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# Embracing Evil: The Threat and Allure of the Female in Greek Poetry

Caley S. McGill

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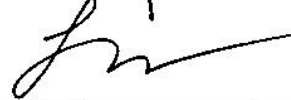
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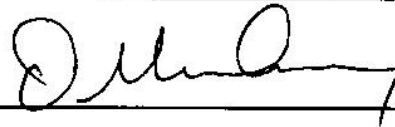


, Chairperson

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Professor Osman Umurhan



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Embracing Evil:  
The Threat and Allure of the Female in Greek Poetry

by

Caley Shannon McGill

B.A., Classics and Languages, University of New Mexico, 2010

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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**Embracing Evil:  
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**Abstract**

Modern scholars have often noted the harsh depictions of women in Greek literature and account for them as simply part of the “tradition of Greek misogyny” that exists throughout ancient Greek texts from the archaic period to classical times. This project argues that these sentiments, which have so often been described as “Greek misogyny” in literature, in fact embody a more complicated and nuanced concept. My objective in this project is to explore the ways in which select “misogynistic” Greek texts express what I call “gyno-anxiety”: the fear that arises from male vulnerability to and dependence upon women, who represent both a threat and an undeniable attraction for men.

My thesis begins with an examination of the work of the archaic poets, Hesiod and Semonides, and analyzes how these authors depict the potential dangers that the average female represents to men in the form of monetary injury as well as reproductive dependence. Next, I turn to the female protagonists of fifth-century Athenian drama and examine how the classical tragedians employ four of their most notorious female characters – Clytemnestra, Medea, Deianeira, and Phaedra – to represent a hyperbolic,

three-dimensional incarnation of the violent and adulterous threats posed by women through the stories of these murderous and overly-sexual tragic wives. To conclude, I emphasize how the concept of “gyno-anxiety” is a more useful interpretive tool to understand the representation of women in these ancient Greek texts.

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## Introduction

Since feminist theory was first applied to the classics, there has been much interesting scholarship regarding the role of women in ancient Greek society and literature. However, the paucity of historical descriptions of the life of women in ancient Greek society has presented scholars with a problem. Outside of poetry and drama, there is little information on the lives of women in ancient Greek society; but because the women in poetry (especially tragedy) are often mythical and extraordinary figures, using them as a source of information about the lives of typical ancient Greek women is problematic.<sup>1</sup> As a result, scholars attempting to discover something about the lives of women in ancient Greece have had to decide for themselves whether any information about real, ordinary women can be gleaned from these texts.

One of the pioneers in this area of study, Sarah Pomeroy, holds the view that no factual conclusions about the lives of Greek women in the classical period can be drawn by examining Bronze age heroines in Attic tragedy; moreover, according to Pomeroy, these depictions merely represent the attitudes/fears/fantasies of the specific male poets who depicted them.<sup>2</sup> However, many other scholars examining the lives of women do not dismiss the genre of drama altogether as source material. Scholars such as Helene P. Foley and Nancy Rabinowitz, while agreeing that these dramatic heroines do not represent a paradigm of the historical Greek woman, hold the view that something useful

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<sup>1</sup> Even depictions of women on Attic vases may be problematic for reconstructing ancient ideologies of gender, as Lewis 2002 argues.

<sup>2</sup> Pomeroy 1975: Introduction, 93-120.



and significant can be learned about women and Greek society by examining these figures.<sup>3</sup> Foley maintains that characters in tragedy represent a more exaggerated version of their Athenian counterparts; and as she considers the world depicted in tragedy to be a deviation from the cultural norm, she argues that one can at least get an understanding of “what women are and how they should act” by looking at tragedy. Rabinowitz, heavily influenced by the theories of Foucault and Lacan, examines how the representation of women serves a male-dominated *polis* and the Greek male imagination. Thus, while Pomeroy is concerned mainly with the documented lives of actual historical Greek women, Foley and Rabinowitz seek to use drama as a means of understanding the social and historical context in which Greek women found themselves. Froma Zeitlin’s work goes a step further: she departs from the search for the “real” Greek woman in tragedy and focuses more on the abstract idea of “femininity” which, as she argues, permeates all aspects of the genre. Zeitlin holds the view that the female tragic heroine, no matter how complex or powerful, only exists as a foil for the male character or to facilitate the *telos* of the play.<sup>4</sup> Recently, Laura McClure has returned to the approach of aiming at a glimpse of the historical Greek woman by looking at literature, and tragedy in particular. She examines the role of women in both Greek culture and onstage in Athenian tragedy, specifically through the issue of speech (or the lack thereof), and the threat uncontrolled female speech presents in disrupting the male governed household and city.<sup>5</sup>

Within this framework of earlier scholarship, this thesis aims to explore the female in Greek literature using a new approach, by focusing on a specific aspect of the representation of the female as it is traced chronologically across different eras and

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<sup>3</sup> Rabinowitz 1993: 1-27, Foley 2001: 1-18

<sup>4</sup> Zeitlin 1996: 341-374.

<sup>5</sup> McClure 1999: 15-24, 70-105, 112-157, 161-201.

genres of Greek poetry. However, this thesis does not attempt to ascertain the image of the historical Greek woman, nor does it seek to explain what the representation of female figures says about a specific author, or even a specific genre. Rather, it will link the language and imagery employed by multiple genres in order to trace the presence of a specific anxiety about female power throughout Greek literature, and thereby provide a detailed and provocative reading of what I call “gyno-anxiety.”

Greek literary “misogyny” often manifests itself in the form of a polarity between the “good” and the “bad” woman. The most obvious example is Penelope set against the sisters Helen/Clytemnestra, an opposition that starts with the epic poems and is carried through other genres.<sup>6</sup> Yet it is the “bad” female characters who receive by far the most attention from male authors for their depraved and/or destructive behavior. Often the descriptions of these women serve as a warning for men about what type of woman to avoid, something like an encyclopedia of “bad women,” as in the iambic poet Semonides (fragment 7). Semonides lists several different types of these execrable women, and then describes in great detail their many flaws by which they are distinguished. Some he says are crafty, some are loud-mouthed, some are lazy or ugly or promiscuous, and only one sort, the “bee-woman,” is without blame. Other authors simply present the many evil attributes of the female sex distilled into one character, as, for example, the insanely jealous, murderous sorceress in Euripides’ *Medea*. Either way, there seems to be many more examples in Greek literature of the “bad woman” than the “good woman”: indeed, aside from Penelope and the bee-woman in Semonides, who is at first glance seemingly flawless, the pickings are slim. Such an imbalance in the source material indicates that

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<sup>6</sup> See especially *Odyssey* xi.426-453, xxiv.192-202 for the contrast.

the issue appears to be more complicated than a simple dichotomy of the “good” vs. the “bad” woman.

Perhaps the more interesting question is: what is it about these female characters that makes them “bad”? And if they are so bad, why is it impossible to resist their allure, as the authors often claim? Is it possible that the figure of the “bad” female incorporates elements of the “good” and thereby presents a more ambivalent and attractive package of meaning? It comes as no surprise that the literary “tradition of Greek misogyny,”<sup>7</sup> as it has often been described by earlier scholars, tends to pivot around the figure of Pandora, the first woman, as presented in Hesiod’s genealogy (*Theogony* 570-610, *Works and Days* 55-60). Pandora emerges in these important early texts as the most ambivalent representation of the female, as she appears to be both good and bad, especially when Hesiod calls her, “an evil you want to embrace” (*Works and Days* 57-59). But this description of the first female, which is so often cited as the explanation for the evil nature of woman, is not presented as a polarity of “good” set against “bad”; rather, both the impulse to embrace the female, that is, her erotic allure, and the evil she supposedly embodies are both manifest within her and are thus presented as sources of anxiety for the poet and his audience. Pandora, and thus all women, both evince and wield their power in their ability to inspire erotic desire. The notorious boundary-blurring, maddening capacity of *eros* is the key factor in the female’s erotic agency:<sup>8</sup> this makes her both appealing to the desiring male, but also dangerous at the same time, because his desire weakens him and clouds his judgment, leaving him vulnerable to her emotionally, monetarily, conjugally, even reproductively. Thus her appeal and danger are mutually

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<sup>7</sup> As noted, for example, by Pomeroy 1975, in her Introduction.

<sup>8</sup> See Cyrino 1995 for an in-depth exploration of the destructive nature of *eros* in Greek poetry.

inclusive, wrapped up in the intoxicating, limb-loosening *eros* that leads the man to take pleasure in embracing his own destruction.

This project intends to offer a more nuanced reading of the representation of female figures in Greek poetry, by focusing on the idea of female erotic agency, that is, the idea that the woman might choose to be the active subject of sexuality, rather than the passive object, and specifically in a subversive, adulterous, or destructive manner. My argument posits not a polarity between the “good” and “bad” woman, nor between “good/bad” as moral terms, *per se*; but rather it traces a trajectory from female sexual allure, to potential agency, to the threat that such erotic subjectivity presents, leading to the ubiquitous expression of anxiety in the verses of the Greek poets. Thus, my project seeks to unpack the conventional idea of “misogyny” as represented in the early Greek poets, by elucidating another, new way of reading the representation of female figures in certain important texts, as “gyno-anxiety.”

This thesis traces this theme of “gyno-anxiety” and examines how it evolves and is used by different authors in different time periods and genres. It considers the way the ideas of and anxieties about female sexuality, both its allure and concomitant danger, which are implicitly expressed in the Homeric poems, are given more explicit voice in Hesiod and the lyric poets; and then, how these anxieties are made performative and visible onstage in the dramas of the Greek tragedians.

To begin let us briefly consider the genre of Homeric epic, focusing specifically on the character of Helen, who, though a notorious *femme fatale*, never acts as an erotic agent in real time in the *Iliad*. Rather, the threat of her erotic agency is implied to have taken place in the past, as she is repeatedly named in the *Iliad* as the cause of the entire

Trojan War. Aside from Helen, the figure of Penelope in the *Odyssey* is equally important to set up this examination because she represents the fear that a “good” wife will turn into a “bad” wife. As the epitome of the virtuous wife, her character is surrounded by the fear that she will possibly falter: the epic hints at an anxiety that she will become like her cousins Helen or Clytemnestra. As with Helen, this anxiety is not directly expressed by Homer, but is rather implicit in the poem, and manifests itself in two ways.<sup>9</sup> First, it emerges as the underlying fear in Odysseus’ mind as he struggles for ten years to get back to his loyal wife; and second, it is suggested by the hardship of Penelope, who for decades resists the pressure to succumb to another man and endures to remain chaste, protecting the household and wealth of her husband, though she does not know if he is alive or dead. Although Penelope wishes for her son Telemachus to take the place of his father if Odysseus does not return, she holds the power to choose another man as her husband, disrupting this natural succession. The *Odyssey* also hints at the figure of the adulteress Clytemnestra, later so prominent in Greek tragedy, who has already killed her husband during the time in which the epic takes place, and thereby reminds the reader of the potential threat of an erotically active wife.

As wives and queens, these epic female figures hold power over their husband’s honor, wealth, household, and children. Thus Helen, by leaving Menelaus for another man, has damaged his honor, taken away his wealth, and denied him the possibility of having any more children (at least with her). Penelope holds even more power over Odysseus, since her decision whether or not to remarry is the key to his continued existence. If Penelope chooses to marry one of her suitors, she will bestow all her

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<sup>9</sup> Consider, for instance, the Song of Ares and Aphrodite (*Odyssey* viii.266-366), where the adultery motif is an allegory for Odysseus’ own fear of marital infidelity (see Konstantakos 2012).

husband's lands, wealth, and power upon another man. In the case of Clytemnestra, instead of protecting the household and wealth of her husband while he is away, as Penelope does, she replaces him with another man and plots his murder. Although the epic poet does not pass judgment or point out this danger overtly, the plot of the epic poems implicitly suggests the threats these three figures represent to their husbands through their ability to be erotic agents.

Thus the epic poems suggest that the power these women hold as wives and queens, as well as the danger they pose to their husbands, is wrapped up in their active sexuality, and specifically, in their potential to exercise sexuality outside of marriage. While the concept of the female using her body as exchange within the context of pre-matrimonial negotiation may be used to contrast with my analysis, my argument focuses not on the woman who is able simply to choose her sexual partner from a group of willing suitors, but rather on the power of extreme female sexuality to subvert that very marriage contract once made. What this project explores, then, is the female figure who wields her sexuality as an active subject, rather than waiting to be acted upon, and in particular the female character who chooses to engage in extreme, dangerous behavior through subversion of the marriage bond. Such extreme behavior outside the marriage bond includes adultery, violent sexual jealousy, and even murder.

Chapter One examines Hesiod and Semonides, who begin to give a more explicit voice to the fear of the female and her sexuality. The female figures represented by the poets in this category are both mythological and literal, specific and general. I begin by looking at Hesiod, where the fear of and attraction to the female becomes explicit in his representation of Pandora. Described as an "evil you want to embrace" or a "beautiful

evil” (*Theogony* 585; *Works and Days* 57-59), these descriptions imply that Pandora does not fit into a good/bad polarity, but rather the poet is positing a trajectory: her erotic allure leads inexorably to danger for the husband who desires her. Pandora’s appeal and repulsiveness come from the same place, namely her sexuality and the power it represents. This is explicitly related in the story of her creation, sexual seductiveness, and opening the jar of evils.

From Pandora in Hesiod, I turn to the archaic lyric poet, Semonides. In Semonides fragment 7, the poet describes several different types of women, likening them to animals and forces of nature. He presents a list of women’s qualities that focus on their extreme sexuality and (often adulterous) rapacity, and thereby both creates and contributes to a vocabulary of expression for both erotic allure and danger. First I examine how this poem serves as a warning of the dangers a woman/wife can represent for her husband as a result of her sexuality; and second how the only type of woman he praises – the bee-woman – seems to pose no threat precisely because she expresses no interest, according to the poet, either inside or outside of marriage, in being an active sexual agent.

In Chapter Two I turn to the genre of tragedy where the “gyno-anxiety” about female sexuality reaches its peak in classical Greek poetry. This underlying theme in earlier poetry becomes actualized in the tragic dramas for the stage and is thereby exaggerated for performance. This chapter focuses on four female characters from fifth-century Athenian tragedy: Clytemnestra from Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, Deianeira from Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*, and in the plays of Euripides, Phaedra from the *Hippolytus* and Medea from the *Medea*.

Beginning with Clytemnestra and Medea, I examine how these characters' disregard for female social norms, appropriation of masculine attitudes, and extreme sexuality lead to disastrous consequences. I consider how Clytemnestra's erotic agency as an adulteress is directly correlated with the murder of her husband and the incitement of the familial slaughter that ensues. While Clytemnestra's murderous rage is already present before the arrival of Agamemnon and Cassandra as his new concubine, it is this erotic slight that catalyzes her anger just moments before the murder. Likewise Medea, having been left by her husband Jason for another woman as the *Medea* opens, pursues active/destructive remedies as revenge for her erotic injury, and this leads to the demise of many and even the death of her own children. Turning to Deianeira and Phaedra, I investigate how the active/destructive remedies these figures employ in attempt to control male sexuality and keep their reputations intact result in similar catastrophes. Deianeira attempts to win back the love of her unfaithful husband, which leads to the deaths of Heracles and herself: this catastrophe is the direct result of her erotic jealousy. Finally, in the *Hippolytus*, Phaedra, tormented by a shameful lust, pursues active/destructive remedies to excuse and even conceal her attempted adultery and erotic sickness, and this leads to the destruction of her husband's household as well as her own death and the death of the man who erotically injured her.

By tracing this thread of the threat of female erotic agency represented in the theme of "gyno-anxiety" through the genres of archaic poetry and fifth-century Athenian tragedy, I aim to produce a more nuanced definition of the underlying anxiety towards active female sexuality, which until now has been simply labeled "misogyny" in Greek



literature. My findings contribute a more subtle and informative reading of sexuality and the representation of women and gender in Greek poetry.

## Chapter One

### Archaic Greek “Gyno-anxiety”: The Threat of the Female in Hesiod and Semonides

Woman takes the blame for humanity’s “fall from grace” in the creation myths of many cultures. Eve, from the Judeo-Christian creation myth narrated in *The Book of Genesis*, is perhaps the best known example, but a close second is Pandora in the Greek creation myths told by Hesiod (*ca.* 750 – 650 BC).<sup>10</sup> While Eve is the cause of humanity’s fall from grace (since it is she who first eats from the Tree of Knowledge), Pandora is much more than that: she is simultaneously both the cause and the fall itself.<sup>11</sup> In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Pandora is Zeus’ retribution for the trickery of Prometheus and the theft of fire; her very creation brings old age, toil, and mortality to a race of men who until then were much more like gods than humans. In Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, Pandora is first created as a punishment for mankind, after which she becomes a double bane when she unleashes all the evils upon the world. While this motif of the female as a vehicle for humanity’s demotion to non-divine status is familiar to us through the figure of Eve, nonetheless Hesiod’s presentation of Pandora in this myth and his view of women as a whole seem exceptionally harsh to modern readers.

Another ancient Greek work stands out as a quasi-etiological narrative, or perhaps a parody of an etiological myth, that explains the creation and malignant nature of women, not just through the creation of one woman, but of several different types: this is

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<sup>10</sup> On the challenges of dating Hesiod and his works, see Janko 1982: 94-98.

<sup>11</sup> See Zeitlin 1993: 71 for the comparison of Eve and Pandora.

fragment 7 of the iambic poet, Semonides (*ca.* 650 BC).<sup>12</sup> In this long poem, Semonides describes the different natures of women comically, though callously, by comparing them to a range of animals and forces of nature, and listing the various faults and troubles with which each burdens her husband. Scholars have tended not to look favorably on this text, perhaps put off by its apparent chauvinistic attitude; indeed, many scholars view Semonides' version of the creation of women to be even more abrasive than Hesiod's.<sup>13</sup> This may be attributed to the genre in which Semonides was working: archaic lyric poetry, especially the category of iambic or invective verse, often gives the impression that the sentiments expressed in the poems reflect the author's actual personal experiences and beliefs.<sup>14</sup> Therefore Semonides' poem comes across as more extreme because of the nature of the genre, whereas Hesiod's epic style (with its invocation of the Muses, use of dactylic hexameter, etc.) gives the impression of greater distance between the author and his literary content.<sup>15</sup> Thus, as a result of the styles and conventions employed by each poet within his respective genre, Hesiod appears more like an intermediary between divinities and mortals as he relates his sacred myths, while Semonides seems more like an everyday Greek male, complaining about women with his drinking companions in an intimate symposiastic setting. Yet despite their many differences, both of these texts have been labeled "misogynistic" by scholars who have cited them as only a couple of examples within a widespread "tradition of Greek

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<sup>12</sup> On the possible dates of Semonides, see Campbell 1967: 184 and Janko 1982: 98.

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd-Jones 1975: 24 discusses this comparison between Hesiod and Semonides.

<sup>14</sup> For more on point of view in lyric poetry, see Carey 2009: 37.

<sup>15</sup> See Bakhtin 1982 for a discussion of the distancing effect of epic.

misogyny”<sup>16</sup> that exists throughout ancient Greek literature from archaic to classical times.

This chapter argues that what has so often been briskly labeled “Greek misogyny” in literature embodies, in fact, a more complicated and nuanced concept. While a specific and rather negative view towards women certainly exists in much of Greek literature, to generalize and call it “misogyny,” stating that this “theme” simply recurs in the Greek literary corpus without analyzing its features and objectives, is not a satisfying scholarly explanation. These texts, I suggest, demand more prudent and detailed examination. This chapter explores how the texts of Hesiod and Semonides, each one in slightly different ways, express what I call “gyno-anxiety”: fear that arises from male vulnerability to and dependence upon women. Moreover, I argue that this “gyno-anxiety” leads to the fear of female “erotic agency,” namely the potential that the woman’s awareness of male attraction to and dependence upon her can result in the active utilization of her sexuality in such a way that will do the man harm, whether the damage is economic, reproductive, emotional, or even physical. By examining the works of Hesiod and Semonides with these terms in mind, I aim to provide a more thoughtful – and perhaps even more accurate – understanding of the texts and the provocative attitudes towards women that they illustrate.

### **Hesiod and “Gyno-anxiety”**

Hesiod recounts two slightly different versions of the Pandora myth, one in the *Theogony* (560-612) and one in the *Works and Days* (60-105). In the *Theogony*, the emergence of Pandora follows the story of Prometheus’ theft of fire, as well as his

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<sup>16</sup> Miller 1996: 26.

attempt to trick Zeus into choosing the less appealing portion of the sacrifice. This story is also told in the *Works and Days* with minimal variations,<sup>17</sup> but the *Works and Days* also includes the episode where Pandora opens the jar of evils (91-105). At the beginning of each version of the tale, Pandora is first and foremost described as a punishment, not just for Prometheus, but for all of mankind. In the *Theogony*, the poet describes her as Zeus' payback for the theft: αὐτίκα δ' ἀντὶ πυρὸς τεύξεν κακὸν ἀνθρώποισιν, "At once he fashioned an evil thing for men as the price of fire" (*Theog.* 570).<sup>18</sup> In the *Works and Days*, Zeus speaks directly: τοῖς δ' ἐγὼ ἀντὶ πυρὸς δώσω κακόν, "I will give to them an evil thing as the price for fire" (*Works* 57). Note that in both passages Pandora is an attractive punishment that man brings upon himself: she is called a καλὸν κακόν, "a beautiful evil" (*Theog.* 585), and, more dramatically in the *Works and Days*, she is described as something ᾧ κεν ἅπαντες τέρπωνται κατὰ θυμὸν ἐὼν κακόν ἀμφαγαπῶντες, "in which all men may take pleasure in their heart while they embrace their own destruction" [ἐὼν κακόν = literally, "their own evil"] (*Works* 57-58). It is this paradoxical nature, both lovely and evil, that makes Pandora such a danger: since she is both alluring and malignant, she is not just a punishment, but a covert punishment, indeed, a trap. Pandora is explicitly described as such by Hesiod: θαῦμα δ' ἔχ' ἀθανάτους τε θεοὺς θνητοὺς τ' ἀνθρώπους, ὡς εἶδον δόλον αἰπὺν, ἀμήχανον<sup>19</sup> ἀνθρώποισιν, "And wonder held both the immortal gods and mortal men when they saw the utter trap [δόλον], against which nothing can be done by men" (*Theog.* 589-590). Again in the *Works and Days*, she is called a δόλον αἰπὺν ἀμήχανον, "an utter trap,

<sup>17</sup> On the complex issue of the connection between the two versions, see Vernant 1989: 21-86.

<sup>18</sup> The text of Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days* is Solmsen 1990. All translations of the Greek are my own.

<sup>19</sup> Sappho uses this same adjective to describe Eros in fragment 130.

against which nothing can be done” (*Works* 83). Thus Hesiod defines Pandora as being in the category of unwanted yet unavoidable gifts, and as a paradoxical, deceptive snare into which men are doomed to fall.<sup>20</sup>

Pandora is carefully constructed by Zeus to be the perfect retribution for the offenses committed by Prometheus, because she embodies characteristics similar to both the stolen divine fire as well as the deceptive sacrifice. The fact that Hesiod has Zeus say he will create Pandora ἀντὶ πυρός (*Theog.* 570) is significant, since the preposition ἀντὶ can be understood as both “in return for” and “in place of” the divine fire. Pandora’s fire-like attributes fit both readings well, for like fire she dries a man out and consumes the fruits of his toils; moreover, like fire she must constantly be fed and cared for, while she wastes her husband’s substance.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, she resembles the trick sacrifice given to Zeus in that she has a beautiful, shining exterior, which gives the illusion of goodness but actually, according to Hesiod, has an evil or worthless interior.<sup>22</sup> Just as the bones and inedible parts of the animal sacrifice are hidden (καλύπτειν, *Theog.* 541) underneath the glistening fat, thus making it an appealing choice for Zeus, so too is Pandora’s evil nature hidden (καλύπτειν, *Theog.* 574) underneath her beautiful exterior. This etiological tale explains two of the biggest threats a woman poses to men, and the basis of male “gyno-anxiety” as expressed in archaic Greek verse: that she, like fire, will weaken him and consume his resources, and that her lovely appearance, like the deceptive sacrifice, will trick him into embracing something he does not know will harm him.

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<sup>20</sup> See Pucci 1977: 98 for a discussion on Pandora as a “trap.”

<sup>21</sup> For the comparison of Pandora to fire, see Clay 2003: 102.

<sup>22</sup> On Pandora’s similarity to the sacrifice, see Zeitlin 1996: 56.

Thus the paradoxical quality of Pandora as a “beautiful evil” is the main source of her power, since if she were not alluring and able to inspire desire, men would not risk coming into contact with such an obvious danger. It is not surprising, then, that Hesiod goes into great detail to explain exactly how this creature is manufactured with the perfect ingredients to make her so beguiling. Hesiod lists the attractive qualities that, under Zeus’ command, are given to her by the gods, such as ἀθανάτης δὲ θεῆς εἰς ὅπα εἴσκειν παρθενικῆς καλὸν εἶδος ἐπήρατον, “the beautiful, charming shape of a maiden, and a face like that of immortal goddesses” (*Works* 62-63); Zeus also orders χάριν ἀμφιγέαι κεφαλῆ χρυσέην Ἀφροδίτην καὶ πόθον ἀργαλέον καὶ γυιοβόρους μελεδώνας, “golden Aphrodite to shed grace upon her head and cruel longing and limb-devouring cares” (*Works* 65-66). Lastly he commands Hermes to give her κύνεόν τε νόον καὶ ἐπίκλοπον ἦθος, “both a bitch’s mind and a deceitful manner” (*Works* 67-68). Note the order in which Hesiod lists these attributes as they are bestowed by the gods: the sequence is significant, I suggest, in that it is linear, almost chronological. Pandora is first given beauty to attract, then desirability that is aroused by beauty, then treachery that follows and takes advantage of the onset of desire. These gifts, listed in this order, foretell the trajectory of doom for every man who meets her: he will first be struck by her beauty, then overcome with desire, and once he has given in to his passion, he will learn of her evil nature too late. Note too how the word κύνεόν, “of a dog or bitch” (*Works* 67), calls to mind the animal imagery found in Semonides’ fragment 7, as we shall see, which is used to describe female negative attributes, specifically in the dog woman.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Aphrodite’s gift of χάρις “grace” (*Works* 65) and the abstract concepts of “painful

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<sup>23</sup> I have opted for the more literal translation of κύνεον as opposed to LSJ’s more liberal rendering of “shameless” (s.v. κύνεος).

longing and limb-devouring cares” (*Works* 66) are noteworthy because they are not physical characteristics; rather, they are subjective responses to physical characteristics. Their presence here demonstrates the subjective human, and specifically male, viewpoint or focalization of the narrative: the desires she inspires and the limbs she will devour are those of the men who encounter her.<sup>24</sup> The emergence of sexual pleasure is not, however, a joyful thing, rather it is a new vulnerability for men since the woman’s χάρις provokes anguishing desire, loss of clear thinking, and exhausting concern.<sup>25</sup> With the emergence of women and sexual pleasure come male weakness and a reason for men to feel the fear inherent in “gyno-anxiety.”

It is not just Pandora’s innate qualities but also her superficial characteristics that add to her power to arouse anxiety. Several lines in both of Hesiod’s poems are dedicated to describing the process by which Pandora is dressed and decorated. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod goes into great detail describing the beautiful adornments given to Pandora by the gods:

ζῶσε δὲ καὶ κόσμησε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη  
 ἀργυφὴν ἔσθητι· κατὰ κρήθεν δὲ καλύπτρον  
 δαιδαλέην χεῖρεσσι κατέσχεθε, θαῦμα ιδέσθαι·  
 ἀμφὶ δὲ οἱ στεφάνους, νεοθηλέος ἄνθεα ποίης,  
 ἱμεροῦς περιθήκε καρῆατι Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη.  
 ἀμφὶ δὲ οἱ στεφάνην χρυσέην κεφαλῆφιν ἔθηκε,  
 τὴν αὐτὸς ποίησε περικλυτὸς Ἀμφιγυῆεις  
 ἀσκήσας παλάμησι, χαριζόμενος Διὶ πατρί.  
 τῇ δ’ ἐνὶ δαίδαλα πολλὰ τετεύχατο, θαῦμα ιδέσθαι,  
 κνώδαλ’, ὅσ’ ἤπειρος πολλὰ τρέφει ἠδὲ θάλασσα,  
 τῶν ὅ γε πόλλ’ ἐνέθηκε, – χάρις δ’ ἀπελάμπετο πολλή, –  
 θαυμάσια, ζῳοῖσιν ἑοικότα φωνήεσσιν.

And the goddess grey-eyed Athena girded and adorned  
 Her with silver-white clothing: down upon her head  
 She placed a cunningly wrought veil with her hands, wondrous to see:

<sup>24</sup> The focalization of the narrative is noted by Clay 2003: 122.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the negative aspects of desire aroused by Pandora, see Pucci 1977: 93.



And around her she placed a crown of fresh blooming flowers.  
 And Pallas Athena placed desire around her head.  
 And around her head she put a golden crown,  
 Which the renowned Limping God made himself  
 Having worked with his own hands, obliging his father Zeus.  
 And on it he wrought many cunning things, wonderful to see,  
 The many dangerous creatures which the land and sea raise,  
 He put many of them upon it – and much charm shone from it –  
 Marvelous things, like living beings with voices.

(*Theog.* 573-584)

The episode in the *Works and Days* also offers an account of her adorning scene:

ζῶσε δὲ καὶ κόσμησε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη·  
 ἀμφὶ δὲ οἱ Χάριτές τε θεαὶ καὶ πότνια Πειθὼ  
 ὄρμους χρυσείους ἔθεσαν χροῖ· ἀμφὶ δὲ τήν γε  
 Ὠραὶ καλλίκομοι στέφον ἄνθεσιν εἰαρινοῖσιν·  
 πάντα δὲ οἱ χροῖ κόσμον ἐφήρμοσε Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη.

The goddess grey-eyed Athena girded and adorned her,  
 And the divine Graces and mistress Persuasion  
 Put golden necklaces around her skin, and  
 The beautiful-haired Hours wreathed her with spring flowers,  
 And Pallas Athena fitted all manner of adornment to her skin.

(*Works* 72-76)

Adornment scenes are found elsewhere in Greek literature especially connected to the goddess Aphrodite. Monica Cyrino (2010) remarks that one of the most notable adornment scenes occurs in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* in which the goddess prepares herself to seduce the mortal Anchises.<sup>26</sup> “As the epitome of feminine beauty, Aphrodite effortlessly expands her divine influence to encompass the use of physical adornment to boost sexual magnetism and achieve erotic goals. Thus the goddess can be said to symbolize the notion of ‘beauty enhanced for a purpose.’”<sup>27</sup> That is, Aphrodite does not go to great lengths to augment her beauty simply to sit around Mt. Olympus with the rest of the Greek pantheon; rather she has the specific aim of sexual seduction in

<sup>26</sup> On Aphrodite’s adornment, see Cyrino 2010: 56-61.

<sup>27</sup> Cyrino 2010: 56.

mind. Just as adornment is a crucial element to Aphrodite's power and signifies erotic intention, so too does Pandora's adornment in the Hesiodic texts emphasize her main objective among men: namely, to beguile them. Yet, while Aphrodite adorns herself in preparation to seduce a specific male, Pandora is adorned in order to seduce all of mankind. Scholars have often remarked on the similarities between Aphrodite's adornment scenes and scenes of Homeric heroes arming themselves for battle,<sup>28</sup> and there are echoes of militarism expressed in Pandora's adornment scenes as well. For example, Athena, goddess of war and military strategy, is prominent in both poems as the deity who dresses Pandora; note that the verb used to describe this act in both Hesiodic passages is ζῶσε (*Theog.* 573 and *Works* 72), from ζώννυμι, which means to "to gird oneself, gird round the loins for a pugilistic conflict."<sup>29</sup> This verb is also used in *Iliad* XIV at line 181 to describe Hera as she adorns herself in preparation to seduce Zeus and subsequently to distract him from the Trojan War. In Hesiod's text, too, we see a conflation of the notions of war and seduction: in the case of both Hera and Pandora, seduction is employed as a trick to subjugate the male and achieve her own ulterior motives. The fact that the goddess of war is dressing Pandora, combined with the emphatic use of this specific verb, indicates that Pandora is not simply an innocent virgin-bride figure being prepared to be led into marriage by her husband, but rather an active agent of *eros* being prepared for a battle of wills in which her aim is to conquer men with her alluring beauty and charm.

Even Pandora's attributes offer certain hints that warn of her dualistic nature as the καλὸν κακὸν. For example, the beautiful gold crown that Hephaestus crafts for her

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<sup>28</sup> For more on the comparison between adornment and arming scenes see Cyrino 2010, with further bibliography.

<sup>29</sup> See LSJ, s.v. ζώννυμι; for examples of warriors arming themselves see *Iliad* X.78, XI.15, XXIII.130.

in the *Theogony* passage is decorated with “the many dangerous creatures which the land and sea raise” (*Theog.* 581-584). The word used by Hesiod for “creature,” κνώδαλον (*Theog.* 582), is notable because it can mean “any dangerous animal, from a lion to a serpent or worm, a monster, beast.”<sup>30</sup> These fearsome creatures engraved on the crown are rendered with such skill they appear to be living, and this illustration of the crown, although perhaps slightly frightening, is described as “wondrous to see” (*Theog.* 581), as it adds to Pandora’s own beauty. Thus Pandora, like the images on the crown she is wearing, possesses both the qualities of loveliness and danger, two seemingly contradictory qualities that are in this instance inseparable from each other. Indeed, as the first woman, Pandora can be counted as one of the dangerous animals depicted upon the crown, which men have reason to fear.

After the beautiful physical adornments are granted by the goddesses, Hermes instills in Pandora ψεύδεά θ’ αἰμυλίους τε λόγους καὶ ἐπίκλοπον ἦθος, “lies and wily words and a deceitful nature” (*Works* 78), which are hidden from view by her beautiful exterior. Note how positive qualities are placed “around” or “on” (ἀμφὶ) Pandora, whereas the evil attributes are placed “within” her (ἐν); this internal quality of the nasty elements emphasizes that she is like the tricky sacrifice and poses the threat of a hidden danger.

Thus, Pandora is created with her irresistible charms and deceitful mind. This dangerous combination of attributes arrayed along a progressive sequence – alluring beauty, arousal of desire, and the ability to deceive – represents a clear threat to males, and one that inevitably arouses their “gyno-anxiety.” Indeed, this mythological account

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<sup>30</sup> See LSJ s.v. κνώδαλον.

for the enigmatic combination of both good and bad female qualities evokes an anxiety about the real potential danger that man faces by interacting with woman: namely, that he is weakened by and susceptible to her charms.

The tone of “misogyny” in the Pandora myth, so often noted by scholars, is most directly expressed in the *Theogony* after the description of the creation and adornment of Pandora where Hesiod makes the connection between the evil nature of Pandora and the evil nature of all women as her successors. The lines that follow the adornment sequence are a meditation on women (that is, real life women, not Pandora), which calls to mind Semonides fragment 7.

ἐκ τῆς γὰρ γένος ἐστὶ γυναικῶν θηλυτεράων,  
τῆς γὰρ ὀλώϊόν ἐστι γένος καὶ φύλα γυναικῶν,  
πῆμα μέγ' αἰ̅ θνητοῖσι μετ' ἀνδράσι ναιετάουσιν  
οὐλομένης πενίης οὐ σύμφοροι, ἀλλὰ κόροιο.

For from her is the race of women and females,  
Of her is the deadly stock and class of women  
Who live among mortal men as a misery.  
Not a companion in destructive poverty, but only in wealth.

(*Theog.* 590-593)

Hesiod uses acrid language to describe women, calling the race of womankind ὀλώϊόν “deadly” (591) and πῆμα “a misery” (592). Hesiod confirms these bitter descriptions by citing the burdensome nature of woman on men, specifically in an economic context. This is most clearly seen in the last lines where the woman is portrayed as being of no use to a man’s household. Hesiod describes women as πενίης οὐ σύμφοροι, ἀλλὰ κόροιο, “not a companion in poverty but only in wealth” (593), conveying the male anxiety that a woman will not help increase the wealth of his household, but will only decrease it the point of impoverishing him. Hesiod continues his rant on the all-consuming, non-producing nature of women with an animal analogy:

ὥς δ' ὀπότ' ἐν σμήγεσσι κατηρεφέεσσι μέλισσαι  
 κηφήνας βόσκωσι, κακῶν ξυνήονας ἔργων·  
 αἱ μὲν τε πρόπαν ἡμαρ ἐς ἥλιον καταδύντα  
 ἡμάτια σπεύδουσι τιθεῖσί τε κηρία λευκά,  
 οἱ δ' ἔντοσθε μένοντες ἐπηρεφέας κατὰ σίμβλους  
 ἀλλότριον κάματον σφετέρην ἐς γαστέρ' ἀμώνται.

And just as when in overhanging hives bees  
 Feed the drones, who are companions to evil deeds,  
 All day long until the sun goes down  
 Each and every day the bees strive eagerly and create the white combs,  
 While the drones, remaining within in the covered hives,  
 Harvest the toil of others into their own stomachs.

(*Theog.* 594-600)

Although the drone bee is in fact male, the analogy here serves to compare the bee-hive to a household where the drone-woman does nothing to help the house prosper, but rather enjoys the fruits of her husband's labor, just as the drone consumes the work of the bees. This analogy further emphasizes the economic threat women pose to men. In these lines, it is evident that the “gyno-anxiety” expressed in Hesiod's text focuses mainly on a woman's consumption of the man's household. By utilizing her beauty and sexual allure, she can coerce the man into allowing her to take what is rightfully his. In addition to this particular new burden – that with the creation of women, men now have to feed and provide for them – Pandora will bring with her other more universal evils, such as old age and death itself, as we shall see when we examine the jar passage below. But most ominously, Pandora comes bearing ἕτερον . . . κακὸν, “a second evil” (*Theog.* 602): namely, the need of children.

ὥς δ' αὐτως ἄνδρεςσι κακὸν θνητοῖσι γυναίκας  
 Ζεὺς ὑψιβρεμέτης θήκεν, ξυνήονας ἔργων  
 ἀργαλέων· ἕτερον δὲ πόρεν κακὸν ἀντ' ἀγαθοῖο·  
 ὅς κε γάμον φεύγων καὶ μέρμερα ἔργα γυναικῶν  
 μὴ γῆμαι ἐθέλη, ὀλοὸν δ' ἐπὶ γῆρας ἴκοιτο  
 χήτει γηροκόμοιο· ὃ γ' οὐ βιότου ἐπιδευῆς  
 ζῶει, ἀποφθιμένου δὲ διὰ κτήσιν δατέονται

χηρωσταί· ὧ δ' αὖτε γάμου μετὰ μοῖρα γένηται,  
 κεδνήν δ' ἔσχεν ἄκοιτιν ἀρηρυῖαν προπίδεσσι,  
 τῷ δέ τ' ἀπ' αἰῶνος κακὸν ἐσθλῷ ἀντιφερίζει  
 ἔμμενές· ὃς δέ κε τέτμη ἀταρτηροῖο γενέθλης,  
 ζῶει ἐνὶ στήθεσιν ἔχων ἀλίαςτον ἀνίην  
 θυμῷ καὶ καρδίῃ, καὶ ἀνήκεστον κακὸν ἔστιν.

Thus even so high-thundering Zeus made  
 Women an evil thing for mortal men, companions  
 In grievous deeds: and he gave a second evil in exchange for good:  
 Whoever, fleeing marriage and the mischievous deeds of women  
 Does not want to marry, he comes upon destructive old age  
 Lacking anyone to attend his old age: though he is not lacking of livelihood  
 While he lives, but when he is dead, distant relatives divide his possessions  
 Among themselves: and for whom the fate of marriage comes,  
 And takes a careful wife who is fitting with (his) mind,  
 Continually for him evil contends with good  
 Never ceasing: for whoever finds himself with mischievous children,  
 Lives always bearing unending grief in his spirit and heart  
 Within his chest, and the evil is incurable.

*(Theog. 600-612)*

These lines express the dichotomy inherent in the familiar “Can’t live with them, can’t live without them” sentiment. Although interaction with women brings nothing but hardship, shunning them completely does not present a more appealing option. According to Hesiod, if a man does not marry and produce children, he has no one to take care of him in his old age, and instead of his name and household continuing on after his death, distant relatives will swoop down and take all of his possessions for themselves (603-607). But even children come with their own set of problems, since if a man has “mischievous” (ἀταρτηρός, 610) offspring, he is exposed to even more grief, which is itself an “incurable evil” (ἀνήκεστον κακόν, 612). Since before the creation of Pandora, there was neither death nor old age and as a result no need for children, these secondary burdens and misfortunes of producing and dealing with heirs stem from the existence of woman and thus she is saddled with all the blame. With the emergence of woman comes

a double bind for men, a critical situation that is once again ἀμήχανος, “something against which nothing can be done.”

Pandora is solely blamed for mankind’s mortal condition, and therefore the male’s role as the father of his children and his need for sex cannot be acknowledged directly in the Hesiodic texts, since he presumably had no knowledge of or reason for either before the creation of Pandora. Rather, Pandora is represented as an artificial creation, imposed on man as an unwelcome addition.<sup>31</sup> Wendy Doniger (1999) notes that the emergence of the first mortal woman is fraught with a great deal of resentment at the human level, even though Pandora’s arrival is clearly introducing a duality to humanity that the gods have always had: that of male and female.<sup>32</sup> Hesiod’s depiction of the myth signals a refusal to acknowledge the male role in reproduction, and this stems directly from the anxiety of male dependency on the female. Instead of simply accepting the reliance, it is rejected by the backwards argument that if women did not exist, men would not need them.<sup>33</sup>

Aside from the misfortune Pandora brings to humanity by being the first woman, the alluring but deceitful trap that can cheat a man out of his house and home, she also plays an “Eve-role” and causes even more trouble for mankind when she removes the lid from the jar of evils and intentionally scatters κήδεα λυγρὰ (*Works* 95), “sorrowful cares,” all over the earth. Thus, Pandora is not only responsible for the adversity men now must face with respect to women, but she is also responsible for the existence of every hardship and trouble in the world. Although Eve was not fully aware of the damage she would do when she ate from the Tree of Knowledge, Pandora resolves intentionally (μῆδομαι, *Works* 95) to open the jar and release the evils. In this portion of the myth

<sup>31</sup> On Pandora as an unwanted gift, see Zeitlin 1993: 85.

<sup>32</sup> For more on Pandora and her emergence as the first human female, see Doniger 1999: 123.

<sup>33</sup> This is a sentiment we will return to when we examine the *Hippolytus* in the next chapter.

(*Works* 91-105), Hesiod uses perhaps the cruelest terms of blame attributed to women as he links them eternally with Pandora and thus every existing misfortune. For not only is Pandora's existence – and thus the existence of all womankind – a detriment to the human race, but she also is charged with introducing the “countless sorrows” (μυρία λυγρὰ, *Works* 100) into the world. Scholars have offered various theories on the symbolism of the jar and the fact that “hope” remains under its rim.<sup>34</sup> But most significant for my argument is that the attribution of this crime to the first woman is no doubt connected to the anxiety caused by the female let loose in the world of men. I suggest that the narrative of the jar of evils is a pointed example of “gyno-anxiety,” in that the woman herself represents a vessel in which countless evils and dangers lie hidden. She has the power to unleash them at any time, just as Pandora released the evils from her jar.

In our examination of Hesiod's texts, Pandora emerges as both the original woman and the fundamental *femme fatale*. She is a costly burden to men and the vehicle for producing even more evils to plague mankind, but at the same time she is something irresistible and unavoidable. Because the “deadly race of women” (*Theog.* 591) stems from her, all men are destined to fall prey to this ἀμήχανον “something against which nothing can be done” (*Theog.* 589) creature and thus they must be wary of all women. Elsewhere in Hesiod there are further echoes of the legacy of woman as “beautiful evil.” For example, in the *Works and Days*, Hesiod turns to the subject of real life women and how to deal with the “evil race,” which is Pandora's endowment to humanity. In the following passage, Hesiod gives his brother, Perses, some advice:

μη δὲ γυνή σε νόον πυγροστόλος ἐξαπατάτω  
αἰμύλα κωτίλλουσα, τεῆν διφῶσα καλήν.

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<sup>34</sup> See Zeitlin 1993: 64-67 for an interpretation of Pandora's jar as a metaphor for reproduction.



ὄς δὲ γυναικὶ πέποιθε, πέποιθ' ὅ γε φηλήτησιν.

Do not let a woman flaunting her shapely buttocks deceive you in your mind,  
Chattering wily things, because she's trying to get your storehouse.  
Whoever trusts in a woman is trusting in thieves.

(Works 373-375)

In narrating the Pandora myth, Hesiod makes only an implicit connection between female allure, manipulation of the male, and the ultimate injury to the man, mainly in terms of loss of resources. In his advice to Perses, however, the association is quite explicit. Hesiod clearly warns his brother that a woman who is brandishing her sexual appeal is actively using her erotic power to manipulate and weaken him, in order to cheat him out of his property. Hesiod's sentiment is not so much one of hatred, but of worry and caution: these lines express the male anxiety that a woman will exploit the man's sexual desire for her – something to which, like it or not, he is susceptible – and turn it against him. Here Hesiod gives explicit voice to one of the threats of female erotic agency. But, as noted also in the *Theogony* (602-606), there is “another evil” for those who flee from marriage and women: a sickly and solitary old age. Thus, later in the *Works and Days*, Hesiod describes how best to go about choosing a good bride so as to minimize one's misfortune.

ὠραῖος δὲ γυναῖκα τεὸν ποτὶ οἶκον ἄγεσθαι,  
μήτε τριηκόντων ἐτέων μάλα πόλλ' ἀπολείπων  
μήτ' ἐπιθεῖς μάλα πολλὰ· γάμος δέ τοι ὠριος οὔτος·  
ἢ δὲ γυνὴ τέτορ' ἠβώοι, πέμπτῳ δὲ γαμοίτο.  
παρθενικὴν δὲ γαμείν, ὡς κ' ἤθεα κεδνὰ διδάξης.

At the right age bring home a wife to your house,  
When you're not much before or  
Beyond thirty years: this is the right age for marriage.  
Let your wife have been in youthful bloom for four years, and marry her in the  
fifth year.  
Marry a virgin, so that you can teach her careful ways.

(Works 695-699)

Obviously the youth of the bride ensures her fertility and good health, while her virginity guarantees the production of legitimate offspring. However, I argue that these particular attributes offer the man other benefits, which specifically allow the husband to minimize his “gyno-anxiety” with respect to his wife. If a man around the age of thirty is supposed to marry a girl who is four or five years past puberty, Hesiod is suggesting at least a ten-year age difference between them, if not more. The preference for a younger girl and one who is sexually inexperienced points to a desire to eliminate preemptively, or at least diminish, the possibility of the wife as an erotic threat to him. If she is inexperienced sexually and young enough to be mostly ignorant of the intimate interactions between men and women, it is unlikely that she would be aware of possessing any sort of power over this older man; while under his guidance, he will only teach her ἦθεα κεδνὰ “careful ways” (*Works* 699) and thus she would never learn to threaten or intimidate him.

In two separate texts, as we have seen, Hesiod presents us with an explanation for humanity’s loss of bliss at the divinely manufactured hands of a woman. Unlike Eve in the Judeo-Christian story, however, Pandora is not punished with eternal subservience to her husband, as Eve is to Adam. Curiously, although woman’s inferior status is strongly implied throughout Hesiod’s texts, the husband’s control over his wife is not distinctly established as a “natural” social rule. On the contrary, woman seems to maintain a fundamental power over man. She can, by her appetites, exhaust and deplete him, seduce him, and rob him.<sup>35</sup> This potential power arouses a constant male “gyno-anxiety” that is evoked and repeated throughout the texts; likewise, this anxiety is undoubtedly the

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<sup>35</sup> On the “depleting” nature of women, see Zeitlin 1993: 71.

essential inspiration for the myth itself, where the mythographer is attempting to make sense of and deal with this ever-present fear.

### **Semonides and “Gyno-anxiety”**

In fragment 7 of Semonides, the archaic iambist offers some likely Hesiodic echoes.<sup>36</sup> From the opening lines, *χωρὶς γυναικὸς θεὸς ἐποίησεν νόον τὰ πρῶτα*, “The god made the female mind separately in the beginning” (7.1-2),<sup>37</sup> Semonides fashions his poem as the beginning of a creation myth. Moreover, in the poem’s summation, Semonides takes a similarly negative stance towards the race of women, just as does Hesiod in his verses: *Ζεὺς γὰρ μέγιστον τοῦτ’ ἐποίησεν κακόν, γυναῖκας*, “for Zeus created this greatest plague: women” (7.96-97). But the myth of woman’s creation presented by Semonides is not the same as either of Hesiod’s versions of the Pandora story.<sup>38</sup> Semonides’ poem does not appear to be based on any one known myth, but it does have an obvious congruence with beast fables, such as those of Aesop, which existed in Mediterranean cultures for thousands of years.<sup>39</sup> Semonides’ tale most closely resembles, in some narrative aspects, an Aesopic fable in which Prometheus created too many animals and did not have enough material left for humans; so he was forced to change some animals into men, and as a result, there are some men who have human bodies but bestial souls.<sup>40</sup> This tale might have been known to Semonides, and it is possible that he adapted it so as to make women the ones with the animal souls instead of

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<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of potential Hesiodic influence on Semonides, see Lloyd-Jones 1975: 18 and Loraux 1993: 72-94.

<sup>37</sup> The text used for Semonides is Campbell 1967. All translations of Semonides are my own.

<sup>38</sup> Lloyd-Jones 1975: 20 compares the ideologies of Hesiod and Semonides.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the fables of Aesop, see Lloyd-Jones 1975: 21.

<sup>40</sup> Aesop 515 (= 240 Perry).

men. Of course, the poem does not need to be based on any attested earlier myth; it could very well have been Semonides' own comedic parody of the creation myth style.

In addition to using different storylines, Hesiod and Semonides were writing very different genres. Hesiod's mythological account of the creation of the heavens and the gods is meant to be taken, if not literally, than at least seriously; whereas Semonides' genre of iambic poetry has a more playful purpose. The word ἴαμβος was used by ancient authors to refer to a certain type of poem, but the specific criteria for what constitutes ἴαμβος is difficult to pin down.<sup>41</sup> The genre seems to be best known for what Martin West (1974) describes as "its notoriously abusive character," though there are poems in iambic meter that do not fit this stereotype.<sup>42</sup> The notion of ἴαμβος as insulting speech seems to have begun with Aristotle, who saw a close connection between *iamboi* and droll reviling.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, iambic poetry has been associated with many types of abusive utterance, to the extent that the genre of ἴαμβος is often defined as "invective verse."<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the clearest examples of this genre are the iambic trimeters and tetrameters of Archilochus (*ca.* 680 – 640),<sup>45</sup> who produced one of the best known examples of invective in an erotic context. After being spurned by his betrothed, Neoboule, Archilochus uses his iambic verses to attack her chastity, which is a charge Semonides repeatedly invokes against the female figures in his fragment 7.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> On the difficulties of defining ἴαμβος, see West 1974: 22.

<sup>42</sup> West 1974: 22. For more on various authors whose work is sometimes classified as "iambic," see West 1974: 22-24.

<sup>43</sup> *Poetics* 1448b24-1449a5. For Aristotle's discussion of iambus, see Bowie 2002: 5.

<sup>44</sup> For the definition, see Rotstein 2010: 281.

<sup>45</sup> Campbell 1967: 137.

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion on similarities between Archilochus and Semonides and their use of invective, see Carey 2009: 160-162. On Archilochus' invective against Neoboule and the tradition of iambic poetry, see Carey 1986.

Hugh Lloyd-Jones (1975) holds the view that fragment 7 is not meant to be taken with the same level of severity as Hesiod's narratives of Pandora.<sup>47</sup> In his important work on the poem, he states: "We should be wary of taking it for granted that it represents the writer's personal attitude, or that it is intended as a serious study of the subject."<sup>48</sup> He argues further against the tendency to view this poem judgmentally:

Any unbiased reader will admit that on the whole the types of women that Semonides describes have enough verisimilitude to be amusing; and if their qualities did not correspond with those of the animals in question, the point of the joke would vanish. We shall understand and enjoy the poem best if we approach it not as a metaphysical or sociological treatise, but as a work of art of its particular kind intended to give entertainment.<sup>49</sup>

Lloyd-Jones is correct in his assessment that it is necessary to take the typical characteristics of a particular genre into consideration before judging it. However, the fact that the genre of iambic poetry is known for harsh criticism – often for the sake of comedy – does not make this poem any less relevant in our re-examination of it as a notoriously "misogynistic" text. Indeed, in the various scholarly interpretations of this text, the humorous intent behind the poem has not acquitted it of the accusation of "misogyny." Thus, I agree with Lloyd-Jones that the poem is meant to be humorous and should not necessarily be taken as the author's own personal, serious view towards women. However, since satire and parodic humor in general are only amusing and entertaining because they are based on at least some kernel of perceived truth, the poem is even more relevant to this examination. For Semonides' audience to find this poem "funny," they would have had to attribute some validity to it (on some level at least). As Karen Bassi (1999) notes: "Comic hyperbole does not negate the significance of the

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<sup>47</sup> See Lloyd-Jones 1975: 26 on the relative "seriousness" of Hesiod.

<sup>48</sup> Lloyd-Jones 1975: 23-24.

<sup>49</sup> Lloyd-Jones 1975: 30.

belief or practice subjected to exaggeration or ridicule; if anything, it proves the audience's familiarity with the nonhyperbolic form of the belief or practice being scrutinized in the comic performance."<sup>50</sup> Therefore, we must assume that Semonides and his audience of mainly elite Greek males at the symposium<sup>51</sup> took pleasure in this poem because it reaffirmed sentiments that already existed in their minds to some degree.

The descriptions of different "types" of women in Semonides' poem essentially encompass all the stereotypically unfavorable qualities females can possess. For example, one talks too much (the dog woman, 7.14-20), another is erratic and changeable (the sea woman, 7.27-42), and another spends too much time and effort on her appearance (the horse woman, 7.57-70). However, there are two specific negative qualities that are repeated, and thereby emphasized, in the descriptions of several of the women in the poem. The first negative quality is familiar to us after having examined Hesiod's texts: that is, stealing and consuming a man's resources. The second negative quality, which is not as explicit in Hesiod's verse, is the trait of uncontrolled sexuality. Marilyn Skinner (2005) notes that the inability to control one's appetites was looked down upon in ancient Greek culture.<sup>52</sup> Overindulgence in any pleasure, according to Skinner, be it food, sleep, or sex, was not just a personal character flaw, but a danger to a man's household and by extension to the entire state:

Competence to supervise the private economy of an *oikos*, to deliberate prudently on affairs of state, to manage public business, and to conduct oneself bravely on the battlefield depended upon self-mastery, *enkrateia*. The man properly in control of himself did not wholly abstain from bodily pleasures, which served as practical tests of his resolve. Instead, through meticulous training in virtue

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<sup>50</sup> Bassi 1999: 107.

<sup>51</sup> For more on the guests and setting of Greek symposia, see Battezzato 2009: 135.

<sup>52</sup> On ancient Greek attitudes towards sexuality and the moderation of pleasures, see Skinner 2005: 14-15.

beginning in boyhood, he had become skilled in using pleasure wisely, never allowing desire, however keen, to overcome rational judgment.<sup>53</sup>

Skinner refers to self-indulgence specifically in men. However, women are also susceptible to the same pleasures, though with women the risks are different. When women engage in these “vices,” it proves to be a great risk to her husband: namely, her propensity for self-indulgence makes him vulnerable to poverty (through her excessive appetite for food), and to the numerous indignities that arise from the complications of infidelity (through her excessive appetite for sex). Thus a great deal of “gyno-anxiety” in ancient Greek culture, and that which specifically finds its way into Semonides’ poem, stems from a woman’s appetites and her (in)ability to control them.

An example of the first negative aspect, squandering a man’s property, comes early in the poem and occurs in Semonides’ description of the sow-woman: τὴν μὲν ἔξ ὕδς ταντύτριχος, τῆ πάντ' ἀν' οἶκον βορβόρω πεφυρμένα ἄκοσμα κείται καὶ κυλίνδεται χαμαί· αὐτὴ δ' ἄλουτος ἀπλύτοις ἐν εἵμασιν ἐν κοπρῆσιν ἡμένῃ παίνεται, “One he made from the bristly sow: everything in her house lies about disorderly, having been mixed with filth, and rolls about her floor, and she, unwashed, in dirty clothes sitting upon the dung heap, becomes fat” (7.2-6). The sow-woman is (as pigs are often described) extremely filthy. This is a fault not only because dirt is disgusting and unhygienic, but because it implies the sow-woman is not doing her wifely duties – in this case, keeping the house clean. The fact that she simply lies around getting fat indicates that she is consuming the man’s hard-earned goods and does nothing in return. Another example of resource squandering occurs in the description of the earth-woman, whom Semonides describes as completely useless: ἔργων δὲ μόνον ἐσθίειν

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<sup>53</sup> Skinner 2005: 14.

ἐπίσταται, “the only task she knows how to do is to eat” (7.24). Like the sow-woman, the earth-woman is a drain on the man’s resources, consuming all of his food but doing nothing in return to earn her keep in the household.

Another iteration of the fault of resource squandering comes when Semonides introduces the donkey-woman, who, unlike the sow-woman and the earth-woman, does sufficient work (7.43-49), but still consumes too much. Note that the description of the donkey-woman also offers the first instance of the trope of uncontrolled sexuality: τόφρα δ' ἐσθίει μὲν ἐν μυχώ προνούξ, προήμαρ, εσθίει δ' ἐπ' ἐσχάρη. ὁμῶς δὲ καὶ πρὸς ἔργον ἀφροδίσιον ἐλθόντ' ἑταίρον ὄντινῶν ἐδέξατο, “She eats in the innermost part of the house all night and day and she eats beside the hearth; similarly, in lovemaking, she also welcomes whoever comes as her companion” (7.46-49). Although the donkey-woman makes some contribution to the household, it does not make up for her incessant eating. Moreover, she is sexually promiscuous, willing to engage in sex with any man who comes to her, accepting lovers as easily as she accepts the chores she is ordered to perform; this egregious flaw cancels out any praise she might receive for doing at least some housework. Thus, with the donkey-woman, a new danger is introduced in Semonides’ poem, one that is potential in all women: namely, sexual infidelity.

The trope of uncontrolled sexuality is brought to the fore with the weasel-woman, who is the epitome of the overly sexual female: κείνη γὰρ οὐ τι καλὸν οὐδ' ἐπίμερον πρόσεστιν οὐδὲ τερπνὸν οὐδ' ἐράσιμον. εὐνής δ' ἀληνής<sup>54</sup> ἐστὶν ἀφροδισίης, τὸν δ' ἄνδρα τὸν παρεόντα ναυσίη διδοί, “There is nothing beautiful or charming about her, nothing pleasant or lovely. She is crazy for lovemaking, but any man who is present

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<sup>54</sup> I read ἀληνής “crazy” with Campbell against West’s (1992) conjectural reading ἀδηνής “ignorant.”



she delivers to sickness” (7.51-54). In this example, the weasel-woman’s uncontrolled sexual appetite is presented as a major flaw, and although she is described as being distinctly unattractive, remarkably this does not seem to prevent her from finding extramarital sexual partners. So, while beauty was attributed to Hesiod’s Pandora as an explanation for why the “evil thing” would be alluring, in Semonides’ imagination, beauty and sexuality are not necessarily connected. As noted above, Archilochus also uses the charge of sexual promiscuity as part of his reproach when he attacks the chastity of Neoboule in his poetry. Here Semonides employs a broader sense of male “gyno-anxiety,” not directed against a particular woman in a specific situation, but rather, against women as a whole as the basis for his castigation.<sup>55</sup>

Sexual promiscuity is typically undesirable as a wifely trait in most cultures, both ancient and modern; thus Semonides does not need to explain why he lists this as a negative quality. We must keep in mind, however, as we examine the text from the perspective of “gyno-anxiety,” what specific threats a sexually promiscuous wife poses to her husband. It is possible that her promiscuity will bring the legitimacy of his children into question; it is possible that it will be a social embarrassment for him; it is possible that his wife’s lover will become a rival and that she and her lover might conspire against (and even kill) him, as the notorious Clytemnestra did with the help of Aegisthus.<sup>56</sup> While none of these possibilities is explicitly expressed in Semonides’ poem, anxiety about these potential outcomes is manifest in the poem’s judgmental tone. This sort of sexual behavior is condemned and here mocked, because ultimately it something to be feared.

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<sup>55</sup> For a comparison of Archilochus’ and Semonides’ invective specifically against women, see Carey 2009: 160-161.

<sup>56</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* IV. 518-535; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1343-1425.

As is readily apparent in the description of the weasel-woman, beauty in Semonides is not necessarily connected with sexuality or erotic manipulation; yet this does not mean that a woman's beauty, and the costs it entails, is not harmful to her husband. This becomes clear in the example of the horse-woman, who, although she is beautiful to look at (7.67-68), does not do any work for the household (7.58-60). This woman's flaw is that she impoverishes her husband: ἀνάγκη δ' ἄνδρα ποιείται φίλον, "She makes her husband dear to Necessity" (7.62). Because of her constant and expensive primping, and her lack of interest in housework, the horse-woman is a drain on her husband's household, just as the other types of women who eat constantly. As Semonides describes her: καλὸν μὲν ὦν θέημα τοιαύτη γυνή ἄλλοισι, τῷ δ' ἔχοντι γίγνεται κακόν, "Such a woman is indeed a beautiful sight to others, but for him who holds her she is an evil thing" (7.67-68). In fact, the horse-woman is such a strain on the resources of the household that only an extremely rich man such as a tyrant or a king can take pleasure in having her as a wife (7.69-70); this man would have to be wealthy enough to afford to buy numerous slaves to manage the house while his wife focuses on her appearance, and who also can pay the costs of her "upkeep." Just like Hesiod's drones, the horse-woman consumes the labor of others while contributing nothing to the household.

Semonides names only one type of woman who can be considered to be without blame: the virtuous and hard-working bee-woman (7.83-93). This bee-woman is the exact opposite of Hesiod's drone-Pandora.<sup>57</sup> Whereas Hesiod compares Pandora to a useless drone who sits in the hive and consumes the work of the other bees (*Theog.* 595-600),

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<sup>57</sup> Zeitlin 1993: 69.

Semonides' bee-woman is herself one of the worker-bees. Semonides praises her unstintingly: *κείνη γὰρ οἴη μῶμος οὐ προσιζάνει δ' ὑπ' αὐτῆς κάπαέξεται βίος*, "For on her alone no blame sits. Under her (care) his livelihood prospers" (7.84-85).<sup>58</sup> Not only does the bee-woman not deplete her husband's wealth, she in fact adds to it, thereby eliminating the male anxiety about a woman consuming his livelihood. In addition, she is far from being sexually promiscuous: *οὐδ' ἐν γυναιξίν ἦδεταί καθημένῃ ὄκου λέγουσιν ἀφροδισίους λόγους*, "She does not enjoy sitting among women where they tell stories about love-making" (7.90-91). One of the bee-woman's most laudable traits is that she is not excessively sexual. This does not mean that she is celibate, for that would not be proper for a good wife. Her sexuality, however, is safely confined within the limitations of conjugal intercourse and motherhood. She must engage in sex with her husband in order to give him legitimate children, but her sexuality stops at the edge of the marital bed.

Furthermore, the bee-woman does not even like to talk about sex with other women. This detail is especially significant, for why would simply talking about sex with other women be a threat to her husband? D. M. O'Higgins (2001) argues that Semonides' praise of the bee-woman in this particular instance of sexualized speech "evoke[s] contradiction in women's roles."<sup>59</sup> The specific "contradiction" she cites is the Thesmophoria, the festival held in honor of Demeter, where women were thought to engage in *aischrologia*, that is, abusive language often of a sexual nature.<sup>60</sup> However, in contrast to O'Higgins, I would argue that the *aphrodisioi logoi* to which Semonides is referring to in his poem (7.90-91) are not connected to the cultic *aischrologia* of the

<sup>58</sup> See Loraux 1993: 102-110 on the description of the bee-woman as unrealistic.

<sup>59</sup> O'Higgins 2001: 148.

<sup>60</sup> For more on the Thesmophoria and its connection to iambus, see O'Higgins 2001: 148-149.

Thesmophoria, since such *aischrologia* would have most likely taken the form of targeted obscenities and verbal abuse in a public context, rather than a more general, and no doubt more private, conversation about sex.<sup>61</sup> This, then, leaves us with the question: why would speech of a sexual nature be accepted and even encouraged in the context of a religious festival (*aischrologia*), but be condemned when confined to an everyday conversation among a group of females (*aphrodisioi logoi*)?

Lloyd-Jones (1975) addresses the question of sexualized speech among females: “This picture of what went on among women when they are alone recalls assertions in comedy that the older women corrupted the younger ones . . . women were often left in the company of women slaves, who are imagined in literature as being like the nurse in the *Hippolytus*.”<sup>62</sup> The male anxiety about female speech to which Lloyd-Jones refers is apparent; however, I would suggest that there is deeper significance to Semonides’ description of the bee-woman’s avoidance of such sexualized talk. The likelihood that mere conversation among women on the topic of sexuality would lead to attempted incest and murder/suicide, as in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, is perhaps an exaggeration of a more plausible fear that has been emphasized and made more dramatic for the stage; though surely it represents more pragmatic concerns. As Skinner (2005) notes: “Confidential information about sexual techniques was reputedly the sort of thing women shared among themselves.”<sup>63</sup> Since knowledge is power, the sharing of sexual information among women could lead to a wife’s sexual control over her husband: this power could manifest in several ways that would threaten the man in question. First, a previously naïve woman

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<sup>61</sup> On *aischrologia* and targeted invective during women’s rituals in honor of Demeter, see McClure 1999: 47-53 with bibliography. Note especially McClure’s analysis of *χλεύη* and *σκόπτω* at *Hymn to Demeter* 202-203 as “pointed insults directed at another person” (McClure 1999: 49).

<sup>62</sup> Lloyd-Jones 1975: 86.

<sup>63</sup> Skinner 2005: 54.

could come to realize her sexual dominance over her husband and perhaps learn how to manipulate him; an extreme example of this is the main comic plot of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, where the women of Athens stage a sex-strike in order to control their men. Second, by hearing what other women say about their husbands and perhaps comparing them to her own marriage, she might conclude that her husband is not as good as the others or that there might be another man whom she would prefer. Third, just as the lovesick Phaedra is urged on to adultery by her Nurse in the *Hippolytus*, a woman might be supported or encouraged by her female peers (though not to such an extreme degree) to pursue or entertain the idea of an extramarital relationship. Thus, the sharing of sexual knowledge among women poses a threat to the man in that his wife might use this information to become an active sexual agent. This calls to mind Hesiod's instructions to his brother to choose a wife who is young and virginal: such a bride would thus be "uncorrupted" or at least "unaware" of her sexuality and of the mischief she can cause by offering it to, or withholding it from, various potential partners. The bee-woman is ideal because she does not even *want* to know about these sexual matters, and therefore gives her husband little to fear.

Though the bee-woman seems to be the one and only redeeming paradigm of the entire race of females described by Semonides, even she may not be as innocent as she seems. In fact, O'Higgins (2001) interprets the description of the bee-woman to be more foreboding than laudatory. The last lines of the bee-woman's description read: *τοίας γυναίκας ἀνδράσιν χαρίζεται Ζεὺς τὰς ἀρίστας καὶ πολυφραδεστάτας*, "Such women are said (to be) the best and most eloquent which Zeus (bestowed) upon men" (7.92-93). O'Higgins focuses on the implication of the bee-woman's final epithet,

πολυφραδής, a word which can mean “very eloquent or wise” or “much talked about”: this adjective is used in Hesiod’s *Theogony* to describe the deceptive words Gaia uses when she tricks her husband, Ouranos (*Theog.* 494). As O’Higgins argues: “Indeed, the poem concluded with a powerful warning: the wife who seems most impeccable is destined to betray her husband.”<sup>64</sup> Because this word πολυφραδής has a literary precedent of describing a scheming wife, it is worth considering this reading here. Curiously, women of the bee type are described as the best “ἀρίστας” (7.93) of all women Zeus has created; yet up to this point, Semonides’ poem has claimed that all women are not good at all, so why boast that bee-women are the “best”? Could ἀρίστας here simply mean the “prime example” of the qualities that women have embodied in the poem up to this point? If so, then this would mean that the bee-woman is most dangerous of all; and with this reading of the text comes yet another level of “gyno-anxiety.” All of the women leading up to the bee-woman have been explicitly condemned for their flaws: their dangerous behaviors have been identified and condemned, and thus steps can be taken against these potential hazards. However, any threats posed by the bee-woman are not yet manifest, and may lay hidden: thus she inspires an even greater fear, because her potential flaws can take any form and so cannot be guarded against. The bee-woman is the most dangerous because she represents the underlying potential of the καλὸν κακὸν, the “beautiful evil,” precisely as Pandora appeared to Epimetheus before he realized his folly. Just as there is a natural instinct to be wary of what seems “too good to be true,” the bee-woman embodies the male “gyno-anxiety” that even a seemingly perfect wife might be treacherous underneath her shiny exterior. In this sense, she is a greater threat than a

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<sup>64</sup> O’Higgins 2001: 146-147.

woman whose faults are known to her husband, because an unsuspecting husband, thinking he possess the perfect wife, trusts her and takes no precautions to protect himself or his household.

The last lines of the poem offer a more austere tone than the majority of the poem that precedes: Ζεὺς γὰρ μέγιστον τοῦτ' ἐποίησεν κακὸν καὶ δεσμὸν ἀμφέθηκεν ἄρρηκτον πέδης, ἐξ οὗ τε τοὺς μὲν Ἄϊδης ἐδέξατο γυναικὸς εἴνεκ' ἀμφιδηριωμένους, “Zeus created this greatest evil, and he has bound them (to us) with unbreakable chains, ever since Hades received those who fought a war for a woman’s sake” (7. 115-118). These final lines take us back to the creation myth theme of the poem’s beginning; and in this closing passage, with its epic resonances, Semonides hints at an etiological explanation for why such a plague was bestowed upon mankind. Yet humans are not being punished for a theft of fire; and while there is a *femme fatale* figure, it is not Pandora: rather, it is Helen. David Campbell (1967) remarks that the final word, ἀμφιδηριωμένους, “fighting over” (7.118), “makes an impressive ending.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed, with this one word, attested only here, Semonides sums up the entire etiology of the existence of women. Semonides uses this allusive statement to suggest that mankind was doomed to be eternally bound to the female race as punishment for the Trojan War, the war fought for a woman’s sake. Thus, as Semonides sums up his version of the myth, Helen assumes the role of the Pandora figure, the Ur-female. Like Pandora, Helen is, in a sense, both the cause of punishment and the punishment itself. The idea of a war fought for the sake of a woman carries with it a great deal of judgment for Semonides, a judgment sprung from the resentment of male dependence on women and the power

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<sup>65</sup> Campbell 1967: 191.

women have the potential to wield. Semonides uses the Trojan War here as a circular example of both mankind's fall from grace and the divine punishment given in retribution, both of which revolve around man's hateful dependence on a woman.

Thus, Semonides presents his audience with a quasi-humorous example of invective iambic poetry, and at the same time offers a great deal of insight into archaic Greek culture's "gyno-anxiety." The poem reflects both the recognition that women are essential, as well as the resentment that comes as a direct result of that realization.<sup>66</sup> Just as Archilochus attacked Neoboule in his verses, traditionally explained as an act of revenge for losing her as his bride, Semonides' fragment 7 can also be read as an act of revenge, not towards a particular woman for a specific slight, rather against the race of women as a whole, one motivated by male anxiety and resentment over male dependency on women.

In *Splitting the Difference*, Wendy Doniger (1999) claims: "Myths derive a great deal of their power and endurance from their ability to express a deeply troubling paradox that everyone in the community shares and no one can solve."<sup>67</sup> In the works of both Hesiod and Semonides, we see a mythology concerning the creation of woman that attempts to account for the purpose behind their existence and of man's dependency on them. As Doniger argues further: "Telling a myth, even to just one other person, gives a kind of comfort: we are all in this together."<sup>68</sup> By attempting to account for the ontology of woman, this dangerous yet alluring Other, and in exploring and weighing all of her potential threats and pleasures, both Hesiod and Semonides participate in this process of coming to terms with a natural and unpleasant reality of the world around them: namely,

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<sup>66</sup> For some other possible motivations that lie behind fragment 7, see Carey 2009: 162.

<sup>67</sup> Doniger 1999: 5.

<sup>68</sup> Donniger 1999: 6.



the ambivalence of the female as the “beautiful evil,” and the concomitant male anxiety about her.

Though examples of different archaic Greek genres, the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* of Hesiod and Semonides’ fragment 7 evince certain similarities in their representations of women in a creation story. Both texts present an etiological myth that accounts for the “evil” nature of women, and as a result both texts have come under criticism by modern scholars. However, by examining these texts, their various images and tropes, and the motivation behind these harsh sentiments, there emerges a more complex explanation than simply the “tradition of Greek misogyny.” What is evident in the texts of Hesiod and Semonides is an expression of “gyno-anxiety” specifically responsive to those dangerous attributes of women that could harm a man; the injury she is capable of inflicting manifests itself in these texts mostly in terms of financial or economic damage, but there are suggestions of other vulnerabilities as well, in terms of a man’s sexual security or personal reputation. This chapter has examined these important archaic Greek texts in order to unpack the tones, images, and themes that have so often been labeled “misogynistic,” and argued that the concept of “gyno-anxiety” is a more constructive, and perhaps more accurate, way to describe them.

## Chapter Two

### Tragic “Gyno-Anxiety”: The Exaggerated Threat of the Female on the Athenian Stage

The female protagonists of fifth-century Athenian drama have captivated and terrified audiences and readers for centuries with their capacity to arouse both sympathy and abhorrence. These complex figures have been viewed as both the epitome of the “bad woman” and proto-feminist symbols. Regardless of interpretation, it is sufficient to say that the Athenian tragedians have presented us with powerful and provocative characters. Much scholarly ink has been spilled on the intense domestic and political issues often represented in Attic tragedy, while many scholars have focused on the important role of female characters in representing these issues. As Barbara Goff remarks:

The fifth-century tragic stage is the site of the enacted transgression and disruption of many of its society’s explicit norms and expectations. The tragedies constitute a relentless display of the dislocation and destruction of individual, *oikos* and even on occasion *polis*, together with the modes of thought that sustain them. This celebration of disaster often gives prominence to eros as a disruptive motive force, and specifically to the female as the incarnation of asociality.<sup>69</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, the archaic texts of Hesiod and Semonides express “gyno-anxiety” in a subtle and potential way. That is to say, these texts focus on the not-yet-realized threat represented by the female; there the focus is predominantly on the beguiling nature of the female and her ability to coerce the male and rob him or consume his household goods. A brief introduction to the possibility of female infidelity occurs in Semonides fragment 7, though the dangers are not explicitly mentioned. In general, both

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<sup>69</sup> Goff 1990: 29.

authors' texts can be interpreted as ontological explanations for the existence and nature of women.

Moving from the latent potential to the dramatized extreme, this chapter will examine how gyno-anxiety appears within the genre of Attic tragedy, how it foregrounds the female as the agent of the destruction, and how this builds on the trope of archaic gyno-anxiety. By analyzing aspects of four different plays – Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, and Euripides' *Medea* and *Hippolytus* – this chapter will explore the violent threat a wife presents to her husband, his children, his household, and even the state. My analysis will attempt to demonstrate how the potential threats of the female, which were presented implicitly in the archaic poems, become realized and exaggerated in these texts, where they are taken past the point of real-life women and onto the plane of hyper-gyno-anxiety, and present us with larger-than-life figures that embody some of the worst female attributes.

The four heroines (or perhaps villainesses) of these plays – Clytemnestra, Deianeira, Phaedra, and Medea, respectively – share certain evident characteristics; for example, they all prove to be detrimental to their husbands' households as a result of unchecked sexuality. What separates them from each other, however, is their intention. Deianeira and Phaedra are aware of their wifely duties, as well as societal expectations, and have no purposeful aim (at least at first) to harm the household, yet they end up doing so nonetheless. Medea and Clytemnestra, on the other hand, are both aware of what Greek society expects of them as women and wives, yet they openly defy it with masculine gusto and ambition.

## Methodology

I shall examine these tragic wives separated into pairs based on their shared traits and characteristics. Each set of characteristics embodied by these dramatic figures, I argue, represents different anxieties about women. Because Clytemnestra and Medea are the most notorious among the dangerous women in tragedy, I have chosen to begin with them. These two figures have many traits in common, including a complete rejection of societal expectations, a proclivity towards violence, and masculine ambition. Indeed, these two characters are so similar that one must consider the possibility that Euripides' *Medea*, written around 431 BCE,<sup>70</sup> was influenced by Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, which was produced almost thirty years earlier around 458 BCE.<sup>71</sup> The section that discusses Medea and Clytemnestra is entitled "Wives Usurping Masculine Power." Because the execution of these two characters' actions and the motivations behind them are readily expressed in the open, an in-depth analysis of Clytemnestra and Medea in the first section will highlight the covert and complex threats posed by Deianeira and Phaedra as explored in the second section.

The examination of this second type of tragic wife will occur under the section "Wifely Devotion Gone Wrong." I have grouped Deianeira and Phaedra together in this section on account of their demonstration of more appropriately (to the ancient Greek mind) "feminine" qualities, such as their intense concern for reputation and *oikos*, their sympathetic natures, ambiguous intentions, and also their resolutions to commit suicide. These two characters also share many similar traits; this may or may not be a result of

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<sup>70</sup> See Mastronarde 2002: 4-8 for the dates of the extant plays of Euripides and the possibility of Aeschylean influence on Euripides' *Medea*.

<sup>71</sup> For a discussion on the possible dating of the *Oresteia*, see Denniston 1957: ix-xii and Mastronarde 2002: 8.

inter-authorial influence. While the dating of the *Trachiniae* is notoriously difficult, most scholars agree that the play was produced sometime between 457 and 430 BCE.<sup>72</sup>

Euripides' second version of the *Hippolytus* was produced around 428 BCE, therefore it is chronologically *possible* that Euripides' creation of Phaedra was influenced by Sophocles' *Deianeira*, however this does not mean that it is *likely*. While some scholars have noted the similar style of Euripides and Sophocles in the *Trachiniae*, P. E.

Easterling, in her commentary on the *Trachiniae* (1982) states: "The only close verbal links that have been found between the *Trachiniae* and the plays of Euripides are of a kind too trivial to be significant."<sup>73</sup> The similar characteristics of *Deianeira* and *Phaedra* may result, therefore, not only from Sophoclean influence on Euripides, but also could simply be explained by the conventions of the genre of tragedy.

By examining the representations of these four tragic wives – looking at the undeniably bad wives, and the seemingly good wives – I shall explore the different forms in which gyno-anxiety appears on stage and the transition from latent potential to exaggerated extreme which the expression of gyno-anxiety undergoes from the archaic poets to the fifth-century stage.

### **Wives Usurping Masculine Power**

Clytemnestra and Medea are perhaps the two most notorious female characters in Greek drama. Refusing to abide by the prescribed social norms and expectations of society, they unapologetically take revenge on those whom they believe have wronged them and are not afraid to pursue their own ambitions actively. They are only successful in their endeavors, however, because they are able to feign proper wifely behavior and

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<sup>72</sup> See Easterling 1982: 19-24 for a discussion on the date of the *Trachiniae*.

<sup>73</sup> Easterling 1982: 22-23.

conceal their true dissident nature. This ability to counterfeit devotion and propriety also corresponds to the male anxiety that a woman might not be what she seems. By adopting the façade of a proper wife, Clytemnestra and Medea are able to lure their husbands into situations in which they are extremely vulnerable.

In the first part of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra presents herself as a typical soldier's wife who is deeply concerned for her absent husband's wellbeing, as she eagerly anticipates his return:

ὅπως δ' ἄριστα τὸν ἐμὸν αἰδοῖον πόσιν  
 σπεύσω πάλιν μολόντα δέξασθαι· τί γὰρ  
 γυναικὶ τούτου φέγγος ἡδίων δρακεῖν,  
 ἀπὸ στρατείας ἀνδρὶ σώσαντος θεοῦ  
 πύλας ἀνοιξαί; ταῦτ' ἀπάγγελον πόσει·  
 ἦκειν ὅπως τάχιστ' ἐράσμιον πόλει  
 γυναῖκα πιστὴν δ' ἐν δόμοις εὔροιο μολῶν  
 οἶαν περ οὖν ἔλειπε, δωμάτων κύνα  
 ἐσθλὴν ἐκείνῳ, πολεμίαν τοῖς δύσφροσιν,  
 καὶ τᾶλλ' ὁμοίαν πάντα, σημαντήριον  
 οὐδὲν διαφθείρασαν ἐν μήκει χρόνου.  
 οὐδ' οἶδα τέρψιν οὐδ' ἐπίψογον φάτιν  
 ἄλλου πρὸς ἀνδρὸς μᾶλλον ἢ χαλκοῦ βαφάς.

But I will strive to be best at welcoming back  
 my revered husband upon his return. For what  
 splendor looks sweeter to a woman than this,  
 to open the gates for her husband after the god has saved him from war?  
 Report this to my husband:

He, beloved to his country, should come as quickly as possible.  
 He will find his trustworthy wife in the house when coming,  
 just as he left her, a guard-dog of his house,  
 faithful to him, an enemy to those who wish him harm,  
 and ever unchanged in all other respects,  
 never having broken any seal for all this time.  
 I know neither the pleasure of another man  
 Nor blameworthy rumor any more than I know a bronze edge.

(*Agamemnon* 600-612)<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> The Greek text of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is from the Oxford edition in Denniston and Page's 1957 commentary. All translations are my own.

In these lines, Clytemnestra boasts of her love for and loyalty to her husband and his household. She makes a point of refuting every allegation with which the audience, familiar with the story, would charge her.<sup>75</sup> She claims to be πιστήν “trustworthy” (606), ἐσθλήν “faithful” (608), and πολεμίαν τοῖς δύσφροσιν “an enemy to those who wish him harm” (608). The audience knows this to be false: she has been engaging in an adulterous affair with a man with whom she intends to murder Agamemnon and usurp the household. Her last lines, οὐδ’ οἶδα τέρψιν οὐδ’ ἐπίψογον φάτιν ἄλλου πρὸς ἄνδρὸς μάλλον ἢ χαλκοῦ βαφάς, “I know neither the pleasure of another man nor blameworthy rumor any more than I know a bronze edge” (611-612), are especially disturbing because they, unlike the rest of her speech, are true. The irony, however, is that Clytemnestra, relatively free from suspicion, may speak them without fear that the other characters onstage will comprehend their true meaning. Clytemnestra has concealed her hatred of Agamemnon from the rest of the household, and as a result, the unsuspecting servants understand her words to mean that the possibility of their mistress having an extramarital affair is as absurd a notion as a woman being skilled with a sword: this would be true for any proper Greek wife. There is pointed dramatic irony that Clytemnestra will soon display she is not, in fact, ignorant of weaponry or adultery when she kills Agamemnon with the help of her lover.

Although Clytemnestra’s lies may be glaringly obvious to the audience, she is not suspected by the other characters in the play. For example, the Herald arriving from Agamemnon’s entourage states without guile: τοῖόςδ’ ὁ κόμπος τῆς ἀληθείας γέμων οὐκ αἰσχρὸς ὡς γυναικὶ γενναίᾳ λακεῖν, “This sort of boast, full of truth, is not

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<sup>75</sup> For a further explanation of the connection between Clytemnestra’s speech as an obedient and loyal wife and her duplicitous nature, see McClure 1999: 76.

shameful for a noble wife to shout” (613-614). The words, ὁ κόμπος τῆς ἀληθείας γέμων “the boast full of truth” (613), signify the extreme skill with which Clytemnestra has been playing the role of a traditional wife. Her effortless perjury makes her exceedingly dangerous, since nothing can be done to protect against her scheme if it is not suspected.

Unlike Clytemnestra, who seems able to hide her murderous rage flawlessly until the opportune moment, Medea initially makes no attempt to conceal her anger, and as a result her deadly intent is readily apparent to those around her. In the opening speech of the play, Medea’s Nurse expresses concern for her mistress’s rage and misery:

δέδοικα δ’ αὐτὴν μή τι βουλεύσῃ νέον·  
βαρεῖα γὰρ φρήν, οὐδ’ ἀνέξεται κακῶς  
πάσχουσ’ (ἐγὼ δὲ τήνδε) δειμαίνω τέ νιν  
μὴ θηκτὸν ὥσῃ φάσγανον δι’ ἥπατος  
σιγῇ δόμους εἰσβάσ’, ἵν’ ἔστρωται λέχος,  
ἢ καὶ τυράννους τόν τε γήμαντα κτάνη  
κάπειτα μείζω συμφορὰν λάβῃ τινά.

I fear that she may be plotting some evil<sup>76</sup> thing;  
for her emotions are heavy to bear, and she will not suffer  
being treated badly (I know this) I am afraid that she  
will thrust a sharpened sword through her liver,  
walking in silence into the house where the marriage bed is spread,  
or that she will kill the royal family and the groom  
and then undertake some greater misfortune.

(*Medea* 37-43)<sup>77</sup>

Here Euripides, through the speech of Medea’s Nurse, subtly makes reference to the two main literary conventions in the narratives of erotically scorned women. These lines imply that there are only two paths for the jilted Medea to take, and therefore she will follow one of two models: the woman who commits suicide, or the woman who murders

<sup>76</sup> See Mastronarde 2002: 171 and LSJ s.v. II. 2 for the negative connotation of νέον in this context.

<sup>77</sup> The Greek text of Euripides’ *Medea* is from Mastronarde’s 2002 edition.



her rivals.<sup>78</sup> Because the idea of a woman choosing a sword as a means of suicide is quite rare in Attic tragedy, the Nurse's fear that Medea will stab herself on the marriage bed (39-41) is most likely a reference to Deianeira, as the only case of female suicide by sword in tragedy.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, her fear that Medea will kill the royal family (42) brings to mind Clytemnestra, who destroys the king (Agamemnon) as well as his royal consort and her sexual rival (Cassandra). As noted in the Introduction, in general, women in Greek literature tend to fall either under the "good" category, such as Penelope and Alcestis, or under the "bad" category, such as Helen and Clytemnestra. In these lines, Euripides seems to be further refining the "bad" group within the genre of tragedy. Namely, that a woman facing ruin will typically follow one of two paths: the self-destructive or the state-destructive. One of these, as the Nurse suggests, Medea is destined to fulfill. Euripides' acknowledgement of this trope serves an important function in that it heightens the effect of the play's climax and sets his play apart from the work of the other tragedians. By having the Nurse disclose the result of Medea's rage in the few lines of the play, it suggests that her behavior is expected and therefore, to some extent, normal; Euripides is conceding that this has been done before. By foregrounding this trope, Euripides emphasizes the originality and horror of his own addition to the myth: Medea as the murderer of her children.

In due course Medea realizes that, in order to be able to plan her revenge, she must stop her unchecked display of sadness and anger, and like Clytemnestra, adopt a façade of the proper wife. Although Jason eventually believes that Medea has had a true change of heart, her past ranting and bad reputation will make it difficult for Medea to

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<sup>78</sup> See Loraux 1987: 17 for a discussion of the masculine quality of suicide by sword vs. by hanging.

<sup>79</sup> On the various methods of female suicide in Greek tragedy and their implication for the interpretation of those plays, see Loraux 1987 and my discussion below.

overcome the suspicion of others. As she pleads for mercy from Creon and appeals to him as a fellow parent to spare her exile for the sake of her children, he is justifiably hesitant to trust her:

λέγεις ἀκούσαι μαλθακ', ἀλλ' ἔσω φρενῶν  
 ὀρθωδία μοι μή τι βουλεύσης κακόν,  
 τοσῶδε δ' ἦσσον ἢ πάρος πέποιθά σοι·  
 γυνή γὰρ ὀξύθυμος, ὡς δ' αὐτως ἀνήρ,  
 ῥάων φυλάσσειν ἢ σιωπηλὸς σοφή.

You speak words that sound weak, but there is a fear for me that in your mind you are plotting some evil thing, and so I trust you that much less than I did before. For a quick-tempered woman – just as a quick-tempered man – is easier to guard against than a clever woman who keeps her own counsel.<sup>80</sup>  
 (*Medea* 316-320)

Creon's lines here express an aspect of gyno-anxiety that is significant in the cases of both Medea and Clytemnestra: the fear of a woman's ability to deceive. Creon is well aware of Medea's past behavior and thus is extremely suspicious of her soft words (μαλθακά, 316). Unlike Clytemnestra's practically seamless performance as a proper wife, Medea's abrupt change in demeanor alerts Creon that this new attitude is likely a façade employed to achieve revenge, and of course he is correct. Creon observes that a person who is able to conceal his or her emotions is more difficult to guard against than someone who is blatantly hot-tempered. Women, being inferior to men in physical strength, must typically resort to secrecy and deceit in order to have a chance at destroying their enemies, and as a result, it is more difficult to defend oneself against their murderous intent. Thus, in the tragic heroines we see how the legacies of Pandora, "both a bitch's mind and a deceitful manner,"<sup>81</sup> become apparent and are actually put into

<sup>80</sup> I read Diggle's emendation of σοφός to the three-termination σοφή (320), which maintains agreement with γυνή.

<sup>81</sup> κύνεόν τε νόον καὶ ἐπίκλοπον ἦθος (*Works and Days* 61).

use. Whereas these endowments were latent in Pandora herself, their potential is explicitly realized in the scheming wives of tragedy.

Much has been written about the masculine rhetorical styles used by both Medea and Clytemnestra in their speeches and verbal interactions with other characters.<sup>82</sup> In this section, however, I intend to examine other masculine traits manifested by these two female characters and how this adds to their power and makes them objects of fear. While Medea and Clytemnestra possess deceitful feminine minds, they both have numerous and powerful masculine aspects to their characters: it is this combination of feminine ability and masculine power that makes them such formidable foes.

Neither Clytemnestra nor Medea shies away from using violent and militaristic imagery in her speech, and both are also compared to warriors by other characters as well. When Clytemnestra graciously welcomes Agamemnon home, she praises him and his military triumph, urging him not to be so modest about his conquest (931-939). In response, Agamemnon scolds her: οὔτοι γυναικός ἐστιν ἰμείρειν μάχης, “It is not for a woman to desire combat” (940). In this line, Agamemnon seems to be momentarily suspicious of Clytemnestra because her enthusiasm regarding martial glory suggests that she is not thinking in the modest way a Greek wife should. In her excitement, and no doubt anticipating the murder to come, Clytemnestra briefly allows her blood lust to become apparent; although Agamemnon takes note of her strange and inappropriate comment, he is not bothered enough by it to suspect her scheme.

After she kills Agamemnon, Cassandra remarks on Clytemnestra’s daring: τοιάδε τόλμα· θήλυς ἄρσενος φονεὺς ἔστιν, “Such over-boldness: a female is the murderer of

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<sup>82</sup> On the masculine speaking styles of Medea and Clytemnestra, see for example Foley 2001: 201-212 and McClure 1999: 70-111.

a male” (1231-1232). Cassandra’s statement is almost gnomic, and seems to transcend political law to natural law. Her words θήλυς and ἄρσιν (“female” and “male”) can describe not just humans but any animal, suggesting that a female killing a male is unheard of in any species and therefore goes against natural law. Cassandra also compares Clytemnestra to a warrior in battle when she kills Agamemnon:

ὥς δ’ ἐπωλολύξατο  
 ἢ παντότολμος, ὥσπερ ἐν μάχης τροπῇ,  
 δοκεῖ δὲ χαίρειν νοστίμῳ σωτηρίᾳ.

And how the all-contriving woman,  
 Just as in the turn of a battle, shouted in triumph,  
 While she seemed to rejoice in the safety of his homecoming!  
 (*Agamemnon* 1236-1239)

Here it becomes clear to the other characters in the play that Clytemnestra is in fact nothing at all like the loyal wife she was pretending to be earlier on. Instead of wishing harm upon his enemies as she claimed, she is in fact her husband’s enemy herself, much like the Trojan soldiers Agamemnon faced on the battlefield. However, she is not a male warrior, but rather a scheming woman, and herein lies the success of her plan. The ploy of luring Agamemnon into the bath, a place where he is most vulnerable and where only his wife might have access to him, gives her the opportunity to do what no Trojan soldier could. By ensnaring him with a net while he is most helpless and unsuspecting, she becomes more terrifying than any enemy soldier, because Agamemnon has no means of self-defense.

Medea also shows a fondness for warfare and violence. In her famous opening speech to the Chorus of Corinthian women, she states:

λέγουσι δ’ ἡμᾶς ὡς ἀκίνδυνον βίον  
 ζῶμεν κατ’ οἴκους, οἱ δὲ μάρονται δορί,  
 κακῶς φρονοῦντες· ὡς τρις ἂν παρ’ ἀσπίδα

στῆναι θέλοισι' ἄν μάλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ.

They say that we live a life free from danger  
at home while they fight with the spear,  
because they think foolishly. How I would rather stand  
three times with a shield than give birth once!

(*Medea* 248-251)

Since Medea states that she would prefer battle, man's work, to giving birth, the toil of a woman, she completely rejects the gender role which has been prescribed to her by Greek society. These lines signify the danger of a wife who has an interest in violence: it threatens the household on several levels. First, if a woman had the option to fight in a battle and thereby assume the role of a man, she would be leaving unfulfilled her wifely duty to bear children, a task a man is physically incapable of performing on his own. Second, a female affinity for violence presents a further threat in its lack of having an appropriate channel. Because a woman does not, in fact, have the opportunity to go off to war, a wife's inclination towards violence can have no productive outlet and the violence is therefore destined to be turned against the realm she governs, the household and its inhabitants. As a result, Medea disproves the male assumption that life at home is free of danger (ὡς ἀκίνδυνον βίον ζῶμεν κατ' οἴκους, 248-249). It can in fact be extremely dangerous for the husband, since certain tragic wives ensure that they create the illusion of a sanctuary for their husbands and play the role of the "guard-dog" of the household in order to disguise their murderous intent.

In addition to Medea's and Clytemnestra's masculine appetites for bloodshed, they are both often likened to ferocious wild animals; such analogies serve to indicate these female characters' brutality and lack of rationality. Both women are compared to a bull/cow (βοῦς, *Agamemnon* 1125; ταυρουμένην, *Medea* 92), a lioness (λέαινα,

*Agamemnon* 1258; λειάνης, λείαναν, *Medea* 184, 1342), and the monster Sycylla (Σκύλλαν, *Agamemnon* 1233; Σκύλλης, *Medea* 1343). The animal imagery signifies the women's bestial savagery and the feral aggression with which they threaten their households, husbands, and children. The association of women and animals is familiar from Semonides satiric account of the nature of women. Similarly, these frightful creatures also bring to mind the *ekphrasis* of Pandora's crown on which all the fearsome creatures of land and sea were depicted (*Theogony* 581-584). While Pandora was only subtly associated with wild beasts by bearing their images on her crown, these murderous wives of tragedy are explicitly equated with them. This conflation of women and animals expresses the continuity of gyno-anxiety from archaic to fifth-century tragedy in this as it moves from the latent to the explicit.

The lion imagery is perhaps the most notable in terms of expressing the extreme degree of both Clytemnestra's and Medea's ferocity. To fully understand the gravity of the analogy, it is useful to examine another literary instance in which a character is described as a lion. In book XXII of the *Iliad*, Achilles compares himself to a lion in response to Hector's request that the winner of their duel allow the loser a proper burial and not mistreat the body (XXII.256-259). Achilles responds: ὥς οὐκ ἔστι λέουσι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ὄρκια πιστά, "There are not trusted oaths between lions and men" (262). Soon after this exchange, when Hector is certain that he will die, he begs Achilles again to treat his corpse with respect; but Achilles is unsympathetic:

μή με κύον γούνων γουνάζεο μὴ δὲ τοκήων·  
αἰὲν γὰρ πῶς αὐτόν με μένος καὶ θυμὸς ἀνήη  
ὄμι' ἀποταμόμενον κρέα ἔδμεναι, οἷα ἔοργα

Do not attempt to cling to me by my knees or my parents, dog.  
If only, somehow, rage and my spirit would allow me

To eat your flesh raw, having carved it off of you, because of what you've done.  
(*Iliad* XXII.345-347)

In this scene, it is clear that Achilles has abandoned the precedent of how to treat one's defeated foe. He renounces his humanity as he equates himself to a lion, while reducing Hector to a miserable creature,<sup>83</sup> and goes so far as to wish to commit the abhorrent act of cannibalism. Later in book XXIV, Apollo also describes Achilles as a lion to account for his brutality; he even states that Achilles is not in his right mind (ὦ οὔτ' ἄρ' φρένες εἰσὶν ἐναΐσιμοι, XXIV.40), as he likens his behavior to that of a lion (λέων δ' ὡς ἄγρια οἶδεν, "he knows savage things like a lion," XXIV.41). So, just as these instances in the *Iliad* utilize bestial imagery to delineate the sheer brutality of Achilles, the description of Clytemnestra and Medea as lionesses signifies their savagery motivated by rage (μένος) that transcends any reverence for the laws of mankind, but instead compels them to do unspeakable things such as destroy their own families.

There is one animal simile that Clytemnestra does not share with Medea, that of the κύνα "bitch." This comparison is first made by Clytemnestra herself in a positive context, boasting that she is a guard dog of the house (δωμάτων κύνα, 607). Cassandra later modifies this analogy in her prophecy foretelling the fall of the household, claiming that Clytemnestra is no guard dog but rather a bitch who feigns loyalty for her master:

νεῶν τ' ἀπαρχος Ἰλίου τ' ἀναστάτης  
οὐκ οἶδεν οἶα γλῶσσα μισητῆς κυνὸς –  
λείξασα κάκτεινασα φαιδρὸν οὔς, δίκην  
Ἄτης λαθραίου – τεύξεται κακῇ τύχῃ.

The commander of the fleet and the destroyer of Ilium  
does not know what sort of things the tongue of this hateful bitch  
is fashioning with wicked misfortune, having licked [him] cheerfully

<sup>83</sup> Achilles' address of Hector as "κύων," literally as a "dog," may serve to emphasize the pathetic status of Hector compared to himself as a lion. For the word as a general insult common in Homer, see Nagy 1979: 222-243 and Garcia Jr. 2013: 85n58, 87-88, 135-136.

and stretched forth her ear, just like secret *Ate*.

(*Agamemnon* 1227-1230)

This metaphor calls to mind the uses of the word *κύνα* “bitch” in both Hesiod and Semonides. Hesiod relates that Pandora was given *κύνεόν... νόον* “a bitch’s mind” (*Works* 67), which accounts for her tricky and untrustworthy nature; although within the works of Hesiod there is no account of Pandora making explicit use of her “bitch’s mind” (she seems to open the jar of evils out of curiosity rather than malice or cunning), Hesiod nevertheless feels compelled to warn his readers of it. Clytemnestra, on the other hand, actually puts her conniving mind to use in order to get away with the murder of her husband. Aside from emphasizing the danger of female speech,<sup>84</sup> this description of Clytemnestra as a *κύνα*, with the words “licking” (*λείξασα* 1229) and “tongue” (*γλώσσα* 1228) also calls to mind the dog-woman in Semonides Fragment 7. In this complex passage in the play, Cassandra reworks Clytemnestra’s own metaphor, in which she described herself as a *δωμάτων κύνα* (607) to reveal Clytemnestra’s faux-subservience and insidious nature. The words *γλώσσα* and *λείξασα* suggest Clytemnestra’s lengthy speech in which she feigned happiness for her husband’s return,<sup>85</sup> like a dog licking its master’s hand and stretching out its ear to be scratched. Cassandra reveals the treachery behind Clytemnestra’s lies, while maintaining the dog analogy; she reveals that Clytemnestra’s *Ate* will bring about destruction. The analogy of the bitch-minded woman is realized here in Aeschylus’ tragedy whereas it existed only as a warning in the archaic poets.

As mentioned above, both Clytemnestra and Medea possess certain masculine traits, especially a proclivity for violence, which make them dangerous. In addition to

<sup>84</sup> On the representation of female speech as “dangerous” in early Greek poetry, see Bergren 2008: 13-42.

<sup>85</sup> For a reading of *λείξασα* and *γλώσσα* as pertaining to Clytemnestra’s speech, see Denniston 1957: 182.



their blood lust, another threatening agency both women share is their capacity to seek out and independently initiate sexual/marital contracts. This trait fosters a great deal of anxiety, because it enables a wife to abandon or destroy her husband and his household while securing new bonds for herself. Here again, the genre of tragedy presents onstage the exaggerated, worst-case scenario incarnation of this fear. As a result, instead of just abandoning their households, the heroines of tragedy completely obliterate them along with the entire state, while securing nuptial and political alliances to serve their own interests. In Clytemnestra's case, she has sustained an adulterous affair with Aegisthus for years while Agamemnon has been away, and plans to rule with him after they murder Agamemnon. She expresses her affection for Aegisthus and how his support aids her in her murderous undertaking: ἕως ἂν αἴθῃ πῦρ ἐφ' ἐστίας ἐμῆς Αἴγισθος, ὡς τὸ πρόσθεν εὖ φρονῶν ἐμοί, οὗτος γὰρ ἡμῖν ἄσπις οὐ μικρὰ θράσους, "So long as Aegisthus kindles the fire in my hearth, well-minded towards me as always, for he is no small shield of courage to me" (1435-1437).<sup>86</sup> Clytemnestra's statement has obvious sexual undertones in addition to the domestic sense. Aegisthus' presence, both as the man of the house and as her love (both implied by the phrase ἕως ἂν αἴθῃ πῦρ ἐφ' ἐστίας ἐμῆς Αἴγισθος "as long as Aegisthus lights the fire in my hearth"), gives her encouragement and strength in her lethal endeavors. In the illicit affair between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, one of the most horrifying potential threats of female adultery is actualized. Clytemnestra clearly states that Aegisthus gives her courage (ἄσπις ... θράσους, 1437) in her mission to kill her husband: therefore, Clytemnestra's mariticide is directly correlated with her adultery.

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<sup>86</sup> For more on the significance of Aegisthus lighting the hearth and taking on the role of master of the house, see Denniston 1957: 202.

The Chorus further elucidates the lovers' political agenda: ὄραν πάρεστι· φροιμάζονται γὰρ ὡς τυραννίδος σημεῖα πράσσοντες πόλει, “It is easy to see: indeed, their prelude is that of people whose actions denote tyranny in the state” (1354-1355). Clytemnestra also expresses her intentions to Aegisthus himself: ἐγὼ καὶ σὺ θήσομεν κρατοῦντε τῶνδε δωμαίων καλῶς, “I and you when ruling this house we will order it correctly” (1672-1673). Her earlier words clearly indicate that she intends for the two of them to rule together, perhaps equally, although she does say ἐγὼ before σὺ (1672-1673). It is likely that Clytemnestra expects to have more power in this new state than a typical queen usually does: indeed, she gives the impression that she will rule first, as a king would, with Aegisthus as her co-regent. Helene Foley explains: “Clytemnestra asks to be judged as a public autonomous actor on the same terms as a male leader about to take over the throne.”<sup>87</sup> Although Clytemnestra has no problem taking on the masculine roles of warrior and leader, she is not so irrational to think she can rule alone. The presence of a male co-regent is vital if she has any chance in succeeding, even if Aegisthus is to be a mere puppet-figure, which is very possible considering how much he is criticized by the Chorus for letting Clytemnestra run the show.<sup>88</sup> Late in the play, the Chorus chastises Aegisthus: κόμπασον θαρσῶν, ἀλέκτωρ ὥστε θηλείας πέλας, “Go on and boast of courage just as a rooster with his hen nearby” (1672). It is obvious to the elders of the Chorus that Clytemnestra possesses the dominant role in the relationship. The important point remains, however, that Aegisthus is a vital component of Clytemnestra's plan to usurp the household and state. Having succeeded in killing her

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<sup>87</sup> Foley 2001: 203.

<sup>88</sup> See also lines 1633-1635, 1643-1647.

husband and usurping his throne, she is free to have more children with Aegisthus and create an entirely new *oikos* of her own choosing after destroying her former one.

Medea, like Clytemnestra, possesses the ability to act as the contractor of her own marriages as her track record proves. Nancy Rabinowitz discusses the sexual autonomy of Medea:

She was never given in marriage in the way that an Athenian woman would have been; there was no ritual of betrothal, no exchange of gifts between men. Rather, she chose Jason. This action is doubly significant, for it not only raises her to Jason's status as an equal – no one gives her in marriage; she has no male guardian (*kurios*) – but also shows her to have sexual desire and to act on it.<sup>89</sup>

Thus Medea has already exhibited a precedent, before the plot of Euripides' play even begins, for taking on the male role of contracting a conjugal union.<sup>90</sup> After being abandoned by Jason, Medea duplicitously laments to Creon that she will be destitute if she is exiled (276-315), but little does he know that she will soon secure a new husband for herself. In her conversation with Aegeus (663-758), Medea learns that he has come to Corinth seeking an oracle of Apollo inquiring about his childlessness (669). In an exchange that Margaret Williamson calls “the most remarkable manifestation of her entry into the public sphere,”<sup>91</sup> Medea tells Aegeus of her own misfortunes, begging him to take her into his home and promising to provide an end to his childlessness:

οἴκιτρον οἴκιτρον με τὴν δυσδαίμονα  
καὶ μὴ μ' ἔρημον ἐκπεσοῦσαν εἰσίδης,  
δέξαι δὲ χώρα καὶ δόμοις ἐφέστιον.  
οὕτως ἔρωσ σοὶ πρὸς θεῶν τελεσφόρος  
γένοιτο παίδων καὶ τὸς ὄλβιος θάνοις.  
εὗρημα δ' οὐκ οἶσθ' οἶον ἠύρηκας τόδε·  
παύσω γέ σ' ὄντ' ἄπαιδα καὶ παίδων γονὰς

<sup>89</sup> Rabinowitz 1993: 138.

<sup>90</sup> For more on the autonomy of Medea in arranging her own marriage with Jason, see Williamson 1990: 18.

<sup>91</sup> Williamson 1990: 19. For more on the significance of the mutual exchange between Aegeus and Medea, see Williamson 1990: 18-19.

σπειραί σε θήσω· τοιάδ' οἶδα φάρμακα.

Have pity, have pity on me, an unlucky woman,  
and do not watch me be exiled, desolate.  
But rather take me into your land and your house as a suppliant.  
If you do so, may your desire for children be fulfilled by the gods,  
and may you yourself die blessed.  
You do not know what a prize you have discovered in this.  
I will put an end to your childlessness and make  
you a father able to produce children, for I know the proper potions.

(*Medea* 712-718)

Aegeus accepts her offer, and thus Medea secures herself a place in his home in Athens.

What is not mentioned is the fact that Medea will cure Aegeus' childlessness by bearing him children herself. Although this is not explicitly mentioned in the play, the Athenian audience would have been familiar with the popular myth in which Medea ends up marrying Aegeus and having his children. It is likely that Euripides' *Medea* already has this in mind, and the speech makes subtle reference to this later narrative. So, having secured a new home and a potential new husband for herself, Medea next goes about the second half of her plan: to destroy Jason's attempt at a new household as well as the household they shared together.

ὅς ἡμῖν σὺν θεῷ τεῖσει δίκην.  
οὔτ' ἐξ ἐμοῦ γὰρ παῖδας ὄψεται ποτε  
ζῶντας τὸ λοιπὸν οὔτε τῆς νεοζύγου  
νύμφης τεκνώσει παῖδ', ἐπεὶ κακὴν κακῶς  
θανεῖν σφ' ἀνάγκη τοῖς ἐμοῖσι φαρμάκοις.

This man – with a god as my helper – will pay the penalty.  
He shall never see his children by me alive ever again,  
nor will he sire children from his newly wedded bride, since that wretched girl  
must die terribly by means of my poisons.

(*Medea* 802-806)

Medea clearly expresses her main objective: to thwart Jason's attempt at establishing a new family by killing his new bride. She also hints at the plan she has concocted to

murder her own children, which is evident in the ominous word ζῶντας (804): Jason will never again see his children by her *alive*. More than anything else, Medea emphasizes the importance of obliterating her husband's heirs: both by his new bride (οὔτε ...παῖδ', 803) and by her (οὔτ' ἐξ ἐμοῦ γὰρ παίδας ὄψεταιί, 803). Medea surpasses Clytemnestra in her capacity for carnage, destroying not only the state and her husband, but her own children as well.<sup>92</sup> What is most appalling about her actions is the fact that she murders her male children, the thing which a proper Greek woman should value most, and does so as a result of sexual jealousy.<sup>93</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, Semonides, in his praise of the bee-woman, confines proper female sexuality to the conjugal bed, for the sole purpose of reproduction; he warns that any female sexuality outside of this realm is dangerous (7.58-70). In the figure of Medea we see this danger actualized and pushed to the extreme. Medea's unchecked sexuality leads to the destruction of her children, which should be a "good" woman's main concern and the only motivation behind her sexuality in the first place.

Herein lies another instance of extreme gyno-anxiety in tragedy. In the previous chapter we explored how the figure of Pandora introduced both death and procreation to mankind, since before the former, there was no reason for the latter. Hesiod also laments man's dependence on women for the production of children. Euripides' Medea, like Hesiod's Pandora, represents the male anxiety surrounding procreation and mortality. Procreation is the means by which a man passes on his genes, name, and household to an heir, and it is the only way mortals can attempt to approach immortality, knowing that

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<sup>92</sup> Although in *The Libation Bearers*, Clytemnestra's problematic relationship with her children suggests that she may be capable of harming Orestes as Agamemnon's heir.

<sup>93</sup> See Rabinowitz 1993: 126 for a discussion of the threat that female sexuality and language poses to male offspring.

their progeny and name will live on after them.<sup>94</sup> Medea, by ensuring that Jason has no means of doing this, has in a sense condemned him to another kind of mortality, or even death. Euripides' Medea also embodies an exaggerated form of the male anxiety concerning the female "monopoly" on procreation. Located in the figure of Medea, this fear transcends the everyday dependence of a man on his wife, as he hopes she will be willing and able to bear him a child, and becomes the fear that she has both the ability to revoke the offspring at any time (by killing them, as in this case) and the ability to sabotage his chance at having other offspring with another woman (by killing any rival).<sup>95</sup> In this sense Medea becomes a terrifying incarnation of the fickleness of female fertility, as she offers it up as a bargaining tool to one man and violently denies it to her husband.

By seeking out new marriage alliances, Clytemnestra and Medea usurp the male role as an instigator of marital contracts. At the same time they violently reject their socially prescribed female roles to protect their household and family, not merely by abandoning them, but by destroying their *philoī* with their own hands. Medea's example is even more terrifying than Clytemnestra's, since rather than attacking her husband physically she attacks his offspring and consequently not only injures him, but also his entire line. She does this intentionally, considering it the worst possible punishment. As Medea states: οὕτω γὰρ ἂν μάλιστα δηχθείη πόσις, "It is the way to sting my husband most" (817).<sup>96</sup> By assuming male social roles and rejecting their feminine ones, Medea and Clytemnestra represent the male anxiety around the female's control of reproduction. This fear is extremely amplified in these dramatic instances, in that the onstage narratives subvert the feminine responsibility of procreation and nurturing the household. These

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<sup>94</sup> For more on the acceptance of death through continuity of the *oikos*, see Seaford 1990: 151.

<sup>95</sup> See Rabinowitz 1993:125 for a reading of Medea's triumph through the destruction of her rival.

<sup>96</sup> Note that δηχθείη continues the association of Medea and dangerous animals.

tragic wives not only possess the ability to create life, but they can also to destroy it and the household too. Each woman leaves her husband, either dead or at least reproductively destitute, in the ashes of his household to create a new *oikos* for herself with some other man.

As discussed above, Semonides condemns wives who exhibit uncontrolled sexuality, but praises the bee-woman alone for her lack of interest in sexuality (7.83-93). In tragedy, we finally see these vague anxieties surrounding the overly sexual wife actualized and pushed to the extreme. Both Agamemnon and Jason, in their respective plays, manifest a newfound sexual interest in a new woman. The uncontrolled sexual jealousy of their wives is a major catalyst for the chaos that ensues and brings down the household and state. As Helene Foley states:

The most infamous of Greek stage wives is Clytemnestra. Combining the treacherous murder of her husband with adultery, she embodies the greatest threats to the cultural system of which a wife is capable; her crime, performed in revenge for a child, then divides her from her remaining children, and thus brings her maternal role into question as well.<sup>97</sup>

While Foley is correct that Clytemnestra's primary reason for wishing her husband dead is the fact that he murdered their daughter, her own sexual jealousy is also a major factor. It is clear from her angry words that Cassandra's presence heightens Clytemnestra's rage and contributes to her blood lust. After murdering both Agamemnon and Cassandra, Clytemnestra gloats over the bodies:

κείται γυναικὸς τῆσδε λυμαντήριος,  
Χρυσίδων μείλιγμα τῶν ὑπ' Ἰλίῳ·  
ἢ τ' αἰχμάλωτος ἦδε καὶ τερασκόπος  
καὶ κοινόλεκτρος τοῦδε, θεσφατηλόγος  
πιστὴ ξύνεννος, ναυτίλων δὲ σελμάτων  
ἰσοτριβῆς. ἄτιμα δ' οὐκ ἐπραξάτην.

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<sup>97</sup> Foley 2001: 201.

ὁ μὲν γὰρ οὕτως, ἡ δὲ τοι κύκνου δίκην  
τὸν ὕστατον μέλψασα θανάσιμον γόον  
κεῖται, φιλήτωρ τοῦδ'· ἐμοὶ δ' ἐπήγαγεν  
εὐνής παροψώνημα τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆς.

Here he lies, the ravager of this woman (me),  
and the darling of all the Chryseises at Ilium;  
and here she lies, his captive, and prophetess and concubine,  
his prophetic, trusty, bed-fellow, equally wearing down the sailors benches.  
The two of them have not met an unjust fate.  
For he lies thusly; and she, like a swan,  
having sung her last, deathly lament,  
she lies here, his lover; but to me she has added  
a little spice to the luxury of my bed.

(*Agamemnon* 1438-1447)

In these lines justifying the double homicide, Clytemnestra makes no mention of Iphigeneia or of her murder by Agamemnon. Her self-validation focuses on the sexual relationship between Agamemnon and Cassandra. Note that her jealousy is most apparent in her biting attack on the chastity of the Trojan princess.<sup>98</sup> Clytemnestra emphasizes Cassandra's role as a sexual partner of Agamemnon, calling her a κοινόλεκτρος "concubine" (1441), ξύνευνος "bedfellow" (1442), and φιλήτωρ "lover" (1446). She even describes her as ἰσοτριβῆς (1443), literally "sexually wearing down" the ship's rowing benches (ναυτίλων δὲ σελμάτων, 1442), implying that she had sex with the entire crew;<sup>99</sup> the prefix "ἴσο-" suggests that her sexual adventures on the rowing benches took place likewise in Agamemnon's bed. While Clytemnestra's jealousy takes the typical feminine form of attacking the chastity of her rival, still she rationalizes the murder as a man would. The custom of bringing a concubine back to one's household is common among Homeric characters in tragedy.<sup>100</sup> Clytemnestra, however responds as

<sup>98</sup> See Zeitlin 1965: 491 for more on Clytemnestra's unusual combination of jealousy and adultery.

<sup>99</sup> Here "sailor's benches" is a metonymy for the sailors themselves.

<sup>100</sup> See Foley 1999: 87-90 for a discussion of Homeric concubines' prevalence in tragedy; for example, Cassandra in Euripides' *Hecuba* and Tecmessa in Sophocles' *Ajax*.



would a cuckolded man, citing Agamemnon’s sexual relationship with another woman as a valid reason to kill them both. The fact that Clytemnestra herself has been engaging in an adulterous affair does not register in her mind as weakening her argument. Because she has rejected the social expectations imposed on women, she believes that her own sexual fidelity has nothing to do with the matter. Her final words are especially disturbing, as she acknowledges that Agamemnon brought Cassandra home for sexual purposes, as παροψώνημα “a relish” to the sexual relationship he has with his wife (τῆς ἐμῆς γλιδῆς, 1447). However Clytemnestra blatantly usurps the masculine role and assumes this sexual “relish” for herself, implying that this new concubine has given *her* sexual pleasure, rather than Agamemnon, by means of her death.<sup>101</sup>

Unlike Clytemnestra whose rage is sparked first by the death of her child, Medea’s sexual jealousy is both the initial and main motivation behind her crimes. Medea admits this while addressing the Corinthian women:

γυνὴ γὰρ τᾶλλα μὲν φόβου πλέα  
κακὴ τ’ ἐς ἀλκὴν καὶ σίδηρον εισορᾶν·  
ὅταν δ’ ἐς εὐνήν ἠδικημένη κυρῆ,  
οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη φρεὴν μαιφονωτέρα.

For with respect to everything else, a woman is full of fear,  
bad at looking on battle or cold steel.  
But whenever dishonor chances upon her marriage bed,  
there is no mind more bloodthirsty.

(*Medea* 263- 266)

Medea confesses that her own sexual jealousy is the impetus behind her anger and claims that this is the case among all women. Also, in her gnomic statement, she implies that sexual jealousy is the only thing capable of turning women, who normally shy away from

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<sup>101</sup> For more on Clytemnestra’s expression of female sexual pleasure, and the reversal of traditional sexual roles in her triumphant speech, see Foley 2001: 204, 214.

battle, into warriors (κακή τ' ἐς ἀλκὴν καὶ σίδηρον εισορᾶν, 264). Her extreme jealousy is readily apparent when she addresses Jason:

χώρει· πόθῳ γὰρ τῆς νεοδμήτου κόρης  
αἰρῆ χρονίζων δωμαίων ἐξώπιος.  
νύμφευ· ἴσως γὰρ σὺν θεῶ δ' εἰρήσεται  
γαμεις τοιοῦτον ὥστε θρηνεῖσθαι γάμον.

Leave: for you are seized by longing for your newly wedded bride  
since you are spending so much time away from her house.  
Go, play husband. For perhaps – and this will be asked of the gods –  
you will marry into the sort of marriage that will cause you to lament.

(*Medea* 623-626)

Medea has plenty of just cause to be angry, seeing as she has been left alone in a strange land with no one to care for her and her children; yet one of her main complaints to Jason, however, is the fact that she has been sexually scorned. She makes a point to accuse him of being so desirous (πόθῳ... αἰρῆ, 623-624) of his new bride that he can hardly stand to be away from her side. The phrase χρονίζων δωμαίων ἐξώπιος “since you are spending so much time away from her house” (624) is clearly sarcastic. Medea mocks Jason, implying that he cannot bear to be away from his new wife even for the brief period they have been speaking.

These passages exemplify another instance of the anxiety surrounding the overly sexual wife, and this significant anxiety will also be explored in the next section. Adultery and sexual jealousy are the main dangers made manifest by the overly sexual woman in Greek tragedy. Unchecked erotic envy combined with the masculine egos of Clytemnestra and Medea lead them to respond to sexual jealousy the way a man would be expected to retaliate against an adulterous wife and her lover: they respond with bloodshed, using specifically male weapons, such as the sword, to destroy their husbands and their children. The figures of Clytemnestra and Medea essentially represent the male

anxiety about the wife who does not submit to male authority. Both women possess a terrifying combination of feminine craftiness and masculine ambition that motivates them to manipulate situations to their advantage: they destroy their husbands, households, and city-states while securing lovers, alliances, and power for themselves.

### **Wifely Devotion Gone Wrong**

We have just explored the severe consequences that arise in tragedy when wives reject societal expectations and instead choose to embrace masculine attitudes and behaviors as their own. Let us now examine a different, but equally dangerous, type of tragic wife embodied in the figures of Deianeira in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and Phaedra in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. By examining how these characters are vastly different from Clytemnestra and Medea, we shall explore a different, perhaps more insidious type of gyno-anxiety, namely that even wives who attempt to be good can harm the husband and the *oikos*. Unlike Medea and Clytemnestra, both Deianeira and Phaedra value their husbands, their status as wives, and their reputations, but they do so excessively. Despite possessing the characteristics typically praised in women, and wives in particular, the excessive degree to which they strive to keep their reputations and households intact nevertheless leads to disastrous consequences.

Phaedra and Deianeira are each presented with difficult circumstances in their marriages not unlike those faced by Clytemnestra and Medea. In the case of Phaedra, she is tempted by adultery, as she is stricken with an intense desire for another man during her husband's long absence; while Deianeira learns that her husband has fallen in love with another woman. What separates these two characters from the other tragic wives, however, is their reaction to these hardships. Instead of openly choosing the extreme path

of adultery, revenge, and murder, both women attempt to bear these burdens like proper Greek wives who are devoted to their husbands, or at least, so it appears on the surface. When Deianeira discovers that her long absent husband, Heracles, is finally returning home after many years abroad, yet he is bringing with him a concubine, she does not fly into a jealous rage, but rather she attempts to accept the situation without anger or blame:

ὥστ' εἴ τι τῶμῳ τ' ἀνδρὶ τῆδε τῆ νόσῳ  
 ληφθέντι μεμπτός εἰμι, κάρτα μαίνομαι,  
 ἢ τῆδε τῆ γυναικὶ τῆ μεταιτία  
 τοῦ μηδὲν αἰσχροῦ μηδ' ἐμοὶ κακοῦ τινος.

And thus if I blame my husband  
 who has been seized by the love-sickness,  
 I am quite mad, or this woman, his accessory,  
 for something not at all shameful or evil to me.

(*Trachiniae* 445-448)<sup>102</sup>

Deianeira places no blame on her husband or his new love interest, a sentiment that is remarkably different from the reactions of Clytemnestra and Medea in response to marital infidelity. She even proclaims that she herself would be crazy (μεμπτός, 446) if she were to blame them, and she plainly states that her husband's actions are neither shameful nor an offense against her (τοῦ μηδὲν αἰσχροῦ μηδ' ἐμοὶ κακοῦ τινος, 448). Deianeira's virtuous empathy, however, quickly begins to erode; while she does not become angry and filled with thoughts of revenge, her sadness and worry soon become evident:

κόρη γάρ, οἶμαι δ' οὐκέτ', ἀλλ' ἐξευγμένην,  
 παρσιδέδεγμαι φόρτον ὥστε ναυτίλος,  
 λωβητὸν ἐμπόλημα τῆς ἐμῆς φρενός.  
 καὶ νῦν δὺ' οὔσαι μίμνομεν μᾶς ὑπὸ  
 χλαίνης ὑπαγκάλισμα. τοιάδ' Ἡρακλῆς,  
 ὁ πιστὸς ἡμῖν κάγαθὸς καλούμενος,  
 οἰκούρι' ἀντέπεμψε τοῦ μακροῦ χρόνου.  
 ἐγὼ δὲ θυμοῦσθαι μὲν οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι  
 νοσοῦντι κείνῳ πολλὰ τῆδε τῆ νόσῳ.

<sup>102</sup> The Greek text of Sophocles' *Trachiniae* is from Easterling's 1982 edition. All translations are mine.

τὸ δ' αὖ ξυνοικεῖν τῆδ' ὁμοῦ τίς ἂν γυνή  
 δύναιτο, κοινωνούσα τῶν αὐτῶν γάμων;  
 ὀρῶ γὰρ ἥβην τὴν μὲν ἔρπουσαν πρόσω,  
 τὴν δὲ φθίνουσαν· ὧν ἀφαρπάζειν φιλεῖ  
 ὀφθαλμὸς ἄνθος, τῶν δ' ὑπεκτρέπει πόδα.  
 ταῦτ' οὖν φοβοῦμαι μὴ πόσις μὲν Ἡρακλῆς  
 ἐμὸς καλῆται, τῆς νεωτέρας δ' ἀνήρ.

A maiden – but rather I think no longer a maiden – but a married woman,  
 I have taken in, just as a sailor takes on cargo,  
 merchandise which is an insult to my heart.  
 For now although we are two we wait under one blanket for  
 his embraces. These sorts of things Heracles,  
 the man I called trustworthy and good,  
 sent back this to me in return for taking care of the household for all this time.  
 But I don't know how to be angry at that man  
 who is now suffering many things by this sickness.  
 But, on the other hand, to live together with this girl,  
 what woman could do it, sharing the same marriage?  
 For I see her youthful bloom advancing slowly forward,  
 and mine decaying. His eye will love to pluck  
 the bloom of hers while turning away from mine.  
 Therefore on account of these things, I fear that Heracles  
 will be called my “husband,” but the younger woman’s “man.”

(*Trachiniae* 536-551)

Deianeira's speech is an amalgamation of fear, resentment, and enduring love for her husband. For Deianeira, this new concubine poses a threat, not merely as a rival for her husband's affections, but someone who jeopardizes her status as wife. She fears that this young woman is already ἐξευγμένην “having been joined in wedlock” (531), surmising that the girl has likely already had sexual relations with Heracles and is thus also his wife.

When Deianeira describes the scenario, δύ' οὔσαι μίμνομεν μᾶς ὑπὸ χλαίνης ὑπαγάλισμα, “For now although we are two we wait under one blanket for his embraces” (535-536), it is an especially vivid and disturbing image: the shocking scene emphasizes the intrusion this new woman poses to her marriage, forcing her to share every aspect of her role as Heracles' wife, even going so far as to enjoy Heracles'

affections in the same bed at the same time. She wonders what woman could tolerate this untenable situation, κοινωνούσα τῶν αὐτῶν γάμων “sharing the same marriage” (546) with another woman. By posing this rhetorical question, Deianeira essentially asserts no woman could endure such an arrangement, and that she herself will certainly not do so. Deianeira goes on to lament the fact that Heracles will undoubtedly prefer this young girl’s fresh loveliness, ἥβην τὴν μὲν ἔρπουσαν πρόσω “blooming youthful beauty” (542), to her own, which is φθίνουσαν “decaying” (547-548). While the prospect of sharing her marriage is already frightening, Deianeira is also struck by the fear that Heracles will neglect her completely and toss her aside for this new wife, thus becoming her husband in name only, while he will be the active sexual partner of the younger girl (φοβοῦμαι μὴ πόσις μὲν Ἡρακλῆς ἐμὸς καλῆται, τῆς νεωτέρας δ’ ἀνήρ 550-551).

Note too that Deianeira exhibits some resentment towards her husband in this speech: she states that she had once considered him πιστὸς... κάγαθός “trustworthy and good” (536) – implying that she no longer does – and questions how he could “repay” her in this way (ἀντέπεμψε, 542) for all the time she has dutifully taken care of the household while he has been away. Deianeira expresses her irritation at Heracles for his lack of domestic reciprocity; while Deianeira has performed her wifely duties of taking care of the house, he does not give her what she deserves in return: loyalty. The prefix ἀντι (ἀντέπεμψε, 542) denotes Deianeira’s expected compensation for executing her domestic duties while Heracles has left her alone for many years. However, instead of reward she receives further burden in the form of the new concubine. Because this new woman is ἐξευγμένην, literally “yoked” (531) together with Heracles, Deianeira is compelled to “share” (κοινωνούσα 546) the affections of her husband; and yet,

Deianeira alone is forced to bear this grievous load (φόρτον ... λωβητὸν ἐμπόλημα, 537-538). Despite these grievances, Deianeira's complaints about Heracles are still a far cry from the impassioned charges of disloyalty and the invocations of gods to witness broken marriage vows that Medea hurls against Jason (*Medea* 465-520). Deianeira follows her expressions of disappointment with the admission that, despite her husband's actions, she does not know how to be angry with him (θυμοῦσθαι μὲν οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι, 544).

Deianeira's fears are not unfounded, and it is obvious that her love for her husband makes it impossible to bear the thought of accepting another woman into the marital bed. However, her love for her husband also ensures that she does not want to follow the course of notoriously wronged women like Clytemnestra and Medea, by taking violent revenge on the *oikos* and finding another lover. Deianeira makes a point to clarify that she has no such intentions:

κακὰς δὲ τόλμας μήτ' ἐπισταίμην ἐγὼ  
μήτ' ἐκμάθοιμι, τὰς τε τολμώσας στυγῶ

May I not know and not nor learn wicked contrivances,  
since I abhor contriving women!

(*Trachiniae* 582-583)

With these lines, Deianeira seems to be directly referring to aggrieved wives, like Medea and Clytemnestra, who dare to take violent revenge against their husbands for sexual infidelity, and she sincerely wishes to distinguish herself from this type of woman. Sophocles even has Deianeira use the word τόλμα in 582, the same word used by Aeschylus' Cassandra to describe the contrivances of Clytemnestra in line 1231 of the *Agamemnon*. The fact that Sophocles has his character suggest such a comparison to a

negative female paradigm is apposite to my discussion of these characters in this chapter as figures who strive to be viewed as good wives.

As noted at the beginning of this section, one aim of this analysis is to contrast the figures of Deianeira and Phaedra with Clytemnestra and Medea in terms of their wifely devotion and reactions to marital rifts in tragedy. However, an intriguing aspect of Phaedra's character is that Euripides' original rendition of her may have been much closer to the extreme wronged wife figure, *à la* Clytemnestra or Medea, than the Phaedra with which we are familiar from the extant play. In Euripides' first (now lost) production, the playwright adopted the version of the myth in which a shameless Phaedra attempts to openly seduce her stepson, Hippolytus.<sup>103</sup> When he refuses her advances, Phaedra accuses him to her husband, Theseus, who in turn begs Poseidon to kill Hippolytus. Once Phaedra's perfidy is discovered, she kills herself out of shame.<sup>104</sup> However, this earlier version of the play was apparently a failure; the audience was appalled by Phaedra's deliberate attempt to seduce her stepson and then blatantly lie about it to her husband's face.<sup>105</sup> In response to the audience's outrage, Euripides reinvented the play with a revised Phaedra who is virtually the opposite of her predecessor. In this second Phaedra, Euripides presents his audience with a woman of great virtue and integrity, who is destined to be destroyed by the merciless Aphrodite: a woman with whom the audience could sympathize. She is the paradigm of female virtue, who values chastity and a good reputation even above life itself; this is in stark contrast to the previous version of

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<sup>103</sup> On the relationship between the first *Hippolytus* and the second, see Barrett 1964: 1-45 and Snell 1967: 47-69.

<sup>104</sup> This motif of the erotically rejected woman accusing her would-be lover of rape is common throughout the Mediterranean world. See, for example, the story of Joseph and the wife of Potiphar in the book of *Genesis* 39:1-20.

<sup>105</sup> For more on the audience reaction to the first version of the play, see March 1990: 44 and Zeitlin 1996: 219.



Phaedra, who subverted feminine norms by openly asserting her sexual desire.<sup>106</sup> Yet what is most remarkable about this transformation is Euripides' ability to redeem Phaedra's virtue without sacrificing her destructive power. As we shall see, it is the character's newly found virtue and sense of propriety that act as the catalyst for domestic devastation.<sup>107</sup>

Just as Deianeira chastised herself with a comment that she would be mad to blame her husband for his lovesickness, Phaedra censures herself for harboring impure feelings of desire for Hippolytus, although she has no intention of acting on those desires:

δύστηνος ἐγώ, τί ποτ' εἰργασάμην;  
 ποῖ παρεπλάγχθην γνώμης ἀγαθῆς;  
 ἐμάνην, ἔπεσον δαίμονος ἄτη.  
 φεῦ φεῦ, τλήμων.  
 μαῖα, πάλιν μου κρύψον κεφαλὴν,  
 αἰδούμεθα γὰρ τὰ λελεγμένα μοι.  
 κρύπτε· κατ' ὅσων δάκρυ μοι βαίνει,  
 καὶ ἐπ' αἰσχύνην ὄμμα τέτραπται.  
 τὸ γὰρ ὀρθοῦσθαι γνώμην ὀδυνᾶ,  
 τὸ δὲ μαινόμενον κακόν· ἀλλὰ κρατεῖ  
 μὴ γιγνώσκοντ' ἀπολέσθαι.

I, unfortunate, whatever have I done?  
 Where have I wandered away from good sense?  
 I was mad, I fell by the ruin of a divinity.  
 Alas, alas, I am miserable.  
 Nurse, hide my head again,  
 for I am ashamed of the things having been spoken by me.  
 Hide it; tears run down from my eyes  
 and my gaze has turned to shame,  
 for being correct with respect to the mind is a pain,  
 and being mad is an evil thing: rather it is best  
 to die while not being aware.

(*Hippolytus* 239-249)<sup>108</sup>

<sup>106</sup> See March 1990: 47 and Zeitlin 1996: 220 for further discussion of the second Phaedra's sympathetic traits.

<sup>107</sup> See Zeitlin 1996: 222 for a discussion Phaedra's excessive concern for proper conventions and how this determines the course of her actions.

<sup>108</sup> The Greek text of Euripides' *Hippolytus* is from Barrett's 1964 edition. All translations are mine.

Phaedra states that the desire is involuntary on her part: the work of some deity. Although she cannot overcome this divine ailment, she adopts the proper wifely attitude in dealing with it: to die rather than shame herself or her household. While some women would surely give in to their desire, Phaedra realizes that to do so would bring shame upon herself and her entire family. By choosing death as opposed to shame, Phaedra makes the responsible choice to surrender her life for the good of the *oikos*. While her death would, no doubt, sadden her family, it is a better fate than tarnishing their reputation. Like Deianeira, Phaedra directly makes reference to “bad women,” in this case specifically adulteresses, and vehemently expresses her hatred for them:

ἔμοι γὰρ εἴη μήτε λανθάνειν καλὰ  
 μήτ' αἰσχροῖα δρώση μάρτυρας πολλοὺς ἔχειν.  
 τὸ δ' ἔργον ἤδη τὴν νόσον τε δυσκλεῖα,  
 γυνή τε πρὸς τοῖσδ' οὐσ' ἐγίγνωσκον καλῶς,  
 μίσσημα πᾶσιν. ὡς ὄλοιτο παγκάκως  
 ἥτις πρὸς ἄνδρας ἤρξατ' αἰσχύνειν λέχη  
 πρώτη θυραίους. ἐκ δὲ γενναίων δόμων  
 τόδ' ἤρξε θηλείαισι γίγνεσθαι κακόν·  
 ὅταν γὰρ αἰσχροῖα τοῖσιν ἐσθλοῖσιν δοκῆ,  
 ἢ κάρτα δόξει τοῖς κακοῖς γ' εἶναι καλά.  
 μισῶ δὲ καὶ τὰς σώφρονας μὲν ἐν λόγοις,  
 λάθρα δὲ τόλμας οὐ καλὰς κεκτημένας·  
 αἰ πῶς ποτ', ὦ δέσποινα ποντία Κύπρι,  
 βλέπουσιν ἐς πρόσωπα τῶν ξυνευενετῶν  
 οὐδὲ σκότον φρίσσουσι τὸν ξυνεργάτην  
 τέραμνά τ' οἴκων μὴ ποτε φθογγὴν ἀφή;  
 ἡμᾶς γὰρ αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ἀποκτείνει, φίλαι,  
 ὡς μήποτ' ἄνδρα τὸν ἐμὸν αἰσχύνας' ἀλώ,  
 μὴ παῖδας οὐς ἔτικτον· ἀλλ' ἐλεύθεροι  
 παρρησίᾳ θάλλοντες οἰκοῖεν πόλιν  
 κλεινῶν Ἀθηνῶν, μητρὸς οὐνεκ' εὐκλειεῖς.  
 δουλοῖ γὰρ ἄνδρα, κὰν θρασύσπλαγχνός τις ἦ,  
 ὅταν ξυνειδῆ μητρὸς ἢ πατρὸς κακά.  
 μόνον δὲ τοῦτό φασ' ἀμλλάσθαι βίῳ,  
 γνώμην δικαίαν κάγαθὴν ὅτῳ παρῆ.  
 κακοὺς δὲ θνητῶν ἐξέφην' ὅταν τύχη,  
 προθεῖς κάτοπτρον ὥστε παρθένω νέα,  
 χρόνος· παρ' οἷσι μήποτ' ὀφθειῖν ἐγώ.

For just as I would not wish my good deeds to be concealed,  
 would that I not have many witnesses to my shameful deeds.  
 For I knew that the deed and the thought were shameful,  
 and besides that, I knew well that I was a woman:  
 An object of hate to all. Would that she be destroyed terribly,  
 whoever first began to dishonor her marriage bed  
 for strange men. This evil began to come into existence  
 among females from noble houses: for when shameful deeds seem good to the  
 noble,  
 then the base will deem it to be good.  
 But I also hate those women who are prudent in speech,  
 but in secret ignobly they procure contrivances.  
 Oh mistresses of the sea, Cypris, however can these women  
 look at the faces of their husbands  
 and not shudder in fear at darkness, their accomplice,  
 and the thought that the chambers of the house may give up speech?  
 For this very thing kills me, friends,  
 that I may not ever be detected shaming my husband  
 nor the children whom I bore: but rather they live free  
 with free speech, growing up, they might inhabit the glorious city of Athens,  
 fortunate on account of their mother.  
 For it enslaves a man, even one who is bold-hearted,  
 when he knows the evil deeds of his mother or father.  
 They say only one thing competes with life:  
 to have a mind that is just and good.  
 But the base among mortals are revealed when the time comes;  
 time positions them like a young maiden before a mirror.  
 Among them may I never be seen!

(*Hippolytus* 403-430)

In the first part of this lengthy speech, Phaedra expresses her desire for a good reputation,  
 yet it is apparent that her concern is superficial. She does not say that she wishes never to  
*commit* any shameful deeds, but rather that she hopes no one would be witness to them  
 (μήτ' αἰσχρὰ δρώση μάρτυρας πολλοὺς ἔχειν, 404). Similarly, she expresses the  
 sentiment that the purpose of accomplishing good deeds is so that they might be known  
 to others (ἐμοὶ γὰρ εἴη μήτε λανθάνειν καλὰ, 403). Phaedra clearly values the  
 appearance of honor above the actual possession of it. She supports this sentiment  
 towards the end of her speech (420-425), when she argues that even the strongest man

can be harmed by the wicked actions of his parent, if he is aware of them (ὅταν ξυνειδῆ μητρὸς ἢ πατρὸς κακά, 425). Her argument can be broken down to as follows: the impression of good causes actual good (if no one knows of her shame, then her children will be allowed to prosper in glorious Athens and enjoy free speech); while the impression of shame causes actual misfortune (knowledge of bad deeds can enslave a man). Phaedra acknowledges that those who commit wicked deeds are forced to face their crimes at the end of their life, like a young maiden placed before a mirror (προθεὶς κάτοπτρον ὅστε παρθένῳ νέᾳ, 429). Phaedra again displays her concern with image: she is not worried that she will have to face her crimes at the end of her life, rather she does not wish to be *seen* as such a person. (παρ' οἷσι μήποτ' ὀφθείην ἐγώ, 430). Therefore Phaedra rationalizes the importance of appearances over reality, stating the truth is irrelevant when mere impressions hold such weight. It is this preoccupation with appearances that allows Phaedra to later commit terrible deeds, for the sake of the appearance of good.

In this speech, Phaedra also expresses her deep disdain for women who commit adultery. As Laura McClure has noted about this passage, Phaedra's speech, in both rhetorical tone and vocabulary, is directly reminiscent of the texts of the archaic poets examined in Chapter One.<sup>109</sup> McClure states: "In this miniature *psogos*, Phaedra employs the standard elements of invective against women familiar from Hesiod and Semonides. She begins by cursing the mythical inventor of adultery in much the same way that Hippolytus will later curse the Nurse and women in general."<sup>110</sup> The fact that Phaedra expresses anxiety about the nature of women in the form of an archaic-style invective

<sup>109</sup> See McClure 1999: 116-119 for further analysis of Phaedra's speech.

<sup>110</sup> McClure 1999: 116.

further exemplifies her role as a proper, chaste wife; she is such a virtuous woman, as the playwright wishes the audience to believe, that she even employs formal invective against the faults of her own gender. Indeed, this speech encompasses every sentiment expected from a proper Athenian woman. In addition to condemning adultery, Phaedra expresses the importance of a good reputation above everything else (405-407), and even slips in some praise of the superior qualities of Athens (421-423). Just as Deianeira wishes to condemn and thus distinguish herself from women who plot against their husbands (cf. *Trachiniae* 582-583 cited above), Phaedra similarly chastises and separates herself from women who commit adultery. By portraying their characters as explicitly distinguishing themselves from the Medea/Clytemnestra model, and then depicting them as the cause/s of tragic destruction, the playwrights exemplify a different, more insidious type of gyno-anxiety. They warn that there is another type of wife to fear besides the overtly dangerous Medea/Clytemnestra model: the woman who seems to have good intentions can be just as dangerous, or even more so.

Although both Deianeira and Phaedra initially seem determined to suffer their misfortunes in silence, both women eventually give in to the idea of alleviating their troubles with the aid of a love potion. In each instance the *pharmakon* is not meant to cure the women of their love sickness, but rather to control masculine desire and thus assuage their suffering by ensuring that their lovesickness is reciprocated. The Nurse hopes that by telling Hippolytus of her mistress's love that he will in turn fall in love with Phaedra, and Deianeira's aim is to cause Heracles to forget his new concubine to turn his attentions back towards her. Ironically, in both cases, the "potion" is not a love potion at all, but rather a catalyst for destruction. Deianeira is determined to regain the love of

Heracles and so she remembers what the Centaur, Nessus, had told her long ago as he lay dying, wounded by Heracles' poison arrow:

ἐὰν γὰρ ἀμφίθρεπτον αἶμα τῶν ἐμῶν  
σφαγῶν ἐνέγκῃ χερσίν, ἧ̄ μελαγχόλους  
ἔβαψεν ἰοὺς θρέμμα Λερναίας ὕδρας,  
ἔσται φρενός σοι τοῦτο κηλητήριον  
τῆς Ἡρακλείας, ὥστε μήτιν' εἰσιδὼν  
στέρξει γυναῖκα κείνος ἀντὶ σοῦ πλέον.

For if you take the blood clotting around my  
wounds in your hands, where the creature,  
the Lernean Hydra, dipped its black-bile arrows,  
this will be for you a charm for the heart  
of Heracles, so that never looking upon another  
woman will he love her more than you.

*(Trachiniae 572-577)*

It is perhaps slightly suspicious that Deianeira does not immediately question the concern this savage beast, who tried to rape her, seems to have for the love life of his intended victim and her husband/his killer: Nessus even adds the curious but true detail of the Hydra, whose blood now poisons the centaur's blood in the intended love spell. Nevertheless, Deianeira decides to use this κηλητήριον “charm” (575) on her husband. After discovering that the blood she smeared on Heracles' cloak is actually deadly poison, Deianeira cannot believe she trusted the words of the centaur:

ὥστ' οὐκ ἔχω τάλαινα ποί γνώμης πέσω·  
ὀρῶ δέ μ' ἔργον δεινὸν ἐξειργασμένην.  
πόθεν γὰρ ἂν ποτ', ἀντὶ τοῦ θνήσκων ὁ θῆρ  
ἐμοὶ παρέσχ' εὐνοίαν, ἧς ἔθνησχ' ὕπερ;  
οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ τὸν βαλόντ' ἀποφθίσει  
χρηζῶν ἔθειλέ μ' ὦν ἐγὼ μεθύστερον,  
ὅτ' οὐκέτ' ἀρκεί, τὴν μάθησιν ἄρνημαι.  
μόνη γὰρ αὐτόν, εἴ τι μὴ ψευσθήσομαι  
γνώμης, ἐγὼ δύστηνος ἐξαποφθερῶ·  
τὸν γὰρ βαλόντ' ἄτρακτον οἶδα καὶ θεὸν  
Χείρωνα πημήναντα, χῶνπερ ἂν θίγη,  
φθεῖρει τὰ πάντα κνώδαλ'· ἐκ δὲ τοῦδ' ὄδε  
σφαγῶν διελθὼν ἰὸς αἵματος μέλας

πῶς οὐκ ὀλεῖ καὶ τόνδε; δόξη γοῦν ἐμῇ.  
καίτοι δέδοκται, κείνος εἰ σφαλῆσεται,  
ταύτη σὺν ὀρμῇ καὶ μὲ συνθανεῖν ἅμα·  
ζῆν γὰρ κακῶς κλύουσιν οὐκ ἀνασχετόν,  
ἥτις προτιμᾶ μὴ κακῇ πεφυκέναι.

Thus I am miserable and unable to know where I fell from reason:  
I see that I have brought about some terrible deed,  
for why ever would the dying beast hand over good favor in return  
to me, the one on whose account he was dying?  
It's not possible, but rather, because he desired to destroy the one who shot him,  
he enchanted me – the knowledge of which  
I gain too late, and am not able to prevent him.  
For I alone – unless I will be mistaken –  
wretched woman that I am, I completely destroy him:  
for I know that the loosed arrow even harmed the god Cheiron,  
and whatever it touches, it destroys all creatures. Since it passed through the black  
blood  
of the wound how would it not also kill him? To my mind, it seems that it must.  
Nevertheless, I am resolved that if he will perish  
with the same movement I will die with him.  
For any woman who values not to have an evil nature,  
it is not endurable to live with a bad reputation.

(*Trachiniae* 705-722)

Deianeira's disbelief that she did not suspect foul play from Nessus' instructions could be a sentiment shared by the audience of this scene. Is it possible, on some level at least, that Deianeira might have known that the "love potion" might actually cause Heracles harm? Nicole Loraux seems to think so when she speaks of the "belated glory of Deianeira, who waits until she has committed the irreparable act before proclaiming her wish for a good reputation."<sup>111</sup> The circumstances are certainly dubious, however and there is nothing expressed overtly in the text to lead us to believe Deianeira intended to harm her husband. The most we can say is that Sophocles represents her as, overwhelmed by love and the fear of losing her husband, so that she made makes a rash decision which leads to Heracles' death by her own hand. Whether or not Deianeira understands the risk of her

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<sup>111</sup> Loraux 1987: 29.

actions, she nevertheless chooses to try to win back the sexual affections of her husband by a method that leads to his death.

Phaedra, too, is swayed by the persuasive speech of another to employ a charm in an attempt to assuage her ailment. After discovering the nature of her mistress' illness, the Nurse tells Phaedra she knows a way she can cure her lovesickness:

ἔστιν κατ' οἴκους φίλτρα μοι θελκτήρια  
 ἔρωτος, ἦλθε δ' ἄρτι μοι γνώμης ἔσω,  
 ἃ σ' οὔτ' ἐπ' αἰσχροῖς οὔτ' ἐπὶ βλάβῃ φρενῶν  
 παύσει νόσου τήσδ', ἦν σὺ μὴ γένη κακή.  
 δεῖ δ' ἐξ ἐκείνου δὴ τι τοῦ ποθουμένου  
 σημειῖον, ἢ πλόκον τιν' ἢ πέπλων ἄπο,  
 λαβεῖν, συνάψαι τ' ἐκ δυοῖν μίαν χάριν.

I have a soothing love-charm within the house  
 – it just now occurred to me –  
 which, without shame or harm to your mind,  
 will stop this sickness if only you are not afraid.  
 It is necessary to take a token from the man you desire,  
 either a lock of hair, or a piece of clothing,  
 and from the two then join them together into a single grace.

(*Hippolytus* 509-515)

Phaedra seems intrigued by the idea and, in the next line, she asks the Nurse: πότερα δὲ χρυστὸν ἢ ποτὸν τὸ φάρμακον; “this drug, is it an ointment or a potion?” (516).

Barbara Goff notes the significance of the ambiguity of the word φάρμακον: “The *pharmakon* is situated within two different discourses, that of medicine and that of love-magic. Within love-magic, the *pharmakon* signifies a charm; within medicine, it signifies either a healing drug or a poison. The Nurse exploits these multiple ambiguities to achieve her persuasion of Phaedra.”<sup>112</sup> Indeed the Nurse dodges Phaedra's question by replying: οὐκ οἶδ' ὀνάσθαι, μὴ μαθεῖν, βούλου, τέκνον, “I do not know; choose to benefit, child, not to learn” (510). It is necessary for the Nurse to be vague when

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<sup>112</sup> Goff 1990: 48-49.



responding to Phaedra because she knows the φίλτροα “love charm” (509) that she speaks of is something Phaedra would never endorse. It is neither χριστόν “ointment” nor ποτόν “potion,” as Phaedra suggests; in fact, it is not even a *pharmakon* proper. Rather this remedy she has in mind is to tell Hippolytus of Phaedra’s affections in the hopes that he will reciprocate them. Just as in the case of Deianeira, the “love-potion” offered to Phaedra is not an effective love-potion at all; and just as Nessus’ potion was deadly, the Nurse’s φίλτροα brings destruction rather than healing. For once her secret is known to Hippolytus, Phaedra will be forced to take drastic and destructive measures to protect her honor.

After discovering what the Nurse has done, Phaedra is determined to save her reputation as a noble and virtuous wife, but also to punish Hippolytus.

καλῶς ἔλεξας· ἐν δὲ †προτρέπουσ’† ἐγὼ  
 εὔρημα δῆτα τῆσδε συμφορᾶς ἔχω,  
 ὥστ’ εὐκλεᾶ μὲν παισὶ προσθεῖναι βίον  
 αὐτῆ τ’ ὀνάσθαι πρὸς τὰ νῦν πεπτωκότα.  
 οὐ γάρ ποτ’ αἰσχυνῶ γε Κρησίους δόμους  
 οὐδ’ ἐς πρόσωπον Θησέως ἀφίξομαι  
 αἰσχροῖς ἐπ’ ἔργοις οὐνεκα ψυχῆς μᾶς.

You have spoken well, but I will add one thing;  
 I have discovered a remedy to this misfortune to be sure,  
 so that I can hand over a life of good repute to my sons  
 and so that I myself might benefit in the face of the things which have befallen  
 me.

For I will not ever disgrace my Cretan home,  
 nor will I come face to face with Theseus  
 charged with shameful deeds just because of a single life.

(*Hippolytus* 715-721)

The Chorus is worried about Phaedra’s words: when they ask, μέλλεις δὲ δὴ τί δοῦν ἀνήκεστον κακόν; “What incurable harm are you intending to do?” (722), Phaedra responds, θανεῖν: ὅπως δέ, τοῦτ’ ἐγὼ βουλεύσομαι, “To die, but the how – that I will

contrive” (723). In the passage above, and her response to the Chorus, Phaedra emphasizes her main concern: her own reputation and the reputation of her family. She is so concerned with keeping up the appearance of a proper Greek wife that she will lie, deceive, die, and even kill in order to protect that image. Thus, this preoccupation with honor is Phaedra’s most dangerous attribute; she is so obsessed with maintaining the aura of a good wife that she is willing to sacrifice the validity behind the guise in order to sustain the illusion.<sup>113</sup>

It is this extreme degree to which both Deianeira and Phaedra strive to protect their reputations and statuses as wives that renders them such fearsome figures. Deianeira is so desperate to hold on to her husband that she, whether stupidly or intentionally or both, falls for a trap set by an enemy. Phaedra is so concerned that her reputation will be tarnished by her own desires and the Nurse’s meddling, that she invents a lie that will kill her stepson in order to salvage her honor. Unlike Clytemnestra and Medea who bring about the destruction of the household by completely rejecting their wifely duties, Deianeira and Phaedra conversely bring about death and destruction through their extreme devotion to the very things Medea and Clytemnestra consider disposable: their *philoï* and reputations as proper wives. As women who wish to be seen as proper wives, Phaedra and Deianeira are part of the *oikos* itself; as a result, the destruction of the household must include their own deaths as well.

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<sup>113</sup> See McClure 1999: 116 for a discussion of Phaedra’s struggle to maintain appearances and how this struggle reinforces Hippolytus’ claims about women.

## Suicides

In her discussion of Hecuba's critique of Helen in Euripides' *Trojan Woman*, Elizabeth Belfiore states; "there is always suicide as a last resort of the chaste woman."<sup>114</sup> Indeed, within the realm of Greek literature suicide is thought of as not only a predominately female act, but also as an act of penance for chaste women when faced with shame.<sup>115</sup> As noted earlier in this chapter, Clytemnestra and Medea possess masculine ambition and have little regard for the societal expectations placed upon women; as a result, they have no thought of or need for suicide. They have no reservations when it comes to simply starting new lives with new lovers after ridding themselves of their husbands. Yet, Deianeira and Phaedra exhibit more typically feminine sentiments and consequently, in the face of dishonor, they both choose to kill themselves in an attempt to atone for (or hide) their crimes. In addition to serving as acts of expiation, their suicides also perform several other narrative and thematic functions in each character's drama; these include the dramatic representation of their misplaced sexuality, the attempt to control the men they love, and the exacting of revenge through deception.

First, each woman's means of suicide is significant and specific to her own situation: Deianeira elects to die by stabbing herself on her marriage bed with a sword, while Phaedra chooses to hang herself from the rafters of the house. Though suicide in Greek society is generally considered a feminine act, suicide by sword is considered a masculine death.<sup>116</sup> This makes Deianeira's atypical manner of death ironic, considering

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<sup>114</sup> Belfiore 1980: 138.

<sup>115</sup> For more on the expectations of a chaste woman in Greek literature, see Belfiore 1980: 136-138.

<sup>116</sup> On death by stabbing as a masculine death compared to the feminine act of hanging, see Loraux 1987: 17.

the fact that, in killing Heracles with poison, she robs him of a masculine death.<sup>117</sup> By choosing a masculine death for herself, Deianeira attempts to make up for the noble death she denied Heracles. The setting of Deianeira's suicide is also relevant. Because she kills herself on the bed she alluded to in connection to her marriage and her sexual relationship with Heracles, the act of the blade penetrating her abdomen on the marriage bed takes on a sexual connotation.<sup>118</sup> This sexualized death she chooses for herself is fitting in that it emphasizes Deianeira's preoccupation with controlling her husband's sexuality, an impulse that ultimately leads to his destruction. For Phaedra, on the other hand, her choice of death by means of hanging serves to downplay her sexuality. As Barbara Goff remarks, "The bloodless death which is that of hanging held a gender-specific position within Greek culture as an avoidance of the bloodshed of rape and defloration, and hence as a denial of active sexuality."<sup>119</sup> Phaedra's means of suicide therefore compliments the sentiments of her suicide note, in that it is a denial of responsibility and sexuality: it evinces itself as a chaste death. Moreover, by hanging herself from the rafters, Phaedra connects her body to the house itself, emphasizing her role as wife and as the keeper of the *oikos*. The fact that her lifeless body remains physically connected to the realm she governed makes the statement that she, even in death, has not forgotten her responsibilities.

Second, suicide allows both women to possess in death the men whom they could not possess in life. When Phaedra tells the Chorus of her plans to end her own life, she cites her desire to teach Hippolytus a lesson as part of her motivation:

καὶ σὺ γ' εὖ με νουθέτει.

<sup>117</sup> For more on the feminine quality of Heracles' death, see Loraux 1987: 25.

<sup>118</sup> See Loraux 1987: 24 for further discussion on the sexual nature of Deianeira's death.

<sup>119</sup> Goff 1990: 38.

ἐγὼ δὲ Κύπριν, ἥπερ ἐξόλλυσί με,  
 ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαχθεῖσα τῆδ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ  
 τέρω· πικροῦ δ' ἔρωτος ἤσσηθήσομαι.  
 ἀτὰρ κακόν γε χᾶτέρῳ γενήσομαι  
 θανούσ', ἵν' εἰδῆ μὴ 'πὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς κακοῖς  
 ὑψηλὸς εἶναι· τῆς νόσου δὲ τῆσδέ μοι  
 κοινῇ μετασχὼν σωφρονεῖν μαθήσεται.

And you have advised me well.  
 I will delight Cypris, who wishes to destroy me,  
 on this day setting my soul free.  
 I will be defeated by bitter desire  
 but to another I will become an evil thing  
 by dying, so that he may know not to be lofty upon my death.  
 By sharing in this ailment with me,  
 he will learn to be prudent.

*(Hippolytus 724-731)*

Phaedra's final words, τῆς νόσου δὲ τῆσδέ μοι κοινῇ μετασχὼν σωφρονεῖν μαθήσεται "by sharing in this ailment with me, he will learn to be prudent" (730-731), exemplify Phaedra's aim to control Hippolytus by means of her death. The "ailment" (731) to which Phaedra refers could simply be "death," since, after all, she intends to kill herself and hopes that Theseus will kill Hippolytus. However, the word νόσος is commonly used throughout the early Greek texts to refer to lovesickness,<sup>120</sup> and the word is common in tragedy to refer to erotic suffering. In fact, Euripides has Phaedra use this word to describe her own lovesickness earlier in line 405. Elsewhere Phaedra has repeatedly stated, starting in line 249, that her lovesickness will be the death of her. So from the beginning of the play, Euripides has fashioned Phaedra's desire to be inseparable from death. It is therefore more likely that Phaedra's words mean that by killing Hippolytus, he will finally share her lovesickness, dying as a result of it, and they will be intimately joined by an erotic death. Moreover, the conflation of desire and death

<sup>120</sup> For a full examination of lovesickness in early Greek poetry, see Cyrino: 1995.

is apparent in Phaedra's suicide note. The letter acts not only as a means to frame Hippolytus for raping her, but also an actualization of her fantasy that Hippolytus reciprocated her passion.<sup>121</sup> Thus Phaedra's murder/suicide plot allows her to maintain her chaste reputation while simultaneously experiencing her fantasy that Hippolytus desired her: a combination that would have been paradoxical in life, but is possible in death.

Deianeira's suicide also serves a similar narrative function in her play. In life Deianeira is faced with the threat of Heracles leaving her for another woman, but by killing him and then herself, Deianeira prevents this betrayal from happening. She consigns him to the fate of death and then joins him, in that sense demonstrating that she possesses exclusive rights over her husband; and by killing herself over the marriage bed, she reinforces the sentiment that it is her territory as the only rightful wife of Heracles.<sup>122</sup>

Finally, each character's suicide achieves revenge through deception. While Deianeira never explicitly states she wants to punish Heracles for his actions, she nevertheless deceives Heracles by presenting him with a garment, which unbeknownst to him, has been covered in a potion which is meant to control him: to correct his behavior for desiring another woman and forcibly return his affections to her. As discussed previously, Deianeira's ignorance with regard to Nessus' potion is also suspicious. It is therefore possible that she, at least on some level, wants Heracles to be punished for his actions. In the end, whether or not Deianeira wishes for revenge, she gets it by causing Heracles to suffer a slow and painful death at the hands of his own wife.

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<sup>121</sup> For more on Phaedra's suicide note as a sort of love-letter, see Goff 1990: 38.

<sup>122</sup> Loraux 1987: 10 describes Deianeira's suicide as "a cunning act of intelligence." Indeed Deianeira's suicide can be viewed as an act of μήτις.

Phaedra, on the other hand, explicitly states her plan to punish Hippolytus, ἀτὰρ κακόν γε χᾶτέρω γενήσομαι θανούσ’, “But I will become an evil thing to another by means of my death” (728-729). While her intent to injure Hippolytus is clear, she, like all tragic wives, must employ trickery to achieve her aim. Previously we have seen the gyno-anxiety that surrounds women’s ability to deceive in Hesiod’s Pandora, who possesses the endowments of κύνεόν τε νόον καὶ ἐπίκλοπον ἦθος, “both a bitch’s mind and a deceitful manner” (*Works and Days* 61); Hesiod explains that these gifts of Pandora account for the insidious nature of all women. In Euripides’ play, Phaedra’s suicide represents an evolution of this fear in that she is not just capable of scheming and dishonesty, but is even able to beguile her husband from beyond the grave. In fact, it is her death that adds validity to her fallacious claims as Theseus himself tells Hippolytus:

τέθνηκεν ἡδε· τοῦτό σ’ ἐκσώσειν δοκεῖς;  
 ἐν τῷδ’ ἀλίσκη πλείστον, ὦ κάκιστε σύ·  
 ποῖοι γὰρ ὄρκιοι κρείσσονες, τίνες λόγοι  
 τῆσδ’ ἂν γένοιτ’ ἂν, ὥστε σ’ αἰτίαν φυγεῖν;  
 μισεῖν σε φήσεις τήνδε, καὶ τὸ δὴ νόθον  
 τοῖς γνησίοισι πολέμον πεφυκένα·  
 κακὴν ἄρ’ αὐτὴν ἔμπορον βίου λέγεις,  
 εἰ δυσμενεῖα σὴ τὰ φίλτατ’ ὤλεσεν.

She is dead. Do you think this will save you?  
 In this you are especially incriminated, you most wicked man.  
 For what oaths, what arguments could be stronger  
 than she is, with the result that you can escape responsibility?  
 Will you say that she hated you and that the bastard  
 is a natural enemy to the legitimate heirs?  
 Then you claim she is a bad merchant of her own life,  
 if through ill will she destroyed the most precious thing.

(*Hippolytus* 958-965)

Theseus explicitly states that it is the obvious fact that Phaedra is dead that makes her story believable (959). So it is through death that Phaedra is able to trick her husband into disowning and eventually killing his own son, thereby destroying the *oikos* as a result of

her scorned love for her stepson. Phaedra thus represents the anxiety that a woman may not be what she seems to be on the outside. As discussed earlier in connection with the bee-woman of Semonides (7.83-93), the woman who seems too good to be true is the most dangerous, because she is above suspicion and as a result is not sufficiently guarded against by men. In leaving her note and taking her own life, Phaedra claims to be a wife so noble that she would kill herself out of shame after being raped; and because she is dead, she cannot be interrogated or have her story tested.

So on the surface, the figures of Deianeira and Phaedra may not appear as threatening as Clytemnestra and Medea. Yet, upon closer examination, these two characters are equally potent examples of the manifestation of gyno-anxiety within the genre of tragedy. Although they may employ a less overtly antagonistic manner than more notorious tragic wives, Deianeira and Phaedra embody the same fears about the nature of women that are often expressed in Greek poetry, such as their extreme or misplaced sexuality, raging erotic jealousy, and scheming minds. However, they also present new anxieties, such as the idea that a woman's overzealous concern for her reputation or her intense love for her husband, which may seem to suggest favorable traits in a wife, can still lead to death and the destruction of the *oikos*.

In conclusion, gyno-anxiety undergoes an explicit development by the time it is made manifest on the stages of fifth-century Athenian drama. Instead of being simply expressed as invectives and warnings against the threats and annoyances of nameless, faceless everyday women, gyno-anxiety in tragedy is, quite literally, incarnated by specific, and often notorious, female characters. Men's worst fears about women take three-dimensional form in the figures of female protagonists on stage. These figures



display all the worst qualities of women and wives, which were articulated in archaic poetry but are now exaggerated to a hyperbolic extreme in tragedy; the horrific consequences of these women's actions are made visible to the entire polis.

## Epilogue

### Hippolytus as the Heir of Invective

In Chapter One we examined the notoriously “misogynistic” archaic texts of Hesiod and Semonides, and found the intrinsic gyno-anxiety emanating from male fear of dependence on women to be the underlying motivation for these strong invectives against the existence of women. In Chapter Two we explored how the violent and conniving actions of specific female tragic characters are symptomatic of the gyno-anxiety surrounding the overly sexual wives represented in fifth-century Attic drama. Let us now turn to an instance in literature where these two genres meet.

In *The Noose of Words* (1990), Barbara Goff notes the appearance of invective speeches made by male dramatic characters, not only against female characters in the play, but also against women in general. These speeches often express sentiments that are reminiscent of earlier Greek texts chastising women, such as the verses of Hesiod and Semonides. These “misogynistic reconstructions,”<sup>123</sup> as Goff calls them, indicate that fifth-century tragedians were very familiar with these types of invective speeches and that they sometimes appropriated them to supplement or contrast their representation of women within their own work.

The most obvious example of such an echo occurs in the *Hippolytus*: Euripides puts an angry speech into the mouth of Hippolytus, as he reacts bitterly to the Nurse’s machinations; this speech, in its tone and vocabulary, is very reminiscent of the invective against women expressed in the works of Hesiod and Semonides.<sup>124</sup> In this speech,

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<sup>123</sup> Goff 1990: 47.

<sup>124</sup> For more on the comparison of Hippolytus’ speech to Hesiod and Semonides, see McClure 1999: 142-146.

Hippolytus laments the existence and nature of women in the traditional structure of invective established by the archaic poets:

ὦ Ζεῦ, τί δὴ κίβδηλον ἀνθρώποις κακὸν  
 γυναῖκας ἐς φῶς ἡλίου κατώκισσας;  
 εἰ γὰρ βρότειον ἤθελες σπεῖραι γένος,  
 οὐκ ἐκ γυναικῶν χρῆν παρασχέσθαι τόδε,  
 ἀλλ' ἀντιθέντας σοῖσιν ἐν ναοῖς βροτοὺς  
 ἢ χαλκὸν ἢ σίδηρον ἢ χρυσοῦ βάρος  
 παίδων πρίασθαι σπέρμα του τιμήματος,  
 τῆς ἀξίας ἕκαστον, ἐν δὲ δώμασιν  
 ναίειν ἐλευθέροισι θηλειῶν ἄτερ.  
 νῦν δ' ἐς δόμους μὲν πρῶτον ἄξεσθαι κακὸν  
 μέλλοντες ὄλβον δωμάτων ἐκτίνομεν.  
 τούτῳ δὲ δῆλον ὡς γυνὴ κακὸν μέγα·  
 προσθεῖς γὰρ ὁ σπείρας τε καὶ θρέψας πατῆρ  
 φερνάς ἀπώκισ', ὡς ἀπαλλαχθῆ κακοῦ.  
 ὁ δ' αὖ λαβῶν ἀτηρὸν ἐς δόμους φυτὸν  
 γέγηθε κόσμον προστιθεῖς ἀγάλατι  
 καλὸν κακίστῳ καὶ πέπλοισιν ἐκπονεῖ  
 δύστηνος, ὄλβον δωμάτων ὑπεξελὼν.  
 ἔχει δ' ἀνάγκη· ὥστε κηδεύσας καλῶς  
 γαμβροῖσι χαίρων σφύζεται πικρὸν λέχος,  
 ἢ χρηστὰ λέκτρα πενθεροῦς δ' ἀνωφελῆς  
 λαβῶν πιέζει τὰ γαθῶ τὸ δυστυχές.  
 ῥᾶστον δ' ὅτῳ τὸ μηδέν – ἀλλ' ἀνωφελῆς  
 εὐηθία κατ' οἶκον ἴδρῳται γυνή.  
 σοφὴν δὲ μισῶ· μὴ γὰρ ἔν γ' ἐμοῖς δόμοις  
 εἴη φρονοῦσα πλείον' ἢ γυναῖκα χρῆ.  
 τὸ γὰρ κακοῦργον μᾶλλον ἐντίκτει Κύπρις  
 ἐν ταῖς σοφαῖσιν· ἢ δ' ἀμήχανος γυνὴ  
 γνώμη βραχεία μωρίαν ἀφηρέθη.  
 χρῆν δ' ἐς γυναῖκα πρόσπολον μὲν οὐ περᾶν,  
 ἄφθογγα δ' αὐταῖς συγκατοικίζειν δάκη  
 θηρῶν, ἵν' εἶχον μήτε προσφωνεῖν τινα  
 μήτ' ἐξ ἐκείνων φθέγμα δέξασθαι πάλιν.  
 νῦν δ' αἱ μὲν ἔνδον †δρῶσιν αἱ κακαὶ† κακὰ  
 βουλευμάτ', ἔξω δ' ἐκφέρουσι πρόσπολοι.

O Zeus, why have you established women in the light of the sun,  
 this counterfeit to mankind?

If you wished to sire the human race,  
 You should not have supplied this ability through women.  
 Rather, men should put down in the temples  
 either bronze or iron or a weight of gold

and buy the cost of the seed of offspring,  
 corresponding to his nobility,  
 and then dwell in houses free of females.  
 But as it stands now, being about to receive an evil into our homes,  
 we pay the wealth out of our homes.  
 In this, it is clear that a woman is a great evil:  
 for the one having begot her and raised her, her father,  
 adds a dowry, hoping to send her away, so that he might be delivered from  
 trouble.  
 But on the other hand, the one taking the ruinous creature into his house  
 rejoices, adding beautiful ornamentation to this worst idol,  
 and he, the wretch, decks her out with garments,  
 slowly diminishing the wealth of the his house.  
 It necessarily goes like this: either it results that a man who has embarked well  
 into marriage rejoices in his in-laws and thereby saves his bitter marriage;  
 or having taken a useful marriage bed but a useless father-in-law,  
 he outweighs the bad with the good.  
 But it is easy for the man with a useless wife;  
 without guile she sits at home.  
 But I hate a smart woman. May there never be a woman in my house  
 with more intelligence than is necessary a woman.  
 For Cypris instills more mischief in the smart ones.  
 The incapable woman is kept from folly by means of her limited mind.  
 It is necessary that a slave not cross the boundary to see a woman;  
 rather it is necessary to place speechless, biting animals  
 with them so that they would not be able to say anything  
 nor receive a voice back from them.  
 But as things are now, the evil ones do evil things,  
 plotting indoors, and their servants carry them out.

(*Hippolytus* 616-650)

In this speech, Hippolytus does not mention Phaedra specifically, but like the invective of Hesiod and Semonides, his tirade is aimed at the “race” of women in general. Just as the archaic poets do, he begins with the mention of Zeus, attributing to him the responsibility of imposing this κακὸν “evil” (616, 625, 629) on mankind. Also, similar to the query posed by Hesiod in *Theogony* 560-612, Euripides has Hippolytus question the ontology of women, as the chaste young man laments their necessary role in procreation. He even scolds Zeus: εἰ γὰρ βρότειον ἤθελες σπεῖραι γένος, οὐκ ἐκ γυναικῶν χρῆν παρασχέσθαι τόδε, “If you wished to sire the human race, you should not have supplied

this ability through women” (618-619). Hippolytus notes that women are costly: calling to mind both Hesiod’s description of women in the *Theogony* (πενίης οὐ σύμφοροι, ἀλλὰ κόροιο, “not a companion in poverty but only in wealth,” 593), as well as Semonides’ horse-woman in fragment 7.58-7.70, who ἀνάγκη δ’ ἄνδρα ποιεῖται φίλον, “makes her husband dear to Necessity” (7.62), Hippolytus complains that a woman is a drain on the finances of the household, requiring her father to pay a φερνὰς “dowry” (629) to get rid of her. Meanwhile her husband wastes resources, ὄλβον δωμάτων ὑπεξελών “diminishing the wealth of his house” (633), by decorating her with κόσμον “ornamentation” (631) and πέπλοισιν “garments” (632). Hippolytus also compares women to δάκη “dangerous [biting] animals” (646), and states that women should be “corralled” (χορῆν... συγκατοικίζειν) with beasts so they are not able to speak to others and are thereby prevented from plotting evil schemes with the help of their handmaids (645-646). This connection of women to dangerous animals recalls Pandora, who is associated with the wild animals depicted on her crown in the *Theogony*, and the many animal-women described in Semonides’ fragment 7. Hippolytus’ speech follows the format of the archaic poets both by lamenting the financial threat that women pose to men and also by reducing women to non-human status.

Lastly, just as Hesiod and Semonides do, Hippolytus warns of women’s deceitful and cunning nature. He states that αἱ μὲν ἔνδον δρῶσιν αἱ κακαὶ κακὰ βουλευμάτων, ἔξω δ’ ἐκφέρουσι πρόσπολοι “evil women make evil plans inside and their servants carry them out” (649-650). These lines carry a more specific connotation than Hippolytus’ previous complaints about women because he uses them to transition from general invective to his personal attack on the Nurse for acting as the courier of Phaedra’s

desire. However, the idea that women scheme when they talk to each other has an archaic precedent as well. Among the laudable qualities of the bee-woman, Semonides lists the fact that οὐδ' ἐν γυναιξὶν ἤδεται καθημένη ὄκου λέγουσιν ἀφροδισίους λόγους, “She does not enjoy sitting among women where they tell stories about love-making” (7.90-91). As discussed previously in Chapter One, this particular quality of the bee-woman is praiseworthy because it ensures that she will not engage in mischievous or adulterous schemes with the help of her servants or peers, as Hippolytus believes Phaedra is doing.

Laura McClure notes the similarities between Hippolytus’ speech and the well-known earlier invective verses against women, as she maintains: “By the end of the fifth century, the invective against women was apparently recognized as a self-contained genre.”<sup>125</sup> If invective against women was a self-contained genre by this time as McClure suggests, then by inserting it directly into the production of tragedy, Euripides is making use of this genre to convey information to the audience about his characters. The fact that this speech comes out of the mouth of Hippolytus, a young man who abhors women and sexuality to the point that Aphrodite herself is determined to destroy him, is suggestive of how its appearance in the play should be interpreted.

As discussed previously, Hesiod’s didactic texts were likely taken more seriously than the iambic poetry of Semonides, which was meant to be more humorous. However, the comic hyperbole of Semonides’ poem does not negate the validity of its sentiments concerning women: if anything, it enhances their authority.<sup>126</sup> Therefore one can infer that both Hesiod and Semonides likely possessed views towards women that are reflected in

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<sup>125</sup> McClure 1999: 142.

<sup>126</sup> See Bassi 1999: 107 for more on the connection between comic hyperbole and the actual nonhyperbolic form of the belief being scrutinized in the comic performance.

their poetry, at least to some degree. In this instance, however, because the invective speech of Hippolytus occurs within the context of a play, and is spoken by a character whose personality can be judged, we can hypothesize how Euripides might have intended his audience to interpret the speech. If we are to view Hippolytus as a religious extremist, who is justly punished at the end of the play for his blasphemy against Aphrodite,<sup>127</sup> then perhaps the audience is not meant to consider the arguments of his speech in the same way they would consider the invective poem of the archaic authors. By the fifth century, the works of Hesiod were already quite old; they would likely have been read with a view to the time they were written, not to mention in a mythological context. Similarly, Semonides' invective is of a comparable age, and because it was written in the genre of *iambos*, its aim was for amusement, even though it might evince serious concepts. Hippolytus' speech is set neither in a mythological nor a comedic context through which to view his invective. Therefore his extreme sentiments voiced aloud to another character seem excessive and out of place.

Thus it is as if Euripides wished to depict Hippolytus as a devout student of Hesiod and Semonides, one who fanatically applies the texts of the archaic poets in his everyday life. Indeed, Hippolytus' extreme and unorthodox religious beliefs are criticized (and misunderstood) by his own father. In lines 952-954, Theseus equates Hippolytus' extreme chastity (which he now believes to be false since Phaedra claims that Hippolytus raped her) with other new and strange religious practices, such as vegetarianism and the secret rights of the Orphic mystery religion. Theseus' critique serves to further emphasize Hippolytus' schismatic beliefs that warrant punishment from the gods. The fact that

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<sup>127</sup> For more on Hippolytus' sacrilegious behavior see Barrett 1973: 3-14.

Hippolytus is actually quite conservative and even archaic in his view towards women is ironically lost on his father who considers Hippolytus to be a young man of the new education and a rebel against traditional mores.

I suggest that Euripides incorporates the genre of invective against women here in his drama, not literally to warn against the dangers of women, since he does this through the actions of his female characters, but rather to show the fanatical nature of Hippolytus and to justify his death as punishment for his sacrilegious attitudes. Therefore, invective against women not only existed as a genre by the time Euripides was writing, but more importantly, its presence within the *Hippolytus* indicates that Euripides was aware of these gyno-anxious sentiments to the point that he is able to utilize this acknowledged trope in order to signify the extreme nature of his character Hippolytus and alienate him from the other characters. Euripides is consequently working within the tradition of gyno-anxiety in a formal literary way by putting this speech of invective in Hippolytus' mouth; yet just as significantly, Euripides gives the audience further insight into the character of Hippolytus as the "heir to invective," by employing a process of trope appropriation that simultaneously underscores the dramatist's innovation in making his female characters actually embody gyno-anxiety onstage.



## Conclusion

Hippolytus' speech offers a convenient ring for this exploration of gyno-anxiety, which begins with the archaic poets discussed in Chapter One and concludes with the fifth-century dramatists in Chapter Two. As we have seen, the archaic poets Hesiod and Semonides use creation myths to explore the qualities and attributes of women they find most threatening. Their poetry, which has often been described as "misogynistic," under closer examination does not express sentiments of hatred towards women, but rather serves both as an explanation and a warning of the dangers that women embody, while lamenting the necessity and allure of the female. Indeed, the archaic poets depict women as powerful and fearsome creatures who pose a great threat while at the same time possessing irresistible qualities. Consequently, I suggest that these archaic texts are more accurately describes as "gyno-anxious" rather than "misogynistic."

Similarly, the formidable female protagonists of Greek tragedy represent male fears pertaining to female power and sexuality rather than hatred, though the expression of these fears takes on a different form in drama than it does in archaic poetry. Gyno-anxiety undergoes an explicit development by the time it is made manifest on the stages of fifth-century Athenian tragedy. Instead of being simply expressed as invectives and warnings against the threats and annoyances of anonymous, everyday women, gyno-anxiety in tragedy is, quite literally, incarnated by specific, and often notorious, female characters. The tragedians present men's worst fears about women in three-dimensional form in the figures of these female protagonists onstage. These figures display all the

worst qualities of women and wives, which were latent in archaic poetry but are now exaggerated to a hyperbolic extreme in tragedy; the horrific consequences of these women's actions are made visible to the entire *polis*. Just as the women represented by the archaic poets, the wives of tragedy are also a manifestation of male anxiety, rather than hatred, towards women.

Finally, in a transformative adaptation of gyno-anxiety, the genre of invective against women appears briefly in the speech of a specific male tragic character, Hippolytus, but unlike its archaic antecedents, his invective serves to give more insight about the character who is delivering the speech than it does about the women who are being targeted. This re-appropriation of invective shows the progression of the trope of gyno-anxiety through different genres and also indicates that the Greek authors were aware of the changing representations of women within different authors and different time periods.

The representation of women in the ancient world has long been an interest of scholars and much important work has been done on the subject, especially in the last few decades. However, there remains a great deal of work to be done to fully understand the complexity of the subject. In this project I have initiated a new way of reading texts depicting women in antiquity. While this thesis focused only on a very small selection of Greek poetry, I believe that the reading of gyno-anxiety remains to be applied to numerous other classical texts and, if applied, it has the potential to yield a more nuanced interpretation of women in ancient literature.

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