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Praise, Blame and Identity Construction in Greek Tragedy

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<u>Declaration</u>

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Signed:

Praise, Blame and Identity Construction in Greek Tragedy: Abstract.

This thesis examines the use of praise and blame in Greek tragedy as a method of identity construction. It takes sociolinguistic theory as its starting point to show that the distribution of praise and blame, an important social function of archaic poetry, can be seen as contributing to the process of linguistic identity construction discussed by sociolinguists. However, in tragedy, the destructive or dangerous aspects of this process are explored, and the distribution of praise and blame becomes a way of destabilising or destroying identity rather than constructing positive identities for individuals.

The thesis begins with a section exploring the importance of praise and blame as a vehicle for identity construction in the case of some of the mythical/heroic warriors who populate the tragic stage: Ajax, Heracles, and Theseus. I discuss the ways in which their own seeking after inappropriate praise leads to the destruction of Ajax and Heracles, and the lack of clear praise for Theseus in extant tragedy. The second half of the thesis examines the devastation caused by women's involvement in the process of identity construction, focusing on Deianira, Clytemnestra, and Medea. All of these women are involved in rejecting the praise discourses which construct the identities for their husbands. Clytemnestra and Medea further replace such praise with new discourses of blame. This process contributes to the destruction of all three women's husbands.

Prioritising this important element in interpretations of tragedy, influenced by a greater recognition of the ways in which tragedy draws on older genres of poetry, leads to new readings of apparently well-known plays, and new conclusions on such iconic figures as Theseus. Furthermore, within the context of the extended scholarly discussion on women's speech in tragedy, this approach demonstrates an effective and destructive result of that speech from a new perspective.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

This thesis explores the use of praise and blame for the process of identity construction in Greek tragedy, and particularly the ways in which tragedy raises issues with or casts doubt upon this process. I shall argue that tragedy shows the destructive aspects of this process, by exploring the ways in which the desires of male warrior figures can create a damaging disjunction between the praise they seek and that awarded to them, and the role of women in rejecting praise discourses or replacing these with discourses of blame, with damaging effects on their husbands. Tragedy's engagement with identity construction through praise and blame represents a development which draws on one of the central functions of older poetic genres, the distribution of praise and blame, and explores its problematic features within a new social context. This project makes use of close readings of tragic texts, informed by a theoretical approach which has been developed in the field of sociolinguistics, in order to discuss the distribution of praise and blame as part of a process of identity construction. In this introduction I shall indicate the literary and theoretical contexts which inform the approach of this thesis, before giving a definition of the terms 'praise' and 'blame' as they are used in this project.

Tragedy and Praise/Blame Poetry

Recent work on tragedy has been particularly concerned with re-situating it within a continuum of lyric poetry, and recognising the ways in which tragedy draws on generic or other features from older genres of lyric poetry as well as epic.[1] This approach to tragedy

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1 Connections between Homeric epic and tragedy are rather longer-acknowledged – see particularly Garner (1990) on direct allusions; Rutherford (2012) 45; Herington (1985) 133-6.

stems partly from Jon Herington's 1985 work *Poetry into Drama*, which details an argument that tragedy is one of the final forms of the Greek poetic tradition found from Homer down to the fifth century BC, and thus specifically connected with poetic genres as much as it has previously been considered to be a form of ritual or part of a separate genre of 'drama'.[2] More recently, there has been an increasing body of work which explores the ways in which tragedy draws on features from specific genres of archaic poetry, such as Laura Swift's *The Hidden Chorus*, which provides one of the most wide-ranging and thorough examples of this approach.[3]

These developments in approaches to the study of tragedy have come alongside a greater awareness of the social functions of poetry, particularly choral poetry, and a recognition of how these functioned as an essential part of Greece's "song culture."[4] Influential works such as those of Claude Calame (1977), Kurke (1991), Rutherford (2001) and Kowalzig (2007) were concerned with identifying the ritual and social functions of

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2 Herington (1985). See also Nagy (1990) 400-13 on the ways in which the tragic chorus' drawing on older forms of choral poetry involved the perpetuation of education in what were previously aristocratic values and ideologies, as a central result of its drawing on older genres of choral poetry. Friedrich (1996) 260-1 and notes provides a good overview of the approach which tried to cast tragedy *as* a form of Dionysiac ritual. Scullion (2002) is one of the most detailed objections to this approach, which is now widely considered to be unhelpful (see also Taplin (1978) 118-9; Vickers (1973) 33-41). For a more nuanced approach to ritual in tragedy, Easterling (1988) is a particularly useful discussion. See also Friedrich (1996); Seaford (1994); Graf (2007) 58-69; Foley (1985).

3 Swift (2010). Similarly Dué (2006) explores the ways in which tragedy draws on older song traditions in presenting the laments of captive women; and Steiner (2010) & Carey (2012) explore uses of the epinician in theatre, particularly tragedy. See I. Rutherford (2001) 108-26 for a discussion of tragedy's use of the paean; R. Rutherford (2012) 45-7 on tragic appropriation of ritual song, and 48-52 on lyric genres more generally. Nooter (2012) examines the "lyricism" of the language of Sophocles' heroes. For a more general overview of this development in the study of tragedy, see also Gagné & Govers Hopman (2013) 18-25.

4 On Greek culture as a 'song-culture' Herington (1985), Ford (2003) 15-37, who focuses on the relationship between performed song, literacy, and the first poetic texts.

various types of choral performance, demonstrating that such performances were an integral part of Greek culture and society, with purposes beyond entertainment. At the same time, the emphasis on these types of poetry as being necessarily performance-based made it possible to examine the social functions of such performances,[5] rather than focusing on the texts as literary works – the latter approach being the result of dependence on the Alexandrian treatments in the centuries of following scholarship.[6] As a result, more recent studies have focused on the role of poetic, particularly choral, performances in re-integrating individuals into a community after an athletic victory,[7] in initiatory and other age-marking rituals,[8] as part of the interstate relations enacted through *theoria*,[9] and in marking religious communities and providing a means for those communities to effect and process social or political change through performance of myth and ritual.[10]

Rather than focusing on these very occasion-specific social roles which choral poetry can perform, this thesis takes a new approach by focusing on a social function of poetic performance which is spread across multiple genres and occasions – the distribution of praise and blame. Detienne's study *Les Maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque* (1969) first brought out the central role of poets as 'truth-speakers' in distributing praise and blame, which was essential for confirming the "memory" of a warrior which would confirm his worth within his society.[11] As such, Detienne's study revealed the importance of praise and blame

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5 Swift (2010) 8-34 further notes that this focus on performance has also significantly adjusted the way in which scholars classify lyric poetry into genres.

6 Calame (1977) 30.

7 Kurke (1991).

8 Calame (1977).

9 Rutherford (2013) 237-46.

10 Kowalzig (2007).

11 Detienne (1996) 45-8.

poetry not only in the genres which were acknowledged as poetic forms of praise and blame, such as epinician or iambos, but as a constant feature of archaic poetry across the genres. This approach was developed further by Nagy (1979), who considered the role of praise and blame in epic and, in a later study, in Pindaric praise poetry and even the prose of Herodotus.[12]

This project marries the two approaches discussed above, by extending awareness of a central social function inherent in a great deal of archaic poetry, the distribution of praise and blame, and considering how tragedy's development from older lyric genres ensured that it continued to explore this poetic function. This is particularly relevant when considering the mythical warrior figures who had appeared in epic and other archaic poetry, such as Theseus, Heracles, and the heroes of the Trojan epics such as Agamemnon and Ajax, who were regular targets of praise and celebration in earlier genres of poetry. The question of male warriors' (or "heroes'") transition from epic or other archaic genres on to the tragic stage has been much discussed,[13] with particular reference to what epic ideas about heroic qualities or values continue to be represented in tragedy.[14] As will be discussed in more detail below, however,

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12 Nagy (1979); (1990).

13 Finglass (2011) 42-3 identifies some key problems with use of the word 'hero' to describe the (usually male) protagonists of tragedy.

14 Vernant (1988) 33-8. Langerwerf & Ryan (2010) 12-6 provides a very good overview of some of the approaches taken to the idea of 'tragic heroes', and of how far the concept maps on to earlier concepts of the hero. Knox (1964) is one of the most influential types of this scholarship, examining what makes a Sophoclean 'hero', as opposed to a Homeric one, although his analysis also includes female main characters in the term. Similarly, although with a very different set of qualities for the 'heroic', Ahrensdorf (2009) examines how far Sophoclean 'heroes' match up to the qualities of rationalism and piety valued in Athenian political philosophy. There is a great deal of similar work on individual tragedies, such as Kokkini (2010) on the *Alcestis,* Allan (2000) 96-37 (partly responding to Whitman (1974) 124). Whitman (1951) & (1965) considered the *Oedipus Coloneus* as representing the reintegration of a transgressive hero into his collective context. The view of tragedy as exploring how epic heroes suit later realities is a particularly prevalent trend in scholarship on Sophocles' *Ajax*, see for example Segal (1983) 150; Knox (1961) 22-23, Winnington-lngram (1980) 59. This focus on the 'hero' in tragedy often also involves discussion of heroes as those who

this thesis examines such figures from a further step away. The focus on praise and blame poetry as a vehicle for identity construction allows a closer examination of the problems and dangers which tragedy presents as being involved in constructing heroic identities. More particularly, it examines the processes of construction and destruction of such identities through praise and blame speech and song, an effect which would have been familiar to an audience used to experiencing such processes as a function of archaic poetry.

Furthermore, this approach also makes it possible to consider a new aspect of the role of women in Greek tragedy. Women make up a staggering proportion of leading characters and choruses on the tragic stage, preventing any exclusive focus on the mythical warriors to whom they often prove to be destructive foils. This thesis therefore examines the important and often destructive role played by female characters in controlling and influencing the praise and blame awarded to the male warriors who appear on stage alongside them, particularly as their husbands. The role of awarding praise or blame could be considered to be more typically male – not least as praise poetry in particular often focuses on male-dominated public spheres such as athletic victories, the spheres of war or politics.[15] There is also some suggestion that not only are they uninvolved in the awarding of praise and blame, but that they should not be involved in receiving it either. This is particularly discussed in relation to Pericles' much-discussed address to the Athenian war-widows:

> … μεγάλη ἡ δόξα καὶ ἧς ἂν ἐπ᾿ ἐλάχιστον ἀρετῆς πέρι ἢ ψόγου ἐν τοῖς ἄρσεσι κλέος ἦ·

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receive cult, and works such as Seaford (1994) and Garland (1992) have been particularly productive discussions of this kind.

15 The comment from the chorus of the *Medea* that their lack of involvement in poetry has caused women to be blamed rather than praised by the poets reflects the same general tradition – see Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of this passage.

... Her reputation will be great, who is least spoken about among men either in praise or blame. Thuc. 2.45.2[16]

This conclusion, however, risks placing too much emphasis on a particular interpretation of Pericles' idealised speech and ignoring evidence from elsewhere. Firstly, while Detienne was primarily focused on the role of male poets and authoritative speakers in assigning praise and blame to male warriors, he also acknowledged the role women played in judging their male compatriots in the Spartan *Partheneia,* where they could either jeer at young men who had done wrong, or sing their praises.[17] Furthermore, there is a specifically Athenian example provided in the *Against Neara*, when the speaker argues that the jury will face condemnation from the women in their homes, if they do not judge Neara to be guilty (Dem. 59.110-1). In the *Iliad* itself, potential female blame is held up as a spur to heroic behaviour for Hector, when he remarks:

αἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ <u>Τρωάδας ἑλκεσιπέπλους,</u>

μή ποτέ τις εἴπῃσι κακώτερος ἄλλος ἐμεῖο:

Ἕκτωρ ἧφι βίηφι πιθήσας ὤλεσε λαόν.

I am ashamed before the Trojans and the Trojan wives with trailing robes, lest some

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16 On the idea that this speech represents the extremely limited status of women in Athens: Pomeroy (1975) 141-2; Rusten (1989) esp 176-7; Schaps (1977) argues that the attitude demonstrated in this comment is partly what lies behind the lack of women mentioned by name in Athenian oratory. Walcot (1973), in an interpretation which rather leans on a view of male psychology as identifying women as property, has analysed this sentence in the context of a Greek view on 'honour', which women could threaten by being publicly discussed. More recently, scholars have moved away from considering these sentences as a generalised statement regarding all women: Hardwick (1993) discusses their relevance to the necessity of moderating the lament to follow; Tyrell & Bennett (1999) argue that Pericles' comment is intended to prevent women raising their voices and shaming their husbands or male relatives for the policy of abandoning the countryside during the war which Pericles had pursued; and Winton (2010) suggests that the comment is a positive encouragement, not an admonition, and that it is designed to both remind the Athenian widows not to behave like Helen, and commend them for being unlikely to do so.

17 Detienne (1996) 45.

other worse man than me will say: Hector, trusting in his own might, destroyed the host! (*Il.* 22.105-7)

It is therefore possible to argue, based on these examples, that there was acknowledged throughout Greek society a potential for female blame of the male leaders in society, and this is further considered in both the latter cases to be a strongly motivating factor.[18] As a result, a focus on women's role in controlling and influencing the praise and blame awarded to their male counterparts enables recognition of tragedy's exploitation of this male anxiety about women's ability to participate in generating discourses of praise and blame.

This project therefore builds on the work on female speech in tragedy which has proved a particularly successful way of examining the process by which female characters are created on stage. Especially influential have been works on the genres and styles used by female characters on the tragic stage, such as McClure's study of female verbal genres,[19] Fletcher's study of Euripidean women's manipulation of oaths,[20] or Mossman's analysis which aims to identify linguistic features of women's speech in Euripides' *Electra,* with particular reference to how these features are affected by the internal audiences (male, mixed, or female-only) to whom they speak.[21] More recently, Chong-Gossard's study of female communication in Euripides examines the uses of song and silence in relation to female spaces which are created by communication by female characters.[22] In their relationships with male characters,

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18 The interpretation of Tyrell & Bennett (1999) discussed above makes reference to the Homeric passage (43-4) in relation to precisely what type of speech from women Pericles aims to "mute".

19 McClure (1999).

20 Fletcher (2003).

21 Mossman (2001). Griffiths (2001) also takes up the search for a female 'style' of speech in tragedy, although he concludes that, given the multiplicity of roles and voices female characters perform and speak in on the tragic stage, no 'woman's voice' can be clearly identified.

22 Chong-Gossard (2008).

studies of individual female speakers have been most common, particularly in relation to the notoriously successful female speakers Medea and Clytemnestra.[23] However, rather than considering what is particularly 'female' about the tragic speech of female characters, the approach developed in this project goes beyond these aspects to explore an efficacious genre of speech – poetry which awards praise or blame – and consider the ways in which tragic female characters exploit this genre and its efficacy against the male characters they join on stage.

In both situations – whether women are involved or not in distributing or rejecting praise and blame discourses in relation to male characters – the awarding of praise or blame is a central aspect of creating or destroying a heroic 'identity' for the male characters involved. As a result, it is possible also to consider this process with reference to poststructuralist theories of identity construction, particularly through language, as argued for by modern sociolinguists.

Identity Construction

Detienne's formulation of the role praise and blame played in Greek society allows for a useful comparison with an approach found in the modern discipline of sociolinguistics. Influenced by poststructuralist thought, the idea of identity as constructed through linguistic practices, including the things (good and bad) spoken about an individual, has become widely accepted in many branches of sociolinguistics. Detienne's discussion presents a contrast between warriors who are praised, thus developing a *logos* which is preserved in "memory",

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23 For scholarship on the speech of these chapters, see Chapter 4, n5 on Clytemnestra; Chapter 5, n44 on Medea.

and warriors who are blamed, who instead experience oblivion, silence, and forgetting – i.e., their *logos* ceases to exist.[24] Furthermore, the 'truth' with which Detienne concerns himself is in itself performative, and, as a mythico-religious figure, "creates being."[25] In the case of the warrior whose *logos* is confirmed and distributed through the praise of poets, the 'being' that is created is his own – his self, or his identity. Along similar lines in a later discussion, Nagy talks of epic and Pindar's praise poetry as "defining" the individuals praised in these genres of poetry.[26]

Poststructuralist theorists established as a central concept the idea that social reality is itself constructed by, not simply reflected in, language, beginning from the theories of the structuralist Saussure.[27] This was further developed into the idea, contrary to humanist thought which posits a fixed inherent essence at the heart of an individual that makes her what she *is*, that an individual's sense of self, or subjectivity, was also constructed through discourse, in language. These ideas of subjectivity suggested a fluid, constantly changing subjectivity which is constantly constructed and reconstructed through speech and thought.[28] This theory does not, however, suggest that subjectivity can be made up of positions (known as subject positions) invented without constraint, entirely in the abstract, but instead, following on from Foucault's theory of discourse, are limited to those available in any given discourse, which are

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24 It is notable that the linguistic roots of the term *logos* also serve to tie the wider meaning intended here into the linguistic focus of sociolinguistics as a discipline.

25 Detienne (1996) 16, where he also notes Foucault's claim that true discourse is "discourse pronounced by men who spoke as a right, according to ritual." (1972) 218. Foucault's formulation of a 'true' discourse thus comes very close to Detienne's idea of performative truth as being spoken by the poets, particularly in their use of praise.

26 Nagy (1990) 146.

27 Saussure (1916).

28 Deckert & Vickers (2011) 10.

in themselves limited to the discourses produced in a particular social and historical context.[29]

It is Foucault's awareness of the ways in which discourses are necessarily products of their social and historical contexts which prevents subjectivity from being an entirely untethered process, and furthermore suitable as a lens for considering the processes through which subjectivity is constructed or established in a range of different historical contexts.[30] As long as awareness of the discourses which exist can be established, some understanding of the construction of subject positions within those discourses can be developed.

This type of theoretical approach has been particularly useful for considering issues of gender. Theorists of the French school such as Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous, argued that such theories excluded women from the possibility of being 'subjects', instead relegating them to positions as object or linguistic 'other', as the theoretical speaking subject was always considered to be male.[31] They suggested that in order to establish a female subject and an idea of what female subjectivity might entail, new methods of producing discourse would need to take place, particularly through new styles of writing.[32] In examining the female speakers of tragedy, this project draws rather more on the Anglo-American tradition which allows for the possibility of female subjectivity, even if it often limited by social contexts.[33] Nonetheless, the limited view of female subjectivity proposed by the French school can be seen as having

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29 Foucault (1981); see also Weedon (1987) 107-113.

30 Althusser (1971) further connected theories of the subject and subjectivity with dominant social ideologies by arguing that individuals become *interpellated* as subjects by an ideology, thus becoming an "agent" of that ideology. The process of interpellation which Althusser posited suggests a more limited scope for the agency of the subject in self-construction, since Althusser's subject speaks as if she is the author of a discourse or ideology, but in fact has been effectively co-opted into the ideology, which exists independently from her in society at large. See further Weedon (1987) 30-1.

31 Irigaray (1975) esp. 135; Kristeva (1980); Cixous (1976) 875-7. See also Smith (1988) 137.

32 Esp. Cixous (1976) 876-7.

33 For more on the study of possibilities of female subjectivity in tragedy, see below.

particular implications for a genre like tragedy, where the "women" who appear on stage are both written and acted by men.

The poststructuralist ideas of a subject constructed discursively have been particularly productive when considering aspects of identity as they are created in language. Sociolinguists have been particularly concerned since the second half of the 20th century with examining the ways in which language is used to indicate and establish aspects of "social identity", such as membership in a community – particularly class, or nationality. As the branch developed into a separate field of linguistics, sociolinguists were often motivated by social or political concerns, so that their work, originally developed from a straightforward study of dialects and regional differences, became concerned with how the linguistic patterns of subordinated groups were involved in establishing stigma and an idea of the 'nonstandard' and thus 'substandard' other in language.[34] One of the earliest studies of this kind looked at linguistic markers used to show that a particular individual came from Martha's Vineyard, particularly where these markers were used to demonstrate a sense of self that might be used against those who were not from the same area.[35]

A focus on one particular aspect of identity – gender – became one of the most prominent areas in the field, and was often motivated by similar political impulses as those experienced throughout the development of sociolinguistics. To begin with, sociolinguists

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34 Cameron (1992) 31.

35 Labov (1963). This type of interactional relationship between identity and group membership is a common feature of studies of this kind, particularly since the development of the theory of social identity (Tajfel (1978)). In sociolinguistics, a more nuanced approach refers to 'communities of practice' as having an effect on the types of group identity which may be relevant – see further Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992) 464; Holmes & Meyerhoff (1999).

examined how language reflects differences in gender,[36] such as the features of a 'woman's language' marked off by Lakoff, as a wider pattern of examining how women were treated as a 'non-standard other'.[37] Acceptance of these ideas of gendered language identities in turn allowed wider acceptance of other aspects of identity to spread, and scholars began to consider identity as encompassing a wider variety of 'group identities' beyond those traditionally considered.[38] At the same time, anthropological studies also explored the links between language and identity in particular communities, including studies on women as a community.[39]

The next step came when sociolinguistics began to consider identity and identities as constructed, not reflected in language, and performed, rather than innate. Again, researchers working in the field of language and gender were especially prominent in this development, as scholars in sociolinguistics, particularly feminist scholars, began to argue that language brings about the existence of gender.[40] Specifically, sociolinguists argued that gender is itself

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36 An excellent overview of such studies is given in Cameron (1992) 55-81.

37 Lakoff (1975).

38 See further Watt & Llamas (2009) 13-4 for a range of examples of the studies produced.

39 e.g. Schiefellin, Bambi & Doucet (1998). One of the most prominent anthropological approaches to gender and language has been the discussion by Edwin and Shirly Ardener of women as a 'muted' group – Ardener (1975); (1978).

40 Influenced by theories of determinism in language as often considered to be exemplified in the Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis, this position also draws strongly on Lacan's theories about language and identity. See Cameron (1992) 131-40. In many ways therefore this development meshes well with the simultaneous approach developed by gender theorists such as Butler which considered gender a construct, established through its 'performance' by an individual. Butler (1990) – although Butler's idea of performativity should not be taken to imply either that individuals have a free choice of what gender they wish to perform at any given time – as with subject positions, performances in Butler's terms are limited to the 'culturally intelligible' – (1990) 22-7. Anzaldua (1990) takes a similar stance on gender as a performed construct, but with an approach which also considers the importance of race as part of this process, and allows a more central role for the body as part of the ongoing performance envisaged.

discursively produced by the taking up by an individual of particular gendered subject positions – thus gender becomes a process, produced and reproduced in every subject position adopted by an individual.[41] This does not, however, mean that an individual is able freely to choose the gendered subject positions which she takes up – as with the earlier limitations acknowledged on subjectivity more generally, these gendered positions are limited to those available within the discourses produced in any given social or historical context.[42]

Furthermore, recent work on discursive constructions of identity, in particular gendered identity, have argued for the necessity of its being seen as an interactional process, achieved or challenged in conversation, rather than purely by the linguistic processes of an individual acting alone. This may seem a somewhat self-evident point – after all, language is open to interpretation, and thus attempted performances of a particular subject position or identity, if produced in language, must be available for misinterpretation.[43] Furthermore, as discussed by Hollway's model of investments, many societies provide built-in rewards or potential disadvantages based on the successful construction of an appropriate gendered identity, or indeed even the temporary successful adoption of a particular gendered subject position, such that the failure to do so can be extremely damaging. This has been a productive focus of study for some anthropologists, influenced by Moore's early proposal of the idea of 'thwarting' – a violent response to the failure to maintain a desired gendered subject position.[44]

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41 For particularly influential discussions: Wetherell (1998); Cameron (1996); West & Zimmermann (1987).

42 Hollway (1984) esp. 236-7 examines the limitations on the availability of gendered subject positions with an eye to her theory of investments – the motivating factors which may compel an individual to take up a particular subject position within a dominant discourse.

43 Sunderland (2004) 176-7 provides a particularly good discussion of the ways in which an individual's "intentional self-construction" may not be interpreted as the speaker intended by an interlocutor.

44 Moore (1994) 64-9; see also Wade (1994); and following Moore's theory of thwarting particularly when considering gendered violence: Peterson (1999) 130-1; Mehta (1999); Niehaus (2012).

The interactional nature of these processes is further ideally suited to the study of tragedy, itself, an essentially interactional, dialogic genre. The primary difference between the performance of tragedy in comparison to the performance of older genres is the far greater extent of conversations, whether co-operative or combative, which the introduction of multiple actors introduces, in comparison to what is possible between a single chorus-leader or poet and chorus.[45] While this project is primarily based on close readings of the extant texts of the tragedies, rather than a more performance-focused approach, nonetheless this dialogic element remains key in understanding the nature of these texts as drama,[46] making the sociolinguistic theories of identity construction as being interactional, particularly apt, and a valuable new approach to the study of Greek tragedy.

Some of the theoretical approaches discussed above have already been adopted as useful tools for considering Greek tragedy, and particularly gender in Greek tragedy. The works of Victoria Wohl and Kirk Ormand in particular have examined the portrayal of female characters in tragedy in relation to theories of subjectivity.[47] Wohl has argued that tragedy complicates performances of exchanges of women between men by allowing for the idea that

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45 As Arnott (1991) 24-5, 44-7. Although Ley (2007) 6-7 adds the important caveat that even multiple actors often interact first with the chorus rather than one another, and thus emphasises the importance of the chorality of tragic performance, rather than seeing the addition of extra actors as representing a development away from such a form.

46 This project therefore does not represent a close relationship with the recent rise in performance-based studies of Greek tragedy, begun by Taplin (1977) & (1978) and followed by studies of tragic performance techniques such as Mastronarde (1979); Ley (2007); Wiles (1987), (2000) & (2007); Harrison and Liapis (2013); and on comedy: Russo (1962); Revermann (2006). Hall & Harrop (2010) represents a move into theoretical approaches to performance when reception and re-performance are considered. Harrison and Liapis (2013) 1-17 provides a good overview of the development of this field of study as an approach to Ancient Greek theatre. Powers (2014) is a very comprehensive treatment of the various scholarly approaches to the study of Athenian tragedy "in performance".

47 Wohl (1998); Ormand (1999).

a female subject may be present in the exchange, and that in the case of Deianira in particular, much of her time on stage is spent attempting to establish such subjectivity. Ormand similarly examines attempts by Sophocles' female characters to attain subjectivity, and the ways in which the dominant ideology of tragedy prevents their doing so. As has been shown above, however, these theoretical approaches have proved particularly productive as a way of examining language and speech practices, and it is these, drawing on approaches popularised in the field of sociolinguistics, rather than subjectivity in a more abstract sense, that this thesis examines.

The sociolinguistic focus on theories of identity and subject positioning as being discursive, produced linguistically and interactively, thus provides an effective framework for considering the arguments about the place of praise and blame in Greek poetry and drama. Detienne's formulation of the authoritative praise or blame speech of praise as key in establishing the *logos* of a warrior, the only idea of them which endures, or, indeed, fails to do so, comes close to describing this process as a form of discursive or linguistic identity construction, as it is discussed by sociolinguists. The same is true of Nagy's discussions of praise poetry as 'defining' an individual.

Furthermore, tragedy's place within its social and historical context suggests its fruitfulness as an arena for examining issues with identity construction and the role which praise and blame could have in that construction. In her 1981 study *L'invention d'Athènes* Nicole Loraux pointed to the importance of rise of the *epitaphios*, the prose funeral speech of praise for a community of dead, as a key element in studying Athenian ideology. With the rise of this specifically Athenian form of praise speech, it is possible to see an ongoing concern

with how individuals should be praised – the old procedures of aristocratic praise poetry being unsuitable.[48] Loraux considers the "official orator" as an heir to the poets who "possess the ainos" - precisely the same authoritative poets as discussed by Nagy and Detienne.[49] The *epitaphios* therefore becomes part of a continuing tradition of praise or blame speech, originally embodied in poetic form, before reaching the prose form favoured in the classical Athenian period.[50] Yet the need to adopt such a new form at all, and, indeed, the noticeably more communal approach of the *epitaphios* in comparison with the traditional genres of praise and blame poetry, with their focus on (often aristocratic) individuals, demonstrates, according to Loraux, that "Entre la gloire des aristocrates et celle des soldats-citoyens s'est donc interposée la cité; et c'est encore la cité qui, donnant la parole à l'orateur, le sépare irrémédiablement du poète."[51] This increased prominence of the *polis* can also be considered a characteristic shared with tragedy, whose citizen choruses and concerns with the "political" in its broadest sense made it a poetic genre into which the city, as in the *epitaphios*, had significantly interposed itself.[52] As a result, it is possible to see that tragedy's repeated concern with the processes of identity construction, as demonstrated in this thesis, is part of a social,

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48 Swift (2010) 106-115 on the unsuitability of epinician and the values represented therein for the democratic ideology of Athens, although she adds some welcome caveats to the traditional argument.

49 Loraux (2006) 22-3.

50 As with Detienne's formulation of archaic praise poetry, designed to ward off the forgetfulness of death ((1996) 47-51), Loraux (1981) 3 also notes the parallel function of the *epitaphios* in preserving the dead and the city in Memory, against forgetfulness and oblivion. See also Loraux (1981) 51-54 on the progression from the poetic praise of Pindar or Bacchylides to the praise found in the *epitaphios*.

51 Loraux (1981) 53.

52 How 'political' or even 'Athenian' a genre was tragedy has been a hotly debated question – Carter (2011) is the most recent foray into this subject. For a good overview of the various potential positions involved see Griffith & Carter (2011) 2-7, 10-11; see also Swift (2010) 43-60 for a good discussion of the 'elite' material of older choral genres and its relationship to the 'democratic' values of tragedy. Recognising this shared context, Loraux's study (1981) frequently examines tragedy and *epitaphios* together as both being genres which explore some of the ideological questions with which democratic Athens grappled.

cultural trend of the time, reflected not simply in drama, but also in the rise of this new genre.[53]

The communal focus of the *epitaphios*, where individuals are praised primarily for their involvement in their community of citizens, is also represented to some extent in the approach which tragedy takes in presenting questions of praise and blame.[54] The inclusion of the chorus on stage as a contrast with the individual actors allows the tragedian to present a community voice, which, when the chorus engages in praise and blame speech, presents a contrast with the individual figure or figures being judged. As well as providing an internal audience,[55] tragic choruses are often explicitly connected with the land in which the tragedy takes place, as is the case with the chorus of the *Medea*, who express their joy at belonging to their local community, unlike the isolated Medea (Eur. *Med.* 644)*,* or the chorus of elders of the *Agamemnon*, who present themselves as representatives of the city community (Aesch. *Ag.* 546, and explicitly when drawing on that communal role to blame Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, 1410-11, 1615-6, 1632). It is therefore possible to see in tragedy's representation of the communal voice of praise and blame, where the chorus takes this role on, tragedy's grappling with the same questions recognisable in the newly communal genre of the

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53 Morgan (2013) in a useful discussion shows how the praise/blame opposition and particularly its nature as rooted in poetry, including epinician poetry, is also essential for the Plato's *Laws*, although here the 'poet' who awards praise or blame is now a lawgiver, and the *Laws* are envisaged as a new genre aimed at surpassing previous genres of both poetry and prose which performed this role. This therefore suggests a further adaptation of a valued principle for the needs of the genre and time, in the same way as the rise of the *epitaphios* represents a generic development which demonstrates similar concerns in its own, slightly earlier, time.

54 Loraux (1981) 42-56.

55 If not an 'ideal spectator', the chorus certainly provides a kind of spectator for the action on stage: on the now rather unpopular idea of the chorus as 'ideal' spectator see Schlegel 1846, 76–77, with responses by Kirkwood (1958), 184; Kaimio (1970), 99; Gould (1996), 219 and n. 2, 232; Mastronarde (1998) 59; Fletcher (1999) 30.

epitaphios – how could praise and blame be properly and democratically awarded, if the old, individualistic and aristocratic genres were no longer suitable?[56]

Tragedy is therefore a genre which, with its relationship to older traditions and to its democratic context, is uniquely positioned at the intersection of old and modern approaches to praise and blame. As with other social issues, it is possible to see questions around these approaches being explored to great effect in tragedy, particularly where the destructive and dangerous effects of issues around praise and blame speech are demonstrated. An awareness of the poststructuralist, sociolinguistic theories of identity construction further provides a new lens through which these effects can be examined. Issues of heroic identity are also particularly apt for examination in tragedy, a genre which features the 'heroes' of epic participating in a new medium.

'Praise' and 'Blame'

It is possible to identify praise or blame speech in tragedy by the use of specific generic features which draw on the traditions of archaic poetry discussed above. This is particularly the case for praise speech in tragedy, especially in choral passages, where these are frequently signalled by features found in the genres of epinician and paean.[57] Triumphs

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56 While not specifically related to praise and blame, there is a close similarity between the interaction of tragedy and *epitaphios* discussed here, and tragedy's presentations of the role of women in laments and mourning, which was, as with praise for the dead, a particularly socially relevant issue. See Foley (2001) 21-55; Loraux (1986) 47-9.

57 Swift (2010) 29-31 describes this type of allusion as medium- or high-level generic interaction, and particularly shows (31) how it is rooted in the widespread familiarity with choral traditions that is a key feature of Greek society. Swift also provides a particularly thorough overview of this kind of allusion for the paean (61-103) and epinician (104-172).

may be specifically described as athletic victories and praised in songs which echo the epinician genre, such as the chorus' praise for Orestes' murder of Aegisthus (Eur. *El.* 860-5), which Electra also takes up in her celebration (866-79). Elsewhere, as in Euripides' *Heracles*, particular tropes of epinician praise such as a focus on youth or vigour (Eur. *Her.* 637-700), or a celebration which ties the 'victor' to his local community (792-7) may evoke the genre even without the more obvious allusion which reference to athletic victory sets up. Similarly the paean in which Ion praises Apollo (Eur. *Ion* 113-83) is marked by a specific paeanic refrain (125-7, repeated at 141-3), as well as by references to sacred labour (esp. 134).[58] Praise which is marked with these type of generic features is thus made formal and established within a context which is familiar to the audiences of tragedy, so that attention is drawn to its function via its form.[59]

It is not possible to identify generic interaction as marking blame speech in tragedy in the same way. The genre most usually considered to be 'poetry of blame', in direct contrast with praise-poetry, is iambos – Pindar himself claimed that Archilochus' iambic poetry should be considered as effectively opposite to his, as that poet distributed ψόγος (blame) where Pindar gave ἔπαινος (*P.*2.55).[60] Aristotle makes similar associations between blame and iambic poetry (*Pol.* 1448b). While there is undoubtedly an increased frequency of invective or mockery as a central feature of iambos,[61] other features too have been identified as key to the genre, such as a pronounced narrative element,[62] or vulgarity in treatment of sex – which is a

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58 See further Rutherford (2001) 111-2.

59 This is particularly the kind of praise discussed in the second half of Chapter 1, where Euripides' Heracles is
   discussed in detail.

60 For the way Greek thought set these two terms in opposition, cf. Nagy (1979) 222-4.

61 Carey (2009) 149-50.

62 Bowie (2001).

less common element in other genres.[63] Furthermore, as with many genres of archaic Greek poetry, there is a distinct flexibility when it comes to identifying iambos – certainly it is not clear that there was any early, formal categorisation of the genre.[64]

By the time of Aristotle's *Poetics,* the association between iambic poetry and invective was considered fixed (1448b 27-31), and, in a particularly relevant move for this project, Aristotle attempted to disassociate *iambos* from tragedy entirely – claiming that epic poetry should be considered alongside tragedy, while *iamboi* should be considered more part of comedy (1448b 38-1449a 6) – and therefore that tragedy was the inheritor of praise poetry, whereas comedy was the inheritor of blame.[65] To some extent this formulation seems reasonable, not least as several of the 'iambic' features noted above will not be found in tragedy – explicit sexuality, for example, or the vulgar language found in Hipponax's approach to the genre. Furthermore, the performance context of the older poetry does not as easily adapt itself to the tragic stage. *Iamboi* are generally assumed to be part of the sympotic solo performance tradition,[66] while in contrast epinician would have been part of a choral performance, and at the very least belong to a more public tradition than the intimate symposium, better suited to the public, festival aspects of the tragic performance.[67] Moreover,

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63 Carey (2009) 151.

64 As is a common problem for Greek poetic genres, cf. Swift (2010) 8-11. For approaches which focus on examining genre through performance context see Calame (1977), Käppel (1992), Rutherford (2001). Specifically in relation to iambos, cf. Carey (2009) 149-50 for some of the problems of identifying pre-Hellenistic categorisations of the genre.

65 For the association between iambos and comedy see Bowie (2002). On some problems with Aristotle's formulation of praise/blame poetry and epic, tragedy and comedy, cf. Nagy (1979) 253-6.

66 Although in the case of Hipponax, Carey (2009) 166 indicates some caveats.

67 For the debate about the choral nature of epinician, cf. Burnett (1989), Carey (1989), (1991) in support of choral performance, and Davies (1988), Heath (1988), Heath and Lefkowitz (1991) on the opposite side. Morrison, Athanassaki, Ferrari, Budelmann, Agócs and Thomas in Agócs and Carey (eds.) (2012) 111-224 all took up the question of social performance contexts for epinician once more. Swift (2010) 105 with n.6 for

while it is possible to identify references to epinician in the tragedians' use of the dactylo-epitrite metre, the iambic trimeter used by Archilochus and Semonides is the usual metre of all dramatic dialogue, so that it would be difficult to suggest that passages in this metre are attempting to refer to the earlier iambic tradition.[68]

However, this clearly should not mean that it is unreasonable to look for or discuss instances of blame in tragedy. For praise, too, it must be possible to talk about praise speech which is not marked in this way through generic interaction or allusion, not least as the importance of the praise/blame opposition in Greek thought extends throughout its literary and performance-based culture, and is certainly not limited to particular genres of lyric poetry.[69] Moreover, the term most commonly considered to sum up this socially-fixed concept of praise, αἰνέω and its compounds (particularly ἔπαινος), itself appears in a wide range of contexts and with meanings which extend beyond formal contexts of praise.[70] Occasionally in tragedy the use of this vocabulary does introduce the kind of formalised, often choral, praise ode that may also be accompanied by features common to the genres of epinician or paean. In the *Oedipus Coloneus*, for example, the chorus introduces their praise ode for Colonus:

ἄλλον δ᾽ **αἶνον** ἔχω ματροπόλει τᾷδε

And I have another word of praise for this my native city. (707)

Similarly the chorus of Aeschylus' *Suppliants,* in the first few lines of their departing song of praise for Athens, sing:

… αἶνος δὲ πόλιν τάνδε Πελασγῶν

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the public aspect of epinician. Kurke (1991) in particular is an earlier example of a treatment which highlights the social functions public performance of epinician could perform.

68 Swift (2010) 120.

69 As above, see also Morgan (2013) 266.

70 For the importance of this vocabulary: Detienne (1996) 45-9; Nagy (1979) 222-3.

ἐχέτω,…

And let this city of the Pelasgians have praise. (Aesch. *Supp.* 1023-4)

This type of specific praise can also be addressed by a chorus to an individual, without the same formalised sung context, as when the chorus of the *Hippolytus* directly tell Phaedra "αἰνῶ δὲ σέ" (Eur. *Hipp.* 483-4), for her decision to die rather than submit to her passion for Hippolytus.

It is also possible, and indeed, common, in Greek to express a more general positive judgement by describing a choice or decision as one to be praised – without any indication that a formal praise context is also being invoked. There is a tendency for scholars to translate the use of Greek praise words for these judgements as 'approve' or 'agree', which demonstrates the limited scope of the English word 'praise' in comparison to the Greek, and has the result of rather subduing the weight of the statements. A clear example is the statement made by the chorus of the *Choephori:*

… ἀρχὰς πρέπον

βίᾳ φρενῶν αἰνέσαι,

It is proper to praise my rulers in spite of my thoughts. (Aesch. *Cho.* 78-9)[71]

There is no indication here that the chorus intends to begin any formal praise of Clytemnestra or Aegisthus of the kind that as is introduced by the use of the term in the examples discussed above. Instead the scope of what may be described as 'praise' appears to cover a far more general positive judgement or attitude. Similarly, the chorus of *Philoctetes* complain to the warrior that:

εὖτέ γε παρὸν φρονῆσαι

τοῦ λωίονος δαίμονος εἵλου τὸ κάκιον αἰνεῖν.

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71 Sommerstein (2008**)** translates 'approve' here.

When it was possible to think sensibly, you chose to praise the worst fate instead of the more desirable.[72] (Soph. *Phil.* 1099-1100)

Again, here, Philoctetes has not been involved in any type of formal praise – rather, the chorus means only that he has been involved in making a positive judgement of what they consider the 'worse' fate. There are similar examples at, among others, Eur. *Alc.* 1093, *Hipp.* 483, *IT* 1023, *Her.* 275. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that the main Greek term for praise, αἰνέω, should be treated as covering a far more general range of positive speech than only those marked by the formal features found in genres of praise poetry.

The use of the concept of αἶνος to convey a general positive judgement is also shown in several cases where individuals express an explicit refusal to praise as a way of conferring negative judgement. In discussing the situation between Andromache and Hermione, for example, the chorus of Euripides' *Andromache* declare:

οὐδέποτε δίδυμα λέκτρ᾽ ἐπαινέσω βροτῶν

I will never praise a double marriage-bed among mortals. (Eur. *And.* 465)

Similarly the chorus of the *Eumenides* include among a long section of generalised advice on social morals (490-565):

μήτ᾽ ἄναρκτον βίον

μήτε δεσποτούμενον

αἰνέσῃς·

Do not praise a life of anarchy, nor one lived under despotism. (526-8)

Medea makes use of the same formula to claim:

οὐδ᾽ ἀστὸν ᾔνεσ᾽ ὅστις αὐθάδης γεγὼς

I do not praise the citizen who is stubborn. (Eur. *Med* 223)

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72 Lloyd-Jones (1998) similarly renders 'αἰνεῖν' 'approve'.

And Phaedra's Nurse taps into a common fifth-century sentiment in the expression:

οὕτω τὸ λίαν ἧσσον ἐπαινῶ

τοῦ μηδὲν ἄγαν·

And so I praise excess less than acting moderately. (Eur. *Hipp.* 264-5)[73]

Phrasing negative judgements in terms of something being unworthy of praise is not limited to generalisations, as it can also be found in specific circumstances or applied to individuals throughout tragedy. Tyndareus complains to Menelaus,

ἐγὼ δὲ μισῶ μὲν γυναῖκας ἀνοσίους,

...

Ἑλένην τε, τὴν σὴν ἄλοχον, οὔποτ᾽ αἰνέσω

I hate wicked women... and Helen, your wife, I will never praise (Eur. *Or.* 518 & 20)

and in the same way Amphitryon passes a negative judgement on all of Greece for their lack of help for his son:

οὐδ᾽ Ἑλλάδ᾽ ᾔνεσ᾽ (οὐδ᾽ ἀνέξομαί ποτε

σιγῶν) κακίστην λαμβάνων ἐς παῖδ᾽ ἐμόν,

I will not praise Hellas (nor will I ever keep silent), on finding her to be most wicked towards my son. (Eur. *Her.* 222-3)

This formulation is found as far back as epic – Penelope's suitors rather startlingly suggest that if their plot to murder Telemachus was discovered by the people as a whole:

οἱ δ᾽ οὐκ αἰνήσουσιν ἀκούοντες κακὰ ἔργα

They will not praise us on hearing of the evil deeds. (*Od.* 380)

In this epic instance, and in some of the examples shown above, the phrase might seem rather an understatement – presumably the people of Ithaca would speak against the attempt to kill Telemachus, rather than simply decline to praise it; and Tyndareus' words against Helen and

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73 Gregory (1991) 52-5.

Clytemnestra, when coupled with his statement of express hatred, are condemnation, rather than merely a neutral lack of praise. However, it seems clear from the repetition of the same formula that discussing a person or a deed in terms of the praise they may or may not win was an established way to discuss positive or negative judgements of that point.

It is similarly possible, as with this discussion of wider uses of terms of praise, to pick out clear instances of judgements being expressed through the use of the typical Greek terms for blame. These words associated in the poetic tradition with blame are identified by Nagy as ψόγος, μῶμος, and ὄνειδος – and both the former and the latter feature prominently in tragedy, especially in statements pronouncing judgement on what is seen to pass on stage.[74]

As with the use of terms stemming from αἰνέω discussed above, the use of this vocabulary for blame seems to invoke a wide range of types of negative speech. This can include comments or specific criticism directed against an individual, as when Creon characterises Haemon's criticisms about his own decisions in relation to Antigone as "ψόγοισι" (Soph. *Ant.* 759), or accusations, as when Athena asks Orestes to defend himself against the Furies' "ψόγον" (Aesch. *Eum.* 436). There are also more general applications – particularly in connection with female characters, who complain about the 'blame' women receive from others more generally. Clytemnestra complains in Euripides' *Electra* that when women cheat in response to the adultery of their husbands:

> κἄπειτ᾽ ἐν ἡμῖν ὁ ψόγος λαμπρύνεται,
>
> οἱ δ᾽ αἴτιοι τῶνδ᾽ οὐ κλύουσ᾽ ἄνδρες κακῶς.
>
> *Then against us the blame shines clearly, but the men who are responsible, are not spoken of badly.* (Eur. *El.* 1039-40)

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74 Nagy (1979) 223.

Similarly, Andromache complains in the *Trojan Women* that:

πρῶτον μέν, ἔνθα (κἂν προσῇ κἂν μὴ προσῇ

ψόγος γυναιξίν) αὐτὸ τοῦτ᾽ ἐφέλκεται

κακῶς ἀκούειν, ἥτις οὐκ ἔνδον μένει,

First (whether a there is a specific accusation that exists against a woman or not)

whenever she doesn't remain inside, this attracts speaking badly about her. (647-9)

The chorus of the *Suppliant Women* apply a similar remark to the fate of foreigners:

… πᾶς τις ἐπειπεῖν

ψόγον ἀλλοθρόοις

εὔτυκος. ...

Everyone is ready to cast blame on those who speak another language. (Aesch. *Supp.*

972-4)

Unlike the comments of Haemon or the Furies labelled as ψόγος above, this type of generalised blame is rarely shown on stage.[75] Furthermore, since this thesis focuses primarily on the identity construction of specific individuals, this type of generalisation is not a key topic of discussion. Nonetheless, it demonstrates a tragic awareness of a context in which awards of praise and blame can be considered widespread judgements, and the importance of this type of speech in dealing with social questions of morality and similar.

As with the praise vocabulary discussed above, there is often a wider scope to the meaning of terms for 'blame' here, such that they encompass a general idea of negative speech. Often it is equally appropriate to render the word ψόγος as 'reproach' or 'criticism' – a

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75 Although see Chapter 5 on how this tradition of generalised blame directed against women is shown being explicitly manipulated by Medea in Euripides' *Medea*.

meaning which is even more apt when the term used is ὄνειδος.[76] This is the case in Euripides' *Ion*, for example, when Ion comments:

ἵν᾽ ἐσπεσοῦμαι δύο νόσω κεκτημένος,

πατρός τ᾽ ἐπακτοῦ καὐτὸς ὢν νοθαγενής.

καὶ τοῦτ᾽ ἔχων τοὔνειδος, ἀσθενὴς μένων

<αὐτὸς τὸ> μηδὲν κοὐδένων κεκλήσομαι.

So I shall burst in on them with two illnesses, that my father is an alien, and I am a bastard. And while dealing with this criticism, I am weak, and I shall be called no one and son of no-ones. (Eur. *Ion* 591-4)

Ion's complaint is not that he fears being blamed in the English sense of the word, implying some fault on his part, but that he fears the bad things that the citizens of Athens will say about him (he goes on to elaborate this point fully, 594-606). More explicitly, Menelaus in Euripides' *Andromache* complains about Peleus' long list of insults, (590-641):

... αἰσχρὰ μὲν σαυτῷ λέγεις

ἡμῖν δ' ὀνείδη διὰ γυναῖκα βάρβαρον,

You speak words that are shameful to yourself, and criticism against me on account of a barbarian woman. (Eur. *And.* 648-9)

In this instance the word encompasses a wide range of accusations and abuse from Peleus. The 'blame' Ion fears is only imagined, whereas the audience experiences the criticisms of Menelaus from Peleus, and, furthermore, can see how they are justified. Nonetheless, both examples demonstrate that a wide range of negative speech contexts can be covered by the term ὄνειδος. This wider scope of meaning is equally applicable to the sort of comments which Creon objects to from Haemon (above).

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76 LSJ s.v.

In the case of several of the examples above, there is a clear indication that the praise or blame offered is distributed by a community. In some occasions, particularly in the cases of the formalised praise expressed by choruses, this communal aspect is expressed by the use of the chorus to pronounce the praise or blame distributed. The chorus may also in these cases themselves have clear ties to their local community, as is the case of the choruses of the *Oedipus Coloneus*, or *Heracles,* such that their judgements seem to lean on a wider context. This is the case even when communities are not as obviously marked out by such ties to a particular place such as Colonus or Thebes. For example the Furies of the *Eumenides*, while they do represent a particular community in themselves, are not representative of a wider social group – the Furies are a very particular group, who are offset by the community of Athenian jurors. The kind of generalised blame against women invoked by Andromache or Clytemnestra is similarly represented as that directed by a community against an individual. As a result, this aspect of the function of praise and blame ties closely into the public, communal contexts for the performance of praise identified above, including the later prose performances represented by the development of the *epitaphios*.

Thus, when considering praise and blame in tragedy, it is important not just to consider those instances where praise is marked and distinguished by allusion to specific genres of archaic poetry, but a much wider base of positive and negative speech. Characters in tragedy reflect a context which allows any positive or negative judgement to be assigned the labels 'praise' or 'blame'. This project therefore explores both situations. There is a particular focus on moments where praise is marked by epinician features, by particular marked vocabulary such as καλλίνικος or forms of αἶνος or ψόγος, or by other formal features which emphasise the importance of the praise and blame being given to or by particular characters. Where

characters or choruses make strong associations between praise or blame awarded, the reputation gained as a result, and the identity of an individual, language around reputation and renown more generally has also been brought out (particularly in Chapters One and Five). However, this thesis also includes discussion of less formally marked examples of praise or blame given to the characters considered, wherever positive or negative comments are made directly about an individual character by another character or chorus. Furthermore, theories of identity construction which take a sociolinguistic approach argue for the importance of *all* comments about, to, or by an individual as part of the process of identity construction.[77] While the marked, formal statements indicated by generic interaction may have additional force, the process overall extends to a far wider range of comments made on stage by individuals and the chorus about one another.

Summary of the Argument of the Thesis

An approach which examines processes of identity construction is ideal for focusing on some of the key individuals who appear on the tragic stage, and examining the functioning of these processes in relation to their situations. This is particularly the case for the individuals who are major figures within an older, often epic, tradition. As a result, this thesis begins with a section exploring the importance of praise and blame as a vehicle for identity construction in the case of some of the mythical warriors who populate the tragic stage: Ajax, Euripides' Heracles (Chapter One), and Theseus (Chapter Two).[78] In the cases of Ajax and Euripides' Heracles this approach has demonstrated that disjunctions between the praise sought after by

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77 Hall & Bucholtz (1999) 21-3 cover the wide range of "linguistic resources" which can be examined and considered as part of the process of identity construction.

78 The texts used for the Greek of all tragedies are the Loeb editions. All translations are my own.

these men and the praise actually awarded by the characters and chorus around them leads to violent crises of identity, from which Ajax does not recover, and Heracles only partially. In this regard, the situation as it is portrayed in Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Heracles* matches the discussion of 'thwarting' begun by Moore – since they both reach for a subject position, established linguistically through discourses of praise, that they fail to establish or maintain. Once this failure is assured, violence breaks out, and for both, an alternate, undesired identity is instead established in the praise and blame discourses within which they are positioned – for Ajax, posthumously, whereas Heracles finally accepts the formulation of his heroic identity constructed throughout the play, at the urging of Theseus. As for Theseus himself, a focus on the praise and blame awarded him by the characters and chorus reveals the unusual lack of direct praise in the *Suppliants, Heracles, Hippolytus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* for the Athenian exemplar, despite the largely positive roles in which he often appears. Instead, praise is used only to persuade Theseus to behave as desired by the characters around him. As a result, while Theseus faces no violent identity crisis, as Ajax and Heracles do, his identity is often more questionable and less secure in the tragedies in which he features.

The second half of my thesis examines the devastation caused by women's involvement in the process of identity construction, focusing on Deianira (Chapter Three), Clytemnestra (Chapter Four), and Medea (Chapter Five). As discussed above, the prominence of female characters in tragedy, often with particularly efficacious speech of their own, makes tragedy a particularly fruitful arena for exploring an issue which had been hinted at in epic as well as Classical Athens – the effect, particularly negative, that the praise and blame of women could have on their male counterparts. In tragedy, this involvement of women in processes of identity construction is shown to be destructive in several key cases, particularly

in relation to the refusal of female characters to accept the validity of established praise discourses, or their attempts to construct their own new discourses of blame within which their husbands are to be positioned. All three of these female characters have been much-studied in relation to their involvement in powerful and efficacious speech,[79] and all three have warrior heroes who are part of an earlier epic tradition as husbands, whose identities are compromised by the destructive impact of their wives' involvement in the production of discourses of praise and blame. This makes them a particularly fruitful topic of study in relation to the question of praise or blame discourses and identity construction. In the case of Deianira therefore, her rejection of the praise discourse usually used to construct Heracles' identity is key to the destruction of his praiseworthy qualities, his body and physical strength. Clytemnestra and Medea both take an even more active role in this destructive process – not only rejecting praise for their husbands, but instead forcibly positioning them within discourses of blame as bad husbands, bad fathers, and in the unusual case of Medea and Jason, blameworthy in specifically female terms. However, it is notable that in all these cases, while the women's rejection or replacement of praise discourses has (often desired) devastating effects on their husbands, it also often comes at the cost of their own destruction, as in the cases of Deianira and Clytemnestra, and to some extent Medea. Medea's success, (qualified, with the loss of her children), is furthermore the result of her deliberate choice to make use of and adapt acceptable gendered discourses of blame, even if she turns these against Jason in a less commonly accepted way. As a result, it is possible to see the limitations in available discourses and subject positions, as discussed in theoretical terms above, in their dramatic reality – for Clytemnestra and Deianira no long-term success is available through the socially unintelligible discourses they propagate, and even in the case of Medea, who draws on socially acceptable discourses, there continues to be a high price to pay for her

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79 See Chapter 3, ns 8 & 9 on Deianira; Chapter 4, n5 on Clytemnestra; Chapter 5, n44 on Medea.

involvement in such a process at all.[80] The exploration of women's role in identity construction through praise and blame which is undertaken by tragedy cannot therefore be seen as positive – women do not succeed in any sustained, meaningful sense in participating to positive effect. In this regard, this aspect of tragedy therefore appears to fit with the views of those scholars of women and tragedy who have argued that tragedy participates in shoring up a patriarchal ideology, rather than providing a subversive space in which this ideology is undermined.[81]

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80 See along similar lines, if far more generally, Wohl (2005) 149-50.

81 As Rabinowitz (2004) esp. 40, (1993); Ormand (1999); Zeitlin (1996). McClure (1999) is also a negative view, showing how tragedy presents the genres of speech associated with women as disruptive and dangerous to civic discourse. On the slightly more positive side, Foley (2001) allows for some challenges to the dominant ideology, even if these prove only temporary, and thus end in reinforcing that ideology. Wohl (1998) suggests that tragedy at least allows for the possibility of female subjectivity for an extended time, even if this is then generally overturned. Seidensticker (1995) gives one of the more positive views of how tragedy interacts with Athenian ideologies of gender. Wohl (2005) provides an excellent overview of the potential positions in this debate, and how these may also be implicated in the political concerns of the debater.

Chapter One: Praise, Blame, and Heroic Identity Crises.

This chapter explores the identity crises experienced by Sophocles' Ajax and Euripides' Heracles, as a result of the inability of both individuals to match their desired subject positions with the subject positions constructed for them through discourses of praise and blame by those on stage with them. In both plays questions of identity and praise are key issues, thus making this a particularly valuable focus for examining these texts. Furthermore, such an approach leads to readings of both the *Ajax* and the *Heracles* which present a different perspective to those more usually found in scholarship, particularly for the *Heracles.* The first section of the chapter covers Sophocles' *Ajax*, and the ways in which Ajax's death is represented as a consequence of his unsuccessful seeking after the identity 'Best of the Achaeans'. The second section addresses the more positive case of Heracles, whose heroic identity is re-constructed after his crisis, caused by a clash between the identities of glorious father and glorious hero, the latter of which he unsuccessfully seeks to replace with the former.

The Best of the Rest: Ajax Thwarted.

Questions of identity and the use of praise to establish identities are central to Sophocles' *Ajax,* particularly as a result of its interaction with Iliadic material. Issues around praise and *kleos* are of course central to the *Iliad*, so much so that it is possible to read the poem as an extended praise song, singing the glories and κλέος of the heroes of old.[1] In the *Iliad*, the most celebrated warrior and prime target for this praise is Achilles, whose wrath opens the action, and whose status and glory is central even when he is physically removed

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1 Nagy (1979) 16-8, Webber (1989) 12, cf. also Arrowsmith (1974) 25-6 on the important connection between heroism and κλέος.

from the action of the poem. A fairly close second is Ajax, son of Telamon, who leads the fighting when Achilles is absent, and is named 'Best of the Achaeans – after Achilles' (2.768). In the *Ajax,* the situation has shifted so that the play takes place after Achilles is dead, yet in the contest for his arms, and his legacy, the hero who in the *Iliad* is named second to him, is not the winner. Instead, the hero of an entirely separate epic and tradition of praise succeeds, Odysseus. Furthermore, in the *Ajax* it becomes clear that Ajax's failure is not simply a failure to win Achilles' arms, but rather a failure to appropriate the whole discourse of praise which positions and identifies him as the 'Best of the Achaeans'. Ajax claims a right to the praise Achilles receives, and thus to the same identity as 'Best', yet the characters around him constantly demonstrate that this claim is inappropriate, and it fails. Instead, Ajax continues to receive praise couched in the same terms as that he is given in the *Iliad* – he is strong, and great, but he cannot inherit the language used to describe Achilles, even when he is rehabilitated at the end of the play.

The destructive violence which breaks out as a result of Ajax's failure to maintain a subject position within this particular discourse of praise corresponds to the situation which Henrietta Moore has influentially described as 'thwarting'. According to Moore,

> Thwarting can be understood as the inability to sustain or properly take up a gendered subject position, resulting in a crisis, real or imagined, of self-representation and/or social evaluation.[2]

Moore notes, along with others who have drawn on her approach, that the process of thwarting regularly involves violence as a response to this failure to sustain a particular subject position.[3] Furthermore, Moore's analysis recognises that such a crisis can be closely

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2   Moore (1994a) 66.

3   Moore (1994) 67-9; Wade (1994) noted the tendency of violence to break out among Colombian men as a

tied to challenges to identity which result in a loss of assets – such as Achilles' arms. Effectively, the inability of Ajax to secure Achilles' arms confronts him with his own failure to position himself as 'Best of the Achaeans', within the poetic praise discourse which establishes this identity, and he experiences thwarting. As a result, he turns first to external violence against the Atreids (intended), and then finally to suicide. Therefore, scholars who argue that Ajax is rehabilitated after his death, as a result of Odysseus' willingness to praise him,[4] have not fully acknowledged that this praise is not the kind which Ajax has claimed. Rather, Odysseus continues to position him within the same discourse of praise as is found describing Ajax in both the *Iliad* and Sophocles' *Ajax* – Ajax is best only after Achilles – and Ajax's attempt to position himself as best outright remains entirely unsuccessful.

Ajax: Best of the Achaeans?

It is perhaps not surprising that we should find a great deal of praise of Ajax in the *Ajax* – after all, the chorus are his sympathetic supporters, and half of the individual characters presented (leaving Ajax himself aside) also demonstrate sympathetic attitudes. Even his enemies prove willing to give praise where it is due – in the midst of celebrating his downfall, Athena asks Odysseus, and receives his ready agreement,

τούτου τίς ἄν σοι τἀνδρὸς ἢ προνούστερος

result of a failure to sustain two competing subject positions, both of which carried particular expectations of their behaviour to those around them. Niehaus (2012) has also recently argued that this same process is at the root of narratives of male suicides in the South African lowveld. It is important to recognise the different cultural contexts present between such case studies and the tragic world depicted in the *Ajax*. Nonetheless, the similarities in the pattern of male individuals failing to sustain particular subject positions, undergoing 'thwarting' as Moore describes it, and turning to external violence and suicide, makes these useful comparative studies to bear in mind.

4   Such as Burian (2012) 80-1; Musurillo (1967) 23-4; Garvie (1998) 12-4, 196-7; Machin (1989) 31-59; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 57-8; Finglass (2012) 62-3; Taplin (1978) 28; Carter (2013) 140.

ἢ δρᾶν ἀμείνων ηὑρέθη τὰ καίρια;

Who was ever to be found, who was more careful or better at doing the right things

than this man? (119-20)

Athena's praise hints at a motif that will be developed in the praise of Ajax throughout the play, and is a key part of praise of Greek heroes as it is presented in the *Iliad* – the idea of judging which hero is the 'Best of the Achaeans.'[5] The contest for the arms brings this Iliadic context directly to the foreground – Achilles is proclaimed by the *Iliad* to be the best of the Achaeans, and so a contest among the heroes after his death to judge the most worthy to receive his weapons also, to some extent, presents the idea of judging which hero is most worthy to stand as his successor in that role. Both Ajax (443) and the chorus (935) in fact specifically connect the prize of the arms with the idea of who is ἄριστος, best – so that the weapons become a symbol of the title and identity Achilles has held, as best of the Achaeans.[6] Athena's comment at the start of the play does not specifically describe Ajax using the standard phrase, but her comparison of him to the rest of the men hints at it, before it becomes a more pronounced theme later in the play.

Ajax himself makes a claim to this highest title available in epic praise poetry, when he claims to be,

... ἄνδρα...

… ἔπος

ἐξερῶ μέγ᾽,

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5 Nagy (1979).

6 It is also important to note in this connection that in the *Little Iliad* the awarding of the arms is in itself the result of a paean of praise awarded to Odysseus but not Ajax, so that the awarding of the prize is closely tied to the awarding of formal praise. See further Detienne (1996) 47 n50.

οἷον οὔτινα

Τροία στρατοῦ

δέρχθη χθονὸς μολόντ᾽ ἀπὸ

Ἑλλανίδος·

A man... I will speak a great word, such as no other of the army that Troy saw come

from the land of Hellas! (421-6)

This statement does recall the typical Iliadic framework which places Ajax as mightiest after Achilles, although it is not an exact reference.[7] It could also perhaps be considered not too extreme – Ajax does not state whether his remark refers to his status now that Achilles is dead, nor does he directly draw a comparison between them. However, in his very next speech, Ajax himself highlights that this comparison is meant to be made by mentioning Achilles as one of the judges for the award of his arms;

εἰ ζῶν Ἀχιλλεὺς τῶν ὅπλων τῶν ὧν πέρι

κρίνειν ἔμελλε κράτος ἀριστείας τινί,

οὐκ ἄν τις αὔτ᾽ ἔμαρψεν ἄλλος ἀντ᾽ ἐμοῦ.

If Achilles were still alive and intended to judge the prize in excellence for someone in

a contest for his own arms, no other would take that prize instead of me. (442-4)

Not only is this statement rather awkward, as presumably if Achilles were still alive he would not be giving his arms away at all, but also, by the deliberate mention of Achilles in this

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7 cf. *Il* 2.768. Contrasting with those such as Winnington-Ingram (1980) 14-15, who argued that this boast showed Ajax's "megalomaniac pride", since he makes the claim of being like no other without the Iliadic exception for Achilles, Garvie (1998) ad loc, and Rose (1995) 68 & n24, have both argued that Ajax's boast is not unusual for an epic hero, as it claims that he is 'uniquely great' rather than better than others such as Achilles. Hesk (2003) 59-60 is particularly useful on this debate overall, and adds the interesting caveat that Ajax may still be mad at the point of making this claim, thus suggesting that care must be taken in interpreting this statement as unproblematic. Finglass (2011) 261-3 ad loc similarly argues that "no one could accept" Ajax's terms of talking about himself here.

context, Ajax invites his hearers to recognise his claim not only to the arms belonging to Achilles, but also his epithet, and identity, as best of the Achaeans, which he tried to assert 20 lines earlier. The use of ἀριστείας, closely related to the praise term "ἄριστος", recalls the praise which he seeks, and is particularly evocative of the close connection with Achilles demonstrated in Ajax's language. Indeed by conjuring up the awkward image of Achilles awarding his own arms to Ajax, Ajax almost creates a slippage between their two identities – Achilles cannot possibly award the arms to Ajax yet carry them himself, unless they are to be identified as the same person.[8] Ajax's suggestion that Achilles would award him the arms thus becomes a suggestion that Achilles and he have a shared identity, and it is this identity that he tries to establish for himself, by positioning himself within the praise discourse more usually found in relation to Achilles. It is also notable that, as O'Higgins has argued, Ajax insists on representing his relationship with Hector in such a way that he effectively substitutes himself for Achilles in that regard, claiming a long enmity which ends in his own death on Hector's sword, as the rivalry between Achilles and Hector was similarly ended on Achilles'.[9]

Ajax does not only assert his own right to receive this type of praise, but also notes emphatically his father's ability to claim such a title. The vocabulary he uses makes it even clearer that it is the praise and title which Achilles earned which he seeks, rather than simply the physical prize of Achilles' weapons. In fact it is his father's success in becoming the best among an Achaean army which particularly seems to chafe for Ajax. He says,

ὅτου πατὴρ μὲν τῆσδ᾽ ἀπ᾽ Ἰδαίας χθονὸς

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8 Michelakis (2002) 145-6 argues that Ajax's boasting at 421-6, by omitting Achilles, threatens Achilles with oblivion, as Ajax attempts to replace him. Ajax effectively represents himself as standing in Achilles' place twice in extremely close succession, with the boasting, as Michelakis acknowledges, and again with the odd situation of Ajax and Achilles both bearing the arms which Ajax implies in his comment about the judgement. See also on the problematic counterfactual King (2012) 401; Gill (1996) 207; Euben (1986) 151-2.

9 O'Higgins (1989) esp. 49-50.

τὰ πρῶτα καλλιστεῖ᾽ ἀριστεύσας στρατοῦ

πρὸς οἶκον ἦλθε πᾶσαν εὔκλειαν φέρων·

ἐγὼ δ᾽ ὁ κείνου παῖς, τὸν αὐτὸν ἐς τόπον

Τροίας ἐπελθὼν οὐκ ἐλάσσονι σθένει,

οὐδ᾽ ἔργα μείω χειρὸς ἀρκέσας ἐμῆς,

ἄτιμος Ἀργείοισιν ὧδ' ἀπόλλυμαι.

I, whose father came home from this land of Ida after winning the army's finest prize for excellence, and bringing every kind of glory. But I, his son, came to the same place, Troy, with no less strength, and having performed with my own hand no less great deeds, I am destroyed, dishonoured by the Argives. (434-9)

The formulation of the remark about his father's prize once again recalls the epic praise which Ajax seeks, with its use of the word ἀριστεύσας – his father can be described as 'best' among the Achaean army, even if the standard phrase is heavily implied rather than directly repeated. Furthermore, this statement is tied directly into the praise his father received for his exploits, by use of the word εὔκλειαν - glory.[10] Ajax directly states that his deeds should be considered equal, yet his honour is not – he claims a right to the praise his father received, in terms which also strongly echo the kind of praise which Achilles deservedly claimed in the *Iliad*.[11]

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10 Nagy (1979) 2§3 notes the centrality of *kleos* (established through praise poetry: and which brings εὔκλεια §3n5) to Achilles' claim to be the 'best' of the Achaeans – so that Ajax's invocation of the same terms in relation to Telamon carries similar connotations.

11 As at *Il.* 1.244, 412, 16.274 – each time Achilles contrasts his identity as 'best' with the lack of honour shown to him by Agamemnon, just as Ajax here brings out the contrast between Telamon's identity as 'best' and the dishonour Ajax faces from the Argives. Nagy (1979) 26-35 discusses the only places where this formulation in the *Iliad* describes individuals other than Achilles, and points out that several times, individuals called 'best' are themselves substitutes for Achilles during his absence. It is further interesting to note that at *Il* 11.784 Achilles' aiming at being 'best' is further associated with his own father by Nestor, who claims that it formed part of an instruction from Peleus to Achilles, thus presenting a further parallel with Ajax's concerns here.

Similarly, when Ajax attempts to decide what he can possibly do after the slaughter of the flocks, he asks,

> καὶ ποῖον ὄμμα πατρὶ δηλώσω φανεὶς
>
> Τελαμῶνι; πῶς με τλήσεταί ποτ᾽ εἰσιδεῖν
>
> γυμνὸν φανέντα τῶν <u>ἀριστείων</u> ἄτερ,
>
> ὧν αὐτὸς ἔσχε στέφανον <u>εὐκλείας</u> μέγαν;
>
> *And what kind of expression shall I show to my father, Telamon, when I appear? How will he ever bear looking at me when I appear naked, without the prize for being the best, when he himself got a great crown of glory?* (462-5)

Ajax again demonstrates his preoccupation with the same ideas - even repeating the same phrases in his use of ἀριστέων and εὐκλείας. Ajax's concern is not simply that his father won renown or prizes which he did not, it is particularly the type of prize which his father has been able to claim which so upsets him. His father has won a prize for the ἄριστος Greek, one which comes with a "στέφανον εὐκλείας", a phrase particularly evocative of praise poetry.[12] Telamon, therefore, has successfully won the same prizes and been honoured in the same way as Achilles, while Ajax in seeking that prize has been entirely unsuccessful. It is possible to see in the description of Telamon's prize an even closer parallel drawn between him and Achilles, in the words Teucer uses to describe their father. He exclaims in a description of his parentage,

> ὃς ἐκ πατρὸς μέν εἰμι Τελαμῶνος γεγώς,
>
> ὅστις στρατοῦ τὰ πρῶτ᾽ <u>ἀριστεύσας</u> ἐμὴν
>
> ἴσχει ξύνευνον μητέρ᾽, ...
>
> *I am born from my father Telamon, who as the army's best prize for excellence won my*

---

12 Kurke (1991) 92 discusses the representation in Pindar of epinician praise poetry as a στέφανος – a crown, or garland, for a victor. See also Nisetich (1975).

mother for a bedfellow. (1299-1301)

In this tragedy, where Telamon is shown as an example of a warrior who has won the same types of prizes and praise as Achilles, who himself constantly lurks just beyond the words the characters speak, it is easy to be reminded of the 'prize' that Achilles himself lost, also a woman, which sparked off the central conflict between Agamemnon and himself in the *Iliad*. Achilles himself even connects the loss of this prize with Agamemnon's refusal to honour "ὅ τ' ἄριστον Ἀχαιῶν" (*Il.* 1.410-2*), connecting the two ideas closely. Fathers play a significant role throughout the *Iliad* in the construction of heroic identity – several times characters represent themselves as acting in particular ways in order to live up to their fathers' standards, either at their instruction, or when compared to them by others.[13] Sophocles' representation of Ajax's concern with establishing his identity as 'best of the Achaeans', established within a discourse of praise poetry as Telamon's was, therefore draws heavily on this tradition, so that Ajax's failure to establish his identity of 'Best of the Achaeans' is one which is framed by the Iliadic context as much as the tragic.

Ajax's view of the subject position 'best of the Achaeans' therefore seems to suggest that it is one which is desired partly in order to meet the expectations of excellence passed on from father to son. His father had successfully maintained this position, established through a praise discourse surrounding his exploits in war, and Ajax demonstrates a keen awareness of

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13 Thus at *Il.* 5.800-813 Athena reproaches Diomedes for not living up to the example of his father, and specifically for not being 'ἐοικότα' him, suggesting an expectation that sons should bear similar or the same identities to their fathers. Agamemnon berates Diomedes for the same fault at 4.401-2. Similar examples showing a warrior son's concern with living up to his father's standards are found at *Il.* 6.206-11 (Glaucus), 11.683 (Nestor), 6.476-81 (Astanyax, although expressed here by the father, Hector), and 11.785-90 (Patroclus, reproached by Nestor). See also Finlay (1980) 268-9; Redfield (1975) 111; Mills (2000); Crotty (1994). On the father as 'internalised other' Williams (1993) esp. on Ajax 84-6 and for Ajax specifically, Gill (1996) 207, Hesk (2003) 61. For a good discussion of potential Oedipal readings of Ajax's relationship to his father see Starobinski (1974) 52-55.

his comparative failure to do the same. It is notable in this regard that when Teucer talks of his own heritage, he identifies himself to Agamemnon:

> … ὧδ' ἄριστος ἐξ ἀριστέοιν δυοῖν
>
> βλαστὼν...
>
> *I, the best son from two of the best people...* (1304-5)

As with Ajax's claims about their father, Teucer creates the impression that his quality as ἄριστος is closely related to his father's own success at being ἄριστος. In fact early on in the play the chorus suggest that Ajax might, like Teucer, claim to have lived up to his father's identity of 'best', when they describe him as:

> ὅς εἷς πατρῴας ἥκων γενεᾶς ἄρι-
>
> στα πολυπόνων Ἀχαιων,
>
> *He who is the best of the much-suffering Achaeans, in relation to his lineage.* (636-7)

However, the chorus' speech expressly goes on to state that whatever good situation Ajax might previously have been in, it no longer applies (639-40). In combination with the comments of Ajax discussed above, it becomes clear therefore that unlike Teucer, Ajax has not successfully lived up to the expectations inherited from his father, that Ajax should match Telamon's identity of 'best'.

Not only has Ajax's failure to maintain this subject position interrupted this succession of expectations, however, it is also possible to see a similarly interrupted succession in his failure to secure the arms of Achilles. In her persuasive analysis, Barbara Goff has shown that the apparent failure in the transmission of the arms of Achilles, combined with Ajax's later concern for the disposition of his own arms, is also represented in the *Ajax* as raising significant questions about Ajax's identities as son and father, both of which are disrupted

through the failed transmission of the arms.[14] Ajax's Iliadic identity as 'best... after Achilles' almost positions him as Achilles' successor,[15] and his attitude in the *Ajax* to the disrupted passage of the arms from Achilles to Ajax presents this passage as a rightful inheritance.[16] His inability to properly 'inherit' his arms therefore also disrupts this aspect of his identity, compounding his inability to live up to his father's identity of 'best', established through praise.[17] Ajax therefore proves to be unable to live up to the subject position expected of him as a result of his paternal inheritance, at the same time as he fails to inherit the physical symbols of that subject position from a substitute paternal figure, Achilles.

Thus the identity 'best' should, in Ajax's eyes, have been one which is expected of him as a result of his inheritance through blood, from his father, and should have been confirmed through the award of Achilles' arms, yet Ajax's crisis and experience of thwarting comes because neither method has been successful. Ajax is unable to live up to his father's much-praised identity, and simultaneously unable to properly secure the inheritance and transmissions of arms made in the play, which further undermines his attempts at establishing his identity. However, as I shall go on to show, it is primarily in the praise and blame of those around him that Ajax's failure to sustain his attempted subject position is realised. Even characters friendly to Ajax refuse to position him within the necessary praise discourse to establish the identity of 'Best'. Instead, they only reproduce Iliadic discourses of praise,

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14 Goff (2010).

15 Although see Kirk (1990) 52-3, Pratt (2009) 159-60 and bibliography cited for the extensive scholarly discussion (beginning in antiquity) on Diomedes vs. Ajax as the Iliadic substitute for Achilles.

16 Goff (2010) 226-7; Michelakis (2002) 146; Starobinski (1974) 19-20. See also on the passage of fame from father to son, Pallantza (2005) 240.

17 Rosenbloom (2001) 116 recognises that the arms are a symbol for "shared essence of Ajax and Achilles as heroes of *kratos* and of *kleos*," thus representing those aspects of Achilles' identity which Ajax is attempting to claim, although Rosenbloom does not acknowledge the essential role of praise in establishing that *kleos* and identity.

repeatedly positioning him as second-best.

Types of Heroism

Aside from the issue surrounding the title 'best of the Achaeans', there are some clear similarities in the types of praise both heroes are given. Both heroes are particularly praised for their physical strength and prowess, contrasting with heroes like Odysseus who receive a wider range of praise.[18] However, although both heroes fall into a specific 'type' of praise discourse, there are significant differences in the way each is described. Sophocles' *Ajax* has often been discussed in terms of 'types' or 'styles' of heroism, with many scholars seeing the distinction between Ajax and Odysseus as one between an archaic, strength-based, individualistic heroism and a classical, democratic heroism which relies on rhetoric and persuasion.[19] Given that Sophocles' *Ajax* provides significant material for a discussion of 'types' of heroism, therefore, it is important to bear in mind this comparison not only when dealing with the relationship between Ajax and Odysseus, but also that between Achilles and Ajax. Moreover, it is particularly important to note the repeated differences in the praise discourses within which Ajax and Achilles are positioned in the *Ajax*, given Ajax's claim to a right to be positioned in the same ways as Achilles has been.

The main vocabulary used in praise of Ajax is the word μέγας – great. Often the word appears as part of a standard identification of Ajax along with the patronymic, so that it

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18 Nagy (1979) 45-9.

19 For examples of this type of discussion see Langerwerf and Ryan (eds.) (2010) 7, with note; Kitto (1961) 122; Webster (1969) 71; Segal (1995) 6, 17; Gardiner (1987) 50. Finglass (2011) 44-5 usefully discusses some problems with this model, see also Rose (1995) 63-5; Hesk (2003) 104-124; Cairns (2006) 115-7.

becomes part of his name, as in the form "μέγας Τελαμώνιος Αἴας" (e.g. *Il.* 5.610, 12.364, 13.321, 14.409, 15.471, etc.). This praise is also applied to his shield, at 11.572 – also an important part of his heroic identification.[20] It is common for Homeric epithets to denote particularly praiseworthy aspects of a warrior's identity, so that rather than being a purely neutral descriptor, they repeatedly invoke a positive context, celebrating speed, as with "πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλεύς", or beauty, in "λευκώλενος Ἥρη".[21] When this epithet is transmitted to tragedy, and used in descriptions of Ajax in the *Ajax,* this positive aspect of the description is intensified, since it is repeatedly found in contexts specifically related to positive, praising descriptions of Ajax.

Throughout Sophocles' play the descriptor μέγας is shown to be an integral part of Ajax's identity, and is an essential part of the praise vocabulary used by everyone else in the play. When the chorus of sailors describe his role in relation to them, they praise his support for their efforts in their comment,

> καίτοι σμικροὶ <u>μεγάλων</u> χωρὶς
>
> σφαλερὸν πύργου ῥῦμα πέλονται·
>
> μετὰ γὰρ <u>μεγάλων</u> βαιὸς ἄριστ᾽ ἂν
>
> καὶ <u>μέγας</u> ὀρθοῖθ᾽ ὑπὸ μικροτέρων.
>
> *And indeed, small men who are separated from great ones become uncertain protection for a wall: for it would be best for small men to be set straight by great men, and great men by those who are smaller.* (158-161)

And a few lines later, follow this with,

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20 See below.

21 Hirsch (2014) 219 connects Homeric epithets to the 'praise names' of heroes in poetic genres from other cultures. See also Parry (1973) 3-4.

μέγαν αἰγυπιὸν <δ᾽>, ὑποδείσαντες

τάχ᾽ ἂν, ἐξαίφνης εἰ σὺ φανείης,

σιγῇ πτήξειαν ἄφωνοι.

They would quickly shrink in fear before the great vulture, if you were to suddenly

appear, and would cower voiceless, in silence. (169-71)

The image of Ajax as a vulture not only has significant epinician connotations,[22] but it also

praises Ajax through representing Ajax as significantly more important and influential than

the Atreids, described as chattering sparrows (167-8). Tecmessa also uses the same word to

praise Ajax, calling him "μέγας" at 205, and the even stronger "μέγιστον ἴσχυσε στρατοῦ" a

few hundred lines later (502). It is perhaps understandable that Tecmessa would focus

particularly on Ajax's physical strength – her presence in the camp is, after all, a direct result

of his martial prowess, as she is a military captive. However, the focus on the word μέγας

particularly recalls the *Iliadic* context of praise for Ajax.[23]

In Sophocles' *Ajax,* there is no detailed praise of Achilles, although as noted above, the

language of Ajax, and Odysseus' comment at the end of the play, (1340-2) recalls the praise

discourse of the *Iliad* in naming him the 'Best of the Achaeans'. As a result it is difficult to

make a detailed comparison of the types of praise received by Ajax and Achilles in the *Ajax*. It

is nonetheless still possible to consider the discourses of praise within which each hero is

positioned in the *Iliad,* and thus to explore the significant differences in the tradition. Unlike

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22 It is very similar to an image found in Bacch. *Ep.* 4.16-30.

23 Rose (1995) 69-71 argues that this imagery is part of a representation of Ajax as a great *strategos*, reflecting
   the contemporary Athenian political situation. This is a reasonable interpretation, but Rose's argument does
   not fully acknowledge the linguistic parallels between descriptions of Ajax in the *Ajax* and the *Iliad,* nor does
   he demonstrate that the idea of soldiers/sailors sheltering behind a great general is specifically and solely
   relevant to a Classical Athenian context, rather than also being a recognisable feature of Homeric poetry, in
   which the generals are also heroic figures who lead the regular soldiers.

Ajax, Achilles is only described once in the epic as μέγας – and the occasion is in his taunts to the Trojan he has just killed, so the comment is made in his own words, rather than his being described in these terms by the narrator or any character around him. Achilles elsewhere in the poem receives an elevated level of praise, being described by such terms as δῖος or διίφιλος – particularly as the epic goes on to the later books, he is praised in terms beyond those deserved by a more 'normal' hero.[24] In comparison, Ajax's key word, μέγας, seems limited, and it draws a distinction between the two heroes simply through the vocabulary deemed suitable for praising them. It is perhaps notable that the lack of the word μέγας to describe Achilles in the *Iliad* does not reflect a difference in their physical attributes – Achilles notes when his armour has been lost that only Ajax's gear might suit him as a replacement (*Il.* 18.192-3), suggesting that in physical terms, the description μέγας is equally appropriate for either hero. The rejection of this term, therefore, in favour of more extreme alternatives of praise, creates a clear distinction between the heroes, and develops contrasting identities for each of them.

As well as praise for physical attributes, both Achilles and Ajax receive praise in the *Iliad* which focuses on descriptions of their roles in the army, and particularly the roles they perform in relation to other soldiers. Both are described in terms of defence – they are called a shield, or bulwark, and said to stand between the Greeks, or a particular group of them, and disaster. Achilles is named by Nestor as,

ὃς μέγα πᾶσιν

ἕρκος Ἀχαιοῖσιν πέλεται πολέμοιο κακοῖο

He who is for all of the Achaeans a great bulwark against evil war. (1.283-4)

Less than a hundred lines later, Achilles himself characterises his role as,

24 Schein (1984) 128-9, 138, Whitman (1958) 138-44.

ἀεικέα λοιγὸν ἀμῦναι

τοῖς ἄλλοις

Warding off loathsome destruction from the others. (1.341-2)

In the *Iliad,* Ajax too is marked as a defender of the army – he is named "Αἴας πελώριος ἕρκος Ἀχαιῶν" (3.229) by Helen, when she identifies him to Priam, and later on he is called by the same epithets (6.5). However, in the parts of the *Iliad* where this description is combined with a more active role in the narrative, there is a difference in how the description is included. When Ajax steps forward to take part in the duel with Hector, he is described once more as the 'bulwark of the Achaeans' (7.211). However, it is notable that when Ajax features in a defensive role, the focus is often devoted to an extra detail, a description of his famous shield:

Αἴας δ᾽ ἐγγύθεν ἦλθε φέρων σάκος ἠΰτε πύργον

χάλκεον ἑπταβόειον, ὅ οἱ Τυχίος κάμε τεύχων

...

ὅς οἱ ἐποίησεν σάκος αἰόλον ἑπταβόειον

ταύρων ζατρεφέων, ἐπὶ δ᾽ ὄγδοον ἤλασε χαλκόν.

Ajax came from nearby, carrying his shield that was like a tower, a shield of bronze with sevenfold bull's hide, which Tychius made, working hard... who had made him his flashing shield of seven hides of sturdy bulls, and over it had worked an eighth, bronze, layer. (7.219-23)

Similarly, at 15.405ff he is instrumental in warding off the Trojans from the Achaean ships. His defence of Patroclus' corpse is also described in detail,

Αἴας δ᾽ἐγγύθεν ἦλθε φέρων <u>σάκος</u> ἠΰτε πύργον...

Αἴας δ᾽ ἀμφὶ Μενοιτιάδῃ <u>σάκος</u> εὐρὺ καλύψας.

But Ajax came up, carrying his shield that was like a tower... Ajax covered the son of Menoetius with his broad shield around him. (17.128, 132)

What is particularly notable in this passage, is the difference between the ways in which Ajax's and Achilles' defensive qualities are highlighted in the Greek. Achilles is himself a 'bulwark' or shield – Ajax acts as one, but the focus is on the shield he carries, which is repeated in the Patroclus passage as a particularly important detail.

In Sophocles' *Ajax,* this idea of Ajax is maintained, with the chorus as the first to describe Ajax as their protector or shield, when they say,

μετὰ γὰρ μεγάλων βαιὸς ἄριστ᾽ ἂν...

χἠμεῖς οὐδὲν σθένομεν πρὸς ταῦτ᾽

ἀπαλέξασθαι σοῦ χωρίς, ἄναξ.

Little men are best [supported by] the great... and we, for our part, have no strength at all to defend ourselves against them apart from you, lord. (160, 165-6)

Similarly, Teucer says scathingly of Agamemnon,

οὗ σὺ πολλάκις

τὴν σὴν προτείνων προύκαμες ψυχὴν δόρει

Did you not often defend this man, [Ajax] offering up your own life to the spear! (1269-70)

The *Ajax's* chorus of sailors even claim rather emotively, once they fear disaster has come to him,

καὶ πρὶν μὲν ἐννυχίου δεί-

ματος ἦν μοι προβολὰ καὶ

βελέων θούριος Αἴας·

And before, furious Ajax was my shield against nightly fear and arrows. (1211-3)

In all these examples, the chorus or Teucer represent Ajax as a shield himself, rather than focusing on the shield he carries. Their language is somewhat more varied than that found in the *Iliad,* so that they do not directly mirror the phrasing found there, only the sense of Ajax's identity which they present. However, Ajax himself resurrects the difference found in the wording of the *Iliad*, even to the point of linguistic echoes, when he discusses the legacy which he intends to pass on to his son. Ajax insists on passing his shield on to his son, despite the fact that all his other weapons will be buried alongside him (575):[25]

> Εὐρύσακες, ἴσχε διὰ πολυρράφου στρέφων
>
> πόρπακος, ἑπτάβοιον ἄρρηκτον <u>σάκος·</u>
>
> *Eurysaces, carry my unbreakable shield of seven hides, turning it about by its well-*
>
> *sewn handle.* (575-6)

The word for shield (σάκος) is the same used in the *Iliad* to describe Ajax's shield,[26] and the use of this word is made even more significant because Ajax claims that it is this word which forms the basis for his son's name (574). It is also made clear that Ajax sees this moment, along with the distribution of his shield, as an intrinsic part of passing his own heroic qualities on to his son,

> ἀλλ᾽ αὐτίκ᾽ ὠμοῖς αὐτὸν ἐν νόμοις πατρὸς
>
> δεῖ πωλοδαμνεῖν κἀξομοιοῦσθαι φύσιν.
>
> ὦ παῖ, γένοιο πατρὸς εὐτυχέστερος,
>
> τὰ δ᾽ ἄλλ᾽ ὅμοιος·
>
> *But immediately it is necessary to break him in accordance with the laws of his father,*

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25 Goff (2010) 228-30.

26 Davidson (2006) 27-31 on the Homeric aspects of this vocabulary choice.

and make his nature quite the same as mine. My child, become more fortunate than

your father, but the same in all other respects! (548-51)

For Ajax, therefore, his shield is an essential part of his heroic identity. Not only is it worth naming his son for – almost in the manner of a patronymic – it is a key part of the instructions to those who will raise him, such that the two instructions, that Eurysakes should carry Ajax's shield alone of his weapons, yet be exactly alike him in nature, become closely intertwined.[27] The passing on of his shield becomes, in this way, an essential part of imparting that set of values and qualities which Ajax wishes to see inculcated in his heroic offspring. In contrast, Achilles is given an entirely new shield during the course of the *Iliad* (18.478-608). While this shield is extraordinary and god-made, it is not envisaged at any point as a part of Achilles' heroic identity. Indeed, the loss of Achilles' original armour is more meaningful for Hector, who steals it, and will then die in it, than it is for Achilles himself.[28] Achilles is shield and defender of his people by his own nature[29] – Ajax claims the same role, but only by virtue of the enormous shield he carries, something external to him, and not as clearly part of his inherent qualities, which are in the tragedy almost displaced into the shield rather than the hero himself.

Furthermore, the presentation of Ajax as shield and protector in Sophocles' *Ajax* is not uncomplicated. Unlike the words of other characters, which refer in the most part to Ajax's

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27 Goff (2010) 30-1 on Eurysaces' name and the complicated relations between the shield, father and son.

28 Allan (2005) 1-16. It is also important to note that the contest for Achilles' arms featured in the *Ajax* prevents their ever being passed on to his heir, Neoptolemus (made the root of his persuasion of Philoctetes in the *Philoctetes,* (359-381) although the claims he makes here are, of course, false). Thus Ajax's concern with the transmission of his shield to Eurysakes is entirely antithetical to the situation of Achilles' arms shown in the play. Goff (2010) 224-6.

29 Although cf. Elliot-Sorum (1986) 364 on Achilles elsewhere in the *Iliad* as aggressor, contrasted with Ajax as defender.

past glories, the sailors focus their praise on a role which Ajax fulfils for them in the present, at least, that is, until he is dead. Once Ajax has died, they are forced to bewail the loss of his protection – the quality their praise was focused on no longer exists, and their praise therefore has to cease. Ajax's role as protector is only praiseworthy while he still lives and can fulfil it; once his protection is removed, the sailors will not be able to praise him in the same terms.[30] Their emphatic positioning of πρὶν at 1211 makes it clear that their praise is very specifically directed at the past, to a situation which no longer applies. Even more notable is the way in which Tecmessa responds to the sight of the death of Ajax; she cries,

> … νιν περιπτυχεῖ
>
> φάρει καλύψω τῷδε παμπήδην…
>
> *I will cover him entirely with this cloak folded about him.* (915-6)

With his death therefore, Ajax does not only lose his heroic role of protector, but finds his situation entirely reversed. Ajax has gone from being able to cover Patroclus' corpse for its protection in the *Iliad*, (it is notable that the same word for 'cover' is used each time), to needing to be covered himself, in his death. However, no warrior or hero stands over him in this moment, although Teucer will eventually perform that role; instead Ajax must be covered and protected by a woman's cloak, hidden away from the eyes even of his friends. It is furthermore significant that while Achilles in the *Iliad* also voluntarily withdraws his protection and shielding qualities from the Achaeans, his withdrawal results only in an increase of his honour, gifts, and increased right to praise for his glorious deeds once he returns. Ajax's withdrawal results in almost entirely opposite results; he must be hidden as if shameful, in the garments more usually used to hide away women from the eyes of others.[31]

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30 Elliot-Sorum (1986) 366 on the sailors as victims of Ajax's heroic desire. Blundell (1989) 75-90 esp. 86-8 on how Ajax's suicide not only removes protection from but actually results in injuring his *philoi*; similarly Belfiore (2000) 106-7.

31 On veiling in Ancient Greece Lee (2015) 154-60; Llewellyn-Jones (2003), esp. 299 on the *Ajax*. Cairns

The idea that Ajax's previously praiseworthy protective attribute now belongs firmly to the past is mirrored in statements made by both the chorus and Ajax in response to the dishonour he claims to have experienced from the Atreids. Both Ajax (446) and the chorus (616-20) claim that his previous deeds of excellence are themselves being erased by his present suffering. Clearly Ajax's deeds cannot literally be undone, or cease to have happened, so the process which the chorus and Ajax describe is one which must be the result of the present blame that Ajax faces for his more recent deeds. Dolores O'Higgins has argued that their description refers specifically to the lack of praise that Ajax is now receiving for those deeds, since "Deeds may not establish or re-establish *kleos*. In themselves they may have no meaning whatsoever," and must therefore be given context and meaning through speech.[32] In the *Ajax,* those around Ajax have refused to perform this function and confirmation of Ajax's

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(2002) esp. 75 notes the many emotional reasons for veiling in Greek culture (shame, grief, anger among others), and argues (76-7) for its use by men in emotional extremes as part of placing themselves "in a feminized predicament" (76), since Greek women habitually veil. It is notable in this context that Ajax further cannot cover himself, and instead is veiled by a woman, most likely using her own cloak rather than a garment owned by a man. Furthermore, Cairns (2002) notes (81-2) that veiling can be a response to a challenge or threat to "one's social self [or] public identity," an idea which is especially fitting to the covering of Ajax once his identity has come under threat by his failure to sustain it through praise. Regarding the use of Tecmessa's cloak, Jebb (1962) 141 ad 915 suggested that a new cloak had been brought on stage by an attendant – for the contrary viewpoint see among others Stanford (1963) 179 ad 916, following Kamerbeek (1963) 184 ad 915. Finglass (2011) ad 915-6 adds that the using of her own cloak adds pathos to Tecmessa's action. Finglass (2009) provides the most compelling argument for rejecting any possibility bar that Tecmessa is covering Ajax in her own cloak.

32 O'Higgins (1989) 48. See also Rosenbloom (2001) 122, who claims that Ajax "naively" assumes that heroic deeds will speak for themselves, and is thus destroyed when he finds they do not. Rosenbloom is correct to note the importance of speech in confirming the validity of heroic deeds in the *Ajax*, but his claim about Ajax's own failure to recognise this element is unfair – Ajax is not naïve at all – he fully recognises that his deeds will not speak for themselves, and his entire complaint in this play (later taken up by Teucer in his defence) centres around the fact that others do not speak of them, praise them, or judge them in the precise way that Ajax believes they should.

deeds, in not awarding him the arms or the identity 'Best of the Achaeans', which should have been confirmed through praise precisely of those deeds. Instead of having his exploits celebrated as the cause for naming him 'best', Ajax is facing blame, censure, rumour and disgrace, and any hopes he held for establishing such an identity for himself are entirely overturned, forcing him through the process of thwarting that Moore recognises in such crises of attempts to establish a particular identity.

Second-Best of the Achaeans

This difference between the two outcomes of their deeds experienced by Ajax and Achilles, is further significant for demonstrating the level to which Ajax's claims to the identity 'Best' fail. As mentioned above, Achilles receives more exaggerated praise, and particularly praise which assimilates him more closely to the divine, as the *Iliad* progresses, particularly once Patroclus has fallen and he re-enters battle. By the end of the epic, he is acknowledged in his early claim of being the Best of the Achaeans, and is able to receive the honours he demanded in the first book of the epic (1.412). In Sophocles' *Ajax*, the precise opposite happens to Ajax once he has claimed the title 'best of the Achaeans', and met his resulting crisis point. Rather than successfully claiming increased honour and establishing his identity as 'Best' through the praise of those around him, Ajax instead faces blame and censure from those who remain after his death, which further destabilises any attempt to position him as 'best', by positioning him instead in discourses of blame rather than praise. Of course his suicide in and of itself has a further destabilising effect on his identity. Once dead, Ajax cannot continue to take part in any discursive practices as a means of constructing an ongoing identity; instead he is reliant wholly on those left alive, and cannot intervene to challenge their

attempts to position him, particularly in discourses of blame.[33]

The culture of blame which surrounds Ajax after his slaughter of the beasts is indicated by the chorus' early talk of bad rumours (137-200), but it becomes especially clear in the words of the Messenger when Teucer has returned to the Greek camp. He says of Teucer,

κυδάζεται τοῖς πᾶσιν Ἀργείοις ὁμοῦ.

στείχοντα γὰρ πρόσωθεν αὐτὸν ἐν κύκλῳ

μαθόντες ἀμφέστησαν, εἶτ᾽ ὀνείδεσιν

ἤρασσον ἔνθεν κἄνθεν οὔτις ἔσθ᾽ ὃς οὔ,

τὸν τοῦ μανέντος κἀπιβουλευτοῦ στρατῷ

ξύναιμον ἀποκαλοῦντες, ὡς τ' οὐκ ἀρκέσοι

τὸ μὴ οὐ πέτροισι πᾶς καταξανθεὶς θανεῖν.

He was reviled by all the Argives together. For they learned that he was approaching from afar and stood around him in a circle; then every single one of them assailed him with blame here and there calling him the brother of the man who, mad, had plotted against the army, and saying that they would not ward off death from him, when he was being entirely mangled to death through stones. (722-728)

The scene is dramatically described – what is particularly notable is that Teucer clearly cannot have been involved in Ajax's actions, since he is described throughout the play before then as having been away, and even the Messenger's speech focuses for the first two lines (719-20) on making Teucer's previous absence and his present return extremely clear. The Argives cannot

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have thought that Teucer was involved in what has happened; indeed, it is clear from the description of the accusation they make (726-7) that their anger is really directed at Ajax. In this scene, therefore, Teucer as Ajax's closest relative and companion in the camp, stands in for Ajax and receives the blame that is directed at him. It is also notable that this blame is widespread, communal, and not the result of any individual enmities; Ajax and the chorus have both previously announced their expectations of taunts and blame from Odysseus, but the audience have seen precisely the opposite. The first instances of blame come from a much wider source – the Argives as a whole – and cannot be dismissed as an example of an individual's bias. Furthermore, the scene depicted here provides a counterweight to the united community represented by the chorus, whose discourses of praise maintain Ajax's heroic identity. Here, a group is similarly described as sharing in a common discourse, but this time of blame. The image of their united, communal role in distributing blame is strengthened by the representation of their standing in a circle, with Teucer isolated (723), just as when on stage individual actors may stand out against the grouped chorus.

Once Ajax is dead, the concern with Ajax's reputation, status and identity becomes the central focus of characters other than Ajax and the chorus. Teucer, Menelaus and Agamemnon are all introduced in the second half of the play, and all make long speeches which attempt to position Ajax within discourses of praise or blame respectively, as a way of posthumously confirming his identity, contrary to the views of the opposing parties. Ajax particularly becomes the focus of a great deal of blame and personal attack, particularly from the two leaders of the army, Menelaus and Agamemnon. Menelaus calls him "ἐχθίω Φρυγῶν" ("*More an enemy than the Phrygians*") (1054), "κακοῦ" (1071) and claims,

...πρόσθεν οὗτος ἦν

αἴθων ὑβριστής,...

Formerly he was heated in his insolence (1087-8)

Agamemnon's arguments are more concerned with Teucer, as defier of Menelaus' stricture that Ajax not be buried, although he also calls Ajax "μηδὲν" (1231), and most importantly asks,

οὐκ ἆρ᾽ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄνδρες εἰσὶ πλὴν ὅδε;

Are there not men for the Achaeans, other than him? (1238)

This comment directly reflects Ajax's earlier claim, and the issue of the praise which he has grasped after, in its deliberate setting of Ajax as simply another man among the Achaeans. Far from being called the best, he is not even marked as outstanding – dismissed by Agamemnon as on a par with all the other unnamed Achaeans. Agamemnon himself also claims to be the heroic equal of Ajax (1236-7), definitively refusing to sanction Ajax's desire to be named the new best of the Achaeans.

In the final scene of the play, after this discourse of blame has fully played out and its results of denying Ajax the identity 'best' are felt, Odysseus makes his reappearance. As the audience have already seen in his first scene with Athena, he is unexpectedly sympathetic to Ajax, presenting a sharp contrast with Ajax's and his supporters' previously expressed fear (148-50, 379-82, 955-60, 971) that Odysseus will mock him and damage his reputation, not praise him. Instead, Odysseus denies any desire to 'dishonour' Ajax at all, and his argument as to why Ajax should be buried directly picks up on the same rhetoric of praise that Ajax laid claim to earlier. Thus he says,

οὐ τἂν ἀτιμάσαιμ᾽ ἄν, ὥστε μὴ λέγειν

ἕν᾽ ἄνδρ᾽ ἰδεῖν ἄριστον Ἀργείων, ὅσοι

Τροίαν ἀφικόμεσθα, πλὴν Ἀχιλλέως.

I would not so dishonour him as to not say or realise that he was the best man among the Argives, of those who came to Troy, except Achilles. (1339-41)

Odysseus' statement clearly mirrors the claim Ajax made to the title granted to Achilles in the *Iliad* so that to begin with, it seems as though he is ready to grant that title in its entirety to Ajax. However, once again Ajax's attempt to claim the identity 'best' is contradicted, as Odysseus insists on including the traditional exception for Achilles. It is not until the very end of his statement that he makes the exception clear, so that the hope is built up by both the phrase itself and the comment that it covers all those who came to Troy that Odysseus will concede this title to the dead Ajax.[34] However, Odysseus' final note makes it clear that he had no intention of making the statement without the traditional, *Iliadic* exception. Ajax is the best only after Achilles, and the way in which this part of the remark falls last, makes it appear a very final judgement.[35] Furthermore, as the praise comes from someone who claims not to be a friend of Ajax (1336-7), it is given a greater validity in Greek eyes – coming from a neutral or unbiased individual.[36] Odysseus comes very close to repeating this judgement in his comments to Teucer a little later, when he states that the funeral rites should be those appropriate to "ἀρίστοις ἀνδράσιν" (1380). The use of ἀρίστοις would seem a concession to Ajax's claims, except for the fact that it appears in the plural, in a generalising comment, so

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34 O'Higgins (1989) 53 n13 notes that "'Best... after' is a promise that is then taken back" in the *Iliad*, thus making it more disappointing than a simple second place. The same effect of a retracted promise is found in Odysseus' formulation here – by delaying the exception Sophocles not only recalls the traditional formulation, but also implies that Odysseus will finally vindicate Ajax's attempt to claim this identity for himself, before that possibility is firmly removed.

35 I do not agree with Murnaghan (1989) 182 that this is a concession of victory from Odysseus – it is not until the *Odyssey* that this title becomes an appropriate measure of his own worth (cf. Nagy (1979) 34-41), so he concedes nothing about himself or his victory to include it here - and Odysseus' inclusion of Achilles in the formula thus thwarts Ajax's desires rather than fulfilling them, as she claims. Similarly Garvie (1998) ad loc claims that Odysseus "validates Ajax's perception of himself" - as I have been arguing, this does not take sufficient account of the difference between what Ajax claims and what Odysseus will allow.

36 cf. Bowie (2002) 180.

that once again Ajax becomes one of several best men, and not the sole "best of the Achaeans." At this stage of the play, too, no one chooses to argue this point – it becomes the final assessment of Ajax's status and the sorts of praise he can claim a right to.[37] In fact, Teucer finally seems to confirm the appropriateness of this judgement, by naming Odysseus "ἄριστ' Ὀδυσσεῦ", in is acknowledgement of Odysseus' help. While this comment does not appear with the full, traditional formulation, by naming Odysseus alone as 'best', with no qualifier or generalising plural, Teucer seems almost to confirm the result of the transmission of Achilles' arms, and that the identity of 'Best' has been inherited by Odysseus along with them.[38] As a result, it seems clear that Ajax's attempt has failed – he is limited after his death to the same status he was granted in the *Iliad*, and has been unable to move beyond it by his ambition after the death of Achilles.

Conclusion

In Sophocles' *Ajax,* Ajax experiences the process of 'thwarting', as a result of his failure to establish the desired identity for himself of 'Best of the Achaeans', through a discourse of praise. Ajax argues for his right to such an identity on the basis of his father's same claim, and his own claim to be Achilles' successor, and recognises in his failure to secure the arms of Achilles a physical symbol of his failure to secure Achilles' desirable

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37 Hubbard (2000) esp. 318 makes the interesting argument that Odysseus' appropriation of the rhetoric of praise poetry, particularly Pindaric poetry, succeeds in contrast to the chorus' failed attempt to reintegrate Ajax into his community through the performance of choral epinician. See also on the chorus' 'epinician' ode Cairns (2006) 103. Finglass (2011) 176 ad 136 objects to Cairns' interpretation, although the arguments of both Cairns and Hubbard seem to me to be reasonable.

38 Odysseus will also be 'best' Achaean in the *Odyssey*, so that the transmission of this identity from Achilles to Odysseus in this play mirrors the transmission of the same title between the two Homeric epics. Nagy (1979) 34-41.

identity. Despite Ajax's claims, the other characters and chorus in the *Ajax* repeatedly fail to position him as 'best', instead repeating the traditional praise discourse of the *Iliad* within which he is instead positioned as different from Achilles rather than equivalent to him. Any attempts to claim further praise are met with the blame of Agamemnon and Menelaus, and the only identity which is successfully rehabilitated and maintained against their competing discourse is that confirmed by Odysseus, 'best... after'. Ajax's violent response to this crisis in the identity he fails to secure is typical of thwarting, and rather than rehabilitating him, his suicide leaves him vulnerable to positioning by those characters who arrive on the stage after his death, and without recourse to further attempts to participate in constructing his own identity.

Ajax is not the only tragic hero to face this type of identity crisis caused by a disjunction in the praise he seeks compared to the praise he receives. Euripides' *Heracles* faces a very similar situation, although in his case the disjunction is far greater, since Heracles attempts to establish a wholly different identity as his praiseworthy self. In the next section I shall explore the ways in which this crisis in praised identities is presented, as a further example with tragedy's persistent representation of identity construction through praise and its more problematic aspects.

Euripides' *Heracles* - "Glorious" how?

In Euripides' *Heracles*, it is possible to see a very similar process at work in the identity crisis faced by Heracles to that faced by Ajax.[39] Like Ajax, Heracles faces a conflict

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39 Barlow (1981) brings out the many similarities between Euripides' Heracles and Sophocles' Ajax in her detailed and very valuable analysis, although she does not recognise that both Heracles' and Ajax's violent

between two desirable subject positions, or identities, both of which are established and maintained through praise, that causes an eruption of violence and almost leads to his suicide. Yet unlike Ajax, Heracles is eventually able to accept the identity constructed for him by the praise of those around him, and thus ends the play still alive, and reintegrated into a community with his heroic identity successfully reconstructed, even if his alternative family-focused identity remains entirely destroyed.

Recognition of this aspect in relation to Euripides' *Heracles* is not entirely new – scholars often argue that the play stages an adjustment of Heracles' identity, from semi-divine hero of renown, to mortal, fallible and destructive father, forced to rely on friends rather than his own qualities of excellence.[40] Many aspects of the play certainly lend themselves to a recognition of these two distinct strands of Heracles' identity, or two separate subject positions which he takes up, one as mortal, family-focused individual, the other as the larger-than life, glorious Heracles of the mythical labours. The split between these two distinct subject positions can be seen in the frequent discussion of the issue of dual parentage,[41] and, when the end of the tragedy is considered, in regard to the future of Heracles' now dual-aspected weapons, both symbols of his heroic victories, and now symbols of the murder of his family.[42] The idea of the two identities of Heracles is also one which reflects the complex representations of his nature in the literary tradition on which tragedy draws. In epic Heracles had been a figure of contrasting values, as likely to break the bounds of hospitality and moral codes as to protect them,[43] so that later epinician poetry, particularly that of Pindar who

madnesses break out in connection with a crisis specifically of identity. See also Michelini (1987) 234-6.

40 e.g. Papadimitropoulos (2008) 132-5; Silk (1985) 12-6; Gregory (1977) 275.

41 Gregory (1977) esp. 260-2.

42 Dunn (1997) 98.

43 Galinsky (1972) 10-15.

celebrated him as a hero, made a significant move towards rehabilitating him, presenting him as a more humanised character, and one whose moral virtue was as supreme as his valour and physical strength.[44] It is possible therefore to suggest that such a transition in Euripides' *Heracles* would be reflecting and continuing the historical trend in the representations of his character found in other genres; Euripides' play continues and dramatises the process of bringing Heracles back to earth as a more mortal figure rather than the destructive hero of enormous dangerous potential.[45]

However, if we focus on the process of identity construction specifically through discourses of praise and blame, a rather different picture emerges. Heracles certainly does prioritise his family life in the middle section of the play, but his attempt to effect any repositioning of himself as father, and family-focused, are in the end entirely unsuccessful, as a result of the reactions of the chorus and characters around him. His actions in this section receive no praise, and are undermined by blame aimed at his acts both here and elsewhere in relation to his family. Furthermore, his departure for Athens with Theseus comes with the promise of a status as an object of praise once more (esp. 1331-5), and as a glorious hero, who leaves his uncelebrated family life behind him, precisely as he had done during his praiseworthy labours.

Renown and Identity

To an even greater extent than in the *Ajax*, Euripides' *Heracles* demonstrates a clear

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44 Galinsky (1972) 23ff.

45 Foley (1985) 175-200 and Swift (2010) 121-56 esp. 122, 155-6 demonstrate the most detailed arguments for the importance of reading Heracles' presentation in tragedy as a development of his portrayal in other genres, particularly in relation to epinician.

preoccupation with the importance of renown, and of establishing and maintaining a particular identity through discourses of praise and blame. Often at moments when we would expect a focus on family or domestic issues, the chorus or characters instead focus on praise of heroic deeds or comments on the reputation gained by such deeds, particularly as a way for characters to decide which actions they can pursue and how they should represent themselves. Furthermore, the characters of the *Heracles* explicitly make a connection between praiseworthy, heroic deeds, the reputation gained by these, and identity, by explicitly identifying themselves with reference to such deeds.

The importance of renown and reputation as a method of expressing identity is brought immediately into focus, by Amphitryon's introduction of himself and the play, when he identifies himself using the question,

Τίς τὸν Διὸς σύλλεκτρον οὐκ οἶδεν βροτῶν,

Ἀργεῖον Ἀμφιτρύων᾽, ...

Who among mortals does not know me, the man who shared his wife with Zeus, Argive

Amphitryon? (1-2)

The idea of his being known to all mortals, and the deed for which he gains this renown, is announced even before his name, and as a key part of his identity. Similarly when Megara enters the stage she addresses him first by recalling his renowned deeds, rather than addressing him by recognition of their family connection,[46]

ὦ πρέσβυ, Ταφίων ὅς ποτ᾽ ἐξεῖλες πόλιν

στρατηλατήσας κλεινὰ Καδμείων δορός

Old sir, you who once took the city of the Taphians, famously leading the army of the

46 In contrast to Eur. *Or.* 241, 470 and 477 for example, where Menelaus and Tyndareus upon their entry on stage are identified primarily by their family ties with the speaker. Similarly Eur. *Supp.* 100, Soph. *OT.* 639.

Cadmeians. (60-1)

The issue of reputation and renown becomes a key one in the scenes involving Lycus' entrance, when Lycus makes sustained efforts to dismiss the importance of such renown in connection with Heracles' identity in his absence. Although he does bring up the unlikelihood of Heracles' being able to rescue his family (144-146), his main argument against Amphitryon and Megara is surprisingly not concerned with this question – rather he wishes to focus on destroying the reputation Heracles has (in his view, unreasonably) attained, and the source of his renown – his heroic deeds.[47] He belabours the point that Heracles' reputation is undeserved, asking:

τί δὴ τὸ σεμνὸν σῷ κατείργασται πόσει,

What awesome thing has your husband even achieved? (151)

Unlike Megara's addresses to Amphitryon, Lycus prominently does not identify Heracles by his deeds, but rather by the family relationship of husband. It is notable that he insists on emphasising family ties in his address to Megara and Amphitryon too, ignoring the praise-focused identification Megara had used (140). In the case of Heracles, he refuses to accept Heracles' reputation as a valid part of his identity at all, arguing instead that he knows the reality of what sort of person Heracles is, and it does not match his reputation:

ὃ δ' ἔσχε δόξαν οὐδὲν ὢν εὐψυχίας

θηρῶν ἐν αἰχμῇ, τἄλλα δ᾽ οὐδὲν ἄλκιμος

Heracles, despite being nothing special, has got a reputation for courage from spearing beasts, although in other things he is not at all brave. (157-8)

His concern throughout is with the disparity he sees between Heracles' deeds and his reputation – he does not ever contradict the tradition that he did kill the Nemean lion or

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47 Foley (1985) 181-2 on some interesting associations drawn in the *Heracles* between Lycus and blame poetry.

"ὕδραν ἕλειον" ("*marsh snake*" 152), but he rejects the reputation Heracles has gained as a result.

It is this aspect too which Amphitryon so angrily reacts against, complaining

… ἐμοὶ μέλει λόγοισι τὴν τοῦδ᾽ ἀμαθίαν ὑπὲρ σέθεν

δεῖξαι· κακῶς γάρ σ᾽ οὐκ ἐατέον κλύειν.

It is my concern to show the ignorance in the words of this man in relation to you

[Heracles]: for to hear you spoken badly of is not to be borne. (171-3)

He picks this up throughout the passage, further commenting bitterly,

ἢ οὐ παῖδα τὸν ἐμόν, ὃν σὺ φὴς εἰκῇ δοκεῖν;

Is it not my son who you say only seems to be brave? (184)

The first part of his defence does not only focus on attesting that Heracles' glorious reputation is deserved, it emphasises its existence and widespread nature, as if its very excessiveness is self-validating. Amphitryon suggests that Lycus could hear of Heracles' renown from the gods (esp. 176 and 180), the Centaurs (181) and even Mt. Dirphys (185) – suggesting that even the great and glorious mythological races of great fame, the gods, and monumental landmarks, will lend their voices to praising Heracles. Furthermore, when he twits Lycus with his own lack of deeds, this too focuses on their nature as praiseworthy or not. He does not only comment that Lycus has done nothing glorious, but (more importantly, to him), that he has done nothing noteworthy even to his own people, let alone those further afield:

οὐκ ἄν σ᾽ γ' αἰνέσειεν· οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ᾽ ὅπου

ἐσθλόν τι δράσας μάρτυρ᾽ ἂν λάβοις πάτραν.

You would certainly not be praised, for you have not done anything good anywhere for

which you could take your homeland as a witness! (186-7)

The importance of this issue to him shows that at this moment it is apparently a greater concern that Lycus not get away with 'slandering' Heracles (174-5) than that he be allowed to kill Heracles' family. It is not until he has sufficiently dealt with issues of λόγοι that he finally turns to Lycus' intended deed (205), thus making Heracles' reputation and the things said about him his most urgent or immediate concern. Amphitryon's first priority is to rehabilitate Heracles' identity as that associated with his reputation and praiseworthy deeds, rather than identifying him in any way in relation to his family relationships, or the threat of Lycus.

In response, Lycus does not reject Amphitryon's argument, but rather his entire approach, commenting:

σὺ μὲν λέγ᾽ ἡμᾶς οἷς πεπύργωσαι λόγοις,

ἐγὼ δὲ δράσω σ᾽ ἀντὶ τῶν λόγων κακῶς.

You go on saying these words to me with which you have fortified yourself, but I will actually do something in return for the things you have said so badly. (238-9)

Lycus argues firmly against an approach which values renown, praise through words, and reputation, in favour of (violent) acts. Furthermore, his lack of concern for reputation can be seen demonstrated elsewhere in his behaviour. Firstly the very act of threatening to burn suppliants around an altar suggests a wanton disregard for the disapprobation such behaviour would earn him – the chorus' own disapproval and horror suggests what the wider public view would be of such an act (252-67). Megara even comments to Heracles, in her discussion of Lycus' conduct:

αἰδώς; γ᾽ ἀποικεῖ τῆσδε τῆς θεοῦ πρόσω.

Shame? Why, he lives far away from that goddess. (557)

Concepts of αἰδώς can often be strongly linked with an idea of what is considered by society

to be conduct likely to bring external criticism rather than honour,[48] and so Lycus' rejection of this idea can be seen as a further step away from valuing public reputation and praise. Thus unlike Megara and Amphitryon, Lycus refuses to accept renown or reputation as a central aspect of identity, and furthermore, does not concern himself with reputation or public opinion when presenting his own identity to others.

Yet Lycus' claim to authority is entirely undermined by the play, with the result that his attitude to reputation and public opinion is not upheld by the characters around him. The chorus complain of the inappropriateness of his current position of power (252-7) and later his *hubris* (740-1)*,* thus undermining any authority his position might supply for his speech, and Heracles and Megara make it clear that his behaviour has been shameful (556-7). His decision to burn Megara and the children on the altar at which they are supplicating (716, 723-5) further discredits his attitude, since it demonstrates willingness to engage in behaviour a Greek audience would have considered disgraceful.[49] Moreover, the attitudes of all the other characters and the chorus to praise and reputation emphasise that Lycus' approach is entirely wrong, even if it were not made problematic by their direct reactions to his words and deeds.[50]

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48 Cairns (1993) 15-8. On the connection between shame and self also Cairns (1993) 18-26.

49 Mikalson (1991) 72-4 and specifically on Lycus 258 n17. Burnett (1971) 162 n8 in a rather unusual reading argues that Megara's faults in the matter of the supplication prevent Lycus from seeming particularly villainous. Burnett's argument at the very least does not take sufficient account of the general condemnation of the chorus and all characters for Lycus' behaviour and attitudes, including his impious treatment of the suppliants, discussed below. Gregory (1977) n9; Yoshitake (1994) 137 and Lee (1980) 37, 39-40 provide sensible counter-arguments to Burnett's view.

50 It is important to note that these rejections further have the effect of setting Lycus up to be isolated in his opinion. Unlike the community of Argives who blamed Ajax in the *Ajax* (above), Lycus is not shown in the *Heracles* to be supported by anyone else, making his blame seem more personally, unfairly, motivated, and significantly less valid and more easily opposed by the communal praise and respect found for Heracles from all others in the play.

As discussed above, all the characters other than Lycus recognise renown as an integral part of a person's identity. Furthermore, in several situations the value of a reputation or renown is given a great deal of weight in arguments or situations where characters seek to decide how to act in such a way that they represent themselves well to others, with Lycus, as mentioned, the only exception.[51] Megara finally manages to convince Amphitryon to support her decision to leave the altar with an argument based on what is worthy of their renowned status. Firstly she reflects a common heroic attitude to reputation and judgement by others, when she claims that death by fire would mean their:

> … ἐχθροῖσιν γέλων
>
> διδόντας, ...
>
> *Giving laughter to our enemies.* (285)[52]

She goes on to focus more specifically on the fact that the children's deaths must not happen in such a manner as to mar Heracles' glorious reputation:

> οὑμὸς δ᾽ ἀμαρτύρητος εὐκλεὴς πόσις;
>
> ὃς τούσδε παῖδας οὐκ ἂν ἐκσῶσαι θέλοι
>
> δόξαν κακὴν λαβόντας· οἱ γὰρ εὐγενεῖς
>
> κάμνουσι τοῖς αἰσχροῖσι τῶν τέκνων ὕπερ·
>
> ἐμοί τε μίμημ᾽ ἀνδρὸς οὐκ ἀπωστέον.
>
> *Is my glorious husband unwitnessed? He would not want to save these children if doing so brought them a bad reputation: for noble parents are distressed by the shames of their children: and I must not reject my husband's example.* (290-4)

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51 The idea of identity as constructed discursively relies on the reception and interpretation of that identity by others, such that this concern over how one is received by others is in itself a question of what identity to construct and present – see Moore (1994) 65-6, Ochs (1996) 424-5.

52 This concern mirrors Ajax and his companions' obsession with the same idea (148-50, 379-82, 955-60, 971 - see above) Maddalena (1963) 138 on the laughter of enemies as the greatest fear of heroes. Foley (2001) 248 similarly on Medea.

Her argument here is bracketed by emphatic references to Heracles' reputation and thus the manner in which her children must behave is clearly to be understood as being dictated by this. Furthermore, Megara argues that Amphitryon's own reputation, independent of his son's, must also preclude such a death for him,

> σὲ μὲν δόκησις ἔλαβεν εὐκλεὴς δορός,
>
> ὥστ᾽ οὐκ ἀνεκτὸν δειλίας θανεῖν σ᾽ ὕπο·
>
> *You obtained a glorious reputation as a warrior, so that it is unbearable for you to die like a coward.* (288-9)

Megara's argument is successful, and there is no suggestion within the play that it is anything other than correct or persuasive to appeal to renown and reputation in this manner.[53] Megara and Amphitryon therefore do not only explicitly identify individuals by their heroic exploits and reputation, they also consider these as an essential aspect in the ongoing maintenance of identity, even to the extent of considering what kind of death is suitable for the type of person which they will present themselves as to others.

Thus the prominence and weight given to a reputation for heroism is reinforced throughout the first half of play by all the characters and chorus. It is an important aspect of identity, and something which must be considered when it comes to making even life or death decisions. Given this background, it may therefore seem strange to suggest that Heracles' transformation in this tragedy includes his rejection of this reputation, when he moves instead to a focus on simpler pleasures – mortal friendship, and a life more focused on the limited

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53 contra Burnett (1971) 159-63. Yoshitake (1994) esp. 137-40 convincingly argues that the *Heracles* supports the importance of preserving reputation through suicide by having Heracles take up and validate Megara's and Amphitryon's earlier arguments. Walsh (1979) 305 argues that Megara fails her family by prioritising the 'public' honour over private ties here, but no other character in the play levels this charge against her, not even Amphitryon in their dispute about whether she is right to choose death.

mortal sphere. In fact, if we continue to consider the role of praise and reputation in relation to that of his more mortal or domestic aspects – his family, his relationship with Theseus, and his choices at the end of the play, it quickly becomes clear that precisely the opposite effect happens. Heracles may attempt to set aside heroism for family life in the middle of the play, but it is an impossible attempt – when his family is destroyed, heroism reclaims him, and nowhere is he able to suppress it by this resolution.

Heracles, Glorious in fatherhood?

As soon as he arrives on stage, Heracles begins to counteract the effect of the chorus, Amphitryon and Megara's earlier focus on his heroic deeds through his attempted rejection of those deeds and the reputation gained by them. He chooses instead to focus his attention entirely on the situation of his family, and explicitly connects that focus with a rejection of his labours in strong terms, as he declares "χαιρόντων πόνοι" (*"Farewell to my labours"* 575), and goes on to argue,

μάτην γὰρ αὐτοὺς τῶνδε μᾶλλον ἤνυσα.

In vain I accomplished them rather than the tasks here. (576)

Furthermore, Heracles specifically connects the idea of abandoning his labours and heroic deeds with the reputation they have won him, when he argues that unless he defends his family,

οὐκ ἄρ᾽ Ἡρακλῆς

ὁ καλλίνικος ὡς πάροιθε λέξομαι

I shall not be called Heracles, glorious in victory, as I was before. (581-2)

The word καλλίνικος is one laden with praise and carries with it the full extent of Heracles'

heroic reputation.[54] In declaring that this term can now only be applied to a successful defence of his children, he associates his rejection of his labours with an attempt to transfer that quality of glory and reputation away from them, and instead on to his domestic work. It is possible to argue that Heracles' decision to overthrow Lycus could also be a socially beneficial heroic task – ridding Thebes once again from wrongful treatment and domination, and Heracles could reasonably celebrate it as such.[55] However, this reading is deliberately undermined by the hero's own presentation of the situation. On leaving the stage, he takes hold of his children and leads them carefully into the house, focusing specifically on their welfare and even remarking:

… καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἀναίνομαι

θεράπευμα τέκνων.

I do not refuse to care for my children. (632-3)

Heracles emphasises that his children and family, not the city, are his priority here. His gnomic statement (634-6) then attempts to make this behaviour sound as reasonable and as widely accepted as his reputation for monster-slaying deeds.

However, despite the confidence and assurance of Heracles in this scene, it is clear from both the reactions of the other characters and the events elsewhere in the play that this attitude is complicated at best. To begin with, the use of gnomic statements in poetry can often

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54 Swift (2010) 132-3 with notes. καλλίνικος also occurs as a cult title for Heracles – see Sourvinou-Inwood (2003) 363; Stafford (2012) 90, 176. Heracles' use of the term also picks up on its appearances elsewhere in the play when it is used as an identifying feature which focuses on his glorious deeds – as at 49, 180, 570 (applied to his club). It is particularly important as a marker of epinician style, as at 681, and 789. See Carey (2012) 29-30. In fact even after his failure to save his children Heracles will still be called καλλίνικος, contrary to his claim here, even by himself at 961 and by the chorus at 1046. (See below)

55 As elsewhere at 50, 265 and 568-70, where Heracles' victory over the Minyans is noted as a great service from Heracles to the people of Thebes.

be seen as an acceptable claim to an authoritative position, backing up an argument or opinion with the strength of generally acknowledged wisdom.[56] Yet the Greek of his statement is ambiguous, "πᾶν δὲ φιλότεκνον γένος" (636) could indicate either that all mortals love children, or all mortals only love their own children. Any strength given to the more general statement is immediately undercut by Heracles' act in the next part of the play: he will kill the children he believes to be Eurystheus' offspring with relish and an excess of violence, even indicating his delight in doing so,

> ὁ δ᾽ ἠλάλαξε κἀπεκόμπασεν τάδε·
>
> Εἷς μὲν νεοσσὸς ὅδε θανὼν Εὐρυσθέως
>
> ἔχθραν πατρῴαν ἐκτίνων πέπτωκέ μοι.
>
> *He raised a warcry and boasted aloud in this way: "This is one chick of Eurystheus' dead, he has fallen to pay me back in full for his father's hostility!"* (981-3)

Heracles does not act in grim silence – he shows no qualms about killing young children, indeed he is represented by the messenger as enjoying a triumph in doing so, and thus there is clear difficulty with setting this desire and delight in child-killing alongside any statement that claims universal love between mortals and children.[57] A similar ambiguity occurs even in the statement by which he declares his intention to save his children:

> ... τῶν δ' ἐμῶν τέκνων
>
> οὐκ ἐκπονήσω θάνατον; ...
>
> *Shall I not labour against the death of my children?* (580-1)

The construction implies precisely the opposite – Heracles could also be asking if he should labour to bring about the deaths of his children and in fact given that he will end up

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56 On authoritative choral wisdom expressed through gnomic statements Swift (2010) 38-9; Calame (2013) 39-40; Foley (2003) 20-1; Segal (1997) 70; Easterling (1978) 158; Goldhill (1996) 252.

57 Padilla (1994) 293; Griffiths (2006) 73. Konstan (2007) 192 considers this issue within the wider context of ethical discussions of violence in Greek society.

accomplishing precisely that, at his hands rather than Lycus, this doubled meaning is significant.[58]

Even without taking into account the ambiguous nature of Heracles' statements, or any acts committed under a god-sent madness, there are clear problems throughout the play with the child- and family-focused attitude he attempts to claim. Unlike the glory bestowed for heroic acts, Heracles receives only mild criticism for and disappointment about his decisions when it comes to care for his family. Amphitryon remarks rather pointedly on Heracles' decision to leave his family behind in order to undertake his labours, stating,

λιπὼν δὲ Θήβας, οὗ κατῳκίσθην ἐγώ,

Μεγάραν τε τήνδε πενθερούς...

Leaving Thebes, where I had settled, and leaving Megara and his in-laws... (13-4)

It does not need stating that Heracles must have left Thebes to go elsewhere and perform labours, but Amphitryon emphasises this point in terms that make it clear he has also abandoned his family – both his father, and his wife and her family. Furthermore, when talking about the responsibilities this has left him with, he is almost scornful, calling himself a "τροφὸν τέκνων" (*"children's nursemaid"*) (45) – an extremely incongruous description for a famous warrior. It is important to remember in this regard that the labours occurring before Heracles' madness is a Euripidean innovation.[59] In other versions of the myth, Heracles does not leave his family in order to complete his heroic deeds, since they are already dead when these take place. As a result, this type of blame from Amphitryon about the negative

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58 Padilla (1994) 292. See also Gibert (1997) 255 and n40 on the discussion of the meaning here. On the parallelism between Lycus' intentions and Heracles' act Papadopoulou (2001) 116; Kraus (1998) 140-3.

59 Conacher (1967) 82 argues that this "humanises" the myth. Padilla (1994) 294 raises the interesting argument that the innovation allows for Heracles' labours to be a duty to Amphitryon, so that both Heracles' fathers in the *Heracles* have sent him to undergo dangerous trials rather than caring for him. See also Holmes (2008) 253-4.

consequences for Heracles' family of his renowned exploits is unique to the situation Euripides has deliberately created.[60] Euripides has effectively forced a situation in which Heracles' treatment of his family, even before his madness, can be called into question or even face outright blame, problematising his desire to be praised for caring for them. Furthermore, Amphitryon's comments suggest either that Heracles is disingenuous to claim that his family must come before his labours, and that all men would agree, or at the very least that Heracles' resolution is rather a case of too little too late, since clearly up until now he has prioritised his labours, not family at all. Therefore his attempt to claim a care for family as a more glorious pursuit than his previous labours is further complicated by the blame which Amphitryon introduces for this element of his identity, which contrasts rather sharply with the play's praise for his labours.

Even in the moments which are meant to show Heracles' care for and devotion to his family, there are some uncomfortable juxtapositions. Megara, immediately before the death she anticipates, describes her grief for her children by talking of the happy and hopeful lives they previously led. However, when she talks of Heracles playing with his children, it is notable that each of them is given an inheritance won by martial deeds, and the first two are lent one of his weapons or heroic tools as a toy (462-475). Perhaps this would be less concerning in the heroic age than in the rather more safety-conscious modern era, if it were not for the fact that the next time the children encounter these weapons, it will be in their father's murderous hands. This troubled connection between Heracles' children and his heroic weapons is at the heart of the conflict embodied in this play between his heroism and his

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60 Griffiths (2006) 21 notes that this innovation "allows Euripides to place Heracles firmly within a family context," but does not fully recognise that the result of this change for Heracles is not only negative in terms of the results of the madness, but also in relation to the blame to which this leaves him exposed for his regular relations with his family.

family life. Once his children are dead, he faces his weapons in full awareness of this fact, imagining that they speak to him, and remind him of how they killed his children in graphic terms

Ἡμῖν τέκν᾽ εἷλες καὶ δάμαρθ᾽· ἡμᾶς ἔχεις

παιδοκτόνους σούς...

You killed your children and wife through us, and you still hold us, your child-slaying weapons. (1380-1)

Simultaneously he recognises that to give them up means repudiating his heroics,

… ἀλλὰ γυμνωθεὶς ὅπλων

ξὺν οἷς τὰ κάλλιστ᾽ ἐξέπραξ᾽ ἐν Ἑλλάδι

But shall I strip off my weapons with which I achieved my most glorious exploits in Greece? (1382-3)

In bringing his two identities too close together, Heracles has seen the more dangerous, heroic side of him utterly destroy his priorities in a mortal, domestic world, and this conflict of what to do with the weapons represents his recognition that the two must once more be separated. In combination with what follows, his decision to bear them once more must be seen as a decision not to put aside his heroic glory as he had previously wished – effectively, the mortal and the heroic sides have clashed horribly, yet it is the heroic side which is maintained and which goes on.

Heracles thus attempts to establish for himself an identity as family-focused man, and further attempts to represent this identity as one which, like his heroic identity, can be constructed and maintained through discourses of praise. Yet even from the earliest moments of the play Heracles' attempted family-focused identity features in no such discourses of

praise. Instead it is established as problematic, only worthy of blame, even from close supporters such as Amphitryon. Furthermore, as I shall go on to demonstrate, Heracles' claims are undermined by the fact that the chorus and characters around him repeatedly insist on positioning him within discourses of praise which only succeed in constructing his identity as heroic, glorious, monster-slaying, and ignore any other aspects of his identity, such as his fatherhood, entirely. In many ways this situation imitates that found in the *Ajax*, therefore, but with a crucial difference. Ajax's conflicting identities are primarily different by degree; he wishes to be praised as the best of the Achaeans, whereas those around him seek to praise him only as almost the best. In Heracles' case the two potential positions are more distinct, although this is primarily a matter of his own apparent desire to separate them out and establish one as his primary identity while rejecting the other.

Heracles, Glorious in heroic deeds

Not only is Heracles' attempt to claim his identity as a father as replacing his heroic identity problematised, it is also openly contradicted by the identity which the characters and chorus around him seek to establish through praise. I have already discussed the ways in which praise and reputation are seen to be essential in establishing and maintaining identity, yet there are also noticeable examples of places where they are expressly privileged above family concerns, both by the chorus and by the members of Heracles' family who appear on stage. Once again, in turning to the expression of praise in the play, we see this theme carefully demonstrated throughout – at times when we would perhaps expect a focus on family or domestic matters, the precise opposite happens, and issues of glory or heroism predominate. Heracles' identity as loving father is never securely established by the discourses

of praise in which the chorus and characters position him, and instead his identity as glorious hero is repeatedly constructed against his apparent wishes.

As has already been discussed, Amphitryon is clearly concerned with his reputation for past glories, and it is notable that on two separate occasions he turns his focus to these even when it might be unexpected. The first time this happens is in what he believes will be his final goodbye to the chorus, when he expects Lycus to return and kill them. He has already called Zeus to aid Heracles' family, and made much of his service to them (339-347, and 497-502). But in his final moments, when he turns to say goodbye to the Theban elders who have shown themselves to be eager friends to the family, he suddenly drops this concern with his family, instead demonstrating that in his final farewell, his reputation and previous glory are his lingering concern,

> ὁρᾶτ᾽ ἔμ᾽ ὅσπερ ἦ περίβλεπτος βροτοῖς
>
> ὀνομαστὰ πράσσων...
>
> ὁ δ᾽ ὄλβος ὁ μέγας ἥ τε δόξ᾽ οὐκ οἶδ᾽ ὅτῳ
>
> βέβαιός ἐστι...
>
> *Look at me, the man who was once admired from all sides by mortals, famous for my deeds... I do not know anyone who has great wealth or reputation as a certain possession.* (508-12)

In his generalisation, Amphitryon asks the chorus to recognise in him not a father, husband, or grandfather, but rather someone who has himself done glorious deeds. He makes of it an essential aspect of his identity, and one which is so dominant that it can be generalised from, unlike any family-oriented aspect of his identity. In a similar way, Amphitryon demonstrates a particular focus when talking to his newly arrived son. Although he originally advises

Heracles to focus on his home, greeting his household gods and protecting his family (599-605), he actually ends up significantly delaying his son in doing so by asking prolonged questions about Heracles' previous deeds in Hades, Eurystheus, and Theseus (610-620). The effect is rather wrenching – at this time of apparent crisis, despite his own advice, Amphitryon is almost lured away from his focus on Heracles' family to dwell on his son's labours, and heroic deeds, and the fellow hero he met in accomplishing them. It is Heracles himself who forces the scene back on to his domestic focus, preventing further questions from his father by addressing his children instead (622).

It is possible to dismiss these examples as being only appropriate to the situation (Amphitryon and the chorus say farewell through mention of a shared background), or dramatically necessary (the details of Theseus and Cerberus will be useful when it comes to the end of the play), but they are accompanied by far more distinct instances of the same approach, which in combination create a noticeable pattern. Furthermore, the other examples of this pattern come from speakers with significant authority: the chorus, and the goddess, Lyssa.

The chorus are immediately identified in a role much closer to that of the authoritative public singers of Greek society,[61] rather than the more dramatically-involved roles which may be seen in such examples as the Trojan captive women in Euripides' *Troades*, or the servant choruses of Sophocles' *Electra* or Euripides' *Hippolytus,* among others. The chorus introduce themselves as

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61 Swift (2010) 1-3 and Goldhill (1996) 252-55, Henrichs (1996) on choral authority more generally. Cropp (1986) 193 notes the chorus of the *Heracles*' role in representing the wider community. See also Worman (1999) 96-7.

ἰηλέμων γέρων ἀοι-

δὸς …

An aged singer of lament. (110-1)

labelling themselves immediately as singers rather than elders or counsellors,[62] and thus imbuing their speeches both with the authority of a public chorus, and, given their focus on their old age, also with the authority of age, even if they comment on their lack of physical vigour (e.g. 107-9, 268-9).

This idea of the chorus both as authoritative speakers and as being much more closely aligned to the idea of public choral performance is maintained throughout the play, such that it is constantly drawn to the audience's attention. In lines 673-700 they give a more formalised lyric announcement of their role as singers, and more specifically, they claim:

ἔτι τὰν Ἡρακλέους

καλλίνικον ἀείδω

I still hymn Heracles' glorious victory. (680-1)

The chorus thus connect their position as singers with the function of praising Heracles and his 'victories', as in an epinician ode.[63] Furthermore, they invest that same victory ode with 'the power of right'[64] in the claim that follows shortly (694-5), in a comment which once again makes explicit reference to their ode as "τοῖς ὕμνοισιν." The chorus thus insist on emphasising their authoritative position, and tying this explicitly to their function as singers beyond their involvement in specific 'character' roles. In their next ode they similarly give great prominence to discussing their use of dance – once again highlighting their function as a

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62 Contrast Soph. *OT.* where the chorus of Theban elders are identified by Creon simply as "ἄνδρες πολῖται" (514), or *Ant.* where they are simply "σύγκλητον γερόντων" (159).

63 Rehm (1997) 53.

64 Kovacs' translation (1998) seems apt for the sense of this passage.

public chorus rather than simply a group of bystanders or similar minor characters. Moreover, the chorus insist on framing Heracles' defeat of Lycus in a similarly self-referential context of song, describing his cries as a μέλος, and turning immediately to their own celebration explicitly involving song and dance once his 'song' is silenced (760-771, 781-9). It is notable that this persistent self-awareness and insistence on representing themselves as singers presents a sharp contrast with the sailor chorus of the *Ajax*, whose only apparently meta-theatrical reference comes in a song to Pan and is not concerned with their role in representing Ajax himself.[65]

It is therefore somewhat understandable that the chorus' main focus in relation to Heracles is his praiseworthy status as a hero – as public singers, they have an important role in conveying mythical material and ideal exempla to the society they serve.[66] Furthermore, the chorus' explicit decision to sing praise songs for Heracles, means that they participate in the construction of his identity through these praise songs throughout the play, in a way which is far more direct than any comparable effect found in the *Ajax*.[67] Their first major ode is sung as a victory hymn for Heracles, describing his success in glorious labours (355-435). It is highly decorative, invoking Phoebus and the lyre at the start in a way which mimics epinician odes,[68] and describing many of Heracles' tasks with adjectives which recall gold, glory, and similarly attractive ideas (e.g. 368, 375, 386, 396, 414, etc.).[69] Futhermore, the chorus expressly

65 *Aj.* 701. Henrichs (1995) 73-5 on the 'self-referentiality' of this passage. Finglass (2011) 347 ad loc argues that this is not meant to be 'extradramatic' or to refer to the tragic chorus itself.

66 Rutherford (2012) 76.

67 See further on 'formally' marking praise discourses with the use of epinician markers, Introduction.

68 Rehm (1997) 53. On the epinician aspect of this ode as a whole Swift (2010) 124-9; Carey (2012) 28-9 and on the specifically Pindaric features Barlow (1996) 139.

69 Galinsky (1972) 61, who notes that this is the longest extant praise of Heracles' deeds in Greek tragedy. See also Bond (1981) 146; Barlow (1982) 118-20 who notes the contrast between the decorative, somewhat vague style here with the specifically physical description by the Messenger of Heracles' 'labour' in killing his

describe their song as "στεφάνωμα μόχθων", a particularly Pindaric way of referring to a praise-song.[70] It is perhaps natural to expect Heracles' labours to be considered a suitable topic for the first choral ode, often focused on mythological background, but the decorative and glorious style is especially notable here. The epinician context positions Heracles within a praise discourse which typically compares winning athletes to glorious, mythical heroes,[71] but here Heracles is himself the hero, not an athlete, so that the effect is undiluted by comparison. With this ode, the chorus draws on that generic context and identifies Heracles purely by his heroic, glorious deeds, without making any reference to family or other aspects of his identity, making his own introduction of those aspects somewhat of a surprise on his entry.

Moreover, their second choral ode (680-1), in explicitly harking back to this first ode through the comment that the chorus "ἔτι...ἀείδω" for Heracles, intensifies this effect still further. This ode celebrates Heracles' sudden return and, coming immediately after his arrival on stage and his promise to protect his wife and children, has far more reason than the first to celebrate the anticipated salvation of his family rather than his past exploits. However, the chorus instead digress into a celebration of Heracles' glory more generally, even concluding with a specific focus on his labours,

> Διὸς ὁ παῖς· τᾶς δ᾽ εὐγενίας
> πλέον ὑπερβάλλων <ἀρετᾷ>
> μοχθήσας τὸν ἄκυμον
> θῆκεν βίοτον βροτοῖς
> πέρσας δείματα θηρῶν.

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children.

70 Carey (2012) 28; Steiner (1986) 35-6.

71 Young (1971); Pavlou (2012) 96; Rutherford (2011) 110; On myths of Heracles himself providing useful exempla Graf (1993) 64 and specifically in Pindar Rutherford (2011) 110 121-2.

He is the son of Zeus: but he has fully overtaken even this good lineage in his excellence, and has laboured and made life peaceful for mortals, and slain terrible beasts. (696-700)

Rather than concluding with a triumphant statement of his ability to save his family, the chorus appear to dismiss that family entirely, naming his divine parent instead of Amphitryon, and concluding with praise of his deeds overcoming 'monsters' rather than any mention of Lycus at all. In their reference to Heracles' slayings of θηρῶν the chorus even pick up Lycus' earlier dismissive complaints that Heracles has earned a glorious reputation through killing beasts (157-8), and effectively refute them.[72] The context calls for praise of Heracles' saving his family, but the chorus instead prioritise further mention of his heroic glories, connecting this ode with their previous glorious hymn to his labours. Indeed Heracles is not identified as even being a father in this ode, only as the son of Zeus. In the same way, immediately after Lycus' death, the chorus sing a brief hymn addressed to Thebes (764-796), before concluding with a description of Heracles and his triumphs. Once again, however, they explicitly claim to be seeing proof of divinity and supermortal status in Heracles' acts (802-3), and almost dismissing Amphitryon and Heracles' mortal nature entirely – although the 'double marriage' is noted, Amphitryon is not named in this passage, and Zeus is named twice as Heracles' father (800, 803). Furthermore, rather than praise Heracles' dispatch of Lycus, the chorus actually choose to focus on the aspect of the events which is most related to his labours and least related to his family, the fact that:

ὃς γᾶς ἐξέβας θαλάμων

Πλούτωνος δῶμα λιπὼν

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72 Bond (1981) 154 also notes that the chorus sings a 'panhellenic' version of Heracles' labours. It could be also argued that a secondary effect of their doing so is to effectively support Amphitryon's earlier insistence on the wide-ranging quality of Heracles' heroic reputation.

νέρτερον.

You came out from the depths of the earth, leaving behind Pluto's home below. (806-8)

Some scholars have argued that it is this deed of Heracles' and the way the chorus praise it which causes his destruction, as it represents him breaking the bonds of mortality.[73] However, what is certainly the case is that twice when given the appropriate dramatic and emotional context in which to praise Heracles in relation to his family, the chorus reject their chance to do so, instead focusing on his labours, his divine nature, and his heroic identity. It is important to note that in the description of Lyssa's attack by the messenger, Heracles' children are named as a "χορὸς... καλλίμορφος" (925), but this chorus, intimately connected with Heracles' mortal family life, are silent for the audience, and utterly destroyed shortly afterwards – the only choral theme which ever dominates is that spoken by the chorus of the tragedy, who celebrate the heroic aspects alone.

The same persistent identification of Heracles by his heroic exploits rather than family relationships is shown by the goddess Lyssa, in her argument as to why Heracles should not be attacked by Hera. It is made clear by Iris that Heracles' punishment is intended to be one which is intensely linked with his family, when she states,

Ἥρα προσάψαι καινὸν αἷμ᾽ αὐτῷ θέλει

παῖδας κατακτείναντι, συνθέλω δ᾽ ἐγώ

Hera wants him to be bound up with kindred blood, from killing his children, and I want that too. (831-2)

However, Lyssa in her argument against the punishment entirely ignores this aspect, choosing instead to emphasis his role as a glorious hero, and his wonderful deeds,

ἀνὴρ ὅδ᾽ οὐκ ἄσημος οὔτ᾽ ἐπὶ χθονὶ

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73 Burnett (1971) 178-9; Silk (1985) 17; Griffiths (2002) 650-2.

οὔτ᾽ ἐν θεοῖσιν, οὗ σύ μ᾽ ἐσπέμπεις δόμους·

ἄβατον δὲ χώραν καὶ θάλασσαν ἀγρίαν

ἐξημερώσας, θεῶν ἀνέστησεν μόνος

τιμὰς...

The man into whose house you are sending me is hardly insignificant, either on land or to the gods: for he tamed the untrodden land and savage sea, and alone restored the honour of the gods. (849-853)

The first part of her response focuses on Heracles' widespread reputation, before she goes on specifically to address his labours. Lyssa could also have argued that slaying his own family is too harsh a punishment, or unfair on their part, but Lyssa does not mention Heracles' family at all, instead talking only of the significance of Heracles' deeds and heroism. In doing so, Lyssa effectively lends divine support to the idea that Heracles should be primarily identified with and through the praise won for his heroic deeds.[74] It is therefore not solely the chorus who add authority to the expressions of this idea by other characters around chorus, but even the divine figures involved in the play insist on reinforcing this type of identity for Heracles, above all else.

Reconstructing the Heroic Heracles

Thus several times in the play the characters and chorus reject opportunities to focus on or value Heracles' relations with his family, instead drawing attention repeatedly back to his heroic labours and his reputation. In this context, it would be odd to suggest that the ending of the play flies in the face of all of this, prioritising Heracles' mortal experiences and

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74 Lee (1982) 46-7 for the importance of Iris' and Lyssa's equal status in giving both goddesses' valid weight within the play.

sending him away to a more restrained existence in Athens. However, it is very clear from the ending notes of the play that this is not what happens. The clash between Heracles' two identities is certainly identified and discussed in the final scenes, but Heracles and Theseus both make a point of rejecting the mortal, domestic ties Heracles had briefly tried to prioritise, instead focusing on his heroic identity as a way of moving forward. In many ways Theseus in the *Heracles* plays a very similar role to that demonstrated by Teucer in the *Ajax* – both enter the stage after the outbreak of violence and identity crises of the protagonists, and both have a friendly relationship with the protagonist which enables them to attempt a reconstruction of heroic identity through praise. Yet where Teucer only succeeds in posthumously re-establishing an identity which Ajax had attempted to reject, Theseus is far more successful, and proves able to persuade Heracles to abandon death and accept the identity previously established for him by the praise discourses of the chorus and characters throughout the *Heracles*.

As with Ajax in the *Ajax*, the violence which breaks out as a result of the identity crisis Heracles experiences has had a destabilizing effect on Heracles' identity, so much so that his friend Theseus is unable to correctly identify him on his entry to the stage.[75] Theseus reveals himself as being entirely unable to recognise who Heracles is, asking Amphitryon:

… τίς δ' ὅδ' οὖν νεκροῖς, γέρον;

Old man, who is that in among the corpses? (1189)

In the descriptions which follow, Theseus and Amphitryon participate in a process of reconstructing Heracles' identity which makes him recognisable once more. This process is accomplished through their positioning him once more within discourses of praise which

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75 Holmes (2003) 263 further points out that Heracles almost does not recognise himself in the extreme "self-alienation," which causes him not to recognise the results of his actions.

celebrate his heroic identity as a monster-slayer, and leaves his identity as mortal family-focused man entirely aside. Theseus and Amphitryon therefore draw on and reiterate the same praise discourses through which Heracles' identity has been constructed throughout the play in order to perform this reconstruction. Heracles' survival enables him to participate in this reconstruction through his discussion with Theseus, and unlike Ajax he proves persuadable, even finally taking back up the praiseworthy identity he had previously tried to reject.

Amphitryon begins this process immediately in his response to Theseus' question of who Heracles is, by identifying him as:

ἐμὸς ἐμὸς ὅδε γόνος ὁ πολύπονος ὃς ἐπὶ

δόρυ γιγαντοφόνον ἦλθεν σὺν θεοῖ-

σι Φλεγραῖον ἐς πεδίον ἀσπιστάς.

That is my son, the man of many labours who came with the gods to the plain of

Phlegra, where many giants fell, as a warrior and spear-carrier. (1190-2)

Amphitryon does describe Heracles by their shared relationship, but immediately passes over it, instead referring to Heracles' labours, and then progressing to a detailed description of one of Heracles' heroic exploits as a means of identifying him to Theseus. In addition, Amphitryon continues the description of Heracles by declaring,

οὐκ ἂν εἰδείης ἕτερον

πολυμοχθότερον πολυπλαγκτότερόν τε θνατῶν

You will not learn of another more-labouring or more-wandering among mortals.

(1196-7)

The comment explicitly evokes Heracles' heroic labours in the term "πολυμοχθότερον" and establishes these as a further element of his identity by which Theseus can recognise him.

These comments may seem somewhat redundant – Theseus and Heracles have a previous relationship of which Amphitryon is already aware (619-20), and so Theseus should not need to hear more than Heracles' name to be able to answer his question. Yet in his state of absolute despair, as Theseus will later state, Heracles is 'not himself' (1414), so in taking more pains over identifying him, Amphitryon and later Theseus begin the process of revealing who that 'self' is, and who he is to be in the future, after the violent crisis in identity he has experienced.

Once Heracles is identified to Theseus, and he is able to persuade Heracles to uncover his head and speak to his friend, they begin the conversation which is often accredited with being part of Heracles' acceptance of a mortal life or lifestyle.[76] However, there are frequent hints that precisely the opposite is taking place. To begin with, Theseus describes Heracles' misery as spanning far more than just the mortal earth:

ἅπτῃ κάτωθεν οὐρανοῦ δυσπραξίᾳ

In your misery, you overtake heaven from down below. (1240)

From then on, he actively rejects Heracles' repeated attempts to continue claiming his more unheroic aspects, at the same time as he reflects the destabilisation of Heracles' identity as part of the violence he has experienced. Theseus begins his comments by remarking dismissively of Heracles' grief:

εἴρηκας ἐπιτυχόντος ἀνθρώπου λόγους

You have spoken the words of some common person. (1248)

In the face of Heracles' enduring despair, however, Theseus is forced to amend his judgement – Heracles is not simply speaking *like* some ordinary person, he has temporarily become someone other than himself, so that Theseus is forced to recognise a disjunction between the identity he expects, and the one which Heracles is displaying to him:

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76 e.g. Galinksy (1975) 65; Gregory (1977) 271-5; Yoshitake (1994) 153; Papadopoulou (1999) 305.

ὁ πολλὰ δὴ τλὰς Ἡρακλῆς λέγει τάδε;

...

εὐεργέτης βροτοῖσι καὶ μέγας φίλος;

Does the much-enduring Heracles say these things? (1250)

Is this the benefactor and great friend to mortals? (1252)

Faced with Theseus' questions, Heracles begins to re-establish his heroic identity for himself, talking of his lineage (1258-68), and dwelling on his labours and successful monster-slayings (1269-1279). However, here he is once more distracted by his desire to focus on family, and furthermore indicates that his killing of his children has undermined the identity that he had begun to re-establish, claiming that he will be unable to move in society (1281-6), and since the earth itself will reject his presence (1294-1300), that he may as well be dead (1301). In his complaints about Hera he argues that she has entirely destroyed him (1303-10). Heracles claims that the man he once was is no longer – that identity has been overturned by Hera's sending of the madness, and despite his acknowledgement of its existence, it cannot be re-established. Once he has acknowledged the previous existence of this identity, however, Theseus makes sure to have Heracles remember and continue to maintain it, asking:

οὕτως πόνων σῶν οὐκέτι μνήμην ἔχεις;

Do you thus no longer hold on to the memory of your labours? (1410)

when he would linger, and accusing:

… ὁ κλεινὸς Ἡρακλῆς οὐκ εἶ νοσῶν.

Distressed, you are not the famous Heracles. (1414)

Theseus' comment explicitly acknowledges the crisis in Heracles' identity, caused by the violent clash between his two potential subject positions.[77] He does not complain that

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77 Kraus (1998) 150 makes the interesting argument that as well as his 'heroic' self, Theseus offers Heracles various 'cult selves' to take up as his identity in the titles at 1250-1, all of which Heracles rejects.

Heracles is not behaving *like* a famous individual, rather that Heracles at this point in time *is* not his famous, heroic self. Yet Theseus does not only state this as a reflection on the situation, his remark is intended as a reproach to Heracles, and does indeed succeed in stinging Heracles to a response which recalls his own triumph in the underworld as opposed to Theseus' failure (1415-7), thus re-connecting Heracles with his heroic identity.

Theseus does not rely solely on Heracles' remembrance of his past heroic identity, however, but offers a future situation which will re-establish that identity for the future, and it is this which causes Heracles to give up on his planned death, and agree to Theseus' suggestions (1322-3). What is particularly important to note in their conversation is that Theseus at no point suggests that Heracles should have any further concern for domestic or family matters. The life he maps out for Heracles in Athens includes the important promise that,

> θυσίαισι λαΐνοισί τ᾽ ἐξογκώμασιν
>
> τίμιον ἀνάξει πᾶσ᾽ Ἀθηναίων πόλις.
>
> καλὸς γὰρ ἀστοῖς στέφανος Ἑλλήνων ὕπο
>
> ἄνδρ᾽ ἐσθλὸν ὠφελοῦντας εὐκλείας τυχεῖν.
>
> *The whole city of the Athenians will raise you up as revered with sacrifices and monuments of stone. For it is a fine crown for the citizens in the view of the Greeks to gain renown for aiding a noble man.* (1332-5)

It is clear that Theseus is not offering a simple domestic life – he talks of honours and prizes in recognition of heroism, and a life associated with that.[78] The close juxtaposition of the terms στέφανος and εὐκλείας evoke the context of praise poetry once more, so that Theseus'

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78 Walsh (1979) 306-8 recognises the public nature of the move to Athens, as distinct from the private realm Heracles failed to maintain through care for his family (306).

words here reflect the chorus' earlier epinician odes for Heracles, and tie his ongoing life in Athens into that context.[79] Furthermore, these gifts are offered in return for another heroic act which Heracles has committed – rescuing Theseus from the underworld (1336-7). Theseus presents an ongoing life for Heracles in which he continues to live and behave according to his heroic identity, and his identity as father is entirely left behind. This promise is taken up by Heracles' agreement to leave with Theseus, so that even before they reach Athens, the path they embark upon will take them back to Heracles' heroic labours – the incomplete task of delivering Cerberus to Eurystheus (1386-8).[80] This decision is even represented in the staging of the scene. Heracles makes the rather symbolic move on stage away from his family – his father is left standing on stage alone, with the bodies of Heracles' wife and children around him, once more responsible for their care (in this case their burial 1358-65), and unable to follow Heracles to his return to heroic labours and a praiseworthy life.

Heracles accepts the idea of maintaining his heroic identity when he takes up his weapons to leave with Theseus. However, even before that, he shows growing concern for this aspect of his identity, and willingness to take it up in preference to his family disasters, in his responses to Theseus' final offer. It is important to note that when he agrees to accept Theseus' gifts, he does so partly with the reasoning,

> ἐσκεψάμην δὲ καίπερ ἐν κακοῖσιν ὤν,
>
> μὴ δειλίαν ὄφλω τιν᾽ ἐκλιπὼν φάος·
>
> *I realised that although I am in the midst of troubles, I have not incurred some charge*

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79 See n12 above on the Pindaric image of epinician poetry as a crown of glory.

80 Bond (1981) 408 ad 1386-8 notes some textual issues here, and rejects these lines as an 'antiquarian's footnote'; Barlow (1996) agrees that they are 'odd'. However, Kovacs (1996) & (1998), and Diggle (1989) do not object to the lines, although both accept Wakefield's (1794) conjecture of 'ἀγρίου' to improve the sense of 1386.

of cowardice by leaving the light. (1347-8)

This is not a statement which is explicitly connected to Theseus' arguments so far, but it is a symbol of his acceptance of the heroic identity which Theseus offers and promotes instead of his mortal one. He allows concern for reputation and renown to hold sway, and it is in association with this reason that he accepts Theseus' offer to go on living as a hero in Athens. It is this reasoning which Theseus plays on in his short accusations, particularly when he argues that Heracles is not behaving like his 'famous' self (1414). Given the prominence with which reputation and renown are treated throughout the play, it is clear that this comment is not meant simply as an additional concern, but rather a return to those heroic values which have dominated throughout for many of the characters, and which Heracles tried unsuccessfully to reject when he promised instead to turn to tending to his family.

This transition is even recognised in the formal context of song which the chorus have demonstrated throughout. Immediately after Heracles' murder of his family, they attempt to put his deeds into an appropriate context through song, as they were able to do throughout with his triumphant labours. However, although they attempt to begin with two different mythological examples – the Danaids, and Procne's story – they reject both as unsuitable, and eventually appear to give up the attempt entirely, crying in perplexity,

αἰαῖ, τίνα στεναγμὸν

ἢ γόον ἢ φθιτῶν ᾠδάν ἢ τὸν Ἅι-

δα χορὸν ἀχήσω;

Alas, what groaning or wailing or song for the dead or chorus of Hades shall I sound?

(1025-7)

Heracles' acts become effectively impossible for them to sing – they cannot relate a

mythological example which is suitable, and they cannot even work out what type of sound they should make to best begin their song, suggesting and failing to take up in turn a groan, a wail, and even a chorus of Hades. Their confusion and inability to handle the situation is emphasised by Amphitryon's repeated attempts to silence them (1042-4, 1048-51, 1052, 1053-4, 1060). The chorus which was so formal and authoritative earlier on in the play is silenced and unable to perform their appropriate function in this new situation – effectively, the destruction of his family that has become the climax of Heracles' attempt to pursue domestic concerns, has made him an impossible target of song.[81] Yet with his promised rehabilitation in Athens, this too will be transformed, as the rites of honour that Theseus promises are closely related to the earlier context of praise songs within which the chorus had repeatedly positioned Heracles.[82]

It is also possible to argue that in the *Heracles* the reconstruction of Heracles' identity as solely heroic is accomplished partly through the functioning of the theme of friendship. In the past scholars have noted the importance of friendship as a potential theme when it comes to Euripides' *Heracles*,[83] but it is significant that any friendship is shown clearly only to manifest on one side of the conflict between Heracles' heroic aspects and his domestic. Amphitryon remarks repeatedly that Zeus refuses to show friendship to Heracles on behalf of his family, when they face trouble (339-47, and 498-502), and it is clear that no friendship

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81 Foley (1985) 187 and Griffiths (2006) for this silencing of the chorus.

82 As above. It is also notable in this regard that even in his despair the chorus prove unable to identify Heracles as anything other than καλλίνικον (1046) – they do not acknowledge that there is any alternative to this identity for Heracles, even while they do more explicitly recognise the family relationships involved in Amphitryon's suffering (1039-41).

83 Silk (1985) esp. 17; Papadopoulou (1999) 303-4 particularly on friendship as a communal, civic virtue; Dobrov (2001) 146.

from Zeus extends to this aspect of Heracles' identity.[84] However, Lyssa herself reveals that in contrast, Zeus has extended friendship, and has protected Heracles from the anger of Hera throughout the time when he was undertaking his heroic acts,

> πρὶν μὲν γὰρ ἄθλους ἐκτελευτῆσαι πικρούς,
>
> τὸ χρή νιν ἐξέσῳζεν οὐδ᾽ εἴα πατὴρ
>
> Ζεύς νιν κακῶς δρᾶν οὔτ᾽ ἔμ᾽ οὔθ᾽ Ἥραν ποτέ·
>
> *For before he brought to an end his painful struggles, it was necessary to keep him safe, and his father Zeus did not permit either me or Hera to do anything harmful to him at any time.* (827-829)

Similarly, Heracles, the chorus, and his family all express dismay that when his family faces trouble, he receives no help or friendship from the people of Thebes (217-228, 272-4, 551, 558-61, 568-9), other than the ineffectual support of the chorus, who, as discussed above, are more concerned with hymning his heroics than talking about or supporting this mortal side of his life.[85] However, when a friend is finally revealed, and explicitly claimed to be of the ideal kind (1404), it is Theseus, a friend who has been won through a heroic deed, and one who will return Heracles to a life of heroism.[86] Even Heracles' friendships are therefore split between his two identities – with only those connected with heroism ever shown to be effective. Euripides' Heracles is also of course shown to be more fortunate in his heroic friends than Sophocles' Ajax, since Theseus, unlike Teucer, arrives in time to prevent his death and

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[84] Mikalson (1986) 94.

[85] In this regard it is important to note, as Mastronarde (2010) 105 does, that the chorus is also left behind while Heracles goes to flourish elsewhere, without even the promise of a delayed opportunity to follow him as is given the choruses of the *Helen* and the *Iphigenia at Tauris.* Even their somewhat ineffectual connection is therefore severed as part of the reconstruction of Heracles' heroic identity.

[86] Theseus is also of course a monster-slaying hero himself, and it is significant that they share the quality of dual mortal/divine parentage which is treated as a marker of Heracles' two competing identities in the *Heracles.* Kraus (1998) 137 argues that Theseus' entrance onstage effectively doubles Heracles' through their similarities. See also Chapter 2, n7.

reconstruct a favourable, heroic identity for Heracles which he is successfully persuaded to accept.

Conclusion

Thus, like Sophocles' *Ajax*, Euripides' *Heracles* experiences a violent crisis of identity as a result of the differing types of praise he seeks and receives. Indeed Heracles establishes a far more extreme difference than that sought by Ajax, in attempting to establish for himself an identity of caring father, a position which he argues should be associated with the same praise as his heroic identity. The two identities, as in the case of Ajax, are incompatible, and Heracles' attempt to forcibly establish the 'father' identity causes an outbreak of violence which is destructive to both. Taking an approach to these plays which is focused on praise and blame therefore provides an alternative perspective to the usual interpretations of the *Heracles* which argue that Heracles' transition is from the dangerously heroic to a more mortal, appropriate type of heroism, treated by the play as a positive transition. Furthermore, the comparison of these two plays enables an exploration of the similarities between the situations of Ajax and Heracles. However, there are some differences between the treatment which appears in Sophocles' play and Euripides', which are worth briefly considering.

The case of Ajax dramatises a crisis caused by a dissonance in the degree of praise sought to that awarded. Ajax unsuccessfully seeks to be positioned with praise discourses as 'best', but this identity is still one which is still focused on military or heroic exploits among men, whereas Heracles attempts to establish his identity through discourses of praise about his role in family life, among women and children.[87] Heracles' two potential identities are more

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87 This type of distinction will also be shown to be far more dangerous where women are involved in the

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distinct than those experienced by Ajax, yet while the identity crisis which consumes Ajax results in his death, that endured by Heracles is somewhat counteracted by the more forceful and persistent praise which reconstructs the heroic identity of Heracles before his death. In this regard it is important also to note, as a substantial difference between the two explorations, the formalisation of such discourses of praise and their role in identity construction in Euripides' play. The chorus has a particularly significant role in this process in the *Heracles,* and their self-conscious acknowledgement of their role as praise-singers and use of epinician motifs is far more pronounced than anything found in the *Ajax.* The question of blame is also different for the two warriors. While Heracles faces similar questioning of his reputation and praiseworthiness as that experienced by Ajax, Heracles' criticisms come from Lycus alone, isolated by the situation of the play, and are neither as thorough nor as widespread as the communal blame endured by Ajax, which perhaps may go some way to explain why the crisis forced by Ajax is fatal, whereas that caused by Heracles is not.

In both these plays male warrior figures face identity crises caused by a failure to establish a desired identity through discourses of praise. Despite their minor variations in the treatment of this issue, both Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Heracles* demonstrate a clear preoccupation with the questions of how to deal with the process of identity construction through praise, and what happens when it fails or is problematised by the desires of the subject. It is perhaps therefore not surprising to see such issues reoccur in the case of another tragic warrior figure, the Athenian exemplar Theseus. However, as I shall go on to discuss in the following chapter, the situation for Theseus is vastly different to that discussed in relation to Ajax and Heracles. Not only does Theseus face no comparable identity crisis in tragedy, but the process of identity construction through praise seems to be presented entirely differently

production of such discourses, in Chapters 3-5.

when it comes to Theseus, across the works of both Sophocles and Euripides.

<u>Chapter Two: Unsung Hero? Theseus as unpraised exemplar.</u>

While the model of identity construction through praise has a great deal of prominence in the *Heracles* and the *Ajax*, it is not the only approach found in tragedy, nor is it a requisite for dealing with the types of male warrior or "hero" figures who move from archaic poetry on to the tragic stage in 5th-century Athens. In fact in the case of Theseus, claimed as Athens' own hero by the virtue of his role as founder and civiliser of Athens itself, this process of identity construction through praise is conspicuous by its absence, providing an interesting counterexample to the cases discussed so far.

As the hero claimed by Athens for her own, supposedly the first king of Athens' mythical democracy, Theseus might be expected to find in Athens' tragedies an unrivalled level of panegyric and praise.[1] Certainly several scholars have recognised that he plays an unusual role – persistently helpful in three of the four tragedies we have, and representing Athens in coming to the aid especially of suppliants.[2] In the last twenty years the position of Theseus in tragedy has attracted a great deal of study, both from those who consider the tragic portrayal in relation to other mythical traditions surrounding him, and from those who would see comments on contemporary politics represented in the way Theseus is portrayed.[3] Sophie Mills' work *Theseus, Tragedy and the Athenian Empire* (1997) has made the strongest case for

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1 On Theseus as Athens' 'own' hero: Mills (1997) 2-6; Walker (1995) 13-5. On Theseus as founder of Athens' democracy: Calame (1990) 259-60; Walker (1995) 35-64, 143-6; Mills (1997) 97-104; Davie (1982). Loraux (1986) 66-7 has some caveats on the idea of Theseus as 'democratic' hero.

2 For purely positive interpretations of Theseus' roles in tragedy, cf. Blundell (1989) 230-2, 248-53; Mills (1997) 160-85; Reinhardt (1979) 208. On Athens' reception of suppliants in tragedy, cf. Carter (2011); Tzanetou (2011), and Mendelsohn (2002) 15-6 on the introduction of this ideology into tragedy.

3 e.g. Michelini (1997); and for further examples see Morwood (2007) 170-1. Zuntz (1955) 155-7 strongly rejected the type of precise historical mapping present in many of these interpretations.

praise of Theseus in tragedy, arguing that the Theseus of tragedy is presented as an embodiment of all Athenian virtues, making tragedy a major contributor in the construction of a picture of Theseus that is relentlessly positive. However, many of these interpretations rely on a reconstruction of an external audience's judgement of the tragic Theseus, and a consideration of his behaviour and actions within a framework of Athenian values, as far as it can be reconstructed from other texts. This is undoubtedly a major part of understanding the presentation of Theseus, but falls short in that it does not take into account the ways in which he is judged within the plays themselves. When we consider the judgements passed by other characters and choruses on Theseus, and the praise or blame awarded to him throughout all four of the extant tragedies which appears, a far less obviously positive picture is presented. In fact, Theseus is directly awarded an unusually small amount of praise specific to himself in tragedy, when set alongside other heroic figures such as Ajax or Heracles, especially in relation to the predominantly positive roles he plays in those tragedies. Furthermore, set against this lack of directly focused praise is a rather surprising degree of blame, both explicitly directed towards him, and implied. Contrary to Mills' argument, it seems clear that if we consider specifically the role of praise and blame in forming judgements of Theseus in tragedy, a rather ambiguous picture at best is presented, and even where his role may be positive, the Athenian tragedians did not use their works to present an unqualified panegyric of the Athenian hero.

What makes the case of Theseus so unusual is that praise across all the tragedies in which he appears is never awarded to him without an ulterior motive on the part of the speaker. Often, characters and choruses praise Theseus in order to flatter and persuade him, rather than to celebrate his successes or virtues. Furthermore, even this rhetorical praise is

often laced with problematic associations and undercut by other issues in the plays, such that it is often complicated and ambiguous. Unlike Ajax or Heracles, therefore, Theseus is not presented as having his identity constructed or challenged through the praise he receives on stage, not least since this is both limited and problematic. Furthermore, Theseus is faced with an unusual level of direct and indirect blame everywhere he appears in tragedy, which is not usually recognised by interpretations of his tragic 'character'. He therefore presents a rather unique case among male warrior figures in tragedy, and one which is unexpected given his high status as Athens' favourite hero.

Praise as Persuasion

Theseus and his deeds do not of course go entirely unpraised in Greek tragedy. As discussed above, praise is often shown to be a key aspect of heroic identity for other male warrior figures in tragedy, to the point of contributing to violent and dramatic identity crises in the cases of Ajax and Heracles; thus to find no praise at all in the case of Theseus would present a dramatic contrast. Yet what makes the situation of Theseus so unusual in tragedy is that where praise for this Athenian hero *par excellence* does appear, it is rarely presented in and of itself, or seen as part of the process of constructing Theseus' identity. Instead, a great deal of the praise given to Theseus across tragedy is deployed as part of a rhetorical strategy, often aimed at persuading Theseus to perform particular acts on behalf of the speaker. Of course, Theseus faces no violent identity crisis such as that experienced by Heracles and Ajax in extant tragedy; nor is he shown in the context of his more heroic exploits.[4] Nonetheless,

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4 The *Theseus* and two *Aegeus* plays, covering Theseus' trip to Crete and defeat of Medea would presumably have featured Theseus in a more central, heroic light. On Theseus in these plays see Webster (1967) 106-7; Mills (1997) 223; Sourvinou-Inwood (1979) 56.

since he does appear in a variety of positive roles in tragedies which focus on his actions as well as those such as the *Heracles* which do not, the lack of comparable praise awarded him is unusual even outside of the destructive contexts in which it is shown in the *Ajax* and *Heracles*.

It might be expected that in the *Suppliants*, which Aristophanes of Byzantium called in his hypothesis "a celebration of Athens" we would find a great deal of praise both of Athens and of its King, who plays a central dramatic role. Certainly among scholarship there has been a great deal of praise of Theseus for his actions, and the ways in which they represent what have been considered cardinal Athenian virtues.[5] However, the praise which is actually addressed to Theseus within the play is limited, and often contains problematic associations which undercut its impact and effectiveness. Almost from the first moment he arrives on stage Adrastus and the suppliants address a great deal of praise to Theseus. However, for reasons that will become apparent, it is important to note that this praise does not actually begin before his arrival on stage – Aethra and the chorus speak only of 'her son' or describe him by name, with no special epithets or descriptions attached (5, 24, 37, 55, 60, 68).[6] It is only once he has asked the meaning of the display, and once Adrastus begins his formal plea, that the

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5   Notably Macleod (1983) 74 on pity as a cardinal Athenian virtue represented by Theseus; on pity combined with an ability to be persuaded Mills (1997) 106; and on piety Mills (1997) 148. Buxton (1982) 185-6 on *peithō* as an Athenian virtue represented by Theseus' values and behaviour in the *Suppliants.*

6   At 65 Euripides' specially-coined noun εὐτεκνίᾳ could be considered praise for her child, as in Kovacs' translation (1998) "the <u>noble</u> son you bore". However, the more straightforward reading is to read it as simply referring positively to the fact that Aethra, whose son is still alive, is considered blessed by the chorus, who contrast this status with the loss of their own sons (and thus her power against their powerlessness). Collard similarly (1975) emphasises the contrast it sets up with δυστυχίαν (cf also n. on 955). This contrast between childlessness and the 'gift' of children, rather than representing any quality of those children, is supported by its use at *Ion*. 470. Note also here the contrast between this family-focused way by the chorus and Aethra of identifying Theseus as opposed to the identifications which focus on praiseworthy deeds found in the *Heracles* (Chapter 1 above). The use of this type of identification squanders a potential opportunity to praise Theseus.

praise begins in very strong terms:

ὦ καλλίνικε γῆς Ἀθηναίων ἄναξ,

Θησεῦ, σὸς ἱκέτης καὶ πόλεως ἥκω σέθεν.

Theseus, glorious in victory, lord of Athens, I have come as a suppliant to you and your city! (113-4)

The word καλλίνικος is elsewhere in tragedy usually used to describe Heracles, and its use here evokes the great hero, both as a familiar comparison with Theseus,[7] and more generally as an exemplar of excellent heroic behaviour, and thus a superlatively praiseworthy figure.[8] Adrastus begins his statement with this description, and in fact prioritises his praise of Theseus before addressing him by his name, which comes last in the phrase. However, as will become an obvious pattern of use in this play, Adrastus' praise is not meant to be simply an overflowing of positive descriptions for Theseus, in the way that, for example, the choral odes praising Heracles in Euripides' *Heracles* might be considered. In fact, Adrastus' praise is intrinsically bound up in the intention he states, his supplication of Theseus, which forms the second half of a neat two-line phrase. Adrastus praises Theseus with the intention to persuade – partly to flatter him into agreeing to Adrastus' request, and undoubtedly partly with reference to his end goal, that Theseus will be 'victorious' in retrieving the bodies from Thebes, at which point Adrastus would be able to praise him in the same terms for this accomplishment on the suppliants' behalf.[9] As a result, unlike the praise of Heracles and Ajax

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7 Morwood (2007) ad loc and Collard (1975) ad loc both note that the term's use here may be intended to evoke this comparison. On the frequent comparisons drawn in the Ancient World between Heracles and Theseus: Barlow (1981) 3; Mills (1997) 108, 138; Connor (1970). Plutarch (*Theseus* 6-12) reflects this process in his claim that Theseus deliberately 'imitated' Heracles' great deeds – see further Ampolo e Manfredini (1988) ad loc.

8 On καλλίνικος see Chapter 1, esp. n54. But see below for the ways in which the use of this description in the *Suppliants* has more troubling associations.

9 Morwood (2007) 152 notes Adrastus' intention to persuade here.

discussed in the previous chapter, Adrastus' praise is part of establishing the identity Adrastus would like to hope that Theseus has, or perhaps would like to encourage Theseus to claim, rather than maintaining an already established identity. If Theseus is indeed the type of individual that Adrastus praises him as, then he will be able to establish the quality καλλίνικος as an aspect of his identity as a result of the actions he undertakes on behalf of Adrastus. Thus, Adrastus' praise refers not solely to Theseus' current identity, but one which he holds out before Theseus as a potential prize for being persuaded by Adrastus. This is wholly unlike the praise discourses within which Ajax and Heracles are positioned, since both of them are instead praised for identities already established as a result of their previous actions. Adrastus' focus on his goal, and his desire to make a request is demonstrated by the play to be the key aim of his statement, since it is clearly picked up by Theseus' response, which addresses him with two direct questions about what he seeks (115). With this in mind, the lack of praise involved in earlier mentions of Theseus becomes clear – before he is on stage, there is little point in attempting to flatter or persuade him by this method.[10]

This technique of persuasion-through-praise, rather than praise for aspects of an already established identity, becomes a central feature of the praise Theseus receives throughout the scene, in a way which has not been acknowledged by previous analyses of the persuasion attempted by Adrastus and the chorus of Theseus. The next piece of praise that comes to Theseus is again given by Adrastus, when he cries,

> ἀλλ᾽, ὦ καθ᾽ Ἑλλάδ᾽ ἀλκιμώτατον κάρα,
>
> ἄναξ Ἀθηνῶν, ἐν μὲν αἰσχύναις ἔχω
>
> πίτνων πρὸς γόνυ σὸν ἀμπίσχειν χερί,

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10 See Introduction for a brief discussion of the widespread awareness in Greek culture of the power of praise or blame as a motivating factor.

[πολιὸς ἀνὴρ τύραννος εὐδαίμων πάρος]·

ὅμως δ᾽ ἀνάγκη συμφοραῖς εἴκειν ἐμαῖς.

But, most mighty man in Greece, king of Athens, although I hold it to be shameful, to be falling on the ground and grasping your knees with my hands, [an old man, who was formerly a fortunate king]: nonetheless I must give way to my disasters. (163-167)

Once again the praise is directly combined with Adrastus' appeal, in this case even with the physical act of supplication, making the two aspects entirely combined.[11] Similarly, this praise too focuses both on Theseus' status as king of Athens, and on praise which represents him as valiant, and thus on his potential to be victorious in fighting or battle, something which foreshadows the role Theseus will actually have to play to fulfil Adrastus' appeal. Similarly Adrastus praises Theseus in connection with his city when he explains why he has come to ask Athens for help, saying,

… πόλις δὲ σὴ

μόνη δύναιτ᾽ ἂν τόνδ᾽ ὑποστῆναι πόνον·

τά τ᾽ οἰκτρὰ γὰρ δέδορκε καὶ νεανίαν

ἔχει σὲ ποιμέν᾽ ἐσθλόν· οὗ χρείᾳ πόλεις

πολλαὶ διώλοντ᾽, ἐνδεεῖς στρατηλάτου.

Only your city could undertake this labour: for it sees pitiable things clearly, and it has you, a young, noble chief: in need of which many cities have been utterly destroyed, through wanting such a general. (188-92)

Again Theseus is described in terms which emphasise potential in battle, particularly in the reference to other cities lacking such a 'στρατηλάτης'.[12] It is perhaps not surprising therefore

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11 Thus readings such as Morwood (2007) ad loc which recognise only Adrastus' emotion and 'respect' in this address do not give sufficient weight for the intended persuasive purpose of this type of praise in Adrastus' speech.

12 Burian (1985) 132 identifies Adrastus' "flattery" as the Argive's attempt to sway Theseus through political

that when Adrastus' request is originally rebuffed, he gives up on his praise, going almost in entirely the opposite direction when he complains about Theseus' response (253). However, the chorus take their cue from his original tactic, crying,

πρός <σε> γενειάδος, ὦ φίλος, <ὦ φίλος>,

ὦ δοκιμώτατος Ἑλλάδι <γαίᾳ>,

ἄντομαι ἀμφιπίτνουσα τὸ σὸν γόνυ

καὶ χέρα δειλαία, ...

...

μηδ᾽ ἀτάφους, τέκνον, ἐν Κάδμου χθονὶ χάρματα θηρῶν

παῖδας ἐν ἡλικίᾳ τᾷ σᾷ κατίδῃς, ἱκετεύω.

By your beard, friend, <friend>, most excellent man in <the land of> Greece, I beg you, embracing your knees and hands, wretched me... do not, child, look away in your prime of life, and leave our sons unburied in the land of Cadmus, a delight to wild beasts, I beseech you. (277-283)

In precisely the same way as Adrastus, the chorus closely entwine their praise with their supplication, and focus particularly on praise which indicates what they expect of Theseus.[13]

As a result, none of the praise that Theseus receives in the early part of the play is delivered unencumbered – both Adrastus and the chorus use it purely as a method of persuasion. Furthermore, it is this same, unusual technique that Aethra develops as her focus in her own attempt to persuade her son, although her approach is slightly different. Rather

considerations.

13 Burian (1985) 134 prioritises the chorus' appeal to pity as their main tactic of persuasion, and does not recognise their simultaneous attempt to take up a tactic of praise in service of persuasion. It is notable that although both Theseus (288) and Aethra (293) recognise the pitiable situation of the mothers, he refuses to be persuaded by this (292-4), partly based on a lack of fellow-feeling – see further on Theseus' 'detachment' Gamble (1970) 386-93; Hesk (2011) 134-5 on neither Aethra nor Theseus being persuaded by pity.

than attempting to persuade strictly through direct praise, she addresses how Theseus will be undeserving of praise if he does not do what is asked – and this approach, unlike that of Adrastus and the chorus, is successful. Her discussion of the rewards Theseus would win for himself is specifically framed in terms of the types of prizes usually closely involved with praise poetry. She says,

> ἐρεῖ δὲ δή τις ὡς ἀνανδρίᾳ χερῶν,
>
> πόλει παρόν σοι <u>στέφανον εὐκλείας</u> λαβεῖν
>
> *Someone will say that out of unmanliness you remained hands-off, instead of seizing a crown of glory for your city.* (314-5)

Theseus picks up her reference immediately, commenting,

> … πολλὰ γὰρ δράσας καλὰ
>
> ἔθος τόδ᾽ εἰς Ἕλληνας ἐξεδειξάμην,
>
> ἀεὶ κολαστὴς τῶν κακῶν καθεστάναι.
>
> οὔκουν ἀπαυδᾶν δυνατόν ἐστί μοι πόνους.
>
> τί γάρ μ᾽ ἐροῦσιν οἵ γε δυσμενεῖς βροτῶν,
>
> *For having done many fine deeds I have declared this kind of habit to Greece, always to appoint myself a punisher of evil deeds.. Therefore it is not possible for me to refuse labours. For what will hostile mortals say about me?* (339-343)

Both show great concern over what will be said about Theseus – and therefore, in combination with Aethra's imagery of winning a crown or garland – indicate that their concern is whether he will win praise or blame for his choice of how to deal with Adrastus.[14] With his reference to his previous deeds, and the reputation they have won him across Greece, Theseus furthermore explicitly connects the issue to his reputation for heroics. Aethra's approach of persuasion through reference to praise is successful where Adrastus and the

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14 On imagery of praise as crowns or garlands, see Chapter 1, n12.

chorus were not partly as she manages to hold before Theseus the promise of winning more praise rather than relying on praise for the deeds he has already accomplished. Yet Aethra also takes the technique further than Adrastus or the chorus, by not only promising praise if Theseus does help the Suppliants, but combining this with the threat of blame if he does not. Not only does she warn him that he must continue to win more praise in order to maintain his identity of heroic and praiseworthy, therefore, she also demonstrates how fragile this type of identity is, and that it can be undermined if his deeds do not continue to win further praise. It is this point that Theseus reflects with his (worried) reference to maintaining the reputation and identity established by praise for his earlier heroics. Effectively, Theseus' and Aethra's conversation here discusses some of the issues at stake in the situations which Heracles and Ajax face, as Theseus prioritises his reputation and earned praise as part of publicly establishing his ἔθος, his customary practice, which he claims can be recognised as part of his typical identity by the Greeks, as something which they can 'always' associate with him. Theseus further recognises the dangers of destabilising that identity through earning blame rather than praise. Yet where Ajax and Heracles attempt to force the issue, Theseus sensibly backs down and takes the course which promises praise that will confirm his traditional heroic identity.[15] Furthermore, even if this conversation reflects the issues faced by Heracles and Ajax, it remains notable that it takes place within a context of persuasion, in which Aethra appeals to praise and the threat of destabilising blame specifically in order to prevail upon

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15 Goff (1995a) 71-4 gives a useful analysis of the roots (maternity and ritual) of Aethra's authoritative speech, as well as her concern with articulating an Athenian identity in the process persuading Theseus (76-8). I would further argue however that it is not solely Athens' identity which is represented as being at stake in the rhetoric Aethra deploys, but also Theseus', and it is this which he takes up as his primary concern in his response to her. See also, McClure (1999) 263 on Aethra's speech being sanctioned by her involvement in public ritual. McClure also notes that Aethra's speech, since it is addressed to her son, should be seen as reasonably authoritative and neither transgressive nor even especially public except appropriately where she discusses ritual. Hesk (2011) 130-3 discusses Aethra's speech in relation to a specifically Athenian concern with *euboulia.*

Theseus, in a way which does not apply to Heracles or Ajax in their own plays.

Thus even though the *Suppliants* opens with a great deal of praise for Theseus, and further discussion of ways in which he can win more praise, all of it is focused on persuasion rather than praise alone. It is perhaps also relevant to note here that when the chorus responds to Theseus' promise of aid, they have returned to calling him simply 'the king' (ἄναξ 367), abandoning their earlier flowery phrases once the cause has been won. In this passage the subject of their praise is rather the city, when they cry,

καλὸν δ᾽ ἄγαλμα πόλεσιν εὐ-

σεβὴς πόνος χάριν τ᾽ ἔχει

τὰν ἐς αἰεί.

A pious labour is a beautiful ornament for cities, and gains gratitude forever. (373-4)
The 'labour' which Theseus had previously agreed to (342) is here transferred to the city as a source of glory. However, this statement comes as the chorus' response to Theseus' need to seek agreement from the city. It is therefore important to recognise that even if they cannot address the city directly, the chorus here nonetheless addresses its praise not to Theseus, who has already agreed to their request, but to the city as a whole, in the hope of persuading the assembly.

Of course, the ancient description of the *Suppliants* does not actually describe it as an encomium of Theseus – it is called an encomium of Athens, instead. Theseus' close ties to Athens are exploited throughout the tragedies, with the city also receiving a detailed degree of praise. As discussed above, however, this praise for the city is also often deployed as a type of persuasion, as by the chorus when Theseus claims that he must convince the city in the form

of the assembly to help them. This type of persuasion through praise of the city is furthermore not limited to the *Suppliants,* but also appears in the *Oedipus at Colonus.* The longest period of explicit, uncomplicated praise for a place in the play is actually focused on the deme of Colonus (668-718), and while Theseus has connections established in mythical tradition both to Athens itself and to Troezen,[16] he does not share the same closeness with Colonus, which has its own eponymous founder-hero.[17] When it comes to Athens, rather than Colonus, however, the characters in the *Oedipus at Colonus* show the same willingness to use praise purely to persuade or manipulate as the characters in the *Suppliants*. Particularly notable in the praise of Athens in this play is its use to set a standard of behaviour which Oedipus believes the chorus and Theseus must live up to, as in his comments on Athens' fine reputation to the chorus,

> τί δῆτα δόξης, ἢ τί κληδόνος καλῆς
>
> μάτην ῥεούσης ὠφέλημα γίγνεται,
>
> εἰ τάς γ᾽ Ἀθήνας φασὶ θεοσεβεστάτας
>
> εἶναι, μόνας δὲ τὸν κακούμενον ξένον
>
> σῴζειν οἷας τε καὶ μόνας ἀρκεῖν ἔχειν;
>
> …
>
> … σὺ μὴ κάλυπτε τὰς εὐδαίμονας
>
> ἔργοις Ἀθήνας ἀνοσίοις ὑπηρετῶν,
>
> *What then becomes of a reputation, or what is useful about beautiful fame that streams*
>
> *away in vain, if they say Athens is god-fearing, and that she alone is the kind of city*

16 See on Theseus and Troezen Walker (1995) 11-2 on the theory that the Theseus myth was adopted by the Athenians from the Troezenians, which he disputes: 12, 14-5. On the later representations of the early parts of Theseus' story with Theseus as Troezenian 'outsider' also 84-113.

17 Colonus is himself explicitly mentioned as the founder of the deme at 59, making it impossible to assume that he is to be ignored, and Theseus is here meant to replace him in significance. On Colonus/Athens and this ode Allison (1984) and Blundell (1993) are particularly useful discussions.

who can save a maltreated foreigner and ward off that mistreatment? … You, don't

cloud over fortunate Athens by helping in unholy deeds. (258-83)

Oedipus' focus on the fame of Athens and her reputation also invokes the things for which she was most praised, at least in the eyes of the Athenians, her protection of suppliants.[18] However, the context of this praise is once again persuasion of the kind which Adrastus applied in the *Suppliants*, and more specifically, Oedipus indicates that praise from others can be shown by him to be undeserved, if the chorus do not do as he wishes. In fact his statement is entirely concerned with praise from others, rather than containing any direct praise from Oedipus himself, and even this he declaims as potentially undeserved.[19] Furthermore, Antigone refers to the land in similar terms when she cries,

ὦ πλεῖστ᾽ ἐπαίνοις εὐλογούμενον πέδον,

νῦν σοὶ τὰ λαμπρὰ ταῦτα δεῖ φαίνειν ἔπη.

Oh land most celebrated with praise, now it is necessary for you to show that these

shining words are true. (720-1)

Here the requirement for Athens to demonstrably earn the praise given is made entirely explicit, so that Antigone's words have the effect of underlining the effect introduced by Oedipus earlier.[20] The point becomes that Athens could be deserving of a great deal of praise, but must earn it and show itself to be so, rather than simply that Athens should be or is praised.[21] As with Megara's arguments in the *Heracles*, and Aethra's in the *Suppliants,*

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18 On Athens and suppliants see n2 above.

19 This type of hyper-aware distinction between praise given and praise deserved appears elsewhere in tragedy – it is on this basis that Amphitryon and Lycus argue in the *Heracles* (see above, Chapter 1). In Sophocles' *Trachiniae* Deianira makes a similarly deliberate distinction between Heracles' fame and praise from others and her own opinion – see below Chapter 3.

20 Segal (1981) 376 argues that this reference is partially metapoetic, and requires Athens to enact (through drama) the praise which poetry (including odes found in drama) awards it.

21 The same type of argument is also made by Creon at (728-34, 747-9), where he praises Athens in order to persuade Theseus to give Oedipus up, and in Oedipus' response to Creon (1003-1013), which praises Athens

Antigone and Oedipus refer to past praise and reputation as a way of establishing an identity which must be maintained by particular acts – just as Megara and Amphitryon must maintain Heracles' praiseworthy identity by dying nobly, so must Theseus give in to Oedipus' requests to maintain Athens' praiseworthy identity, and by extension, his own.[22] Yet in the case discussed in the *Heracles*, there is no suggestion that Heracles' reputation could be proved undeserved; indeed, this is precisely what Amphitryon argues successfully with Lycus. In the *Oedipus at Colonus*, the presentation of reputation and identity is made more fragile; by not living up to Antigone's or Oedipus' expectations, Oedipus claims that Athens' reputation could be judged to be 'in vain', her fame 'clouded', and even previous praise demonstrated to be false. Thus the use of praise and reputation is far more weighted here, and simultaneously shown to be, itself, significantly more fragile than the praise given to Heracles which forms a similar standard for Megara and Amphitryon. Oedipus and Antigone not only refer to this praise only to use it in persuasion, undermining its impact, they also call it into question at the same time, thus making it impossible to read such comments as being uncomplicated panegyrics of Athens which reflect well on Theseus.

The use of praise in relation to Theseus in these plays therefore presents a stark contrast with the situations found in the *Ajax* and the *Heracles*. In both the *Ajax* and the *Heracles* concerns of being praiseworthy were used to motivate behaviour, but praise was not held out so explicitly as a prize for preferred behaviour. Furthermore, there is plenty of praise

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in order to persuade Theseus not to! Buxton (1982) 137-8 notes Creon's use of flattery in what seems to be persuasion but turns out to be deceit.

22 Hesk (2012) 169 notes that it is Theseus' arrival and promise to help Oedipus that stir the chorus to "express their Attic values and identity" at 668-719, as part of the very close connection which the play develops between Theseus and Athens or Attica. The patriotism of the chorus is only introduced by the appearance of Theseus, so that it is a reaction as much to him as to the land itself. See further Dhuga (2005) on the interesting status of the chorus of the *OC*.

of both Ajax and Heracles in their respective plays which does not conform to this motivation for use, which is intended rather for the construction of their heroic identities after the crisis these face, or as rather straightforward celebration of their heroic deeds. Theseus is unusual on both fronts, therefore. Praise both of him and of Athens is deployed far less subtly in these plays in order to persuade him to undertake specific acts, and there is very little praise awarded to him which does not possess this ulterior motive. Moreover, as I shall go on to show, much of the praise given to Theseus in the *Suppliants* and *Oedipus at Colonus* is complicated by problematic associations or undercut by the context within which it appears, creating a further contrast with the praise given to both Heracles and Ajax, and the identities constructed for them as a result.

Problematic Praise

It is possible to trace this ambiguous use of praise even in the apparently uncomplicated praise Theseus receives for his successful deeds during the *Oedipus at Colonus*. Once Theseus has rescued Oedipus' children from Creon's kidnapping, Oedipus claims:

> ἐπίσταμαι γὰρ τήνδε τὴν ἐς τάσδε μοι
>
> τέρψιν παρ᾽ ἄλλου μηδενὸς πεφασμένην.
>
> ...
>
> … ἐπεὶ τό γ᾽ εὐσεβὲς
>
> μόνοις παρ᾽ ὑμῖν ηὗρον ἀνθρώπων ἐγὼ
>
> καὶ τοὐπιεικὲς καὶ τὸ μὴ ψευδοστομεῖν.
>
> *For I know that the delight revealed to me from these girls is due to no other... and I*

121

have found piety and what is fitting and a lack of falsehoods in you alone among

mortals. (1121-7)

Praising the same rescue, Antigone calls Theseus "ἄριστον ἄνδρα" (1100), a term associated

in Homer with the utmost in heroic exploits,[23] and Oedipus repeats the term upon his death,

"τὸν πάντ' ἄριστον Θησέα" (1458). By rescuing Oedipus' daughters, Theseus has apparently

fulfilled his promise to protect Oedipus (1039-41, 1145-6), and so in many ways the level of

praise given is warranted. However, even in this relatively uncomplicated situation, this

apparently high praise is not presented unambiguously. It is notable in Antigone's statement

that as well as including her praise for Theseus she indicates the fact that while she can

describe him thus, her father cannot necessarily join in on her judgement, as he cannot

actually see Theseus,

<div align="center">ὦ πάτερ πάτερ,</div>

τίς ἂν θεῶν σοι τόνδ᾽ ἄριστον ἄνδρ᾽ ἰδεῖν

δοίη...

Oh father, father, who of the gods could grant that you see this, the best of men?

(1099-1100)

A reference to Oedipus' blindness here is not perhaps entirely surprising – it is, after all, partly

the reason why Oedipus has needed Theseus to protect his daughters on his behalf. However,

in combination with Oedipus' answering praise of Theseus above, stating the excellence

which he has <u>found</u> in Theseus, Oedipus' inability to see Theseus becomes rather more

meaningful. In fact, throughout the play, Oedipus has demonstrated several times an inability

to judge Theseus' qualities – including in direct relation to the qualities he praises here, such

as that of truthful speech. Early on in the play, when Theseus agrees to receive Oedipus'

supplication and offer his own help in protecting Oedipus from Theban assailants, there is a

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23 Nagy (1979).

curious exchange when Oedipus makes it clear that he is doubtful how far he should trust the Athenian king:

> Ο: εἰ σοί γ᾽ ἅπερ φὴς ἐμμενεῖ τελοῦντί μοι.
>
> Θ: θάρσει τὸ τοῦδέ γ᾽ ἀνδρός· οὔ σε μὴ προδῶ.
>
> Ο: οὔτοι σ᾽ ὑφ᾽ ὅρκου γ᾽ ὡς κακὸν πιστώσομαι.
>
> Θ: οὔκουν πέρα γ᾽ ἂν οὐδὲν ἢ λόγῳ φέροις.
>
> Ο: πῶς οὖν ποήσεις;
>
> *O: If you abide by what you've said to me, and accomplish it.*
>
> *Th: Be a man of good courage: I will not betray you!*
>
> *O: Indeed I will not make you trustworthy through an oath, as if you were wicked.*
>
> *Th: You would get nothing more than by my word.*
>
> *O: So how will you act?* (648-52)

Oedipus' doubt about Theseus' agreement to help is clearly expressed – and his reference to seeking a binding oath to prevent any potential dishonesty, along with Theseus' slightly touchy rejection of such a tactic,[24] makes it clear that he does not necessarily believe that Theseus' speech is as truthful as he will later claim in his praise.[25] Furthermore, even when Theseus has indeed 'carried out' his pledge as promised, Oedipus continues to seek further assurances from him for the rest of the play, such that it is impossible to suggest that Oedipus' praise follows a change of opinion as a result of Theseus' success. Directly following his praise of Theseus, Oedipus finishes,

> σὺ δ᾽ αὐτόθεν μοι χαῖρε καὶ τὰ λοιπά μου

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24 On Theseus' irritability in dealing with Oedipus' doubts see below.

25 Fletcher (2015) 118-9 argues that Theseus' ability to make authoritative speech acts, an ability which Oedipus shares, gives his word the force of an enacted oath. See also Markantonatos (2007) 171-5; Sommerstein (2014) 100-3 shows how any request for an oath here would be an insult, whereas later, once Oedipus moves beyond the mortal realm, Theseus' pledge can be sought and demonstrates a stratifying of their statuses.

μέλου δικαίως, ὥσπερ ἐς τόδ᾽ ἡμέρας.

But you, greet me from that very spot and for the rest, take care of me justly, just as

you did up to this day. (1137-8)

It is strange that Oedipus does not seem to consider his praise of Theseus' previous deeds, which he recognises again at the same time as this request, evidence that he does not need to ask Theseus again to protect him in the future, although Oedipus' vulnerable position is undoubtedly highlighted by his frequent requests for protection.[26] Effectively, however, his praise of Theseus comes to seem almost hollow, as while he claims to see piety, fairness, and truthfulness in Theseus, he does not trust these qualities to be sustained long enough to need no further reminders from him. In fact earlier in the play, when Theseus leaves the stage and entrusts Oedipus to the care of the chorus (652), Oedipus explicitly states the same doubt to them, suggesting a lack of belief in the effectiveness of Theseus' charge. What is particularly noticeable here is that Oedipus does not cast his doubts in terms of asking the chorus if they will help him, but gives a far more negative impression,

ἰὼ ξένοι. τί δράσετ᾽; ἦ προδώσετε,

κοὐκ ἐξελᾶτε τὸν ἀσεβῆ τῆσδε χθονός;

Oh guest-friends, what will you do? Will you betray me, and not drive out the ungodly

man from this land? (822-3)

The extremely negative tone of his language – asking if they will betray him rather than simply asking what they will do to help, suggests once again that Oedipus has no trust at all in Theseus' assurances, nor in the explicit pledge to help given by the chorus (726-7). He makes this point even more strongly when the issue of his son's supplication comes up, and this time Theseus even rebukes him for his lack of faith:

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26 Repeated at 276, 284-5, 457-60, 625-6, 648, 653, 724-5, 822-3, 1137, 1206-7, at which point Theseus finally rebukes Oedipus for asking 'twice' (somewhat understating the issue) and Oedipus does not ask again.

O: μόνον, ξέν᾽, εἴπερ κεῖνος ὧδ᾽ ἐλεύσεται,

μηδεὶς κρατείτω τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς ποτε.

Θ: ἅπαξ τὰ τοιαῦτ᾽, οὐχὶ δὶς χρῄζω κλύειν,

ὦ πρέσβυ. κομπεῖν δ᾽ οὐχὶ βούλομαι· σὺ δ᾽ ὢν

σῶς ἴσθ᾽, ἐάν περ κἀμέ τις σῴζῃ θεῶν.

O: Only, guest-friend, if ever that man should come here, do not ever let him get mastery over my life.

Th: I need to hear such things only once, not twice, old man, I do not want to boast, but know that you are safe, if some one of the gods keeps me safe. (1206-1210)

Theseus' loss of patience is understandable – Oedipus reveals that regardless of what positive things he may have said only 100 lines before, his trust in Theseus is not as thorough as that praise might suggest, and therefore invites us to question how sincere or lasting his previous praise truly was. Furthermore, Oedipus' praise, like Adrastus' in the *Suppliants*, is of course intrinsically linked to the services he expects from Theseus. Not only is it shown to be rather uncertain in foundation, as Oedipus does not seem entirely sure that it is correct, but it is also delivered with a motivation beyond simple praise, unlike, for example, the choral praise of Heracles in the *Heracles*. Furthermore, in Oedipus' frequent apparent recantations of his earlier praise for Theseus, expressed through his doubts that the qualities he praises in Theseus are actually consistently present, Oedipus almost appears to consider that Theseus' stable identity remains divorced from the praise he gives him and is somehow otherwise to be described, in a way which does not ever occur in the *Ajax* or *Heracles* for their respective heroes.

Of course, it is worth briefly noting here that Oedipus' concerns turn out not to be

totally unfounded – although Theseus does succeed in retrieving the two kidnapped daughters, their abduction only happens at all because he leaves the stage to return to a sacrifice, and so is unable to protect them. In addition, this too undermines a further aspect of Oedipus' praise for Theseus: his claim to have found Theseus ultimate in piety. Theseus' frequent absences to return to his aborted sacrifice are indeed considered by scholars to be a sign of his piety,[27] yet while this piety might be admirable in the abstract, in the situation of the play it results in Oedipus' daughters being abducted, thus adding a rather doubtful note to Oedipus' praise of this virtue.[28] Furthermore, in his debate with Creon it becomes further evident that the promise of protection Theseus gave to Oedipus was baseless:

ὅμως δὲ κἀμοῦ μὴ παρόντος οἶδ᾽ ὅτι

τοὐμὸν φυλάξει σ᾽ ὄνομα μὴ πάσχειν κακῶς.

I know that my name will guard you whether I am present or not, so that you don't

suffer badly. (666-7)

Theseus accuses Creon that in behaving with violence against the people under his protection,

καί μοι πόλιν κένανδρον ἢ δούλην τινὰ

ἔδοξας εἶναι κἄμ᾽ ἴσον τῷ μηδενί.

And you thought that my city and men were slaves or something, and that I was equal

to nothing at all! (917-8)

It is clear that Theseus contrasts the way Creon thought of Athens and its king with the way he

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27 As Kelly (2009) 114; Mills (1997) 179 who also argues that Theseus' willingness to abandon the sacrifice shows an Athenian 'enlightened' piety balanced with recognition of other matters which took priority, although if this is the ideal, then it might be argued that perhaps Theseus should have also been enlightened enough to leave the sacrifice for good in order to stay with Oedipus and protect him; Ahrensdorf (2008) 187; Markantonatos (2007) 109, 130.

28 Dhuga (2005) 344 rightly notes in an interesting discussion of the chorus' authority, that Theseus throughout the play only enters the stage on the chorus' summons. Thus it could be argued in relation to Oedipus' and Creon's concern with Theseus' frequent absences that in fact absence is his 'natural' state, and his presence and agency is rather subordinated to theirs.

should have – that is, the way Theseus expected his name would serve in protecting Oedipus. Theseus' expectation is that his public reputation and identity should have been recognised by Creon and thus should have protected Oedipus, and in claiming that Creon set Theseus' very self as 'nothing', seems to realise that no such identity has been established. It could even be possible to argue that Theseus' objection that Creon set him as 'nothing' reflects the slipperiness of Oedipus' praise for Theseus in this play. Shown through the expressions of his doubts mentioned above, Oedipus has failed to establish a firm heroic identity for Theseus through any consistent and unambiguous awarding of praise, and even more notably, no other character in the play has participated in any such process either.[29] Creon's identification of Theseus as 'nothing' could be considered justified, therefore, as no alternative, heroic Theseus has been convincingly established for his identification.[30]

Once Theseus is back on stage, he makes a noticeable effort to make up for his previous absence – Theseus volunteers himself particularly as Creon's escort (1028), and even Creon comments rather pointedly,

οὐδὲν σὺ μεμπτὸν ἐνθάδ᾽ ὢν ἐρεῖς ἐμοί·

While you are here nothing you say to me is blameworthy. (1036)

His emphasis on Theseus' current location and physical presence set up a rather obvious contrast with the king's previous absence, and the falseness of Theseus' assumption that even

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29 The chorus, Megara, Amphitryon and Lyssa all contribute to such a process for Heracles, and for Ajax, Tecmessa, the chorus, Ajax himself, Teucer and Odysseus do the same, so that even when there are competing discourses of blame presented on stage, there is nonetheless a persistent process of identity construction through praise taking place.

30 It is also worth briefly noting here that this accusation from Theseus reflects the blame for Ajax spoken by Menelaus and Agamemnon in their explicit attempt to reject his praiseworthy identity – Menelaus (Soph. *Aj.* 1231) openly calls Ajax 'μηδὲν' in an assessment which is vehemently rejected by Teucer, since the dead Ajax, unlike Theseus here, cannot reject it for himself. (Chapter 1 above)

while 'absent' he could serve as protection. Creon shows clearly that nothing less than his presence will suffice. In this regard the case of Heracles provides a particularly illuminating contrast. When Heracles was absent from the stage in Euripides' *Heracles*, the chorus, Megara and Amphitryon all still maintained their faith in his praiseworthy identity, and the chorus indeed continued to participate in the maintenance of that identity. That faith was further justified by Heracles' return and defeat of Lycus, so that his praiseworthy characteristics remained consistent and stable even in his absence. Creon's failure to recognise Theseus' praiseworthy identity in his absence, and Oedipus' doubt that it can remain consistent, therefore contrast sharply with that faith, and demonstrate that the lack of praise for Theseus has indeed contributed to his identity as praiseworthy being less stable and consistent than that of Heracles, despite the fact that Theseus experiences no dramatic crisis of identity as Heracles does.

Aside from these brief, somewhat unstable, descriptions, there is very little explicit praise of Theseus in the *Oedipus at Colonus*. The only other clearly positive description used of him by the characters is the term γενναῖος, used in connection with Theseus twice by Oedipus (569, 1042), and once by the Messenger (1636). Within this play, however, the word γενναῖος functions primarily to establish a concord of similarity between Theseus and Oedipus, who is the only character otherwise described as noble. Scholars have noted that the description is used to demonstrate their equality and level of understanding, rather than as a type of praise specific to Theseus.[31] A particularly conspicuous absence in this lack of praise is the chorus of the *Oedipus of Colonus*, who both in their ode celebrating Colonus and their description of the battle to rescue Ismene and Antigone manage to abstain entirely from directly praising Theseus. This chorus' difference from the *Ajax's* chorus of sailors, with their

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31 Kelly (2009) 112. See also Burian (1974) 415, Walker (1995) 188.

dependence on Ajax, might be expected, but the refusal to praise Theseus here strikes a sharper contrast with the chorus of the *Heracles*. Both of these choruses are groups of elder men from the local community, thus represent a similar demographic. Yet where the chorus of the *Heracles* play an instrumental role in constructing Heracles' identity through praise, the chorus of the *Oedipus of Colonus* do nothing of the sort.[32]

In Euripides' *Heracles,* while Theseus again has a positive role in reconstructing Heracles' heroic identity and thus preserving his life,[33] only one comment is made directly praising him: Heracles' famous comment,

… τοιόνδ᾽ ἄνδρα χρὴ κτᾶσθαι φίλον.

Such is the type of man it is necessary to gain for a friend. (1404)

It is notable that in such a praise-focused play there is no other praise given to Theseus at all, but as the main focus of this play is Heracles, this is perhaps not enormously surprising.[34] In the *Hippolytus,* as perhaps would be expected, he is considered predominantly unworthy of praise. Thus the only other extant play in which there is any specific, extended praise of Theseus is Euripides' *Suppliants.*

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32 Dhuga (2005) 337-9 argues that the *OC's* chorus' Athenian nature and different approach to old age makes them inherently more active and influential than the similar chorus in the *Heracles* – I would suggest further that the choruses have deliberately been positioned as more and less effectual in order to adjust the relative statuses of their respective protagonists. The chorus of the *Heracles'* ineffectual attempts to help Amphitryon and Megara make the situation for these two more desperate, and Heracles' arrival and role as saviour considerably more glorious, whereas the chorus of the *OC* in succeeding in detaining Creon on the stage somewhat diminish Theseus' comparable triumph – he does rescue Antigone and Ismene, but does not need to rescue Oedipus as a result of the chorus' activity, and cannot therefore gain as much credit as Heracles. I would therefore disagree, as Dhuga does (2005) 342 with the view of Burton (1980) 252-3 that the chorus can do nothing without Theseus.

33 As in Chapter 1.

34 Chapter 1 above. Amphitryon does briefly praise Athens in lieu of Theseus (1405), and Theseus invites comparison of himself with εὐγενὴς mortals (1227), but other than these rather tentative examples only gratitude is expressed to or about Theseus, no direct praise.

In the *Suppliants*, as discussed above, a great deal of praise is awarded for Theseus with the ulterior motive of persuasion. Once these are set aside, the praise Theseus receives is extremely limited. The only further praise from Adrastus comes at the very end of the play, in his expression of gratitude, which speaks only of their being treated γενναῖα (1178). Otherwise, Theseus is the subject of praise from the Messenger, who describes his victories in the battle fought against Thebes, calling him "παῖδα κλεινὸν Αἰγέως" (656) and beginning the description of what in this play serves almost as his heroic *aristeia*,

κἀν τῷδε τὸν στρατηγὸν αἰνέσαι παρῆν·

And in this thing the general was to be praised: (707)

The description of this scene provides a sharp contrast with what is effectively a very similar moment in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (1044-99) – another battle which Theseus fights to fulfil his pledges to the suppliants. In Sophocles' play the battle itself is not narrated by an eyewitness, instead the chorus gives an account of their imaginings about the situation, which effectively reproduces the information given by the Messenger in the *Suppliants.* However, these different techniques provide an illuminating contrast. The chorus' imaginings are reasonably distant from the battle itself, in their description as well as the physical position the chorus holds in relation to the battle, unlike the Messenger, who has been on the battlefield. However, the level of detail the Messenger reveals, particularly in his description of Theseus' actions, goes beyond simply providing more information. The Messenger relates,

αὐτός θ᾽ ὅπλισμα τοὐπιδαύριον λαβὼν

δεινῆς κορύνης διαφέρων ἐσφενδόνα

ὁμοῦ τραχήλους κἀπικείμενας κάρᾳ

κυνέας θερίζων κἀποκαυλίζων ξύλῳ.

He, taking up the Epidaurian weapon, a terrible club, he chucked it about on either

side of him, snapping necks and reaping helmeted heads with the club. (714-7)

This has been discussed simply in terms of an archaic or Homeric level of violence –

connecting this description of Theseus with similar moments from the *Iliad* to reflect a similar

degree of greatness.[35] However, the context that this scene appears within suggests that this

cannot be a moment of glory for Theseus, despite the fact that the Messenger claims it is

'praiseworthy'. Throughout the play there is an unusually strong focus on the troubles and

woes brought by war, with several characters contributing some blame towards the violence

and loss it involves.[36] The Theban Herald begins the argument, claiming that peace is better

than war, and emphasising slavery as a consequence (486-93). The Herald seeks to persuade

Theseus not to engage with Thebes, so some bias would be expected. However, immediately

after the news of Theseus' success has come, along with its heavy emphasis on the battle,

Adrastus cries,

… ὦ κενοὶ βροτῶν,

οἳ τόξον ἐντείνοντες †τοῦ καιροῦ† πέρα

καὶ πρὸς δίκης γε πολλὰ πάσχοντες κακά,

φίλοις μὲν οὐ πείθεσθε, τοῖς δὲ πράγμασιν·

πόλεις τ᾽, ἔχουσαι διὰ λόγου κάμψαι κακά,

φόνῳ καθαιρεῖσθ᾽, οὐ λόγῳ, τὰ πράγματα.

Oh destitute mortals, who stretch out their bows to shoot beyond the mark and rightly

suffer a great many troubles, you are not persuaded by your friends, but only by

deeds: cities, you could turn around your misfortunes through words, but you destroy

them through slaughter, and not through words. (744-9)

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35 Mendelsohn (2002) 182-4, Collard (1963), 178–82.

36 Kitto, (1939) 222-3, Greenwood (1952).

This is not his only comment of this kind: when he has given the speeches of praise for the dead warriors, he comments further,

… ὦ ταλαίπωροι βροτῶν,

τί κτᾶσθε λόγχας καὶ κατ᾽ ἀλλήλων φόνους

τίθεσθε; παύσασθ᾽, ἀλλὰ λήξαντες πόνων

ἄστη φυλάσσεθ᾽ ἥσυχοι μεθ᾽ ἡσύχων.

Oh wretched mortals, why do you get spear-heads and use them against one another in murder? Stop it, stay your labours and guard your city instead, and rest along with relaxing people! (949-52)

Mills has tried to separate these parts of the play, along with their problematic message, from the first half, with what she considers its less problematically positive presentation of Theseus.[37] However, the way these anti-war statements bracket the unusually graphic violence of the Messenger's description of Theseus' fight make it difficult to believe that these are meant to be somehow isolated from one another. Given the background of extreme loss this play presents, and these explicit arguments against war, it seems almost impossible to consider that the praise of Theseus taking such a violent role in war is meant to be considered as uncomplicated or untroubled.[38]

Even without this problem, there are issues which arise from the specific language

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37 Mills (1997) esp. 122. Contrast Burian (1985) 145 who sees Adrastus' speech as instead forming a bridge between the first part of the play with the second. Mill's separation is partly an attempt to deal with the complex question of the tone of the *Suppliants*, which has been argued to be both optimistic and pessimistic by scholars, who remain split. Zuntz (1955), Collard (1972) & (1975); Smith (1966) (although in a more qualified form than Zuntz or Collard), and most recently Storey (2008) esp. 101-4 all reject the idea that the *Suppliants* should be read as ironic and pessimistic, as argued by Gamble (1970), Fitton (1961), Greenwood (1953) and Mendelsohn (2002).

38 Thus I cannot agree with Burian (1985) 143-4 who omits discussion of this passage when he characterises the battle as showing Theseus to be an "ideal" of heroism, particularly in regard to his moderation.

used in praise of Theseus, and the concepts it evokes throughout the *Suppliants*. Even the epithet with which Adrastus begins his praise, καλλίνικος, is complicated by more than just the comparison with Heracles it invites. This epithet comes once more in the tragedy, but this time it is used by Evadne to describe her suicide over Capaneus' tomb (1059). Mendelsohn (2002) has convincingly shown the ways in which Evadne here claims the glory and praise of a male hero, in what he sees as a central part of this play's blurring of lines and categories between the genders.[39] Even if one takes a more cautious approach, it is obvious that Euripides' use of this word for both figures, particularly as it is not especially common in tragedy, is deliberately designed to draw an uncomfortable parallel.[40] Evadne's fate shows the ways in which seeking military glory can have terrible results, both in her choice to pursue her own dramatic death, and in the fate her husband faced for his boasts of intended military triumph, already referred to explicitly several times in the play (495-9, 639-40, 860-1, 934-5, 984-5, 1011). In fact Capaneus is only mentioned once without reference to his being struck by lightning. As a result his fate, and hers, as she forces them together, become intrinsically bound up with the idea of his punishment – and thus cast a rather uncomfortable light back on the only other time when the term καλλίνικος was used, and its intention. Adrastus, as discussed, used the term intending to spur Theseus on to military victory – the same kind of victory boasted of by Capaneus, which caused his disastrous end. It is a rather unpleasant connection, and thus casts a rather long shadow on the term as it is used to praise Theseus.

Furthermore, the other language used to praise Theseus, even in persuasion, demonstrates further complicated associations. Adrastus' praise of Theseus' 'youth' (190) as a

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39 Mendelsohn (2002) 203-5. See further on Evadne below.

40 Forms of καλλίνικος appear only 32 times in extant tragedy, including fragments, with all but one of these instances in Euripides. It occurs once in a fragment of Aeschylus (fr. 190), probably in an address to Heracles.

strong leader of Athens introduces a term which is presented elsewhere in the play almost entirely as a form of blame: νεανίας. Theseus himself in his response to Adrastus' appeal gives a tirade against the young, νέοις, (232-7), before the chorus responds with the rather surprising idea that it is natural for young men to make mistakes:

> ἥμαρτεν· ἐν νέοισι δ᾽ ἀνθρώπων τόδε
>
> ἔνεστι· συγγνώμην δὲ τῷδ᾽ ἔχειν χρεών.
>
> *He has made a mistake. But this happens among young men; and there is a need for*
>
> *forgiveness for this.* (250-1)

It is not entirely clear whether the figure the chorus considers to have erred is Theseus or Adrastus, but the central point, that it is natural for young men to make mistakes, is not very flattering for someone praised for his youth very shortly before this comment.[41] An even stronger remark is made by the Herald in his argument with Theseus, when he comments dismissively,

> γνώσῃ σὺ πάσχων· νῦν δ' ἔτ' εἶ νεανίας.
>
> *You will learn by suffering: for now, you are still young.* (580)

This comment neatly combines the two ideas presented so far – both that the young have much to learn and therefore make mistakes, as the chorus says, and Theseus' association with youth in the play. Indeed the connection between Theseus and youth could be extended. Walker has rightly emphasised the irony present in Theseus' criticisms of youth when he himself was predominantly associated with youth in Athenian mythical tradition.[42] Even without this extension of the concept, it is clear that within the *Suppliants* youth is something with a great deal of potential for criticism and blame, rather than praise, and so Adrastus' use

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41 Collard (1975) ascribes the description to Adrastus, but Morwood (2007) n. on this line, demonstrates well the problems with this reading.

42 On the association between Theseus and youth in Athenian thought: Mastronarde (2010) 284, Mendelsohn (2002) 149, Calame (1990) esp. 191.

of it to praise Theseus in the start of the play is rather complicated.[43]

It is not solely the specific praise given to Theseus in the *Suppliants* however, which carries such potentially negative connotations, and make this praise problematic. Throughout the play, a problematic discourse around praise is established, in a way which does not apply to such an extent in either the *Heracles* or the *Ajax.* The existence of this discourse can be seen in the question of the funeral orations given to the Seven dead Argives. It has been noted by scholars that those funeral orations contain a great deal of problematic material, both in their relationships with the traditional myths surrounding these figures, and in relation to the language of the rest of the play.[44] Commentators, most notably Helene Foley, have represented the scene between Theseus and Adrastus as an attempt by Theseus at suppression of (archaic), female lamentation in funeral ritual, which is then replaced with praise focused on a civic discourse.[45] The process is not entirely successful, particularly given that Adrastus' speech is immediately followed by the dramatic suicide of Evadne, and the laments of the mothers and their grandsons.[46] Furthermore, the praise which Adrastus gives to the Seven in his apparently

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43 See further Burian (1985) 143.

44 Collard (1972) 39-53 and Zuntz (1955) 23 are among the few scholars to read the speech 'straight'. Michelini (1994) 242-5 argues that despite its presentation as a public funeral speech the speech cannot be considered a typical Athenian *epitaphios* as it discusses individuals rather than a collective, but notes the similarities in content with an *epitaphios.* Loraux (1986) 108-8 provides some justification for Euripides' inclusion of what she still considers to be an *epitaphios* which focuses on individuals. Fitton (1961) 437-40 argues that the speech is intended to be ironic. Burian (1985) 147-8 attempts to read Adrastus' speech as a genuine, but failed, attempt at praise.

45 Foley (2001) 36-44. Loraux (1986) 48-9, unlike Foley, argues that this process, once undertaken by Theseus' intervention in Adrastus' lamenting is a success, and that the Argive mothers are appeased by the praise speeches and integrated back into the 'civic' sphere. Similarly Vinh (2011) 331-2 argues that the praise speech 'replaces' the chorus' farewell songs.

46 Foley (2001) 42-44; Mastronarde (2010) 81-2 similarly argues that the mothers' laments juxtapose a personal, antipatriotic grief with the civic patriotism of the public funeral speech and the attitudes of Aethra and Theseus in the play.

civic funeral speeches seems to be so far divorced from the traditional representations of those praised, as well as apparently divorced from the reality of the play, that scholars have suggested that they are parodies of Athenian funeral speeches.[47] This is the only episode of praise in the play which does not contain an ulterior motive such as persuasion, and given that it is Theseus who has instructed Adrastus to give the speech (839-43), it is also sanctioned by the most authoritative figure of the play. Yet as the praise given is so incongruous as to be disturbing, the process of praising itself is cast into doubt, particularly given that there is no comparable, positive example of praise in the play. In the *Suppliants,* praise is used to persuade, or once Adrastus gives his *encomia* for the Seven, seen only to be problematic, disingenuous, and troubling.

Furthermore, the case of Evadne discussed above does not only cause problems with the vocabulary of praise used to describe both her and Theseus, but also with praise for heroic deeds in and of itself. Evadne's suicidal speech is littered with explicit claims to seek glory and praise from those around her, and to be compared to other women. She declares her intention to gain "εὐκλεΐας" (1015) through her suicide, claims to be "καλλίνικος" (1059), claims that her victory will put her above all women (1061), and expressly connects that victory as being one of "ἀρετή" (1063).[48] Scholars such as Mendelsohn (2002) and Chong-Gossard (2008) have shown that Evadne's speech severely complicates the relationship

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47 Foley (2001) 38; Fitton (1961); Smith (1966). Collard (1972) 44 objects to the idea that variations from the traditional presentations of the Seven should lead to suspicion, citing the tragedians' freedom in interpreting myth – but this objection doesn't fully acknowledge the inconsistencies that still exist within presentations of the figure of Capaneus internally to the play itself.

48 Evadne's claim to be judged on her ἀρετή in fact makes her comparable to Heracles and Ajax, both of whose plays represent concerns with what this value is and how it can be demonstrated by traditionally 'heroic' mythical warriors. On Heracles and ἀρετή see Galinsky (1972) 15; Halleran (1986) 177; Adkins (1966); Swift (2010) 142-5 and on the *Ajax* Winnington-Ingram (1980) 36-69; Blundell (1989) 94-103; Blake-Tyrrell (1991) 66-72.

between such qualities and the usual restrictions of gender found in Athenian society.[49] However, there is another aspect to Evadne's unusual behaviour which deserves further consideration. Chong-Gossard has rightly pointed out that Evadne's behaviour is designed to be public, and to transmit her newly heroic reputation back to Argos through a network of women's gossip.[50] Moreover, Evadne is explicit about her desire to win glory and a fine reputation, established through the praise of others, in a way which no other character in the *Suppliants* is. While Theseus expresses a desire to avoid blame, he does not express any similar eagerness to seek praise, so that Evadne is the sole example of this, more usually male, pattern of behaviour. Evadne's explicit, disturbing seeking after praise and glory would make an extremely uncomfortable comparison with any other character to indulge in the same behaviour.[51] In combination with the subdued praise of the Seven found in the unusual funeral scene, this scene adds to an impression of praise and seeking glory as problematic and un-Athenian, even un-male, in sharp contrast with the picture presented in both the *Ajax* and the *Heracles*, where the male protagonists' concern with praise, glory and reputation as an essential aspect of their identity is presented as reasonable and understandable.

It might be possible to argue that this rejection of the heroic-style seeking after praise, which is treated as more reasonable in the *Heracles* and *Ajax,* represents a chronological shift of perspectives, particularly given the shift depicted in the appropriate manner of dealing with the heroic dead shown in the *Suppliants*.[52] The argument would suggest that in later,

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49 Mendelsohn (2002) 202-8; Chong-Gossard (2008) 220-2. On Mendelsohn's argument related specifically to *kallinikos* see also above.

50 Chong-Gossard (2008) 224-5.

51 Indeed Hesk (2011) 131-2 rightly notes that even Theseus' more cautious decision to be swayed by Aethra's promise of glory must mirror Adrastus' disastrous decision to attack Thebes for similar reasons, casting suspicion on Theseus' decision to do the same.

52 Since this does reflect a chronological shift in Athenian society: Loraux (1986) 49; Foley (2001) 40; Jouan

democratic times, the archaic method of establishing male, heroic or warrior/athletic identities through praise poetry was becoming unpopular, partly as the state-approved genre of funeral *epitaphioi* took its place.[53] Unfortunately any chronological argument involving the *Suppliants* becomes problematic as its date is so uncertain.[54] Furthermore, while the early date of the *Ajax* and late date of the *Oedipus at Colonus* could support such an argument, if, as is most commonly argued, the *Suppliants* is dated to the mid-twenties BC, it would have been performed nearly 10 years before the *Heracles,* which demonstrates no such reluctance to draw upon traditions of praise poetry in dealing with questions of identity.

If the difference is not chronological, it may nonetheless tie into a changing attitude to praise and praise poetry in democratic Athens. Given that Theseus, unlike Heracles or Ajax, has persistent strong connections to Athenian democracy,[55] he could have been considered a specifically unsuitable target for identity construction through praise. However, while there is no tragedy extant which presents a great deal of praise for Theseus, there are two odes by Bacchylides (Bacch. 17 & 18) which do precisely that. Furthermore, as well as being described through a great deal of decorative praise,[56] Theseus is directly connected with Athens by Bacchylides (18.60), such that it should not be suggested that it is a non-Athenian

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(1997) esp. 226.

53 Loraux (1986) 44-9. On the general trend of secularization and politicisation of speech and poetry in this period Detienne (1996) 100-116.

54 On dating the *Suppliants* see Storey (2008) 23-8; Morwood (2007) 26-30.

55 Although it is important to note that some scholars (most notably Hall (1997)) have argued that the process undergone by Heracles in the *Heracles* is partly related to the need to adapt and claim him for translation to Athens, and it is notable that, based on the number of shrines and sanctuaries, worship of Heracles was extremely widespread in Athens itself. On Heracles being claimed by Athens see: Hall (1997) 102; Dobrov (2000) 146; Griffiths (2006) 102-3. On shrines to Heracles: Stafford (2012) 92, 167-70, 176-80.

56 17: 47, 113-4, 122-4. 18: 17-9, 46-61.

Theseus celebrated in this way.[57] Of course Bacchylides was not a tragedian, and worked earlier than both Sophocles and Euripides,[58] such that even if we cannot claim a chronological shift in attitudes to heroic identity construction through praise, we might suggest that such a shift does take place specifically in relation to Theseus, or even perhaps that it is a generic shift, in relation to portrayals of Theseus in tragedy. Yet making such an argument on the basis of the rather limited selection of extant tragedy featuring Theseus would be risky – given the subject of Bacchylides 18 may well have been mirrored in either or both of the *Aegeus* plays, they might also have contained some similar language in praise-focused descriptions of Theseus.

There is also a further complicating factor to be considered when portrayals of Theseus in tragedy are considered. Theseus is not subject to the same process of identity construction through praise as that undergone by Ajax and Heracles, but he is instead repeatedly and explicitly positioned in discourses of blame alongside the problematic praise discussed above.

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57 Fearn (2007) 242 claims that although the ode was performed in Delos, not Athens, "the mythological and ideological force of Bacchylides 17 is strongly Athenian". See more fully Fearn (2007) 242-56. It is interesting to note that the second ode featuring Theseus is one of the most dramatic dithyrambs to survive: Fearn (2007) 193. Burnett (1985) 114-7 further argues that Bacchylides' ode 18 (& 16) are specifically (and unusually) tragic in character.

58 Although not a great deal earlier if Bacchylides was active primarily during the first half of the 5th century BC (Cairns (2010) 4), and dating Bacchylides' odes is tricky at best – see Cairns (2010) 1-4 for a good discussion of some possibilities for dating the odes. Furthermore, while Bacchylides was not writing drama, his 'dramatic' dithyramb 18 seems to have been intended for public performance in Athens, indeed probably at a state-sponsored festival, and is therefore not enormously removed from the performance context of tragedy. Burnett (1985) 117.

<u>Blaming Theseus</u>

Of course the main source for blame of Theseus is Euripides' *Hippolytus*, in which Theseus plays a rather negative role, and suffers for it. To some extent the comparison with Heracles and Ajax provides Theseus with an unfortunate disadvantage in this regard, as while both of them similarly perform negative acts in their own tragedies, neither of them manages to kill any figure as prominent as Hippolytus, and Heracles is exonerated by madness, Ajax to some extent by his offended honour, while Theseus in the *Hippolytus* can claim no such excuse. Mills has again attempted to exonerate Theseus from the worst aspects of this play, based partly on a perceived distance between the Theseus of this play and the 'Athenian' Theseus of others.[59] To address the first part – Mills' claim is similar to Edith Hall's argument that the setting of *Hippolytus* in Troezen means the deliberate distancing of Theseus from Athens, and thus a disconnection being created between the blame he deservedly earns in this play, and his praiseworthy status as hero of Athens.[60] This is a reasonable argument, but in both accounts insufficient attention has been paid to the extent to which the play works against too great a disconnection by frequent reminders that even if Theseus is not in Athens when the drama takes place, that is his land, and an essential part of his identity. Even at the very start of the play, Aphrodite deliberately notes that the seeds of the drama began in Athens, not Troezen at all. She comments that Hippolytus came to "Πανδίονος γῆν" (26) for the mysteries, that Phaedra build a temple in honour of her love, "πέτραν παρ᾽ αὐτὴν Παλλάδος" (30), and makes the connection between Theseus and Athens especially clear when she says,

ἐπεὶ δὲ Θησεὺς Κεκροπίαν λείπει χθόνα

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59 Mills (1997) 186-7

60 Hall (1997) 103

μίασμα φεύγων αἵματος Παλλαντιδῶν

…

ἐνιαυσίαν ἔκδημον αἰνέσας φυγήν,

But Theseus left the Cecropian land fleeing the pollution from the blood of the Pallantidae... having agreed to a year-long exile from home. (34-7)

The repetition of names for Athens, the central location of Phaedra's temple, on the Acropolis, with ties to Athena, and the reference to Athens as Theseus' home all make close and explicit the ties between Theseus and Athens, making it difficult to conclude that the audience could hear this litany and then promptly disassociate the hero from his usual city. Furthermore, the reference to the killing of the Pallantidae at this stage of Theseus' life is an innovation by Euripides – it more usually comes as part of Theseus' original integration into Athens, and the securing of Aegeus' throne on his own behalf and as such can be considered an integral part of his move from Troezenian bandit-killer to Athenian civic hero, and king.[61] The introduction of the Pallantidae thus recalls Theseus' arrival in Athens, and succession to its throne, and so in combination with the other references to Athens discussed above, makes it difficult to consider Theseus as being entirely separated from his usual connections with the city.

Furthermore, the references to Athens as Theseus' natural homeland are sustained throughout the play – they cannot be dismissed simply as an unusual feature of the goddess' prologue. The chorus in their opening ode call Theseus, "τὸν Ἐρεχθειδᾶν ἀρχαγόν" (151-2), and Phaedra, despite her own obvious connections to Crete,[62] wishes for her children,

… ἀλλ᾽ ἐλεύθεροι

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61 Plutarch *Theseus* XIII. Mills (1997) 193 attempts to distance this murder from his role as king of Athens, but this is rather strained given that traditionally their murder comes as a result of their challenging his right to the succession: Calame (1990) 74-6.

62 *Hipp.* 156, 337-9, 372, cf. Reckford (1974).

παρρησίᾳ θάλλοντες οἰκοῖεν πόλιν

κλεινῶν Ἀθηνῶν, …

But may they live as free men in the city of the famous Athenians, flourishing in the

right to free speech. (422-3)

The emphasis on free speech is a particularly Athenian virtue, and with this comment Phaedra makes it clear that not only her husband but also her sons, and thus the family with which this play is partly concerned, are essentially connected to Athens.[63] Even more significantly, the exile Theseus pronounces upon Hippolytus, a central aspect of his blameworthy behaviour in this tragedy, is explicitly framed as an exile primarily from Athens. Theseus in his sentence cries,

ἔξερρε γαίας τῆσδ᾽ ὅσον τάχος φυγάς,

καὶ μήτ᾽ Ἀθήνας τὰς θεοδμήτους μόλῃς

μήτ᾽ εἰς ὅρους γῆς ἧς ἐμὸν κρατεῖ δόρυ.

Go away out of this land into exile as quickly as possible, and don't come back to

either godbuilt Athens or the boundaries of any other land which is ruled by my spear.

(973-5)

The exile from Athens is mentioned first, with the extension to Theseus' other lands added as a further point, rather than the central aspect. Hippolytus emphasises precisely the same aspect in his response, when he complains,

… φευξούμεσθα δὴ

κλεινὰς Ἀθήνας. ἀλλὰ χαιρέτω πόλις

καὶ γαῖ᾽ Ἐρεχθέως· ὦ πέδον Τροζήνιον,

I shall go into exile from famous Athens. But farewell, city and land of Erechtheus. Oh

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63 On free speech as an essential part of Athenian democracy, Hdt. 3.80.6 and Thuc.2.37.1, Ober (1989) 296, Griffith (1966) 115–38.

land of Troezen. (1093-5)

Troezen, the land Hippolytus will technically be leaving, is dismissed to the end of the third line of his complaints, with Athens coming first, both as the place he declares his exile to be from, and in his dramatic farewell – as well as recalling the same connection with Erechtheus that the chorus had previously mentioned. Furthermore, his death as explicitly characterised as a loss for Athens, both by the Messenger (1158), and even more dramatically by Theseus in his final remarks,

> ὦ κλείν᾽ Ἐρεχθέως Παλλάδος θ᾽ ὁρίσματα,
>
> οἵου στερήσεσθ᾽ ἀνδρός.
>
> *Oh famous territory of Erechtheus and Pallas, what a man you have been deprived of!*
>
> (1459-60)

The text is unfortunately uncertain here, but the descriptions of Athens as Erechtheus' land and the reference to Pallas Athena would seem to recall the descriptions of Aphrodite in the prologue – thus concluding a sustained thread of references to Athens running throughout the entire play, which should make it impossible to consider that the Theseus of the *Hippolytus* has somehow been entirely separated from the 'expected' portrayal of Athens' national hero.

It therefore seems unreasonable to separate out the Theseus of the *Hippolytus* and the blame he receives as somehow unconnected to the Athenian Theseus of other tragedies. This is not to say that the Theseus who appears in various tragedies should be treated as being the same character – it has long been recognised that tragedies and the characters represented within them stand as self-contained units, or at most connected elements of a single trilogy, and to expect close similarities in character or attitude from one to another is unrealistic.[64]

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64 Thus I would be very cautious about interpretations such as that of Michelini (1987) 258 who suggests Euripides systematizes character traits across plays, including in presentations of Theseus.

However, in treatments of Theseus, and particularly when focusing on the blame he receives in tragedy, it is possible to see some particular characteristics presented as blameworthy across multiple tragedies, and reaching their most extreme point in the *Hippolytus.*

The first of these is Theseus' anger, considered an essential part of his error in dealing with Hippolytus. When the curse against his son has been pronounced, and Hippolytus appears on stage, the chorus cry to Theseus,

> … ὀργῆς δ᾽ ἐξανεὶς κακῆς, ἄναξ
>
> Θησεῦ, τὸ λῷστον σοῖσι βούλευσαι δόμοις.
>
> *Let go your evil anger, lord Theseus, and deliberate on what kind of things would be better for your house!* (900-1)

The chorus places heavy emphasis on Theseus' response being one of anger, which they criticise as being "κακῆς", and their words make it clear that they believe this anger is causing him to harm his house rather than do what is best. Their persuasion is unsuccessful, and the speech that follows from Theseus to his son demonstrates his rage in the strong language he uses (936-80). Hippolytus too recognises the source of this speech, and remonstrates against it,

> πάτερ, μένος μὲν ξύντασίς τε σῶν φρενῶν
>
> δεινή·
>
> *Father, the temper and rigidity of your heart is terrible.* (983-4)

Indeed even Theseus recognises the contrast between the anger of his response and the attitude of Hippolytus, although he does so rather scornfully,

> ὃς τὴν ἐμὴν πέποιθεν εὐ<u>οργη</u>σίᾳ
>
> ψυχὴν κρατήσειν,...

> *He is persuaded that he will overcome my spirit through his gentleness of temper.*
>
> (1039-40)

Even the Messenger who brings the news of Hippolytus' fate, and speaks in his support (1173-7, 1243-6, 1250-4), despite saying that he is only a slave, 'advises' Theseus not to be 'savage' to his son, before Hippolytus returns to the stage. Furthermore, once Artemis has revealed the truth to Theseus, Hippolytus remarks that even if Theseus had not spoken a curse,

> … ἔκτανές τἄν μ᾽, ὡς τότ᾽ ἦσθ᾽ ὠργισμένος.
>
> *You still would have killed me, since you were provoked to such anger.* (1413)

The emphasis on Theseus' anger as one of the key points of his error is therefore clear throughout the play, presenting a damaging picture of Theseus' inability to master his inappropriate anger and thus harming Hippolytus in error.

Given this background, it is notable that in two of the other extant plays in which Theseus has an important role, the *Suppliants* and the *Oedipus at Colonus*, he makes comments blaming anger as a problematic quality, despite not remaining entirely clear of it himself. In the *Oedipus at Colonus*, references to Theseus' anger are more limited, as with Oedipus on stage, characterised as someone with a "θυμὸς ὀξύς" by his daughter (1194), it would be difficult to represent Theseus as someone especially angry in comparison, without his betraying a rather alarming type of behaviour. However, as has been mentioned above, Theseus does demonstrate irritation (at best) with Oedipus' tendency to question his word.[65] Furthermore, in dealing with Creon Theseus appears to make a conscious effort to moderate his anger, since he comments,

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65 On Theseus' irritability or impatience when dealing with Oedipus: Jebb (2004) ad 1208 generously judges it only to be excusable; Kelly (2009) in a more nuanced reading identifies "a certain tetchiness" both here and at 652-6 in defence of his honour, and labels this as typical of an autocrat (115), drawing reasonable parallels between Oedipus and Creon in that regard.

εἰ μὲν δι᾽ ὀργῆς ἧκον, ἧς ὅδ᾽ ἄξιος,

ἄτρωτον οὐ μεθῆκ᾽ ἂν ἐξ ἐμῆς χερός·

If I came to such anger with him as he deserves, I would not set him free from my land

unharmed. (905-6)

Nonetheless, in his desire to avoid that he "γέλως δ' ἐγὼ ξένῳ γένωμαι τῷδε," (903-4) there is

more than a hint of anger – particularly in the suggestion that he will seem 'foolish', and this

comment coming immediately prior to a deliberately stated desire to restrain anger present the

topic as more of a concern than it might otherwise have been.

The issue of anger is treated similarly in the *Suppliants*. The Herald, in his argument

with Theseus, first warns against it,

σκέψαι δέ, καὶ μὴ τοῖς ἐμοῖς <u>θυμούμενος</u>

λόγοισιν, ὡς δὴ πόλιν ἐλευθέραν ἔχων,

σφριγῶντ᾽ ἀμείψῃ μῦθον ἐκ βραχιόνων.

Think about it, and don't, angry at my words, respond with overfilled words from a

small start, saying that your city has freedom. (476-8)

The Herald's warning is rather similar to the chorus' injunction to Theseus in the *Hippolytus* to

restrain his anger and consider the matter and his actions more carefully, and it seems

appropriate here – the Herald's words manage to rouse both Adrastus, who begins with abuse,

and even Theseus to some anger. Morwood has rightly noted that Theseus' interruption of

Adrastus here (513) is the most abrupt and rude in extant tragedy, and his language is

extremely brusque.[66] His response to the Herald is equally sharp – he begins by remarking,

οὐκ οἶδ᾽ ἐγὼ Κρέοντα δεσπόζοντ᾽ ἐμοῦ

οὐδὲ σθένοντα μεῖζον, ὥστ᾽ ἀναγκάσαι

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66 Morwood (2012) 560.

δρᾶν τὰς Ἀθήνας ταῦτ᾽·

I do not know that Creon is my master, nor that he has greater strength than me, so

that he can force Athens to do these things. (518-20)

The tone becomes rather more moderate as the speech goes on, but it seems clear that Theseus is not entirely free from the anger the Herald had warned against. At the end of the exchange, Theseus remarks,

οὔτοι μ᾽ ἐπαρεῖς ὥστε θυμοῦσθαι φρένας

τοῖς σοῖσι κόμποις· ἀλλ᾽ ἀποστέλλου χθονὸς

λόγους ματαίους οὕσπερ ἠνέγκω λαβών.

περαίνομεν γὰρ οὐδέν.

You will not stir up my heart to anger with your boasts: but leave the land and take off

your empty words that you brought with you. For we are finishing nothing. (581-4)

The very necessity of making the denial seems to belie its content once again – particularly given the strength of the command he then gives to the Herald, along with his insult towards the herald's speech.

In neither play is the theme of Theseus' problematic anger treated anywhere near as drastically as in the *Hippolytus*. However, the references to anger made as warnings and blame from characters who seem to recognise its potential presence in Theseus' behaviour is clear, and perhaps somewhat unnecessary given the different focuses of both the *Suppliants* and the *Oedipus at Colonus*. The consistent presentation of this trait as problematic in Theseus' case allows characters across multiple tragedies to voice blame for the same quality in his character, and thus to represent his identity as consistently blameworthy in a way which is not found in the cases of either Ajax or Heracles.[67] While both those heroes do face blame or

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67 Anger in Athenian culture is not in itself inherently problematic. Aristotle *EN* 4.5, 1125b35-1126a1 discusses

criticism, it is either unfounded (as is the case for Lycus' blame for Heracles), or in the case of Ajax, purely situational and fiercely disputed. Neither of them are subject to the same presentation of traits of their character and identity as blameworthy across multiple tragedies, and it is therefore surprising that Theseus, the Athenian hero, should be.

There is another aspect to consistencies between Theseus' behaviour in tragedy which is even more problematic, and leads to repeated blame from the characters around him – especially when it appears in its most extreme form in the *Hippolytus*. A central part of Theseus' identity in antiquity represented him as a 'punisher' of evil – particularly in his dealings with the bandits of his early exploits.[68] This aspect also becomes a prominent part of his presentation, including particularly his self-presentation, in extant tragedy. In the *Oedipus at Colonus* this quality is limited, although it may be alluded to in Theseus' words that he will return Creon's behaviour directly upon himself (907, 1025-7). In the *Suppliants,* however, Theseus explicitly claims this as part of his heroic tradition,

πολλὰ γὰρ δράσας καλὰ

ἔθος τόδ᾽ εἰς Ἕλληνας ἐξελεξάμην,

the possibility of 'virtuous anger', although this must be applied *appropriately*, and more contemporaneously to tragedy, Longley (2012) 76-77 has argued that Thucydides consistently represents anger as "irrational and damaging." Allen (2003) 76-9 has argued that Athenians valorized anger as a potential virtue in civic situations, especially when applying the law. However, she goes on to demonstrate (84-5) that while useful in the *polis*, anger is simultaneously dangerous when turned in against the family in a destructive fashion, precisely as Theseus' anger is in the *Hippolytus*. Furthermore, the persistent criticisms and reproaches, or disquieting images associated with Theseus' anger or irritation by the characters and choruses who appear with him in tragedies hardly suggests that in these contexts it can be considered a virtue. It is furthermore possible to read Theseus' repeated anger as being part of a trope of 'angry rulers' found in Greek literature – see Harris (2001) 229-32, Erskine (2015) 118. If this reading were accepted, it would add a further problematic aspect to the portrayal of Theseus' anger, as the majority of rulers portrayed this way are non-Greek, and tyrannical, often foolish rulers such as (in Herodotus) Cambyses or Xerxes.

68 Plutarch *Theseus* 11.1, and Ampolo e Manfredini (1988) ad loc, who relate this to traditional Greek thought. On Theseus as 'punisher' see also Davie (1982) 25; Mastronarde (2010) 299.

ἀεὶ κολαστὴς τῶν κακῶν καθεστάναι.

For having done many fine deeds I have declared this kind of habit to Greece, always to appoint myself a punisher of evil deeds. (339-41)

Furthermore, in his debate with the Herald he emphasises this again not only as characterising his action here, but as a part of his general temperament,

K: ἦ πᾶσιν οὖν σ᾽ ἔφυσεν ἐξαρκεῖν πατήρ;

Θ: ὅσοι γ᾽ ὑβρισταί· χρηστὰ δ᾽ οὐ κολάζομεν.

H: So did your father bring you forth to be a match for everyone?

Th: Sure, those who are outrageous: we do not punish the good. (574-5)

Theseus' actions and behaviour are characterised as a consistent trait - "I do not punish" rather than 'will not' referring to this specific action against Thebes. Furthermore, once again Theseus describes this as part of his own self-presentation, rather than something perceived by others, and the trait is again discussed in terms of punishment.

Even before addressing the *Hippolytus*, where this trait becomes most problematic, there are hints of trouble in the *Oedipus at Colonus* and the *Suppliants.* In Sophocles' play Oedipus chides Theseus for reproving him before hearing all the information, in a rather similar fashion to the way he will behave in relation to his son in the *Hippolytus*,

ὅταν μάθῃς μου, νουθέτει, τανῦν δ᾽ ἔα.

Whenever you have learnt from me, chastise me, but for now, leave it! (593)

Theseus accepts the rebuke, agreeing not to 'blame' Oedipus without further information, (595), and interestingly the next time he uses this term it is in asking Oedipus about the suppliant, whom Oedipus rejects, so that Theseus asks,

καὶ τίς ποτ᾽ ἐστὶν ὅν γ᾽ ἐγὼ ψέξαιμί τι;

And who is the man who I should blame? (1172)

In both instances therefore Theseus is judged to need assistance in apportioning blame, and making the kind of judgements which are such an important part of his usual characterisation. In the same way in the *Suppliants* Adrastus objects to Theseus' remarks about the fate he has suffered,

> οὔτοι δικαστήν σ᾽ εἱλόμην ἐμῶν κακῶν
>
> οὐδ᾽, εἴ τι πράξας μὴ καλῶς εὑρίσκομαι,
>
> τούτων κολαστὴν κἀπιτιμητήν, ἄναξ
>
> *I did not choose you to be a judge of my troubles, or if I am found to have done*
>
> *something not fine, to be punisher or chastiser of these things, lord.* (253-5)

Here not only is Theseus' judgement called into question, but also with the specific use of the term "κολαστὴν" his traditional role as punisher is explicitly rejected as being inappropriately applied to the Argives.[69] Furthermore, the issue of appropriateness of punishment is raised again when it comes to dealing with the fates of Capaneus and Amphiaraus. The Herald argues that Theseus' attempt to bury these two men sets himself against the just punishments given to them by the gods (494-505), even concluding,

> ἤ νυν φρονεῖν ἄμεινον ἐξαύχει Διός,
>
> ἢ θεοὺς δικαίως τοὺς κακοὺς ἀπολλύναι.
>
> *Now either boast that you think better than Zeus, or that the gods rightly destroy the*
>
> *wicked.* (503-4)

Although the chorus address this point by saying that the Thebans are in fact adding to Zeus' punishment, not simply upholding it (511-2), Theseus does not directly address this point,

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69 Storey (2008) 34 on the reasonable nature of this rebuke, in contrast to Theseus' not having "behaved well" in harshly criticising Adrastus. Fitton (1967) 140 similarly: "Adrastus is rightly annoyed." Scodel (1999) 139-40 argues that Adrastus may be complaining that Theseus has selected the wrong 'genre' of speech in his reply.

rather talking more generally about the injury the Thebans suffered in being attacked by the Argives, and their deaths as sufficient justice for this. Furthermore, the treatment of Capaneus later in the play continues to make the issue of this judgement contentious. Theseus makes it clear that his burial will have to be handled separately from those of the other Seven, (935-7), and Evadne's sudden appearance and dramatic death continues to keep attention fixed on this controversial figure.[70] However, the point at which Theseus' judgements in terms of Capaneus become most obviously open to questioning is during the funeral orations, when Adrastus explicitly praises Capaneus for a lack of boasting, and "εὐπροσήγορον στόμα" - giving a description which seems to present precisely the opposite picture to that upheld in mythical tradition, and which the Herald has already confirmed: that Capaneus died due to his boasting enraging the gods. Theseus does not make any further comment on Capaneus, except for making the burial arrangements, such that Adrastus' contrary depiction is allowed to stand, giving Theseus' judgement a rather questionable quality. It would not be unreasonable to have him maintain the rightness of burying even Capaneus, but the fact that to begin with he does not even address it, followed by the rather surreal praise given by Adrastus, leaves the issue with a decidedly problematic quality.

In the *Hippolytus*, these problematic aspects of Theseus' self- and traditionally assigned role as punisher become entirely destructive. The central importance of Theseus' potential for judgement is made clear throughout the play.[71] Before her trouble is even revealed, Phaedra cries,

μὴ δρῶσ᾽ ἔγωγ᾽ ἐκεῖνον ὀφθείην κακῶς.

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70 Mendelsohn (2002) 202.

71 Mills (1997) as a further attempt to exonerate him argues that Theseus is a 'minor' part of this play, which I hope what follows will demonstrate to be rather a minimisation of his role.

May I never be seen doing something wrongly against him [Theseus]! (321)

She elaborates this point further in her revelation of the depth of the situation, expressing disbelief that unchaste women can even look into the faces of their husbands (416), and further suggesting that the darkness or the house itself would seem to betray them.[72] She even specifically expresses her desire to die in order that,

ὡς μήποτ᾽ ἄνδρα τὸν ἐμὸν αἰσχύνασ᾽ ἁλῶ,

I may never be caught shaming my husband. (420)

As soon as he has heard the Nurse's words Hippolytus declares that only piety stops him from telling Theseus (658), but even so, he will make sure to be present to see how Phaedra and the Nurse manage to face him (661-2). Phaedra repeats that,

οὐδ᾽ ἐς πρόσωπον Θησέως ἀφίξομαι

αἰσχροῖς ἐπ᾽ ἔργοις οὕνεκα ψυχῆς μιᾶς.

I will not come to face Theseus with shameful deeds against me, all for the sake of one life. (720-1)

Once Theseus' harsh judgement has been pronounced, as well as expressing distress with its results, Hippolytus does also note the importance of the source of the punishment,

… δακρύων ἐγγὺς τόδε,

εἰ δὴ κακός γε φαίνομαι δοκῶ τε σοί.

This is near to being worthy of tears, if I seem to appear wicked to you. (1070-1)

Thus the weight given to Theseus' judgement, as well as to its significant results, is developed throughout the play until the curse is pronounced. Theseus himself represents his punishment of Hippolytus, particularly the curse, as being an act of justice, declaring to the Messenger upon hearing of its results,

εἰπέ, τῷ τρόπῳ Δίκης

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72 Goff (1990) 2-12.

ἔπαισεν αὐτὸν ῥόπτρον αἰσχύναντ᾽ ἐμέ;

Tell me, in what way did the stick of justice strike him for shaming me? (1171-2)

Furthermore, Theseus himself explicitly connects his judgement of his son with his previous career, particularly in relation to his traditional punishments of the bandits between Troezen and Athens. He says,

εἰ γὰρ παθών γέ σου τάδ᾽ ἡσσηθήσομαι,

οὐ μαρτυρήσει μ᾽ Ἴσθμιος Σίνις ποτὲ

κτανεῖν ἑαυτὸν ἀλλὰ κομπάζειν μάτην,

οὐδ᾽ αἱ θαλάσσῃ σύννομοι Σκιρωνίδες

φήσουσι πέτραι τοῖς κακοῖς μ᾽ εἶναι βαρύν.

For if having suffered this I am to be defeated by you, Isthmian Sinis will not again witness that I killed him but boast that it was in vain, and the Skironian rocks by the sea will not say that I am a burden to the wicked. (976-80)[73]

The audience, of course, knows that Theseus' role as punisher here has led him to a fatal mistake, but even beyond this recognition, several of the characters in the tragedy explicitly blame him for his actions.[74] The chorus give an immediately condemnatory response to his pronouncement of the curse,

ἄναξ, ἀπεύχου ταῦτα πρὸς θεῶν πάλιν,

γνώσῃ γὰρ αὖθις ἀμπλακών· ἐμοὶ πιθοῦ.

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73 Walker (1995) 113.

74 Mills (2002) 213 nonetheless argues that it is a Euripidean innovation that Theseus uses the first wish, which makes his decision less blameworthy, since he could not know that the wish would be successful. I would not agree that some uncertainty over whether he would successfully achieve his attempted murder of his son makes Theseus less culpable for that murder - see Kohn (2008) for a thorough analysis of the 'three wishes' motif, which is not so favourable to Theseus. It is notable that, as Kohn points out (380-1), the tradition of Theseus being granted wishes by Poseidon *never* appears without his using one to kill his son.

Lord, wish this prayer back away, by the gods, for you will learn that you have erred!

Trust me. (891-2)

Theseus does not accept their warning, and instead completes his sentence, condemning Hippolytus to exile as well.[75] The chorus are not the only one to criticise Theseus' judgement – the Messenger who relates Hippolytus' fate gives the dramatic closing statement,

δοῦλος μὲν οὖν ἔγωγε σῶν δόμων, ἄναξ,

ἀτὰρ τοσοῦτόν γ᾽ οὐ δυνήσομαί ποτε,

τὸν σὸν πιθέσθαι παῖδ᾽ ὅπως ἐστὶν κακός,

οὐδ᾽ εἰ γυναικῶν πᾶν κρεμασθείη γένος

καὶ τὴν ἐν Ἴδῃ γραμμάτων πλήσειέ τις

πεύκην· ἐπεί νιν ἐσθλὸν ὄντ᾽ ἐπίσταμαι.

So I at least am a slave of your house, lord, but I will never be able to believe such a thing, that your son is wicked, not if all of the race of women should hang themselves and fill with writing all the pine on Ida. Since I know that he is noble. (1249-54)

The messenger's decision to explicitly contradict Theseus, despite his acknowledgement of the unusual nature of this sentiment from a slave, and the extreme exaggeration of his case, makes it clear quite how much he blames Theseus' failure to judge correctly. In fact even Hippolytus, after he has realised the full situation, queries the appropriateness of Theseus' punishment, claiming that he would have killed his son for a similar crime rather than simply exiling him (1041-4). Of course, Hippolytus has not heard the curse, only having been told by

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75 cf. Parker (1983) 191-5 on the social/historical situations involving the combination of curses and exile – Theseus' double punishment is paralleled in the historical evidence for such sentences for the especially polluted, making it not an obviously unreasonable choice to enact both exile and a curse in combination. Thus Rabinowitz (1993) 175, in her otherwise extremely interesting and valuable discussion of the relationship between Theseus and Hippolytus, is a little harsh in her judgement of the addition of exile to the curse as excessive. See Goff (1990) 75 on the two punishments, curse and pronouncement of exile, as performative utterances with a similar source.

his father of his banishment, so does not realise that Theseus' intention is to kill him as well. Still, this comment adds to the weight of criticism against Theseus' punishment, from all those who witness it.

The most vehement blame that Theseus receives for punishing Hippolytus is divine – from Artemis, and, according to her, Poseidon too. Artemis' language is strong; she accuses Theseus of killing his son in an 'unholy' fashion, (1287), and remarks,

πῶς οὐχ ὑπὸ γῆς τάρταρα κρύπτεις

δέμας αἰσχυνθείς,

ἢ πτηνὸν ἄνω μεταβὰς βίοτον

πήματος ἔξω πόδα τοῦδ᾽ ἀνέχεις;

ὡς ἔν γ᾽ ἀγαθοῖς ἀνδράσιν οὔ σοι

κτητὸν βιότου μέρος ἐστίν.

Why do you not hide beneath the earth, having disfigured your body in shame, or pass over the sky having changed your life to that of a bird and lift your foot out of this pain? For you are not worthy of a share of life among good men. (1291-5)

Effectively her instruction to Theseus that he should remove himself entirely from society functions in the same way his exile for Hippolytus did – and is the kind of treatment reserved for serious criminals and the religiously polluted in the ancient world, thus judging him as part of this category. Indeed by suggesting that Theseus should die, as Heracles and Ajax considered, or cease being a man at all, Artemis suggests that by acting as the 'punisher Theseus' inappropriately, against his son, Theseus has entirely destabilised that previous identity and its praiseworthy qualities, even if it is only a momentary comment, and does not carry the full weights of the situations in the *Heracles* or the *Ajax.* Artemis does not stop

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there, however, expressing a clear desire to 'sting' Theseus with the truth (1313), calling him κάκιστε (1316), saying he acted 'rashly' (1323), and repeating the criticism with a comment that even Poseidon, his father, and the means by which his curse was fulfilled, now condemns him,

> σὺ δ᾽ ἔν τ᾽ ἐκείνῳ κἀν ἐμοὶ φαίνῃ κακός,
>
> *You appear wicked to him and to me alike.* (1320)

The language used picks up on Theseus' previous claims to punish τοῖς κακοῖς, especially when Artemis remarks that Hippolytus was after all δικαίαν, and Theseus' punishment is criticised specifically as being wrong, with all the divine blame directed against the only person shown to be explicitly and accurately described as κακός, Theseus himself.

It was notable particularly when discussing the *Oedipus at Colonus* that the lack of identity construction through praise for Theseus made the praiseworthy aspects of his identity unstable and inconsistent. Oedipus did not trust these characteristics to remain consistent throughout the play, and Creon supposedly failed to recognise that they even existed, particularly in such a strong form as to be still in existence while Theseus was absent. In Aethra's persuasion in the *Suppliants* she similarly suggested that Theseus had yet to establish a secure identity through praise that could not be challenged, and used that insecurity to persuade him through the promise of further praise. It is therefore particularly unexpected that where Theseus does seem to have consistent, stable features of identity represented across multiple tragedies, these are all blameworthy, and reflected and constructed as part of his identity through the blame of those around him.

There is a final aspect to presentations of Theseus in tragedy which makes it difficult

to consider his portrayal as being entirely positive. Many scholars have recognised that the pre-tragic Theseus had plenty of troubled associations in his mythical background, which are a curious facet of his adoption as the national Athenian hero.[76] However, it has not been as widely recognised that even if the extant tragedies featuring him do not explicitly cover these myths, many of them make frequent references to mythical traditions which introduce less salubrious elements. The dual parentage of Theseus, for example, is obviously a central point in the *Hippolytus*, but appears frequently in the background even of the *Oedipus at Colonus,* partly due to the setting's close connections with Poseidon.[77] Several times when Theseus is off-stage, he is said to have been sacrificing at the altar to Poseidon (888, 1158, 1493-5). It has been reasonably argued that this is intended to represent his piety, but the decision to have the sacrifice be to Poseidon rather than, for example, Athena, constantly reminds the audience of this connection, particularly given that this location is repeated.[78] A similar effect is present even in the *Heracles*, which as mentioned above contains the least direct praise or blame for Theseus of any of his tragic appearances. Not only is Theseus' discreditable trip to the underworld evoked by his presence there, but twice when Heracles talks of his own visit to the underworld, he specifically draws attention to Persephone (608, 1104) – providing a further reminder of the illegitimate purpose of Theseus' errand. I am further convinced by the arguments that place the *Peirithous* in the same trilogy as the *Heracles*.[79] This would mean that not only were the audience reminded of the circumstances of Theseus' rescue from the

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76 Esp. Walker (1995) 1, 61.

77 On connections between at Colonus and Poseidon: Kelly (2009) 68-71.

78 On Theseus' sacrifices as demonstrating piety cf. Kelly (2009) 114; Blundell (1993) 289-92. Some scholars have also seen in the references to Poseidon a hint towards the activity of Peisander and the Four Hundred – see Hesk (2012) 175.

79 Mette (1983), Dobrov (2000) 136. If this is correct, the reference to Ixion at 1298 could also be evoking fr.5, and the multiple generations of sins against the gods represented by Peirithous and his father (not a creditable association for Theseus).

underworld, they might even have seen it immediately before the *Heracles* began – making it difficult to avoid any negative associations from that errand being connected to his presence in the *Heracles*. In fact the doomed expedition with Peirithous is not only referred to in the *Heracles*, but also explicitly mentioned entirely gratuitously, by the Messenger who narrates Oedipus' death in the *Oedipus Coloneus* (1593-4). No dramatic context requires this reference, unlike in the *Heracles,* and it could easily have been omitted – its inclusion is deliberate and therefore meaningful. Scholars have frequently highlighted the positive aspects of Theseus' relationship with Peirithous in their interpretation of this brief comment, partly in order to exonerate Theseus from any criticism that it might imply.[80] However, the mention is so brief that it is difficult to consider it wholly or successfully characterised positively, as the messenger immediately moves on without explicitly making a positive judgement of Theseus' pledge. Furthermore, while it is entirely possible to argue that references to myth are intended to call forth positive associations in an audience, to ignore their potential to simultaneously do the opposite is overly simplistic. While Theseus' loyalty to his friend in dire straits may be commendable, it cannot be ignored that an expedition to abduct the Queen of the Underworld is hardly a creditable exploit for Theseus and Peirithous to have undertaken.[81] If Sophocles had intended to avoid the negative implications of this complicated episode in Theseus' traditional history, by far the easier course would have been not to refer to it at all.

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80 Such as Markantonatos (2007) 175-7 who sees the Peirithous myth, and particularly Euripides' staging of it as demonstrating Theseus to be the exemplar of Athenian humanity and Justice. See also Mills (1997) 257-60; Eucken (1979); Sutton (1987). Against these, Wilson (1997) 105-6 argues that its inclusion here is as an example of a failed or broken promise which contrasts with the promises to Oedipus which Theseus succeeds in keeping.

81 Walker (1995) 15-6; Griffiths (2006) 105-6; Blondell (2013) 231; Slater (1968) 394-5. Scholars who dismiss the problematic aspects of their expedition rather skate over the fact that in most versions, Peirithous is punished for it by never being able to return, and Theseus himself only escapes through Heracles' help, without which he would be similarly fixed there in punishment. See further Dobrov (2001) 142.

There are further hints at Theseus' problematic mythological past in the *Hippolytus*, particularly in the comments by the chorus when Phaedra's malady is first revealed. In their attempts to guess at the source of her misery, their first suggestion after offended gods is infidelity on the part of Theseus (151-5), which they give with a rather full description. While it turns out to be entirely the wrong suggestion, since the infidelity is in fact Phaedra's, the chorus' comment immediately calls to mind Theseus' traditional mythical identity as lustful.[82] The same tradition may also be indicated in Phaedra's reference to her sister, a previous conquest of Theseus', only 200 lines further on (339). Indeed even if these references are considered to be suggestive rather than explicit, Hippolytus' very presence on stage as Theseus' illegitimate son is problematic for his marriage,[83] and invites recollection of the exploits with the Amazons which formed part of his more lustful exploits.

None of these references to mythical tradition can of course be considered as particularly strong sources of blame – there is certainly no direct or explicit blame from characters or choruses involved in making them – and the impact of their presence should therefore not be overstated. However, the tragedians were adapt at selecting from and alluding to a vast range of myth in order to create the effects they sought, and, while they may be more relevant to the *Hippolytus,* neither of these allusions is strictly necessary for the main plots presented by the *Oedipus at Colonus* or the *Heracles.* By purposefully introducing these mythical allusions, the plays make it possible to connect the problematic associations they bring with them to the Theseus who appears on stage.

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82 Rabinowitz (1993) 179; and more generally on Theseus' troubled exploits with or against women: Zeitlin (1996) 89-90; Slater (1968) 391-3. Plutarch *Comparison of Romulus and Theseus* 6.1 (Manfredini e Ampolo (1988)) indeed condemns Theseus very strongly for his 'lustful' behaviour.

83 Rabinowitz (1993) 179-80 notes that the reconciliation between father and son in the *Hippolytus* conveniently displaces the marital problems inherent in Hippolytus' bastardy and Theseus' excessive lust on to Phaedra, who is not included in such a reconciliation. See also Walker (1994) 124.

Conclusion

Thus, even though Theseus appears in largely positive and helpful roles in extant tragedy, it is nonetheless problematic to suggest that this leads to a mostly positive portrayal, let alone that tragedy functions as the extremely positive, panegyric style genre that Mills supposed. It is not enough when considering tragedy to simply discuss either our own interpretation of actions undertaken, or a reconstructed version of an Athenian interpretation – we must also pay close attention to what the characters on stage with any given figure say about him, particularly when they choose to allot praise or blame to his actions. In the case of Theseus, I have shown that express praise of Athens' hero is extremely limited, and even where it exists, it is often intended as a type of persuasion rather than purely meant to praise. Even then, there are problematic elements raised in the praise assigned to him in almost every tragedy he appears in. Further, there is a surprising amount of direct and implied blame aimed at him, not only limited to criticism specific to the particular scenarios he appears in, but extending to common traits across all portrayals of Theseus.

While part of this difference may result from the differences in extant tragedies featuring Theseus in comparison with the *Heracles* and *Ajax*, it still remains notable – even where he has a largely positive role, whether this is as a main character or in a more supporting position – that Theseus is never positioned in the same discourses of praise which construct a particularly heroic identity for him. As a result his identity as praiseworthy is flexible, unstable, and open to challenge and rejection in a way which Ajax's and Heracles' both prove not to be. Where they attempt to supplant one praiseworthy identity with another and force a violent crisis in their identities, Theseus is distinguished instead by demonstrating no such praiseworthy identity at all. Furthermore, the uniquely consistent positioning of

Theseus in discourses of blame which continues across multiple tragedies further disadvantages him in comparison. It is possible to see both this unusual method of dealing with praise and blame as a tragic response to contemporary social concerns about the status of heroism and discourses of praise, although as discussed above there are complicating factors which prevent this effect being dismissed as simply a chronological change, nor is it straightforward to explain why it should appear so distinctively in tragedy alone, and not elsewhere in poetry which features Theseus. To some extent, such questions are made more difficult to answer simply by oddities of surviving material. It is entirely possible that if either of the *Aegeus* plays or a *Theseus* had survived, the picture given of Theseus and identity construction through praise would be entirely different.

However, the example of the *Suppliants,* in which issues around seeking and awarding praise are vividly raised, suggests further that perhaps Theseus, as a uniquely Athenian figure, also presented a uniquely interesting figure to deploy in explorations of such issues. It is certainly not surprising to find the concerns around funeral procedures and public praise raised in the Athenian democracy explored in the *Suppliants*, given the tragic stage's usefulness for exploring social concerns and issues of ideology.[84] Perhaps it is also reasonable therefore to see such a consistent portrayal of Theseus as unpraised and unpraiseworthy as part of a similar exploration of such issues in a democracy which was grappling with how to deal with praise of individuals. It is particularly notable that this situation occurs across the work of both Sophocles and Euripides, thus suggesting a consistent concern with such issues which is wider than being just an interest of one particular dramatist. Furthermore, these issues surrounding praise are similar to those raised in the *Ajax* and *Heracles.* In all of the plays discussed so far, the process of identity construction through praise is dramatised and

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84 Gellrich (1995); Goff (1995b) 11-24 are particularly useful on tragedy and ideology.

problematised, and praise itself becomes problematic as a way of establishing who a character *is*. In the cases of Heracles and Ajax these issues involve the violent crises reminiscent of thwarting, whereas the case of Theseus presents a far more subtle discussion of concerns around praise and praiseworthiness. The situation of Evadne presented in the *Suppliants* also rather unsubtly introduces a new element to this discussion which will be a key factor in the second part of the thesis: gender. All of the situations discussed so far have focused on the issues raised by identity construction for male, warrior figures, the traditional subjects of praise poetry. Yet the tragic stage is notorious for its focus not solely on these heroic males, but also their female counterparts. As I shall go on to show, issues of identity construction through praise become even more complex where female characters become prominent, particularly as they seek to establish themselves as producers of discourses both of praise and blame, through which they often destroy their male peers, just as figures such as Ajax and Heracles destroy or almost destroy themselves through such seeking.

Chapter Three: Deianira and the control of Praise and Blame in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*

In Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, it is not the conflict between praise sought and praise awarded that causes a physical destruction of Heracles' identity, unlike in Euripides' *Heracles* or Sophocles' *Ajax*. Nor is Sophocles' Heracles' situation comparable to that of Theseus throughout tragedy. Rather than facing an entire dearth of praise, or praise deployed solely with an ulterior motive such as persuasion, Heracles receives praise from the chorus of the *Trachiniae* in terms which are largely compatible with the praiseworthy qualities he claims for himself. However, like Euripides' Heracles and Sophocles' Ajax, Sophocles' Heracles still faces destruction of his praiseworthy qualities and identity in the *Trachiniae*, and this is once again represented through the treatment of the praise which establishes that identity. Instead of being caused by Heracles' own participation in shaping the discourses of praise involved in the construction of his identity, however, the violence and crisis of the *Trachiniae* is caused by the involvement of his wife, Deianira. In this regard, Deianira is one of several female characters who, as wife of an otherwise praiseworthy male warrior, has a destructive role in rejecting or reshaping the discourses of praise and blame within which her husband is positioned.

Sophocles' *Trachiniae* can be described as a *nostos* play – the warrior returns home to his family, at the end of his deeds abroad.[1] Alongside the dramatic features which this identification can invoke, the return of Heracles is also portrayed in such a way as to establish it firmly within another poetic context – namely the return of the victor, as envisaged in the

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1 Taplin (1977) 124-6 and 302, Levett (2004) 41. Also more recently Kratzer (2013) for the play's interaction with traditional *nostos* motifs. Hölscher (1990) 50 connects it to the *nostos* of Odysseus, which builds up the parallels some scholars have seen between Deianira and Penelope (cf. n10 below).

epinician odes of Pindar and Bacchylides.[2] The announcement of Heracles' return is presented in a way which positions the messenger as the epinician herald; wearing the traditional garland ("κατάστεφῆ" 178), he declares Heracles' return by reference to his family, as found in the victory statements of the herald at the games, and describes him as νικηφόρῳ, a word which is commonly found in Pindar.[3] A little later, he is similarly described by the chorus as "ἀρετᾶς λάφυρ᾽ ἔχων ("bearing trophies of valour" 645). As scholars have previously discussed, the contest described at the start of the play between Achelous and Heracles is also suggestively framed as an athletic contest, one worthy of notably epinician description.[4] As a result, Heracles' return is framed by language which is more usually associated with praise poetry, setting up a context which will be of central importance throughout the rest of the play, particularly in the ways in which Deianira exerts her own authority and power within the context of praise.

When considering the *Trachiniae*, scholars often make two particular observations on the character of Deianira. The first, and now somewhat less popular view, was that Deianira is weak, uncertain, and unable to influence the events around her.[5] The second major point in many scholars' discussions of Deianira, is their comparison of her directly with another tragic husband-killer: Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, whose active role in her husband's death is very similar to Deianira's, and who similarly spends a great deal of time on stage managing the

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2   Kurke (1991) 6 on the role epinician can be argued to play in returning and reintegrating an athletic victor to his home, and thus the similarity between the context of these praise poems, and the *nostos* discussed in the *Trachiniae*.

3   eg. Pind. *Ol.* 2.5, 10.59, 13.14, *Pyth*. 1.59, 8.26, *Nem*. 1.9, 3.67, *Isth*. 1.22 etc.

4   Stinton (1976) 126, Easterling (1982) 136 on 504–5 and 137 on 514–16, Kratzer (2013) 28-30, Heiden (1989) 77-8.

5   Bowra (1943) 121-4.

events surrounding her husband's death.[6] In many ways Clytemnestra is not a very satisfactory model – she kills her husband directly, face-to-face, and while she does use a robe like Deianira's, she in fact destroys Agamemnon with a weapon, as a male killer would act.[7] She is undeceived at the time of her murder, she does not kill herself, and at every step she is willing to try the male approach, argument, against those who would condemn her, whereas Deianira at the critical moment instead chooses silence. Yet in Deianira's control of speech and of the praise given to her husband, both areas which are usually not recognised at all by scholars, it is possible to see a connection between Deianira and Clytemnestra, who, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* particularly, demonstrates many of the same qualities in her control over speech and the praise or blame awarded to Agamemnon.[8] Throughout the *Trachiniae* Deianira displays a level of control over her speech and that of those around her which sets her aside from all the other characters on stage. This is particularly important given the significance of speech, reports, and stories in the play.[9]

It is this control over her speech which enables Deianira to manipulate and reject the

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6 Errandonea (1958), March (1987) 69-70, Levett (2004) 85, Carawan (2000), esp 191, Beer (2004) 87; Rutherford (2012) 307-9; also see Zeitlin (1990) 347-8 who combines the two ideas so that Deianira only exists as destroyer of Heracles, with no further independent purpose. Conversely Webster (1936) 177 drew parallels between Deianira and Penelope, the paradigmatic wife. More recently Mattison (2015) argued that the comparison between Clytemnestra and Deianira is built around their roles as loving/bitter and innocent/contriving in the murders of their husbands, and particularly focused on the reactions to the concubines each husband had introduced to the household.

7 Marshall (2001), esp. 59 with notes for summary of discussions on Clytemnestra's weapons.

8 Mossman (2012) 496 argues that allusions in the *Trachiniae* to the *Agamemnon* are in fact meant to emphasize the differences between Deianira and Clytemnestra, which can be partly shown through their different styles of speech. However, as will become clear, in characterising Deianira's speech as "hesitant, stumbling [and] rambling", Mossman takes a very different view of Deianira's use of speech to that argued for in this chapter. Clytemnestra's destructive involvement in identity construction through praise and blame is discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

9 Heiden (1989), Kraus (1991) esp. 84-8.

praise discourses within which her husband is positioned, and which gives this technique such a destructive effect. As a result, this chapter, as with Chapters Four and Five on Clytemnestra and Medea, will explore the ways in which women's control over speech and awareness of efficacious speech can be turned against men specifically through awareness of the importance of praise and blame speech, and ability to manipulate its role in identity construction.[10]

Demanding Truth

Deianira's influence over speech and control of praise and blame is demonstrated partly through her strong desire to maintain control of what is spoken around her, including by directly seeking truth above misleading words. Even from her opening statement, Deianira demonstrates a desire to effectively de-emphasise what is commonly held as truth in favour of what she herself knows, in saying,

> Λόγος μὲν ἔστ᾽ ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανεὶς
>
> ὡς οὐκ ἂν αἰῶν᾽ ἐκμάθοις βροτῶν, πρὶν ἂν
>
> θάνῃ τις, οὔτ᾽ εἰ χρηστὸς οὔτ᾽ εἴ τῳ κακός·
>
> ἐγὼ δὲ τὸν ἐμόν, καὶ πρὶν εἰς Ἅιδου μολεῖν,
>
> ἔξοιδ᾽ ἔχουσα δυστυχῆ τε καὶ βαρύν,
>
> *There is an ancient, revealed saying of men, that you cannot understand a man's life*
>
> *before he dies, neither if it is good for him, nor if it is bad. But as for me, even before*
>
> *going to Hades, I know well that I have an unfortunate and grievous life.* (1-5)

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10 As a result this project builds on previous work on women's speech in tragedy such as the works of McClure (1999) and Mossman (2001), which were primarily focused on the stylistic or generic features of their speech.

The emphatic positioning and repetition of her "ἐγὼ δὲ τὸν ἐμόν" make clear that she prioritises her own experience and understanding above what 'men' believe to be true.[11] From then on, she displays herself clearly as someone who is eager to reach the truth behind what is told to her, as with her first conversation with Hyllus. He appears readily willing to accept the hearsay available on Heracles' location,

ἀλλ᾽ οἶδα, μύθοις γ' εἴ τι πιστεύειν χρεών.

But I know, if we can trust what people are saying! (67)[12]

whereas she appears more doubtful, remarking

πᾶν τοίνυν, εἰ καὶ τοῦτ᾽ ἔτλη, κλύοι τις ἄν.

Then one might hear anything, if he endured even that! (71)

Her emphasis is not on the idea that Heracles might be *doing* anything, if he put up with being a slave, rather that one might *hear* any report of him – as such it subtly questions the report, and from there Hyllus follows her lead, constantly remarking that his further knowledge is all

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11 There may also be a point about gender to be made in Deianira's contrast between the knowledge *men* have and she, a woman, can demonstrate. See Easterling (1982) 72 on 4-5 on the rhetorical precedence for this type of statement, although it is not very common elsewhere in tragedy. Heiden (1989) 1-2 has argued that the unusual nature of this prologue (rare in tragedy) adds a performative quality to Deianira's speech, and thus supports the idea that this statement is a programmatic one which demonstrates Deianira's concern with speech and its effectiveness.

12 Heiden (1989) 33-4 correctly notes this statement as part of Hyllus' tendency to "exaggerate the extent of his knowledge", which he demonstrates throughout the play, but does not recognise in Deianira's questions a desire to replace this exaggeration with a more accurate report, instead claiming that Deianira repeatedly interprets Hyllus' report in terms of her own interpretation, one which expects negative news. Deianira's questions, however, are neutral in content – rather than indicating any unusual degree of fear, she asks for precise information about Heracles' location and status, as well as casting doubt on the veracity of the report Hyllus brings. Further, in her discussion of the prophecies, rather than demonstrating any "expectation of disaster" (Heiden 34), Deianira technically gives more weight and detail to the positive potential meaning of the prophecy (80-1), than to the negative (79), which she passes over more quickly. Heiden's reading is part of a trend of scholars who seem determined to read a persistent and unnatural level of fear or anxiety as the central trait of Deianira's character – see also Mattison (2015) 14-5; Rabinowitz (2014) 192; Morwood (2008) 29-31; Mossman (2012) 495.

gained by report: "ὡς ἐγὼ κλύω" (*"As I hear"* 72) and "φασίν" (*"They say"* 74). Deianira turns the conversation away from the reports by drawing Hyllus' focus to the prophecies left to her, which she calls, "πιστὰ" (*"trusted"* 77), thus valuing the prophecies she has and can see herself above the things she hears from others.

Similarly, her interrogation of the various messengers who bring news of Heracles' location and status, involves repeated questioning which clarifies the source of the information, as well as its content.[13] When the first messenger arrives, she has him repeat his information and clarify it from its originally rather grandiose wording (180-6). Once she has clearly ascertained the message, Deianira asks specifically for the source of the information,

καὶ τοῦ τόδ᾿ ἀστῶν ἢ ξένων μαθὼν λέγεις;

And from which one of the citizens or strangers have you learned this information that

you tell me? (187)

Her question even differentiates between citizens and strangers when she asks who he heard it from, undoubtedly in order to clarify the answer she receives beyond simply being told that the messenger heard it from some particular individual. In checking her source in such detail, she confirms how trustworthy it should be, expecting a difference in the nature of the story a citizen would tell compared to one she might hear from a stranger. She then has a further question designed to confirm a final point of information. It is only after she has checked all these issues that she is willing to believe and celebrate the information given (200-4).

In the same way, once Lichas arrives she asks him very specific questions for his first few moments on stage (232-33, 236, 239, 242-3) – thus quickly gaining the exact information she seeks. It is only once she has obtained this information that she asks a more general

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13 Bowra (1944) 121 rather characterises this care instead as uncertainty and unwillingness to act.

question, which allows Lichas to give a fuller answer and tell his full story:

ἦ κἀπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πόλει τὸν ἄσκοπον

χρόνον βεβὼς ἦν ἡμερῶν ἀνήριθμον;

Was he gone for that reckless, immeasurable span of time in order to attack this city?

(246-7)

She uses the same technique when attempting to question Lichas about Iole, asking deliberately specific questions of her lineage and name of him (316 and 318), the latter question even suggesting for Lichas a way in which he might have gained information even if his first answer, that he has not asked any questions, might still be true. Even at her most emotionally charged moment on stage, when Hyllus accuses her of murdering Heracles, Deianira demonstrates this clarity and interrogative nature, first refusing to accept Hyllus' accusations until she understands their cause exactly,

τί δ᾿ ἔστιν, ὦ παῖ, πρός γ᾿ ἐμοῦ στυγούμενον;

And what is the hateful thing that I have done, my son? (738)

Her question, in contrast to Hyllus' emotional and powerful statements, is brief and precise, seeking exact information rather than simple dramatic declarations. Once again in this instance she also seeks to confirm the source of this information asking

τοῦ παρ᾿ ἀνθρώπων μαθὼν

ἄζηλον οὕτως ἔργον εἰργάσθαι με φής;

You say that I have done a terrible thing, but from which man did you learn this? (744-5)

Deianira's next question seeks to clarify Hyllus' information even further; she asks,

ποῦ δ᾿ ἐμπελάζεις τἀνδρὶ καὶ παρίστασαι;

Where did you approach the man, and stand by him? (748)

She presumably aims, given the focus on his location and where he stood, to find out whether Hyllus saw from a distance, or whether he was close enough to the action to know exactly what has happened. As with her questioning of the messengers, Deianira prevents Hyllus from immediately launching into his story until she has ascertained to her satisfaction his source, and exactly what he wishes to tell. Even when she sees the captive women, including Iole, her reaction involves questions seeking information (307-313, 316, 318, 320-1) at the same time as her more emotional response of sympathy (298-306). In her conversation with Lichas she lays heavy emphasis on how she values the truth, first with a generalisation about the dishonourable nature of lying (449-454), and then finishing with an emphatic statement of the importance she personally puts upon hearing the truth,

σοὶ δ᾽ ἐγὼ φράζω κακὸν

πρὸς ἄλλον εἶναι, πρὸς δ᾽ ἔμ᾽ ἀψευδεῖν ἀεί.

I tell you to be deceitful to someone else, but always to be honest to me! (468-9)[14]

It is possible to see displayed in Deianira's interrogation of those around her a certain degree of power. Discourse analysts have identified questions as potentially powerful forms in and of themselves, since they both oblige a response, and in Grice's terms regarding logic in conversation, also oblige a conversationally relevant response.[15] Furthermore, sociolinguists have shown that questions tend to be used more commonly by the more powerful participants

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14 Sommerstein & Torrance (2014) 90-2 notes that Lichas' perjury here is given extra weight by his decision to swear an oath by Zeus which he then breaks, so that his grim fate can be considered the just retribution for this perjury. Deianira's demand is therefore unfortunately aimed at possibly the least suitable candidate for such a speech in the *Trachniae*, since Lichas is not solely a liar, but even a perjurer. They further show (93-4) how Deianira's later claim that Lichas indeed swore he did not know who Iole is, which he has not, (what Sommerstein and Torrance label a "Sophoclean Oath") demonstrates the weight Deianira places upon his falsehood, judging it to be as serious a matter as a broken oath to Deianira.

15 Grice (1975), Coates (1995) 16-8.

in a conversation, and sometimes even seem to be part of establishing that more powerful position.[16] In this regard, then, Deianira's repeated questioning of others on stage could already be considered part of an attempt to position her as both the more powerful participant in these conversations, and as exerting powerful forms within the conversations. It could even be argued that this is a position which Deianira claims for herself, as part of the contrasts she has established between what 'men say' [above], and the truths she will seek out. Moreover, in seeking this position Deianira creates a direct contrast between herself and those around her, who demonstrate no such desire for either the position of power created through Deianira's persistent questions, or even the truthful information gained by her reaching that position. As a result, Deianira's involvement in the process of identity construction in relation to Heracles comes from a position which Deianira attempts, with some success, to establish as authoritative, since it is rooted in what she perceives as 'the truth' based on her careful questioning.

As mentioned above, all of the characters around her have a far more relaxed approach to gaining information through speech. Hyllus seems willing to believe reports of Heracles' location without very much doubt (77), and the chorus celebrate Lichas' message (291-2) with none of Deianira's doubts or concerns (295-306). Perhaps the most important examples of other characters failing to follow Deianira's sensible technique are the situation that arises between the Messenger and Lichas' alternate accounts of Iole's capture, and Heracles' reaction to the poisoned robe. The information that Lichas brings to Deianira is called strongly into question by the Messenger,

ἀνὴρ ὅδ᾽ οὐδὲν ὧν ἔλεξεν ἀρτίως

φωνεῖ δίκης ἐς ὀρθόν, ἀλλ᾽ ἢ νῦν κακός

16 Harris (1984).

ἢ πρόσθεν οὐ δίκαιος ἄγγελος παρῆν.

This man has just told you nothing which is spoken truthfully or justly, but either now

he is base, or before he was present as an untruthful messenger. (346-8)

But the Messenger, it turns out, is basing this accusation only on another version of the message which he has heard Lichas give – with no real evidence as to which version is more truthful.[17] The chorus then suggests that Deianira may be able to get the truth from Lichas by questioning him again (385-6), but there is no clear reason why his willingness to lie to her previously should be changed by a second questioning. Lichas does change the version of the tale he tells Deianira, so that it matches the version which the Messenger shares, but he does not say what his source is for the second, passion-driven narrative, only that Heracles has not specifically asked him to conceal it (479-80). Neither messenger has any better information than hearsay – Lichas mentions that at least part of his story comes from what Heracles has told him (253), but unusually for this play does not mention being present for or witnessing any of the events that he describes.[18]

This relative laxness in gathering information is also demonstrated most strongly by Heracles, both in his time off-stage and once he arrives before the audience. Most noticeable in this regard is his treatment of Lichas once the poisoned robe has been brought to the sacrifice. Hyllus makes clear with his contradiction, that Heracles' original interrogation of his herald is made under the assumption that he is the guilty party,

ἐνταῦθα δὴ 'βόησε τὸν δυσδαίμονα

Λίχαν, τὸν οὐδὲν αἴτιον τοῦ σοῦ κακοῦ,

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17 Heiden (1984) 67-9.

18 Contrast Hyllus at 749. Scholars have previously commented on the level of attention given in the play to what information has been witnessed or seen, see Heiden (2012) 134 and note for a full details of the discussion.

ποίαις ἐνέγκοι τόνδε μηχαναῖς πέπλον·

Then he shouted at unlucky Lichas, who was not responsible for your evil, demanding to know by what kind of scheme he had brought this robe. (772-4)

Even when he has the truth, it seems to matter very little, and Heracles' behaviour is apparently unchanged, as he kills Lichas regardless of the information he gives – in direct contrast with Deianira, who only comes up with her new strategy of using the poisoned robe once she has discovered the truth about Iole. In the same way, Hyllus is forced to make ten attempts at revealing the truth to Heracles, who is repeatedly resistant to his son's speech. He is so convinced that he already has the truth that he makes no effort to question Hyllus at all, instead choosing the opposite course and attempting to reject Hyllus' speech entirely, saying

ὦ παγκάκιστε, καὶ παρεμνήσω γὰρ αὖ

τῆς πατροφόντου μητρός, ὡς κλύειν ἐμέ;

O most base man, have you again mentioned your father-killing mother, so that I can hear it? (1124-5)

and following it with a recommendation that, contrary to Hyllus' statement, silence would be best (1127). From then, he repeatedly cuts Hyllus off in his attempts to reveal the full information (esp 1131, 1133, 1135, and 1137). The last example is especially notable – when Hyllus claims:

ἅπαν τὸ χρῆμ᾽, ἥμαρτε χρηστὰ μωμένη

She did something entirely wrong, but she only made a mistake in her good intention.

(1136)

referring to her intention, Heracles instead objects to her act itself:

χρήστ᾽, ὦ κάκιστε, πατέρα σὸν κτείνασα δρᾷ;

Did she do a good thing, wicked one, in killing your father? (1137)

Heracles thus completely misses the significance of Hyllus' statement, and the truth contained within. Indeed while Hyllus does manage to reveal some truth to Heracles, it is not the truth he wished to convey – that of his mother's innocence – rather Heracles seizes on the involvement of the centaur, and only when his name is revealed claims,

οἴμοι, φρονῶ δὴ ξυμφορᾶς ἵν᾽ ἕσταμεν

Alas, I know now what the disaster I stand in is. (1145)[19]

He never speaks of Deianira again, and it becomes clear that Heracles has once again taken the information he wants and ignored anything else, as he could be said to do when he later dismisses the feelings of his son about his deathbed orders.[20]

Commanding Speech and Silence

In this respect, then, Deianira demonstrates herself to be capable and sensible in her use and understanding of speech – selecting the important truths in all her interactions with other characters, in a way which sharply contrasts with those around her, who are repeatedly misled or made uncertain by their inability to do the same. There is another aspect to her interaction with speech, however, that reveals Deianira as displaying a surprising level of control and power. Frequently in her discussions with others she is able to order them to speak or otherwise, effectively exerting power even over their ability to speak on stage. This influence is particularly evident in her interactions with the chorus, whose speech she effectively permits or forbids several times. The most obvious example of this type of

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19 On Nessus and Heracles' understanding of the centaur's role, Fowler (1999) 165-7, who connects this realisation strongly to the myth of Heracles' apotheosis. Also Holt (1989) 75, Dickerson (1972) 447.

20 For other interpretations of this scene see Linforth (1952) esp. 258-62, Jebb (1902) *ad loc*, Easterling (1981) 57, (with notes for a good summary of earlier critics' views of the end of this play), Segal (1981) 99-100, Galinsky (1972) 52.

instruction is when she has heard the news of Heracles' return, and addresses those around her, with particular reference to the chorus,

φωνήσατ᾽, ὦ γυναῖκες, αἵ τ᾽ εἴσω στέγης

αἵ τ᾽ ἐκτὸς αὐλῆς, …

Speak out, women, both those inside the house and outside the court. (202-3)

The command has an immediate effect, and the chorus break into song, but interestingly their own song includes injunctions for the house, and men to join in

ἀνολολυξάτω δόμος

ἐφεστίοις ἀλαλαγαῖς

ὁ μελλόνυμφος· ἐν δὲ κοινὸς ἀρσένων

ἴτω κλαγγὰ τὸν εὐφαρέτραν

Ἀπόλλω προστάταν,

ὁμοῦ δὲ παιᾶνα παι-

ᾶν᾽ ἀνάγετ᾽, ὦ παρθένοι,

βοᾶτε …

Let the house which is about to be a married household cry out with shouting: let the shouts of the men go forth in common with them to our protector, Apollo of the bright quiver, and with them, lift up the Paean, maidens, the Paean, shout aloud... (205-12)[21]

It is almost as though Deianira's command to speak out has such force, that the chorus is able to take it and apply it to others not addressed, including the inanimate force of the house itself.[22] In this context it is also important to note that it is only on the urging of Deianira that Lichas gives in and reveals his supposedly true version of Heracles' capturing Iole (468-9, and

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21 On the paeanic and Dionysiac features of this ode, see Rutherford (2001) 113-4.

22 Gardiner (1987) 121 notes the autonomous position of the chorus – but this still does not prevent their obeying Deianira's commands whenever she gives them.

472-4).[23] In answer to the messenger's badgering Lichas displays only strong resistance, even rejecting the idea of speaking to him at all,

ἄνθρωπος, ὦ δέσποιν᾽, ἀποστήτω· τὸ γὰρ

νοσοῦντι ληρεῖν ἀνδρὸς οὐχὶ σώφρονος.

Let the man go away, mistress: for it is mad to speak with a man who is not in his right mind. (434-5)

Perhaps the most definite and striking example of Deianira's control over the chorus' speech comes with her instruction to them regarding her plan with the robe,

μόνον παρ᾽ ὑμῶν εὖ στεγοίμεθ᾽·

Only I hope that I will be well concealed by you. (596)

The silence she enjoins upon them here is maintained beyond the length of the play. Even when Deianira's act has come to light, the chorus never discuss it or reveal its roots with Hyllus, the Nurse, or Heracles – they talk of her death, and in their lament they talk of the centaur's blood and his cunning (831-848), but they do not reveal the methods or intentions of Deianira even after she is dead. There is a strong similarity with the chorus in Euripides' *Hippolytus,* who upon Phaedra's urging to "σιγῇ καλύψαθ᾽ ἀνθάδ᾽ εἰσηκούσατε" (*"Keep hidden in silence what you have heard here."* 712), agree not to speak of it, and even go so far as to lie to Theseus when he asks what has happened, claiming that they do not know why she has died, as they are only recently arrived at the house (804-5).[24] However, Phaedra's chorus

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23 contra Gardiner (1987) 124-5.

24 The chorus of the *Iphigenia at Tauris* also lie for Iphigenia in order to conceal her escape (1056-1077, 1293-1301), although it is important to note that in order to gain this result, Iphigenia supplicates the chorus of the *IT* (1069-70), while Deianira needs only to give a command to her own chorus. See Foley (2003) 16 on choral deception. Chong-Gossard (2007) 155-74 discusses choral silences at the request of women, aimed at 'covering-up' wrongdoing in terms of 'female solidarity' in Euripides, demonstrating how the female characters often appeal to shared female experiences in order to establish this solidarity (156). See similarly

do indicate the extra knowledge they have and begin to reveal it when they tell Theseus that he has made a mistake in his understanding of the situation (891-2). Furthermore, in their lament, they state clearly Hippolytus' innocence (1148-50). They remark much more clearly and decisively on the events that have happened, revealing discussion particularly of those outside Theseus' knowledge, than the chorus of the *Trachiniae* ever do once Deianira has given her authoritative command. Indeed it is emphasised clearly that the chorus of the *Trachiniae* recognise the full force of her command and its destructive nature when they cry at her exit,

> τί σῖγ᾽ ἀφέρπεις; οὐ κάτοισθ᾽ ὁθούνεκα
>
> ξυνηγορεῖς σιγῶσα τῷ κατηγόρῳ;
>
> *Why do you steal silently away? Do you not understand that your keeping silent seconds your accuser?* (813-4)

They recognise clearly that both her silence and their own bind them into an untenable situation – Hyllus cannot be persuaded of the truth if no one will speak to do so, but they are powerless to prevent her choice, or to break their own enforced quiet. Nor are they even able to warn Hyllus of Deianira's intention to die (revealed to them at 719), or to hint at it as Sophoclean choruses in similar situations elsewhere do.[25] Their emphatic repetition, "σῖγ᾽... σιγῶσα" has the effect of highlighting the strength of the idea – both Deianira's silence and their own are too strong to be overcome, and thus Deianira goes to her death without anyone

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Montiglio (2000) 252-6. Deianira's silence differs significantly from these (generally Euripidean) silences, in that she takes pains to distinguish herself from the chorus in their early meeting (see further below), refusing to draw on the sorts of female solidarity discussed by both Montiglio and Chong-Gossard. Furthermore, the chorus' dismayed response to her silence and the silence Deianira has imposed upon them (below) suggests a greater degree of compulsion and unwillingness than is suggested by the cases of the other choruses who are complicit in a female character's silence.

25 *Ant.* 1251, *OT* 1073. Burton (1980) 43 notes the contrast as 'curious', but does not recognise that it is the force of Deianira's command for silence which thus binds them.

being able to correct Hyllus until it is too late.

In her injunction to silence, and the death which caps that command, Deianira demonstrates not just a concern for what she says, in preventing Hyllus or Heracles from questioning her further. Her death is also placed within a context of her concern for what others say *about* her – her reputation. While Deianira does not make as much of her concerns for her reputation as Euripides' Phaedra does, she does refer to it specifically as part of the context for her command of silence made to the chorus:

> μόνον παρ' ὑμῶν εὖ στεγοίμεθ'· ὡς σκότῳ
>
> κἂν αἰσχρὰ πράσσῃς, οὔποτ' αἰσχύνῃ πεσῇ.
>
> *Only I hope that I will be well concealed by you: since if you commit shamelessness in darkness, you will never fall into shame.* (596-7)

Furthermore, she connects her death too to this idea of protecting her reputation:

> ζῆν γὰρ κακῶς κλύουσαν οὐκ ἀνασχετόν,
>
> ἥτις προτιμᾷ μὴ κακὴ πεφυκέναι.
>
> *For it is unendurable to survive and be called evil, for any woman who takes care to live well.* (721-2)

Indeed, as I will go on to show, in this regard Deianira's act is doubly successful. Not only does she succeed in preventing the chorus from discussing what she has done, and in preventing any further questioning of her purposes from Hyllus and Heracles, but her death also has the effect of rehabilitating her reputation, such that Hyllus, previously her greatest accuser (749-812), is willing to attempt to defend her virtue and innocence to his father. Thus not only is Deianira's use of and control over speech an effective tool in achieving her goals, but she is also able to deploy its counterpart, silence, to good effect.

178

There is a further comparison to be made within the *Trachiniae*, which emphasises the unusual nature of Deianira's influence and effectiveness. Several commentators have drawn parallels between Deianira and Iole in the *Trachiniae,* emphasising their shared statuses as prizes won or exchanged by men, particularly Heracles, and the link between them created by the empathy Deianira has for Iole.[26] In fact, however, the presence of Iole highlights the unusual nature of Deianira's position in the tragedy, and the change between the position she held as a young woman, and the one she claims now. The only strongly defined characteristic Iole is awarded is her silence. Lichas comments that even outside the confines of her presence on stage she has wept but never spoken (322-8), with particular emphasis on her persistent silence (322-3), and unlike Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*, to whom she is also frequently compared, Iole does not speak at all on stage in the *Trachiniae*.[27] As has been shown above, however, this characteristic could hardly be further from Deianira's position in the tragedy. It is certainly the case that Deianira's story of her past capture by Achelous places her in a position which is similar to Iole's, particularly as regards her passivity (21-5, 523-30) and self-enforced silence about the fight (21-3), which is mirrored in Iole's silence about her own, similar position in coming into Heracles' possession. Yet Deianira takes deliberate pains to distance the woman she is at the time of the *Trachiniae* from that earlier self and the position she held. Even in her conversation with the chorus, she draws a clear distinction between the

26 Rabinowitz (2014) 194-5, Foley (2001) 95. Segal (1977) 62 suggests that their similarity lies in Heracles' view of them as similar. Easterling (1982) 2 argues for Iole as establishing a physical link (among other objects such as the robe) between Deianira and Heracles, who never come into contact in the play.

27 On Iole and Cassandra Mattison (2015) esp. 12-3, 24; Mossman (2012) 496. Iole's persistent silence presents a dramatic contrast between her and Cassandra, who begins in silence but dramatically breaks it, which somewhat counteracts the value of such parallels between the two concubine figures – see McClure (1999) 92-7 for a thorough and convincing analysis of the important effect Cassandra's speech has in the *Agamemnon*.

types of woman they are, young and unmarried, (143-8) as she was at the time of the Achelous incident, and the type of woman she now is, in her married, fearful position (148-52).[28] In her attempt at conversation with Iole, Deianira makes clear that she considers Iole to be counted among young girls, νεανίδων, (307), rather than among married women such as herself.[29] Indeed her prayer that Zeus never be turned against her offspring the way he has turned against these young women (303-306) makes the distinction even stronger – Deianira aligns herself with Iole's parents in her fears, not Iole herself, seeing a clear difference in the positions in life which they hold.

Moreover, the difference between Iole and Deianira is also emphasised by the dynamics of the drama itself. Unlike some other tragic leading women, Deianira does not make much of her presence in the semi-public arena of the open stage, outside the house - it is a position which she at least does not problematise.[30] However, her position outside the house does present a contrast with Iole, who is described far more in terms which associate her with being inside, not out in the public space which Deianira occupies. Deianira first associates

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28 Mattison (2015) 14-5 argued that Deianira here attempts to "infect" the chorus with her own fear – I do not see any evidence for this in her language, and would argue instead that she makes her fearfulness in this situation part of the contrast she draws between the 'group' truth they claim to represent, and Deianira's own, lived truths which she argues for throughout the play. (As above).

29 Seaford (1986) esp. 55-9 and Ormand (1999) 42 have both argued that in fact Deianira's transition to (particularly happily-) married woman is incomplete, and this is part of the reason for the destruction which the play represents. I would not contradict these valuable arguments, but rather state that Deianira at least claims this status for herself in her interactions with the chorus and Iole, even if an external audience or reader may interpret her position differently.

30 Goldhill (1992) 41 argued that all instances of women speaking in public are inherently problematic, but see McClure (1999) 261-2 for a more nuanced and helpful approach to the issue of women's public speech in drama. It also must be important to consider the difference between tragic women who draw attention to their 'public' speech (for example Clytemnestra in Aesch. Ag. 855-7, Electra and Chrysothemis in Soph. El. 310-5, 328-30, Heracles' daughter in Eur. Hcld. 474-5, or Medea, Eur. Med. 214-5) and those who don't, as Deianira does not.

Iole with the inside space when she invites Iole to go inside "οὕτως ὅπως ἥδιστα" (330), suggesting that Iole will be more comfortable inside. When Deianira begins to follow her, she is delayed by the messenger (335-8), so that she maintains her position outside of the house while Iole goes in. Furthermore, Deianira expresses explicit awareness of Iole as being positioned 'inside' when she exclaims:

> τίν' ἐσδέδεγμαι πημονὴν ὑπόστεγον
>
> λαθραῖον;
>
> *What secret enemy have I taken <u>in</u> under my roof?* (376-7)

Once she knows the truth of Iole's situation, Deianira goes inside the house with Lichas, but immediately returns, even explicitly announcing her return to the 'outdoors' of the stage and contrasting that with Lichas and the girls, Iole included, who are still inside (531-3), and even repeating this idea of Lichas and Iole inside while she is outside in her comment to him before he leaves (601). It is only finally with the failure of the potion and the destruction of Heracles, effectively ending the status Deianira had claimed as older, married woman, that she removes herself from the stage and goes inside in silence, like Iole. Yet Deianira's silence, as discussed above, maintains a very different function to that displayed by Iole. As Rabinowitz has argued, Iole's silence is partly a feature of her being passed around as a voiceless object between Heracles and Hyllus.[31] In contrast, Deianira's silence, as discussed above, serves the two positive purposes she seeks from it, the preservation of her reputation and the prevention of the chorus from speaking about what she has done, thus maintaining elements of control. Unlike Iole, whose silence has no apparent impact on her fortunes or reputation, Deianira's use of speech and silence demonstrates that she has moved beyond the position Iole holds in

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31 Rabinowitz (2014) 195. Wohl (1998) 39 argues convincingly that Iole's silence also allows Deianira to project her own construction of Iole's identity on to Iole, without any involvement from Iole herself.

this play, and established herself successfully in a far more influential position.[32]

Deianira does not only reveal power over speech and silence, she also exerts control over the precise content of both her own speech and that of others. The first indication of this tendency is given in her conversation with the Nurse and Hyllus. The Nurse is granted her ability to speak presumably by Deianira's grace; she asks permission with:

νῦν δ᾽, εἰ δίκαιον τοὺς ἐλευθέρους φρενοῦν

γνώμαισι δούλαις, κἀμὲ χρὴ φράσαι τὸ σόν·

Now then, if it is right for slaves to instruct the free with their knowledge, then it is

necessary for me to advise you. (52-3)

and Deianira agrees,

κἀξ ἀγεννήτων ἄρα

μῦθοι καλῶς πίπτουσιν· ἥδε γὰρ γυνὴ

δούλη μέν, εἴρηκεν δ᾽ ἐλεύθερον λόγον.

Even words from ill-born people can fall out well: for this woman is a slave, but she

has spoken a speech worthy of a free man. (61-3)

However, when she passes the Nurse's words on to her son, she repackages them, changing

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32 Wohl (1998) 44-5 has argued that the gendered spaces of inside and outside the house are clearly demarcated, with no overlap, in that Deianira's meaningful actions take place inside, and Heracles only returns to it once he has been feminised by the robe. It is important to note however that Heracles does not enter the house at the end of the play, instead being removed immediately to the site of his pyre (Hyllus even summons the chorus to leave the house behind entirely – 1275). Furthermore, it is difficult to judge whether there should be such a strong distinction made between speech and action in tragedy, of the kind Wohl makes (45) given that nearly all tragic 'action' of any kind happens off-stage, very often in an inside location. All of Deianira's speech happens outside, without any symbolic 'inside' moments which introduce a definite and explicit movement outside to continue their speech, as is seen with Medea, or Ajax, for example – both of whom can be heard actively participating on the drama on stage while still positioned as 'inside', in a way Deianira never is.

the meaning subtly but decisively. Where the Nurse says it would be "εἰκὸς" to send Hyllus to inquire after Heracles, Deianira claims it is "αἰσχύνην" that he does not go, making the comment far more of a value judgement against Hyllus than the Nurse apparently intended. It is perhaps understandable that, as a servant, the Nurse might seek Deianira's approval before speaking, but the extent to which Deianira rephrases her words is more unusual – she does not simply pass on the Nurse's speech, but redevelops it so that the Nurse's words end up taking on the message that Deianira wishes to convey – even while they remain attributed to her. This adjustment in the strength of what is said explains Hyllus' rather surprised objection that it is not shameful because he does in fact already know where his father is, (67), and Deianira is forced to move to a new tack in order to persuade Hyllus, the mention of the prophecies. Apparently having judged that the Nurse's statement was not strong enough for her purpose, Deianira appears perfectly capable of changing its content while claiming simply to relay it, in order to get the maximum affect from what is spoken.

Her message to Heracles via Lichas demonstrates a very similar level of control and understanding of the exact words that should be used to achieve her desired affect. Having told him what he is to tell Heracles in much detail, she outlines to him clearly that he must be careful to specifically pass on her message,

> ἀλλ᾽ ἕρπε, καὶ φύλασσε πρῶτα μὲν νόμον,
>
> τὸ μὴ ᾽πιθυμεῖν πομπὸς ὢν περισσὰ δρᾶν·
>
> *But go, and first keep your eye on the rule, that a messenger should not want to be over-involved beyond the scope of his message.* (616-7)

Lichas agrees, but when he says that "φράσω σεσωσμένα" (*I will explain that all is well* 626), Deianira does not leave it at that – she quickly steps in again and specifies exactly what

he will speak of in this context, firstly pointing him to the fact that she has welcomed Iole "φίλως" (628), and then adding the rhetorical question,

τί δῆτ᾽ ἂν ἄλλο γ᾽ ἐννέποις;

Then what else could you tell him? (630)

She makes it clear to Lichas that there is nothing else he should say to Heracles, and indeed, Lichas agreeably goes away without adding anything else to his proposed message, at least before Deianira. Most noticeably, Deianira expresses her awareness of how carefully the message should be constructed,

δέδοικα γὰρ

μὴ πρῲ λέγοις ἂν τὸν πόθον τὸν ἐξ ἐμοῦ,

πρὶν εἰδέναι τἀκεῖθεν εἰ ποθούμεθα

For I am afraid, lest you speak to him early about longing for him from me, before learning if I am also longed for there. (630-2)

She is aware of potential repercussions from speech which may run against what Heracles wishes to hear, and is therefore unusually careful and controlled when instructing Lichas on what message to carry.

Both Lichas and the Nurse are in a social sense subordinate to Deianira, and so her level of influence could be considered unsurprising. However, both reveal by their autonomy and level of independence that she does not necessarily have a constant, controlling authority over them both. Despite her request for permission, the Nurse does feel she is in a position to give advice to Deianira (53), and she describes how she watches Deianira in her distress,

κἀγὼ λαθραῖον ὄμμ᾽ ἐπεσκιασμένη

φρούρουν·

And I kept watch on her, covering over my face. (914-5)

and takes steps to prevent her suicide (presumably against Deianira's will) by running to fetch Hyllus,

κἀγὼ δρομαία βᾶσ᾽, ὅσονπερ ἔσθενον,

τῷ παιδὶ φράζω τῆς τεχνωμένης τάδε.

And I went running at full tilt, as quick as I could, and warned her son of this thing she was contriving. (927-8)

Elsewhere in the play she is significantly less present or active than Nurse figures from other tragedies, such as Phaedra's nurse, so it is difficult to establish her level of independence fully, but it certainly seems clear that she is not such a subordinate figure that she objects to advising, or even attempting to involve herself in Deianira's actions. Lichas is a far more active character beyond the bounds of Deianira's potential influence, and establishes himself outside the period of Deianira's questioning as able to act independently, and even against her potential wishes, as he does when he strongly resists the messenger's attempts to make him reveal the full story to Deianira (393-435). Despite the fact that he claims that Deianira is his "δεσπότιν" (407), he rejects any charge that in refusing to fully answer her questions he is being "μὴ δίκαιος" as the Messenger alleges (411). In fact he refuses to give the information she seeks until she gives her own long response to his obfuscation, littered with strong commands:

μή … ἐκκλέψῃς λόγον.

…...……………….

ἀλλ᾽ εἰπὲ πᾶν τἀληθές· ὡς ἐλευθέρῳ

ψευδεῖ καλεῖσθαι κὴρ πρόσεστιν οὐ καλή.

ὅπως δὲ λήσεις, οὐδὲ τοῦτο γίγνεται·

πολλοὶ γὰρ οἷς εἴρηκας, οἳ φράσουσ᾽ ἐμοί.

…...…………………

... σοὶ δ᾽ ἐγὼ φράζω κακὸν

πρὸς ἄλλον εἶναι, πρὸς δ᾽ ἔμ᾽ ἀψευδεῖν ἀεί.

Do not conceal your story!... But tell me the whole truth! It is not a good thing for a free man to be called a liar. Nor can you in any way escape notice: for there are many people to whom you spoke, and they will tell me... I tell you to be deceitful to someone else, but always to be honest to me! (436-69)

It is only then, still with reluctance, that Lichas reveals the truth and all the information he has concealed, and he makes it clear that he has done so of his own volition,

οὔτ᾽ εἶπε κρύπτειν οὔτ᾽ ἀπηρνήθη ποτέ,

ἀλλ᾽ αὐτός, ὦ δέσποινα, …

…...…………………

ἥμαρτον, εἴ τι τῶνδ᾽ ἁμαρτίαν νέμεις.

He [Heracles] did not tell me to hide anything, nor to deny anything, but, mistress, I myself did wrong, if you think that anything in this was wrong. (480-83)

Even before he enters, there is some suggestion that Lichas has the power to act fairly independently of Deianira's wishes, as the messenger indicates that he is delayed in bringing the story to her (193-9), despite her eagerness to hear the news, which the messenger himself identifies (189-91). It is clear therefore that the power Deianira exerts over both Lichas and the Nurse is stronger than any compulsion based on relative social status – not least as both of them seem often not to recognise a great deal of influence from this source.

Similarly Hyllus, as her son, demonstrates independence and autonomy which prevent

186

his being repeatedly persuaded by Deianira from seeming only a consequence of their mother-son relationship.[33] Hyllus reveals that he has been collecting information on his own initiative even before Deianira instructs him, and passes that information on with apparent confidence in its veracity, until it is questioned by Deianira (67-75). Furthermore, in the later parts of the play he demonstrates himself to be entirely willing to set himself against his mother, in his rush on to the stage after he has seen the results of the poisoned robes. He makes extremely strong comments, declares firmly his wishes for their ties to be severed, either by her death or by having never existed, (734-7) and then moves on to his direct accusations. However, even after this dramatic shift in their relationship, both in her skilful handling of the questioning at the start of the play (see above), and in her actions around her death, Deianira is still able to lead Hyllus strongly down the routes she prefers. She even succeeds in transforming him from her prosecutor to her defendant through her death, although it is notable that his own skill in speech is significantly less than hers, and so he proves a poor advocate for her to Heracles.

In contrast, there are few others able to command speech or silence in the same way Deianira does. Lichas makes it very clear that Heracles has not been so careful in his message to Deianira – indeed Lichas is able to change its content entirely, apparently without fearing any repercussions from Heracles (479-83). His whole comment makes it clear that he has been passing on his message rather than one specifically marked out by Heracles, and thus shows that the off-stage hero has been far less concerned with controlling his messenger's

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33 Hall (2009) in her discussion of poor decision-making in this tragedy has argued that in fact Hyllus' status as young adult male in the family makes him somewhat superior to Deianira, and leads to an expectation that Deianira should consult him for advice, so that her failure to do so should be seen as part of the cause of the disaster (84-6, 94). While the Athenian audience may have expected to see Hyllus take such a role, however, it is important to note that no similar expectation is raised within the play itself – the Nurse does not advise Deianira to consult with Hyllus, rather to take her own decisions and use him to carry them out (54-60, esp. 60 when she claims Deianira should "χρῆσθαι" Hyllus).

speech, in comparison to Deianira. Perhaps the most striking example of lack of control and inability to command speech is found in the scene which ends in interaction between Hyllus and Heracles at the end of the play. In his extremity of pain, Heracles is originally silent and sleeping, and three times the accompanying old man warns Hyllus that he similarly must be quiet, and avoid waking his father (974-7, 978-81, 988-91), but his commands and urgings have no affect at all. First Hyllus answers the old man's command with a question urging the old man to more speech rather than less (977), then he rejects (rather abruptly – beginning "ἀλλ᾽ ἐπί μοι") the other's command in order to lament his own misery (982-3), and when the old man remonstrates with him a third time, he rejects his instructions again, instead commenting on his own feelings (992-3). The old man has no influence at all on Hyllus' speech, unable to keep him silent even to protect his beloved father.

Once Heracles awakens, his pain is poured out in a great flood of speech, with the old man and Hyllus interjecting once, but unable to interrupt him again. He ends his final speech with a desire to have Deianira near, but this time he does not express a wish to punish her physically (recognising this as potentially impossible - 1107-8) as such, but claims,

προσμόλοι μόνον,

ἵν᾽ ἐκδιδαχθῇ πᾶσιν ἀγγέλλειν ὅτι

καὶ ζῶν κακούς γε καὶ θανὼν ἐτεισάμην.

Let her only come close, so that she may be taught to announce to everyone that both living and dead I have punished the wicked. (1109-1111)

The choice of language, given his wish to have her "ἀγγέλειν" what he wishes, suggests that his focus is on exerting control over Deianira's speech, particularly as this statement is combined with his explicit recognition of his inability to punish her physically. However, even

this level of control is denied him. Deianira's silence has been made total and permanent by her death – the choice of silence she has already made cannot be broken by Heracles or any other, and so his wish to control her speech, unlike her own, is totally ineffectual. He then begins his conversation with his son, and as mentioned above, they repeatedly talk at cross purposes. Heracles attempts to interrupt or stop his son from talking several times, and Hyllus goes on determinedly, utterly uncontrolled by his father's words. But similarly, Hyllus is not able to influence his father to actually accept his speech – the frequent interruptions and objections prevent his getting to the central point for over 20 lines. Neither speaker is strong enough to assert control of the conversation and affect the speech of the other, unlike in the conversations Deianira led. Their confusion and contradictions contrast strongly with her strength and control, and leave a powerful impression of her skill in this area, even after her death, which functions to bind her silence effectively as she desires.

By seeking and demonstrating such authority in the realm of speech and silence, Deianira obtains an unusual position in relation to her husband, and the discourses of praise and blame within which he is positioned. None of the male warriors discussed in the previous section – Ajax, Euripides' Heracles, or Theseus – have wives who demonstrate the same type of strength. As a result, particularly in the cases of Ajax and Heracles, they themselves are the most influential figures who attempt to involve themselves in the production or rejection of praise or blame discourses, in order to construct their own identities to their satisfaction – with ruinous results. In the *Trachiniae*, Deianira's authoritative position in relation to speech, and particularly the efficacious praise and blame speech which is used for identity construction, makes it possible for her involvement to carry much more weight than is seen from any of the women on stage with Theseus, Ajax or Euripides' Heracles, and it is this

weight which means that in the *Trachiniae* it is her involvement, not Heracles', which ends destructively.

The Destruction of Heracles' Praise

The effect which this strength of Deianira's has on her husband's identity, and the ways in which it becomes part of his destruction, can be demonstrated through her relationship with the discourse of praise that Heracles attracts. Unlike Megara in Euripides' *Heracles,* Deianira demonstrates a clear unwillingness to accept the praiseworthiness of her husband, and to contribute to the praise culture surrounding him. As a result she does not participate in maintaining his identity or subject positions within discourses of praise – instead, she rejects the discourse entirely, and causes the undermining and eventual destruction of his praiseworthy identity.

Deianira refuses ever to praise Heracles directly – the closest she comes to such an action is when she calls him "κλεινὸς" (*"famous"* 19), thus evoking the praise that others have given him in the past, but given her later moves to undercut his praise, this is a rather double-edged compliment. When Heracles' return has been announced to her, she is not as quick to join his praise as those around her, saying only:

> πῶς δ᾽ οὐκ ἐγὼ χαίροιμ᾽ ἄν, ἀνδρὸς εὐτυχῆ
>
> κλύουσα πρᾶξιν τήνδε, πανδίκῳ φρενί;
>
> πολλή ᾽στ᾽ ἀνάγκη τῇδε τοῦτο συντρέχειν.
>
> *How then should I not rejoice with an entirely righteous heart, in hearing about this*
>
> *successful business of my husband? It must surely be the case that my joy must match*

up to this success. (293-5)

This is her only indication that she might intend to share in the celebration, and she immediately turns away from it, instead focusing on her pity for the captured women. Her questioning tone to begin, discussion of the triumph in strong terms of obligation ("πολλή ἀνάγκη") and her focus on what is fitting or right ("πανδίκῳ φρενί") suggests obligation rather than any actual willingness, and as a result she avoids actually praising Heracles, rather casting doubt on the whole process before she refuses to participate in it and chooses pity instead. It is further important to note that the chorus begin to frame Heracles' return in very epinician terms (see above), such that Deianira's rejection of this celebration constitutes a rejection of the formal praise with which they might celebrate a returning victor. Again, this presents a significant contrast with the chorus' epinician celebrations of the returning warrior in Euripides' *Heracles*, which receive no rejection or dismissal, and thus stand more securely as a positive process of identity construction for Heracles.[34]

Once she has heard the full story of Iole, she takes this line of thought to its bitter end, calling Heracles sarcastically,

ὁ πιστὸς ἡμῖν κἀγαθὸς καλούμενος

He who is called both trustworthy and noble. (541)

Rather than simply focusing on the description of her husband, it is important to note that Deianira highlights the fact that this is what he is *called* by others – once again raising a dissenting voice against the praise given to him by others, and disassociating it clearly from anything she might say about him. Her message to Lichas similarly contains none of the praise or welcome found from other wives to their returning husbands, focusing instead on the

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34 Chapter 1.

idea that she has welcomed Iole, and warning Lichas against expanding further.[35] Thus in a play in which Deianira is shown to be particularly concerned with truth and careful speech, it is notable that she is never willing to praise her husband, and even undercuts the praise of others when she mentions it. As a result, her apparent control over speech is involved in refusing to position Heracles within praise discourses, thus removing the option for this efficacious speech to be an aspect of his identity construction, at least while she dominates the stage.

Deianira is not only involved in denying Heracles praise, she is also responsible for suggesting implied blame for her husband, in her reactions to what the chorus and messenger see as triumphant victories in his labours. Even early on, while the other characters on stage are celebrating her husband's return, she warns that she must fear for Heracles,

ὅμως δ᾽ ἔνεστι τοῖσιν εὖ σκοπουμένοις

ταρβεῖν τὸν εὖ πράσσοντα, μὴ σφαλῇ ποτε.

Nevertheless, it is for those who consider things well to be terrified for the man who is doing well, lest one day he is thrown down. (296-7)

While her words mirror a trope often found in Greek thought, and particularly in disclaimers such as those found in Pindar's poetry,[36] they are still an unexpected negative note from someone who claims that she 'should' rejoice at hearing of her husband's return.[37] As the tragedy progresses, she takes this negative note much further, however, and while she never moves into outright blame, she makes several comments which invite those around her to

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35 As above. Contrast the (deceptive) praise Clytemnestra displays as part of her welcome to Agamemnon, esp. Aesch. *Ag* 896-913. In Eur. *El.* Electra complains 157-66 that Clytemnestra's welcome to Agamemnon did not (at least according to her version) involve the appropriate garlands and context of praise for a wife welcoming home a victorious husband.

36 Egs. *Ol.* 5.23-5, 7.24-6, 12.6-12a, *Pyth.* 3.80-106.

37 Easterling (1982) 2-3 on this idea of the mutability of human fortune as a central theme in the play.

consider whether Heracles' actions might be at least unworthy of praise, if not outright blameworthy. When she interrogates Lichas she comments:

εἰ μὲν ἐκ κείνου μαθὼν

ψεύδῃ, μάθησιν οὐ καλὴν ἐκμανθάνεις·

εἰ δ᾽ αὐτὸς αὐτὸν ὧδε παιδεύεις, ὅταν

θέλῃς λέγεσθαι χρηστός, ὀφθήσῃ κακός.

If you lie because you have learnt it from him [Heracles], you are not learning a fine lesson well: but if you yourself have educated yourself in this fashion, whenever you want to be said to be honest, you will in fact be seen as base. (449-52)

Although she does not go so far as to explicitly condemn Heracles, the strength of her language to Lichas, and the description of him she provides as acting in such a way as to prevent his ever being seen as honest, is very damning. There has in fact been no indication from Lichas that he should be repeating a message he has been schooled in by Heracles – Deianira's drawing in of her husband as a cause for the blameworthy actions she sees in Lichas is unfounded, as Lichas himself will reveal (479-83). Her introduction of Heracles into the issue leaves him open to criticism and censure, in the same way that the behaviour she feels he has caused in others is open to censure, despite the fact that he is not actually directly responsible for what has been said.

In a similar manner, Deianira manages to indicate reproach for Heracles' actions in discussing the matter of Iole, without ever directly blaming him herself. She cries,

πλείστας ἀνὴρ εἷς Ἡρακλῆς ἔγημε δή;

κοὔπω τις αὐτῶν ἔκ γ᾽ ἐμοῦ λόγον κακὸν

ἠνέγκατ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ὄνειδος·

> *Didn't one man, Heracles, sleep with many women? But not one of these has borne a bad word from me, nor any blame.* (460-62)

Deianira here uses a rhetorical effect to avoid actually blaming Heracles, while nonetheless making it clear that his actions would be worthy of blame. It is similar to the orator's technique of paraleipsis, which despite the denial manages to introduce a discussion of the very thing supposedly not to be mentioned.[38] Although Deianira claims that she has never spoken evilly or reproached any of the women Heracles has slept with, the very fact that she denies having done so opens up the possibility, and invites her hearers, the chorus and Lichas, to consider that she could have taken this course, and would not have been entirely unreasonable to do so. Furthermore, the very fact that she makes Heracles distinctly the agent in the situation, while stating only that she does not blame the women involved, leaves rather obviously unspoken her opinion of his behaviour as opposed to theirs. The strength of her opening sentence, contrasting the singled-out εἷς Heracles with not simply other women, but πλείστας women, leaves the potential for blame even more noticeably highlighted – Deianira describes the situation in the strongest, most negative words possible, while still avoiding actually reproaching her husband for his actions. With this in mind, it is notable that when Deianira decides to take action to change the situation, it is Heracles' behaviour which becomes her target – she does not even seem to consider taking action against Iole.

It is not only the crisis of infidelity that Deianira hints at blaming in the *Trachiniae*. The grand undertaking that became synonymous with Heracles' identity, his labours, become a target for her disapproval, even if, again, this is never expressed through direct blame. Even at the beginning of the play, she describes her married life in rather negative terms,

> λέχος γὰρ Ἡρακλεῖ κριτὸν

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38 e.g. Dem. 19.182, 19.145, 21.15, 21.95-7.

ξυστᾶσ᾽ ἀεί τιν᾽ ἐκ φόβου φόβον τρέφω,

κείνου προκηραίνουσα. …

 …..………………

κἀφύσαμεν δὴ παῖδας, οὓς κεῖνός ποτε,

γῄτης ὅπως ἄρουραν ἔκτοπον λαβών,

σπείρων μόνον προσεῖδε κἀξαμῶν ἅπαξ·

τοιοῦτος αἰὼν εἰς δόμους τε κἀκ δόμων

ἀεὶ τὸν ἄνδρ᾽ ἔπεμπε λατρεύοντά τῳ.

For, won as the chosen bride for Heracles, I always foster some fear or another,

anxious for him... indeed we had children, who he, just like a farmer who has taken a

distant piece of ploughland, only looks at when he is sowing or reaping: such is the

life which sends my husband, working in service to someone, always to and from

home. (27-9, 31-5)

Her description is unflattering – she reveals no joy in the way she came to be married to Heracles, or any feeling more than 'anxiety' for him (which, given her later musings on the difficult state of women when their husbands/male protectors are defeated (298-306), may in fact be closer to anxiety for herself). Her description of his role as a father stops short of actual blame – she does not clearly indicate that she holds him responsible for his attitude, or even that such an attitude is totally reprehensible – the farmer she gives as an example, after all, is not doing anything obviously wrong. However, the context in which the image is presented makes it clear that even if Deianira does not blame Heracles directly, she invites those around her to share in recognising how her situation, caused by her marriage to him, is less than ideal. Indeed, in this aspect she is successful, for both the Nurse and the chorus on their respective entries to the stage comment on her misery (49-50 and 103-131), and neither

reproach her for it – the chorus even suggest that they sympathise with her, even though they urge her to hold on to hope, "ὧν ἐπιμεμφομένας ἀδεῖα" (122). It is notable here that even though Deianira has not indulged in any direct blame of her husband for her unhappiness, the chorus in responding to her words use the verb ἐπιμέμφομαι, often used with the meaning 'cast blame upon.' Even if Deianira does not directly express any blame, the chorus seem to read the possibility of her doing so from her words, and to acknowledge the blameworthy aspects of the situation of her marriage. This aspect of her reframing of his identity is perhaps one of the most damning. By refusing to praise Heracles' labours, and in fact inviting blame for him from others, Deianira does not reinforce the 'traditional' heroic identity he would gain from them. Again, there is a clear contrast with the situation found in Euripides' *Heracles*, where the chorus and Lyssa both use reference to Heracles' labours in order to position him within discourses of praise as a heroic, triumphant figure.[39] In the *Trachiniae*, Deianira denies Heracles a similar identity by rejecting these types of praise discourses, and instead suggesting that the labours are not praiseworthy at all, even if any blame is implied rather than directly spoken. Thus in direct contrast to Euripides' Heracles, who seeks to reject this aspect of his identity and has it forced upon him nonetheless, for Sophocles' Heracles this praiseworthy, heroic subject position ceases to be accessible at all, since Deianira, whose control over speech is demonstrated whenever she is on stage, refuses to establish or maintain it as part of his identity.

In the same way, Deianira's reactions manage to create blame for Heracles in another individual on stage, even without any direct comment from her. As discussed above, Deianira refuses to blame Iole expressly for her role in Heracles' infidelity and the actions following. However, when Heracles commands Hyllus to marry her, the blame that she hinted could have

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39 Chapter 1.

come from Deianira is effectively transferred to Hyllus, who expresses horror at the idea, and blames Iole for all that has happened. Heracles' words in the command, when he suggests that Hyllus should,

> μηδ᾽ ἄλλος ἀνδρῶν τοῖς ἐμοῖς πλευροῖς ὁμοῦ
>
> κλιθεῖσαν αὐτὴν ἀντὶ σοῦ λάβῃ ποτέ
>
> *Never let another man but you take her who has lain pressed to my side.* (1225-6)

clearly recall Deianira's emphasis on Heracles as 'one man' with many wives, as he insists on remaining the sole man for Iole, with the exception of his son who will stand as an unwilling proxy for himself. Furthermore, in his reply Hyllus claims that the only person worthy of blame for the situation is Iole, declaring,

> τίς γάρ ποθ᾽, ἥ μοι μητρὶ μὲν θανεῖν μόνη
>
> μεταίτιος, σοὶ δ᾽ αὖθις ὡς ἔχεις ἔχειν,
>
> τίς ταῦτ᾽ ἄν, …
>
> ἕλοιτο; κρεῖσσον κἀμέ γ᾽, ὦ πάτερ, θανεῖν
>
> ἢ τοῖσιν ἐχθίστοισι συνναίειν ὁμοῦ.
>
> *Who possibly, when she is the only accessory to my mother's dying, and to your being in the way you are, who then... could choose this? Better for me too to die, father, than to live together with she who is the most hateful to me.* (1232-7)

Despite the fact that Hyllus has explained the role of Nessus to his father only 100 lines before, he entirely omits the centaur from any further responsibility, unlike Heracles (see below), claiming that Iole is the only cause for all that has happened, and describing her in very strong terms. Further more, he suggests that to marry her would be "δυσσεβεῖν" (1245), and the context suggests, both with this line and his description of Iole's perceived crimes, with his mother's death coming first, that it is primarily his mother's perspective he wishes to

represent here. With the focus on Iole, therefore, Hyllus has taken his mother's earlier words of suggested blame and applied them directly – just as Deianira does not dwell on blame for Nessus' role, neither does Hyllus, who in forming his judgement of what has happened, refers only to ideas his mother has previously suggested. While Hyllus, like Deianira, may not express direct blame for Heracles, this re-issuing of Deianira's earlier implied blame invokes the previous occasion, a situation in which Heracles, while not explicitly blamed, is indicated as being potentially blameworthy.

Thus Deianira has an instrumental role in not only rejecting the praise tradition for Heracles, but even in inviting and creating blame from others around him, even if, as a good wife, she never actually speaks such blame aloud herself.[40] Of course her physical destruction of the very qualities for which he was previously praised, his strength and vitality, even if unintentional, is the final overturning of any praiseworthy identity for Heracles, once again managed by Deianira. Nearly all of the praise which Heracles receives in the *Trachiniae* from those around him is focused on his physical strength, and often his vitality. The messenger announces his return by specifically mentioning his "κράτει νικηφόρῳ" (*"victorious might"* 186). Lichas emphasises the same points when giving a report of Heracles' condition,

ἔγωγέ τοί σφ᾽ ἔλειπον ἰσχύοντά τε

καὶ ζῶντα καὶ θάλλοντα κοὐ νόσῳ βαρύν

For myself, I left him strong, alive, and flourishing, and not weighed down by any

illness. (234-5)

Deianira has no reason to suspect illness in Heracles – perhaps she might fear that he would be wounded or dead – but Lichas' focus on health emphasises this as one of his most-praised

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40 This lack of explicit blame from her is the major contrast between Deianira and Clytemnestra and Medea, discussed in Chapters 4&5.

characteristics, especially as he repeats the comment that he is strong. The chorus imagine his "πάσας ἀρετᾶς λάφυρ᾽" (*"Trophies of all valour"* 645) and later describe him as "ἄλκιμον" (*"mighty"* 956). Heracles himself focuses on his many feats in relation to the physical parts of his body which have brought them about, talking of the "καὶ χερσὶ καὶ νώτοισι μοχθήσας ἐγώ᾽" (*"labours of my arms and my back"* 1047).

It is these praiseworthy attributes which are then described as so utterly ruined by the robe Deianira sends. Heracles himself recognises the destruction which the robe brings as being a devastation of the body, focusing on it when he cries

πλευραῖσι γὰρ προσμαχθὲν ἐκ μὲν ἐσχάτας

βέβρωκε σάρκας, πλεύμονός τ᾽ ἀρτηρίας

ῥοφεῖ ξυνοικοῦν· ἐκ δὲ χλωρὸν αἷμά μου

πέπωκεν ἤδη, καὶ διέφθαρμαι δέμας

τὸ πᾶν, ἀφράστῳ τῇδε χειρωθεὶς πέδῃ

It has stuck to my sides and eaten into my innermost flesh, and it clings to me and devours the pipes of my lungs: already it has drunk my fresh blood from me, and my whole body is utterly destroyed, as I have been mastered by these unspeakable fetters.

(1053-1057)[41]

The focus on the physical effects is emphasised by his insistence that the entirety (τὸ πᾶν) of his body is ruined – the hero whose greatness lay in physical strength of the body, for which he was most praised, now finds that it is in this aspect that his destruction is wrought.[42]

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41 Mattison (2015) 12 on the verbal echoes between the description here and that of the robe in Aeschylus' Agamemnon.

42 On the extremely physical aspect of the robe, Kratzer (2013) 46-7, who compares the robe to a wrestler, recognising the physicality of its effect. Also Pozzi (1994) 585, who treats the robe as an embodiment of Deianira, forcing a physical union between her and Heracles.

Heracles emphasises this point further in his cry, focused on the physical instruments of his success:

ὦ χέρες χέρες,

ὦ νῶτα καὶ στέρν᾽, ὦ φίλοι βραχίονες,

ὑμεῖς ἐκεῖνοι δὴ καθέσταθ᾽....

O my hands, my hands, O my back and shoulders, O my beloved arms, are you the same ones which once subdued [the Nemean lion]. (1089-91)

Similarly a little later he complains, immediately after a description of his successful labours (1101-3):

νῦν δ' ὧδ' ἄναρθρος καὶ κατερρακωμένος

τυφλῆς ὑπ' ἄτης ἐκπεπόρθημαι τάλας,

But now, unjointed and torn to rags, I, wretched, am undone by blind ruin. (1103-4)

Heracles contrasts the descriptions of his past glories with his physical destruction through his close juxaposition of both. As a result the destruction of his physical strength is presented as simultaneously the destruction of his glorious identity, which should have been preserved through praise discourses, as is the 'heroic' identity of Heracles in Euripides' *Heracles*, particularly in the celebration of his labours which the chorus carry out. In the *Trachiniae*, there is no such celebration of Heracles' labours – other than the chorus' brief early allusions, the only sustained praise for them comes in Heracles' statements here, where they are forcibly coupled to their detriment with the destruction of his physical strength. Deianira's refusal to sustain a discourse of praise within which Heracles is positioned therefore prevents him from having any other access to a discourse of praise within which his heroic identity can be constructed, and contributes to the impossibility of sustaining that identity.

Heracles' recognition that this destruction of his strength has been effected by a woman "φασγάνου δίχα" (*"without a sword"* 1063) emphasises the incongruity of Deianira's strength – without recourse to 'manly' might (1062) or even a weapon such as he would recognise, she has destroyed his strength and made of him something unworthy of praise.[43] His surprise, however, is mistaken. Deianira's actions are the final step in her process of problematizing the praise which Heracles has received throughout the play, by reducing him to a status which cannot be praised at all. Furthermore, this destruction of his capacity to be praised is the result and final unconscious extension of her own skill and command over the speech of those around her, and her control and understanding of the value of truth and correct speech. As a result, this verbal destruction of his heroic identity is part of the simultaneous destruction of the physical strength, so that Deianira's skill with speech, not Heracles' own problems as in Euripides' *Heracles*, makes it impossible for Heracles to maintain his desired identity.

Conclusion

Although Deianira's destruction of Heracles' praiseworthy identity affirms her power in the short-term, as with many powerful women in tragedy, it is difficult to read the *Trachiniae* as a triumphal argument for the righteousness of women's influence. It is unlikely that any Athenian audience could look at the play, with Deianira dead, Heracles, a great hero,

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43 Wender (1974) 14, Machin (1981) 274. It is worth noting here that although Deianira kills Heracles without a (typically masculine) sword, she does of course bring about her own death using one. See also Loraux (1987) 9-11 on possible gendered readings of tragic deaths, and Winnington-Ingram (1980) 81 n.28, who connects this mode of death with the sexual relationship between Deianira and Heracles. Hoey (1970) 16 also provides a gendered reading of the deaths of both characters.

dying, and Hyllus extremely upset,[44] and consider that this is a positive ending. Deianira's influence over speech has in fact only succeeded in destroying herself and everything around her – and while this may involve the vindication of her own doubts about Heracles' praiseworthy status, this is in no way a success which the wider community can celebrate. If tragedy is meant to involve that community, in the form of its audience, in passing judgements on the events of the play, then Deianira's fate is a dangerous warning of what can happen when women successfully claim influence for themselves, particularly in the realm of public discourses of praise and blame, from which they are more usually considered to be barred by Athenian society.[45] Much of Deianira's implied criticism of Heracles is entirely justified – by bringing Iole back to the house in the way that he does, he cannot be considered an entirely innocent victim of his own fate.[46] Nonetheless, the connection between the praise of Heracles which Deianira so aptly controls, and the intensely physical aspects of his destruction, prevent Heracles' death from being represented as a consequence of his own actions rather than hers, and thus make Deianira appear as the far more problematic figure. Heracles' behaviour may be condemnable, but Deianira's condemnation is terrifyingly destructive.

In many ways, however, Deianira's treatment of Heracles' praiseworthy identity is mild. While she may refuse to position him within discourses of praise, she does not progress beyond implied blame to outright criticism, nor does she openly position him through discourses of blame rather than praise. As a result, she presents a decided contrast with the two other wives selected for discussion in the next two chapters, Clytemnestra and Medea.

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44 Even if his 'succession' is assured by his marriage to Iole – Wohl (1998) 4.

45 As suggested in the somewhat notorious comment of Pericles at Thuc. 2.45.2. On this, see further the Introduction.

46 Foley (2001) 94-104, esp. 95-7 on the *Trachiniae* discusses well tragedy's extremely negative portrayal of male attempts to introduce concubines into homes where wives already exist and the relationship between these portrayals and Athenian male anxieties about marriage. See also Mattison (2015) 22-3.

Both of these characters take a far more active and damaging role in the identity construction of their husbands, by replacing the praise discourses within which they are replaced with discourses of blame. In this regard, Deianira's use of this technique can be seen as part of a repeated pattern in the depiction of the destructive wives of warrior figures in tragedy, which is only revealed when the use of discourses of praise and blame as a method of identity construction is examined.

Chapter Four: Clytemnestra's new discourses of blame.

When an attempt is made as part of identity construction to position someone (or oneself) within a particular discourse, there are a variety of possible responses, particularly if this attempt is made as part of a conversation or similar interactive process.[1] The discourse and the position within it may be successfully conveyed, and the desired identity constructed. The discourse may be resisted or rejected entirely, and the identity constructed within it may therefore be destabilized in the eyes of the interlocutor, as is the case with Deianira's rejection of the praise discourses which position Heracles in the *Trachiniae*.[2] Or, as an alternative response, a competing discourse may be presented by the second participant, which attempts to construct an alternative identity for the original participant.[3] This is the approach taken by Clytemnestra to the identity construction of her husband, Agamemnon.

Like Deianira, from the *Agamemnon* onwards Clytemnestra dominates the discourses of praise and blame surrounding her husband, so that her influence over these becomes part of his death. However, unlike Deianira, Clytemnestra chooses not simply to reject the dominant discourse of praise within which Agamemnon is usually situated by the chorus and other characters. Instead, in all the tragedies in which she appears, Clytemnestra insists on situating Agamemnon within an entirely different discourse of blame. Rather than allowing him to be praised as general or warrior, she insists on constructing his identity within a discourse of

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1 Davis & Haare (1990) esp. 45, 48 present a particularly clear analysis of how processes of subjectivity through discursive practice take part in conversations between multiple participants.

2 Sunderland (2003) 176-7 on some of the ways these attempts to construct identity may be resisted by an interlocutor. Also Davis & Haare (1990) 53.

3 On resisting subject-positioning within a particular discourse by either of the two methods mentioned here, see also Weedon (1987) 97-8, 111-2; Moore (1994) 48, 61.

blame which focuses on his roles as father and husband, a more domestically-focused discourse. Her success in asserting this discourse as the dominant one contributes to the erasure of Agamemnon's praised identity and thus his death, as is the case with Deianira's success in the *Trachiniae*. However, Clytemnestra's introduction of a competing discourse as a means of verbalising this destruction, with its focus on blame for the roles played within the family, leaves her vulnerable to the same effect. Deianira's death comes with her insistence upon silence; Clytemnestra's, in contrast, is a triumph of the very same discourse she had produced around Agamemnon, taken up and used against Clytemnestra herself by her children, Orestes and Electra, who simultaneously reject its suitability for constructions of Agamemnon's identity, and insist on repositioning him within the more familiar discourses of praise for his heroic identity. Both of these effects remain constant across the tragedies in which Clytemnestra and Agamemnon appear, developing from their original (extant) introduction in the *Oresteia*. It is a consistent aspect of her appearances in drama that she deploys a discourse of family-focused blame against him, yet finds the same discourse turned against her by her own family.[4] While it is often recognised that Clytemnestra's facility with persuasive speech is part of her undermining and eventual destruction of her husband, Agamemnon, this chapter instead explores the ways in which this facility with speech is often framed in the plays as being part of a specific awareness of the efficacious nature of praise and blame speech, particularly in relation to its use as a process of identity construction. As a result, it is specifically Clytemnestra's control over discourses of praise and blame, and her use of these to construct an alternative, negative identity for Agamemnon, which is argued for here as the most destructive aspect of her verbal influence.

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4   See Chapter 2 esp. n64 on dealing with one character across multiple plays.

<u>Controlling Praise & Blame</u>

Like Deianira, Clytemnestra is consistently presented as being concerned with and skilled in the manipulation of speech. However, unlike Deianira, Clytemnestra also demonstrates a persistent awareness of the power of specifically praise and blame speech, and a clear desire to control this efficacious type of speech. Moreover, she is frequently portrayed in tragedy as not only being aware of the power of praise and blame speech, but particularly its powerful relationship with identity, particularly her own.

Clytemnestra's skill with language and her use of that skill against her husband is well-recognised as a consistent part of her characterisation in Greek tragedy.[5] In the *Agamemnon* in particular, despite the chorus' continued attempts to call the value of her speech into question, this faculty is proven beyond doubt. In their earliest address to Clytemnestra the chorus ask for information, yet indicate that they doubt she will speak to them at all, anticipating that she may instead choose to keep silent (263). When she answers with the news that the Argives have conquered Troy (267) they initially doubt her, drawing particular attention to a perceived lack of clarity in her speech:

πῶς φής; πέφευγε τοὔπος ἐξ ἀπιστίας.

What are you saying? The word escaped me, as it is unbelievable. (268)

Clytemnestra's somewhat sarcastic response repeats the information before she asks "ἦ τορῶς λέγω", drawing attention to their apparent disbelief and dismissing it. Their further interrogation about the source of her information leads to a further criticism of their doubts

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5   For example: Raeburn & Thomas (2011) lii, lix; McClure (1999) 70-100; Goldhill (1984) esp. 35; Goward (2005) 63-8; Sevieri (1991); Rabinowitz (1981) 168; Mossman (2001); Thalmann (1985) esp. 226-30. McClure (1997) (partly influenced by Neustadt (1929)) in an interesting assessment argues that parts of Clytemnestra's speech in Aeschylus (specifically *Ag.* 958-74) draw their efficacy from the use of magical incantations.

from her:

> παιδὸς νέας ὣς κάρτ' ἐμωμήσω φρένας.

> *You have criticised me as if I were a very young child!* (277)

Yet her rebuttal doesn't entirely convince the chorus, who express further confusion about how she could have received the message (280), before Clytemnestra launches into the beacon-speech explaining the situation (281-316). This is a rhetorical tour de force,[6] and although the chorus doubt her again later in their concern to hear a spoken account rather than try to read a message born of light (496-7), while she is still on stage and addressing them they express willingness to be convinced. They ask first for her to repeat her message, this time without expressing disbelief at her words (318-9), before confirming that they approve her final explanation and its trustworthiness:

> γύναι, κατ' ἄνδρα σώφρον' εὐφρόνως λέγεις.

> ἐγὼ δ' ἀκούσας πιστά σου τεκμήρια

> *Woman, you speak reasonably, like a sensible man.*

> *And I, now that I've heard trustworthy proofs from you...* (351-2)

They cannot resist demonstrating further doubts about her honesty and trustworthiness, even if this time correctly, when they express doubts about her welcoming message to Agamemnon (615-6), but this time Clytemnestra does not seem to have remained on stage to rebuff their complaints.

There is also a particular concern found in Clytemnestra's response about a certain

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6   This beacon speech has been much-discussed in scholarship. Rosenmeyer (1982) 116-7 focuses on its artistry, particularly for conveying geographical scope (further on potential issues with the geography, Quincey (1963)); Goldhill (1984) 33-42 & (1992) 50-1 argues that it shows Clytemnestra's facility for manipulating the gap between signs and meaning. Tracey (1986) suggests that the speech invokes negative allusions to the Persian war, which compete with its positive light-based imagery. See also Rabinowitz (1981) 166-7 for a particularly interesting discussion of its oxymoronic complexity.

type of speech, which the chorus does not share. While the chorus may be concerned with speech in general, Clytemnestra's criticism of them focuses on their inappropriate use of blame specifically, (ἐμωμήσω 277) and thus points to her particular awareness of the importance of this type of speech. She does not object explicitly to their refusal to believe her, nor to their repeated questions, instead complaining about their inappropriate blame, and it is notable that her complaint has immediate effect – the chorus stop asking about the source of her information and immediately turn their attention to finding out the details of her knowledge (278). Furthermore, it becomes clear that this preoccupation with the value of appropriate praise and blame, beyond a more general concern with speech or truth, as is demonstrated in the case of Deianira, is a consistent element of Clytemnestra's characterisation.

In the same way, Clytemnestra's complaint about her treatment after celebrating the news of the beacon is focused upon the (to her) unfair verbal criticisms of others. Again she does not complain that she was not believed, but instead comments:

καί τις μ' ἐνίπτων εἶπε...

...

λόγοις τοιούτοις πλαγκτὸς οὖσ´ ἐφαινόμην·

And someone spoke, criticising me... in words of such a kind I was proclaimed to be a mad woman. (592-3)

As with her complaint about the criticisms of the chorus, Clytemnestra explicitly focuses on the identity which the unnamed individual constructs for her with through the use of this blame, claiming that these words attempt to position her within a discourse of blame that constructs her as a mad woman, just as the chorus, in her eyes, criticised her as if she had

been a young child. Neither type of blame is accepted by Clytemnestra, and in both cases she is vindicated, and her rejection of these suggested identities is successful.

Furthermore, there is a strong sense in the *Agamemnon* that Clytemnestra's influence as regards blame she might receive extends significantly beyond her own direct objections. In the very earliest scene of the play, the Watchman claims that he will not comment on the situation in the house, although he expresses a desire that it might speak for itself.[7]

> τά δ' ἄλλα σιγῶ· βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσσῃ μέγας
>
> βέβηκεν. οἶκος δ' αὐτός, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι,
>
> σαφέστατ' ἂν λέξειεν·
>
> *I am silent about the other things: a great ox has stepped on my tongue. But the house itself, if it had a voice, might speak most clearly.* (36-8)

The image he uses to represent his silence indicates an almost forced quality to his refusal to speak – his silence is effected and imposed upon him by an external force, rather than being entirely of his own will. Similarly on the herald's arrival to the palace, the chorus refuse to answer his question about why the citizens have been unhappy, saying only:

> πάλαι τὸ σιγᾶν φάρμακον βλάβης ἔχω.
>
> *For a long time I have used silence as a remedy against harm.* (549)

The herald correctly reads the chorus' implication that they have been afraid of someone (550), but the chorus does not explicitly identify the person they fear, nor do they express any blame for the situation in Argos which goes beyond their deliberately vague forebodings.[8] The sense conveyed in both instances is that the watchman and the chorus would like to criticise

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7   Euripides makes especially pointed use of a similar idea when Phaedra claims that the house should speak out specifically against adulterous wives in *Hipp.* 417-8. Goff (1990) 8-9. This could also have rather telling implications for the watchman's comment here.

8   Goldhill (1989) 51-2.

Clytemnestra, to blame her before the audience and their companions on stage, but find themselves unable and unwilling to do so. There is a further enlightening comment in the chorus' first address to Clytemnestra, when they claim:

> ἥκω σεβίζων σόν, Κλυταιμνήστρα, κρατος·
>
> δίκη γάρ ἐστι φωτὸς ἀρχγοῦ τίειν
>
> γυναῖκ', ἐρημωθέντος ἄρσενος θρόνου.
>
> *I have come, Clytemnestra, revering your power. For it is right to honour the wife of a male ruler, when the throne is deprived of that man.* (258-60)

Their use of the term σεβίζων echoes meaningfully in their first address to Agamemnon, when they ask:

> πῶς σε προσείπω, πῶς σε σεβίζω,
>
> μήθ' ὑπεράρας μήθ' ὑποκάμψας
>
> καιρὸν χάριτος;
>
> *How shall I address you, how reverence you, neither neither overshooting nor falling short of the target of pleasure?* (784-6)

This sung address is very reminiscent of the Pindaric technique of comparing the selection of the appropriate extent of praise to the shooting of a projectile, as with the arrow of *N.* 6.26-8, or *Ol.* 2.83, 89-90.[9] The chorus' question about 'reverencing' Agamemnon is thus one which evokes the context of praise poetry, and could even be translated as 'How shall I praise you'? Given the close parallels of their similar address to Clytemnestra, as both are opening remarks, directed precisely to the king (782) and queen (259-60) with specific references to that power, it is possible to see a similar meaning in their opening remark to her. However, in

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9   For projectiles more generally see also *Ol.* 13.93-5; *Pyth.* 1.42-5; *N.* 7.70-72 and 81, N. 9.55, and *Isth.* 2.35-37. On the Pindaric resonances of the use of this image in the *Agamemnon* see Steiner (2010) 25-6. On the epinician echoes of this passage more broadly cf. Harriott (1982) esp. 11-12; Steiner (2010).

addressing Agamemnon, the chorus allows some uncertainty to be expressed, whereas the address to Clytemnestra mentions only the requirement that they σεβίζειν her, indicating, in common with the earlier restrictions on their ability to blame her, a stronger sense of external pressure to praise Clytemnestra than is felt with Agamemnon. The environment created by these more subtle comments, along with her explicit refusals to allow blame which does not suit her, is one in which Clytemnestra has a great deal of influence or power over the blame accorded her, which neither the watchman nor even the chorus, who are themselves invested with 'authority' for public speech, are able to overcome.[10]

It is only once the murder has taken place that Clytemnestra's influence over blame is most explicitly demonstrated in relation to herself. Immediately after the murder of Agamemnon, it is again Clytemnestra's speech that the chorus find fault with rather than blaming any aspect of what she has done, complaining:

θαυμάζομέν σου γλῶσσαν, ὡς θρασύστομος,

ἥτις τοιόνδ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ κομπάζεις λόγον.

We wonder at your language, how insolent it is, when you make such a boast above

your husband. (1399-1400)

Clytemnestra's objection is quick, and in precisely the same terms as those she made earlier to the chorus' repeated comments about her speech:

πειρᾶσθέ μου γυναικὸς ὡς ἀφράσμονος·

ἐγὼ δ' ἀτρέστῳ καρδίᾳ πρὸς εἰδότας

λέγω – σὺ δ' αἰνεῖν εἴτε με ψέγειν θέλεις,

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10 Gantz (1983) 67-9 on the idea that the chorus of Argive elders are analogous to the jury of *Eumenides*, and thus carry some of their weight when it comes to the making of public judgements. On the choral voice more generally in the *Agamemnon*, Fletcher (1999) esp 29-30. On choruses and public authority to pronounce praise/blame more generally, see Chapter 1, n61.

ὅμοιον·

You are trying me as if I were a senseless woman: but I am telling you, with a fearless heart, what you already know – and whether you want to praise me or to blame me, it's all the same. (1401-4)

As in the comments discussed above, Clytemnestra again reproves the chorus for speaking to her in a way which she argues would be more suitable if she were someone else, so that once again her complaint is about the mismatch between their criticisms and her identity, which they have not correctly assessed. Furthermore, this time her complaint is more explicit, and she decisively rejects their right to praise or blame her at all, even invoking both terms in a way which recalls their traditional, starkly antithetical use in poetic contexts.[11] The chorus in their response invoke the community as a whole in support of their judgement (1407-11), and notably speak of the ἀράς which they anticipate Clytemnestra receiving, thus introducing further negative speech aimed at the queen, even if this time they have rather obediently avoided any direct reference to blaming her. As the exchange continues, Clytemnestra also successfully diverts their blame for Helen (1455-61):

μηδ' εἰς Ἑλένην κότον ἐκτρέψῃς

ὡς ἀνδρολέτειρ', ὡς μία πολλῶν

ἀνδρῶν ψυχὰς Δαναῶν ὀλέσασ'

ἀξύστατον ἄλγος ἔπραξεν.

Don't turn your ill-will against Helen, as the man-slayer, or the one woman who has destroyed the lives of many Danaan men, and caused entirely incurable pain. (1464-67)

As with her instructions about blame directed at herself, Clytemnestra's command here has immediate effect, and rather than continuing to talk about Helen, the chorus instead turn their

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11 Nagy (1980) 222-4.

discussion against the "δαῖμον" of the Atreid house (1468-74). At this, Clytemnestra even voices explicit approval for the new target of their blame for what has happened:

νῦν ὤρθωσας στόματος γνώμην,

Now you have set straight the judgement of your tongue. (1475)

And the chorus do not return to the subject of Helen at all, never returning to the blame which Clytemnestra forbade them to speak.

Cut off or denied blame by Clytemnestra every time they attempt to find a suitable target, therefore, the chorus is left in complete confusion (1530-6). They then turn to the question of Agamemnon, seemingly as a reaction to Clytemnestra's repeated blame for his role in Iphigenia's death (1521-29, 1431-7, 1412-25, 1397-4). It is important to note that their concern does not only focus on Agamemnon's burial (1541-6), but also about who will properly *praise* Agamemnon as he deserves:

τίς δ' ἐπιτύμβιον αἶνον ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ θείῳ

σὺν δακρύοις ἰάπτων

ἀληθείᾳ φρενῶν πονήσει;

Who, standing over the tomb and offering praise for the godlike man, along with tears, will perform the task with a truthful heart? (1547-50)

Once again Clytemnestra rejects their right to be involved in such things at all:

οὐ σὲ προσήκει τὸ μέλημ' ἀλέγειν

τοῦτο·

That concern is not for you to care about. (1551-2)

Furthermore, her response concerns itself solely with the question of burial and laments (1552-9), and does not suggest that she will be involved at all with praising Agamemnon. As a

result, the chorus' apparent attempt to involve themselves in praising him is immediately cut off once more, so that her blame is left as the only tolerated speech. Indeed in their answering comment the chorus both recognise the prominence of this type of speech and appear to renounce any further attempts to involve themselves or influence what Clytemnestra says of this kind:

> ὄνειδος ἥκει τόδ' ἀντ' ὀνείδους,
>
> δύσμαχα δ' ἐστὶ κρῖναι.
>
> *Blame comes up against blame, and it is a hard struggle to judge.* (1560-1)

Given that Clytemnestra had previously disavowed their ability to judge her, as they had not done so for Agamemnon (1411-20), their final inability to do so is a concession to her repeated objections. The chorus find that only the blame which Clytemnestra approves may stand, and any other judgement is impossible.

Such explicit control over praise or blame is not found outside the *Agamemnon*, which is a play in which issues of speech are represented as particularly important.[12] Nonetheless, there are comments throughout the other extant tragedies which maintain references to this strength as part of Clytemnestra's character. In the *Choephori*, the chorus, as with the chorus of the *Agamemnon* and the watchman, hint at criticisms which they refuse to speak aloud (46-7, 56-7),[13] before commenting more explicitly:

> ἐμοὶ δ᾽...
>
> ...

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12 Thalmann (1985); Goldhill (1984); Goward (2005) 91-108; McClure (1999) 70.

13 Both of these comments are somewhat obscure – Garvie (1986) ad loc. gives some of the most common readings for both, and the potential objections that may be made to various proposed emendations. The use of σέβας again at 55-7 may also recall its earlier use in contexts of praise, particularly given that this time it is something which is specifically *heard*.

δίκαια καὶ μὴ δίκαι' ἀρχὰς πρέπον

βίᾳ φρενῶν αἰνέσαι,

πικρὸν στύγος κρατούσᾳ·

For me... it is fitting to praise the just and unjust deeds of my leaders in spite of my

own feelings, with bitter loathing overruled. (75-80)

Once again therefore they express a forced sense that they must praise Clytemnestra, and now

Aegisthus, rather than being able to speak as they choose, and here the use of αἰνέσαι rather

than σεβίζειν makes the comment even more explicit than those made by the chorus of the

Agamemnon. In the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Clytemnestra expresses keen awareness of the

importance of appropriate praise in her address to Achilles:

πῶς ἄν σ' ἐπαινέσαιμι μὴ λίαν λόγοις,

μηδ' ἐνδεὴς τοῦδ' ἀπολέσαιμι τὴν χάριν;

αἰνούμενοι γὰρ ἀγαθοὶ τρόπον τινὰ

μισοῦσι τοὺς αἰνοῦντασ, ἤν αἰνῶσ' ἄγαν.

How should I praise you without excessive words, and not destroy your favour by

falling short? For when being praised the good hate those who praise them in some

way, when they praise too excessively. (977-80)

In the tragedies which focus on the next generation, Electra and Orestes, Clytemnestra

often displays the same awareness of the importance of appropriate praise and blame, but here

her comments are often directed against others over whom she has significantly less

influence.[14] In Sophocles' *Electra,* for example, the same concern is demonstrated by

Clytemnestra's complaint about Electra's behaviour, which focuses on her public, blaming

speech for Clytemnestra herself:

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14 See below on Electra and Orestes' ability to turn Clytemnestra's own discourses of blame against her.

νῦν δ' ὡς ἄπεστ' ἐκεῖνος, οὐδὲν ἐντρέπῃ

ἐμοῦ γε· καίτοι πολλὰ πρὸς πολλούς με δὴ

<u>ἐξεῖπας</u> ὡς θρασεῖα καὶ πέρα δίκης

ἄρχω, καθυβρίζουσα καὶ σὲ καὶ τὰ σά.

Now when he (Aegisthus) is away, you do not respect me at all, but <u>you declare</u> often to many people that I am bold and rule unjustly, acting violently to you and your things. (519-22)

Similarly she objects to Electra's long speech of blame, claiming that she has "ὕβρισεν" Clytemnestra herself (613), claiming that Electra's hatred and "πολυγλώσσῳ βοῇ" would spread rumours through the entire city if allowed (641-2), and uses the same term once the messenger is on stage, asking him to silence Electra's "τῆς πολυγλώσσου βοῆς" (798).[15] She complains of the same problem in the case of Orestes too, representing their relationship as having been ruined by his "ἐγκαλῶν μοι" (777). In Euripides' *Electra* too the same element becomes a consistent part of her characterisation. The farmer suggests her awareness of the opinions of others in his prologue, when he claims that it was only due to fear of resentment that she protected Electra (30), and the old man backs up this argument by indicating that Clytemnestra:

<u>ψόγον</u> τρέμουσα δημοτῶν ἐλείπετο.

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15 Finglass (2007) as part of his defence of Electra argues that Clytemnestra throughout this scene is "abrupt and aggressive" (252), and accuses her of beginning her "abuse" of Electra "abruptly" (256), apparently giving the lie to her claim at 523-4 that she does not treat Electra badly. Yet this argument does not take sufficient account of the fact that Clytemnestra here is entirely right – Electra *has* been 'outside' blaming Clytemnestra for all of the play up to this point – and a rebuttal that comes after 500 lines therefore perhaps should not be seen as being too abrupt. Clytemnestra's awareness of and close focus on Electra's blaming speech here is what gives her argument against Electra its righteousness – she is not objecting to anything the audience has not seen, unlike Electra (on the truthfulness or otherwise of Electra's claims in the confrontation see Lloyd (2005) 86-7).

She stayed behind fearing <u>blame</u> from the citizens. (643)[16]

In her discussion with Electra Clytemnestra complains of her "δόξ' κακὴ" (1013), and most notably refers again to the unfairness of inappropriate *blame* assigned in response to adultery:

… ἁμαρτάνῃ πόσις

τἄνδον παρώσας λέκτρα, μιμεῖσθαι θέλει

γυνὴ τὸν ἄνδρα χἄτερον κτᾶσθαι φίλον

κἄπειτ' ἐν ἡμῖν <u>ὁ ψόγος</u> λαμπρύνεται,

οἱ δ' αἴτιοι τῶνδ' οὐ κλύουσ' ἄνδρες κακῶς.

When a husband errs and rejects his inside wife, and the wife wants to imitate her husband and get another love then the <u>blame</u> shines out against us, but the men who are guilty of the whole thing, hear nothing bad at all. (1036-40)

As with the earlier Clytemnestras, Euripides' character expresses her acute and explicit awareness of blame which she claims is inappropriately applied to women and not men. It is also notable that Euripides' Clytemnestra expresses this concern by specifically referring to the term for blame most commonly referenced in terms of the praise/blame opposition in Greek thought – "ψόγος."[17]

It is therefore clear that throughout her appearances in tragedy, Clytemnestra is portrayed as recognising, objecting to, and on several occasions controlling the appropriate deployment of praise and blame. In this regard she takes an approach which goes beyond that of the *Trachiniae*'s Deianira, whose concern is with speech and truth more generally, and whose deployment of blame or undercutting of the praise of her husband is never so self-aware and explicit. Furthermore, Clytemnestra's control in this regard is distinguished from

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16 Cropp (1988) ad loc.

17 See Introduction.

several of the characters who appear in plays around her. As mentioned above, the chorus are unable to resist her instructions regarding the blame they wish to pronounce at the *Agamemnon*. Agamemnon does express an objection to her praise which is far more explicitly worded than any attempt they make:

> ἀπουσίᾳ μὲν εἶπας εἰκότως ἐμῇ·
>
> μακρὰν γὰρ ἐξέτεινας· ἀλλ' ἐναισίμως
>
> αἰνεῖν, παρ' ἄλλων χρὴ τόδ' ἔρχεσθαι γέρας.
>
> *You have spoken similarly to my absence: for you have stretched it out a great deal: but to praise appropriately, it is necessary for that prize to come from someone else.*
>
> (914-7)

In her analysis of this scene Deborah Steiner has shown clearly that Clytemnestra's epinician-style speech is part of her subverting the prerogative of an external, male poet, who should be speaking such praise, and this is therefore the reason for the objection that Agamemnon makes.[18] However, it is worth noting that Agamemnon's complaint comes only after Clytemnestra has finished speaking, and is entirely ineffectual. It has no noticeable impact on Clytemnestra or her speech, and indeed serves as a prelude to the scene in which she will use persuasion to overwhelm him utterly. If Agamemnon is more able to object to Clytemnestra's dominance than the chorus is, he is still not able to affect the situation in a meaningful way.

The comparison with her second husband in the same play is also illuminating. On Aegisthus' entry to the stage, the chorus manage to overcome the confusion caused by Clytemnestra's refusal to allow them the blame they wish to express, and turn to insulting him openly:

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18 Steiner (2010) 34-5. More generally on the unusual style of Clytemnestra's praise here, Rutherford (2012) 301.

Αἴγισθ', ὑβρίζειν ἐν κακοῖσιν οὐ σέβω·

σὺ δ'ἄνδρα τόνδε φὴς ἑκὼν κατακτανεῖν,

μόνος δ' ἔποικτον τόνδε βουλεῦσαι φόνον.

οὔ φημ' ἀλύξειν ἐν δίκῃ τὸ σὸν κάρα

δημορριφεῖς, σάφ' ἴσθι, λευσίμους ἀράς.

Aegisthus, I don't honour insulting people in the middle of troubles: but you say that you willingly killed this man and that you alone planned this piteous murder? I say you, rightly, will not escape the curses, thrown at your head by the people, which you deserve. (1612-6)

Their reference to ἀράς revives the similar threat they had made to Clytemnestra, of speech acts being turned against the pair, but unlike Clytemnestra, Aegisthus is unable to direct their blame.[19] While he does complain about the way they speak (1617 and again at 1628-32), this only spurs them on to even more explicit insults (1625-7, 1633-5, 1643-8), and he is forced to threaten physical violence to shut them up (1649-50). The chorus still do not adjust their way of speaking, and it is not until Clytemnestra herself steps in again and eventually dismisses their words as "ὑλαγμάτων" that the situation is diffused by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra's taking possession of the palace. Indeed it is significant that Clytemnestra's words, rather than a choral comment, close the play – her dismissal of the chorus' blame seems to prevent entirely their speaking about the issue again.[20]

There are of course two characters in these tragedies who are not ever influenced by

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19 While ἀράς is most literally a curse, rather than specifically blame, the chorus have already established their association between public blame or criticism and this idea of it being closely connected with such curses, at 456-7. The same sense can be read as intended in both threats to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as a result.

20 Fraenkel 1950 ad loc., on the argument against there having been further closing choral anapaests. Goward (2005) 42 connects Clytemnestra's closing the play with the chorus' powerlessness at the end of it. See also Rutherford (2012) 44-5.

Clytemnestra's commands in relation to praise or blame. Orestes and Electra both demonstrate resistance which is beyond Agamemnon or the chorus, even if they are not able to influence her speech in return. In the *Choephori,* Clytemnestra attempts to turn Orestes' blame against herself for adultery (917) on to his father instead, as she had successfully with the chorus of the *Agamemnon*:

> μᾶλλ' εἶφ' ὁμοίως καὶ πατρὸς τοῦ σοῦ μάτας.

> *No, but you should speak equally of your father's lewdness.* (918)

However, unlike the chorus who were successfully diverted to different topics at Clytemnestra's demands, Orestes refuses to accept or allow this type of speech:

> μὴ 'λεγχε τὸν πονοῦντ' ἔσω καθημένη.

> *Do not censure the man labouring while you were sitting around inside.* (919)

This time Clytemnestra is forced to attempt a new subject (920), and when this too is refuted, she gives up all further attempts to blame Agamemnon. Similarly Electra in both Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electras* is never silenced by her mother's remarks. In all the cases discussed above, where Clytemnestra attempts to silence her daughter or complains about Electra's public blame, her comments are ineffectual.

In the extant tragedies in which she appears, therefore, Clytemnestra is established as demonstrating a similar level of control and influence over praise or blame as Deianira in the *Trachiniae*. However, unlike Deianira, she is explicitly self-aware in doing so, frequently commenting about her own or others' use of praise and blame. Moreover, Clytemnestra several times, particularly in the *Agamemnon,* expresses explicit awareness of the ways in which blame may be tied to identity, when she complains that the chorus' blame has been responsible for constructing inappropriate identities for her. Yet unlike Deianira, Clytemnestra

comes up against effective opposition from her children, who are unaffected by her influence, in contrast with the choruses and other characters who demonstrate no such effective resistance.

Changing the Discourse

The most significant difference between Deianira and Clytemnestra, however, is not the one revealed above. More important, particularly for examining her involvement in the distribution of praise and blame to effect processes of identity construction, is the way in which Clytemnestra, not satisfied with simply rejecting or undercutting praise for Agamemnon, insists on establishing a competing discourse of blame for him. These discourses insist on positioning him as a bad husband, or father, and ignore his more public identities such as commander. As a result, Clytemnestra's successful physical destruction of Agamemnon, as with Deianira's of Heracles, comes along with her verbal facility in destabilising his public, praiseworthy identities through her use of alternate blame discourses within which he is positioned. It is these same discourses which are then turned against her by Orestes and Electra, which leads to her destruction at their hands.

It has been considered possible to frame the conflict in the *Oresteia* and later plays as being not only gendered,[21] but one which also makes use of the popular opposition present in some tragedies between the *oikos* and *polis*.[22] These discussions have been extremely fruitful in examining the conflict which arises between the generations of the family. However, there

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21 Euben (1982) 24; Sommerstein (2010) 181-93; Goward (2005) 87-90.

22 As Goldhill (1984) esp. 267, 282-3; Euben (1982) 24-6. Foley (2001) 9-10 (with full notes) provides some important caveats for dealing with this opposition.

is a further argument to be made which pays closer attention to the specific types of blame Clytemnestra attempts to use against Agamemnon, and which is then turned against her in return.

With the exception of Clytemnestra, the characters of the *Agamemnon* are content to praise Agamemnon with respect to his role as leader, and king. On his return from Troy in the *Agamemnon*, the herald becomes the first character to explicitly praise Agamemnon, in his cry addressed to the palace and shrines:

ἥκει γὰρ ὑμῖν φῶς ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φέρων

καὶ τοῖσδ' ἅπασι κοινὸν Ἀγαμέμνων ἄναξ.

ἀλλ' εὖ νιν ἀσπάσασθε, καὶ γὰρ οὖν πρέπει,

...

ἄναξ Ἀτρείδης πρέσβυς εὐδαίμων ἀνὴρ

ἥκει. τίεσθαι δ' ἀξιώτατος βροτῶν

τῶν νυν·

For he comes to you and to all these people in common bearing light into the night – Lord Agamemnon! But give him a good welcome, for that is entirely proper... the senior lord, son of Atreus, has come home a blessed man. He is most worthy of honour of all mortals now alive. (522-4, 530-2)

In between his praise and welcome the herald describes Agamemnon's victory at Troy, so that this, and his role as king, are the central aspects for which the praise is given to him. Furthermore, in his final long speech to the chorus, he gives a detailed description of the time on campaign (551-79) before concluding:

τοιαῦτα χρὴ κλυόντας εὐλογεῖν πόλιν

καὶ τοὺς στρατηγούς· καὶ χάρις τιμήσεται

Διὸς τόδ' ἐκπράξασα. πάντ' ἔχεις λόγον.

It is necessary now that you've heard such things to praise the city and its generals;

and let the favour of Zeus be honoured, as it has accomplished all this. Here you have

my whole speech. (580-2)

This statement comes as his last comment about Agamemnon, and once again it is focused on his public role as στρατηγός, his relationship with the city, and the praise that should be given to Agamemnon. As a result this required praise is closely tied to Agamemnon's public, masculine roles by the herald, and participates in a process designed to construct his identity of successful general.[23]

It is presumably partly in response to this that the chorus attempt their welcoming ode, although it is notable that not only is this upstaged significantly by Clytemnestra's deceptive praise speech which follows, but their praise for Agamemnon is in itself rather muted. However, once again they choose to address him specifically in terms of his public positions:

ἄγε δή, βασιλεῦ, Τροίας πτολίπορθ',

Ἀτρέως γένεθλον,

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23 The play's focus on the less glamorous results of Agamemnon's warlike behaviour has the effect of problematising this praise: Bakewell (2007) argues that the use of contemporary references in descriptions of war in the *Agamemnon* is designed to remind the audience of its most negative aspects. However, there is no evidence that the herald himself intends such a problematisation - Scodel (2006) esp. 122-130 discusses the herald's desire to only present the war's positive aspects here as part of the public process of establishing 'social memory'. Rather, his aim is to praise Agamemnon's triumph, and any irony is an extradramatic quality – accessible to the audience, but not to the chorus (the herald's immediate audience). Furthermore, my argument is not substantially affected even if the herald does intend some irony – whether his praise is genuine or somewhat problematic, it nonetheless positions Agamemnon only as a public figure in relation to the city and general to the army, constructing none of the family-related identities which Clytemnestra focuses on. The praise levied by the chorus, who *do* suggest some more ambiguous feelings towards Agamemnon's success, similarly participates in the same type of identity construction.

πῶς σε προσείπω, πῶς σε σεβίζω.

Come then, king, sacker of Troy, born of Atreus, how shall I address you? How shall I

honour you? (782-4)

Their address once again focuses on his public position as βασιλεύς, before also invoking praise for his generalship at Troy. Even the reference to him as offspring of Atreus has rather public connotations, as it is this inheritance which makes him the king. Even when they move towards suggesting some blame for Agamemnon, in their depiction of their dislike of his decision to lead the Greek expedition for Helen (799-809), this has been prefaced by the identification of Agamemnon through his public roles, and is surrounded by advice on dealing with the chorus' fellow citizens (795-8, 807-9), so that this blame also has both a public, *polis*-oriented context and, as their complaint is about the reasons for war, content.[24]

Rather than take up or attempt to reject this discourse, which conveys praise and some blame for Agamemnon's life as a public, male figure, Clytemnestra insists on blaming him within a discourse which instead focuses on his relationships with his family, and his identity within the *oikos*. As a result, she creates a competing range of subject-positions for him, which form a new, negative identity, separate to that constructed by the herald, watchman and chorus. Indeed it is notable that even her deceptive praise in the speech of welcome she gives is repeatedly focused on his importance to the *oikos,* and to her as his wife, rather than celebrating any of the martial exploits which he has declared successful. Her complaint about his absence is focused on the perspective of the wife sitting at home (861-2), in direct contrast

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24 The chorus has previously recognised the public aspects and indeed blame that have come from Agamemnon's decision to undertake the Trojan War at 427-57, so this concern for consequences which the *polis* suffers is also one which they have demonstrated previously in relation to the war. See Lawrence (2013) 80-5 who argues that it is partly Agamemnon's over-identification with these roles which leads to his bad decision-making.

the herald's earlier speech which was delivered purely from the perspective of the soldiers abroad (555-79). The comments she makes about waiting for Agamemnon and weeping over his absence are given an extremely domestic, interior focus by the explicit description she gives of being in her bedroom attempting to sleep (889-91). Furthermore, when she goes on to praise him directly she talks about him only in relation to his position in the household, not referring to the city or any of his public roles:

λέγοιμ' ἂν ἄνδρα τόνδε τῶν σταθμῶν κύνα,

...

... μονογενὲς τέκνον πατρί,

...

τοιοῖσδε τοί νιν ἀξιῶ προσφθέγμασιν,

I would call this man the guard-dog of his homestead... a father's only son... I think that he is deserving of such names. (896, 903)

While the images that come in the omitted lines, of a ship's mast, or land seen by sailors, could be read as being oriented towards a more public context, the inclusion of the images of Agamemnon as a father's son and a watchdog instead keeps the flow of appellations firmly within a domestic context.[25] This is particularly the case given that all of Clytemnestra's preceding speech has focused on her own sufferings in the house in Agamemnon's absence – in no way has a public, πόλις-related context been invoked. Furthermore, the image of Agamemnon as 'watchdog' harks back rather pointedly to Clytemnestra's praising description of herself in such a role at 607, thus making it impossible to consider this to be a description which is also suitable as praise for a public-serving male individual.[26]

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25 Wohl (1998) 104 further convincingly argues that Clytemnestra's speech here positions her as the male who appears within each image, while Agamemnon is assimilated to "the infantile, bestial and objectified role".

26 On some problems with the dog imagery in the trilogy Goldhill (1986) 56-7 & n92; Raeburn & Thomas (2011) lxvi-lxviii; Harriot (1982) and more generally Blakey (1972); Chesi (2014) 24-5. Chesi (2014) 25 also

Once the murder has taken place, Clytemnestra famously declares:

πολλῶν πάροιθεν καιρίως εἰρημένων

τἀναντί' εἰπεῖν οὐκ ἐπαισχυνθήσομαι.

I said said many things previously that were appropriate at the time, and I am not

ashamed to say the opposite now. (1372-3)

Although she does immediately move from praise to blame, much of what Clytemnestra now says of Agamemnon has a similar focus to that she displayed earlier. The discourse of blame she produces is entirely concerned with his crimes in relation to the house, and his position within it. She accuses:

τοσῶνδε κρατῆρ' <u>ἐν δόμοις</u> κακῶν ὅδε

πλήσας ἀραίων αὐτὸς ἐκπίνει μολών.

This man came home and is now drinking up the krater which he has filled with so

many accursed crimes <u>in the house.</u> (1397-8)

Furthermore, her lengthy explanation of the justice of her deed focuses on Agamemnon's unfatherly treatment of Iphigenia, rather than indicating any concern about his performance as a ruler or general (1412-25). She emphasises the idea that Iphigenia was his daughter (1417), and with her deliberate focus on her own pains in childbirth (1418), further emphasises the physical   aspects of the maternal relationship. When she describes the situation with Cassandra, she insists on giving him another appellation:

κεῖται γυναικὸς τῆσδε λυμαντήριος,

Χρυσηΐδων μείλιγμα τῶν ὑπ' Ἰλίῳ,

Here lies this man, destructive to his wife, the fondler of Chryseis and the others at

___

argues that in her use of this language Clytemnestra may be attempting a claim to the authority over the household which should be Agamemnon's.

Troy. (1438-9)

The reference to Chryseis could have been used to allude to an entirely different context, since the most famous portrayal of that affair, in the *Iliad,* has intensely public consequences for Agamemnon, when it causes the quarrel with Achilles. However, Clytemnestra's focus is entirely on how it causes him to be a bad husband, not a bad general or king. When she returns to the matter of Iphigenia, she calls it "δολίαν ἄτην <u>οἴκοισιν</u>" (*A treacherous ruin <u>for the house</u>* 1524-5), and again refers to the intimacy of the relationships which should have bound Iphigenia, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra herself together:

> ἀλλ' ἐμὸν ἐκ τοῦδ' ἔρνος ἀερθέν,
>
> τὴν πολύκλαυτόν †τ' Ἰφιγένειαν†
>
> *But my sprout, conceived from him, the much wailed Iphigenia [he axed].* (1525-6)

In the chorus' question, discussed earlier, of how Agamemnon will be praised regarding his "ἔργων μεγάλων" (1545-6), Clytemnestra again emphasises instead the primacy of his role within the family as being the sole concern, with her sarcastic comment about Iphigenia being the one to kiss her father and mourn (or not) his death (1555-59). The chorus' reference to Agamemnon's great deeds attempts to site him once more within a traditional discourse of praise for heroic feats, but Clytemnestra refuses to accept this construction at all, immediately substituting the family-focused blame she has championed, and re-positioning Agamemnon as 'bad father'.

The same contrast is demonstrated in the *Choephori,* and particularly emphasised in both *Electra* plays. In none of these dramas is Clytemnestra ever willing to engage with a discourse of praise or blame that constructs Agamemnon as a public, male figure. Instead, she repeatedly insists on representing him within a discourse of blame which focuses solely on his

role as father and husband, within the tight confines of the *oikos*. In the *Choephori*, Clytemnestra is not allowed a great deal of space to attempt to blame Agamemnon – as mentioned above, her criticism of his adultery (once again focused on his poor performance as a husband) is refused by Orestes, and her second comment, that his absence also makes him a poor husband (920) is similarly refuted before Orestes diverts the conversation entirely. Nonetheless, even in these limited comments, Clytemnestra demonstrates a focus on the same discourse of blame.

In the *Electra* plays, however, the delay in the reunion between Orestes and Electra, and the staging of longer confrontations between Clytemnestra and particularly Electra, afford her far more space to blame Agamemnon, and once again Clytemnestra demonstrates her determination to produce and disseminate the same discourse of blame against Agamemnon. In Sophocles' *Electra*, her very first statement of blame to Electra focuses on Agamemnon's failure as a father in the sacrifice of his daughter, and again emphasises the relationship which also existed between Clytemnestra and Iphigenia, as parent and child:

ἐπεὶ πατὴρ οὗτος σός, ὅν θρηνεῖς ἀεί,

τὴν σὴν ὅμαιμον μοῦνος Ἑλλήνων ἔτλη

θῦσαι θεοῖσιν, οὐκ ἴσον καμὼν ἐμοὶ

λύπης, ὅτ' ἔσπειρ', ὥσπερ ἡ τίκτουσ' ἐγώ.

Then that man, your father, who you are always wailing about, alone among the Greeks dared to sacrifice your sister to the gods, even though the pains that he had in sowing her were not at all the same as mine in bearing her. (530-3)

The deliberate naming of Agamemnon as Electra's father in opening her blame for him emphasises that this is the role she criticises him in, and again with the focus on the physical

pains she has suffered in childbirth, and Agamemnon's role in 'sowing' Iphigenia, Clytemnestra prioritises these aspects of the identity he bears in relation to her, and does not even mention any public role which might have been relevant. She does not criticise him as a bad general, or a bad king, but entirely and specifically as a bad father. Once she has argued against the logic of his decision more fully (534-45), she emphasises this point even more strongly:

οὐ ταῦτ' ἀβούλου καὶ κακοῦ γνώμην πατρός;

Is that not the quality of a father who is wicked and entirely thoughtless in his judgement? (546)

Πατρός is here given extremely emphatic positioning, and Clytemnestra's question again emphasises that the discourse of blame she produces is concerned not with constructing Agamemnon's identity as a man, nor in any public role, but as a father.

In Euripides' *Electra* both aspects of this family-focused discourse of blame are invoked together, so that Agamemnon is criticised as a bad husband and a bad father simultaneously. Clytemnestra opens her speech of blame with a similar reference to Agamemnon specifically as a father (and once more as Electra's father) to that found in Sophocles:

τοιαῦτα μέντοι σὸς πατὴρ βουλεύματα

ἐς οὓς ἐχρῆν ἥκιστ' ἐβούλευσεν φίλων.

But of such a kind were the schemes of your father, against those loved ones who he should least of all have been scheming against. (1011-12)

Furthermore, in her very first accusation she explicitly connects the claim that Agamemnon has failed as a husband with the argument that he has failed as a father:

ἡμᾶς δ' ἔδωκε Τυνδάρεως τῷ σῷ πατρὶ

οὐχ ὥστε θνήσκειν οὐδ' ἅ γειναίμην ἐγώ.

My father Tyndareus did not give me to your father so that I or the children I bore

should be killed. (1018-9)

Clytemnestra's argument here is one which deploys not only blame on her own behalf against Agamemnon, but accuses him of failing even in relation to the patriarchal requirements which an exchange of women in marriage involves.[27] By raising the issue of her father, she claims that not only has Agamemnon offended against her, a woman, but even against the man who might more justifiably choose to blame him for his inappropriate behaviour. Once again the description of Agamemnon specifically as Electra's father focuses on this aspect of his role, and Clytemnestra neatly combines blame for both his poor fathering and poor husbanding in her dramatic statement. As her speech continues, she repeats the emphasis on the idea that it is Agamemnon's failure in both regards of his expected private roles which has caused her to become murderous, with her introduction of the complaint about Cassandra:

ἀλλ' ἦλθ' ἔχων μοι μαινάδ' ἔνθεον κόρην

λέκτροις τ' ἐπεισέφρησε, καὶ νύμφα δύο

ἐν τοῖσιν αὐτοῖς δώμασιν κατεῖχ' ὁμοῦ.

But he came home to me bringing the god-maddened maiden and installed her in my

bed, and intended to have two wives in the same house at the same time. (1032-5)

Helene Foley has shown in her analysis of tragic concubines that the extreme disruption to a household and bloodline which tragic concubines often represent in tragedy demonstrates the likely undesirability to an Athenian audience, concerned about the concubine's place in

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27 On the homosocial exchange of women in Greek tragedy see Wohl (1998) esp. xiii-xxxvii; Ormand (1999) 18-25.

society, of Agamemnon's attempt to bring Cassandra to his home.[28] As with the reference to the damage done to Tyndareus' interests by Agamemnon's murderous ways, therefore, Clytemnestra has produced a discourse of blame which is not only focused on Agamemnon's responsibilities to his family, but is also framed in such a way that it subscribes to patriarchal social values as regards that family. Unlike the Clytemnestras of the *Agamemnon*, *Choephori*, and Sophocles' *Electra* therefore, Euripides' Clytemnestra shows awareness of appropriate social contexts, even while she continues to attempt to position Agamemnon within this discourse of blame for his poor behaviour as husband and father.[29]

Even in the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, when the sacrifice at issue is yet to take place, Clytemnestra is represented as producing the same discourse.[30] Once she has found out about the plan to sacrifice her daughter, she cries:

… μεμηνὼς ἆρα τυγχάνει πόσις;

...

... τάλαιν' ἐγώ, τάλαινα δ' ἥν πατὴρ μέλλει κτανεῖν.

Has madness come upon my husband? Unhappy me, unhappy girl who her father intends to kill. (876, 880)

The first comment, her immediate reaction to the news, refers to Agamemnon not by name,

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28 Foley (2001) 87-91.

29 It could be argued that in this regard the identity she aims to construct for Agamemnon is more likely to be successful since it is more "coherent" than one which does not take sufficient account of appropriate social norms and contexts. See Wood (1999) 47; Ribeiro (1993); Tannen (1985) for the idea of social norms as providing essential context for constructions of identity.

30 It is also notable that she is represented in the *IA.* as already demonstrating some mastery over speech – Mastronarde (1979) 78 has excellently demonstrated the 'isolation' she enforces upon Agamemnon in her speech by denying him the ability to establish proper 'contact' either with Iphigenia or with Clytemnestra herself.

but by his identity in relation to her, as her husband,[31] and the second by calling him πατὴρ again emphasises the contrast between his relationship with Iphigenia and the act he intends to commit. Immediately before their confrontation she criticises Agamemnon's "ἐπὶ τοῖς αὐτοῦ τέκνοις ἀνόσια πράσσων" (*Unholy deeds against his own children* 1104-5), again emphasising the relationship between them. In making her accusations to his face she first names him πόσι again (1129) and then very deliberately asks:

> τὴν παῖδα τὴν σὴν τήν τ' ἐμὴν μέλλεις κτανεῖν;
>
> *Do you intend to kill your child and mine?* (1131)

The speech of blame which follows his admission is somewhat controversial, particularly as regards Clytemnestra's accusations of his poor behaviour in marrying her (1148-1156).[32] However, even in the more widely accepted section of Clytemnestra's speech (1185-1208), the blame she levels at Agamemnon continues to be focused on his identity as father. Indeed, here she even contrasts his failure to discharge the responsibilities of that identity correctly with his more public position as general:

> ἥκων δ' ἐς Ἄργος προσπεσῇ τέκνοισι σοῖς;
>
> ἀλλ' οὐ θέμις σοι. τίς δὲ καὶ προσβλέψεται
>
> παίδων σ', ἵν' αὐτῶν προσέμενος κτάνῃς τινά;
>
> ταῦτ' ἦλθες ἤδη διὰ λόγων, ἢ σκῆπτρά σοι
>
> μόνον διαφέρειν καὶ στρατηλατεῖν μέλει;
>
> *When you have come back to Argos, will you embrace your children? But that would*

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31 On the *Oresteia* Goldhill (1984) 89-90 notes Clytemnestra's deliberately differentiated use of ἀνηρ and πόσις for Aegisthus and Agamemnon specifically – the address here may recall that insistence with ominous effect.

32 Kovacs (2003) 95-7 assigns most of this section to a later 'reviser' on the basis of both content and style. My argument is not substantially changed by accepting or rejecting the passage as originally Euripidean – if it is a later addition, then it is valuable to note that Kovacs' 'reviser' or another interpolator apparently recognised and maintained the same discourse of blame as found in Clytemnestra's other speeches (including 1185-1208 here). If not, then this remains a consistent element of Euripides' technique in dealing with Clytemnestra.

not be right for you. And which of your children will look directly at you, so that you may pull one of them aside and kill them? Have you already considered these things at all, or do you only care about carrying the sceptre and being a general? (1191-5)

It is particularly notable here that Clytemnestra's extremely strong contrast is an element of blame which only appears in her speech. The chorus join in encouraging Agamemnon to be persuaded, but with a much more generally applicable principle that it is good to save the lives of children (1209-10). Thus while Clytemnestra contrasts the two potential sets of subject positions Agamemnon could be maintaining, and criticises him strongly for his destructive behaviour in relation only to the private, *oikos*-centred position, the chorus have a far more general perspective, not recognising the significance of her distinction.

Across multiple appearances in tragedy, therefore, Clytemnestra refuses to position Agamemnon within a traditional, masculine discourse of praise which celebrates his public identities such as king or general. Instead, she repeatedly positions him in a discourse of blame which criticises him for his performance in private, familial identities such as husband and father. This treatment of Agamemnon is unique to her in all of the tragedies in which she appears, and is made an integral part of the murder by her frequent deployment of this discourse as a justification for her actions. Clytemnestra's victory over Agamemnon is therefore doubled – not only does she physically destroy his praiseworthy identities of general and king through the usurpation of his throne that results from his murder, this is also made part of a verbal process which denies him the right to such identities at all, and instead positions him only in identities for which he can be considered to have failed, and for which he is more likely, at least in her eyes, to deserve the punishment which Clytemnestra awards him.

Like mother like children – Taking up the new discourse

Clytemnestra's family-focused discourse of blame, and influence over praise and blame more generally, utterly confounds the chorus of the *Agamemnon*, as mentioned above, and is thereafter represented as an integral part of her destructive behaviour in relation to Agamemnon. Yet it is not a discourse which is wholly unique to her, and her production of it proves immensely destructive to Clytemnestra herself, in all the plays which follow the *Agamemnon*. As discussed above, Clytemnestra's children are able to resist her usually efficacious commands in order to continue blaming her against her will. However, not only do they continue to deploy more generalised blame against her, but it is also possible to see in the specific arguments used by Orestes and Electra, the same type of discourses of blame for Clytemnestra as a bad wife, and a bad mother, as those which she had turned against Agamemnon.[33] Furthermore, at the same time as appropriating this discourse for use against Clytemnestra, the children of Agamemnon also take steps along with the choruses of their respective plays to re-position Agamemnon's identity back within the more traditional discourse of praise for martial arts and heroism that Clytemnestra had replaced.

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33 It could be possible to argue that this focus is a necessary facet of Clytemnestra's gender, since Clytemnestra could not be expected to maintain any public subject-positions or identities such as those which are available to Agamemnon. However, in the chorus of the *Agamemnon's* comment (258-60) that she is indeed entitled to a public-serving identity while he is absent, there is some suggestion that here tragic standards, particularly for Queens, allow for her having a rather more public identity than would be forgiven in an Athenian woman (see Seidensticker (1995) 155-60 on this point. Foley (1981) 155-63 notes further that the strict division of public/private when considering the responsibilities and roles of women even in Athenian life is inappropriate, since the spheres are seen as complementary.) Furthermore, it is notable that when Orestes or Electra choose to blame Aegisthus and Clytemnestra together, they raise the spectre of tyrannicide, and criticise them for their behaviour related to their identities as rulers (Aesch. *Cho.* 972-7; Eur. *El.* 314-22). There is no instance where this type of publicly-focused blame is attached to Clytemnestra alone, but the inclusion of it as an aspect of her shared wrongdoing with Aegisthus indicates that it is not impossible for her to hold and be criticised for such an identity.

In the *Choephori*, Electra's long prayer, filled with blame for Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, focuses on the household and the problematic relationships between the mother and her children, not the public situation of Argos. She complains about Clytemnestra 'receiving' Aegisthus in exchange for selling her children (132-4),[34] and particularly about mismanagement of the household resources – usually a responsibility belonging to wives, so that Clytemnestra's squandering of resources represents a failure to perform properly in that role.[35] Orestes' prayer to Zeus a little later implicitly blames Clytemnestra in very similar terms, describing Electra and himself as exiles from their home (254), and talking of the 'fall' of the house as a whole (262-3). He repeats the same point about their apparent exclusion at 407-8. It is however notable that Electra's complaints tend towards the more vehement, and the more specifically focused both on Clytemnestra rather than just the situation of the two children, and on her failures as a mother and wife. After Orestes' comments, Electra cries:

ἦ τάπερ

πάθομεν ἄχεα πρός γε τῶν τεκομένων;

[Shall we talk about] the pains which we have suffered, and those even from the one

who brought us into the world? (419-20)

As with Clytemnestra's blame for Agamemnon in the case of Iphigenia, the term Electra uses is charged with the full weight of the physical relationship between Clytemnestra and her children, so that blaming her for their "ἄχεα" carries this resonance in strong terms. Furthermore, in her description of the murder of Agamemnon which immediately follows, she

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34 The same complaint is made by Orestes to Clytemnestra (915-7).

35 A similar argument could of course be made about her wasteful use of resources in the 'carpet scene'. Xen. *Oec.* 7.25 makes management of the household property the wife's task, while the husband brings in the necessary raw materials to add to that property. See also 9.16, 7.41-2. It is notable in connection with this idea that on Agamemnon's return Clytemnestra takes pains to state that she has in fact been carefully preserving the possessions of the household: Aesch. *Ag.* 609-10.

says:

ἰὼ ἰὼ δαΐα

πάντολμε μᾶτερ, δαΐαις ἐν ἐκφοραῖς

ἄνευ πολιτᾶν ἄνακτ',

ἄνευ δὲ πενθημάτων

ἔτλας ἀνοίμωκτον ἄνδρα θάψαι.

Oh cruel and all-daring mother, it was a cruel deed when you buried your husband, a king, without the citizens, without mourning and unlamented. (429-33)

While the concern over Agamemnon's funeral does place this event in a specifically public context, or rather indicates the inappropriateness of it having not been so, Electra brackets her statements with blaming adjectives about her mother, attached to nouns which indicate her by her private relationships, not her role as queen or any similar title. Both her identity as mother (430) and wife (433) are specifically referred to, so that these become the primary reference points for the blame Electra speaks. The much-discussed scene involving the Nurse involves precisely the same discourse of blame against Clytemnestra.[36] While she does not criticise Clytemnestra directly beyond the complaint that she does not grieve as she should (734-40), the emotional story of her role in Orestes' upbringing explicitly contrasts her own behaviour as nurse with Clytemnestra's as mother,[37] and therefore has the effect of significantly strengthening the criticisms which Electra and Orestes have made of Clytemnestra's behaviour in that regard.

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36 Sommerstein (2010) 189 and Conacher (1987) 120 do not doubt the Nurse's accusations here, while Margon (1983) is less willing to accept them as accurate. See also Rose (1982).

37 Goldhill (1984) 248-9 argues that this scene contributes significantly towards the erasure of Clytemnestra's identity as mother (discussed in more detail below), although he sees this erasure as being part of a civic discourse represented throughout the tragedy, which represents the *polis* as able to replace the individual family in significance and value. Conacher (2000) 335-6 provides some valuable criticisms of this argument.

In the confrontation between Orestes and Clytemnestra, he too focuses entirely on blame which positions her as a bad wife and mother. His sarcastic comment in response to Clytemnestra's recognition of Aegisthus' death immediately brings her adultery to the forefront (894-5). Clytemnestra immediately appeals to her identity as his mother (896-8) in defence of her life, and once Pylades has overcome Orestes' hesitation, he returns to more explicit criticism which is based on her adultery and the offence against his father he sees this as:

> ἕπου, πρὸς αὐτὸν τόνδε σὲ σφάξαι θέλω·
>
> καὶ ζῶντα γάρ νιν κρείσσον' ἡγήσω πατρός.
>
> τούτῳ θανοῦσα συγκάθευδ', ἐπεὶ φιλεῖς
>
> τὸν ἄνδρα τοῦτον, ὅν δὲ χρῆν φιλεῖν στυγεῖς.
>
> *You, follow me, I want to slaughter you next to him: for while alive you regarded him*
>
> *as superior to my father. You can sleep with him in death, since you love this man, who*
>
> *you should have hated loving.* (904-7)

The complaint about Clytemnestra loving who she should not, and hating the one she should have loved bears close similarities with Clytemnestra's blame for Agamemnon plotting against those he should not have plotted against in Euripides' *Electra* (1010-1), which may suggest an echo of Orestes' comment in her statement. Not only is Orestes' comment both explicitly and vehemently critical of Clytemnestra's adultery, he is also concerned with the ways in which it perverts the required relationship Clytemnestra should have shown as Agamemnon's wife, in the same way that her later complaint will be about Agamemnon's duties specifically as a father to those to whom he bears that relationship.[38] This focus will be maintained throughout

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38 It has been argued (see esp. Caldwell (1974-5) 36) that this type of matricidal myth involving an issue of adultery can be given an Oedipal reading, in which the son's fury over the adultery partly results from the fact that, despite the absence of the father-figure, he has been unable to claim sexual possession of the mother. See Griffiths (2012) for the problems of reading Orestes' matricide in relation to the idea of a 'matricidal

their exchange. First he comments on the fact that Clytemnestra cannot maintain her relationship with him due to her being the murderer of his father (909). Then he moves explicitly to criticising her failures as his mother:

τεκοῦσα γάρ μ' ἔρριψας εἰς τὸ δυστυχές.

You bore me, then you threw me out into misfortune. (913)

Once again the use of τεκοῦσα emphasises the physicality of her mother-son relationship with Orestes, making his blame for her behaviour in that relationship even more emphatic. When Clytemnestra attempts to refute this point (914, 916) he turns back again to her failures as wife and the adultery with Aegisthus (917). As mentioned above, he refuses to entertain Clytemnestra's equal blame for Agamemnon as husband, and even contrasts a picture of the standard expectations for a wife's behaviour, remaining at home while the husband suffers, with the inappropriate blame for this situation which Clytemnestra attempts (919, 921).

After the matricide, Orestes delivers his harshest blame for Clytemnestra's crimes, including in a lengthy, vicious criticism for her behaviour which, as before, is very closely focused on blame for her actions which casts her as a bad wife, and bad mother:

ἥτις δ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ τοῦτ' ἐμήσατο στύγος,

ἐξ οὗ τέκνων ἤνεγχ' ὑπὸ ζώνην βάρος,

φίλον τέως, νῦν δ' ἐχθρόν, ὡς φαίνει, δάκος -

τί σοι δοκεῖ;...

...

τοιάδ' ἐμοὶ ξύνοικος ἐν δόμοισι μὴ

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myth'. Not only does Caldwell's reading require subscription to Freudian interpretations of the development of the self, in this case I would also argue that it does not take sufficient account of the specificities of Orestes' complaints that it is the attempt to replace Agamemnon at all which has caused him such distress.

γένοιτ'·

But she who had in mind this hateful attack against her husband, from whom she had borne the weight of his children under her girdle, children who were dear up to then, but now are hostile, as it seems – how does she seem to you?... May such a wife as this never come into my house! (991-1005)

Orestes manages to combine both accusations and demonstrate their interconnected nature. He claims both that Clytemnestra is a bad mother, resulting in the hostility of her children, and that she is a terrible wife, as is conveyed in its strongest terms by the hyperbole of his final statement. Indeed in wishing to himself avoid such a wife, he elides the relationships between him and Clytemnestra as mother and Clytemnestra as wife, so that no position is indicated beyond those she should have in a traditional family setting – in his blame, Orestes reveals that she is nothing more to him than mother and image of wife, affording her no separate identity, in the same way that Clytemnestra sought to prioritise and construct only Agamemnon's private identity through her own blame. The same focus is conveyed even when Orestes briefly explains why he has killed Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides:*

ἀνδροκτονοῦσα πατέρ' ἐμὸν κατέκτανεν.

She killed her husband, and she killed my father. (602)

The close juxtaposition of both identifications of Agamemnon, with no use of his name or suggestion of his public roles, such as his kingship, has the effect of drastically emphasising that it is Clytemnestra's offence against these relationships which is being blamed for her death. As with the examples above, therefore, Orestes persists in the same type of blame which Clytemnestra had used against Agamemnon, repeatedly focusing on her failures as wife and mother in connection with her family relationships.

The same discourse is repeated by Clytemnestra's children even more vehemently in the *Electra* plays. Moreover, in these later productions, the idea that Clytemnestra has had further children by Aegisthus is made prominent, so that Clytemnestra's crime as wife, of replacing her husband with a new man, is doubled in her role as mother, and she becomes similarly guilty of replacing her 'legitimate' children (Electra and Orestes) with new offspring. In her explanation of her laments to the chorus, Sophocles' Electra focuses on her extremely negative relationship with her mother, again indicating their physical connection in her description (261-2), and in turning back to deal with Clytemnestra after her comments on Aegisthus, complains of her adultery (272-4). In her direct confrontation with Clytemnestra, Electra blames the murder of Agamemnon on Clytemnestra's adultery, rather than any revenge for Iphigenia (561-2), and by far the longest portion of her speech, after the explanation of Artemis' role in the death of Iphigenia, is given over to her blame for Clytemnestra's behaviour as wife and mother (585-609). She calls Clytemnestra's adultery with Aegisthus "αἴσχιστα πάντων" (586), and makes much of the idea that Clytemnestra has failed as a mother by supplanting Electra and Orestes with her new children (589-91), and with her apparent abuse of Electra and Orestes (599-609). Immediately after the death of Orestes has been reported, Electra again blames Clytemnestra for her response by deliberate reference to her maternity:

> νῦν γὰρ οἰμῶξαι πάρα,
>
> Ὀρέστα, τὴν σὴν ξυμφοράν, ὅθ' ὧδ' ἔχων
>
> πρὸς τῆσδ' ὑβρίζῃ μητρός...
>
> *Now I will lament for your disaster, Orestes, when in this situation you are insulted by*
>
> *this mother of yours!* (788-90)

Her comment has the effect of elevating the significance of Clytemnestra's 'insults' above

Orestes' supposed death, so that rather than the disaster itself, Electra objects most strongly to Clytemnestra's treatment of it, and with particular attention to the fact that it is as his mother that she is behaving in such a way.

In Euripides' *Electra* many of the same points are focused upon in the discourse of blame against Clytemnestra. Even in her first statements of the play, she is already blaming Clytemnestra:

ἡ γὰρ πανώλης Τυνδαρίς, μήτηρ ἐμή,

ἐξέβαλέ μ' οἴκων, χάριτα τιθεμένη πόσει·

τεκοῦσα δ' ἄλλους παῖδας Αἰγίσθῳ πάρα

πάρεργ' Ὀρέστην κἀμὲ ποιεῖται δόμων.

For the accursed daughter of Tyndareus, my mother, has thrown me out of the house,

as a favour for her husband: and now she's borne other children to Aegisthus, she

makes Orestes and me into the illegitimate children of the house. (61-3)

Once again Electra immediately brings Clytemnestra's role of 'mother' into the frame by referring to her as such in a prominent position. Her complaint follows those lines by emphasising the idea that Clytemnestra has rejected her legitimate children in favour of her new offspring, so that Electra's blame suggests not only that Clytemnestra is a bad mother, but even that she has entirely rejected the role in relation to her children by Agamemnon, in favour of her relationship with Aegisthus and his offspring. Similarly in her lament, Electra claims Clytemnestra:

μάτηρ δ' ἐν λέκτροις φονίοις

ἄλλῳ σύγγαμος οἰκεῖ.

My mother, in her bloody bed, lives as wife to another man. (211-2)

Again Electra makes her naming of Clytemnestra as 'mother' prominent, and the image of the bloody bed, while obviously recalling the domestically-sited murder of Agamemnon, may also recall a bed stained in childbirth, so that the reference to her as mother is made vivid, and its corruption more evident by the slippage in the image between the murder of her husband and the bearing of his children. In this neat two-line phrase, which ends her lengthy blaming explanation to the chorus, Electra manages to combine both blame for Clytemnestra as mother and Clytemnestra as wife, foregrounding both, while there is no mention here or anywhere else in the lament which might lend a more public aspect to Clytemnestra's crime. Indeed, in the only reference anywhere in her laments to a potentially public context, Agamemnon's welcome home, Electra makes it clear that here too Clytemnestra has failed in the welcome a wife is to supply, by failing to provide garlands for Agamemnon (163-4), and by using the occasion to 'win' another man entirely (164-6). When explaining her situation to Orestes, Electra similarly brings the two ideas of Clytemnestra's adultery and her failures as a mother into extremely close contact, when she claims:

γυναῖκες ἀνδρῶν, ὦ ξέν', οὐ παίδων φίλαι.

Women love their husbands, stranger, not their children. (265-6)

There is a rather bitter irony in this statement, as it is in fact Clytemnestra's failure to love her husband that has caused the utter breakdown of her relationship with their children. Furthermore, the use of the plural ἀνδρῶν might suggest an even more critical meaning to Electra's complaint: 'women love men', recalling the polyamory which Clytemnestra has demonstrated. Once again therefore, her failures as a mother, this time in loving her children, are intertwined with her failures as a wife, both in failing to love her (first) husband appropriately, and in loving men who were not her husband.

In her confrontation with Clytemnestra the same discourse of blame is reproduced, and in many ways finds some of its most extreme forms. Electra's accusations about Clytemnestra's conduct as wife are no longer limited to the actual fact of her adultery; instead she blames Clytemnestra for seeking an inappropriate relationship even before her association with Aegisthus:

> ἥτις, θυγατρὸς πρὶν κεκυρῶσθαι σφαγάς,
>
> νέον τ' ἀπ' οἴκων ἀνδρὸς ἐξωρμημένου,
>
> ξανθὸν κατόπτρῳ πλόκαμον ἐξήσκεις κόμης.
>
> γυνὴ δ' ἀπόντος ἀνδρὸς ἥτις ἐκ δόμων
>
> ἐς κάλλος ἀσκεῖ, διάγραφ' ὡς οὖσαν κακήν.
>
> οὐδὲν γὰρ αὐτὴν δεῖ θύρασιν εὐπρεπὲς
>
> φαίνειν πρόσωπον, ἤν τι μὴ ζητῇ κακόν.
>
> *Before the sacrifice of your daughter had even been confirmed, when your husband was only newly out of the home, you were adorning your yellow locks of hair in a mirror. Whenever a woman works on her beauty while her husband is away from home, you may put her down as wicked. For it is not necessary for her to show a pretty face outside, unless she is seeking something wicked.* (1069-75)

Electra's detailed accusations go beyond just complaining about Clytemnestra's current relationship with Aegisthus, and extend the scope of her blame, so that she criticises Clytemnestra's behaviour as a wife even before the adultery has begun. Indeed she even goes on to argue Clytemnestra's behaviour is even worse, given that her excellent husband should have deserved a similarly excellent wife (1080-3). Furthermore, her complaints about the way Clytemnestra has contracted her new marriage once again indicate her failure as a bride, as well as wife:

πῶς οὐ πόσιν κτείνασα πατρῴους δόμους

ἡμῖν προσῆψας, ἀλλ' ἐπηνέγκω λέχει

τἀλλότρια, μισθοῦ τοὺς γάμους ὠνουμένη,

After killing your husband, why did you not hand over our paternal house to us, but instead you brought it to another marriage, purchasing your husband-for-hire? (1088-90)

Electra's complaint does not only focus on Clytemnestra's remarriage, but furthermore insists on indicating the distortion which is present in Clytemnestra's conducting it for herself, by providing the dowry and choosing her own husband. Not only has Clytemnestra failed in her first marriage, therefore, she is blamed for her approach to the second, which demonstrates her to be an unfit bride as well as wife. In this context it is also particularly worth noting that in her insults to Aegisthus, Electra accuses him of hoping unreasonably that Clytemnestra will be a good wife:

ἐς τοῦτο δ' ἦλθες ἀμαθίας ὥστ' ἤλπισας

ὡς ἐς σὲ μὲν δὴ μητέρ' οὐχ ἕξοις κακὴν

γήμας, ἐμοῦ δὲ πατρὸς ἠδίκει λέχη.

You came to such a pitch of stupidity that you hoped that my mother would not be a bad wife to you, even when she had already offended against the bed of my father. (918-20)

Again Electra persistently names Clytemnestra and Agamemnon by their relationships to her, but her complaint here also goes beyond blaming Clytemnestra for being a bad wife to Agamemnon, and suggests that it is not possible for her to be anything other than a bad wife. There is nowhere in this play or elsewhere any evidence that Electra's accusation here is well-motivated,[39] but it is nonetheless a reasonable extension of the discourse which Electra in

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39 Zeitlin (1970) 666. In fact supporting Aegisthus at the sacrifice is the act of a good wife – Foley (2001) 234.

particular has turned against Clytemnestra. By repeatedly positioning her within this repeated discourse of blame for her as 'bad wife' and 'bad mother', Electra participates in constructing an identity for Clytemnestra, which, when it is combined with Orestes' violence, Clytemnestra can not effectively contradict. Thus her accusation after the death of Aegisthus, even if it may not seem motivated by events, is motivated by the knowledge of this aspect of Clytemnestra's identity as Electra has created it.

It is important to note that this discourse of blame is explicitly recognised in Sophocles' *Electra* as having belonged to Clytemnestra originally, and simply having been taken up by Electra. Immediately after Clytemnestra has complained about Electra's blame for her mother (discussed above), Electra argues that her behaviour is caused entirely by her being taught by Clytemnestra. In response, Clytemnestra cries:

ὦ θρέμμ' ἀναιδές, ἦ σ' ἐγὼ καὶ τἄμ' ἔπη

καὶ τἄργα τἀμὰ πόλλ' ἄγαν λέγειν ποεῖ.

Oh you shameless child, really my words and my actions make you say too much.

(622-3)

It is significant that Clytemnestra troubles to distinguish between what she has done and the way she has spoken – and furthermore, that she argues that the difference caused is in Electra's speech, not her behaviour. Moreover, Electra agrees:

σύ τοι λέγεις νιν, οὐκ ἐγώ. σὺ γὰρ ποιεῖς

τοὔργον· τὰ δ᾽ ἔργα τοὺς λόγους εὑρίσκεται.

You say these things, I don't. For you do the deed, and it is the deed that finds the words. (624-5)

Electra in her opening statement explicitly claims that the discourse she has turned against

Clytemnestra is one that Clytemnestra herself speaks, even if she then also recognises the intertwined nature of Clytemnestra's speech and actions.[40]

However, unlike Clytemnestra, Electra does not exhibit a wider relationship with discourses of praise and blame, beyond the accusations she makes against her mother. Electra's language does not contain the same repeated references to such speech, nor is she overtly concerned with controlling the praise and blame of others as Clytemnestra is. Her use of this discourse is temporary, and less self-aware than Clytemnestra's. The same is true of Orestes – so that in combination their use of this discourse is powerful enough to cause the same damaging effects towards Clytemnestra as Clytemnesta's to Agamemnon, but while she has been alone, Electra's blame has had no strong effect on Clytemnestra.

Identity Destruction

Nonetheless, Electra's and Orestes' use of these discourses of blame partly derives its strength not from their faculty with language, as Clytemnestra's, but from the sweeping and exaggerated way in which they deploy these discourses. In several places throughout these tragedies, this discourse of blame is extended far beyond the limits of the ways it was applied to Agamemnon. Orestes and Electra are not satisfied with positioning Clytemnestra only as a

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40 Cropp (1988) xxxvii further points to the many echoes between Euripides' *Electra* and the Clytemnestra of the *Agamemnon*, so that it is not a significant stretch to argue that even if in this play Electra does not specifically refer to her taking over her mother's discourse of blame, there is enough correspondence created between them for the audience to recognise a similar effect. Finglass (2007) 277 (ad. 603-9) rejects the claims for similarity between Electra and Clytemnestra which he claims come from "Electra's critics", yet while he is right to query the idea of any "moral equivalence" between Electra's unacted-upon hatred and Clytemnestra's accomplished deeds, this does not necessarily also prevent any similarity at all between them, particularly if this similarity is shown in their use of language. See also on similarities between the pair Winnington-Ingram (1980) 246; Cairns (1991) 19-30.

'bad' wife or 'bad' mother; several times they instead make use of this blaming discourse to position her as not a mother at all, thus erasing that aspect of her identity entirely. Both Orestes and Electra indicate in their blame that Clytemnestra has committed such great crimes that they do not even continue to accord her the identity of mother. In the *Agamemnon,* Electra names Clytemnestra:

> ἐμή γε μήτηρ, οὐδαμῶς ἐπώνυμον
>
> φρόνημα παισὶ δῦσθεον πεπαμένη.
>
> *My mother, in no way rightly named that, since she possesses such an impious attitude towards her children.* (190-1)

Similarly, in Sophocles' *Electra*, she accuses Clytemnestra:

> καί σ' ἔγωγε δεσπότιν
>
> ἤ μητέρ' οὐκ ἔλασσον εἰς ἡμας νέμω,
>
> *I at least consider you more a mistress than a mother to us.* (597-8)

Again she denies Clytemnestra's right to claim the identity *mother*, and positions her through this blame instead as a tyrant or slave-owner over Orestes and Electra.[41] Furthermore, in Sophocles' play she repeats her claim in conversation with Orestes:

> μήτηρ καλεῖται· μητρὶ δ' οὐδὲν ἐξισοῖ.
>
> *She is called my mother: but she is in no way the same as a mother.* (1194)

In Euripides' *Orestes* Orestes makes a very similar comment to Tyndareus about how Clytemnestra should be named:

> ἡ σὴ δὲ θυγάτηρ (μητέρ' αἰδοῦμαι λέγειν)
>
> *Your daughter (I am ashamed to say 'mother').* (556)

In her welcome to Orestes in the *Choephori*, Electra insists on addressing him by a plethora of

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41 This could also be connected to the complaints from Orestes which accuse Clytemnestra of 'selling' him in exchange for Aegisthus.

family relationships:

> ... προσαυδᾶν δ' ἔστ' ἀναγκαίως ἔχον
>
> πατέρα τε, καὶ τὸ μητρὸς εἰς σέ μοι ῥέπει
>
> στέργηθρον – ἡ δὲ πανδίκως ἐχθαίρεται –
>
> καὶ τῆς τυθείσης νηλεῶς ὁμοσπόρου·
>
> πιστὸς δ' ἀδελφὸς ἦσθ'...
>
> *I address you necessarily as father, and the affection for a mother falls to you from me – for she, rightfully, is detested by me – and even the affection for our ruthlessly sacrificed sister: and you have been a faithful brother.* (239-42)

Of the relations Electra lists, only Clytemnestra is still alive, giving her claim to address Orestes as her mother much greater weight than the rather more reasonable suggestion that he may stand in for her dead relatives. Moreover, Clytemnestra is the only one the transferral of whose identity to Orestes Electra takes pains to justify, with her criticism of her mother. As with the examples above, Electra's address here has the effect of erasing Clytemnestra's identity as mother, through the blame which names her as "ἐχθαίρεται", and positioning Orestes instead as mother, in the same way that he stands in as a substitute father and sister. A similar but somewhat inverted idea is also found in Electra's lament for Orestes in Sophocles' *Electra* where she claims:

> οὔτε γάρ ποτε
>
> μητρὸς σύ γ᾽ ἦσθα μᾶλλον ἤ κάμοῦ φίλος
>
> *You were never the beloved of your mother more than you were mine.* (1146)

This claim comes as part of Electra's argument that she had taken on the responsibility of raising Orestes (1143-8), and thus again contributes to an erasure of Clytemnestra's identity as mother as the result of Electra's blame, although this time Electra substitutes into that role

rather than Orestes. In his interesting analysis of this play, Kirk Ormand has also argued that in her excessive lamentation and care for Agamemnon's household Electra perpetrates a system of endogamous marriage, effectively ending up 'married' to her dead father.[42] As a result, it is possible to see Electra as having erased Clytemnestra not only as mother to Orestes, in order that she can substitute herself into that role in her relationship with him, but also as wife to Agamemnon, with a similar substitution achieved.[43]

Dramatic examples of these ideas are also found in the claims of those around Orestes and Electra who take up this idea and also use it against Clytemnestra. In their urging Orestes on against Clytemnestra, the chorus of the *Choephori* suggest:

ἐπαΰσας θροεούσᾳ

πρὸς σὲ "τέκνον" "πατρός" αὔδα,

And when she cries out to you "My child" shout over her, "My father's child!" (828-9)

Their suggestion is effectively that Orestes should erase Clytemnestra's identity as his mother entirely, by shouting over her assertion to it with one that claims only his father as his parent. Apollo's argument in the *Eumenides* that the mother is not a parent at all (658-674) is therefore the final capstone to a rhetoric of blame which is found throughout the discourse in which Clytemnestra's identity is constructed, and Athena's similar assertion that she can be her father's child alone sanctifies and ratifies this erasure of the mother in relation to Orestes (734-43).

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42 Ormand (1999) 65-7.

43 The deception enacted in Euripides' *Electra* in fact also closely mirrors this situation of maternal erasure, although particularly in its transference to Electra herself. Cf. Zeitlin (2008) 323. Electra is already positioned as a wife who is not a wife, yet the deception also relies on her claiming an identity as mother while in fact not being one. The strange doubling of wife/not-wife mother/not-mother is a close parallel to Clytemnestra's situation of being inappropriately Aegisthus' wife/not-wife, and mother/not-mother to Orestes and Electra. See also Hall (2006) 79-80.

Thus in their use of this blame to erase Clytemnestra's identity as mother entirely, Orestes and Electra take this discourse to its most extreme end, far beyond the use Clytemnestra puts it to in her positioning as Agamemnon only as a bad father and husband. As a result, even if their use of such efficacious speech is less obviously skilful or marked by consciousness of its effectiveness, they prove themselves able to turn Clytemnestra's discourses of blame against her as a part of their destruction of her, and her identity.

Rehabilitating Agamemnon

At the same time as turning Clytemnestra's discourse of blame against her, Electra and Orestes, and the characters and choruses who support them, are engaged in an attempt to re-situate Agamemnon back within the traditional discourse of masculine praise, which focuses on his public life and martial exploits. As discussed above, this discourse is already present in the *Agamemnon*, in the praise and blame given by the watchman and chorus to Agamemnon. However, in the *Agamemnon*, these attempts are overcome by Clytemnestra's facility in managing praise and blame, and her competing, privately-focused discourse is substituted for theirs. In the later plays, this is not the case – as shown above, Clytemnestra's children forcibly direct her own privately-focused discourse of blame against her, and simultaneously begin the work of restoring Agamemnon to his traditional place within the discourse which she had previously suppressed.

This process begins in the *Choephori,* in the lament which Electra and Orestes sing for their father. In itself, this is a very effective genre within which to produce such a discourse of

praise, since the laments for buried men were in 5th-century Athenian society the most prominent, public context for such praise.[44] Orestes' opening comment does not explicitly praise Agamemnon, but instead shows how he should have been praised, if he had died at Troy:

> λιπὼν ἄν εὔκλειαν ἐν δόμοισιν
>
> τέκνων τ' ἐν κελεύθοις ἐπίστρεπτον αἰῶ
>
> *You would have left behind you glory in your house, and for your children a life in which people turn around to see them in the streets.* (349-50)

Orestes is therefore explicitly aware that this type of praise, appropriate for a man who dies glorious in battle, is not the discourse within which his father has been positioned, but nonetheless argues for its appropriateness for Agamemnon. In response, however, the chorus do not limit themselves to hypotheticals, but immediately move to praising Agamemnon as:

> ἐμπρέπων
>
> σεμνότιμος ἀνάκτωρ
>
> *Prominent, as a revered ruler.* (356-7)

They focus on his public role as king while alive (360), and deliver praise only related to this topic, without the indication of the contrast between this praise and the blame he has actually received, which Orestes referred to. From then on, the chorus of the *Choephori* repeatedly refer to Agamemnon in these terms, as martial commander and king,[45] entirely ignoring his private or domestic roles, as at 627-8, 723-4, and in their final comment of the play, where Thyestes is described with reference to his children, but Agamemnon only with:

> δεύτερον ἀνδρὸς βασίλεια πάθη,

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44 Katz (1994) 81. See also Foley (2001) 231.

45 Sommerstein (1989) 162 however notes the somewhat darker aspects of this type of address, particularly when it comes to the *Eumenides*, given the negative portrayals of the war found earlier in the trilogy.

λουτροδάικτος δ' ὤλετ' Ἀχαιῶν

πόλεμαρχος ἀνήρ·

Secondly, the kingly sufferings of the man who was the war-leader of the Achaeans

was destroyed, slain in his bath. (1070-2)

Similarly in the *Eumenides* Orestes identifies Agamemnon to Athena as:

Ἀγαμέμνον', ἀνδρῶν ναυβατῶν ἁρμόστορα,

ξὺν ᾧ σὺ †Τροίαν† ἄπολιν Ἰλίου πόλιν

ἔθηκας...

Agamemnon, commander of men and sailors, with whom you made the city of Ilium

into no city at all. (456-8)[46]

In the following case, Apollo directly praises Agamemnon, when he argues:

οὐ γάρ τι ταὐτὸν ἄνδρα γενναῖον θανεῖν

διοσδότοις σκήπτροισι τιμαλφούμενον,

It is not at all the same thing, for a noble man to die, who was honoured by the royal,

god-given sceptre. (625-6)

The epithet "γενναῖον" and even his kingship are set as positive descriptions of Agamemnon's identity, and here again there is no direct reference to his role as father or husband, so that his public, praiseworthy identity is the one which endures, particularly as this is in fact the final description of Agamemnon in the trilogy. It is perhaps particularly notable in the *Oresteia* that Orestes claims immediately after the death of Clytemnestra:

νῦν αὐτὸν <u>αἰνῶ</u>, νῦν ἀποιμώζω...

Now I can <u>praise</u> him, now I can lament him. (1014)

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46 Rosenbloom (1995) esp. 106-117 argues that this naval imagery is part of an Aeschylean argument against the dangers of naval hegemony. However, as with the praise from the herald discussed above, there is no indication that Orestes here intends such a negative meaning within the play – any such connotations are extra-dramatic.

He explicitly connects Clytemnestra's death with the freedom to praise Agamemnon which has previously been denied, and all the following references to Agamemnon by his public identity must be seen as a part of this freedom, which Orestes has established by overcoming Clytemnestra's ability to produce her competing discourse.

In the same way, Electra takes pains in Euripides' *Electra* to contrast Clytemnestra's discourse of family-focused blame with her own praise for her father's public identity. In one of her very first comments she calls him "κλεινοῦ" (206), a word which suggests awareness of previous praise which has brought him to that status. In her complaints to (the still unknown) Orestes, she refers explicitly to Agamemnon's role as military leader by referencing the slaves he has taken from Troy (316), to his kingship and sceptre, along with his command over the Greek army (320-2), and finally to his destruction of Troy (336). The choral ode of 432-481 gives a lengthy, decorative description of the ships in the expedition to Troy, and the arrival of Achilles, before ascribing all of this as a positive attribute of Agamemnon's in their description of him as:

τοιῶνδ' ἄνακτα δοριπόνων

... ἀνδρῶν...

Lord of such spear-carrying men. (480-1)[47]

Similarly in her song of praise for Orestes, Electra refers to him as:

… πατρὸς ἐκ νικηφόρου

γεγώς, Ὀρεστα, τῆς ὑπ' Ἰλίῳ μάχης

Orestes, son of your father who won the prize of victory in the war at Troy. (880-1)

The use of the word "νικηφόρου" gives the passage an epinician flavour,[48] and Electra

47 For interpretations of the complexities of this ode, O'Brien (1964); King (1980).

48 See Chapter 3, n3 on epinician echoes of this term.

therefore manages explicitly to work in epinician, public praise for Agamemnon's victory at Troy at the same time as she celebrates Orestes' success against Aegisthus. Even in her insults towards the dead Aegisthus, she takes pains to point out:

κἄγημας αἰσχρῶς μητέρ' ἄνδρα τ' ἔκτανες

στρατηλατοῦνθ' Ἕλλησιν, οὐκ ἐλθὼν Φρύγας.

And you shamefully married my mother, after killing the man who was the leader of the Greek army, even while you didn't go to Troy at all. (916-7)

It is particularly notable here that while Electra refers to Clytemnestra as "μητέρ'", Agamemnon is described entirely with reference to his role as general, and Electra does not indicate her relationship with him or his relationship with Clytemnestra – he is described neither as her father or her mother's husband. As a result, this identity as husband and father is left unspoken, and becomes subsumed in the public, praiseworthy identity he holds as the Greek general. Similarly, as discussed above, Electra's speech to Clytemnestra focuses particularly on blame which criticises her mother for her behaviour as wife and as mother, yet describes Agamemnon thus:

ἄνδρ' εἶχες οὐ κακίον' Αἰγίσθου πόσιν,

ὅν Ἑλλὰς αὑτῆς εἵλετο στρατηλάτην·

You had a husband who was certainly not worse than Aegisthus – in fact Greece herself chose him as her commander-in-chief. (1081-2)

Again therefore Clytemnestra's family-focused blame finds its answer in Electra's publicly-oriented praise, as she refuses to accept the validity of Clytemnestra's discourse, and instead re-positions her father within a type of praise which is traditionally more appropriate.

It is possible to see in this attempt to rehabilitate Agamemnon through discourses of

praise a similar clash of identities as that discussed in Chapter One, in relation to Euripides' *Heracles*. As with Heracles, Agamemnon is described in relation to two separate identities, one public, martial, and concerned with leadership, the other private, and concerned primarily with his roles as husband and father. Yet in the *Heracles*, Heracles' private identity finds no confirmation through the discourse of public praise within which he is positioned; instead his heroic, public identity is reaffirmed, so that it is this which survives the clash. In contrast, the praise discourse positioning Agamemnon as a public leader is overcome by Clytemnestra's skill in praise and blame in the *Agamemnon*, and does not truly recover from the competition with her competing, family-focused blame discourse until it is resurrected and produced more successfully by his children.

The Dangers of Discourse

Clytemnestra's destruction is the result of her own discursive practices as much as it is the result of her physical acts. In killing her kin, Clytemnestra leaves herself vulnerable to the same death, and, as I have shown above, in producing and forcibly positioning Agamemnon within a privately-focused discourse of blame for his behaviour as husband and father, she similarly becomes vulnerable to the same discourse about her behaviour as wife and mother, when her children take up the task of positioning her discursively. Yet there is a further problematic aspect to this discourse, and its use by Electra and Orestes, which I would like to deal with briefly. The rather famous comment of Pericles, that women should be spoken of neither in praise nor in blame, does not allow for the type of family-focused blame discourse shown to be active in these plays.[49] If the act of praising or blaming in Athenian culture is

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49 Although see further discussion of the problematic aspects of this in the Introduction. Hollway (1984) 236-7 has argued that availability or non-availability of subject positions in particular discourses is part of what

therefore to be seen as part of the masculine, public sphere, it would seem that the production of a discourse of privately-focused blame would present its own difficulties, even before the serious problems caused by its then being directed against a man.

Indeed, tragedy does provide some evidence for the problems inherent in the production and use of such a discourse, in the figures of Orestes and Electra. As discussed above, both children use this discourse to great effect in constructing an identity for Clytemnestra as bad mother, bad wife, and ultimately erasing her identity and positioning her as no mother at all. However, the problems inherent in the very production of this discourse, become apparent in the ways they also attempt to speak about one another, particularly in the case of Electra, who, as a woman, should according to the Periclean ideal be prevented from participating in such discursive practices. Scholars have already discussed in great detail the perversion that results in Euripides' *Electra* from her use of epinician praise when describing Orestes' attack on Aegisthus.[50] As was the case with Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*, it is at best disturbing to see a woman involved in the production of such praise at all, let alone the concerns which result from its content. Moreover, there are repeated occasions in tragedy which demonstrate that Electra is unable to limit her family-focused blame to Clytemnestra as she might wish – while she is not seen turning it against Agamemnon, there are occasions where this type of blame seeps into her descriptions of Orestes, and she criticises him too for his failures as her brother, rather than in relation to any of his public positions. As with her criticisms of Clytemnestra, Electra's blaming speech is not marked with the self-conscious language that Clytemnestra's displayed, and is thus not shown as being particularly effective,

establishes and reinforces gender-differences in any given society, an argument which has particular resonance for the apparent attempt by Pericles to claim that subject positions within discourses of praise/blame should be entirely unavailable to Athenian women. See also Moore (1994) 65.

50 See esp. Zeitlin (1970) 655-7; Swift (2010) 157-72.

but it nonetheless indicates a corruption in their relationships that she is so freely willing to cast blame against all of her surviving relations.

It is primarily through the delayed recognition of Sophocles' *Electra* that Electra is presented with any opportunity to talk about, rather than to, Orestes at all. The decision to delay the reunion has many results, but for the purposes of this discussion one of the particularly interesting issues it creates is that Electra is seen blaming Orestes for his role in her unhappy situation, caused by her need to wait for him. In her opening discussion with the chorus she complains of Orestes' messages and his failure to return to her (168-72), and then goes on to emphasise this point by blaming his absence as a main cause of her situation:

> ἐγὼ δ' Ὀρέστην τῶνδε προσμένουσ' ἀεὶ
>
> παυστῆρ' ἐφήξειν ἡ τάλαιν' ἀπόλλυμαι.
>
> μέλλων γὰρ ἀεὶ δρᾶν τι τὰς οὔσας τέ μου
>
> καὶ τὰς ἀπούσας ἐλπιδας διέφθορεν.
>
> *And as I am always waiting for Orestes to come and stop all this, I am perishing in my unhappiness. For always in delaying doing anything he has wrecked my hopes, and even hopes that were far from me.* (303-6)

The chorus follow this up by asking for further information about her brother (317), and Electra complains again of his hesitation and inaction (319, 321). Furthermore, when Chrysothemis enters the stage, Electra immediately begins to blame her too for her apparent submission to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (341-68), and even claims a lack of kinship with her, resulting from Chrysothemis' apparent association with her mother instead of her father (341-2, 365-6). Once she has heard of Orestes' apparent death she returns to blaming him for destroying her hopes (808-12), and in her lament over his urn claims:

<div align="center">ὥς μ' ἀπώλεσας·</div>

ἀπώλεσας δῆτ', ὦ κασίγνητον κάρα.

How you have destroyed me: Yes, you have destroyed me, my dear brother. (1163-4)

In Electra's case, her persistent blame for her mother has effectively spilled over into blame for her brother and sister too, so that all of her relations face her criticism for their behaviour in relation to her. It may be pertinent here to note the strain of scholarship which argues persistently for a reading of Sophocles' *Electra* in which Electra becomes steadily more unstable and degraded as the play proceeds, and particularly the recent argument of Graham Wheeler that this downward progression is the result of her transgression against gender-based conventions.[51] The corruption in Electra's familial relationships as a result of her excessive use of this privately-focused blame discourse could well be seen as part of the same pattern of gendered self-destruction as argued for by Wheeler – in attempting to claim the (controversial) right to produce such an inappropriate discourse Electra causes her own destruction, in the same way as her mother had before her.

The same issue is seen in Euripides' *Electra,* where Electra is also found blaming Orestes in his absence. She complains very early on in the play of Orestes':

οἰκτρὰν ἐν θαλάμοις λιπὼν

πατρῴοις ἐπὶ συμφοραῖς

ἀλγίσταισιν ἀδελφᾶν.

Leaving your pitiable sister to disasters in your father's halls. (132-4)

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51 Wheeler (2003). On Electra's disintegration: most drastically Winnington-Ingram (1980) 228 argued for her being as much a victim of the Furies as their agent. See also Friis Johansen (1964) 8-32; Kells (1973) ad 1313, 1346-88. I agree with Wheeler that it is not satisfactory to judge Electra's behaviour and situation as if she were not a woman, as March (2001) n.2 does, in an attempt to avoid this type of reading. Issues of gender and the setting of standards for women are rife particularly in Electra's own blame for her mother (as discussed above), and cannot therefore be disregarded in considering Electra herself.

Here her description of herself as his sister, rather than any use of the first person, brings their relationship to the foreground in contextualising Orestes' supposed offence, in the same way that both children's repeated focus on Clytemnestra's relationship to them made it such an emphatic part of their blame. The same complaint about Orestes' absence is made to Orestes himself (unknowingly) at 245, and a little later she imitates Sophocles' Electra by complaining of his hesitation or apparent cowardice (275, 277). Interestingly in this play these complaints are also turned back on Electra herself in the chorus' comment that she has done something terrible specifically to her κασίγνητον in urging him on (1204-5), thus again foregrounding the relationship as the necessary context for their blame. Furthermore, by the end of Euripides' *Electra* both children of Clytemnestra have also begun to blame themselves for their terrible behaviour as a son and daughter, so that none of their remaining family relationships are left untainted by this type of blame (esp. 1182-4, 1194-7, 1214-7, 1227-32). Therefore for Electra in both *Electra* plays, the deployment of blame against all of her family-members is represented as having grown beyond her control, so that there is no relation besides her father who she does not criticise. It may be effective against Clytemnestra, but it is perhaps no coincidence that in order to be successfully rehabilitated, Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes* insist on Electra's successful transition, through marriage, out of the Atreid family entirely, to one where she has as yet made no use of this type of privately-oriented blame, and thus has corrupted none of her new familial relationships.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Thus, Clytemnestra makes her claim to production of the discourses of praise and blame surrounding Agamemnon a part of her wholesale destruction of him. Yet, unlike

Deianira, she is not content simply to reject the traditional, masculine, public praise discourse he is usually positioned within, but instead uses her influence over speech, praise and blame to position him within a new discourse of blame, one which focuses on his failures as a husband and father, and is thus wholly concerned with the private, family roles he plays. When this discourse is appropriated by her own children and turned against her, however, it becomes part of Clytemnestra's death too. Furthermore, the inappropriateness of this discourse being perpetuated as part of public praise causes it to destabilise family relationships throughout the generations.

Clytemnestra's fate, like the techniques she uses against her husband, can further be seen as being very similar to that of Deianira. While they both succeed (even if Deianira's success is reluctant) in destroying their husband's praiseworthy identities through their manipulation and rejection of praise and blame discourses, they are themselves both destroyed in the process. As a result, both represent the dangers of female involvement in such a process – their victories are pyrrhic at best, and unlikely to have been considered a 'success' in any meaningful sense for an Athenian audience. However, there is one further example of a tragic female character who similarly involves herself in a process of identity construction and destruction through her manipulation of praise and blame discourses, yet does not suffer the same fate as a result. In the next chapter I shall demonstrate that Euripides' Medea, like Clytemnestra, demonstrates a self-conscious manipulation of praise and blame discourses as a method of positioning her husband, Jason, and herself, and constructing the desired identities for each. However, unlike Clytemnestra, Medea further demonstrates a consistent ability to draw on 'socially coherent', established discourses of gendered blame in her methods of identity construction, which is a key element of her success and survival, in contrast to the

ultimate failures of Clytemnestra's and Deianira's methods.

Chapter Five: Jason and Medea – Switching Discourses

In some ways, the issue of praise and blame is more central to Euripides' *Medea* than any other play featuring a married couple. Both characters face an exceptionally high level of blame from one another, and even more unusually, this is directly addressed to the individual concerned. Furthermore, the focus of the chorus on poetry and song as a way of establishing reputations demonstrates the importance of this concept within the tragedy itself. Not only do the chorus comment repeatedly on the importance of poetry, particularly in relation to the tradition of blame faced by women, but Jason and Medea too make reference to the importance of the reputations they develop, based on the comments of others, and Jason mentions song specifically as part of this. As part of this context, the chorus express a wish for the reputations of men and women to be exchanged, so that women become better thought of while men receive the condemnations for faithlessness which they deserve. However, what the chorus does not recognise is that Euripides' *Medea* represents a world where their anticipated reversal has already happened.

In the *Medea*, Medea demonstrates a similar awareness of the functioning of praise and blame in constructing identity as that shown by Deianira and Clytemnestra. Yet unlike Deianira, Medea does not simply resist the discourses of praise established by others about her husband. Instead, she insists on propagating her own discourse of blame within which Jason is positioned both by her, but also by the chorus and other characters in response to her complaints. Furthermore, this blame is unusually and explicitly gendered in a way which does not apply so obviously to Clytemnestra's use of a similar tactic. Medea and sometimes Jason himself both express awareness of the ways in which this blame is gendered, often assigning

it to a generalised discourse of blame traditionally applied to women. However, Medea's recognition of this aspect in particular indicates a high level of self-awareness in her use of this tactic. Furthermore, by repeatedly positioning Jason within discourses of blame 'marked' as suitable for positioning women, not men, Medea's blame has the effect of positioning Jason not simply as blameworthy, but specifically as a blameworthy woman, according to the terms of the discourse.

It is an inherent risk of identity construction as a discursive process that it can be challenged or subverted by other participants in the process of such construction.[1] Furthermore, although the 'subject' in such poststructuralist approaches may be constructed through the production of subject positions in discourse, he or she nonetheless also remains an active participant in such construction, capable of producing new discourses, but also of reflecting on the positioning of their 'self' within these discourses, and of turning that reflection outwards to consider the positioning of others.[2] In the *Medea* it is possible to see Medea and the chorus engaged in precisely this type of reflection, since she leads the chorus in considering the importance of what is said in establishing identity, and in the production of specific discourses of blame within which Jason is positioned. Medea's approach is one which further makes destructive use of this understanding, since she noticeably chooses to draw on discourses of blame which Jason has identified and named as gendered, specifically feminine, and positions him in these rather than discourses of blame which would be marked more normally as applying to masculine values. Discourse production in a society relies on understanding and acceptance from others in that society – it is impossible to establish a discourse which is considered to be incoherent, and thus a great deal of subject positioning

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1   See Introduction, above.

2   Weedon (1987) 125; Sunderland (2004) 173-4.

takes place within discourses which are widely recognisable and accepted, even where a position involves explicit rejection of such a discourse.[3]

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that in her predominantly patriarchal society, Medea must make use of blame discourses which are already established in order to position Jason, even if these are not discourses within which men could normally be positioned. The chorus, after all, recognise that poets have not previously said enough about men's weaknesses (429-30), indicating a lack of any recognisable discourse along these lines which Medea could appropriate.[4] It has long been recognised that an awareness of poetry's role in establishing discourses of praise and blame is placed centre-stage in the *Medea* by the chorus' famous lines:

> ἄνω ποταμῶν ἱερῶν χωροῦσι παγαί,
>
> καὶ δίκα καὶ πάντα πάλιν στρέφεται·
>
> ἀνδράσι μὲν δόλιαι βουλαί, θεῶν δ᾽
>
> οὐκέτι πίστις ἄραρεν.
>
> τὰν δ᾽ ἐμὰν εὔκλειαν ἔχειν βιοτὰν στρέψουσι φᾶμαι·
>
> ἔρχεται τιμὰ γυναικείῳ γένει·
>
> οὐκέτι δυσκέλαδος φάμα γυναῖκας ἕξει.
>
> μοῦσαι δὲ παλαιγενέων λήξουσ᾽ ἀοιδῶν
>
> τὰν ἐμὰν ὑμνεῦσαι ἀπιστοσύναν.
>
> οὐ γὰρ ἐν ἁμετέρᾳ γνώμᾳ λύρας

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3   Sunderland (2004) 29, 169-71; Hollway (1984) 236; Moore (1994) 65.

4   The chorus thus almost pre-empts a central argument made by Irigaray on the impossibility of a female subject within a patriarchal society dominated by masculinist discourses (1977). See further Smith (1988) 144-6.

ὤπασε θέσπιν ἀοιδὰν

Φοῖβος ἀγήτωρ μελέων· ἐπεὶ ἀντάχησ᾽ ἂν ὕμνον

ἀρσένων γέννα. μακρὸς δ᾽ αἰὼν ἔχει

πολλὰ μὲν ἀμετέραν ἀνδρῶν τε μοῖραν εἰπεῖν.

The streams of sacred rivers flow upwards, and order and everything twists about; for the thoughts of men are deceptive, and their pledges by the gods no longer hold fast. Rumour will overturn my life and bring it good repute; honour is coming to the race of women: no longer will shrieking rumour come to women. The songs of ancient poets will stop singing our faithlessness. For Phoebus lord of songs did not grant to our minds the inspired songs of the lyre: or I could sing a hymn in answer to the race of men. For great time could say many things about the fate of men as well as ours. (410-430)

The chorus' ode is sung in a decorative style, and its highly poetic nature, with specific reference to Phoebus and the lyre emphasises the unusually metapoetic style of the ode.[5] Its focus on poetry as a vehicle for transmitting discourses of blame against women further demonstrates an unusual level of self-awareness of this feature within the world of tragedy, itself a poetic producer of discourses.[6] The ode has the effect therefore of highlighting the importance of this element in interpreting the play. At the same time, however, it demonstrates the unusual nature of this focus from the perspective of the characters involved in the drama. In hearing this ode, the audience is presented with a group of characters who, like the chorus, demonstrate far more awareness of the functioning of poetry to transmit and authorise discourses of praise and blame than is usual in tragedy. In the figure of Medea, this awareness

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5   See Swift (2013) 140-1 on some of the complications caused by the chorus' apparent song to disavow their own ability to sing here, which she sees as representing a conflict between their gendered identity as women, which Medea encourages them to identify with most strongly, and their identity as a chorus.

6   Swift (2013) 141-2 on the problematic features of praise/blame poetry as represented within the ode itself.

is further turned to destructive ends, as she uses this understanding to begin her own persuasive, dangerous positioning of Jason within specific blame discourses.

Scholarly interpretation has tended towards two specific points in the discussion of this section. The first approach suggests that this ode indicates the confusion of the chorus, who have been taken in by Medea's speech, leading to their own confusion and inability to correctly pass moral judgements on her behaviour as the play goes on.[7] The second approach focuses much more on the awareness of genre and literature displayed by the chorus in this ode, leading to a reading which argues that the play itself is attempting to do what the chorus sings of, with limited success. One of the first to suggest this reading was Knox (1977), who claimed, "'Legends now shall change direction; woman's life have glory' sings the chorus, but the future tense is unnecessary. Euripides' play itself is the change of direction."[8] Later readers added some very necessary caveats, with Rabinowitz rightly pointing out that the chorus of male voices singing a male author's words, might not be able to represent the full reversal they anticipate in women's position,[9] and Boedecker positioning the play as a conflict between literary genres – tragedy and epic – with tragedy overtaking and negating the old-fashioned heroics of epic.[10] Rehm argued similarly to Boedecker, although with a rather more gendered perspective, that the *Medea* represents Medea's failed attempt to break out of a male, heroics-based method of discourse and replace it with a new female λόγος.[11] The latter argument is similar to those of the scholars such as Foley who see the *Medea* as demonstrating a conflict of values and characteristics as embodied in the figure of Medea – male, heroic, traditional

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7   Mastronarde (2010) 118.

8   Knox (1977) 224.

9   Rabinowitz (1993) 153.

10 Boedeker (1997) 108-9.

11 Rehm (1989) esp. 106-11.

morals contrasted with female 'virtues' such as maternal feeling.[12] However, close examination

of the play reveals that many of these interpretations fall short of understanding the full extent

of what is happening in Euripides' *Medea*. Far from expressing only a wish for the future, the

chorus describes what they and the other characters in the tragedy continually demonstrate – a

complete reversal in the types of praise and blame given to the male/female pair, Jason and

Medea. Knox's analysis therefore comes closest to describing the situation presented in the

Medea.

However, the reversal indicated in the chorus' ode is not specifically the result of

Medea's violence, which, in itself, has no obvious effect on reversing poetic discourses of

blame against women. Rather the culmination of the chorus' envisaged reversal, is found in

the way that the others on stage around Medea speak of what she has done in murdering her

children – the terms which they choose to blame her, and equally, to blame Jason. Medea's

awareness of discourses of gendered blame, traditionally used to position women as lustful,

crafty, faithless, and over-emotional, allows her to draw on these discourses for blame which

positions Jason in precisely the same way.[13] This construction of Jason is largely accepted by

those around her, so that combined with the reversal in their respective fates enacted by her

violence, her blame succeeds in leaving Jason, not her, positioned as blameworthy, and

feminine.

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12 Foley (1989) revised in (2001) suggested influentially that the debate Medea holds with herself at 1019-80 represents a struggle between Medea's two gendered selves, each of which embodies one part of these virtues. The recognition of male/heroic qualities in the presentation of Medea has been argued for by Maddalena (1963), followed by Knox (1977), Bongie (1977), Dihle (1977) esp. 29, Burnett (1973) (although this view was adjusted slightly in Burnett (1998)), Rickert (1987), McDermott (1989) esp 56, Seidensticker (1990).

13 For the use of generalisations such as 'women are/do x' to mark the use of particular, established discourses, see Sunderland (2004) 178.

Renown and Reputation

The characters of the *Medea* display a keen awareness throughout the play of the importance of praise or blame in forming their reputations, and their public presentations of themselves. This awareness is shown by characters and the chorus throughout the tragedy, and is thus not only to be found in the chorus' ode about poetry as a vehicle for forming reputations. In fact, in taking this tack in their ode, the chorus is responding to an attitude which Medea has demonstrated throughout her time on stage. Medea establishes the importance of this idea explicitly as part of her concern for self-construction and presentation to those around her, so that the chorus follows her in considering the issue. Medea frames her very entry on to the stage, and thus, perhaps, even her visible existence as an individual within the world of that stage, as undertaken due to concerns for her reputation, and specifically concern that she might earn blame:

> … ἐξῆλθον δόμων
>
> μή μοί τι <u>μέμψησθ</u>᾽· οἶδα γὰρ πολλοὺς βροτῶν
>
> σεμνοὺς γεγῶτας, τοὺς μὲν ὀμμάτων ἄπο,
>
> τοὺς δ᾽ ἐν θυραίοις· οἱ δ᾽ ἀφ᾽ ἡσύχου ποδὸς
>
> δύσκλειαν ἐκτήσαντο καὶ ῥᾳθυμίαν.
>
> *I have come out of the house lest <u>you blame me</u>: for I know that many mortals are haughty, both away from sight, and when they're outside: but others from their offhand way of life get a bad reputation and one for indifference.* (214-8)

Indeed she carries on talking about potential risks to a reputation for a further four lines, eventually turning with her own situation 12 lines into her opening speech – so that the

concern for reputation and blame is far more prominent.[14] Furthermore, upon Creon's entry to the scene a little later, there is a repeated emphasis on reputation and blame. First, Creon claims that he is relying partly on the reports of others against Medea to make his decision (287-9). In fact the audience have already seen that these reports are truthful – Creon could be responding to what Medea has promised the chorus she will attempt. However, Medea claims in her refutation that the whole matter is one of a mistakenly bad reputation, crying:

> οὐ νῦν με πρῶτον ἀλλὰ πολλάκις, Κρέον,
>
> ἔβλαψε δόξα μεγάλα τ᾽ εἴργασται κακά.
>
> *Not for the first time now, but often, Creon, has my reputation greatly harmed me and*
>
> *made trouble.* (292-3)

She goes on to a further lengthy development of the harm a particular reputation can cause, dwelling on the perils of being thought clever. Given the way she speaks about the others around her, and the way they view her cleverness (303), it might be expected to see some evidence of more widespread hostility among the Corinthians, perhaps represented by the chorus, but it seems that despite her argument, Medea has been able to preserve her reputation with everyone except for Creon – who aside from her cleverness has focused his accusations on the threats which the audience knows to be true.[15] Medea's argument against Creon's accusations attempts to set up an alternate identity for herself to that established by this negative reputation he bases his arguments on, as she argues:

> οὐχ ὧδ᾽ ἔχει μοι, μὴ τρέσῃς ἡμᾶς, Κρέον,

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14 Rabinowitz (2004) 52 notes further that her choice of vocabulary also has a masculine effect. However, it is perhaps relevant to note that while her description may be masculinised, her need to excuse her exit from the house into the public arena is a type of speech limited to female characters in tragedy (See further on this Chapter 3, n30).

15 On the Corinthian friendliness to Medea in this version Easterling (1977) 180. The Nurse comments that she is loved by the Corinthians (15), possibly alluding to the myth which is noted by the scholiast to Pindar *Ol.* 13.74 – that Medea had saved the Corinthians from famine.

ὥστ᾽ ἐς τυράννους ἄνδρας ἐξαμαρτάνειν.

Do not fear me, this is not in me, Creon, to be able to harm the royal family. (307-8)

Medea attempts to counteract the 'reports' of threats which Creon has heard with a presentation of her identity (the 'type' of person she is) which establishes it as one entirely alien from the identity he claims is hers, and on which her reputation is built. However, even if the audience hadn't heard the same threats for themselves, the Nurse's words at the very start of the play make it impossible for this false, alternative identity to stand as the 'true' Medea, as she wishes it to. The Nurse has both expressed fears that Medea is precisely this kind of person (39-42), backing it up with the assertion "ἐγῷδα τήνδε" (39), and revealed that she has already committed crimes against the leaders of two lands – Pelias (9) and her father, as Medea herself later confirms (31-4, 166-7). Medea's attempt to create a new identity for herself with Creon, having rejected the one at the root of her unfavourable reputation, is therefore unsuccessful, forcing her to turn instead to formal supplication, which does not rely on her being a particular (kind of) person in order to succeed.[16] Medea's awareness of the potential distinctions between a reputation and 'actual' identity, shown in her first statements to the chorus, therefore leads to her awareness that this gap can be manipulated in order for her to influence Creon. Even if her attempt is ultimately unsuccessful, it shows a subtle degree of awareness of how reputation and blame can be essential for achieving her goals, as well as how it can be turned against her and thus, at her hands, against Jason.

Medea is not the only character to demonstrate awareness of the importance of a

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16 On Medea's use of supplication to persuade Allan (2002) 56; Rabinowitz (1993) 129-30, who argues that her supplications position her as victimized and thus sympathetic; McClure (1999b) 373, who calls it a 'typically feminine' aspect of her persuasion of male characters; Foley (2001) 258-9; Williamson (1990) 21; Boedeker (1991) 98-9. Allan (2007) 121 suggests Creon's acceptance of Medea's supplication demonstrates his piety rather than simply her persuasiveness.

reputation in establishing the public identity of an individual. After the chorus has introduced the idea of poetry as a vehicle for establishing praise and blame and the negative reputations of women, Jason takes up the same idea in his argument against Medea. He claims:

πάντες δέ σ᾿ ᾔσθοντ᾿ οὖσαν Ἕλληνες σοφὴν

καὶ δόξαν ἔσχες· εἰ δὲ γῆς ἐπ᾿ ἐσχάτοις

ὅροισιν ᾤκεις, οὐκ ἂν ἦν λόγος σέθεν.

εἴη δ᾿ ἔμοιγε μήτε χρυσὸς ἐν δόμοις

μήτ᾿ Ὀρφέως κάλλιον ὑμνῆσαι μέλος,

εἰ μὴ ᾿πίσημος ἡ τύχη γένοιτό μοι.

All the Greeks know that you are clever and you have a reputation: if you were still living on the farthest boundaries of the land, there would be no story about you. Let there be neither gold nor the power to sing songs more beautiful than those of Orpheus in my house, if fame does not become my lot. (539-44)

Not only does Jason recognise Medea's own desire for a good reputation and fame, he also makes it clear that such considerations are important to him (more so than gold, even, which has supposedly partly spurred him on to the new marriage at the centre of the tragedy (559-565)) – and he connects them explicitly in his wish with song. Medea does not acknowledge Jason's point at all, but it is notable that she has spoken of all her major, undoubtedly familiar, mythical achievements in her own address to Jason, effectively demonstrating for the audience the reputation which Jason claims not unreasonably to have been instrumental in her winning.[17] It is also notable that it is not solely the two 'main' characters and the chorus who demonstrate this concern with the importance of reputation and renown; even Aegeus in his brief time on stage devotes some time to expressing his desire to remain blameless, "ἀναίτιος," in the eyes of his hosts (730).

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17 cf. Foley (1989) 75. On the mythical tradition surrounding Medea and Jason see Graf (1997).

All of this repeated stress on the issue of praise, blame and reputations makes it clear that these are central to any interpretation of the play. Furthermore, Medea's particularly subtle understanding of how reputation, blame, and identity can be manipulated to cause harm, is a central facet of her success in destroying Jason. It is this understanding which she deploys against him, and which enables her to appropriate traditional blame discourses to position him in such a damaging way.

Blaming Jason

It is widely acknowledged by scholars that Medea's introduction to the audience, while she remains off-stage, is framed in terms more usually found in describing a male, heroic figure, than a woman. Her off-stage cries of grief strongly parallel those of Sophocles' Ajax,[18] and the images the Nurse uses to describe her of a rock and then a wave (28), present her as masculine in her hardness.[19] Even the repeated allusions to her wrath (93-4, 99, 107-8, 172) and references to her potential for violence are very unusual in descriptions of a woman. In fact the word χόλος used in accusation several times against Medea (1150, 590, 172, 99, 898, 126, 94) about her persistent anger is far more commonly in tragedy applied to male figures – describing Ajax (Soph. *Aj.* 41, 744), Zeus (Aesch. *PV.* 29, 376), Hephaestus (Eur. *Phae.* 258), Neoptolemus (Soph. *Phil.* 328), and Heracles (Soph. *Trach.* 269).[20] Furthermore, the famous comparison between childbirth and battle which she makes in describing women's fate (241-

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18 Knox (1977) 196.

19 Boedeker (1997) 129-30.

20 The term is also used once of Electra's anger (Soph. *El.* 176), and for Hera and the Erinyes (Eur. *Her.* 840 and *IT.* 1439). Medea has by far the most sustained association with the word – and an entirely unparalleled one for any other mortal woman.

58) insistently brings the heroic, masculine world of war into the realm which is more properly Medea's as a woman, so that she forcibly assimilates them.[21]

Her reversal of traditionally gendered discourses is not limited to the way she presents herself or is presented by others, however. Medea is not alone in tragedy as a female character described in language more usually applied to men, since such descriptions are also applied to characters such as Clytemnestra.[22] However, what makes her situation in the *Medea* particularly unusual is her active participation in continuing the process of gender reversal in the discourses of blame which she directs against Jason, and which are taken up and propagated by the chorus and other characters. Each of these discourses is in fact deliberately and explicitly marked by Jason, Creon, and indeed Medea herself as being properly applicable to women, not men. As a result, Medea's appropriation of such discourses of blame along with deliberate attempts to position Jason within them and refuse to let herself be thus positioned is a far more noticeably gendered approach to blame than seen in other tragedies such as the *Trachiniae*, or even the approach used by Clytemnestra. To some extent this approach is even highlighted by Medea's first direct criticism to Jason of his behaviour:

> ὦ παγκάκιστε, τοῦτο γάρ σ' εἰπεῖν ἔχω,
>
> γλώσσῃ μέγιστον εἰς <u>ἀνανδρίαν</u> κακόν,
>
> *Oh most vile man, for I have this to say to you, the worst thing from a tongue against such base <u>unmanliness</u>.* (465-6)

Medea directly connects her blame with what she considers his 'unmanliness', thus closely intertwining her blame and the feminisation of Jason that these discourses produce.

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21 See further on this point Mastronarde (2010) 264.

22 Foley (2001) 260-2 and n.61. On Clytemnestra McClure (1999a) 72-5; Katz (1994) 84. On the 'masculinized women' of tragedy more generally, Gould (1980) 56-7; Pomeroy (1975) 98-101; Foley (1981) 151-2.

Effectively this comment signals the approach to blame discourses that will predominate in her speech throughout the play, with its destructive result.

One of the discourses of blame most obviously marked as gendered, and primarily for identifying women, is one which positions women as lustful, and inappropriately invested in sex. Discussion of this issue is unusually common in the *Medea,* which is filled with terms for Jason and Medea's relationships which evoke a sexual context in their use of words for 'bed' rather than more neutral terms, so that the words λέχος, λέκτρον, εὐνή and κοίτη occur 32 separate times in the play.[23] Medea who first identifies this discourse as being marked for use in positioning women, when she argues about women:

> ὅταν δ' ἐς εὐνὴν ἠδικημένη κυρῇ,
>
> οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη φρὴν μιαιφονωτέρα.
>
> *Whenever she turns out to have been wronged in matters to do with the bed, her mind*
> *is more murderous than any other.* (265-6)

Jason makes a similarly generalised statement of blame, positioning women as excessively concerned with sex, to Medea in their *agon*:

> ἀλλ' ἐς τοσοῦτον ἥκεθ' ὥστ' ὀρθουμένης
>
> εὐνῆς γυναῖκες πάντ' ἔχειν νομίζετε,
>
> ἢν δ' αὖ γένηται ξυμφορά τις ἐς λέχος,
>
> τὰ λῷστα καὶ κάλλιστα πολεμιώτατα
>
> τίθεσθε. ...
>
> *But you women have come to such a point, that you think if the bed has been set*
> *straight then you have everything, but if some disaster occurs to your bed, you hold*
> *your most agreeable and finest things to be most hostile.* (569-73)

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23 Sanders (2013) 45.

This type of blame is modelled on a traditional discourse of blame regarding women as overly sexual which is found throughout Greek literature.[24] Both Jason and Medea in their use of generalisations of this kind also mark them as explicitly gendered, to be applied to women as a class, not just Medea herself.[25] In Jason's case this is particularly unexpected – his ongoing conflict is with Medea, not women generally. Moreover, unlike Hippolytus, who makes similar blaming generalisations against women while keeping himself firmly away from any positive interaction with them, Jason is already engaged in a relationship with a different woman, Creon's daughter, making his generalisation somewhat more unusual.

Medea's use of this generalisation might be similarly unusual, since it suggests a somewhat self-loathing willingness to draw on traditional blame discourses to criticise herself. In fact, however, rather than acknowledging this discourse as applicable to herself, Medea instead persists in drawing on it to blame her husband, Jason. It is notable that a great deal of her blame for Jason represents an attempt to position him within this same discourse, as destructively lustful and concerned with his bed. Furthermore, Medea is significantly more successful in positioning Jason in this way than Jason is in his own attempts to do the same to her, since while she and the chorus never accept that such blame might be applied to her, the chorus and even Aegeus do accept and even participate in perpetuating her criticisms of Jason.[26]

Medea often expresses her blame for Jason's behaviour in terms which establish the

24 Gould (1980) 55-6; Carson (1990) 159; Allan (2002) 61; on narratives of women's destructive sexuality Goldhill (1995) 145.

25 On the traditional generalisation of blame for an individual woman becoming blame for the entire class see Loraux (1993) 72-110; McClure (1999b) 377; on these as especially common in Euripides Pomeroy (1975) 106-8. This is also oddly true of modern blame for women. See further on generalisations of blame below.

26 Mastronarde (2010) 136-7 sees the chorus' responses to Medea as evidence of her 'manipulative power'.

sexual nature of his transgression. Early on, before Jason is present to hear her blame, she calls his new marriage a "γάμους" (marriage), a relatively neutral and less sexual term. Yet once he has arrived on stage, he is faced with her direct accusation that he has:

… καινὰ δ' ἐκτήσω λέχη,

παίδων γεγώτων· ...

Taken a new bed although we already had children. (489-90)

In contrast to her earlier statement, which described his union simply as a marriage, here she makes explicit reference to the marriage bed, and to it, or, rather, marital sex, as a source of children. It is notable that it is this particular aspect of this accusation which Jason attempts to refute, claiming explicitly:

οὐχ, ᾗ σὺ κνίζῃ, σὸν μὲν ἐχθαίρων λέχος

καινῆς δὲ νύμφης ἱμέρῳ πεπληγμένος

It was not the thing which provokes you so, that after hating your bed I was struck with longing for the bed of the maiden. (555-6)

Further, he complains again a few lines later that Medea is galled by the issue of sex specifically (568), before making the generalisation listed above that this is a typically blameworthy quality found in women.[27] Yet despite his complaints that this is Medea's preoccupation, not his, in referring to his new bride a few lines on, he calls her "λέκτρα" (594), which is a term more straightforwardly translated as 'bedfellow' than the perhaps less implicitly sexual γύνη.[28] It is therefore perhaps in response to Jason's lingering on these details

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27 Jason's description of Creon's daughter as a νύμφη is somewhat problematic in itself – not only does it imply that he thinks of her as young and nubile, sexier than Medea (Sanders (2013) 46), but also sets up an interesting parallel to Medea's younger self, since Jason later uses very similar terms to talk of their early relationship at the time when their children were born (1336). Jason effectively implies precisely that he has replaced Medea with a younger model.

28 In Euripides this word refers far more often to the bed than the occupant thereof, but it is also significant that it very frequently appears where situations of sexual impropriety and in fact almost exclusively infidelity

that Medea accuses him:

> χώρει· πόθῳ γὰρ τῆς νεοδμήτου κόρης
>
> αἱρῇ χρονίζων δωμάτων ἐξώπιος.
>
> νύμφευ'· ...
>
> *Go away: for you are seized with desire for your newly-tamed maiden, having spent so much time outside of your house. Go off and be married.* (623-5)

Her focus on Creon's daughter as a maiden, and reference to Jason in terms of desire, both suggest a more erotic approach to his new bride than Jason has previously admitted (555-566). Her dismissal is abrupt, and immediately followed by the focus on his apparent motivation, particularly given the use of the term "πόθος," which is often sexual in meaning.[29] It is also notable that Jason makes no further response to this accusation, simply leaves, leaving Medea's interpretation of his reasons for going as the only motivation suggested. Furthermore, it is this comment by Medea that is followed by the chorus' ode about Aphrodite's power, featuring the prayer:

> μηδέ ποτ' ἀμφιλόγους ὀργὰς ἀκόρεστά τε νείκη
>
> θυμὸν ἐκπλήξασ' ἑτέροις ἐπὶ λέκτροις

(including where divine relationships interrupt mortal marriages) are being discussed, as at *Her.* 345; *El.* 1037; *Hipp.* 14 (even if the impropriety is in Hippolytus' eyes only), 463, 860, 944; *And.* 35; *Hec.* 635; *Tro.* 404, *Ion.* 819; *Hel.* 637, 666, 794; *Pho.* 49, 59; *Or.* 1009; and *IA.* 1275. The only cases in Euripides where λέκτρα does not occur in this troubled context are at *Supp.* 56 in relation to Aethra's marriage to Aegeus (although given the more usual mythical background for this relationship, the portrayal of it here as a 'regular' marriage is itself rather odd), *Tro.* 745, where Andromache calls her marriage bed 'δυστυχῆ', and 981 where Hecuba claims that Athena dislikes the λέκτρα; *Hel.* 1400 where Helen claims to be honouring her first 'marriage-bed' in the faked funeral; and *Pho.* 14 where it is the childless bed of Laius and Jocasta. The vast majority of instances of the term λέκτρα in Euripides therefore refer to situations of sexual infidelity (no comparable case can be considered for Sophocles and Aeschylus since it appears only once in the extant works of each).

29 See McClure (1999b) 387, who also points out that Medea's later (1364) accusation that Jason's desire is a νόσος, makes use of a term most often used in Euripides for specifically *female* desire.

προσβάλοι δεινὰ Κύπρις, ...

Never, terrible Cypris, dash disputatious anger and unending strife against me, having struck my heart with desire for another's bed. (639-41)

It therefore seems reasonable, as Buchan has argued, to see this ode expressing fear of excessive lust as being aimed not at Medea's situation, but Jason's, and to thus as supporting the construction of Jason which Medea has put forward, as forming inappropriate sexual relationships due to his concern for sex.[30] The chorus have earlier suggested tentative willingness to accept this idea with their comment:

εἰ δὲ σὸς πόσις καινὰ λέχη σεβί-

ζει, ...

If your husband reveres the bed of another... (155-6)

Now, no trace of the conditional remains, and the impression is conveyed that in their time on stage together, the chorus have come to believe Medea's blame to be an appropriate way to criticise Jason.

Having apparently convinced the chorus, Medea next turns to Aegeus, and in her conversation with him draws upon the same discourse of blame to construct the Jason to whom he will react. When Aegeus asks why Medea has been set aside, the conversation proceeds:

Α: πότερον ἐρασθεὶς ἢ σὸν ἐχθαίρων λέχος;

Μ: μέγαν γ' ἔρωτα· πιστὸς οὐκ ἔφυ φίλοις.

Α: ἴτω νυν, εἴπερ, ὡς λέγεις, ἐστὶν κακός.

Aegeus: Was it some passion or was he starting to hate your bed?

Medea: A great love: he has become unfaithful to his loved ones.

---

30 Buchan (2008) 7-8, who also connects the ode's words to Aegeus' situation.

Aegeus: Well then, if that's the case, as you say, he is wicked! (697-9)

It is Aegeus who introduces the idea that Jason may have developed a new love, and his vocabulary, while far more dispassionate than Medea's, specifically focuses on Jason's actions in terms of "ἐρασθεὶς" and, once more, the bed. Medea follows his cue by blaming Jason for developing a great "ἔρωτα", once again eschewing the more neutral talk of a marriage for talk of erotic passion. What is notable here is that Aegeus immediately accepts Medea's claim, and agrees that Jason *is,* therefore, base. Furthermore, he directly connects this blameworthy character of Jason's to what Medea has said – her attempt to construct a Jason who is blameworthy for his inappropriate love affairs has expressly succeeded, since Aegeus agrees and accepts that this construction of Jason is correct.

There is further evidence elsewhere that this type of blame by Medea is successful, since the Nurse also talks of Jason's new match in explicitly sexual terms. She claims:

γάμοις Ἰάσων Βασιλικοῖς εὐνάζεται,

Jason is lying down in a royal marriage. (18)

Once again the use of the verb εὐνάζεται in combination with the more neutral γάμοις draws attention to the sexual side of his relationship, since it refers specifically to Jason and Creon's daughter lying down together rather than the legal or social aspects of the match. Moreover, in itself it is a rather unusual verb in the context of marriage.[31] Similarly in her description of the situation to the chorus she claims:

τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἔχει λέκτρα τυράννων

The bed of the royals holds on to him. (140)

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31 The verb is not common, but is found elsewhere in explicitly sexual contexts in Euripides – as at *Ion.* 17, 1484; *Phae.* 45 See also Hom. *Od.* 5.65, 5.119. In Euripides and Sophocles it can mean the more neutral 'lie down' but specifically in the context of illness, so that it is entirely separated from the context of marriage: as Soph. *Trach.* 106, 1041, 1242; *OT.* 961; Eur. *Or.* 152.

The Nurse thus again describes Jason's interest as being specifically the royal 'bed' rather than describing a woman or maiden. Her use of this blame is not quite the same as the chorus' or Aegeus', since both of these take their cue from Medea's words on stage, whereas the Nurse speaks before Medea at the start of the play. Nonetheless, given Medea's ability to convince all other supportive characters around her that this is the appropriate way to position Jason as blameworthy, it is not a terribly great stretch to suggest that the Nurse, as a subordinate if supportive character, also imitates this language and sentiment from her conversations with Medea, even if it is not seen to happen within the bounds of the play itself.

Thus Medea's use of blame primarily focused on Jason as inappropriately concerned with sexual matters draws on a discourse of blame marked as traditionally applicable by her and by Jason to women, not men. Yet her convincing and persuasive speech makes such a distortion of the tradition successful, and Jason continues to be positioned in such a way by the chorus and other characters, despite his unsuccessful attempts to instead turn such a discourse against Medea.

The discourse of women as blameworthy in love/lust is not the only blame discourse directed at women which Medea draws upon in her criticisms of Jason. A similarly traditional discourse of blame for women as tricky and deceptive, and particularly suited to planning harmful acts in secret is identified by her in her early plans:[32]

> … πρὸς δὲ καὶ πεφύκαμεν
>
> γυναῖκες, ἐς μὲν ἐσθλ' ἀμηχανώταται,
>
> κακῶν δὲ πάντων τέκτονες σοφώταται.
>
> *And furthermore we are women by nature, totally resourceless in noble things, but*

---

32 McClure (1999a) 26-7; Foley (2001) 112; Murnaghan (2009) 238.

most clever in crafting all kinds of harm. (407-10)

Her contrast between 'noble' deeds and the evils which women can work reflects the decision she has made not to take the 'noble' route and stab Jason and his new wife (378-80), but instead to use poison and stealth (384-5), as long as a way to do so safely appears, and is thus intimately bound up with the type of trickery and plotting she anticipates for her course of action. Creon makes a similar complaint about a particularly dangerous type of woman which draws upon the same traditional discourse of blame of dangerous women who plot tricks in secret:

γυνὴ γὰρ ὀξύθυμος, ὡς δ' αὕτως ἀνὴρ,

ῥᾴων φυλάσσειν ἢ σιωπηλὸς σοφή.

For a hot-tempered woman, or a man like that even, is guarded against more easily than a silent, clever woman. (319-20)

Yet it is actually Jason in the *Medea* who is explicitly blamed as having acted in secret and been deceptive and unfaithful. Medea is never directly blamed for any type of deceptive act, or for secretive dangerous behaviour, other than implicitly via the generalisations above. Once again Medea establishes this as an appropriate type of blame for him, since the Nurse describes her crying out about his broken oaths (20-23) in which she had been deceived, and the audience is shortly treated to the same type of outburst (160-3), with the Nurse's and chorus' acknowledgement (168-70, 206-210). To herself she labels his behaviour strongly in terms of deceit and trickery when she calls his act:

τοῖς Σισυφείοις τοῖσδ' Ἰάσοος γάμοις,

This Sisyphean marriage of Jason. (405)

Furthermore, in their *agon* scene Medea first objects at length to his having broken his oath to

her (492-5), then directly argues against his long justification of his actions:

χρῆν σ', εἴπερ ἦσθα μὴ κακός, πείσαντά με

γαμεῖν γάμον τόνδ', ἀλλὰ μὴ σιγῇ φίλων.

It was necessary for you, if you were not to be wicked, to have persuaded me about making this marriage, but not secreted it away from your loved ones. (586-7)

Jason ignores her comments about his oaths entirely, and dismisses her argument about his acting in secret (588-90). However, in doing so he simultaneously admits that her accusation is valid, since he does confirm that he has in fact acted without having told her. As a result Medea's positioning of Jason within this type of blame stands, she demonstrates successfully that he is the type of person that Creon had warned against, and she herself had identified as generally a dangerous type of woman. Furthermore, once Aegeus arrives on the stage, Medea again makes a similar criticism to Aegeus, although this time it is put more subtly, when Aegeus asks whether Jason approves her exile (707):

λόγῳ μὲν οὐχί, καρτερεῖν δὲ βούλεται.

In what he says, he does not, but he is willing to put up with it! (708)

Once again therefore Medea blames Jason for acting deceptively, keeping his own counsel contrary to what he says, and neither Aegeus nor any other contradicts her, since Aegeus is entirely willing to accept this construction of Jason.

Aegeus is not the only person to accept Medea's construction of Jason, since he is joined most noticeably by the chorus. The crisis in poetic blame which the chorus envisage is, after all, triggered by their dismay at Jason's failure to keep a sworn oath (413-4), and they claim:

ἀνδράσι μὲν δόλιαι βουλαί...

The thoughts of men are deceptive. (413)

Indeed here the chorus take Medea's construction and, just as she and Creon had indicated it as a discourse of blame suitable for the positioning of women, they insist on expanding it outwards beyond Jason so that it becomes a discourse of blame, given authority by its analogy to the established poetic discourses they refer to, suitable for positioning men in general.

A very similar, if not overlapping, discourse of blame is indicated once again by the chorus' complaints about blame from poets:

μοῦσαι δὲ παλαιγενέων λήξουσ' ἀοιδῶν

τὰν ἐμὰν ὑμνεῦσαι ἀπιστοσύναν.

The songs of ancient poets will stop singing our faithlessness. (421-2)

The chorus identifies a discourse of blame found in poetry, one which positions women as faithless, even as they avow that it will no longer be applied to women at all. This avowal is of course triggered by Medea's fury at and blame for Jason's corresponding faithlessness in his inability to keep to his oaths. The audience's first experience of Medea involves hearing her cries about Jason's oaths:

ὦ μεγάλα Θέμι καὶ πότνι' Ἄρτεμι,

λεύσσεθ' ἅ πάσχω, μεγάλοις ὅρκοις

ἐνδησαμένα τὸν κατάρατον

πόσιν; ...

Oh great Themis and mistress Artemis, do you see the things I suffer, I who have bound my abominable husband with great oaths. (160-3)

The Nurse claims that Medea has been making such statements for some time (20-3, 168-70), and the chorus further support this point by echoing once more what she is saying. As a result

Medea's blame for Jason's failure to keep his oath is not only highlighted by her own cries, but it is also taken up and passed on, even if primarily in the form of a reported statement, by both the chorus and the Nurse.

Once they confront one another, Medea once more makes a great deal of his faithless conduct:

> ὅρκων δὲ φρούδη πίστις, οὐδ᾽ ἔχω μαθεῖν
>
> εἰ θεοὺς νομίζεις τοὺς τότ᾽ οὐκ ἄρχειν ἔτι
>
> ἢ καινὰ κεῖσθαι θέσμι᾽ ἀνθρώποις τὰ νῦν,
>
> ἐπεὶ σύνοισθά γ᾽ εἰς ἔμ᾽ οὐκ εὔορκος ὤν.
>
> *Trust in your oaths is gone, and I do not understand if you think the gods no longer rule or that now there are new rules laid down for men, since you know that you have not been faithful to your oath to me.* (492-5)

Jason's faithlessness is here raised up as so heinous that it can even overturn established theology, echoing her earlier complaints to the gods that his offence is against them as much as her. She similarly accuses him sarcastically:

> ... θαυμαστὸν δέ σε
>
> ἔχω πόσιν καὶ πιστὸν ἡ τάλαιν' ἐγώ,
>
> εἰ φεύξομαί γε γαῖαν ἐκβεβλημένη,
>
> *I have in you a wonderful and <u>faithful</u> husband, wretched me, if I am to flee the land, thrown out of it!* (510-1)

In his response, Jason does not even refer to Medea's accusations about oath-breaking, much less successfully refute them, despite his attempts to address others of her concerns. Even when the children are dead, he does not respond to Medea's calling him "ψευδόρκου" (1392). As with the discourses of blame discussed above, Medea also uses this type of blame to

persuade Aegeus of the identity he should ascribe to Jason, claiming:

> … πιστὸς οὐκ ἔφυ φίλοις.

> *He has not been faithful to his loved-ones.* (688)

It is perhaps noteworthy that Medea here describes Jason's failure to be faithful as something he *is*, rather than a way he has behaved, and Aegeus follows this cue in his response, as mentioned above, by claiming that Jason therefore *is* base (699), just as Medea says. His faithlessness, along with his inappropriate lust, is therefore accepted by Aegeus as being a quality of Jason's identity, established successfully in Medea's speech, or specifically, through her blame. Much has been made of the following scene with Aegeus and the oath he swears to protect Medea (731-755) – with scholars arguing both that it is meant to demonstrate the oath that took place between Medea and Jason, and that it is meant to contrast with an oath which did not properly take place.[33] However, whether the oaths Jason swore were legitimate to an Athenian audience or not, the preceding discussion between Medea and Aegeus shows that he accepts her construction of him as faithless, in a way that Aegeus proves not to be. The effectiveness of this construction once again lies partly on the fact that Medea draws on a traditional discourse of blame, usually directed against women, in order to establish it as part of Jason's identity.

A further discourse of blame marked as appropriate for construction of female identity yet used primarily against Jason in the *Medea* is one directed against women as 'over-emotional'.[34] Yet Medea's use of this discourse in her construction of Jason as blameworthy in

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33 Allan (2007) (with full notes for the discussions of oaths in the play) argued that the 'oath' Medea claims to have performed with Jason is not meant to be seen as legitimate by the audience. It is important to note however that while an audience might have judged this to be the case, Jason himself *never* states or even implies that the 'oath' she holds him to is invalid, which would presumably have been a valuable point in his defence.

34 On this as traditional blame Zeitlin (1996) 343-4; McClure (1999a) 40-7 in relation to women's role in

these terms is in many ways the most effective, since it is also configured in their relative statuses as the play progresses. At the start of the play, Medea laments, and Jason argues coolly,[35] while by the end of the play, the situation is reversed, and Jason laments while Medea responds coolly. As regards this type of blame, therefore, while it receives less explicit acknowledgement from the characters who interact with Medea, it is nonetheless borne out as a reasonable construction of Jason by his own behaviour after the death of his children. Again it is Medea who marks out this type of criticism as being supposedly appropriate for positioning women, when she comments:

γυνὴ δὲ θῆλυ κἀπὶ δακρύοις ἔφυ.

A woman is by nature female and prone to tears. (928)

The statement occurs as part of what scholars have called Medea's 'performance' of femininity in order to persuade Jason, and he accepts it as a legitimate argument immediately.[36]

Yet Medea undergoes a conscious process of making sure that this blame cannot apply to her, by several times connecting her emotion for her children to the idea that she will be laughed at and her reputation damaged, and rejecting it as therefore inappropriate to the identity for herself she wishes to establish.[37] The chorus first suggest that her emotion will prevent her plans, when they ask:

πῶς δ' ὄμματα προσβαλοῦσα

---

lament.

35 It is important to note however that in her early, off-stage lamenting, Medea more resembles the male Ajax of Sophocles than a female sufferer such as Hecuba, whose misery is played out entirely on-stage (Foley (2001) 260 and with a further comparison to Hecuba 260 n61; Knox (1977) 76). Furthermore, it is in the description of her misery that a great deal of the vocabulary describing her as dangerous, hard, and super-human discussed above occurs, making this not obviously typical female behaviour on her part.

36 Barlow (1989) 163-64; Boedeker (1991) 99; Foley (2001) 258-61.

37 Foley (2001) 261-2 persuasively argues that here Medea is deliberately converting herself to a more masculine/heroic figure, and dropping a 'feminine mask'. See also Levett (2010) 62.

τέκνοις ἄδακρυν μοῖραν

σχήσεις φόνου; ...

Having turned your eyes to your children how will you bear their fate of murder

tearlessly? (860-2)

Medea overcomes that emotional response in her lengthy monologue (1019-80), so that by the time she has heard of the fate of Creon's daughter and is fully resolved, she no longer speaks emotionally (1236-50). As a result, once the children are dead, it is not Medea who gives way to grief and proves 'prone to tears', but Jason. He claims "ἐμοὶ δὲ τὸν ἐμὸν δαίμον' αἰάζειν πάρα" ("*mine is a fate to bewail*") (1347), and Medea coolly recognises that she has "touched his heart" (1360). As the scene goes on Jason attempts to make her take a greater share in their joint grief (1361), but she does not accept it. Furthermore, he descends from anger into a wish to "κλαῦσαι" ('*mourn*') (1377) his children, calls them φίλτατα (1397) and longs to touch them (1399-1400), before begging Medea directly that he might touch them (1402-3). He also cries:

ἀλλ' ὁπόσον γοῦν πάρα καὶ δύναμαι

τάδε καὶ <u>θρηνῶ</u> κἀπιθεάζω

But groaning as much as I can I call the gods against you and <u>lament</u>. (1408-9)

His use of the formal word for a lament emphasises the emotional nature of his appeals by this stage, and in response Medea has remained calm, choosing to insult Jason rather than express any similar mourning.[38] It is not hard to argue that her previous claim that women are inclined towards tears seems more apt for Jason's behaviour here than her own, while he laments and

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38 Knox (1977) 206-11 saw the end of the play as moving Medea beyond humanity, and into the position of a *theos*, removed from the action, thus her emotional detachment, which Jason does not share. See also Pucci (1980) 161, and 158ns 28 & 29 for a variety of earlier scholarly views on Medea's elevated reappearance; Mastronarde (2010) 186 deals with the dramatic conventions involved in her appearance as a *deus ex machina*. Rutherford (2012) 95-7 on the ways in which Medea's final scene contrasts with a standard *deus ex machina* epiphany.

wails, and she merely argues in response.

Thus in her blame against Jason, Medea repeatedly draws on traditional discourses of blame against women as lustful, purveyors of secret tricks, unfaithful and overly-emotional. Both she and Jason further explicitly acknowledge the usual appropriateness of this blame for positioning women, thus specifically marking the gendered aspects of the blame discourses she positions him within. As a result, Medea's persuasive blame successfully constructs an identity for Jason which is blameworthy, but also feminised, since he is repeatedly criticised in terms more appropriate for women's failures than men's, and these criticisms are widely accepted by other characters and the chorus. Unlike the other male figures discussed elsewhere, Theseus, Heracles, Ajax and even Agamemnon, Jason furthermore has recourse to no competing praise discourses within which to establish a masculine, heroic identity. He is primarily positioned through blame, not praise, and suffers a great deal as a result. However, it is possible to see in his own responses to Medea some attempts to rectify this situation, as he engages in an attempt to position himself within a more traditional discourse of male praise, even if this is unusually solely self-generated.[39] Unfortunately for Jason, Medea's mastery of speech provides her with the means to counteract his self-praise with her own more effective blame. Furthermore, she is able to engage in the same method as he does to generate her own effective identity through self-praise, in such a way that she strengthens her power on stage as she simultaneously destroys Jason's.

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39 While Ajax and Heracles in particular also engage in identity construction through self-praise (see Chapter 1), they are also surrounded by a great deal of competing praise and blame from those around them, so that this process is not nearly so isolated as it is in the case of Jason, who receives no praise of any kind from anyone in the play bar himself.

Self-praise and Identity

The most significant difference between the cases of Jason and Agamemnon, or Heracles in the *Trachiniae*, or even of Ajax and Heracles in the *Ajax* and *Heracles*, is that unlike any of these individuals, none of the characters or chorus who share a stage with him participate in establishing any competing discourse of praise within which to establish an alternate identity to the one which Medea propagates in her blame. Similarly while Clytemnestra may dominate the praise/blame discourses within which Agamemnon is positioned in the *Agamemnon*, this effect is offset by the effective speech of Orestes and Electra, so that, after his death at least, his identity is somewhat rehabilitated. In contrast, Jason's situation is more like that of Theseus explored in Chapter 2 – there is no strong, enduring identity for him of any kind established in the praise of those around him, so he is left to be constructed primarily through Medea's blame.

There are however some attempts by Jason himself to create a competing discourse of praise which establishes a contrasting identity to the blameworthy, female-indexing one which Medea propagates. In fact, Jason attempts to convert the discourse surrounding both Medea's main accusations, that he has betrayed his oaths and marriage to her, and that he has done wrong in marrying again at all, into discourses which position him as the heroic, reasonable male leader of the household, a position which Medea refuses to allow him.

In his longest speech in answer to Medea's accusation, Jason even manages to praise himself as regards the speech itself, claiming that he will have to be a good speaker in order to counter her (522-4), and furthermore creating an image of himself as captain of a ship which

has rather Argonautic echoes.[40] Then, rather than allow Medea's image of her help (476-89) as being the key factor of his success, Jason instead argues that he was helped by a god:

ἐγὼ δ᾽, ἐπειδὴ καὶ λίαν πυργοῖς χάριν,

Κύπριν νομίζω τῆς ἐμῆς ναυκληρίας

σώτειραν εἶναι θεῶν τε κἀνθρώπων μόνων.

But I, since you exaggerate your kindness so much, I think that Cypris alone of gods and men was my saviour on the voyage. (326-8)

The image is intended to raise Jason's profile as a heroic figure, through divine association rather than the association Medea had claimed, with herself.[41] Finally, in speaking of their earlier history, Jason adds the curious detail of praise for himself in how he has treated Medea:

πάντες δέ σ' ᾔσθοντ' οὖσαν Ἕλληνες σοφὴν

καὶ δόξαν ἔσχες· εἰ δὲ γῆς ἐπ' ἐσχάτοις

ὅροισιν ᾤκεις, οὐκ ἂν ἦν λόγος σέθεν.

All the Greeks know that you are clever and you have a reputation: if you were still living on the farthest boundaries of the land, there would be no story about you. (539-41)

The comment is followed immediately by Jason's own statement placing fame and a good reputation beyond wealth or talent in his estimation (542-4). In fact Jason's statement is somewhat undermined by the claim Medea has already made that her reputation for cleverness does not benefit her at all, rather it harms her and leads to suspicion:

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40 Rabinowitz (1993) 135-6 traces a 'backdrop' of sea-based imagery as part of Euripides' emphasis on the Argonautic myth, contra Barlow (1971) 98 who considered it a 'cliché'. See also Boedeker (1997) 130. Mastronarde (2002) ad loc. suggests there may also be a rather unflattering allusion to trading by sea in Jason's language.

41 Mastronarde (2002) ad 528; Bongie (1977) 43.

οὐ νῦν με πρῶτον ἀλλὰ πολλάκις, Κρέον,

ἔβλαψε δόξα μεγάλα τ' εἴργασται κακά

...

σοφὴ γὰρ οὖσα, τοῖς μέν εἰμ' ἐπίφθονος

...

σὺ δ' αὖ φοβῇ με· ...

Not for me for the first time but often, Creon, has my reputation hit me greatly and made harm for me... for being clever, I am envied by some... and you fear me. (293-4, 303, 309)

Medea has thus already, and convincingly, given that she persuades Creon, argued that the conclusion Jason draws here is incorrect. While he may have had a major part in the exploits which formed her wider reputation, given the harmful effects of that reputation, this is hardly to his credit. Medea has undermined Jason's discourse of self-praise before he even gives it, making it significantly less effective as an alternative to her own discourse of blame.

In the same way, Jason attempts to defend himself from her blame about the new marriage by instead positioning himself within a discourse of praise that argues that he is an ideal husband and father:

ἃ δ' ἐς γάμους μοι βασιλικοὺς ὠνείδισας,

ἐν τῷδε δείξω πρῶτα μὲν σοφὸς γεγώς,

ἔπειτα σώφρων, εἶτα σοὶ μέγας φίλος

καὶ παισὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖσιν...

But for the things about which you blamed me for my royal marriage, in this thing I shall show first that I have been clever, then sensible, since I have been a great friend

to you and the children. (547-50)

Alongside the claims to have been "σοφὸς" and "σώφρων", his assertion that he has been a 'great friend' to Medea and his children taps into the heroic code of values found throughout tragedy and Greek society, that particularly applies to the type of behaviour expected of male heroic or warrior individuals.[42] As a result the praise he awards himself covers a range of positive descriptions, including some of those (e.g. cleverness) which Medea has also included among her own self-praise, in her confrontation with Creon. Yet when Medea described herself as "σόφη", she argued that such a reputation had been damaging to her, leaving Jason's claim to the same virtue somewhat tenuous in its positive effect. Furthermore, Jason's attempt to position himself within this discourse, against Medea's blame, proves flatly unsuccessful. The chorus acknowledge his skilful speaking, but refuse to concede any other point, instead arguing that he has acted "οὐ δίκαια" (578). The contrast with the success of Medea's discourses of blame is distinct. Medea's blame was readily accepted as reasonable and as establishing a consistent identity for Jason not only by the supportive chorus, and by the Nurse, but also by the disinterested Aegeus. In contrast no one accepts Jason's self-praise as valid, so that the alternative identity he attempts to construct through it fails to stand.

The failure of Jason's self-praise to convince described above, and his failure to establish a credible alternative identity, is further intrinsically bound up in one of the events he attempts to praise himself *for,* his introduction of Medea into a land where she can establish a proper, praiseworthy reputation (539-544).[43] Yet as has been shown above, this introduction of

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42 Blundell (1989). Of course Medea's actions simultaneously attempt to reinforce this code by contravening it, since she will destroy her own φίλοι in order to harm her enemies. Belfiore (2000) 131-2; Rehm (2002) 261-2; Williamson (1990) 24-5 notes further her long history of harming *philoi* and not correctly identifying enemies in her association with Jason.

43 Rabinowitz (2004) 53 convincingly argues that Jason's claim here is to have given Medea the civilising, masculine force that is culture.

Medea into a context where renown and discourses of praise and blame are so central has in fact been Jason's own undoing, since it is precisely these discourses which Medea deploys against him. Medea's speech is shown throughout the play to be significantly more persuasive than that of Jason,[44] and her constructions of Jason's identity through female-indexed discourses of blame are the ones that endure, against his own attempts to position himself instead through self-praise.[45] Furthermore, faced with Jason's attempts to position Medea herself as a blameworthy woman, Medea not only appropriates traditional blame discourses in order to position him within them; she simultaneously makes use of her awareness of these traditional praise and blame discourses to construct a heroic, masculine identity for herself, in her descriptions of their shared past. She claims multiple times to have saved Jason (476, 482), and more specifically, that she was the one who killed the dragon that Jason had to defeat to get the golden fleece (480-82), a rather unusual feat for a woman to be able to boast of.[46] It is also particularly significant in this regard that once Medea has received sanctuary from Aegeus and confirmed her plans, she claims that she will be:

νῦν καλλίνικοι τῶν ἐμῶν ἐχθρῶν...

Now glorious in victory over my enemies. (765)

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44 Boedeker (1991); Rabinowitz (1993) 142-5; Allan (2002) 44; Foley (2001) 258-60; Mastronarde (2002) 8; Conacher (1967) 188-9.

45 Her decisions to narrate sections of their previous adventures, and Jason's death to come also effectively show her taking a role in the construction of his entire mythical identity. Segal (1996) 37-8 is particularly persuasive on how she 'recasts' his life story, shaping it from a "woman-centred view" which centres his entire story on his relationship and marriage to her, and significantly diminishing the Argonautic aspects (and, indeed, the Argo itself at (1386-88). While Segal's interpretation is extremely effective, I would also argue that it is not simply a matter of Medea's role as speaker or narrator which makes her able to affect this change, but particularly her awareness of and faculty with the genres of praise and blame speech. See further on re-narrations of the Argonautic myth in this play Boedeker (1991) 104-8.

46 While Medea is always involved in helping Jason with the bulls and providing assistance or advice, a major role in dealing with the dragon seems to have been a rather later addition to the tradition, and may well be a new or exaggerated feature of her account here. McCallum-Barry (2014) 25-9.

The use of the term καλλίνικος positions her within a discourse of praise usually appropriate only to male heroes (and primarily Heracles), and is a particularly unusual term to be claimed by a woman.[47] Moreover, the Nurse has already signalled that Medea has been aiming to identify herself in such a way since before the play began (45), suggesting a long association with the concept as part of her self-identity. It is particularly incongruous not just because Medea is a woman, but also when it is associated with the act by which she intends to attain that status, the murder of her children.[48] Medea's self-praise therefore does not only involve praise for her own exploits in helping Jason, she also invokes a term which has a very specific, masculine, praise context associated, and thus attempts to position herself effectively within that context.

Furthermore, Medea's very concern with reputation and mockery from her enemies is, in itself, part of constructing a masculine, heroic identity for herself, and reflects a further problem with Jason's attempt to praise himself for bringing her a good reputation, since she now demonstrates anger at his likelihood of doing the precise opposite.[49] Immediately after her supplication to stay in Corinth is granted by Creon, and just as Medea begins to reveal her plot (364-409), she expresses the importance to her of avoiding the 'laughter of enemies', identified as a particularly 'heroic' spur to action in tragedy. She further specifically recognises the chance of being laughed at as a risk to her first plan (384), so that it is instrumental in the choice she makes to proceed with drugs. The situation she envisages is entirely generated by herself, and the mockery she expects does not materialise, but she nonetheless treats it as an

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47 See Chapter 1 n54, and Chapter 2 on Evadne's seeking after the same term, another unusual female pursuit of male-appropriate praise.

48 Although this also provides an interesting comparison with Euripides' Heracles, who also self-identifies as καλλίνικος specifically as the result of his (unknowing) slaughter of his children (Eur. *Her.* 961), see Chapter 1 above.

49 Bongie (1977) 44.

essential aspect of judging how she should act:[50]

> ὁρᾷς ἃ πάσχεις; οὐ γέλωτα δεῖ σ᾽ ὀφλεῖν
>
> τοῖς Σισυφείοις τοῖσδ᾽ Ἰάσονος γάμοις,
>
> *Do you see what you are suffering? It is necessary for you not to incur mockery for*
>
> *this kind of Sisyphean marriage of Jason's.* (404-5)

Similarly she spurs herself on to the idea of killing her children by imagining the laughter of her enemies (797), and famously expressing the desire to be thought:

> βαρεῖαν ἐχθροῖς καὶ φίλοισιν εὐμενῆ:
>
> τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων εὐκλεέστατος βίος.
>
> *Hurtful to enemies, and kind to friends: for such people have the most glorious lives.*
>
> (809-10)

Her desired image has rightly been identified as coming extremely close to the code of ethics identified by Mary Whitlock Blundell as central to the Sophoclean hero,[51] and its close association with being 'glorious' in her eyes similarly appropriates the hunt for κλέος which is a driving force for the heroic figure in the *Iliad* and some tragedy. In her reference to the idea that people who behave as she intends to may have "εὐκλεέστατος" lives, Medea also invokes the praise discourses which were seen to result in awarded κλέος. The statement almost becomes a form of pre-emptive praise of herself, since she anticipates joining the ranks of these praiseworthy individuals. However, the discourse she appropriates is one which is usually applied not to women, but to men, so that Medea is effectively attempting to position

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50 This anticipation of mockery is similar to that mentioned by the chorus and characters of the *Ajax* - see Chapter 1 above. However, the case presented in the *Ajax* was less unusual, as the feared mockery was related to a male character, and as Rehm (1989) 109 points out, the last thing Medea could be considered after killing Creon and his daughter is 'laughable', unlike Ajax, whose violence is laughable exactly because it is so wildly ineffective after the intervention of Athena.

51 Blundell (1989), but see Williamson (1990) 26, Foley (1989) 66

herself within masculine praise discourses.[52] In fact, by framing this as a question of the *type of person* she wants to be, Medea comes close to demonstrating explicit awareness of the process of identity construction, which she ties closely to the type of praise she wishes to receive. Medea returns to the same spur on the very point of the infanticide, crying,

> βούλομαι γέλωτ᾿ ὀφλεῖν
>
> ἐχθροὺς μεθεῖσα τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἀζημίους;
>
> τολμητέον τάδ᾿;
>
> *Do I want to incur mockery, and let my enemies go unpunished? Must I endure that?*
>
> (1049-50)

The emphasis she has placed on her reputation throughout is enough, with this reiteration, to drive her to the deed, and confirm her resolve. As is often the case with this type of statement, Medea's behaviour is therefore driven by the type of blame she fears to attract.[53] However, it is also part of a sustained approach to praise and blame which she develops in order to construct her identity as one which is masculine, heroic, and thus fears blame in the same way a male hero might, and seeks praise in the same terms.[54]

Medea's self-praise is therefore significantly more effective as a method of identity construction than Jason's is, partly as it is combined with the sustained awareness of her attempts to establish her masculine, heroic identity. As a result, where she strengthens her powerful presence on stage, so that her success in constructing an unfavourable and diminished identity for Jason can be seen not only as a result of his failure to maintain an

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52 Although Rehm (1989) 109-11 sees this as Medea lapsing into an unsuitable masculine λόγος, as a result of her failure to establish a better female version.

53 On praise or blame as motivating factors see Chapters 1 & 2.

54 Medea's ability to consider the effects of multiple identities and argue for the prioritisation of one over another for the best effect for her desires, can also be seen in her requests that the chorus prioritise their shared identity as women over differences in ethnic identity, as shown deftly by Swift (2013) 134-8.

alternative subject position, but also as due to her successful construction of herself as someone who belongs in this context of masculine praise and blame in her own right.

Conclusion

Thus, Medea succeeds in her destructive positioning of Jason within discourses of blame typically marked as female not only through her facility in drawing on these discourses, but also through her skill at constructing a powerful identity for herself where he fails. As in the situations of Ajax, Heracles (twice), and Agamemnon, where praiseworthy, masculine identities come under siege from competing discourses of praise or blame, the deployment of these discourses of blame against Jason by Medea is also combined with an end result of physical violence. This violence also simultaneously has, as with the examples discussed previously, an effect on his identity which mirrors the effect caused by Medea's use of blame discourses. Medea's blame, unlike Clytemnestra's, does not focus on Jason as a father, nor does she position him as a 'bad husband'; instead by drawing on discourses of blame traditionally used for women she avoids constructing him as a husband at all. It is partly these roles that he therefore attempts to reconstruct in his competing discourse of self-praise, as discussed above, when he claims that he has acted as a good husband and father. Yet not only does Jason prove discursively unable to establish himself as father and husband, but by acting violently against her children, Medea simultaneously destroys any physical aspect of these roles.[55] Jason is in fact removed not only linguistically but physically through her violence into the subject position Medea held at the start of the play. Where she was separated from

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55 It is also notable, as Segal (1996) 39 points out, that Medea continues to identify herself as 'mother' (1397), while Jason is unable to similarly self-define as 'father'. See further on Medea's history of violence as well as her present violence primarily resulting in the destruction of roles or identities rooted in familial ties (e.g. 'daughter' 'sister') Sanders (2013) 47-8.

friends and family, her spouse, and facing potential separation from her children, now Jason has experienced the same as a result of the death of his father-in-law, new wife, and Medea's refusal even to enable him to perform the role of father in burying his dead children (1377).[56] Medea now retains hold over their (dead) children and, just as Jason did at the start of the *Medea*, with her journey to Athens already arranged, has secured future connections with a new Greek ruler.[57] Even more notably, Jason's acceptance of Medea's repeated refusal to allow him to touch the children (1399-1404), is signalled by Jason's declaration of an even more substantial linguistic distancing from his identity as father, since he cries:

οὕς μήποτ' ἐγὼ φύσας ὄφελον

πρὸς σοῦ φθιμένους ἐπιδέσθαι.

I really wish I had never begotten them, to see them destroyed by you. (1413-4)

Jason's wish to have never been a father is the final thing he says on stage, and thus represents the pinnacle of Medea's successful transformation of his identity. Similarly, the success of her enforced switch in their positions is perhaps recognised in Jason's accusation:

οὐκ ἔστιν ἥτις τοῦτ' ἂν Ἑλληνὶς γυνὴ

ἔτλη ποθ'...

λέαιναν, οὐ γυναῖκα, τῆς Τυρσηνίδος

Σκύλλης ἔχουσιν ἀγριωτέραν φύσιν.

There is no Greek woman who would have dared this... you are a lioness, not a woman, and have a nature more savage than that of Tuscan Skylla. (1339-1343)

Jason refuses to identify Medea first as a Greek woman, then as a woman at all, thus

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56 Blondell (1999) 166; Segal (1996) 21-2.

57 Williamson (1990) 19 also rightly points out that much of Medea's arrangement with Aegeus is in itself similar to the contracting of a new marriage in terms of the benefits she and he gain from it, and in the way she describes it to Jason at 1385. Thus Medea's arrangement with Aegeus mirrors the one Jason had previously made with Creon's daughter.

demonstrating that not only her discourse positioning him rather than her as blameworthy in regard to female qualities has been successful, but also her simultaneous construction of herself as unwomanly, in contrast to him.[58]

Medea's destruction of Jason therefore contains two major elements. The first, and the one which scholarship and audiences have reasonably been focused on as the most dramatic, is the violence which physically destroys his identities as father, bridegroom, and new son-in-law. However, this is also combined with the less commonly acknowledged effect enabled through her blaming speech, in which she draws repeatedly on discourses of blame marked by her and Jason himself as more appropriate to women, in order to construct an unflattering identity for him. As a result, any of Jason's praiseworthy, masculine identities are undermined by her effective use of this blame, to the extent that the chorus, Nurse, and Aegeus all accept Medea's construction of his blameworthy, feminised identity. Jason's own attempts to counteract this by self-praise fail, partly due to Medea's faculty in the same area, and he is left by the end of the play only with the blameworthy, feminised identity Medea has created for him, while she, having successfully constructed herself as a heroic, masculine worthy opponent to him, triumphs.

Medea's manipulation of identity construction or destruction through praise and blame discourses is in some ways the most successful of the three female cases discussed. Even if it comes at the cost of her children, her technique does not result in her own death, as do the attempts of Deianira and Clytemnestra. This success is the result of her use of culturally intelligible, gendered discourses of blame, in contrast to the unacceptable discourses of blame

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58 On Jason's monstrous examples and how far Medea can be judged to be a 'typical woman', Segal (1996) 27-31.

perpetuated by Clytemnestra. Furthermore, unlike Deianira, Medea chooses to go beyond simple rejection of the identities constructed for Jason and herself through praise and blame, and participate in establishing alternative identities for them both, ensuring that her own identity is established securely and successfully at the same time Jason's is destroyed. Yet even in the case of Medea, the result achieved is not positive – the loss of her children for herself, and the wider social destruction caused by her prevent any triumphalist reading of the *Medea.* As a result, it can be argued that tragedy persistently represents the participation of female characters in generating praise and blame discourses as dangerous, troubling, and problematic for society. In this situation therefore, as in others, tragedy presents the actions of female characters in such a way as to uphold the patriarchal ideologies of Athens, by demonstrating the potentially dangerous results that could arise from situations in which women were participating actively in an arena in which they were considered not to belong.[59]

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59 On tragedy and patriarchal ideology, see Introduction, n81.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the ways in which tragedy explores the process of identity construction through discourses of praise and blame. Tragedy draws upon this important social function of archaic poetry in a performance culture, the distribution of praise and blame, in order to show its dangerous and destructive aspects. In the tragedies discussed these destructive aspects are further shown to be the result of the increased involvement both of the male warriors whose identities are established by such discourses of praise and blame, and of the female characters, in the cases discussed, their wives, who involve themselves in the production, manipulation and rejection of these discourses.

The project has developed a methodology which draws upon the sociolinguistic theories of identity as being constructed through language, rather than a fixed, inherent quality. The process of establishing the memory or 'truth' of a warrior, his *logos*, through the praise and blame awarded him in poetry, as identified by Detienne as a key feature of archaic poetry,[1] bears many similarities to the linguistic constructions of identity argued for by sociolinguists, particularly those influenced by poststructuralist theories.[2] Furthermore, this approach has been particularly suited for a discussion of tragedy since it argues for identity construction as being a dialogic process, in which identities are challenged, negotiated, and established through interaction rather than being a process undertaken by individuals without any interactive aspect.[3] As a result it is a theory which is particularly apt for the dialogic genre of tragedy.

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1 Detienne (1969).

2 See Introduction ns 34-42.

3 Sunderland (2004) 176-7.

The first chapter demonstrated how a focus on identity construction through praise and blame discourses leads to new understanding of Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Heracles.* In both these plays, the central protagonist faces an identity crisis as the result of the disjunction between the identity he seeks to construct and maintain through discourses of praise, and the identities constructed for him by the other characters and choruses on stage. Ajax attempts to claim for himself the identity 'Best of the Achaeans', a key position established through the praise discourses of the *Iliad* as belonging primarily to Achilles, and which Ajax claims as his inherited right. His failure to do so represents the process described as 'thwarting' by Moore,[4] and destabilises his legitimate identity as 'second-best', which is only reconstructed after his death, through the praise of Teucer, Odysseus, and the chorus (of the *Ajax*). Heracles, in contrast, seeks to establish a subject-position for himself as a 'glorious father', and to gain praise for his deeds as a father and husband. However, his identity as father is only established by the other characters in the *Heracles* through discourses which imply blame, not praise, and instead he is repeatedly positioned within praise discourses as a glorious, heroic figure as a result of his labours. This effect is especially powerful in discourses marked formally as praise-songs by the chorus (of the *Heracles*). When Heracles' identity crisis manifests itself, the strength of this alternative glorious identity causes it to endure, so that his crisis, unlike Ajax's, is not fatal. As a result his identity of glorious hero is reconstructed in the manner of this persistent discourse, with the help of Theseus, and his identity as a father is lost. This approach to the two plays therefore demonstrated that they represent a persistent concern with the issues which could be created by individuals seeking after praise, or a particular type of praise discourse, and the conflict created between this seeking and the type of praise awarded by the larger community. This reading therefore provides a contrast with previous scholarship on this play, which tends to argue instead for the opposite transition – that the *Heracles*

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4   Moore (1994).

represents Heracles' progress from glorious hero to a more mortal, fallible figure.

Chapter Two considered the case of Theseus, and demonstrated that while the same issues are not raised in the presentation of Theseus across tragedy, there is nonetheless a similar problematisation of praise discourses which is a key part of his presentation. This chapter showed that Theseus is most frequently praised as a means of persuading him to act in particular way, thus, praise is distributed, where it appears at all, only with an ulterior motive. Furthermore, tragedy simultaneously presents the more blameworthy aspects of Theseus' identity, so that he is constructed within discourses of implied or explicit blame, rather than direct praise. The lack of direct praise for Theseus in extant tragedy, along with the persistent way in which he is positioned through discourses of blame, result in his heroic identity being flexible and open to challenge in a way which neither Ajax's nor Heracles' is. The difference in this approach to Theseus may result partially from the limited selection of extant material. However, the consistency of this technique, along with the example of the *Suppliants*, in which praise is treated as problematic in itself, rather suggests that this treatment of Theseus is part of a wider democratic grappling with issues of how to correctly position individuals within praise discourses at all. The historical context within which tragedy is situated, where issues of praise and particularly questions around the role of praise at burials were becoming a key issue for the democracy, are particularly important for the argument of this chapter.[5] As a key Athenian exemplar, Theseus was the ideal hero on whom to pin such questions in tragedy. Furthermore, this focus on praise and blame suggests that scholarship which argues for Theseus' presentation as an uncomplicatedly praiseworthy figure in tragedy (bar the *Hippolytus*), has not taken full account of the specifics of the praise and blame addressed directly to or about Theseus, which presents a far more complicated picture.

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5   Loraux (1981).

In both these chapters, therefore, I argued that tragedy represents a process of questioning traditional approaches to poetic praise and blame as a method of identity construction. In the cases of *Ajax* and *Heracles*, the potentially destructive results of conflicting desires on such a process are explored, whereas the treatment of Theseus across tragedy demonstrates a wider concern with the appropriateness of praise and its role in Athenian society. In the final three chapters of the thesis, I have argued that such questions around the functioning of identity construction through poetic discourses of praise and blame are not limited to plays dealing with male warriors and their heroic exploits, but take on a gendered aspect in the plays which feature Deianira, Clytemnestra, and Medea.

Chapter Three demonstrated the ways in which Deianira's refusal to accept the discourses of praise which attempt identity construction of Heracles upon his return constitutes a part of his destruction, simultaneously to the physical destruction she causes. As a result of her influence over and attempted control of speech throughout the *Trachiniae*, her influence over the praise discourses within which he is positioned is powerful; and she is able to reject his identity as praiseworthy, at the same time as causing the physical destruction of the qualities which make it possible to consider him a hero to be praised, his strength and vitality. As a result, this builds on the work of scholars such as McClure who have examined women's speech in tragedy, but the focus on praise and blame makes it possible to argue for a more influential, powerful Deianira than is normally accepted.[6] Yet while Deianira's influence may result in the physical confirmation of her own view of Heracles' identity, that is, that he is unworthy of praise, it also results in the destruction of herself, her household, and her husband. As a result, it cannot be considered a successful or triumphal narrative, and instead

6   McClure (1999), although McClure chooses not to address the works of Sophocles at all.

represents a potential warning about the dangers of involvement of female characters, or women as a whole, in the production or reception of praise and blame discourses.

This warning note is one which is repeated in the presentation of Clytemnestra throughout tragedy, discussed in Chapter Four. Clytemnestra takes her negative involvement in the identity construction of her husband, Agamemnon, much further than Deianira, and rather than simply rejecting praise discourses as a way of positioning him as a subject, seeks to replace these with alternate discourses of blame that construct an identity for Agamemnon as bad husband and bad father. As a result, Clytemnestra's blame is focused on the identities he holds within the *oikos*, as an alternative to the public, *polis*-focused discourses of praise within which choruses and other characters attempt to establish Agamemnon's identity as good king, and successful general. Clytemnestra's influence over speech and overt awareness of the power of successful praise and blame discourses make her positioning of Agamemnon more powerful than the praise discourses attempted by those around her, so that in the *Agamemnon*, her successful re-construction of his identity is part of his destruction. However, I have also shown that Clytemnestra's introduction of this type of blame discourse is then turned against her by Orestes and Electra, who persistently attempt to construct Clytemnestra as bad wife, bad mother, corresponding to her own blame for Agamemnon. At the same time, Agamemnon's children undertake the rehabilitation of Agamemnon through discourses of praise which restore his identity to its public, successful, status. Clytemnestra's attempts to use such discourses thus, like Deianira's rejection of the praise discourses for Heracles, is only temporarily successful. Furthermore, the introduction of such discourses of blame also has a destabilising effect on Electra's family relationships, suggesting a further damaging result to both women's participation in the generation of praise and blame discourses.

Medea's case, discussed in Chapter Five, is thus the most successful of the attempts of these three wives to involve themselves in the production, rejection, and manipulation of praise and blame discourses. Unlike Clytemnestra, who attempts to generate a new and unusual discourse of blame within which Agamemnon may be positioned, Medea draws on traditionally established, gendered discourses of blame, usually directed at women, and instead positions Jason within these. Other characters and the chorus of the *Medea* demonstrate acceptance of the identities constructed for him as a result, that both feminise him and position him as blameworthy. At the same time, Medea successfully constructs her own identity as masculinised, and thus able to participate in the production of such discourses. These two techniques in combination – her own self-construction and the use of culturally-intelligible discourses within which Jason is positioned – are the key factors in her success. The comparison between Medea's case and Clytemnestra's builds on the recognition in poststructuralist theory that available subject positions are limited to those which are 'socially coherent', and are considered intelligible within their wider cultural contexts.[7] Medea makes use of discourses of blame which are culturally coherent, while Clytemnestra does not, and thus is less successful. However, Medea's success, of course, comes along with the loss of her children, and thus partially her identity as mother, so that even her situation does not suggest that tragedy ever presents a fully successful, triumphant picture of female characters' involvement in the production of praise and blame discourses.

This thesis has thus explored the ways in which tragedy casts doubt upon or raises questions about the process of identity construction through praise and blame discourses, a process inherited from its prominent position in archaic Greek poetry. This approach has been

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7   Hollway (1984) esp. 236-7.

particularly valuable where questions of identity, heroism, *kleos*, and praise or blame are, themselves, key aspects of the play, and are highlighted in the comments of the characters. It is therefore particularly productive as a lens through which to gain new readings of individual or selected plays. The project has also developed an approach which could be developed further in future work. Where the focus on praise and blame is maintained, this thesis has primarily considered women and gender as they relate to the production of discourses of praise and blame, rather than examining the ways in which male and female characters may be positioned differently in such discourses. Future studies might also move away from the focus on praise and blame and consider identity construction as a wider process throughout tragedy. The methodology developed in this project, drawing on the field of sociolinguistics and poststructuralist theory, has proved especially productive for considering the genre of tragedy, due to tragedy's linguistic, dialogic aspects. As a result such a methodology could be broadened out to consider linguistic (verbal and non-verbal) processes beyond the distribution of praise and blame, and how these can be assessed as contributing to the construction of characters' identities in tragedy.

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