below, the appearance of Haemon after Antigone's death is of crucial importance, and renders the events in the cave very different from Danae's divine union.

manner of death to preserve her rebellious act from erasure and retain her surrogate maternity of Polyneices.

If Danae's imprisonment is figured as a double of Antigone's present and a model for her future, the exemplum that succeeds it operates as a warning on the repercussions of prolonged immurement. The emphasis placed, in this stanza, on the severe consequences of withholding from the gods the acknowledgement and worship that is their due has compounded the impression that the Chorus here sing with Creon in mind.³⁷⁹ Yet the centrality of the theme of imprisonment (955 ζεύχθη, 957–58 πετρώ- | δει κατάφαρκτος ἐν δεσμῶ) indicates that the story of Dryas' son picks up the thread of meaning from the previous exemplum and illuminates another aspect of Antigone's punishment. The opening word of the stanza (955 ζεύχθη) briefly reintroduces the central notion of imprisonment as marriage,³⁸⁰ but the lines that follow develop the theme of immurement in a more ominous direction. Behind the repeated references to the mellowing, subduing effect of imprisonment on the anger and madness of Dryas' son (959–60 οὕτω τᾶς μανίας δεινὸν ἀποστάζει | ἀνθηρόν τε μένος) lies a warning about a similar effect on Antigone's stubborn will, and more specifically on the *μανία* that accompanies her *erōs* for death.³⁸¹ To preclude the possibility of capitulating to Creon's authority while still alive in her cave, and to maintain the unwavering determination that was necessary for pursuing her *erōs* ἀμηχάνων, Antigone must avoid a prolonged stay in the underground enclosure.

The final exemplum follows rather abruptly after the brief mention of Lycurgus' transgressions against Dionysus, and its relationship to the rest of the ode, if not with the play at large, is hard to establish with certainty. Of all the figures featured in these two stanzas, Cleopatra—never referred to by name—is the one most easily related to Antigone. Her perverted or thwarted marriage, as well as her association with the cave, are enough to mark her story as an illustration of Antigone's fate, even if no further similarities are detected. That Cleopatra's confinement, recorded in a later version of the myth, was also known and definitely recalled here is neither necessary nor can it be ascertained.³⁸² But even if we can accept that Cleopatra, in contrast to the previous mythic figures, does nothing but emphasise a situation already obvious, there remains the conundrum of the stanza concerning the Phineids.³⁸³ Here, the only persuasive line of interpretation has been proposed by Sourvinou-Inwood,

³⁷⁹ Winnington-Ingram, 1980: 102–04; Segal 1981: 182; Sourvinou-Inwood 1989a: 151–52; Ormand 1999: 100; Griffith 1999: 289–90. Seaford (1990: 86) argues that if Lycurgus' removal was part of the earlier Aeschylean dramatisation of the myth, it would parallel Antigone's departure for the cave.

³⁸⁰ Sourvinou-Inwood 1989a: 148.

³⁸¹ Bowra (1944: 105) suggests that the Chorus may be telling Antigone that she will rightly be imprisoned for the madness she has displayed, and that her punishment is in fact lighter than it could be. Sourvinou-Inwood (1989a: 148–50) interprets Lycurgus' punishment as a temporary, learning experience that strongly contrasts with the permanence of Antigone's punitive immurement.

³⁸² Arguments that presuppose knowledge of Cleopatra's imprisonment: Winnington-Ingram 1980: 106–07; Seaford 1990: 86.

³⁸³ Varied interpretations have been suggested. Segal (1978: 1181) has read the savage wife as an archetypal Evil Mother figure that blinds/symbolically castrates her sons, and views the death of the Phineids as part of the

who points out the ambiguity of the identity of ἀγρίας δάμαρτος (973) and its productivity: allowing for the identification of Cleopatra with both the wild wife and the innocent victim, it offers different models after which to imagine Antigone.³⁸⁴ I propose to take the possibilities raised by this ambiguity further, and read in this last paradigm the most detailed and explicit reference to Antigone’s future actions that we have encountered so far.

First, it is worth examining the observed parallels between Antigone and Cleopatra in order to establish whether they forecast for Antigone a future different from that which the previous exempla suggested. As Sourvinou-Inwood correctly points out, Antigone’s ancestry strongly resembles that of Cleopatra, marked as they both are by their status as princesses in their respective cities and a certain savagery and wildness of character inherited from the paternal side.³⁸⁵ In Cleopatra’s case, this savagery assumes a more literal aspect: she is the daughter of Boreas, reared among his storms in a wild location where she roams unchecked:

τράφη θυέλλησιν ἐν πατρώαις
Βορεὰς ἄμιππος ὀρθόποδος ὑπὲρ πάγου
θεῶν παῖς.

(Soph. *Ant.* 984–86)

But she was reared in distant caves, among her father’s storm winds, a daughter of Boreas riding with the others beyond the steep mountain, a child of the gods.

Antigone’s wildness, which manifests more as hardness of spirit than wild roaming in unknown landscapes, is nonetheless portrayed in similar terms. Not only is she likened by Creon to a spirited horse (477–78), but her harsh and raw nature is figured as a paternal inheritance (471–72) and described in the second confrontation with Creon as the blowing of the same winds (929–30). If these features, shared between Antigone and Cleopatra, warrant a characterisation of the latter as a particularly wild *parthenos*, the same status may be reasonably conferred on Antigone, too. More important than the mere fact of *partheneia*, however, is the information that Cleopatra remained in this state despite inhabiting what for Antigone spells its perversion—that is, a distant cave (983–4

connection, evidenced elsewhere in the play, between the loss of men and the passion and violence of women. Seaford (1990: 86) considers the fate of the Phineids as another instantiation of a nexus of themes (blindness, imprisonment, familial introversion) that also govern Antigone’s myth. For Ormand (1999: 100–01) the reaction and plight of Phineus’ sons demonstrate the complications of treating women as replaceable. All these approaches salvage the unity of the stasimon, but do not exhaust the interpretative potential of the paradigm for Antigone’s situation.

³⁸⁴ Sourvinou-Inwood 1989a: 154–61. My approach differs primarily in that I view Cleopatra as a model for Antigone to emulate in the near future rather than as a figure which helps bring out the complexity of Antigone’s situation in the present.

³⁸⁵ Sourvinou-Inwood 1989a: 155–56, 160–61; Foley 2001: 199.

τηλεπόροις δ' ἐν ἄντροις | τράφη). The paradigm of Cleopatra, then, can be said to open up for Antigone the possibility of exceptional *partheneia* even in the context of a punishment figured as symbolic marriage. Yet the story, as it can be assembled from the Chorus' allusions, furnishes Antigone with still more options. The somewhat difficult articulation ματρὸς ἔχοντες ἀνύμφευτον γονάν (980), referring to the sons of Phineus, designates Cleopatra as an unwedded woman who is, paradoxically, a mother.³⁸⁶ A contradictory identity of this type corresponds with uncanny accuracy to Antigone's desire for reconciling her *partheneia* with her substitute maternity of Polyneices, and reinforces the aptness of Cleopatra's story as a blueprint for Antigone's future actions.³⁸⁷

The precise way in which Antigone may assimilate herself to Cleopatra to achieve the combination of *partheneia* and motherhood she exemplifies can be found in the story of the Phineids if we identify the 'wild wife' as Cleopatra. Embedded as they are in a narrative concerning the fate of Oedipus' family, the nature of the Phineids' wounds, as well as the feminine instrument with which they were inflicted (975–76 ὑφ' αἱματηραῖς | χεῖρεσσι καὶ κερκίδων ἀκμαῖσιν), would not have failed to recall the self-blinding of Oedipus himself and the events that led to it. As was pointed out before, in her desire for death by public stoning Antigone would approximate the bloody death not only of Polyneices and Eteocles, but also of the other absent brother. At the same time, this form of punishment, diffusing responsibility for its enforcement, would ultimately cast Antigone as both perpetrator and victim—or in terms of the present mythic exemplum, as both the ἀργία δάμαρ and the blinded sons. Under the present circumstances, where a bloody death has been foreclosed, the closest alternative to the desired end is the use of another instrument with feminine associations—girdle or veil—to bring about a self-inflicted death. To put it differently, if Antigone wishes to remain sole author of her death and use it as a vehicle for partial identification with her dead brother(s), hanging in the cave emerges as the only option.

³⁸⁶ A marriage that is not marriage: Seaford 1990: 87; Ormand 1999: 101. The reading ἀνύμφευτον of the codices has been emended to ἀνυμφεύτου by Meineke. Seaford, who accepts the original reading, reads the adjective as implicitly characterising both Cleopatra and her sons (as γονάν). For Sourvinou-Inwood (1989a: 155), the emphasis is all on the unmarried status of Cleopatra's sons/seed, who, blinded (and imprisoned?), will not marry and will not continue her noble bloodline. The alternative reading she proposes, which connects ἀνύμφευτον with the mother, hinges on interpreting γονάν as 'womb', a meaning elsewhere found in Eur. *Phoen.* 1595 and perhaps fr. 839. Nevertheless, I think that ἀνύμφευτον as a shared trait between Cleopatra and her sons does not violate the sense of the passage, and against the background of Antigone's incomplete marriage is almost expected. The suggestion of Jebb (1900: 176), followed by Winnington-Ingram (1980: 106) and Griffith (1999: 294), to interpret ἀνύμφευτον as 'hapless in her marriage' is neither required nor supported by other occurrences of the word (e.g. Soph. *El.* 165).

³⁸⁷ Sourvinou-Inwood 1989a: 159–60 takes a very different view, and argues that Antigone's identification with the blinding ἀργία δάμαρ casts her as a bad mother and wild wife. Antigone is a bad mother because she has prioritised her brother over hypothetical children (905–07), and because she has denied her future children the right to be born by acting outside the limits of her female role. See also Segal 1981: 182.

Creon, and also to be paraded, in the Messenger's speech, in front of the Theban elders upon whom she called earlier as witnesses to her fate. And even though the claim to political power that Antigone articulated by burying Polyneices is nowhere explicitly acknowledged, its vindication is manifest in the devastation her suicide spells for Creon: faced with the loss of his family, the previously assertive and powerful ruler declares himself 'a nothing' and wishes for a swift death (1325, 1329–32), yet his inability to give way to misfortune and forsake his duties emphasise all the more his total loss of power.³⁸⁹

Renewed defiance of Creon's decree is not, however, the only way in which Antigone's suicide allows her to approximate a male model of behaviour and arrogate masculine power. In spite of its reputation as a traditionally female death, suicide by hanging here has a masculinising effect because it cunningly resembles the threat that Creon levelled against the male Guard(s) should he fail to procure the perpetrator of Polyneices' burial: 308–09 οὐχ ὑμῖν Ἄιδης μοῦνος ἀρκέσει, πρὶν ἄν | ζῶντες κρεμαστοὶ τήνδε δηλώσηθ' ὕβριν.³⁹⁰ This coincidence should not be disregarded, especially in view of Creon's determination to deprive Antigone of a male death, and Antigone's implicit desire to emulate her brother(s). Significantly, the threat was partly prompted by Creon's conviction that the guard(s) had themselves performed the burial, effectively committing treason against their king.³⁹¹ Hanging does not involve the bloodshed of public stoning or of mutual fratricide on the battlefield, but its association with treason is enough to link a traitorous brother and his rebellious sister, and unexpectedly inflects Antigone's gender as masculine. One may recall here the second strophe of the fourth stasimon, where the blinded Phineids and their blinding mother instructed Antigone to emulate her dead brother(s) by using feminine instruments. The fine cloth of her makeshift noose has now served this purpose, assisting Antigone in her pursuit of this manifestation of her *erōs* ἀμηχάνων.

Even in her rocky prison, then, Antigone will suffer to be neither invisible nor confined, but will emerge instead in the male sphere of politics with ineluctable force. Acceptance of a slow death in the cave would have enabled Antigone's release and rehabilitation. As in the myth of Lycurgus, her rebellious act would have been forgiven and forgotten, her motivating *μανία* drained and subdued, and her death rendered irrelevant, set to occur in a future point far beyond the play's reach. Her suicide responds to the warning implicit in the song, placing her spirit, her act, and her death beyond Creon's control. In this light, retrospectively cast, one of the earlier exchanges between Creon and Antigone appears prophetic. Reacting to Creon's demand for Ismene to be brought before him, Antigone had presented him with a *prima facie* rhetorical question: 497 θέλεις τι μεῖζον ἢ κατακτεῖναι μ' ἑλών; As

³⁸⁹ See the Chorus' mild rebuke and reminders to Creon of his duties: 1334–35, 1337–38.

³⁹⁰ Griffith (1999: 176) interprets this punishment as ἀποτυμπανισμός instead of hanging. As Loraux (1995: 103, 287–88 n. 14) has demonstrated, however, the two are very similar, especially regarding their effect on the body.

³⁹¹ Soph. *Ant.* 308–12, 321–22.

evidenced by subsequent events, Creon's response—498 ἐγὼ μὲν οὐδέν· τοῦτ' ἔχων ἅπαντ' ἔχω—was insincere.³⁹² His desire extended beyond Antigone's death to encompass something μείζον, the complete erasure of the burial and the imposition of a conventional female identity on Antigone. Her suicide is a denial to cede this μείζον, which would stifle her *erōs ἀμηχάνων*, allowing him instead to take only that for which he expressly wished, the mere fact of her death.

For Antigone, however, the implications of entombment far exceed Creon's stated intentions, and interfere with her *erōs ἀμηχάνων* in less obvious but equally important ways. In her dirge, she articulated her sorrow and indignation at the immurement in terms of an incomplete, perverted marriage ritual that would hinder full reintegration into her natal family. Antigone addresses these aspects of her imprisonment with an act whose effect is twofold. Contrary to the entombment, her suicide, unexpected as it is, has not been framed as a marriage in/to death, and therefore renders the manifestation of this motif irrelevant for her identity. To bolster her claim to uncompromised *partheneia*, Antigone moreover chooses a self-killing method with unmistakable connections to such a state. Hanging replaces stoning as the desired type of death and casts Antigone resolutely in the mould of the pathological Hippocratic *parthenoi*, whom she has been dangerously approximating—but not fully emulating—throughout the play. Her μανία, which unlike that of Lycurgus has not abated, has helped bridge the distance separating Antigone from those young women committed to virginity and the noose. In a move that makes the parallels with Cleopatra even more striking, Antigone has managed to turn the cave into a location of wild *partheneia*. She now resides there not as an alienated μέτοικος, but as an unmarried daughter reclaiming her legitimate position in her natal family.

If *partheneia* is by definition a transitional stage where the contours of the young woman's gender are still vague, it does not follow that the immutable *partheneia* of Antigone in death excludes the performance of distinctly female roles. In her death Antigone does, indeed, find a femininity, but it is neither one she has been renouncing while alive nor the assumption of a conventional female identity.³⁹³ On the contrary, the female roles she assumes with her suicide correspond to those she would perform if executed by stoning, and serve to underline, rather than undermine, her *partheneia*. As a type of death entirely devoid of blood, hanging necessarily precludes the kind of erotic union Antigone hoped to achieve with her dead brother(s). It does, however, effect a closure of the body that renders it equally inaccessible to other men. In other words, Antigone comes to imitate a loyal wife that saves her body for the exclusive use of her husband, and she does so without recourse to wedding imagery or connotations. Insofar as the desired erotic union will never take place Antigone also

³⁹² According to Chesi (2013: 233–34), Creon's response, considered sincere, demonstrates the limits of his political authority. Although by convicting Antigone in accordance with the law he normalises her death, he cannot hope to control it.

³⁹³ Loraux 1987: 32.

retains her status as *parthenos*, therefore reconciling two roles otherwise mutually exclusive. The fulfilment of the incestuous *erōs* that was an offshoot of her desire for ἀμήχανα is indefinitely postponed, but not foreclosed by a union with another.

The only role left for Antigone to retrieve with her self-inflicted death is that of Polyneices' mother. Bound up with her commitment to bury Polyneices, maternity seems crucial for a decisive rejection of the entombment, but is also most at odds with hanging as a bloodless kind of death. It has often been observed that the manner of Antigone's suicide cannot help but evoke her mother's hanging, and this parallel alone should be enough to foreground Antigone's maternal aspect.³⁹⁴ This argument, however, is premised on a surface similarity, and involves a profound misrecognition of what we can reasonably assume—and ascertain from *Oedipus Tyrannus*—were Iocasta's motives. Where Iocasta attempted to renounce the union of common blood that the birth of children rendered terrifyingly obvious, Antigone seeks to reunite the family that was broken by enmity and parental despair at its incestuous origins. If, however, Antigone's claim to motherhood cannot be grounded on a death shared with her mother, it may still be justified by other aspects of her suicide. The sealed body that resembles a pregnant one protectively closed around an unborn child, is in itself an indication that Antigone has not abandoned her surrogate maternity of Polyneices. Yet insofar as pregnancy is a process rather than a definite and indisputable conclusion, her position as Polyneices' mother may still be challenged. This perplexing issue cannot be viewed in isolation from the kind of acknowledgement her act of burial demands if it is to be equated with the preservation of Polyneices' identity, and therefore, his 'birth'. As a public act performed by the whole community, stoning would amount to an explicit acknowledgment that the burial of Polyneices was the very act (28 τάρφω καλύψαι) Creon had forbidden. The citizens' perspective on the act would be aligned with Antigone's, and as a consequence, the deed's maternal connotations, bolstered by the presence of blood, would be confirmed. Hanging, on the other hand, occurs under considerably different circumstances. We saw that for Antigone, entombment virtually erases the act for which she is punished; the moment she is underground, Teiresias emerges to declare the polluting nakedness of Polyneices' corpse. Antigone's suicide, as an act that thwarts the prescribed punishment, repeats her claim to the act of burial and its maternal connotations, but the secrecy surrounding it deprives it of the validation only public acknowledgement can bestow. It is not without significance that Antigone was first likened to a mother in an account of the burial provided by a third party. Without confirmation that she has rendered Polyneices the rites that preserve his identity, the maternal role that depends on such a preservation is only partially fulfilled.

³⁹⁴ Jacobs 1996: 906, 909–10; Johnston 2006: 182, 185 n. 12.

Nevertheless, her maternal aspect does not remain under doubt for long. A more appropriate way to understand and articulate it can be found in the temporal relation between her suicide, its revelation, and the changes in Polyneices' status. Insofar as Antigone cannot anticipate Creon's subsequent change of mind, she must be aware of the vulnerability of her act of burial as she takes her life. By hanging herself, perhaps she intends to preserve Polyneices in her closed maternal body until the burial and her role in it have been duly acknowledged, rendering her the mother of the person whose identity she rescued. Indeed, her suicide is soon revealed, but with Creon now performing the funeral rites for Polyneices, it would seem that Antigone has lost all authorship of the burial. Nevertheless, we must consider the presence of elements that help render her suicide a claim to a central role in burying Polyneices. First, although the precise timing of her suicide is impossible to establish, we must accept it takes place while Creon is changing course under the weight of Teiresias' warnings. The correspondence of her imprisonment with the renewed nakedness of Polyneices' corpse makes a similar coincidence between hanging and burial not unlikely. Second, in the reordering of events required by the plot, Antigone's suicide is only discovered *after* Creon has buried Polyneices.³⁹⁵ Her hanged body emerges when the burial can no longer be negated, and as a result the defiance and maternity inscribed on it are inevitably viewed against the background of an accomplished burial. Though artificially, the succession of events that Antigone intended has been restored: first comes Polyneices' burial, and then a publicly witnessed death with clear connotations of motherhood for Antigone.

Antigone's suicide effects the long-deferred fulfilment of the *erōs* ἀμηχάνων that has been motivating her actions throughout the play. Hanging signals the end of a long process over the course of which Antigone's *erōs* manifested in different forms, resisted confinement, and vested her with an array of often conflicting and incompatible gender roles. Even though events crucial for the development of the plot follow hard upon the heels of Antigone's death—indeed seem to be triggered by it—their unfolding does not impact Antigone's gender as that has been configured by her suicide. Even Haemon's own suicide, often considered the true denouement of Antigone's drama, assumes a shape that leaves her identity intact, as will be now shown.

Haemon's suicide

Haemon's suicide in the cave has traditionally been interpreted as an unmistakably erotic union of the betrothed in death.³⁹⁶ If accepted, such a perspective on his death would seem to compromise

³⁹⁵ Segal (1981: 176) argues that because it involves cremation and the creation of a mound, Creon's action is not the burial required by the nether gods. The text, however, gives no indication that the burial leaves something to be desired.

³⁹⁶ Goheen 1951: 38–40; Oudemans and Lardinois 1987: 183–84; Seaford 1987: 108, 120–21; Rehm 1994: 64–65; Griffith 1999: 339; Ormand 1999: 92; Craik 2002: 90–93. Segal (1981: 181, 189) sees the futility and failure of this attempt at an erotic union. The only approach directly questioning this interpretation that I have come across is Miller 2014: 163–85, to be discussed below.

Antigone's status as ἀμήχανον, at least to the extent to which such a status hinges on the attainment of eternal *partheneia* and a wife-like devotion to her dead brother(s). While the Messenger's account of the event is indeed replete with words and expressions suggestive of such a union, I believe it is possible to demonstrate that the terms in which Haemon's death is couched do not require Antigone's return to a conventional female identity. Indeed, a persuasive case can be made for interpreting the scene in question in line with the image of Antigone drawn so far.

To begin with, the expressions in the Messenger's report that identify Antigone's tomb with a marriage chamber may not foreshadow the events to follow, but rather look back towards the pervasive presence of the marriage in/to death motif in the procession to the cave.³⁹⁷ If it can be argued that Antigone's suicide and the series of disastrous events that it triggers are to come as a surprise to Creon and the audience,³⁹⁸ then it is reasonable to assume that such blatant descriptions of the tomb as a marriage chamber are not to be read, at least not exclusively, as paving the way for yet another manifestation of the marriage in/to death theme. It should also be noted that after Haemon's death no further mention is made of the tomb; that may well be because the action moves away from it and towards the palace, but for all of Creon's concern for Haemon's attachment to Antigone, he never frames his son's death as a union with his intended in death. Eurydice's own reference to Haemon's marriage draws attention to the wasted potential rather than its perverse realisation in Haemon's dying moments (1302–04 κωκύσσασα μὲν | τοῦ πρὶν θανόντος Μεγαρέως κενὸν λέχος, | αὐθις δὲ τοῦδε).³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ Soph. *Ant.* 1204–05, 1207, 1220. For of these lines as preparation for the union of Haemon and Antigone in death see Goheen 1951: 39–40; Craik 2002: 90.

³⁹⁸ Creon's words in 887–88 (εἶτε χρῆθ' ἀθανεῖν | εἴτ' ἐν τοιαύτῃ ζῶσα τυμβεύειν στέγη) could perhaps be construed as an indication that he expects Antigone to commit suicide in the cave. However, several elements in the text militate against such an interpretation. To begin with, the same contrast between life in the tomb and death is first encountered in 773–80, where Creon announces the change of penalty. Here it is made clear that the expected outcome of the imprisonment is death, even if it is inflicted in a slow and roundabout way that will enable Creon to distance himself from it. The possibility of survival is added merely as a taunt to Antigone, who has been shown to revere Hades above all other gods: 777–78 κάκει τὸν Ἄϊδην, ὃν μόνον σέβει θεῶν, | αἰτουμένη που τεύξετα τὸ μὴ θανεῖν. In fact, throughout the play and until the re-opening of the cave such is the absence of hints that Antigone would take her life (Loraux 1986: 193) that some critics have argued the text allows for the possibility that she was murdered by Haemon (see for example Calder 1959; much more nuanced in Hiscock 2018: 6–12, where this is one among many conflicting interpretations encouraged by the text). Creon's actions after Teiresias' warnings have changed his mind furnish another clue in support of the view that he is unprepared for Antigone's suicide. If he had truly expected such an outcome, would he have tarried in releasing his niece? Indeed, his reported reaction at the sight of his son and Antigone in the cave can be seen to further confirm his lack of forethought and imagination. Lines 1127–29 can be read as an address to Antigone that expresses Creon's horrified surprise at discovering she has killed herself (see for example Ledbetter 1991). It is true that the same lines are often taken to refer to Haemon; nevertheless, the continued uncertainty as to their intended addressee testifies to the lack of explicit references to Antigone's suicide prior to the event. For the ambiguity of 1227–29 see Griffith 1999: 336; Hiscock 2018: 10–11, with relevant bibliography.

³⁹⁹ The reading κλεινόν of the transmitted text is difficult to make sense of as a description of λέχος; Kamerbeek (1978: 207–08) accommodates it by understanding λέχος as 'death' rather than 'marriage bed'. It is rather unlikely, however, that this is the first meaning the audience would hear. An alternative has been proposed by Bothe, who changes λέχος to λάχος ('the noble fate'). This could hold if κλεινόν only belonged to Megareus,

Iocasta's dead body with a shower of blood, comes as a reaction to previous erotic unions, now bitterly repented and denounced. Even if we discount claims for the equation, in Greek thought, between the eye and the penis, we must at least allow that Oedipus may be trying to contain the destructive sexuality that led to the present situation by turning the threatened sexual violence against himself.⁴⁰³ As for the passage from *Agamemnon*, it is hard to ignore that the character whose eloquence paints blood as fertilizing rain is one repeatedly labelled as masculine. Indeed, nowhere in the drama does Clytemnestra wield more masculine power than when she delivers the deathly blows that kill the leader of the Greek army. Conversely, the murder of the king, repeatedly framed as a perverted sacrifice,⁴⁰⁴ diminishes his status and assimilates him to the helpless maidens tragedy likes to sacrifice, or even the menstruating women who bleed like sacrificial animals.⁴⁰⁵ In either case, the equation of male bleeding with insemination is undermined either by a desire to prevent further erotic unions, or by the feminisation of the bleeding man. Could the scene of Haemon's death also carry similar connotations, and if so, what would be the implications for our understanding of Antigone's gender?

Examined closely, Haemon's actions display a fundamental ambivalence that casts doubt on the interpretation of the scene as a marital/erotic union. While wielding a sword, a phallic symbol with connotations of heroic masculinity, Haemon also becomes the target this weapon penetrates, assuming on the symbolic level the roles of both lover and beloved.⁴⁰⁶ To this we may add Miller's observations on the connotations of defloration introduced by the concomitant expulsion of blood.⁴⁰⁷ Unexpectedly, Haemon has become the sole protagonist of this erotic union, performing, as it were, the roles of both the male and female actors. Even the language of the Messenger's report supports this subversive interpretation. Towards the end of his speech, the Messenger concludes that Haemon *κεῖται δὲ νεκρὸς περὶ νεκρῶ, τὰ νυμφικὰ | τέλη λαχὼν δειλαιοῦ ἔν γ' Ἄιδου δόμοις* (1240–41). In this deceptively clear description of death as marriage, Haemon is presented as the only recipient of marriage rites, while the supposed union is articulated in terms that actually emphasise Antigone's non-participation. For Oudemans and Lardinois, the recurrence of *κεῖται* in the passage introduces the same sexual connotations as when used by Antigone to describe an anticipated union with her dead brother(s) (73).⁴⁰⁸ Yet not only does the verb have too wide a field of application to invoke erotic unions on its own,⁴⁰⁹ but the capacity under which Antigone and Haemon 'lie' differs significantly, too. Antigone and the person to whom she refers in line 73 are defined by their mutual *philia* (φίλη [...] φίλου), and she envisions lying *with* him (μετ' [...] μέτα) in companionship, as a full participant in the

⁴⁰³ See also Chapter 4, pp. 176–78.

⁴⁰⁴ Aesch. *Ag.* 1056–57, 1384–86, 1432–33.

⁴⁰⁵ Arist. *Hist. an.* 7.1.581b1–2; Hippoc. *Mul.* viii.30.16–17.

⁴⁰⁶ Miller 2014: 171: 'Haemon's suicide is neither "masculine" nor "feminine".'

⁴⁰⁷ Miller 2014: 170–71. See also Jacobs 1996: 907; Thumiger 2013: 37 n. 32.

⁴⁰⁸ Oudemans and Lardinois 1987: 184.

⁴⁰⁹ LSJ s.v.

relationship. In Haemon's death scene, on the other hand, Haemon and Antigone are merely νεκροί, a description of their condition rather than of their relationship to each other. Moreover, Haemon lies *around* Antigone, enveloping a body that has had no role in the action and that remains remote in this embrace.

This is not the first indication that Antigone remains essentially untouched by the events unfolding in the cave. Earlier in the Messenger's speech, members of Creon's entourage entered Antigone's tomb to discover Haemon clasping her and εὐνής ἀποιμύζοντα τῆς κάτω φθοράν (1224). Jebb proposes two possible interpretations for the expression: Haemon bemoans the ruin either 'of his bride who is dead', which Jebb accepts as the most likely meaning, or 'of his marriage, (which is to be only) in the world below'.⁴¹⁰ I agree that the original can hardly support the second of these, unless we are to understand, as I believe we should, not that only a dead Haemon can be joined with Antigone in marriage, but that his expectation of a marital union in death—the attainment of a 'marriage-bed below'—has been already thwarted.⁴¹¹ Noting the potential of φθορά to denote the corruption of a woman, Griffith suggests that the union has been foreclosed by the symbolic seduction of Antigone by Hades, which places Antigone out of Haemon's reach.⁴¹² However, this otherwise appealing suggestion presupposes that Antigone's suicide is a continuation, rather than a renunciation, of the marriage-to-death motif accompanying the immurement, and contradicts the evidence for Antigone's continued *partheneia* (which Griffith acknowledges)⁴¹³. Nevertheless, there is merit in such a reading of φθοράν, and perhaps it can be qualified to indicate Antigone's expectation of an erotic union with her brother(s). As it was noted, the fulfilment of this hope is indefinitely postponed, but insofar as Antigone is determined to accept no alternative, she may as well be already 'corrupted'—not by an erotic partner, but by her own desire for her brother(s).

Haemon's death in Antigone's presence and in the locale of her own suicide has far-reaching implications: it destabilises Haemon's own gender, and in order to be read as a marital/erotic union, it demands that he assume both a masculine and a feminine identity.⁴¹⁴ It does not, however, manage to alter the effects of Antigone's self-chosen death on her own gender identity; rather, Antigone's peculiar status as an ἀμήχανον ripples outwards and affects the development and outcomes of events that are partly intended to normalise Antigone's identity and render her intelligible again. Antigone

⁴¹⁰ Jebb 1900: 217. See also Segal 1981: 447 n. 83.

⁴¹¹ The first interpretation suggested by Jebb would equally well demonstrate the impossibility of a marital union between Haemon and Antigone. If, as I understand, it conveys the meaning that Haemon hoped to find Antigone alive in the cave to fulfil their marriage, then his lamentations imply that he does not envision the possibility of a union in death.

⁴¹² Griffith 1999: 335.

⁴¹³ Griffith 1999: 334.

⁴¹⁴ Miller 2014: 170–71. He does, however, cede that the Messenger's presentation of the suicide offers Haemon a masculine identity of which Creon had implicitly attempted to deprive him. In the end, Miller contends that the same act renders Haemon either feminine or masculine depending on whose perspective of the events is adopted—Creon's or the Theban people's, who are represented by the Messenger.

remains the perplexing combination of perverted feminine roles and masculine traits that her *erōs* ἀμηγάνων made her into, and it is for the other characters to adapt and comply with the demands of such an identity.

Conclusions

With Antigone's suicide, her *erōs* for the ἀμήχανα is finally fulfilled. Hanging is the last act in a performance during which this *erōs* appeared in different guises and necessitated the enactment by Antigone of a range of distorted and often conflicting gender roles. The burial, the ἀμήχανον par excellence, has been successfully performed, and its destabilizing repercussions for the sphere of public action have been crystallised in the figure of Antigone as a woman acting and speaking in a realm and with a language that should have been inaccessible to her. Her incestuous *erōs* for her dead brother(s), though indefinitely postponed, is neither stemmed nor redirected to a more appropriate object. The preservation of her body for these inaccessible lover(s) presents her as a virtuous wife, but she has managed to disentangle herself from the network of marriage references developed around her entombment. Her particular mode of death reinforces this unmarried status, and pushes Antigone's *partheneia* to the extreme evidenced in the diseased bodies of the Hippocratic corpus' young women. Even so, Antigone manages to retain the maternal aspect discerned in her distress over Polyneices' newly naked body, and comes as close as possible to carrying within her own body the brother that she cannot reproduce. Antigone has, ironically, become a woman in her death, but that identity is neither devoid of distinctly male characteristics nor straightforward. In the end, she has assumed the aspect of something beyond the human experience, impossible to categorise or describe in conventional terms. That at various moments in the play Antigone is labelled as raw and harsh intimates a sense of being at a loss in the face of such a multitude of contradicting gender identities. Pursuing her *erōs* ἀμηγάνων, Antigone has herself become an ἀμήχανον; she should not be possible, but her existence and her strangeness are undeniable.

CHAPTER 4—EPICASTE / IOCASTA

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore the surviving tradition of Iocasta/Epicaste's suicide by hanging, and in the process take a much-needed step towards filling the gap in literature on the topic.

Considering the frequent suggestion by critics of the homonymous Sophoclean play that Antigone's suicide is intended to recall her mother's death, it is surprising that the latter has not to date attracted much critical attention.⁴¹⁵ This state of affairs partially reflects, though it is not entirely justified by, the relative paucity of evidence in our sources for the Oedipus myth. Despite the numerous surviving versions of Oedipus' career, and the recurring appearance of Iocasta as Oedipus' mother-wife, her end is often passed over in silence.⁴¹⁶ When she does not disappear from the story without explanation, however, she is generally presented as killing herself.⁴¹⁷ In this respect, by far the most popular tradition is that in which her suicide takes the form of hanging. There are, in fact, three versions of the myth where Iocasta chooses this mode of self-killing, and these form the focus of the present enquiry.⁴¹⁸

These accounts, sourced from texts belonging to different genres, are also temporally separated. The earliest one comes from book 11 of the *Odyssey* (271–80), where Oedipus' mother (here named Epicaste) is one of the heroines Odysseus interviews during his visit to the Underworld; then there is Sophocles' celebrated drama *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1234–64) that has almost become the canonical version of Oedipus' myth; finally, we have a succinct account in Ps.-Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* (3.5.7–9), complete with the Sphinx's riddle and Oedipus' exile and death in Colonus. Against the background of the more or less expected divergences among these accounts, it is their remarkable similarities that command attention, and specifically the temporal relationship they create between the revelation of the truth of Oedipus' identity and Iocasta's suicide. In all three accounts, Iocasta ends her life after the incestuous character of her relationship to Oedipus has become public knowledge—

⁴¹⁵ The most sustained treatments of the topic have been offered by Loraux (1987: 4, 9, 14–15, 17, 21, 23–24, 26, 51–52) and Garrison (1995: 103–13, 126–28), and both discuss the versions preserved in the tragedies of Sophocles (*Oedipus Tyrannus*) and Euripides (*Phoenissae*). Though the briefer of the two, Loraux's analysis continues to be valuable and thought-provoking. Garrison is primarily interested in a sociological approach, and although she often reaches the heart of the matter with remarkable clarity, she sometimes side-lines the question of the suicide in pursuit of concerns that are not immediately relevant. For more scholarship that touches upon the issue of Iocasta's suicide see the notes at the beginning of the sections on the *Odyssey* and the *OT*.

⁴¹⁶ For an overview of the variants of the myth and Iocasta's role in them see Gantz 1993: 492–502.

⁴¹⁷ According to Σ Eur. *Phoen.* 26 there was a version of the myth in which Oedipus killed his mother, though no details are offered beyond the bare fact. Other surviving accounts mention or imply that Iocasta died, but again no further information is available: Σ Eur. *Phoen.* 1760; Pherecydes 3F95 *FGrHist*.

⁴¹⁸ Among the traditions of Iocasta's death, the most prominent alternative to suicide by hanging is suicide by stabbing, which she chooses in Euripides' *Phoenissae*. The number of accounts in which suicide by hanging is attested can be brought up to five if we include Soph. *Ant.* 53–54 and the Σ Hom. *Od.* 11.271. However, both mentions are too brief, and contained in a context that does not promote further enquiry into the relationship between Iocasta's suicide and her gender. I have therefore excluded these references from consideration.

that is, not merely discovered by her and Oedipus, but revealed to the whole of Thebes. The agreement among sources on the sequence of events (revelation-suicide) provides the ideal field to explore the ways in which the specific narrative context in each case activates different connotations of suicide by hanging. This is especially the case since, as will be demonstrated below, ostensibly similar narratives may work towards different presentations of Iocasta's gender, while other accounts may be brought in a relationship of complementarity to paint a clearer and more nuanced picture.

It is thus that in the first section of this chapter I will be focusing on the few lines allocated to Epicaste in Homer with the aim of showing that, contrary to what happens in Sophocles' *OT*, here the confused identity that results from incest is reclaimed and implicitly instituted as worthy of commemoration. The *OT*, on the other hand, offers up a Iocasta who uses the symbolic potential of her suicide to renounce the creation of blood relationships through sexual unions, and thus to purge her identity from its transgressive elements. However, in this attempt she emerges in a state of extreme wifely chastity that is equally disruptive of gender norms. The unsettling character of her new gender configuration is reinforced through the multiple parallels drawn between Iocasta and the Sphinx, the full force of which is brought out through a parallel reading of Sophocles' drama with Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*.

Epicaste in Homer's *Odyssey* 11.271–80

The account of Epicaste's life and death that Odysseus includes in his *Apologoi* presents the reader with various challenges. On the one hand, as an account offered only posthumously, it is inevitably filtered through Epicaste's—and to a certain extent Odysseus'—knowledge of the aftermath of her death. Unlike, for example, a tragic play, this retrospective narration simply does not allow us to access Epicaste's thoughts and emotions as the action unfolds. On the other hand, this brief recounting of her story is located in an extremely complicated narrative framework. Odysseus prefaces his catalogue of heroines with an explicit reference to the technique he used to acquire the material for his narration: he questioned each heroine that came forward about her genealogy (11.231–34). Yet, as quickly becomes clear, Odysseus creatively manipulates that information in a way that makes it impossible to safely distinguish between what the heroines themselves narrated and what Odysseus supplied or decided to omit.⁴¹⁹ The fusion of the heroines' accounts with Odysseus' own contributions, coupled with the temporary withdrawal of the omniscient poet-narrator, casts serious

⁴¹⁹ Approaches to the presentation of the heroines' stories vary from certainty that they are reliably reported or at the very least focalised through their eyes (Doherty 1991: 150–51, 155–57; 1995a: 91, 95–96; Gazis 2018: 128–29, 155, 164) to acceptance of the probability of Odysseus' intervention (Doherty 1991: 148, 157–58; 1995a: 68, 97; de Jong 2001: 282) and emphasis on his mediation of their voices (Vergados 2014: 448). For a nuanced discussion of the interplay between reporting and manipulating the information given by the heroines, see Sammons 2010: 85–91.

ἦ δ' ἔβη εἰς Αἶδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο,
ἀψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὸν ἀφ' ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρου,
ᾧ ἄχεϊ σχομένη: τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν. 280

(Hom. *Od.* 11.271–80)

And I saw the mother of Oedipodes, beautiful Epicaste, who did a monstrous thing in the ignorance of her mind, wedding her own son; and he, when he had slain his own father, wedded her; and soon the gods made these things known among men. Nevertheless, in lovely Thebes, suffering woes, he ruled over the Cadmeans by the dire designs of the gods; but she went down to the house of Hades, the strong warder, making fast a deadly noose from the high ceiling, caught by her own grief; but for him she left behind countless woes, all that a mother's Furies bring to pass.

Here, as in other versions of the myth, Epicaste's self-killing occurs after the status of her relationship with Oedipus has been made known: 11.274 ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν. However, the narrative fails to clarify whether the motive for Epicaste's suicide is the fact of incest itself, or more specifically its revelation to a wider audience. I submit that distinguishing between the two scenarios and following each one to its conclusion is necessary for ascertaining the potential significance of this ambiguity for the presentation of Epicaste's gender and its operation in the poem. In what follows, I will offer interpretations of Epicaste's gender identity within the context of either possible narrative, and attempt to highlight the subtle differences as well as some striking similarities. It will emerge that in both situations, some attempt is made at dividing the roles of mother and wife that marriage to Oedipus has confused, albeit motivated by different considerations and looking towards different outcomes. I will argue that Epicaste's actions in both cases ultimately undermine the attempt to disentangle familiar relations, either because of these actions' inherent potential to evoke both her maternal aspect and her role as wife, or because they serve to maintain, as much as to untangle, her confused identity. Moreover, it will become apparent that Odysseus' visit in the Underworld and his narration of Epicaste's story actually affirm Epicaste's anomalous identity and establish it in poetic tradition as the core of her status as one of the heroines of old.

Scenario 1: incest as motivation for Epicaste's suicide

In an understanding of the text where realisation of the incestuous union motivates Epicaste's suicide, the act of self-killing quite naturally appears as the point where her conflicting roles become separated, validated, or rejected. As I will demonstrate below, this function of her suicide has been prepared through the progressive introduction and interweaving of Epicaste's incompatible roles, while

its outcome is sufficiently hinted at in the account's concluding lines. The result seems to be a split image of Epicaste, whereby the Theban queen *qua* shade in Hades is defined by her maternal qualities, while the marital union with Oedipus remains contained in her career on earth. However, as I will argue, this image becomes complicated when Odysseus' narration combines in song these previously separated roles; indeed, the poetic reconstitution of a non-normative identity activates and capitalises on the previously latent ability of suicide by hanging to evoke both a condition of pregnancy and connotations of wifhood, and demands a re-evaluation of the constitution of Epicaste's gender as presented to the audience of Phaeacians.

The manner in which Epicaste is introduced in the Catalogue of Heroines is an ideal point to start unpacking the complexities of her presentation that were summarised above. Contrary to all other heroines, who are located in a specific mythological era, place, and family tree through mention of their father's or husband's name, Epicaste is ushered into the narration in her capacity as mother of Oedipus (11.271).⁴²¹ Although this characterisation is in line with the overall matrilineal focus of Odysseus' catalogue and of *ēhoiē*-type poetry more generally,⁴²² it is remarkable in that it not only contradicts the rubric under which Odysseus has subsumed the heroines of whom he speaks (11.227 ὄσσαι ἀριστήων ἄλοχοι ἔσαν ἠδὲ θύγατρεις; cf. 11.329), but also, in another departure from Odysseus' usual practice, precedes even mention of her name. It has been pointed out that, given Epicaste's career, her introduction by means of the relationship she violated is quite appropriate.⁴²³ That certainly appears true, and it serves to insinuate from the very beginning that untangling Epicaste's complex identity is going to be a challenging endeavour. Nevertheless, it is also true that a similar evocation of familial transgressions could have been achieved if Epicaste had been called the wife, rather than mother, of Oedipus; either term would activate the background mythological knowledge necessary to detect in these appellations hints of the family trouble to follow. The primary reason for emphasising Epicaste's maternal role *vis-à-vis* Oedipus seems to be a different one—namely, that in her posthumous existence Epicaste is first and foremost known as—and identifiable by others as—a mother, rather than a woman with a hopelessly complicated identity.

The lines that follow Epicaste's introduction develop the underlying theme of transgression to foreground her role as Oedipus' wife, at the same time moving the action from Hades, where

⁴²¹ The only other women in the catalogue that lack genealogical information of this kind are the ones mentioned only by name (Phaedra, Procris, Maera, and Clymene) and Eriphyle, in whose entry the husband, the only relative mentioned, does not receive a name (11.327). Perhaps, as has been suggested by Arft (2014: 403–11), the parallel between Epicaste and Eriphyle is not accidental, as the two figures can provide different examples of behaviour for Arete. However, my suggestion of the particular ways in which Arete's actions can be mapped onto those of Epicaste differs significantly from those outlined by Arft (2014: 405–06, 411).

⁴²² For the catalogue of heroines as matrifocal see: Skempis and Ziogas 2009: 239. For the focus of *ēhoiē*-poetry in general on motherhood see: West 1966: 34–35; Lyons 1997: 5.

⁴²³ Houlihan 1994: 3. See also Pade (1983: 11–12), who explains the priority of children over husband in Epicaste's entry as a result of the convoluted familial relations.

Odysseus identified her as Oedipus' mother, to Thebes and to Epicaste's life. The phrase *γημαμένη ᾧ υἱ* (11.273), which refers to Epicaste (11.272), is closely echoed by the word *γῆμεν* (11.274) used for Oedipus' actions, and forcefully introduces the theme of marriage within the family as an act of reciprocity.⁴²⁴ The combination of contradictory terms in *γημαμένη ᾧ υἱ* pointedly summarises the paradoxical identity Epicaste attains, but also serves to maintain her maternal role at the forefront of our attention. Although in her earthly career Epicaste is increasingly characterised in terms of marriage, the presence of *μητέρα* and *ᾧ υἱ* as subject and object, respectively, of *γημαμένη*, do not allow us to forget her maternal aspect. At the same time, the slight imbalance that occurs when the participial character and passive voice of *γημαμένη* is viewed against Oedipus' active and emphatic verb *γῆμεν* (placed at the end of the sentence and the beginning of the line), serves as a subtle reminder that Epicaste's role as wife cannot be examined in separation from her maternal relation to Oedipus.

The increasingly tense interplay between the roles of mother and wife in the text comes to a head with Epicaste's suicide. A reaction to the news and an attempt to reinstate the appropriate boundaries in the relationships between family members, this act of self-killing will constitute a choice between incompatible roles. Given the potential of suicide by hanging to evoke both pregnancy/motherhood and wifely devotion, only attention to the text can help determine what configuration of Epicaste's identity emerges. The description of the suicide itself (11.279), with its emphasis on height and the evocation of the interior of a palace, is remarkably similar to accounts of suicides of tragic wives.⁴²⁵ Epicaste has presumably retreated inside, perhaps in her marriage chamber, but at any rate in the enclosed space that is identified with the wife's domain, while the high beam from which she hangs her noose, itself called 'steep', may well recall the high stature of the husband for whom she dies.⁴²⁶ It appears that at the point of death Epicaste prioritises her marriage with Oedipus, rejecting her maternal relationship with him.

However, Epicaste's choice of the status of wife as she hangs herself does not mean that she also descends to Hades in possession of that identity. As the concluding lines of her entry in the Catalogue suggest, and as the introduction indicates, in the Underworld Epicaste is first and foremost Oedipus'

⁴²⁴ Doherty 1991: 156; 1995a: 96.

⁴²⁵ The word *μέλαθρον*, literally meaning 'beam', can also denote the house (LSJ *s.v.*). For the death of tragic wives in their bedchambers see Loraux 1987: 23–24 (although as Chapter 2 and the present chapter demonstrate, some of these women are more than merely wives).

⁴²⁶ For this connotation of suicide by hanging in the interior of the house, often evoked in tragedy, see Loraux 1987: 24. This husband, if evoked, remains resolutely nameless; yet there is good reason to believe that we are meant to think of Oedipus rather than Laius. Throughout the preceding lines, the focus has been on the marriage union between him and Epicaste while Laius, never mentioned, is only vaguely alluded to solely in his capacity as Oedipus' father (11.273). Moreover, I believe that if the poet wanted us to think of Laius, or at least draw attention to the ambiguity of this evocation of Epicaste's dead husband, it would have been easy to mention him when introducing her.

mother; the Furies that she leaves behind to torment him belong to her only in that capacity (11.280 ὄσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν). What has happened, I would argue, is that the suicide addresses the problem of Epicaste's convoluted identity by dividing its components between two versions of Epicaste: conceived as a human being who lived at Thebes, she is seen primarily as Oedipus' wife; the moment, however, she enters Hades she sheds that identity and becomes identified instead as his mother. The suicide represents the interface between the two, the point at which they converge and separate.

The events contained in 11.271–80 conclude with an unrepeatable act, Epicaste's suicide, which divides the two incompatible aspects of her identity. Once, however, we shift attention from the events to their re-presentation in a retrospective account, we realise that the split thematised in the narration has been compromised by the very fact of this posthumous narration. To recall one's past is to claim the self shaped by past events as part of one's current identity; this is partly the reason why Odysseus' revelation of his identity to the Phaeaceans coincides with the lengthy narration of the adventures that inform this identity. When the interview between Odysseus and Epicaste is over, she cannot commit suicide once again to repeat the splitting of roles that allowed the untangling of familial relations. By recalling and presenting her story Epicaste reclaims the anomalous identity she had previously repudiated with her suicide. On the formal level, this process of reclamation is indicated by the containment of her story between two characterisations, one at the beginning and one at the end, of Epicaste as mother. She appears to Odysseus solely as Oedipus' mother (11.271 μητέρα τ' Οἰδιπόδαο), assumes the added role of his wife over the course of her narration (11.273 γημμαμένη ᾧ υἱῷ), and returns to the place and time of narration, where she is once again a mother (11.280 μητρὸς Ἐρινύες). However, the fact that she knows what transformations her gender will undergo during the events contained between these framing characterisations of Epicaste as mother has already contaminated her presentation solely as mother of Oedipus. Similarly, when Odysseus recounts to the Phaeaceans the encounter and the information he has gathered, he is already aware of Epicaste's complicated identity, even as he begins by calling her simply Oedipus' mother. Simply put, the moment the narration begins, the separation of roles enacted in the events narrated has already been negated, to be replaced by the reinstatement of Epicaste's anomalous identity as mother and wife to her son.

Scenario 2: revelation of incest as motivation for Epicaste's suicide

The above interpretation proceeds from the assumption that Epicaste's decision to commit suicide is the past, now standing revealed. However, as mentioned earlier, the text is sufficiently ambiguous enough to suggest that her suicide was prompted by the extent of the revelation itself. According to such an understanding of the passage, her death appears to respond to the need for an intelligible,

socially acceptable public image, and to reconfigure her identity to that end. In what follows, I will argue that in this case, too, Epicaste's suicide effects a separation and redistribution of the contradictory aspects of her gender, which are now organised around the opposition between visibility and invisibility. Epicaste's concern with her public image shifts the focus to the alignment of social visibility with repudiation of incest and to the relegation of her confused identity to the dark and inaccessible spaces of house and Hades. Odysseus' visit to the Underworld and his interview with Epicaste become the occasion for broadcasting the anomalous identity preserved in invisible realms, and disrupt the association between normativity and visibility, allowing Epicaste to establish her gender in the realm of public knowledge.

Several elements in the passage sustain the ambiguity surrounding Epicaste's motivations by subtly hinting at an alternative interpretation of the narrative. One such element is the presence, at the beginning of the sentence describing the revelation, of ἄφαρ (11.274), whose precise meaning, both here and elsewhere, is much debated.⁴²⁷ Although the majority of the proposed translations, the most popular among which are 'as soon as' and 'suddenly', would neither impair the meaning nor affect the interpretation proposed here, there is one that is particularly fit for purpose. If, as Tsitsibakou-Vasalos suggests in her extensive examination of its occurrences in Homeric epic, ἄφαρ is to be understood here as an epitatic of ἀνάπυστα, then the focus shifts from the temporality of the revelation to its magnitude.⁴²⁸ Significantly, the recipients of the divinely revealed information are not only Oedipus and Epicaste or the Theban citizens at large, both of which would make sense, but ἄνθρωποι in general. The fate of the Theban ruling family has escaped local restraints to become a tale known among all men.⁴²⁹ Given that ἀνάπυστα itself can connote the distribution of disreputable information, the whole sentence strongly advocates a causal connection between Epicaste's suicide and the wide circulation of the news of her incestuous marriage.⁴³⁰ We are again pointed towards the same direction

⁴²⁷ The meaning of ἄφαρ in *Od.* 11.274 has generated much critical debate, whose origins can perhaps be traced back to Pausanias. In 9.4.2, he concludes that Oedipus must have had the four known children from a second wife called Euryganeia based precisely on the certainty that ἄφαρ means 'immediately'. Following the exactly opposite direction in his reasoning, the scholiast (*Σ Od.* 11.274) chooses to render ἄφαρ as 'suddenly' (ἐξαίφνης) rather than 'straightaway' (οὐκ εὐθέως) to accommodate within the narrative time the birth of children, of which he assumes Homer was aware. A similar oscillation between different translations and their implications for the narrative characterises much of the contemporary discussion on the point. Heubeck and Hoekstra (1990: 94) follow Stanford (1959: 391) in advocating a reading of ἄφαρ that allows for the passing of some time ('after a while, after a year or so' and 'after that', respectively), while more recent critics prefer the more common meaning 'immediately' (e.g. Barker and Christensen 2008: 23; Gazis 2018: 140). However, for the purposes of the present argument it is the sequence of events rather than the time elapsed that is significant. The absence in the text of any hint as to the existence of children is considered indication enough that this question should not impinge on the interpretation of Epicaste's gender.

⁴²⁸ Tsitsibakou-Vasalos 1989: 84.

⁴²⁹ Barker and Christensen (2008: 25) interpret this choice of word as a tacit acknowledgment of the broadcast of the Theban tradition, which Odysseus tries to surpass. Even this reading, however, readily recognises the widespread circulation of information that ἀνθρώποισιν implies.

⁴³⁰ For the meaning of ἀνάπυστος see Tsitsibakou-Vasalos (1989: 84 n. 73), and Barker and Christensen (2008: 24 n. 93) for its potentially pejorative connotations.

when considering the precise content of the phrase ὃ ἄχεϊ. Even though its proximity to the suicide suggests that it functions as an explanation for Epicaste’s actions, the source of this pain remains unspecified. Recourse to the text reveals that the most recently mentioned event that could shed light on Epicaste’s ἄχος is the revelation of the parricide and incest, which reinforces the impression that an alternative scenario, originating from Epicaste’s distress at the revelation, is contained in the text.⁴³¹

While the realisation of incest committed in ignorance demanded that Epicaste address the situation by disentangling the multiple positions she occupied, the ἄχος caused from widespread revelation of the truth leaves open more courses of action: she can attempt to recover a normative female identity in a public, visible way, or hide from view a nexus of uncomfortably concentrated female roles. In fact, as the text indicates in this alternative reading of Epicaste’s motives, the mother-wife of Oedipus combines the two in a series of actions organised around the visibility/invisibility polarity. To begin with, there exists a sharp contrast, articulated by the pair μὲν-δέ, between the fates of Oedipus and Epicaste in the wake of the revelation (11.275 and 11.277 respectively).⁴³² Oedipus continues to reign in Thebes, and in this most public and visible of figures the past remains firmly in view, embedded in the present. It is no accident that in his capacity as ruler Oedipus, who makes no effort to conceal his identity, endures many sufferings (11.275); nor is it without significance that under his rule the city of Thebes becomes truly πολυήρατος (11.275)—that is, both much-cursed and rich in the excessive love of its ruling family, which was at once the cause and manifestation of the city’s accursed status.⁴³³ Epicaste, on the other hand, retreats from public view in two consecutive movements: she commits suicide in an interior space (11.278 μελάθρου), away from prying eyes, and the consequence is an even more effective concealment in the Underworld—that is, until Odysseus arrives. All that remains of her in the public realm are her Erinyes, which, tied as they are to her maternal aspect, severely undermine, if they cannot entirely erase, her identity as Oedipus’ wife. In this context, it is particularly fitting that Odysseus summarises her identity as μητέρα [...] Οἰδιπόδου when he introduces Epicaste: in the afterlife of her and Oedipus’ story, this is the role under which she has come to be publicly known and that her name recalls.

⁴³¹ See Tsitsibakou-Vasalos (1989: 83–84) for a similar interpretation of the connection between revelation, ἄφαρ, and ἄχος.

⁴³² Gazis 2018: 141–42. Barker and Christensen (2008: 25), on the other hand, see a parallel between the two lines and the two adjectives πολυηράτω and πλάρατω, which they use to explain Epicaste’s death as a symbolic consignment of the Theban tradition to forgetfulness.

⁴³³ πολυήρατος seems to derive from ἐράω, contrary to Arete’s name, whose likely etymology is from ἀρητός and, ultimately, from ἀράομαι (LSJ *s.v.*). However, the incongruity of the meaning ‘much-loved’ or ‘lovely’ for Thebes in the present context, already noted in antiquity (Σ *Od.* 11.275), has fostered the supposition that πολυήρατος may instead mean ‘much-cursed’. Arft (2014: 404–05) argues that the transformation of ‘an inherently cursed city into a lovely place’ through etymological play is deliberate on the part of Odysseus, who is thus presenting Epicaste in a favourable light in order to address as delicately as possible Arete’s own relationship with her own cursed homeland. See also Barker and Christensen 2008: 25; Gazis 2018: 142 n. 53.

Nevertheless, a very different configuration of Epicaste's gender emerges in the enclosed, hidden spaces of house and Hades. As we have seen, her suicide, facilitated by a high beam of the house, the female realm *par excellence*, is couched in language that highlights her role as wife. However, in her descent to Hades she appears in the guise of Epicaste-as-mother. ἡ δ[έ] (11.277), the subject of the sentence detailing Epicaste's move from Thebes to the Underworld, points back to Ἐπικάστην, or μητέρα (11.271). There is no word in the text that signifies as clearly and unambiguously Epicaste's status as wife, and that could impinge on our understanding of ἡ δ[έ]. Out of sight, then, Epicaste retains her anomalous identity by dividing it between two dark, inaccessible spaces. The division of her roles between house and Hades seems to follow a logic that readily acknowledges the similarities between the grave and the womb. The μέλαθρον stands in for the sphere of female activity to which Epicaste would be consigned as wife, while Hades recalls the recesses of the female body with which it shares the function of hiding mortals.⁴³⁴

Epicaste's actions, then, unfold along two parallel lines: in the realm of visibility and knowledge, she bequeaths an image of herself as mother, divested, as much as possible, of reminders of the unlawful union. These she hides and maintains in enclosed spaces inaccessible to human vision or even knowledge, sustaining the convoluted gender resulting from the confusion of roles. The opportunity to reclaim this hidden identity emerges with Odysseus' visit to Hades and his decision to interview some of the female shades. The act of narration, first on the level of the one-to-one interview, and then in the context of public performance, retrieves Epicaste's anomalous identity from the Underworld and ensures its establishment in the public world of song and its performance contexts. Not unlike Tyro, who was obliged during her lifetime to conceal the identity of her divine lover (11.251), Epicaste was unable to live as mother and wife of Oedipus.⁴³⁵ In her capacity as a ghost in Hades however, where the demands of the society of mortals no longer exercise any power, Epicaste can lay claim to her anomalous identity and disrupt the usual associations between scrutiny and control, or visibility and life.

Iocasta in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*

The account of Iocasta's death contained in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, though largely agreeing with the brief description of the *Nekyia*, differs from that narrative on points significant enough to demand a different appreciation of Iocasta's suicide and its role in shaping her gender. Even after isolating what may be considered generic differences (e.g. absence of epic resonances, description of Iocasta's behaviour prior to the suicide, etc.), the myth is here developed in such length and detail that it inevitably departs from the *Odyssey's* narrative on various counts. To begin with, the indisputable

⁴³⁴ See Murnaghan 1992, esp. 248–50.

⁴³⁵ For Tyro's act of revelation and its possible implications see Doherty 1993: 6; 1995: 125; Skempis and Ziogas 2009: 236; Gazis 2018: 134–35.

existence of children from the marriage between Oedipus and his mother further complicates Iocasta's identity, as the roles of wife and mother are replicated in her second, incestuous marriage. The tragedy is also less ambiguous on the topic of Iocasta's motives for committing suicide, though the relevant literature has not always been successful in isolating them. Most critics attribute her act of self-killing to shame or distress at the realisation of her incestuous relationship with Oedipus.⁴³⁶ However, as will be argued below, careful reading of the text suggests that the motivating force behind her suicide is the threat of an imminent widespread revelation of the truth. Some critical approaches that argue for Iocasta's knowledge and acceptance of the incest seem to gesture towards this conclusion, although they often stop short from articulating it with conviction.⁴³⁷ This lack of attention to Iocasta's suicide is the inevitable outcome of a more general failure to correctly assess the importance of her role in the drama, which is often overshadowed by Oedipus' presence.⁴³⁸ Yet in this play of reversal of fortunes, Oedipus is not the only one who has been transformed by the end of the play; Iocasta undergoes her own transformation, and furnishes us with an alternative way of understanding the play's problematisation of the formation of identity.

These differences between the two accounts of Epicaste's/Iocasta's death are actively involved not only in tailoring the heroine's presentation to the epic or tragic context, but also in determining which connotations of her suicide are foregrounded and how they shape her identity. In this section, I will argue that her suicide in *Oedipus Tyrannus* responds to the threat of revelation not, as in the *Odyssey*,

⁴³⁶ Hay 1978 (a brief mention to her 'intolerable guilt'); Dawe 1982: 19–20; Loraux 1987: 14; Segal 1995: 175 (a passing reference to Iocasta's 'horrified recognition'); Garrison 1995: 111–13; Wilson 2004: 33. Often the topic of Iocasta's motivation is not touched upon at all, and this omission is all the more striking in the lengthier treatments of the play, such as Segal 1981: 207–48.

⁴³⁷ To my knowledge, Kawashima (2014: 115) has come the closest to identifying the revelation of the truth as Iocasta's motive for killing herself: 'She would be capable of living on with that knowledge or at least she has tried to keep her son Oedipus alive and simply to live on with him [...] She would have been able to live, if his pursuit of the truth had not been as relentless as it was and he had not come to learn his own identity'. However, it remains somewhat unclear whether the decisive factor is the emergence of the truth in the public sphere or specifically Oedipus' discovery of it, as the two are often considered interchangeable—and admittedly coincide in the play (Kawashima 2014: 94, 115–16). Machin (1990: 7–18), who makes the strongest case for Iocasta having suspected the truth even before the events of the play took place, remains ambiguous on the topic of her motives, simply stating that the queen decides to take her life when she realises that 'all is lost' ('que tout est perdu'). Vellacott's (1971: 223–27) suggestion that Iocasta might have suspected early on in the drama brings his interpretation closer to my position, even though elsewhere he seems to imply that Iocasta is motivated by distress.

⁴³⁸ Assessments of Iocasta as a character in the drama vary widely. Many critics only comment briefly on her character, usually in relation to her rejection of prophecy and her subsequent turn to Apollo with offerings (Jebb 1893: xxviii–xxix, 98–99, 124; Knox 1957: 47–48, 142–44, 154–55; Kamerbeek 1967: 20, 182; Gould 1970: 106–07, 119; Dawe 1982: 18), or her role as a supportive and caring wife to Oedipus (Foley 2001: 144; Finglass 2018: 371). See also a summary of these views in Whitman 1951: 123–33. Vellacott (1971: 183–87, 196–200, 215–17) who devotes more space than others on Iocasta's role and behaviour, consistently downplays her strength and her power of understanding, and by making her need Oedipus' guidance to comprehend and accept the truth also misrepresents the relationship between the two. Even Garrison (1995: 105, 110–12), who makes an effort to shed light on Iocasta's character to explain the suicide, does not go further than presenting her as a composed and self-reliant woman who refuses to become integrated in a world that leaves no room for her scepticism. The strongest argument for viewing the queen as a more complicated character who lives out her own tragedy is put forward by Machin (1990: 7–18), and, more recently, by Kawashima (2014: 75–96).

by affirming her convoluted identity, but by attempting to designate Iocasta exclusively as wife. To that end, the suicide is explicitly figured as an attack on the blood relationships that result from sexual unions. I hope to show that the effects of this act ripple out to encompass Oedipus' self-mutilation, challenging its popular interpretation as a repetition of the incestuous union and bringing the symbolic potential of the scene under the influence of Iocasta's hanging. However, the repudiation of sexual activity enacted in her suicide undercuts the effort to curb the proliferation of her roles on two fronts: first, it deprives the ostensibly normative role of wife, to which she attempts to restrict her identity, of one of its core contents; second, by suppressing blood relations, it enables her to assume the position of wife in relation to both Laius and Oedipus, thereby re-introducing the problematic doubling of roles initiated by incest. These anomalies result in a severely restricted, anomalous female identity, the excluded aspects of which continuously threaten to erupt into visibility.

An appropriate way for comprehending the configuration of Iocasta's identity is offered by the text itself, which draws parallels between the queen and the hybrid Sphinx. I will argue that shared features and functions not only bolster the argument for Iocasta's identity as anomalous, but also serve to present the Sphinx as a magnified image of the problematic elements in her human counterpart's gender. To further illustrate the parallels, I will draw on the details of the Sphinx's career included in Apollodorus 3.5.7–9. The coincidence of the myth's outline in this version with the plot of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* invites us to draw on his description of the Sphinx to imagine what the drama's elliptical presentation may have communicated to an audience familiar with the myth.

The motivation of Iocasta's suicide

The vagueness detected in mainstream interpretations of Iocasta's motives for committing suicide, though partly the result of insufficient attention to the topic, appears somewhat justified if we consider the text between the queen's final departure from the stage and the end of the Messenger's report. In that part of the drama, we are presented with a seeming plethora of possible motives: sorrow (1074 λύπη), shame (1079 αἰσχύνεται), Iocasta's own self (1237 αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτῆς), anger (1241 ὀργῆ χρωμένη), and Oedipus' birth and the incestuous union (1241–50). However, careful consideration of the text dispels the appearance of heterogeneity by demonstrating the derivation of these partial motives from Iocasta's alarm over the prospect of a widespread revelation of her true relation to Oedipus.

The recurrent references to the incestuous union in the Messenger's report (1242–43, 1246, 1248–50), as well as the focus, in the previous scene, on the revelation of Oedipus' identity (1171–85), may create the impression that Iocasta kills herself in reaction to the fact of incest, or at the very least to Oedipus' realisation of a truth she may privately have known or suspected. However, her increasingly desperate pleas to Oedipus to stop the enquiry (1056–68) indicate that her fear centres on the impending revelation to a wider audience, not the private communication of a terrible truth. Now that

the audience can be certain she is in full knowledge of the facts,⁴³⁹ her attempts to conceal the truth can more convincingly be understood as an indication of her willingness to uphold the status quo so long as she does not have to defend the incestuous relation publicly. This suggestion appears all the more likely if one considers the possibility that either or both spouses have always suspected, or even known with relative certainty, the truth of their past.⁴⁴⁰ In such a scenario, Oedipus' insistence on bringing his enquiry to a successful conclusion and Iocasta's efforts to prevent him would not illustrate so much a clash between blissful ignorance and painful realisation, but between public acknowledgement and continued silencing of a truth already known and tacitly accepted. Once it has become clear that Iocasta's suicide is motivated by the revelation of the truth, the various explanations provided by the text fall into place. Oedipus' intransigence and the need for swift and decisive action fuel Iocasta's anger/frenzy, and the realisation that past and present are about to come to light gives rise to sorrow and shame.⁴⁴¹ Oedipus was, in a sense, right to suspect that Iocasta is ashamed of his *δυσγένεια* (1079); what he failed to realise was that her shame concerned the imminent revelation of the true dimensions of his *δυσγένεια*, which will come to encompass a family background very different from the one he imagines.

The only motive proposed by the text that has not already been shown to derive from Iocasta's concern with the revelation of the truth is the one the Messenger provides in response to the Chorus' question: 1236–37 *πρὸς τίνοσ ποτ' αἰτίας; | αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτῆς*. The rather difficult expression *αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτῆς* at first glance appears more appropriate as a statement on the *manner* of Iocasta's death, rather than the reason behind it. At the same time, the phrase may be taken on grounds of syntax to be making the somewhat odd point that Iocasta is the reason for her own death.⁴⁴² This double vision

⁴³⁹ Opinions on the point at which Iocasta becomes apprised of the truth vary widely. According to Jebb (1893: xxiv), Iocasta has known the truth since line 1044, and Garrison (1995: 109) pushes the realisation back only a few lines to 1060, with the earliest intimations of her knowledge being located at 1056. Kawashima (2014: 68–69) argues that Iocasta realises the truth while Oedipus is offering a summary of his life before arriving at Thebes, bringing the realisation forward to 771–883.

⁴⁴⁰ For Oedipus suspecting the truth see Vellacott 1971: esp. 166–200. For Iocasta see Vellacott 1971: 224–27; Machin 1990: 7–18.

⁴⁴¹ In the present context, whether *ὀργῆ* *χρωμένη* is taken to mean that Iocasta is in a frantic state or, as *ὀργή* would often indicate (LSJ *s.v.*), specifically angry is not an important distinction. However, see p. 180 for the possible connotations that the first of these interpretations may activate. For a summary of the interpretations offered see below n. 469.

⁴⁴² A literal translation would be 'she because of herself'. Garrison (1995: 65) translates the exact same phrase that describes Deianeira's suicide in Soph. *Trach.* 1132 as 'she herself by herself'. However, Heracles' question *πρὸς τοῦ*; can be translated both as 'because of whom, by whom' (*τοῦ* masculine or feminine) or 'because of what, from what cause' (*τοῦ* neuter). Also, in the *OT* we have *αἰτίας* as well, which removes the possibility of asking about the perpetrator or the means. Here, the correspondence between the Chorus' *πρὸς τίνοσ [...]* *αἰτίας* and the Messenger's *πρὸς αὐτῆς* leaves little doubt that we are meant to read *πρὸς* + genitive as expressing causality. Some of the usual translations, such as 'by her own hand' (Jebb 1893: 163; Lloyd-Jones 1994: 457; Finglass 2018: 454 (with the addition of 'she herself')), 'she brought it on herself' (Taplin 2016: 64), or 'she killed herself' (Bagg 1982: 58; Fagles 1984: 235–36) either introduce words absent in the original or offer a more straightforward meaning in order to iron out the difficulties of this condensed phrase. One of the more accurate translations remains the one offered by Gould (1970: 141): '-What was responsible? –Herself'.

afforded by αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτῆς helps bring out Iocasta's own involvement in the revelation that prompts her death. In the Messenger's account of her actions before her suicide, it emerges that the queen, who in her last moments had been preoccupied with thoughts of her marriages and children, is the source of her present woes, all of which emerged, quite literally, from her own body—first as the child Oedipus, then as the children she had with him.⁴⁴³ And even though these past events are not precisely the cause of her distress, it remains true that Iocasta has caused the situation that mandates her suicide in another capacity: in her attempt to assuage Oedipus' anger at the suggestion that he was Laius' killer she provides him with the clue that first sets him on the right path to discover the truth.⁴⁴⁴ Even later on, Iocasta repeatedly appears as the person that can and does, though unwillingly, facilitate the discovery of the truth—first by sending for the old shepherd (861), then by emerging as the final piece in the puzzle of Oedipus' identity.⁴⁴⁵ Iocasta's suicide is thus shown to constitute an attack on the source of her problems, which is no other than her own self. The Messenger's condensed reply to the Theban elders appropriately summarises her twofold role as both reason and means for her suicide.

Iocasta's suicide

In order to better comprehend precisely why the impending revelation of Iocasta's incestuous marriage is a concern grave enough to make her take her life, it is useful to understand her fear more specifically as an awareness that her position as mother-wife to Oedipus and mother of his children will be rendered unviable. Her suicide may then be imagined as an attempt to reconfigure her public identity to conform with prescribed gender norms. The problem that this assumption immediately encounters is that the text does not provide a description of the actual act of self-killing, thus depriving us of positive evidence to support the above interpretation of the suicide. However, as I will show, this momentary gap in the narration can become a space for transformation.

Given Iocasta's concern with her image in the public mind, it seems appropriate that her first act after failing to halt Oedipus' interrogation of the shepherd is to retreat inside (1241–43). The complicated identity she embodies is removed from the public space and returned to the private realm, where Iocasta proceeds to relive the events that led to the present situation.⁴⁴⁶ And while the rehearsal of past

⁴⁴³ This observation refutes Wilson's (2004: 33) claim that such nouns such as σπερμάτων (1246) or παιδουργία (1248), which she correctly identifies as indicating Iocasta's motives, actually stand in for Oedipus, with whom they eventually become identified. Rather, they refer to the sexual relationships in which she engaged and their catastrophic results.

⁴⁴⁴ This is the mention of the 'place where three roads meet' (716) while Iocasta is informing Oedipus of the reported circumstances of Laius' death. Interestingly, Oedipus completely ignores an even more revealing piece of information that follows a mere two lines later—namely, the condition of the exposed infant's feet: 718 *viv ἄρθρα κείνος ἐνζεύξας ποδοῖν*. Various explanations for this curious oversight have been put forward: Gould (1970: 93) and Kamerbeek (1978: 151) argue that ἐνζεύξας, meaning simply 'fastening', does not make explicit the infant's maiming that would have caught Oedipus' attention, while Dawe (1982: 20) and Kawashima (2014: 66) attribute Oedipus' indifference towards the information to dramatic purposes.

⁴⁴⁵ For more on this see pp. 183–86.

⁴⁴⁶ Segal 1995: 155–56.

events, already known in their outline, is presented in the Messenger's report without omissions (1245–50), the conclusion is obscured from view, as the moment of Iocasta's death is elided: 1251 *χῶπως μὲν ἐκ τῶνδ' οὐκέτ' οἶδ' ἀπόλλυται*. This statement is significant; the Messenger admits ignorance on two points—first, the manner in which Iocasta died, and second, the causal relation between the events she had been recollecting and her decision to die. Considering the publicity that Iocasta's last moments in the bedchamber receive once inserted in the Messenger's report, the literal and metaphorical inability even to glimpse her suicide seems to indicate Iocasta's failure to counteract the effects of the revelation: her shameful past deeds have been exposed yet again, but her response to them has failed to reach an audience. Nevertheless, I would argue that the obscurity surrounding Iocasta's death operates in the opposite direction, and becomes a space that allows alternative interpretations of the import of her suicide to emerge.⁴⁴⁷ More specifically, I aim to show that the text suggests that Iocasta kills herself in a manner that symbolically repudiates blood relationships and portrays her solely as chaste wife.

The lines in which the Messenger relates the queen's distraught behaviour in the bedchamber overflow with phrases that emphasise Iocasta's generative powers: 1242–43 *νομφικά | λέχη*, 1246 *σπερμάτων*, 1247 *τίκτουςαν*, 1248 *δύστεκνον παιδουργίαν*, 1250 *τέκν' ἐκ τέκνων τέκοι*. These references to profligate procreation, already negatively inflected by virtue of belonging in the narrative of Iocasta's suffering, become a concentrated attack on blood relationships when viewed in conjunction with her suicide.⁴⁴⁸ Her hanged body, doubly enclosed in noose and bedchamber, resembles pregnancy without issue, thus illustrating the scenario that should have never been enacted: Iocasta's ability to bear children to Laius and Oedipus should not have mandated she do so. In spite of her generative ability, the emergence of offspring should have remained a possibility indefinitely deferred.

This repudiation of blood relations created through procreation is paired with an emphasis on the impenetrable, inviolable body of the loyal wife. Iocasta, enclosed in the space reserved solely for the married couple, approaches the extreme of wifely loyalty and chastity. Her renunciation of the one night with Laius that fulfilled Apollo's prophecy is so pronounced as to take the character of a wholesale renunciation of sexual relations. And while this newfound chastity highlights her position as wife by foreclosing the birth of a child fatal to his father, it also marks a certain failure on her part

⁴⁴⁷ There is a tendency to present this literal and metaphorical blockage of vision as counter-productive, a hindrance to knowledge and interpretation. The emphasis that the unavailability of Iocasta's suicide to vision receives in the text becomes for Segal (1995: 157, 159) the grounds to assert that the suicide *must* remain hidden from view, while Wilson (2004: 33) reads the obscurity of this moment as a means to cover up and remove from view 'the proliferations of Iocasta's sexuality'. I prefer to interpret this startling lack of visual and auditory cues as an opportunity afforded to the audience/readers by the play to reflect on the shape Iocasta's final moments might have taken and on their implications for the play's overall representation of the Theban queen.

⁴⁴⁸ That the sexual relations are at issue here as much as their product is a point supported by Long's (1968: 122) and Finglass's (2018: 549) comments on the scene.

to fulfil the duties of a wife. By excluding from this role the sexual union that constitutes a woman as wife, she empties it of one of its core contents. The truncation of this role is signalled on the lexical level through the shifting uses of *γυνή*, which is the term most often employed in the text to designate Iocasta's gender.⁴⁴⁹ The different proposed interpretations of the term are instructive: where Gould emphasises the proliferation of identities not only for Iocasta, but potentially for all women, who 'could play one and the same role', Jebb instead discerns a consistent emphasis on the conjugal relationship between Iocasta and Oedipus.⁴⁵⁰ Jebb may not have in mind a definition of the role of wife identical to that exemplified by the hanged queen, but the dissent on the significance of the word's repetition points up the double meaning of *γυνή*: it can describe a mature woman who has hit all the landmark stages in the female life cycle (marriage, defloration, childbirth), but it can also be applied with greater precision to communicate the more narrow meaning 'wife'.⁴⁵¹ Iocasta's characterisation as *γυνή* throughout the play is a constant reminder of both her initial and her posthumous identity, thereby illustrating the transformation Iocasta undergoes: though she may still be a *γυνή*, the meaning of the word and the identity it describes have changed profoundly for her.

Understood as an attack against sexual relations and the creation of blood bonds through them, Iocasta's suicide undermines her attempt to construct a normative female identity in two ways. First, as we just saw, it renders the role of wife almost entirely meaningless; second, it suppresses the maternal connection to Oedipus, unexpectedly enabling her to appear as the wife of both Laius and Oedipus. Throughout the play, Iocasta is unable to recall her position as Laius' wife without simultaneously drawing attention to her identical role in relation to Oedipus. The marriage chamber and marriage bed that feature prominently in her suicide served as such not only during her shared life with Laius, but also in her marriage to Oedipus. When she bewails her union with Laius and the subsequent childbirth, she bemoans in the same breath her marriage to Oedipus and the birth of incestuous offspring: 1249–50 γοῶτο δ' εὐνάς, ἔνθα δύστηνος διπλῆ | ἐξ ἀνδρὸς ἄνδρα καὶ τέκν' ἐκ τέκνων τέκοι. The doubling of her role as wife, and more specifically the terms in which this is expressed, reinforces the impression that for Iocasta, the source of her anomalous identity is the creation of blood relations. If she is not related to Oedipus, the source of the opprobrium attending their marriage is removed. By suppressing motherhood and the complications it introduces, Iocasta's suicide embraces the paradox of Oedipus' existence without the precondition of a union between Laius and Iocasta. If the bonds of common blood are removed, Iocasta, in an ironic fulfilment of the Corinthian Messenger's address to her, can be an absolute wife (930 παντελής δάμαρ), the role

⁴⁴⁹ The term is applied to Iocasta 22 times. *Μήτηρ* occurs 16 times, but only in four of these instances is there an explicit reference to Iocasta, with the rest referring ambiguously to Oedipus' mother (whoever she may be) or Merope (1 instance).

⁴⁵⁰ Jebb 1893: 126; Gould 1970: 115.

⁴⁵¹ LSJ s.v.

describing the entirety of her identity and of her relationship to both Laius and Oedipus.⁴⁵² Of course, what is presented as a new, socially viable identity ends equally problematically, undermined by the exclusion of sexual relations and the paradox of marrying someone—Oedipus—whose very existence is dependent on her participation in such relations. Nevertheless, Iocasta's suicide can be deemed a success insofar as it partially fulfils its purpose—namely, to untangle the familial relationships that render her position unviable. In fact, as I will demonstrate below, the extent of this success is such that it forces the events that follow the suicide—Oedipus' entry in the bedchamber and his self-blinding—to conform with the image Iocasta creates for herself.

Oedipus' self-blinding

The events leading up to and immediately following the discovery of Iocasta's body are usually interpreted as a symbolic re-enactment of Oedipus' past crimes, or, at the very least, as a reminder of his unlawful union with his mother.⁴⁵³ However, if we consider the interplay, in the description of these events, between visibility and invisibility, and its importance for reshaping Iocasta's gender, it becomes possible for Oedipus' actions to admit of an interpretation not previously considered.

It is true that the relevant passage in the Messenger's report (1252–81) is rife with sexual imagery. As soon as he enters the palace, Oedipus asks in the same breath for a sharp penetrating weapon and for the wife that is not wife, while the violent impact of his weight against the chamber's doors and the forced entry are similarly couched in language laden with sexual connotations (1260–61).⁴⁵⁴ If, as was argued earlier, the closed bedchamber and the sealed body within signify the sterile chastity with which Iocasta surrounds herself as wife, then Oedipus' entry and subsequent actions threaten the very foundations of her new identity. Nevertheless, this threat never truly materialises, despite appearances to the contrary. At the moment of Iocasta's greatest vulnerability, when the suggestive loosening of her noose (1266) and the removal of her brooches (1268–69) leave her exposed to the consummate act of sexual violence towards which Oedipus' actions have been building,⁴⁵⁵ her husband-son instead directs that violence against himself. The self-mutilation that is usually understood as a recapitulation

⁴⁵² The phrase is usually taken to mean that Iocasta is a 'complete wife'—that is, one that has rendered her marriage τέλειος through the birth of children: Σ Soph. *OT* 930; Jebb 1983: 126; Kamerbeek 1967: 185; Gould 1970: 114; Dawe 1982: 190–91; Finglass 2018: 453. The juxtaposition of meanings potentially contained in παντελής δάμαρ if my interpretation is accepted serves to highlight the paradoxical relationship between Iocasta's initial (mother-wife) and posthumous (chaste wife) identity.

⁴⁵³ Hay 1978: 105; Segal 1995: 159. Wilson (2004: 29–30) admits that the self-blinding is as much a re-enactment of the parricide and incest as it is an attempt to 'reject the taint' of these acts. See also Gould (1970: 47, 57, 59, 102), who suggests that the two crimes are equated not only in this instance, but at several points throughout the play. Finglass (2018: 556) concentrates instead on the role of blinding as punishment for incest or adultery.

⁴⁵⁴ Gould 1970: 74, 142–44; Hay 1978: 103, 105, 112, 125; Segal 1995: 156; Finglass 2018: 552.

⁴⁵⁵ Segal 1995: 158–59.

of the incestuous union becomes, from this angle, an act that removes the source of all threats to Iocasta's impenetrability.

There are several ways in which Oedipus' self-blinding operates to negate the potential of a symbolic sexual union with Iocasta. One that has already gained traction among critics of the play is the implicit equation of this act with self-castration, a relation of substitution that has been argued by Devereux.⁴⁵⁶ However, more concrete, and in the drama's context, perhaps more appropriate, evidence can be derived from the prevalent Greek idea that the eyes are the seat of desire.⁴⁵⁷ Whether as the organs that perceive an object's desirability or as the source of sexual attraction itself, Oedipus' eyes pose a threat to Iocasta's perverse wifely chastity; their removal safeguards it. On a more literal level, as he himself admits as he performs the gruesome act, Oedipus is punishing those organs of perception that, by failing to correctly identify his kin, burdened him with intimate knowledge of those from whom he should have observed appropriate distances:⁴⁵⁸ 1273–74 ἀλλ' ἐν σκότῳ τὸ λοιπὸν οὐκ μὲν οὐκ ἔδει | ὀψοίαθ', οὐκ δ' ἔχρηζεν οὐ γνωσοίατο. Blinding re-establishes the boundaries transgressed,⁴⁵⁹ and by precluding the performance of similarly transgressive actions in the future, becomes aligned with Iocasta's effort to exclude from her identity the sexual knowledge a wife normally possesses.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁶ Devereux 1973. Even Hay (1978: 128), who objects that the text does not support such an interpretation of Sophocles' intentions in having Oedipus blind himself, admits that the act has sexual undertones and constitutes 'a deliberately homeopathic self-punishment'.

⁴⁵⁷ See Calame 1999: 19–22; Cairns 2011 (37 n. 2 and 38 n. 4 for examples from literature).

⁴⁵⁸ As Devereux (1973: 38) points out, it is significant that only in this passage does Oedipus advance an explanation for his self-blinding as *punishment* for his ignorance and, by extension, for the crimes he committed on account of it. See also Finglass 2018: 557. Others comment on the suitability of the reasons put forward in these lines as justification for his act, but without addressing the issue of self-punishment: Dawe 1982: 226; Kawashima 2014: 138.

⁴⁵⁹ For blindness in Sophocles' plays as a condition that counter-balances an excess see Buxton 1980, esp. p. 32.

⁴⁶⁰ Evidence that Oedipus' self-blinding serves Iocasta's efforts to redefine her identity comes almost immediately after the description of the gruesome act, as the Messenger refuses to repeat Oedipus' chosen word for his incestuous relationship with his mother and in doing so erases it from public view: 1289 τὸν μητρός, αὐδῶν ἀνόσι' οὐδὲ ῥητὰ μοι (but see Finglass 2018: 562 for the view that the aposiopesis highlights the horror of the incest). Later, when Oedipus himself has emerged on stage and is bewailing his rescue from Cithaeron and the evils that resulted from it, he describes himself as his mother's νυμφίος (1358). Normally a word for the bridegroom, in this context νυμφίος narrows the focus to the act of getting married, as opposed to the other aspects of the institution of marriage that Iocasta was so keen to denounce. Admittedly, the designation, in some editions of the text, of Oedipus as ὁμολεχῆς δ' ἀφ' ὧν αὐτὸς ἔφυν τάλας (1361), which follows closely upon νυμφίος, could serve to reintroduce the disturbing aspects of his relationship with Iocasta. ὁμολεχῆς, which is an emendation by Meineke, was introduced to circumvent the problems that the received ὁμογενῆς presented to any attempt at making satisfactory sense of the phrase. To make ὁμογενῆς, which usually means 'belonging to the same family', fit the present context requires special pleading: Jebb (1893: 177) devised an exceptional meaning to the word, 'sharing a common brood', as a way to reconcile the manuscript tradition to what he perceived to be the sense of the passage, and critics such as Kamerbeek (1967: 248) and Gould (1970: 153) have followed his example. More recently, Finglass (2018: 582) has introduced again the unattested active meaning of the word to which Jebb was opposed. However, Dawe (1982: 234) is right to point out that such interpretations strain the word, and on the basis of this he makes a case for accepting ὁμολεχῆς. Although I can offer no definitive answer to the question, it is worth considering the implications of retaining ὁμογενῆς and

The compatibility between Oedipus' self-blinding and Iocasta's new identity is not a happy accident; rather, it is a direct result of Iocasta's suicide, as is confirmed by the fact that he manages to see her in her new status before he strikes his eyes. For Hay, the moment when Oedipus views Iocasta's dead body also marks the first and only time that he truly sees—and knows her—for who she is.⁴⁶¹

Although this moment of visual perception has a profound impact on Oedipus, I would argue that what he sees upon entry is not Iocasta still in possession of her convoluted identity as his mother-wife, but Iocasta in her new identity as chaste wife. This sight imposes itself on Oedipus and compels him to protect Iocasta's status from the repercussions of his penetrating, desirous gaze. In fact, the strength of this compulsion is such that it not only deprives Oedipus of the power to violate Iocasta's chastity, but also has a feminizing effect on him. The penetration of his body by the sharp ends of Iocasta's brooches, and the flow of blood from his eyes, which are described in terms applicable to female genitalia,⁴⁶² are instances that do not, like the implicit association of blinding with castration, merely feminise Oedipus, but almost present him as the female participant in a sexual act. Oedipus is cast simultaneously as sexual aggressor and victim, and insofar as a form of symbolic sexual act can be said to be taking place, Iocasta remains decidedly unaffected by its occurrence.⁴⁶³ Under the influence of Iocasta's suicide, the sexual overtones of the self-mutilating act performed over her body to create a scene of self-contained sexual aggression that cancels itself out and eliminates the threats to Iocasta's status as chaste wife.

Iocasta and the Sphinx

With a suicide that foregrounds the position of wife even as it deprives it of its sexual content, Iocasta reconfigures her confused identity into one divested of incestuous elements, but no less anomalous for all that. In what follows, I will argue that similarities between the respective careers of Iocasta and the Sphinx confirm the unconventional character of Iocasta's identity as wife, and serve to present it as positively monstrous. The parallels that the text of the *OT* invites, and the argument into which they

attempting to comprehend the passage in the light of a presumed attempt on the part of Oedipus to articulate the horrors of incest. 'Belonging to the same family with those from which I, miserable, was born' might initially appear tautological, if not entirely nonsensical, but it may be seen to betray Oedipus' inability, in the wake of Iocasta's suicide, to accurately express the way in which he re-entered his natal family. In other words, the frustration one experiences at reading ὁμογενῆς δ' ἀφ' ὧν αὐτὸς ἔφρον τάλας may be argued to be a corollary of the reconfiguration of Iocasta's relationship to Oedipus after her suicide: by denouncing sexual and blood relationships with him, she has not only severed those links, but made their expression in language impossible.

⁴⁶¹ Hay 1978: 81–82.

⁴⁶² Gould 1970: 145.

⁴⁶³ Hay (1978: 125) has already alerted readers of the play to the onanistic, androgynous quality of this symbolic act of sexual intercourse by correctly identifying autogamy as its significance. That he considers this act suggestive of a 'maculate reconception' preceding Oedipus' rebirth emphasises all the more Iocasta's imperviousness to all and any attempts to draw her back into the nexus of relationships formed through sex and common blood: even within the innermost recesses of the θάλαμος which recalls the wife's and mother's womb, Oedipus has to generate his own self.

coalesce, may be rendered clearer if viewed side by side with the detailed presentation of the Sphinx in Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* 3.5.8. This combination of sources is recommended by the overall coincidence between the plot of *OT* and the version of events recorded by Apollodorus, and by indications in Sophocles' text that the *Bibliotheca*'s information on the Sphinx is compatible, or at least not inconsistent, with the drama's events and prehistory.⁴⁶⁴ Moreover, the brief description of Iocasta's life and death in Apollodorus' account renders an attempt at mapping her identity almost entirely dependent on an interpretation of the parallels with the Sphinx.⁴⁶⁵ There is, therefore, no reason to believe that the image there offered is harnessed to a specific portrayal of Iocasta, one that would be at odds with her presentation in *OT*. I will, then, be introducing elements contained in the *Bibliotheca* to supplement and clarify the parallels that the play draws between Iocasta and the Sphinx, and to reinforce the impression that the latter's hybrid nature is an exaggerated representation of Iocasta's deviation from gender norms.

At first glance, Iocasta and the Sphinx, or more specifically the ways in which each undermines established categories, appear to exist in an inverted relationship: The Sphinx flaunts norms through her monstrosity, the excess of identities generated by the multiformity of her body, whereas Iocasta's deviation consists of an almost diametrically opposed deficiency of identity, which is disruptive in its narrowness and limitations. However, the impression of opposition is dispelled upon closer examination of the identity each figure assumes prior to and after her death. As I will demonstrate below, both move from an initially excessive to a narrowly defined identity characterised by exclusion of sexual relations. Since our play presents the Sphinx from a perspective inevitably informed by knowledge of her death, which has occurred prior to the drama's events, it is advisable to start by mapping the gender assigned to her after her demise.

In two of the play's few references to the Sphinx, she is described in terms usually reserved for designating the sexual and marital status of human women. As κόρα (508) and παρθένος (1199), the Sphinx is located in the same stage of the female life cycle as young unmarried women ripe for marriage. The play itself is silent as to the manner of the Sphinx's death,⁴⁶⁶ but her emergence into a

⁴⁶⁴ References to the Sphinx in *OT* as αἰδός (36), ποικιλωδός (130), ῥαψωδός (391) and χρησμοδός (1200), as well as to Oedipus' role in vanquishing her and putting an end to deaths through recourse to his wisdom (35–36, 396–98, 508–10, 1200–01) are compatible with the *Bibliotheca*'s information on the riddle, the deaths the Sphinx inflicted, and Oedipus' success at providing the right answer.

⁴⁶⁵ After the mention of her parentage and marriage to Laius at the opening of 3.5.7, the rest of her life is summarised in a few lines at the end of 3.5.8 and the very beginning of 3.5.9: Oedipus married her, they had four children together (though these may have been from Euryganeia), and after the revelation of the truth she hanged herself.

⁴⁶⁶ The text only speaks of the Sphinx's death in vague terms, though enough is said to indicate that Oedipus was instrumental in her demise (397 ἔπαυσά νιν, 1198–99 κατὰ μὲν φθίσας | τὰν γαμψώνυχα παρθένον). It is not uncommon in scholarship to encounter claims based on the assumption that the Sphinx's death in *OT* is the same as that testified in later sources (see for example Jebb 1983: xxi; Segal 1988: 130 and 1995: 227). For an overview of the various ways in which the Sphinx meets her end in different mythological traditions, see Gantz

state of *partheneia* only posthumously is confirmed by the information provided in the *Bibliotheca*. After Oedipus has provided the correct answer to the riddle, we read that the Sphinx ‘threw herself from the citadel’ (3.5.8 ἡ μὲν οὖν Σφιγξ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀκροπόλεως ἑαυτὴν ἔρριψεν). Her fall places her in the company of Britomartis, another chaste virgin, who resorts in a similar action to avoid the sexual pursuit of an unwanted suitor.⁴⁶⁷ Oedipus’ success at solving the riddle can be interpreted as the prelude to a similarly threatening symbolic sexual act, since it does not only deflect the danger of being consumed by the Sphinx, but also turns the threat, recast as figurative devouring, against her. As well as inscribing the Sphinx in a narrative of embattled *partheneia*, her suicide also recollects the symptoms displayed by the diseased *parthenoi* of the Hippocratic corpus. As already discussed, in Hippocratic gynaecology jumping and hanging are interchangeable as symptoms of a dangerously protracted *partheneia*.⁴⁶⁸ The Sphinx’s fall, resulting in just such a state, provides a precedent for interpreting Iocasta’s suicide as a similar renunciation of all sexual relationships. Even though Iocasta’s role as chaste wife in *OT* may appear at odds with the Sphinx’s uncompromising *partheneia*, the denial of sexual activity that defines both identities aligns Iocasta more closely with the perpetual *parthenoi* than with the fully-fledged wives and future mothers. Indeed, some of the circumstances surrounding Iocasta’s death seem to uphold this connection, even if they cannot unequivocally confirm it: commenting on the queen’s final exit, the Chorus remark on her agitated emotional state (1073–74), and the Messenger’s report similarly paints a picture of a distraught, raging Iocasta (1241, 1243, 1249). This state is not too far removed from the mania displayed by the diseased *parthenoi* of the Hippocratic corpus,⁴⁶⁹ and although Iocasta’s distress arises from indulgence in sex rather than delayed defloration, her behaviour may well be the precursor to an act that paints her more as a chaste *parthenos* than a regular wife.

It is, however, also possible to demonstrate that for both Iocasta and the Sphinx, the sexual chastity that becomes accessible after death is preceded by a state of excess, a plethora of identities, which is moreover the result of sexual profligacy and incestuous unions. The Sphinx’ hybridity, presumably

1993: 497–98. It is nevertheless interesting, especially in view of the lack of concrete information, that the Sphinx’s name suggests an etymological link with the verb σφίγγω, ‘to bind fast’ or ‘tighten up’ (LSJ *s.v.*). Gould (1970: 18) claims, without citing any sources, that this is how many people supposed she killed her victims. In view of the many similarities between her and Iocasta it is difficult to ignore the potential of this etymology—real or imagined—to bolster the claim for an equivalence, if not identity, between the deaths of Iocasta and the Sphinx. For σφίγγω as ‘strangle’ see Diod. Sic. 12.17.2: παραχρήμα θνήσκειν ὑπὸ τοῦ βρόχου σφιγγόμενον.

⁴⁶⁷ Callim. *Hymn* 3.189–205.

⁴⁶⁸ Hippoc. *Virg.* viii.468.14–15.

⁴⁶⁹ Hippoc. *Virg.* viii.468.9–17. Most commentators agree that here ὀργῆ χρωμένη (1241) denotes a frantic mood rather than anger: Kamerbeek 1967: 232 (who adduces as further evidence the Chorus’ comments in 1073–74); Dawe 1982: 223; Finglass 2018: 547. Gould (1970: 142) maintains the meaning of ὀργή as anger in the interest of showing Iocasta to share the same passionate nature as Oedipus. Alongside this almost manic state Iocasta also displays the diseased *parthenos*’ desire for hanging and her longing for death as the utmost good.

familiar to Sophocles' audience, is explicitly stated in the *Bibliotheca*, where she is also endowed with a doubly monstrous genealogy.⁴⁷⁰ Her parents, Typhon and Echidna, are themselves monsters who have emerged from the same pair of pre-Olympian deities.⁴⁷¹ Both Iocasta and the Sphinx are embedded in a morass of extremely intimate familial relationships, which result in both cases in a state of excess—either of physical forms or gender roles. Moreover, because for the Sphinx monstrosity is also implicitly associated with voracious sexuality, her connection with Iocasta serves to implicate the latter's sexual activity, and by extension her relationship to Oedipus, as the mark of an excessive and monstrous identity.

Although evidence in the *OT* for the Sphinx's identity before her death is slim, traces of it survive in some of the descriptions employed. The term κύων used by Oedipus in 391 is indicative of the way in which the Sphinx's hybridity may be explained as a symptom of her gender, and vice versa. Possibly a reference to the form of the Sphinx's body, it is also a word often applied to women to indicate shamelessness or audacity, and in particular shameless sexual behaviour.⁴⁷² Similarly, the adjective γαμψώνυχος, which implicitly recalls the Sphinx's animal form, seems to allude to her rapacious nature and exists in a certain tension with the noun παρθένος that it modifies.⁴⁷³ The suggestion that the Sphinx should be viewed as a sexually voracious female figure is upheld by the passage in the *Bibliotheca*, where the Sphinx is said to devour anyone who fails to correctly answer her riddle.⁴⁷⁴ The detail that her last victim before her defeat by Oedipus was Creon's son, a presumably young man, firmly inserts her in a tradition of winged female figures who abduct their male victims in a conflation of erotic and death imagery.⁴⁷⁵ However, Oedipus deflects the danger posed by the Sphinx's rapacity by providing the correct answer to her riddle. Once the Sphinx has been removed,

⁴⁷⁰ Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.8 εἶχε δὲ πρόσωπον μὲν γυναικός, στήθος δὲ καὶ βάσιν καὶ οὐρὰν λέοντος καὶ πτέρυγας ὄρνιθος. In Hesiod's *Theogony* (309, 313, 319, 326–27), the Sphinx is said to be the daughter of Chimaera and her uncle Orthos. That the Sphinx's presence in the Theban legend had already been established at this point makes it all the more likely that later audiences would have inherited the Sphinx's incestuous parentage along with her role as a plague for the Thebans.

⁴⁷¹ Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.8 Σφίγγα, ἡ μητρὸς μὲν Ἐχίδνης ἣν πατρὸς δὲ Τυφῶνος. In Apollodorus, both Echidna and Typhon are said to be the offspring of Tartarus and Gaia, although the occurrence of this information in different parts of the text may indicate their kinship was not intended to be registered: Γῆ [...] μίγνυται Ταρτάρῳ, καὶ γεννᾷ Τυφῶνα ἐν Κιλκία, μεμιγμένην ἔχοντα φύσιν ἀνδρὸς καὶ θηρίου (1.6.3); λέγεται δὲ ὅτι καὶ τὴν Ταρτάρου καὶ Γῆς Ἐχίδναν (2.1.2). Earlier sources record the union of Echidna and Typhon but ascribe to them distinct genealogies, and often the Sphinx is not included among the offspring. See Gantz 1993: 22–24, 48–51.

⁴⁷² For the canine elements of the Sphinx's identity see Finglass 2018: 295. Helen applies κύων as a term of reproach to herself in *Il.* 6.344, 356. See further examples in LSJ *s.v.*

⁴⁷³ Gould 1970: 72–73. Bringing the two terms and their associations together, the phrase τὰν γαμψώνυχων παρθένων (1199) does not so much belie the Sphinx's *partheneia*, but rather preserves the memory of her former identity as a sexually active being alongside the condition of chastity she assumes in death. This function, whereby a transformation of identity is reflected on the lexical level, is similar to the one performed by γυνή when applied to Iocasta, and highlights the parallel trajectories followed by the two figures. For the use of γυνή to encapsulate Iocasta's identity see p. 175.

⁴⁷⁴ Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.8 συνιόντες εἰς ταὐτὸ πολλάκις ἐξήτουν τί τὸ λεγόμενόν ἐστιν, ἐπεὶ δὲ μὴ εὔρισκον, ἀρπάσασα ἓνα κατεβίβρωσκε.

⁴⁷⁵ Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.8 πολλῶν δὲ ἀπολομένων, καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον Αἴμονος τοῦ Κρέοντος. The same tradition regarding Haemon's death is attested in a fragment from the epic *Oedipodeia* (fr. 1 *PEG*). For the combination of death and *erōs* in figures like the Sphinx see Vermeule (1979: 169–73).

how is the threat of devouring recast in the relationship between Oedipus and Iocasta, and who assumes the Sphinx's visage?

In his insightful analysis of the Theban myth, Moore argues that when Oedipus (thinks he) has correctly answered the Sphinx's riddle, he 'devours' her, and then inadvertently goes on to fulfil Apollo's prophecy, successively 'devouring' his father by killing him and his mother by marrying her.⁴⁷⁶ However, if closely examined, this claim is revealed to misconstrue the redistribution of roles once the Sphinx is dead. Oedipus' success, which secures his survival and guarantees the Sphinx's death, can be easily imagined as a symbolic performance of the act of devouring with which she threatened her victims. However, in his relationship with Iocasta the threat of 'devouring' is not posed, as Moore argued, by the unknowing Oedipus, but by the female body from which he emerged and to which he returns as husband. That women were considered not only sexually voracious, but also dangerous in their insatiable sexual appetite, was a widespread idea variously expressed in different areas of Greek thought.⁴⁷⁷ In addition, the female body, in possession of a hidden space, readily lends itself to parallelisms with the earth: their shared capacity to nurture new life encourages a further transference of functions from earth to woman, whereby the latter is also identified as the place where life ends. The two ideas—of the female body as a threat to masculinity and as the space where life starts and ends—readily combine in Oedipus' case, and his intimate relationship with the maternal body thus doubly threatens to devour him. Significantly, it is the fact of the identity between the body of the wife and the body of the mother that activates Iocasta's latent potential for overpowering and consuming Oedipus. It is perhaps not an accident that, as has been frequently noted, Oedipus seems for much of the action to be dependent on Iocasta and unexpectedly receptive to her suggestions, despite his otherwise stubborn and irritable behaviour.⁴⁷⁸ Iocasta, an older woman with previous sexual experience, seems to be dominating her current sexual partner, but her attitude to Oedipus, especially in his moments of anger and frustration, has a distinctly maternal quality.⁴⁷⁹ In the end, Oedipus avoids the danger of being entirely devoured by Iocasta by once again arriving at the correct answer to a riddle. Realising that a revelation is imminent, Iocasta performs the act that symbolically denies Oedipus access to her body, thus reconfiguring her into a less threatening presence. Yet neither her nor the Sphinx's threat is entirely neutralised: if the Sphinx failed to consume Oedipus, she nonetheless enabled him to claim as his reward an equally dangerous

⁴⁷⁶ Moore 1980: 8.

⁴⁷⁷ See, for example, the recurrent references to the sexual appetites of the various types of women in Semon. 7.48–49, 53–54, 62. See also Dean-Jones (1993: 72–91) for the Hippocratic's subscription to the idea of women's inability to control their sexual desire and their different elaboration of its causes.

⁴⁷⁸ Whitman 1951: 132–33.

⁴⁷⁹ Whitman 1951: 133; Gould 1970: 85, 127. Newton 1991 offers the most detailed analysis of Iocasta's maternal behaviour towards Oedipus; however, the features he identifies as characteristic of such a behaviour mean that in his analysis, this stance manifests at different points of the play than usually acknowledged.

substitute, Iocasta.⁴⁸⁰ The Theban queen then emerges as a second Sphinx who repeatedly draws the hero back into the body from which he emerged, and whose later attempt to sever the ties compels Oedipus to condemn himself to a darkness as absolute as that of the womb and the grave.

The trajectory that Iocasta and the Sphinx follow in the *OT* and, more prominently, in Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* leads them from a plurality of identities premised on the transgression of boundaries to a narrowly defined identity organised around the renunciation of sexual relations. The centrality, in the identity of both figures, of the link between abnormality and the violation of generational order alerts us to other ways in which the Sphinx's monstrosity reflects on Iocasta. The sexual undertones of the threat the Sphinx poses to the Thebans cast Iocasta's relationship to Oedipus as one of threatening, unbridled sexuality, reinforcing the impression that her suicide addresses specifically the sexual element in their relationship. In addition to these parallels there exist other areas of overlap between the figure of the Sphinx and Iocasta that, though not immediately bearing on the question of gender, nevertheless support the case for a mirroring between the two. Outside the realm of sexuality, the strongest evidence for the similarities between Iocasta and the Sphinx comes from the intimate connection of their respective lives with riddles. In this respect, Oedipus has usually provided critics with a much more appealing candidate for the position of a double to the Sphinx, or at the very least of a figure whose destiny is intertwined with hers.⁴⁸¹ However, much of the material that is usually adduced to support this hypothesis can be shown to apply in the first instance to Iocasta. Twice the text diverts attention from Oedipus to her at moments when the truth and its implications are a paramount concern: first, when the shepherd, a mere three lines before revealing the identity of Oedipus' mother, directs him to Iocasta as the authoritative source of information (1171–72), and second, when Oedipus curses the eyes that did not recognise those they should have known (1273–74).

⁴⁸⁰ See also Davies' (2014: 433) eloquent comment on 'the ambivalence of Iocasta as Oedipus' reward for solving his riddle, a woman initially gratifying because of the power and prestige she brings as wife but, as his mother, ultimately involving death and disaster (and not only for him)'. Even though this observation is made in the context of a discussion on points of contact between Theban and Trojan epic, it also summarises successfully an important aspect of Iocasta's role both in *OT* and the *Bibliotheca*.

⁴⁸¹ Moore 1980. See also Segal (1981: 238; 1988: 130) for this and other similarities between Oedipus and the Sphinx. When critics comment on the relationship between the two the focus is usually on the relevance of the Sphinx's riddle to Oedipus' own present and future condition: Hoey 1969: 296; Vernant 1982: 25; Segal 1988: 133, 140. However, one must note that Sophocles' text does not offer much by way of an explanation of the riddle's contents, nor does it seem to encourage the audience/readers to link the riddle with Oedipus' fate after his victory (Dawe 1982: 103). Kamerbeek (1967: 10) may be right that this silence is not proof that the riddle is itself irrelevant to the play; however, we can hardly argue for the significance of the riddle on the basis of lines 390ff., as he suggests. The parechesis in ὁ μὴδὲν εἰδὼς Οἰδίπτου (397) may be suggestive (Kamerbeek 1967: 99–100) but certainly not strong enough as evidence.

The first of these instances comes at the end of a scene in which Oedipus' preoccupation with the mystery of his identity manifests as an obsessive return to the question of his parentage.⁴⁸² Iocasta's crucial role in this painstaking process of piecing together the truth is indicated by Oedipus' successive questions to the shepherd regarding her involvement in his exposure: 1173 ἦ γὰρ δίδωσιν ἦδε σοι; 1174 ὡς πρὸς τί χρείας; 1175 τεκοῦσα τλήμων; Despite the enormity of the revelation in lines 1167–71, knowledge of his kinship with Laius and of the parricide he committed does not suffice to conclude Oedipus's enquiry into his past. However, his determination to recover more information does not take the form of an enquiry into his mother's identity, as the prior focus on Laius would suggest. Instead, Oedipus is concerned with determining Iocasta's role in his exposure or, in other words, her identity in relation to his past. This development is all the more striking considering the prominence to which the theme of his mother's identity had risen in his final scenes with Iocasta on stage.⁴⁸³ Evidently, at this point the question about Oedipus' identity has been reshaped into one about Iocasta's identity.⁴⁸⁴ Soon enough, the impression that Iocasta's identity does not bear directly on the topic of Oedipus' parentage is dispelled, as the shepherd confirms their family relation. This revelation, which occurs almost incidentally, confirms the hypothesis that Iocasta is the riddle Oedipus must solve to arrive at full knowledge of himself. The identity of his mother, which allows him to reconstruct his past and recover his true identity, is not a piece of information accessed through direct questioning, but through enquiry into the actions of Iocasta as a figure who, for all her ties to Oedipus, maintains a certain independent stature. In this respect, Iocasta's role as the repository of the knowledge Oedipus demands is doubled: as an active participant in his exposure, she can fill in the gaps in his knowledge about his past; as his mother, she helps define his identity by locating him precisely within a nexus of familial relationships.

The scene featuring Oedipus and the shepherd as they work towards the revelation of the truth is not the only instance in which Iocasta is presented as the riddle at the heart of the play. If the fact that Oedipus ends his enquiry shortly after he discovers Iocasta's identity is not adequate proof that he considers the enigma solved, one may also consider the terms in which he justifies his act of self-

⁴⁸² The scene is preceded by a stasimon where the Chorus frame the question of Oedipus' parentage as a matter of confirming he is a native of Thebes; within this context, they imagine his parents successively as Cithaeron (1089–91), Pan (1098–101), Apollo (1101–03), and/or mountain nymphs (1107–08). After a section where the shepherd's own identity and his previous acquaintance with the Corinthian messenger is established (1110–1141), the interaction between Oedipus and the Shepherd becomes progressively focused on the question of his parents' identity, as his reception by the Corinthian messenger/bivouac is traced backwards to his exposure by Iocasta.

⁴⁸³ Soph. *OT* 1062–70, 1078–85. It is no accident that after the heated exchange between Oedipus and Iocasta, which results from the latter's refusal to divulge any information, the issue of Oedipus' parentage is narrowed down to a question about his mother and her origins (1062–63, 1080–82). Agitation, frustration, and the feeling that the truth is within his grasp make Oedipus single out the aspect of the question that most concerns him. For different interpretations see Jebb 1893: 141 (the choice highlights the contrast between Oedipus' suspected base descent and the reality) and Gould 1970: 126 (the choice of mothers is entirely arbitrary).

⁴⁸⁴ Kawashima (2014: 68) noted the equivalence of the two questions (“Who is Oedipus?”=“Who is Iocasta?”) when discussing Iocasta's second mention of Apollo's oracle.

mutilation. In one of the rare moments in the play where a relatively straightforward explanation for Oedipus self-blinding is provided, Oedipus chooses to express the root cause of his misfortune, which is ignorance of himself, as ignorance of the identity of others: 1273–74 ἀλλ' ἐν σκότῳ τὸ λοιπὸν οὐς μὲν οὐκ ἔδει | ὀψοίαθ', οὐς δ' ἔχρηζεν οὐ γνωσοίατο. This admission encompasses his ignorance of Laius' identity as much as that of Iocasta; however, the setting in which it is uttered, with Oedipus striking his eyes over the dead body of his mother-wife, emphasises the lack of knowledge on which this particular relationship was premised.

Iocasta thus emerges as the riddle that Oedipus is called upon to solve, and in this respect demonstrates her close affinity with the Sphinx. Though more properly a riddle-poser, the latter can be considered interchangeable with her riddle insofar as it constitutes the condition and justification for her existence.⁴⁸⁵ Similarly, although the unfolding of the plot is largely driven by the unrelenting questions posed by Oedipus, Iocasta is no less of a riddle-poser. Not only does she often divulge information that Oedipus must comprehend in terms of his own history, but also, her identity constitutes the question that Oedipus attempts to untangle by articulating it as a series of other questions.⁴⁸⁶ The identical responses of Iocasta and the Sphinx to Oedipus' success at solving their respective riddles confirms that they share this double status as riddles and riddle-posers. For either of them, alighting on the right answer means certain death.⁴⁸⁷ This is even more so for Iocasta, whose final exit coincides with the final leg of Oedipus' journey towards knowledge, and whose suicide can be shown to have occurred roughly at the same time as Oedipus realises she is his mother.⁴⁸⁸ The terms that cluster around Iocasta's suicide are evocative of the language used throughout the play to denote the solving of the Sphinx's riddle and the city's subsequent salvation: when the riddle of her identity has been solved, Iocasta ties a woven noose around her neck, which Oedipus proceeds to loosen to no avail. In this use of language the riddle of Iocasta's identity is inscribed on her body, as are the various stages towards the revelation of the truth. When she hangs herself, Iocasta does not exactly attempt to re-establish herself as an enigma, but rather to re-create the conditions that, while her riddle remain unsolved, allowed her to occupy an intelligible position. It is a measure of her success that Oedipus, who intervenes to loosen her noose when he has realised the truth of their

⁴⁸⁵ Moore 1980: 7–8: 'Because her existence depends upon riddles, language is symbolic action for her; her questions are her fate.'

⁴⁸⁶ Most of the questions that Oedipus asks about his origins could potentially be traced back to his fundamental ignorance of Iocasta's identity, but the attempt to unravel her riddle by articulating it as a series of other, less profound ones, is most evident in his brief exchange with the shepherd at 1173–75.

⁴⁸⁷ This has already been noticed by Davies (2014: 434), who saw the relevance of the two riddles to the Sphinx and Iocasta respectively. However, his conviction that here the riddle-posing function, traditionally allocated in stories of a similar type to the princess the hero woos, has been transferred instead to the monster, forces him to deny Iocasta the role of riddle-poser. Nevertheless, insofar as a second riddle emerges in the play—that of Oedipus' identity—there is no reason why the role of riddle-poser should not also appear doubled.

⁴⁸⁸ Oedipus bursts into the palace just as Iocasta prepares to take her life. As he has spoken but few lines after the conclusion of his interrogation of the shepherd (1181–85), and since the Chorus are starting their next stasimon, it is safe to assume that at this point he exits the stage to search for Iocasta in the palace.

situation, cannot change her condition. Instead, he is compelled to preserve it by neutralising the threat he represents to her new-found chastity.

Conclusions

Navigating the surviving versions of Iocasta's suicide by hanging reveals the variety of ways in which one narrative element functions in specific contexts to yield different portrayals of Iocasta. It also provides an insight into the possible connections between separate accounts of a myth, and the interpretative potential unleashed when different narratives are carefully brought together to shed light on an area of overlap. In a catalogue like the one in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, the passage relating Epicaste's career needs to be approached on its own terms, but also viewed in the context of a complex narrative framework and the goals it serves. The ambiguity around Epicaste's motivation opens up the space for a proliferation of interpretations, but within the constraints of the narrative both return, through different paths, to the same point: the anomalous identity, which Epicaste assumed as a result of the incestuous marriage and that she attempted to normalise with her suicide, is in Odysseus' narration recouped and established in tradition.

Similarly, Iocasta's suicide in *Oedipus Tyrannus* must be approached from within the drama, but its interpretation has the potential to re-orient our approach to the play and challenge long-held assumptions about its themes and concerns. Iocasta's death is traced back to her concern over the implications of a widespread revelation of the truth, and is therefore motivated by a desire to purge her identity of the elements that render it unintelligible. The conditions surrounding her suicide portray the act as a renunciation of blood relationships, as well as of the sexual unions that generate kinship ties. The identity of chaste wife that Iocasta assumes, however, is very nearly devoid of content once sexual relations have been excluded; at the same time, the elision of kinship through blood removes the objections to a marriage with Oedipus, and propels Iocasta into yet another paradoxical position as wife both to Laius and Oedipus. Iocasta's emergence into this unconventional identity not only challenges some critical perspectives on her role and importance in the drama, but also ripples through time to prompt a re-examination of the events after her death. Oedipus' self-blinding takes on the character of a symbolic self-castration or a failed, onanistic sexual act, requiring in the process a re-evaluation of the drama's treatment of sexuality, of the dynamics between Iocasta and Oedipus, and of the latter's fate.

The unconventional configuration of Iocasta's gender after her suicide also shifts our perspective on events occurring outside the drama's timeline. Parallels between Iocasta and the Sphinx certainly hint towards a more profound similarity, therefore threatening to displace Oedipus as the generally accepted double of the Sphinx. Iocasta's identity is not merely anomalous, the text implies, but

positively monstrous. At this point, Apollodorus' text emerges as a suitably complementary narrative: the agreement of the two versions regarding the order and type of events encourages the creative if cautious use of the *Bibliotheca* to fill the gaps left by the allusive hints of the *OT*. The resulting image of a mirroring between Iocasta and the Sphinx, where the latter's physical monstrosity reflects the former's deviance from gender norms, serves both texts: to the *OT*, it offers a wider range of connections that a knowledgeable audience may have drawn; to the *Bibliotheca*, it provides a criterion against which to measure the interpretations allowed by the summary treatment of events. Both texts emerge richer for the attempt at a side-by-side reading, and confront the critic with a new range of questions to explore.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis set out to interrogate the often-repeated assertion that in Greek thinking, suicide by hanging was a woman's way of death. It has at least established that if the connection was instituted and sustained by numerous Greek discourses on gender, it did not therefore always entail a feminising effect; in fact, within certain contexts it could provide the means for exposing the constructed character of normative femaleness and for redeploying its constitutive elements in the performance of subversive gender identities. As a mode of dying, suicide by hanging did indeed develop a network of associations with women, including their reproductive functions, domestic activities, roles, life stages and intellectual features. However, the way in which these associations operated when introduced in the narrative contexts of the various Greek myths that formed the material of this study was far from univocal. As was demonstrated in the cases examined in Chapter 1, suicide by hanging can evoke pathological conditions that threaten the normative concept of woman; it may pervert the female roles it introduces in a parodic re-enactment of gender norms; or it can introduce an element constitutive of normative femaleness in a context that combines it with masculine features to create a transgressive gender identity. The very plethora of associations between suicide by hanging and women means that in certain contexts, the former can turn into a site for the redeployment of norms in ways that subvert them.

Clearly, a project that would seek to unseat long-held certainties about Greek ideas on the connection between death and gender would also need to approach the topic from a fresh perspective, and Butler's theoretical work on gender and the formation of identity furnished many of the conceptual tools necessary for this enquiry. The close fit between this theoretical framework and the investigation undertaken, as well as the former's contributions to the latter, have been felt over the course of the thesis; nevertheless, they merit a more explicit restatement here, especially because they can help to bring into sharper focus some of the more important insights of the project. Many of the cases examined, particularly the more detailed ones, served as a confirmation and re-articulation of the point made above—that suicide by hanging can distort, exaggerate, or pervert the connotations it evokes. In itself, this is an illustration of Butler's point about the 'possibilities of doing gender that repeat and displace through hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation the very constructs by which they are mobilised'.⁴⁸⁹ If, in the domain of Greek thinking on gender, a woman is defined by one or another of a limited number of roles—*parthenos*, wife, and mother—it does not follow that the reappearance of these roles as associations of suicide by hanging signal her inability to escape the hegemonic discourse that regulates the formation of gender. The extreme chastity and unavailability of the hanged woman *qua* wife, her interminable pregnancy, or her eternal *partheneia*

⁴⁸⁹ Butler 1999: 43.

appear as parodic repetitions of the norms, exposing their constructed character. At the same time, the specific way in which this theoretical point was applied in this project constituted a re-elaboration and modification of the theory itself: while Butler most explicitly discusses the possibility of the subversive redeployment of norms as the appearance of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual contexts,⁴⁹⁰ the way suicide by hanging has been shown to operate also indicates the same possibility for other norms.

The ability of suicide by hanging to evoke multiple, often contradictory, aspects of a normative female identity, as well as to distort them, provides yet another area for a successful meeting of the Greek material with Butler's theory. A question that often arises in the context of discussions on suicide is that of agency, and more specifically of the way to determine the extent to which agency manifests in an act of self-killing. In the present enquiry this question became all the more urgent, as it has serious implications for our understanding of the conditions under which non-normative gender identities might emerge. Butler's suggested conceptualisation of agency both corresponds to the operation of suicide by hanging outlined above and is borne out by the actual study cases. The introduction, in certain narrative contexts, of several female roles as a result of suicide by hanging can be viewed in terms of what Butler describes as the convergence of the multiple demands entailed by the injunction to be a given gender: when Althaea is presented with the conflicting demands of her natal family as embodied in her brothers, and those imposed by her maternal relationship to Meleager, the clash results in a paradoxical gender configuration where the hanged woman is simultaneously cast as *parthenos* and mother. At the same time, the exteriority of gender, its character as a social temporality, draws attention to the absence of an independent subject that guides the formation of subversive identities when the space for the exercise of agency emerges. This means that the resulting gender configuration exceeds the intentions of the person that embodies it; in our texts, this became obvious in the emergence of gender identities the constitutive elements of which could not be securely attributed to fully conscious, intentional manipulation of norms, and which more often than not comprised a combination of the connotations of hanging with the narrative context. Consider, for example, the various instances of heroisation and/or immortalisation of the dead women in some of the myths discussed: neither Cleite nor Byblis could have predicted their memorialisation in the form of springs, and yet this afterlife is integral to our understanding of their gender as configured in their respective narratives. Similarly, Phaedra's installation in Hippolytus' cult and the commemoration of her *erōs*, though dependent upon her suicide in more ways than one, are clearly an outcome not envisioned by any of the human characters and only rendered possible by the unexpected intervention of divine actors. In all these situations, as well as in the other cases discussed in this thesis, the

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.: 42–43, 167–68.

suicidal woman's actions are instrumental in the performance of a subversive gender identity, but they cannot be considered to derive from an independent will, or to be the sole defining factor.

This contextualised approach to instances of suicide by hanging, whereby its import for the dead woman's gender is assessed in conjunction with the narrative context, has to a large extent been a corollary of adopting Butler's notion of gender as performance. Critical analyses of such instances have often tended to accord death a privileged position in the formation of the woman's identity, and have viewed suicide if not in isolation from the events preceding it, at least with a marked resistance to the possibility that it may do more than confirm the woman's femininity. The conceptualisation of gender as a stylised repetition of acts helped turn attention to the ways in which suicide by hanging may constitute a repetition of the acts that have preceded it, and as a result enriched the interpretative possibilities presented by individual cases. In this respect, Antigone's death constitutes a characteristic example: viewed as the mode of dying appropriate to a *parthenos* and/or as a justified measure to avoid a slow death, her suicide in the cave appears more or less disconnected from her course of action throughout the play, incapable of shedding light on it or being illuminated in turn. Approached, on the other hand, from a perspective informed by her previous pursuit of a specific type of death, it becomes involved in the play's elaboration of issues of political power; by the same token, it is also brought to bear on the interpretation of later events, notably Haemon's suicide. The result is not only a reappraisal of the suicide's role in shaping Antigone's gender, but a renewed encounter with the play as a whole.

Renewed efforts at viewing the mythic suicides in their wider context is but one example of the expansion of the field of interest that constitutes a characteristic of this thesis. Once again, Butler's theorisation of gender enabled the widening of the research horizons by exposing the artificiality of the distinction between sex and gender, and developing an understanding of the latter as the cultural means by which the former is produced as a pre-discursive, 'natural' essence. This re-conceptualisation of the terms meant that my investigation into gender could and should draw on a wider range of Greek material than the traditional dichotomy would allow, and to map connections that might have been overlooked in an approach informed by such a dichotomy. The gynaecological treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus, so crucial to the argument of this thesis, are a case in point. Falling, *prima facie*, under the category of material on sexed bodies, their potential to be meaningfully combined with cultural ideas on gender to offer an interpretative framework for suicide by hanging could have been overlooked. As it is, in my analysis the Hippocratics' representation of the female body has been explicitly read as the product of hegemonic discourse on gender, and considered together with those elements of the narratives that are more immediately recognisable as cultural norms pertaining to gender.

As well as nuancing the relationship between sex and gender, Butler's theoretical framework enabled me to incorporate in the field of research the domain of sexuality. Approaching sexuality as distinct from but participating in the formation of gender allowed me to demonstrate how specifically sexual deviations can inform our understanding of the gender of those performing them. This is especially crucial in a discussion of Greek myths, where violations of sexual norms are frequent and prominent features of the careers of several figures. We already saw how incestuous desire in the cases of Antigone and Byblis created a confusion not only of positions within the family—themselves always gendered—but also of other gender roles: these are *parthenoi* who aspire to become wives without relinquishing their position in the natal family, but to remain forever in possession of both of these mutually exclusive identities. Yet the case in which the importance of incorporating sexuality in a discussion of gender became especially obvious was the treatment of Iocasta in Sophocles' *OT*. Despite the centrality of the incestuous relationship in the drama and its acknowledged role in guiding the character's actions, most commentators see no paradox in treating Iocasta simultaneously as a typical, if noble, woman and as the mother-wife of Oedipus, as a woman that does not transgress gender boundaries, though she clearly violates sexual norms. Bringing her incestuous relationship with Oedipus to bear on her gender configuration not only revised our understanding of the latter, but finally shed light on the role of her suicide, which has now been shown to be intimately related to both the incest and its implications for Iocasta's gender.

As this discussion has demonstrated, the application of a theoretical framework derived from Butler's work on the Greek material gave rise to a fresh approach and resulted in a series of renewed encounters with the texts. As well as new interpretations of familiar cases of suicide by hanging and of the narratives in which they are contained, it also suggested a new approach to the topic of gender in Greek antiquity, which may be further developed and applied in areas other than myths. At the same time, some of the gender configurations that took shape in our sources have illustrated with greater clarity some of the implications of understanding gender as the product of discourse, and the problems that may arise. In many of the cases we explored, suicide by hanging participates in the performance of gender as an act in a repetition but is not, strictly speaking, necessary: Erigone, for example, may well have attained the same status of eternal *partheneia* had she simply lived out her days as a *parthenos* rather than committing suicide. However, in most situations, the subversive gender identity is dependent, though not exclusively so, on the act of self-killing for its performance. A look at the cases of Chapters 2–4 is enough to convince of the truth of this statement: In the *Odyssey*, Epicaste cannot maintain her confused identity once it has become known; she can recoup it in the act of narrating her story to Odysseus, but to achieve that she must die first. Her Sophoclean double, too, must denounce the position as mother-wife to Oedipus, and aspire to achieve another non-normative identity in death. Finally, If Phaedra is to contain her *erōs*, an achievement that would

paint her as a non-menstruating *parthenos* and pregnant woman as well as a chaste wife, she can only look to death as a solution.

These instances show very clearly how gender norms can often operate to make subversive identities not only socially but also literally unviable, and warn that alternatives to norms may be available only at a very high cost. This is an issue that Butler discusses elsewhere in her oeuvre though not in the works consulted here, and which should caution against facile arguments about the liberating potential of Greek myths. However, our material also warns against this assumed priority of life over death: Antigone's ἀμηχανία is linked to, indeed predicated on, the pursuit of a goal termed ἀμήχανον because it will result in death. Nevertheless, it is worth considering the context that renders Antigone's gender contingent on death: when life has become unliveable, and the only goal worth pursuing cannot be achieved on this side of the divide between life and death, is the performance of a subversive gender identity through and in death an indication of its failure to stand as an alternative, or does it emerge as yet another way to shape life by determining its end? These questions about the relevant importance of life and death or the conditions under which the performance of subversive genders becomes possible cannot be easily answered here. What this investigation into the relationship between death and gender offers is another space for thinking through these questions and their implications in the hopes of shedding more light on the issues they reflect.

However, the exploration undertaken in this thesis has not resulted only in highlighting some important theoretical questions about ancient conceptualisations of gender and our ability to access them; it has also served to bring into sharper focus some interactions between death and gender that in their repetition may be justifiably considered as available ways of thinking about gender norms and the potential of their subversion. These were outlined in Chapter 1, but are more conveniently summarised in the terms encountered in the title of this thesis: divine, *amēchanon*, monstrous. The function of suicide by hanging of enabling the formation of a divine or inhuman identity is clearly a recurrent one, and as such has rightly found a place in the title. Its instrumental role in the gender formation processes taking place in Euripides' *Hippolytus* is but an elaborate example of its potential, which may be realised in the form of numerous distinct gender configurations. Similarly, the *amēchanon* and monstrous that complete the triad of genders in the title do not claim to represent rigid or clearly delimited genders, but rather the effects produced by the various ways in which suicide by hanging participates in the formation of gender identities. Though most clearly exemplified by the Sophoclean Antigone, *amēchania* is more generally the result of the simultaneous presence of contradictory roles, especially when themselves distorted. Some such examples include Callirrhoe and Ariadne, who fall in the space between *partheneia* and wifehood, or Byblis, who, not unlike Antigone, seeks to conflate familial roles through an incestuous *erōs*. Iocasta's monstrosity in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, though not obviously paralleled elsewhere, represents another aspect of the processes through which suicide by hanging accommodates tensions through recourse to a

sphere outside mortal existence and its limitations. In that respect, establishment in cult, displacement of existence onto a feature of nature, and assimilation to a monster are but different instantiations of the potential of this mode of death to give rise to subversive gender identities and designate a place for their existence.

Another reason for the isolation of divine, *amēchanon*, and monstrous as representative examples of gender configurations produced by suicide by hanging is the work these terms do to draw attention to the implications of such conceptualisations of gender. While designating gender configurations as supra- or inhuman or as generating *amēchania* clearly marks them as subversive of norms, it may also imply their marginalisation or ‘othering’. In itself, such an implicit evaluation of non-normative conceptualisations of gender does not negate their potential to operate as aberrant performances of norms that are available in theory, if not in practice, to gendered subjects; it does, however, highlight the need to exercise caution if they are used as the basis of assumptions about lived reality or dominant discourses, or to posit Greek myths as spaces free from such discourses. Nevertheless, when we turn to the contexts in which these terms most clearly emerge as appropriate designations of non-normative gender identities—i.e. Euripides’ *Hippolytus* and Sophocles’ *Antigone* and *OT*—we find not only that these terms alert us to the limitations of their use but also, that their contexts interrogate and redefine them.

The representation of the gods in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* raises questions that have a direct bearing on the conceptualisation and evaluation of Phaedra’s gender identity. How are we to understand her proximity to the divine in the light of the hotly contested morality of the divine actors, and the inability to gauge the distance separating mortals from gods? Excessive both in their justice and their cruelty, sharing with humans passions and desires that become, in their case, magnified and all-consuming motivations, the gods appear both uncomfortably close and inexorably distant from mortals. In such a context, the divine character of Phaedra’s gender is less a clear evaluation and more a mark of ambivalence: unconstrained by the limitations of human existence, it is nonetheless at least partially comprehensible, and if, like the *homilia* of Hippolytus and Artemis, it cannot be maintained without consequences, it is not clear that it must therefore be eschewed in pursuit of more easily attained identities.

Similarly, Iocasta’s monstrosity in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* becomes upon closer look more than an unambiguous condemnation of the generational disorder Iocasta represents and of the complicated gender identity in which it results. Her career parallels that of the Sphinx both before and at the point of death; yet if Iocasta dies, as she does, in an attempt to untangle the complicated familial relationships, while Oedipus remains alive, does her monstrosity really signify an identity more abominable than his? Moreover, although the Sphinx stands as a magnified representation of Iocasta’s complex identity, some of her more threatening functions have been transferred to Oedipus. While

Iocasta poses a threat specifically to Oedipus, he is the cause of the suffering of the entire city; and if she represents a riddle to be solved, she at least attempts to dissuade Oedipus from answering it. It is his determination to find the truth that triggers the series of disastrous events and creates the conditions for Iocasta's monstrosity to become exposed. At the same time, Iocasta does embody a conflation of distinct identities, a situation that she seeks to uphold; and when she commits suicide to denounce the sexual relations that generate blood bonds, she becomes a threat by disrupting procreation altogether, and implicitly upholding her incestuous relation to Oedipus by purging it of blood connections. Operating in the specific context of the *OT*, Iocasta's parallel with the Sphinx prompts reflection on the constitutive elements of monstrosity and the desirability—or not—of such a status.

The fundamentally ambivalent stance invited by the contexts in which non-normative gender identities are articulated is best exemplified in Sophocles' *Antigone*. The ἀμηχανία that her gender configuration provokes, at least as gauged by the reactions within the play's boundaries, cannot be reduced either to unqualified admiration or confident disapproval. Drawing characterisations ranging from δαιμόνιον τέρας (Soph. *Ant.* 376) to ὄρνις (424), γέννημα ὠμόν (471), and θυμούμενος ἵππος (477–78), *Antigone* illustrates how a subversive gender identity can become a contested field for the evaluation of norms, an evaluation the outcome of which is not necessarily predetermined. Indeed, the play retains the ambiguity and uneasiness around *Antigone*'s gender to the very end. Though she is not explicitly vindicated, Creon's actions are shown to have been terribly misguided; at the same time, while Creon's mistakes are exposed at the end, *Antigone*'s actions do not re-enter the discussion at this point, and she all but disappears from view.

As divine, *amēchanon*, and monstrous, the gender configurations that have emerged over the course of this thesis are neither categories with a defined and easily described relation to lived reality, nor do they entail clearly articulated stances towards them. More often than not, and especially in the more detailed cases explored, they seem to be involved in a two-way process of interrogating, redefining, and expanding the concepts that best describe their effect, thus retaining an ambiguity and open-endedness that marks both their potential as much as the limitations of their use to make arguments about ancient and modern concepts and debates. If it is not likely to offer clear-cut answers, further exploration of the relationship between death and gender in Greek antiquity is at least bound to help test the validity of the observations summarised above. Other types of death, such as that inflicted by the sword, or falling from a high place, are also inflected by gender, as the brief forays into Deianeira's death in the *Trachiniae* and Evadne's in Euripides' *Supplikes* demonstrated. An enquiry into the network of associations each has with other gendered aspects of experience will serve to check and qualify the conclusions drawn, pointing out areas of overlap between the respective relationships of these types of death to gender, and highlighting the effects unique to suicide by hanging. This is even more so considering that some of these types of death lend themselves to the

application of a Hippocratic framework: death from bleeding can easily be related to the regular flow of blood from the female body, while jumping and/or falling belongs among the symptoms of impeded menarche as much as a desire for suicide by hanging does.

Another direction that may be fruitfully pursued is the array of non-realised deaths encountered across our sources for Greek myths. Appearing in the form of threats, fears, expectations, or wishes, these may provide a more accurate indication of which modes of dying were considered suitable for specific contexts, as well as the particular reasons that rendered them so; they may therefore serve as an important corrective, as well as an added source of information, on the role of context in shaping the relationship between a type of actualised death and gender. The ‘imagined’ character of these cases may also help define more clearly the challenges and limitations posed by the dependence of certain gender performances on death: comparable scenarios distinguished only by realisation or not of a type of death can shed light on its precise role in the performance of gender, and offer a more nuanced understanding of the consequences of articulating gender identities contingent on death. Finally, these non-realised deaths seem to undermine the gendered distribution of modes of dying in Greek myths, which constituted the impetus for the present enquiry. In desperate situations with an uncertain outcome, we routinely find men as well as women posit death by hanging or by the sword as alternatives, while an array of deaths not otherwise actualised make appearances in wishes.⁴⁹¹ What modifications does such an allocation of types of (imagined) death among men and women entail for an analysis of the relationship between modes of dying and gender, and what is the role of the distinction between actualisation and non-realisation in determining the gendered distribution of types of death?

Clearly, the relationship between modes of dying and gender in Greek antiquity remains a field of yet unexplored possibilities that have only just begun to become visible. The present thesis has attempted to shed some light on the connotations of a type of death hitherto considered synonymous with normative femaleness, and to initiate a discussion on the possibilities for aberrant repetitions of gender norms afforded by the discourses operating in Greek myths. It remains to investigate what other insights in the conceptualisation of gender in antiquity such a study of Greek myths may offer, and explore their implications for our understanding of the past and its uses in the present.

⁴⁹¹ The noose or the sword: Eur. *Alc.* 227–29 (the Chorus to Admetus); *Andr.* 412 (Andromache); *Hel.* 353–55 (Helen); *Ion* 1064–65 (the Chorus about Creusa); *Or.* 953 (the Messenger to Electra), 1035–36 (Orestes for himself and Electra). Other types of death: Hom. *Od.* 20.61–63 (shot by Artemis), 79–80 (annihilated by the gods, shot by Artemis); 12.342–43 and Soph. *Phil.* 956–57 (death by hunger); Eur. *Hipp.* 1290–91 (going beneath the earth).

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