ANCIENT GREEK TRAGEDY: A STUDY ON THE NATURE OF DYSTOPIANISM

By

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Dedication

This thesis marks the culmination of a journey that I started when I was eight years of age and now it has come to a reluctant end. I should like to thank many people who have helped me to get here. Firstly to Mr Tyler for introducing me to Latin, Miss Johnson who kept my love of Classics alive, all my lecturers at university for their support and to Dr Niall Livingstone, my supervisor.

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This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Robert W. Heath.

Abstract

This Thesis concerns Dystopianism on the Athenian Tragic state in the Fifth century BC. It reconsiders Zeitlin's view that Thebes was the mirror image of Athens and instead argues Argos represents the anti-Athens. It also explores how Thebes and Argos were portrayed, arguing that although both were 'Sin Cities', the way they were portrayed on the tragic stage was substantially different. The key themes that are examined in order to reach this conclusion are, the position and role of women especially regarding the *Polis/Oikos* relationship and the position of the 'hero' in the city.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents an analysis of Thebes and Argos on the tragic stage, and the differing ways in which they may be used to suggest, by contrast or comparison, what characteristics Athens itself does (or should) possess. The inspiration for this thesis is based on Zeitlin's essay 'Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama' in Winkler & Zeitlin (1992). Zeitlin suggests that Thebes is the mirror image of Athens representing the 'other' on the tragic stage and sees dramatic Thebes as a recurrent concept with certain clusters of ideas that reoccur throughout the interpretations of the myths.[1] This thesis argues Thebes is not Zeitlin's 'anti-Athens', rather it is a dystopian portrayal of Athens: a fanciful realm in which social conditions are extravagantly and implausibly worse than in the real world. I will propose alternatively Argos becomes the anti-Athens on the tragic stage, as the values of Argos as shown through tragedy are opposite to those of Athens, and the mirror image metaphor is more applicable to Argos than Thebes.

The idea of a dystopia has its roots in the opposing, positive concept of 'utopia', an imagined place of implausible perfection. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines utopia as:

[1] Zeitlin 1992: 131.

1. An imaginary island, depicted by Sir Thomas More as enjoying a perfect social, legal, and political system.

b. transf. Any imaginary, indefinitely-remote region, country, or locality.

2. A place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions.

b. An impossibly ideal scheme, esp. for social improvement.[2]

Although this thesis is not concerned with utopianism, a brief sojourn into the plethora of utopian literary criticism is of benefit in understanding any proposed dystopian analysis. The concept of the utopia was discussed by Foucault who saw it as an unreal place that presented society in a perfect form or as a society turned upside down.[3] There has been much study on the concept of utopia. Kumar sees it as living "in a world that cannot be but where one fervently wishes to be".[4] Kumar continues to argue in this work that all societies had a utopian ideal and that the Hellenic utopia presented 'the city' as the only opportunity for reason and the good life.[5] The concept of the Hellenic utopia is discussed in Hesiod's *Works and Days* but there will not be an in depth discussion on this topic. It must be noted however, in *Works and Days* there is a contrast between what is seen as the good place and the 'golden age' and the bad place or 'age of iron' where Hesiod describes the pride of

[2] Oxford English Dictionary: sv Utopia.
[3] Foucault 1986: 24.
[4] Kumar 1991: 3.
[5] Kumar 1991: 12.

the few as having a negative effect on the entire city (241-242). Conversely in Hesiod the 'golden age' is a rural idyll. The idea of the 'golden age' has been discussed in relation to Marxist thinking, and Geoghegan discusses the use of the golden age metaphor as a way of giving substance and plausibility to a utopian future.[6]

Konstan discusses utopianism in relation to comedy, and argues convincingly that there are many forms of utopia found in classical literature that represent the social 'other place'.[7] This observation is key in understanding how the city was portrayed on the stage, and aids in the comprehension of complicated images of Athens such as 'cloudcukooland' (*The Birds)*, where the city is a complex image of Athens' own contradictions.[8] By differentiating the forms of utopia it becomes easier to understand the city. This is potentially a failing of other commentators on utopianism who consider there is only one kind of utopia, whereas as Konstan has shown, there are a multitude. I will apply a plural analysis of dystopian forms of tragic cities in order to show how each city was differently portrayed.

Dystopia is defined as:

1. An imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible.

[6] Geoghegan 1987: 56.
[7] Konstan 1995: 33-34.
[8] Konstan 1995: 44.

The OED notes the concept of dystopia is first attested to in Hansard, recording J.S. Mill's use of the adjective 'dystopian' in 1868 to indicate the reverse of utopian. The political scientist Williams defined dystopias as: "images of a future so terribly imperfect that, given a chance, people would prefer to flee as far as their wherewithal can possibly take them".[9] Dalton-Brown notes regarding Russian literature: "the dystopian plot follows an inverse development to that of the utopia, ending not with climactic joy but with doubt, uncertainty, fear, or at best an expression of rather naive optimism".[10] Kumar sees the utopia and anti-utopia as being locked together, and that "the anti-utopia is formed by utopia and feeds parasitically on it".[11] This analysis can be applied liberally to this thesis, as I will argue the anti-utopian or dystopian analysis of the tragic city is a form of corruption of the utopia, i.e. Athens. Where Kumar[12] is limited is his assumption that there is only one type of parasite, I will argue that there is a plurality of dystopias on the tragic stage and it is the 'type' of dystopia that is key in understanding the tragic city.

As the term dystopia is a relatively modern invention the definition is fluid and has been applied to modern plays, books and films such as *Blade Runner* (1982) where the hero/villain dichotomy is blurred.[13] The modern interpretations of dystopia are important to understand as they shape how the modern scholar perceives the tragedies through the social and cultural traditions of the age. In modern literature evidence for

[9] Williams 1988: 384.
[10] Dalton-Brown 1995: 112.
[11] Kumar 1987: 100.
[12] Kumar: 1987.
[13] Williams 1988: 389.

the pluralities of dystopias are more profound. There are some general themes within modern dystopian fiction, however each author creates his or her own dystopia. Within the fictional dystopia Dalton-Brown argues there is a breakdown of law and order or another key function of society, for example in *Laz* by Makanin, where those in power were absent and ineffectual while society crumbles around them.[14] This is indicative of the isolation of the people from the rulers, a theme that will be discussed later in this thesis. Williams shows that the breakdown of law and order and the curtailment of individual rights by the centralised state is key in forming a dystopia in his examination of modern films such as *Escape from New York* (1981).[15] His arguments highlight the effect of the dysfunctional ruler in causing the breakdown of society.

Orwell's *1984* presents a more complicated analysis. Here, law and order are present, but it is the nature of such laws that aid in the creation of the dystopia. Indeed Kumar presents the argument that the anti-utopia had developed by the time *1984* was written such that a slight exaggeration of contemporary trends was sufficient to present a fully founded anti-utopia.[16] Therefore a number of small matters are changed to induce the creation of a dystopian paradigm of modern society.

[14] Dalton-Brown 1995: 113.
[15] Williams 1988: 387.
[16] Kumar 1987: 110.

A method of creating the dystopia is through a or the parody of utopia[17] where the author of dystopian literature takes the 'ideal' and parodies it. Another method of creating the dystopia is through inversion of societal norms. Bowie discusses how in Acharnians Athens is portrayed as a "world turned upside down"[18] and it provides a way of reviewing the competing claims in the *polis*.[19] In Attic comedy such as the *Acharnians* or *Lysistrata* the social order is inverted and through this inversion a comment on society can be made. Attic comedy is the main area where both parody and satire help create a negative image of the city. Bowie discusses Attic comedy as a tool for analysing the problems of ancient Athens.[20] However, the inversion of society is a form of dystopia, as it demonstrates the morals of a good society before inverting them. Konstan argues that the city in comedy is portrayed as a utopian inversion through the social meaning of the action, and can present a core Athenian institution (such as the courts in *Wasps*) in such a way that undermines or resists the utopian paradigm.[21] Thus the inversion of the institutions that are key to the functioning of the city help create the anti-utopia, or another form of dystopia. Although the discussion has so far been in the context of comedy, an area not considered in this thesis, it is important to note the anti-utopian paradigm can be created through inverting the city. There are multitudes of ways in which the city can be portrayed both as the ideal and abhorrent, and this thesis will explore the nature of the negative portrayal of the city, and how this has been achieved.

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[17] Resch 1997: 151.
[18] Bowie 1993: 23.
[19] Bowie 1993: 44.
[20] Bowie 1993: 293 and passim.
[21] Konstan 1995: 16.

The analysis will be based on the assumption that there are pluralities of dystopias, and it is the aim of the following chapters to show the differences in the creation and presentation of dystopia and how the tragic cities are portrayed on the tragic stage. This thesis specifically challenges Zeitlin's analysis and to an extent the structuralist approach as neither recognise the pluralities of dystopias. Structuralism encourages the critic to think in terms of binary oppositions, and it is true that much can be gained from seeing set relationships within the *polis* as a series of oppositions, such as the *oikos-polis* dynamic. However, much of Greek drama operates in the grey areas. By applying a plural approach, more can be understood about the city.

To understand how these cities were portrayed the role of certain social institutions must be explained, the most important of these is the *oikos-polis*. It is generally accepted that the *oikos* was the foundation block of Athenian society[22] with the *Kyrios* being able to take an active role in Athenian society, whereas the lesser members, and specifically women, could only take part in the actions of the *polis* through their limited role in ritual. The *oikos* can be seen as a network of kin,[23] which becomes a microcosm of the state, and becomes a metaphor for a wider conflict within the society as the state is built of individual households. The analysis is not limited just to the conflict between two building blocks of society but within the blocks

[22] Carter 2007: 66.
[23] Roy 1999: 2.

themselves; creating a more complicated and plural analysis of relationships than previously envisioned.

I do not seek to argue the *oikos* and *polis* are diametrically opposed, but that there is a nuanced relationship between the two, unique for each city in tragedy, and by analysing these relationships a more thorough and comprehensive analysis of the city is possible. This position can be seen as at odds with the structuralist thinking on the *oikos-polis* dynamic, and throughout this thesis I will make arguments that challenge the current methodology for analysis. I see the conflict between the two institutions as a factor in understanding the myth, but it is a wider nexus not envisaged in structuralism that aids in the analysis.

I intend to show that tragedies set in cities other than Athens are characterised by emphasis on conflict between the *oikos* and the *polis*. Although at first sight this might seem a structuralist interpretation of the myth, as I discuss the *oikos* and *polis* in terms of constituent units of the sort discussed by Levi-Strauss[24] where aspects of a myth can be broken down into units and then analysed. Indeed Segal describes the structuralist methodology as: "Utilizing patterns of binary oppositions in an attempt to grasp the underlying "syntax" of myth and focussing on the dichotomy between nature and culture".[25] Structuralism focuses on the relation of myth to society, and how myth reflects on society. However I seek to analyse society's comment on myth.

[24] Levi-Strauss1963: 210 and passim.
[25] Segal 1978: 129.

Although I see the *oikos* and *polis* as a series of units, one leading into the other, I do not subscribe to the view that the two are in binary opposition. I will argue that analysing the *oikos-polis* dynamic and accepting that there are no clear universal rules is key in understanding the tragic city.

Thebes and Argos have been chosen for analysis as all three of the remaining playwrights approached the myths and in both cities women play central roles. My focus will be on extant plays set in Argos and Thebes respectively. The two chapters discussing Argos and Thebes have similar structures, and their principal focus is on female characters. The figure of the tragic female and gender relationships will be examined. Examination of how women act and interact will reveal the particular dystopian dynamics of the city. The final section of the chapters will consider the role of men in the plays and of men's relationship with women in the dystopian vision.

Following the chapter on Thebes there will be a case study of two plays: Aeschylus' *Septem Contra Thebas* and Euripides' *Bacchae*. This chapter will assess differences and similarities in the portrayal of Thebes in these two plays, by different playwrights and separated by more than half a century.

CHAPTER TWO: THEBES

Thebes functions in the theatre as an anti-Athens[26]

There [in Thebes] Athens acts out questions crucial to the polis, the self, the family and society, but these are displaced upon a city that is imagined as the mirror opposite of Athens[27]

The current literature on dramatic Thebes is dominated by Zeitlin's theory that Thebes was used by the tragedians as the mirror image of Athens and that it was the negative model of Athens' image of itself. This culminated in the assumption that Thebes is the 'other' place[28], the other implying it shows what the viewer is not. The function of the mirror is to enable the viewers to see themselves, thus this metaphor implies that Thebes on the tragic stage was a reflection of Athens. This chapter explores an alternative hypothesis: instead of Thebes being the anti-Athens as Zeitlin has argued, it is presented on the tragic stage in a more complex manner. Zeitlin argues that Thebes becomes the manifest negative image of Athens regarding governance, society and the self,[29] implying it was the morally opposite location to Athens. I agree that Thebes as a tragic *topos* is a negative manifestation of Athens, however, the concept can be taken further. It can become a device to warn the

[26] Zeitlin 1992: 144.
[27] Zeitlin 1992: 144.
[28] Zeitlin 1992: 131.
[29] Zeitlin 1992: 131.

audience: tragic Thebes becomes a cautionary tale to the Athenians, assuming the nature of a fable. Addressing the other metaphor used, it is my argument that rather than using a simple reflection to enable Athens to view itself on the tragic stage, Thebes became a vessel used by the playwrights to show the negative attributes of Athens in an exaggerated manner. Whereas a normal mirror merely reflects an image, this chapter will argue that the tragic representation of Thebes also magnifies and distorts the image. Kumar's definition of dystopia as "the mirror image of utopia – but a distorted image, seen in a cracked mirror"[30] may be a more pertinent metaphor for Thebes as, I will argue, Thebes is a distortion of Athens. The first section will explore the role and functions of women in dramatic Thebes.

The essence of drama is conflict, and Theban women appear at the centre of conflict; all are caught up in various forms, and the outcomes are central to the tragic representation of the city. Jocasta, Antigone and Ismene are the three women of the House of Laius that will be considered in this section. One of the major conflicts of tragic Thebes is that between *oikos* and *polis.*

Antigone by Sophocles is an example of this type of conflict and the disastrous results for both the *polis* and the *genos*. Knox's widely accepted interpretation, although criticised in Hamilton is that Creon is representative of the *polis* and Antigone

[30] Kumar 1987: 100.

represents earlier traditions, possibly dating back to Mesolithic practices.[31] The interpretation of the Mesolithic practices implies an older loyalty that predates the current states and is deep rooted. If Knox's argument is expanded, it implies that the fifth century *polis* is something that is a relatively new creation whereas the loyalty to the *oikos* and its practices are older and more established. Knox immediately assumes a difference in priority between the *oikos* and the *polis;* this difference becomes more than a loyalty to family or state but a conflict between old and new. Another way of viewing this difference is as a conflict between the rules of the mortal and the immortal. The essence of the conflict between Sophocles' Antigone and Creon is the dispute over the burial of her brother Polynices, and to whom her first duty should lie. Creon as leader of the *polis* and her *genos* believes it is to him and therefore the state but she argues it is to:

> Unwritten unalterable laws
> Of God and heaven (S., *Ant.* 454-5, trans Watling)

Or

> The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven (S., *Ant.* 454-5, trans Storr)

This immediately establishes a conflict between the two, where both sides believe themselves to be correct. The wider issue becomes whether the duty to bury a family member and complete the religious duty is superseded by loyalty to the state.

[31] Hamilton 1991: 88.

Antigone appeals to both the *oikos* and the gods, she values both and aligns the two together, as incompatible with the state in this context. The above lines warrant a further observation: the *polis* channelled through Creon, will order acts that are contrary to divine law, to the 'unalterable laws' provoking a conflict. In burying her dead brother, Antigone is preserving the unwritten unalterable laws,[32] but she is directly disobeying her *kyrios* and the ruler of the *polis* by committing an act of rebellion.

Antigone is choosing the religious and ritual obligations to her *oikos* over any threat to her life. Sophocles' Antigone is aware of the consequences of her disobedience, the death sentence. The outcome of the conflict is Antigone's political failure and Creon's domestic one.[33] Creon fails his *oikos* by causing, unintentionally, the deaths of all except for himself and Ismene. Creon fails the gods as stated by Teiresias[34] in keeping a corpse in the upper world and burying a living person, thus blurring the lines between the land of the living and the dead.[35] However, as Sourvinou-Inwood argues, the Athenian audience of the 440s BC would have found the denial of proper burial of Polynices perfectly reasonable but it is only later and through Teiresias that the true crime of Creon is discovered and for the reasons stated above.[36] By this interpretation it is Creon's decision to blur the lines between the *polis* and religious discourse that causes the displeasure of the gods, as the state seeks to infringe on the divine order.

[32] Hamilton 1991: 96.
[33] Zelenak 1998 : 77.
[34] S., *Ant.* 1067-73.
[35] Sourvinou-Inwood 1989: 146.
[36] Sourvinou-Inwood 1989: 139 and passim.

Creon fails the *polis* by seeking to give it too much power and over values it; Antigone fails her *oikos* and the *polis* as she dies an unmarried virgin and cannot fulfil her duty as a woman to produce an heir.[37] Rather than marrying, Antigone is in effect marrying her family, mirroring the actions of her father, in both Sophocles' *Antigone*, where she describes her funeral bed as her marriage bed,[38] and in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, where she rejects marriage to Haimon in favour of loyalty to her brother and father.[39][40]

Segal describes *Antigone* as a play of "antithesis and conflict"[41] and argues that the two protagonists, Antigone (*oikos*/female*)* and Creon (*polis/male*), are ideologically opposed to each other; thus conflict becomes inevitable. This argument is based on the assumption that these institutions cannot coexist harmoniously and is a key argument of the structuralists. Vernant writes on the conflict between Creon and Antigone, arguing each represents a conflicting religious position.[42] Creon is preoccupied with public religion that has become confused with the supremacy of the gods whereas Antigone rejects the call of Dionysos and Eros for the cult of her dead family.[43] Both Segal and Vernant see the city portrayed through these conflicts, and the action arising from the irreconcilable positions of the protagonists.

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[37] Wilner 1982: 63.
[38] S., *Ant*. 73-6.
[39] S., *Ant*. 679-81.
[40] Seaford 1990: 78.
[41] Segal 1986: 137.
[42] Vernant 1996: 41-42 and 101-102.
[43] Vernant 1996: 41-42.

Conversely it is my argument that the attempts for resolution within Thebes lead to destruction. Thebes is attempting to be a utopia but is unable to be so, leading to conflict. For example through Antigone trying to remedy the refusal of Creon to allow proper burial for Polynices, and Creon trying to uphold the right of the state to dispose of traitors in an appropriate manner, both are striving to uphold the correct values of the state. Thebes tries to uphold values recognisable to an Athenian audience such as loyalty to the state and religious observance, yet in Thebes these fundamental value systems cannot coexist harmoniously. This can be seen as a warning to the Athens, as Thebes strives for cohesion and fails, leading to the eventual destruction of the *polis*.

Another aspect of *Antigone* is that Antigone herself completes a task that is essential to the *polis*, the burial of the dead and the transference of the soul of the dead person to the netherworld. As argued by Winnington-Ingram it is the hubris that Creon has kept a dead man from returning to where he belongs, although full ritual burial is not required.[44] Those not given funeral rites were ritually conveyed from the realms of the living to those of the dead, even those who betrayed Athens were put into pits outside of the city, giving them a form of burial.[45] It is this, as Winnington-Ingram argues, that Antigone seeks to remedy. Polynices is given some form of burial, conveying him from the realms of the living to the nether gods, in whose service she is.[4647] This

[44] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 121.
[45] Sourvinou-Inwood 1989: 147.
[46] S., *Ant.* 451.
[47] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 142.

refusal of the leader of the city, and indeed the *kyrios*, to allow the proper burial is indicative of the type of dystopia that Thebes has become. The leader of the social unit attempts to do what is right i.e. the correct Athenian reaction to the disposal of enemy carrion but the attempts by all parties to do the correct ritual are flawed. Creon does not give Polynices an honourable burial, but in doing so he does not dispose of the body, leaving it in the realm of the living. Antigone attempts to remedy this wrong, but in doing so she disobeys the orders of the *kyrios* and leaves her traditional role within the *oikos* and, as Sourvinou-Inwood argues, the Athenian audience would have recognised that Antigone was out of her proper place and completing the ritual that was traditionally completed by a male.[48]

The character of Jocasta is central to the *oikos/polis* conflict nexus. As with Antigone, this female character becomes a centre of conflict that cannot be resolved and as a result the entire city is affected. The Jocasta of Sophocles in *Oedipus Tyrannus* is forced to prioritise the needs of her family over the wider needs of the state. Jocasta's actions have indirectly caused a plague upon the city of Thebes, immediately creating a link between the rulers and the people. The issue of whether it was Oedipus or Jocasta who caused the plague can be approached in different ways. The question arises as to whether Oedipus was able to make any of the choices that led to the situation of incest or parricide arising, or he was a mere chess piece of fate. The arguments are circular: are Jocasta and Laius to blame for not killing Oedipus or for

[48] Sourvinou-Inwood 1989: 140.

attempting to kill him? Or was it impious of them to try to kill him to prevent the outcome predicted? Dodds argues that it is not how good Oedipus was that is at issue but what is important is how Sophocles wished him to be seen.[49] In Dodds' opinion on the facts Oedipus was meant to be seen as a good man.[50] Furthermore he argues that Oedipus could not escape his fate as the oracle was unconditional.[51][52]

The actions of Jocasta in her impiety have, however, contributed to the situation that is presented on stage. Jocasta and Laius in trying to prevent the unpreventable have been the authors of their own misfortune. The play begins with the emphasis of a link between the city and the rulers, that the actions of one have affected the entire location.[53] These lines connect the rulers of the city with the people, thus the actions of the Theban rulers affect the entire city in an extreme way, i.e. through the plague.

This link between the rulers and the *polis* can be seen further, for example Thebes did not declare war on Argos in *Septem Contra Thebas*, but it was the ruling brothers' actions that led to war; the city and its citizenry were caught up in the conflict. There are two respects in which this is particularly significant in Thebes. Firstly there is the supernatural aspect, personified through the plague instigated by the gods against Thebes, and secondly the fact that the ruling family itself is cursed as evidenced through the curse of Laius, so the history of the House of Cadmus is filled with

[49] Dodds 1966: 40.
[50] Dodds 1966: 40-1.
[51] S., *OT*. 790.
[52] Dodds 1966: 41.
[53] S., *OT*. 21-39.

murder and destruction. The Sophoclean Jocasta is forced to choose between remaining alive, therefore serving her *oikos*, even though it is not viable and corrupted (for example Antigone is her daughter, granddaughter and sister-in-law), or dying and saving the city from her abomination. The Sophoclean Jocasta was portrayed as dying by hanging, which is a death with shameful connotations[54]; other women who die like this are Phaedra and her own daughter Antigone. This is consistent with the account in the *Odyssey*, where a brief outline of the life of Oedipus is given (however Jocasta is referred to as Epikaste).[55] This brief summation of the life of Oedipus makes no mention of a plague which first appears in Sophocles' version, however it mentions the furies, more commonly associated with Orestes in Argos in tragedy. Therefore the method of suicide was established by the fifth century and any changes by playwrights to the established method of suicide (as in *Phoenissae*) must be noted.

In *Phoenissae* the fate of Jocasta is different. Instead of hanging herself immediately in shame as in Sophocles she chooses to continue to live; she takes her life when she sees the death of her sons, the future of her *oikos* are mutually destroyed. The messenger describes how she wept as a mother.[56] Nurturing them at her breast is a sign in tragedy (and life in general) of motherly affection, thus Jocasta is expressing her love. This invokes the concept of *threptra* 'repayment for rearing' as seen in the *Iliad*,[57] it is said of a young man who dies in battle that 'he did not pay back the

[54] Loraux 1987.
[55] H., *Od*. 307-315.
[56] E., *Phoen.* 1433-5.
[57] H., *Il*. 4.477-8 and 17.301-2.

threptra to his dear parents'. Jocasta's effort is lost because she will get no *threptra* from her sons.

Parents burying their children (or simply living to see them die) is a powerful image of the destruction of the *oikos* and the failure of its continuity. Euripides then describes the death of Jocasta, by the sword, differing to how she dies in Sophocles, by hanging.[58] Death by the sword presents a powerful image and is a more heroic way to die, as worthy heroes, such as Ajax, died with honour with a sword;[59] however Ajax's death itself is problematic as the sword he uses is not his own but Hector's. Here, instead of dying like a wife in the marriage chamber, she is dying in the manner of a man, in his sphere: on the battlefield over the dead bodies of her sons. As she laments over her two sons she is lamenting the end of her *genos*, and at the destruction of what society expected her to produce, male heirs. It also shows the breakdown of the *oikos* and *polis* simultaneously, as brothers have turned on each other and in doing so have caused war. As this version of Jocasta leaves the realms of her sex to die like a man in his typical domain, Euripides is showing that to try and restore order to the *polis* because the men are delinquent, the woman is forced to take on the role of the man. Euripides presents an image of Thebes firstly where women are forced from their traditional domain into the realms of men, but more importantly where the women are loyal to their *oikos* without regard to the state. The *polis* and the

[58] E., *Phoen.* 1455-9.
[59] Loraux 1987: 14.

oikos are destroyed when the men become delinquent, therefore posing a warning to Athens as to the importance of their societal roles.

In tragedy Athens becomes the generic ‘good place’, the term utopia should be used cautiously, as mentioned in the introduction the original meaning of utopia was ‘no place’ rather than a place of well being. Yet the term utopia could be applicable as the tragic Athens is both not a place in existence ‘ou-topia’ but also it is idealised ‘eu-topia’. In Athens, conflicts are resolved, as in the trial of Orestes (see chapter four), and Oedipus and Heracles head there for shelter after committing crimes, and the ruler Theseus is shown as a wise and good ruler. Furthermore, there are examples of women succeeding where their Theban counterparts have failed. For example, in the *Suppliants* Aethra persuades her son to aid in the retrieval of the Argive dead, which may be contrasted with Antigone’s attempts to ensure burial of her dead. As Thebes is ruled by an inbred and cursed family, so there is a plague and civil war; the leadership is linked to the state of the city. As mentioned in the introduction, the breakdown of the family and the state are key traits of a dystopia; thus all attempts that are made to resolve problems will fail.

Another theme of conflict that runs in the Theban plays regards intra-familial disputes which cause the women to participate in, or take responsibility for, resolution between the two opposing sides. Conflict is a common theme within the House of Laius, and in every play regarding that line there is intra-familial conflict, which then causes

conflict within or strife to the city. Although this is not an isolated occurrence in tragedy, exploring aspects of the conflict and course of events which are specific to Thebes will aid in understanding what is distinctive about Thebes as a tragic city.

The intra-familial bonds are stronger than usual within the offspring of Jocasta, as they shared the same womb, including the son/father.[60] This could lead to the supposition that their destinies and lives are so intertwined that they cannot escape each other as they are bound by deep-rooted links, formed through this unusual characteristic. These links within the family also extend to their people: just as the house itself is linked, the actions of the rulers are portrayed as having an extreme effect on the city. For example in the *Phoenissae* when the dying Polynices begs Jocasta and Antigone to be buried, he expresses the connection he felt with his brother, with whom he shared the same womb.[61]

The links in death between the offspring of Oedipus are strong, reinforcing the bonds within the *oikos*, showing the positive values of Thebes, in other words strong ties in the *oikos*. However the members of the House of Laius seem to be unable to translate these bonds in the correct (idealised Athenian) manner. Considering the corrupted nature of their parentage the pattern of the story must end in conflict and death.

[60] Hamilton 1991: 95.
[61] E., *Phoen* .1446.

Antigone in *Oedipus Coloneus* tries to dissuade Polynices from attacking Thebes, as he had been exiled by his brother Eteocles.[62]

Here Antigone is giving military orders, for the good of the state. Antigone in *Oedipus Coloneus* has ceased from being a physical inhabitant of the *oikos*, as she has left her home to serve her father. Although she is still serving a member of her family, Antigone is doing it in a most unconventional way. She has left her physical home, to roam the wilds and now she is giving orders like a man. In these two instances her motives are to preserve her family and her city, but the methods she is using are unconventional. This can be compared with what Oedipus says about his sons having turned normal (Greek) customs upside-down.[63] There he compares the situation to Egypt, where men stay at home and the women go out to win the daily bread. Therefore Antigone is still trying to fulfil her role within Greek customary life, but failing as the situation in Thebes will not allow her, whereas Oedipus, as the male, sees that the sons have emasculated the city so women are having to take the role of men as the men are metaphorically staying at home and weaving.

Jocasta in the *Phoenissae* unsuccessfully tries to resolve the dispute that will lead to fratricide and the destruction of the *polis*. The Jocasta of Euripides, as mentioned above, is different in her values and character to that of Sophocles. She is more closely linked with the offspring of her womb than with the good of the state and the

[62] S., *OC*. 1416-7.
[63] S., *OC*. 337-52.

shame inflicted upon her house. She cannot resolve the conflicts of the house because they have spilled into the realms of the *polis*, through the war between Thebes and Argos. Even though there is an attempt at conflict resolution, Jocasta is unable to resolve the dispute which ends in death and the destruction of the city. Polynices turns to Jocasta to reconcile the warring brothers.[64] It is noteworthy that Polynices is handing the fate of 'all the city' into the hands of a woman, which is not her traditional gender role. Even though she is their mother and suitable for familial reconciliation, because the conflict has been extended beyond genetic ties she has been taken out of her normal sphere. Jocasta fails to reconcile her sons, and as a result the *polis* is destroyed, the Oedipus-nexus results in normal authority being undermined. Jocasta is placed repeatedly into a position where she must save the city, this can be seen later on in the *Phoenissae* where Jocasta condemns the actions of her offspring for the effect it will have on the land.[65]

The link between *oikos* and *polis* is strongly established in *Phoenissae* because of the war, the direct consequence of the ruler's actions. Unlike Argos, the citizens of Thebes suffer directly because of their actions. The Euripidean Jocasta is trying to save the city, although she is primarily concerned with the preservation of her *oikos.* She is not able to put the needs of her country before the needs of her offspring, like Antigone in Sophocles, Jocasta is favouring the cult of her kin over the state.

[64] E., *Phoen*. 435-7.
[65] E., *Phoen*. 563-7.

Another aspect of tragic Thebes is the women are forced to switch gender roles. The major gender reversal concerns the role of women within religious rites which aids the creation of a city that contradicts Athenian social mores. In Thebes women take on the roles of men in religion, either because the man cannot or will not do it himself, or because women are unable to complete their religious obligations[66]. The playwrights have created a city where women are unable to fulfil their traditional religious roles. As mentioned above, Jocasta[67] is forced into the role of peacemaker as her sons are warring and are therefore unable to care for the state. Her son and husband, Oedipus, who would normally be the ruler, is locked in a tower room, blind and raving, calling down curses on the city; the former ruler is turning against his land. The only resolution to this situation is a woman 'saving' the city because the men have failed in their traditional role, so Jocasta is being forced out of her traditional sphere into that of her male offspring.

The role of women in religion and specifically 'cult' activity in Thebes can differ from that of Athens. Women who can engage in cult activity on the stage were both positive and negative in their actions. On the tragic stage a woman's participation in ritual activity can save the city, yet the actions of women in cult rituals can be negative. For example in *The Bacchae,* Agave's participation in Maenadic ritual leads to the death of her son, Pentheus, and when she leaves the trance that Dionysus' worship caused there is the haunting sudden realisation that she has torn off the head

[66] Goff: 1995b: 353 -65.
[67] In E., *Phoen.*

of her son.[68] Theban women are freed from their domestic spheres by the inadequacy of men, leading to destruction and disaster. This can be interpreted as a warning to Athenian men: this will happen if women are not controlled and the men fail in their duties. Yet it can also be another method of mocking and critiquing Thebes: this is where women take on male roles/the men there are not masculine enough.

Theban women have to de-feminise themselves in order to fulfil their moral obligations. This de-feminisation entails the removal of the women from their traditional field into the world of men. For example, Sophocles' Antigone has to negate her female obligations in order to fulfil her moral obligations towards her brother. This action she knows will lead to her death but she chooses to die a 'hero' rather than become a conventional 'heroine'. It also implies that she rates her duties towards her brother, Polynices, higher than those towards the *Kyrios* and *polis*, as has been discussed above. Furthermore Antigone cannot effectively be prohibited from undertaking her actions because there is no strong male that can prevent her

By choosing death over the conventional marriage and acquiescence to male authority, Antigone is making a statement that is not undermining the *polis* but upholding some of its values, as due religious ritual was essential to the just state. On the other hand, by not carrying on her duties to the *oikos* in producing a child, she is

[68] E., *Bacch*. 1284.

terminating that which she seeks to uphold. Therefore it may appear at first that she is trying to destroy the *polis* and uphold her *oikos,* in fact the opposite has occurred.[69]

Similarly in *Oedipus Coloneus* Antigone rejects her female traditional 'role' in order to help her family. This is another example of how she seeks to uphold one section of the traditional *oikos* yet she is unable to fulfil all of its traditional roles. In being the dutiful daughter and sister she cannot fulfil her primary reproductive function. The sacrifice she has made is emphasised by her father's words.[70] The description of Antigone who 'roamed the wilds' is almost maenadic, implying something wild, uncontrollable, and most importantly dangerous, as, like Agave in the latter half of *The Bacchae*, she is not under the 'yoke' of strong, male control so her actions and chasteness cannot be guaranteed. Although she is in the company of her father, the nature of the relationships within the House of Laius breaks down the sanctity of her position.

Antigone is removed from her traditional domestic role as she has become something wild that cannot be controlled by man and leaves the physical structure of the home and enters into the 'wild'; she goes from the enclosed to the exposed. She rejects a life of 'happiness' in order to follow her familial duty and become her father's guide, of which she claims 'it is noble, father'.[71] This loss of control by men, and rejection of traditional values, is seen also in *The Bacchae,* but to a greater extent, which will be

[69] S., *Ant*. 465-8.
[70] S., *OC* .345-52.
[71] E., *Phoen*. 1692.

discussed in the next chapter. Yet the maenadism is contrary to what has been said earlier; her selfless devotion to the men of her family. As will be shown in *The Bacchae* maenads follow the god Dionysus and abandon the bonds of family in frenzy, instead leaving their duties behind to worship the deity. The two can perhaps be reconciled by seeing her as a maenad of the *oikos*: the men of her family become her Dionysos. Thus by her actions she is prioritising the religion of her family over her womanly duties to them. The ritual obligations felt by Antigone supersede domestic duties, and the maenadic nature of the obligation means that it cannot be completed within the safety of the home. Athens is a place where rituals can be completed by women in a controlled manner, and in tandem with traditional domestic duties. Thebes, by contrast, is where the two cannot coexist. Both Thebes and Athens have the same values, yet in Thebes these values cannot be upheld.

In the *Phoenissae,* Jocasta has to de-feminise herself as well in order to try and save her *oikos*, and beseeches Antigone to do the same.[72] In order for this to take place Jocasta and Antigone must cross the enemy camp. Warfare and the battleground are traditionally a male area, so by their presence they are symbolically crossing over from one gender sphere to the other. Once again, the women of the House of Laius are de-feminised as they are forced to leave the household and enter the male-dominated area of war in order to perform the male role of saving the land. Although other women are also called on to 'save the day', for example Iphigenia and

[72] E., *Phoen.* 1280-3.

Makaria, Theban women do so in a distinctively active way, not by passively submitting to sacrifice. This is more evidence of women in Thebes leaving their traditional passive sphere and adopting male behaviour.

What is Antigone's standing in Sophocles' plays? Is she a 'heroine' or a 'hero', and if a hero, does this add to her de-feminisation? I use the term 'heroine' in two specific senses. The term active heroine will imply actively stepping outside conventional feminine roles. This term could perhaps be equated with the modern idea of the 'hero', a leading protagonist in a drama. Classical examples include Medea, Electra and Antigone. Durham suggests in relation to Medea that "it may be a contradiction in terms to speak of a tragic heroine, that women characters who achieve heroic stature in tragedy necessarily reject their femaleness or participate in its devaluation".[73] Thus Durham is defining certain characters in terms of the active heroine. The woman who actively engages in the action of the play, although her ultimate conclusion is that human traits are ultimately linked with gender, and there has yet to be a human transcendental hero. Even Medea, who is arguably the most active heroine, is still essentially female although her role in the play is continually active. As Bongie has stated, Euripides reveals the "paradox of Medea's masculine nature" whilst still "presenting the picture of a woman who has allied herself completely to the interests of her husband".[74] Bongie argues that Medea is a "saint" in relation to the ancient

[73] Durham 1984: 55.
[74] Bongie 1977: 28.

heroic code, and Medea is written in the tradition of the Sophoclean hero.[75] Although it may be enticing to enter into a discussion on Medea as the hero at this point there is a danger of deviating from the purpose of this discussion. Medea is perhaps the closest example from tragedy of becoming "hero" although throughout the play, as Durham has argued, Medea remains essentially female.[76] Therefore Antigone, the active heroine of Thebes, remains very much a woman even though her actions have male characteristics. It is the activeness of her actions that help shape the distinct Theban dystopia.

An example from modern literature of an active heroine is Scarlett O'Hara, whose actions in the post-American Civil War era lead her to be criticised by the community for being too masculine. The book raises questions about female identity and her role in both Mitchell's contemporary world and in civil war era America.[77] As Mulvey states about women in modern cinema: "An active/passive heterosexual division of labor has similarly controlled narrative structure".[78] Where Scarlett in the narrative structure of the book differs is that she does not conform to this division of labour. De Lauretis argues the "construction of the female social subject in cinematic representation bear in their visual form the prefix "de-" to signal the destructuring, if not destruction, of the very thing to be represented".[79] Scarlett de-feminises herself in her actions but throughout the book remains intrinsically female and throughout

[75] Bongie 1977:55-56.
[76] Durham 1984: passim.
[77] Fox-Genovese 1981: 393.
[78] Mulvey 1975: 7.
[79] De Lauretis 1985: 175.

Medea it is clear that Medea is always a female. Scarlett O'Hara saves her family at the expense of her feminine reputation by taking on the role of a man challenging the established gender roles of the time.[80] Thus she becomes the active heroine of the story rather than the passive such as Melanie, her sister-in-law. Another example is the lead character of Ripley, played by Sigourney Weaver in *Alien* (1979): this part was originally written for a man, and the female character is represented as being stretched to the limits of her mental and physical ability, but rather than become passive in the manner of a heroine, she is active throughout the film. Ripley is the strong woman, its survivor, and her success is grounded in intelligence and strength of character, she is active in her roles as opposed to the men who shy from the action.[81]

The term passive 'heroine' in this thesis is used to denote a female character who is passive yet plays an important dramatic role, for example Ismene, Makaria. It is clear that Ismene remains passive in contrast to Antigone, whose actions are key in the play. Antigone is the active heroine of the House of Cadmus and Ismene is the passive heroine. Ismene's passivity is displayed in her compliance to the will of the *polis* and her new *kyrios* leading to her inability to disobey it and him. Although it is arguable there is more depth to Ismene's character, she does not provide a focus for action, unlike Antigone.

[80] Fox-Genovese 1981: 399-400.
[81] Kavanaugh 1980: 93.

In the *Oedipus Coloneus*, Ismene elects to remain at Thebes, rather than sacrifice her duties as a woman, as Antigone has, but she does leave the city in order to warn her father of the coming war. The Antigone-Ismene relationship is another display of how the *oikos-polis* relationship cannot be resolved in Thebes. She obeys the words of men, unlike Antigone who appears willing, maybe eager, to die[82]. Ismene has the same respect for the laws of the *polis* in *Antigone*, contrary to its eponymous character.[83]

The passivity of Ismene is reflected here, although she wishes to bury her dead brother, she cannot go against her rulers as 'to do more is madness'. The character of Ismene in her passivity becomes the heroine, obeying the *dike* of the *polis* unlike her sister who is obeying the *dike* of the gods. Although she does not actively disobey the law, she still morally believes her brother ought to be buried, and this is essential in understanding her character. Ismene embraces the female ideal, she has a strong moral awareness of duty to the dead yet her loyalty and obedience to the state are overriding.

As noted above it is essentially the breakdown of the male and his role in the *polis* that lead to women having to leave their traditional gender roles. Knox's seminal work on Oedipus describes the Theban hero as:

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[82] S., *OC.* 1723-30.
[83] S., *Ant.* 58-68.

> [he is unreasonable to the point of] madness, suicidal, bold, impervious to argument, intransigent, angry; an impossible person....But to the hero himself the opinion of others is irrelevant[84]

By this description the hero is different from our modern ideal; the Theban hero is the central character who must pursue his course in spite of himself. In pursuit of his aim the hero is unable to attend to his role within the *polis*, and thus the women must fill the void created by the hero. These traits are possessed by many of the key male characters of Thebes. What singles out Oedipus and Heracles is that they can receive redemption and salvation, but must leave the city to receive it and head to Athens, the Utopia.

The most famous portrayal of Oedipus is by Sophocles in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus Coloneus*. Here the hero is similar to other Sophoclean heroes, he is one who:

> Unsupported by the gods and in the face of human opposition, makes a decision which springs from the deepest layer of his individual nature, his physis, and then blindly, ferociously, heroically maintains that decision even to the point of self destruction.[85]

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[84] Knox 1964: 28.
[85] Knox 1964 : 5.

On Knox's interpretation, when Oedipus kills his father at the crossroads, although he thinks he is only killing a stranger, he is in fact acting from inside, from deep within his nature. His insistence in pursuing the person who murdered Laius to the end also leads to his self-destruction. There are several instances in *Oedipus Tyrannus* when he could have ceased from pursuing the investigation to the end but this heroic rashness that arises from deep within his character, compels him to finish it. For example he could have not killed Laius at the crossroads but Laius affronted his pride. Oedipus has a deep determination to uncover the truth and refuses to yield in the face of threats and persuasion.[86]

Once the hero had decided on a course of action it must be fulfilled to the end, even his wife's pleading cannot deter him. Jocasta has no desire to discover the 'mystery' of Oedipus' birth, perhaps as she fears the outcome but also because she is not driven by the same heroic curiosity as her husband. Oedipus is incapable of learning from his mistakes. At the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, he is still issuing commands even though no longer king, and has to be reminded of this by Creon.[87] Oedipus at the end of *Oedipus Coloneus* also displays the same forthrightness, even though he has experienced life as a humble beggar and suppliant. Creon condemns him for his inability to learn.[88]

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[86] S., *OT*. 1056-61.
[87] S., *OT*. 1523-4.
[88] S., *OC*. 804-5.

Oedipus is the salvation and curse of Thebes. Through Oedipus the riddle of the Sphinx is solved and the city is saved.[89] En route to saving his city he also sows the seeds of Thebes' and his line's destruction as he kills his own father, unknowingly fulfilling the first prediction of the oracle that he is fleeing. Thus Oedipus is both the salvation and destruction of Thebes.

In the finale of *Oedipus Coloneus*, Oedipus displays that he is still a powerful civic figure, condemning Thebes and his sons to ruin, siding with Athens, and receiving his redemption. It is by no means a 'happy ending' but the hero is forgiven by the gods and received into the grove of the Eumenides, which was a historical cult centre of Oedipus, the Eumenides and Demeter.[90] Oedipus can only receive redemption by leaving the city and turning to its neighbour, Athens, and its noble king Theseus. Only by seeking salvation in Athens, can the man who has performed such terrible acts be redeemed because it is a place that gives sanctuary to the characters of tragedy, (Medea, Heracles, Orestes, Oedipus, etc). It is also notable that in order to become the hero again he must leave Thebes and side against it, protecting Athens in his death from Thebes. Athens here is how the playwright wished it to be, whereas Thebes is what Athens could become. One is an inspiration and the other a warning. It must be noted that Oedipus in this version of the story is able to be a hero in the modern reading of the term through leaving Thebes and finding redemption. Thebes is a place

[89] S., *OT.* 35-36.
[90] For wider discussion of Oedipus as a cult figure see Edmunds: 1981.

where salvation cannot be achieved and it is only through leaving the dystopia that Oedipus can find a resolution for himself.

Heracles is another character associated with Thebes. There are four tragedies concerning Heracles directly or indirectly (three by Euripides and one by Sophocles): the *Heracleidae*, the *Alcestis,* in which he appears as a slightly comic character firstly disrupting the household, in a manner more typical of Heracles in comedy, before revealing himself as a saviour; the *Trachiniae,* and the *Hercules Furens,* both of which represent Heracles in person. Due to word constraints only the *Hercules Furens* will be discussed.

The *Hercules Furens* is set in Thebes, where Heracles' family is resident, a generation after the death of Oedipus. Heracles returns to them from the underworld, to find the state and his family in distress. King Lycus has killed Creon and must kill the line of Heracles to stop them gaining revenge on him when they grow up.[91] The usurper Lycus shows that if there is a corrupted ruler, tragedy will occur. Here Lycus has admitted to the murder of the rightful ruler and is about to commit infanticide. It seems that the legacy of the House of Cadmus has continued and even after the last of that line has been murdered Thebes is still wretched, so the damage incurred lasts.[92]

[91] E., *HR.* 166-9.
[92] E., *HF*. 272-5.

Heracles was one of the more complicated of all the Greek heroes in cult and myth, and in Athenian drama the nature of his personality is semi-comic, destructive and ambiguous, dependent on the genre his character appeared in. He is neither god nor man; he is a hero and yet very flawed. Because of these traits, he is at home in a city which presents a negative image of Athens, and it is not until he can seek redemption, like Oedipus and Orestes, that he is allowed into Athens. In *Hercules Furens* the movement is towards humanity. The hero enters as a godlike, loving figure, is called so by his wife[93] and does not become insane when he discovers Lycus' actions; instead he acts according to his divine nature which is a bloody response.[94]

He is driven to madness by Lyssa, the personification of insanity, on Hera's orders, at his moment of triumph when he has killed Lycus. When be returns to normality he chooses to become a human rejecting his divine parentage, considering a mortal to be his emotional father figure, and he leaves the stage a broken man.[95] There is an interesting juxtaposition between the triumph and the tragedy, confirming that Heracles is the strangest and greatest of Greek heroes,[96] and that the theme of his suffering should be underpinned by the notion of friendship in *Hercules Furens* confirms this. The play gives no clue as to why this theme is present and it seems that the transference of Heracles the comic to Heracles the tragic has brought with it elements of the comic. The location of Thebes for this play is important as it brings in

[93] E., *HF*. 277.
[94] Silk 1985: 13.
[95] E., *HF*. 1265.
[96] Silk 1985: 1.

key themes from the tragedies set in the House of Laius. The divine strikes down the hero, as with Oedipus and the plague and also Pentheus and Dionysus. However, Heracles like Oedipus is offered sanctuary rather than remain amongst the ruins left as a result of mad destruction in Thebes. Thus in Thebes the gods can strike down the hero, however the retreat to Athens indicates that for these heroes there is sanctuary from both the citizenry and the gods.

Heracles' curse in this play is temporary madness, but his actions will have consequences until his death. Tragic madness becomes something external and invasive, it is daemonic and autonomous[97], and it is not part of the hero but causes the hero to act - Oedipus and Heracles both are compelled by a temporary madness.

The Theban hero, in becoming a hero, negates his citizenship and finds redemption in Athens, whereas the other male characters of Thebes remain in the city and do not receive salvation. They either die and by their death cause no benefit, or alternatively live on although their lives have been destroyed. Oedipus (*Oedipus Coloneus)* is the only male member of the House of Laius to escape Thebes, although Heracles (*Hercules Furens)*, also escapes and they both find redemption; however Creon (*Antigone)*, Pentheus (*The Bacchae*) and Polynices (*Septem Contra Thebas, Phoenissae)* do not. They die as a result of their own actions or for Creon, are left

[97] Padel 1995: 20.

alone as his *oikos* has been destroyed. It appears that there can be no resolution in Thebes, only mutual and assured destruction.

The first two sections of this chapter have examined how Thebes was portrayed on the Athenian tragic stage. Zeitlin argues that Thebes is the mirror image of Athens, which implies a form of intrinsic opposition. I have argued that Thebes is not presented like this: instead it is used to dramatise a negative extension of Athens. This makes it both a hyperbole and parabolic at the same time: Thebes is an exaggeration of Athens in its negative form, and is also used as a parable. In Thebes the consequences of the ruler's actions affect the whole city, they are extreme, and the only methods of resolution are either death or exile to Athens.

Each playwright had a different way of portraying this myth on the tragic stage, but what is common in Thebes is the breakdown of male leadership. They are pushed out of their traditional sphere of the *oikos* and are made to act in the *polis* (Antigone and Jocasta). Where Theban women are active, and the more their actions become active, the more the city becomes dystopian, which can lead to the conclusion that Theban women are warnings to Athenian men. If a woman takes an active role in the affairs of the state it will ultimately lead to the destruction of the *polis*. The heroes are destroyed and forced to leave the city because they cannot function in this environment, they seek refuge in Athens instead (Heracles and Oedipus). The heroes also are unwilling to leave a course of action, pursuing it to the end (Oedipus and

Creon). They cannot compromise. The actions of the ruler reverberate on his people, Thebes' ruler is corrupt, therefore the city is damned; it is a warning to Athens, if the Athenian rulers become corrupted, Athens will become damned.

CHAPTER THREE

Case Study on Thebes: Septem Contra Thebas and The Bacchae

This chapter will consider the earliest and latest surviving plays set in Thebes: Aeschylus' *Septem Contra Thebas* and Euripides' *Bacchae* and the changing portrayal of Thebes on the tragic stage over time. The *Septem* is the last and only surviving part of a connected trilogy, and is concerned with the demise of the house of Laius, whereas the *Bacchae* confronts the Theban foundation myths. The first part of this chapter will examine the *Septem.*

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The focus of the *Septem* is Eteocles although it has a female chorus. The pervasive theme of the Theban plays, women being prevented from completing their religious rituals, is introduced in *Septem.*[98] The women of Thebes are trying to aid the city in the only manner in which they are able, through prayer [99] and call upon the gods to defend the city[100] and promise future honours.[101] Eteocles seems unwilling to let them complete this course of action and tirades against them because their attitudes are demoralising the citizens. Yet Eteocles also invokes the gods to protect the city,[102]

[98] A., *Septem.* 214-7 and 265-6.
[99] A., *Septem.* 80 onwards.
[100] A., *Septem.* 86.
[101] A., *Septem.* 304-11 and 312-17.
[102] A., *Septem.* 76-77.

and as the relationship between Thebes and the gods is one of interchange.[103] The chorus runs to the statues of the gods whereas the king entrusts his faith in the practical towers of Thebes, these were both appropriate responses in contemporary Athens[104] but in Thebes the two reactions cannot exist harmoniously. The effect that this has on the portrayal of Thebes is crucial. Women in *Septem* are trying to save the city, through the mode that is appropriate for the passive yet pious Athenian women: prayer. In Thebes an attempt is made to pray, but the appropriate prayers cannot be completed. If Thebes was the mirror image of Athens the chorus would not have attempted to pray. Here the appropriate course of action was taken but it could not be completed due to the actions of the male.

Eteocles is displaying an equally extreme reaction to the situation. Zeitlin argues that Eteocles over-values the *polis* by aligning himself completely to it, and distancing himself from his *genos*.[105] This further indicates how Thebes is a negative portrayal of Athens on the tragic stage, as Eteocles is striving towards civic loyalty, however as with other Theban plays, the values of the *polis* and the *oikos* cannot be reconciled in Thebes.[106] Eteocles aligns himself to his 'other': the earth, and the autochthonous Spartoi warriors[107] unlike the women who align themselves to the gods, indicating a clash of values. Through this Aeschylus is showing the natural cycles which give

[103] Thalmann 1978: 51.
[104] Brown 1977: 301.
[105] Zeitlin 1990: 107.
[106] A., *Septem.* 745-49.
[107] Zeitlin 1990: 107.

stability to life in the city and the bonds between the earth and the citizens,[108] although in Thebes these natural cycles cannot be completed as the city is dystopic. In doing this in the earlier parts of the play it highlights the pollution of the brothers destroying each other in the latter parts.

The *Septem* is a battle play yet there is little action on stage, the women of the chorus are commentators on the action of the play. It is debatable whether Eteocles is the hero or the destroyer of Thebes,[109] his emphasis changes from civic to personal during the play. At first he appears to be concerned primarily with the welfare of his city, he asks the gods for their help[110] but also rebukes the chorus for running to the gods for help because of their frenzied indiscipline.[111] Eteocles thinks the women should pray that the defences do not fail showing the "bitter cynical realism that regularly marks a soldier's attitude to war".[112] He does not object to the chorus seeking the aid of the gods but he is concerned that their "hysteria"[113] will alarm the citizens. Eteocles is portrayed as the civic defender, his supplications to the gods are specific to defence of the city, not himself. His rebukes to the women are because he fears they would alarm his citizens; his aim is to protect the *polis* at the expense of the proper worship of the gods. Midway through the play Eteocles' character changes and when he finds out Polynices is waiting at the gates to fight he decides to fight his brother: 'king against

[108] Thalmann 1978: 43.
[109] See Von Fritz in Lloyd: 2007.
[110] A., *Septem.* 275-7.
[111] Podlecki 1999: 29.
[112] Golden 1964: 80.
[113] Golden 1964: 80

king, and brother against brother'.[114] The curse does not come to prominence until the impending battle between the brothers.[115][116]

The issue of Eteocles' character development has been discussed in the literature in this area and as Podlecki aptly states: Eteocles is a bundle of contradictions.[117] With reference to the text Podlecki sees Eteocles change from the strong leader[118] and the guardian of the nation to a man who undertakes to kill his own brother. Therefore to save the city the hero must undertake sacrilege, to defend the last gate and therefore the curse is fulfilled. Yet Brown sees Eteocles as forgetting the claims of patriotism in favour of personal honour, he may have avoided the pollution by making the conscious decision to back out from the combat.[119] Lines 673-675 show that part of Eteocles' motivation is his view that he is the best choice to defend the seventh gate;[120] however, if Eteocles was motivated purely by civil loyalty then surely the pollution that is mentioned in 679-82 would supersede the necessity for his defence of that gate. In the alternative Eteocles is compelled by his own personal drive to kill his brother and that the sentiment not to dishonour himself and the feeling of revenge take over and the excuse is necessity. As Vellacott argues, Eteocles reveals a hatred of

[114] A., *Septem.* 674.
[115] A., *Septem.* 653.
[116] Brown 1977: 308.
[117] Podlecki 1964: 284.
[118] Podlecki 1964:284.
[119] Brown 1977: 312.
[120] DeVito 1999: 167.

his brother as a life-long obsession[121] which may have aided in his drive to fight his brother. Once he makes the decision to fight, his passionate desire to fight Polynices then arises.[122] DeVito argues that Eteocles is able to decide how to face what fate has dealt him, displaying the uneasy relationship between the will of the human and the divine in Thebes.[123] Yet Nussbaum argues, albeit unconvincingly that Eteocles has no alternative but to fight his brother.[124] In any event by the time there is a realisation that the brothers must fight, Eteocles makes it clear that the gods have abandoned his family,[125] and the contrast is drawn between the ruling family and the city.[126]

When the two brothers fight the curse of Oedipus comes to its (inevitable) conclusion. The change in Eteocles' character is symptomatic of Thebes the city, with the hero seeking to act for the good of the *polis* but inevitably necessitating the will of his *oikos.* Eteocles has been described as having two distinct phases by Winnington-Ingram[127] but Vellacott sees three: the first where Eteocles appears with the chorus, the second with the warriors and the third where he should fight his brother.[128] The relationship with the chorus has been discussed above, yet when surrounded by the warriors he appears kingly and controlled, a contrast to the earlier and later

[121] Vellacott 1979: 216.
[122] Brown 1977: 313.
[123] DeVito 1999: 165.
[124] Nussbaum 1985: 253-254.
[125] A., *Septem.* 702-704.
[126] Thalmann 1978: 54.
[127] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 22.
[128] Vellacott 1979: 211.

representations.[129] In terms of Knox's definition of the hero (see chapter two), Eteocles decides to face his brother, fulfilling his father's curse, even to 'the point of self destruction'[130] and in full knowledge of the extent of the pollution he would be causing. This shows Eteocles as ultimately someone who is attempting to save his city, but a character who is going to pursue his intention to the last no matter the consequences.

The *Septem* presents an image of Thebes as a place of inevitable destruction. In Thebes the homeland cannot be defended against the invader as the invader is itself and therefore it is unable to find a balance that will lead to the salvation of the city. There is no other course except destruction open to Eteocles, as if he was predestined to fight his brother due to the curse then Thebes is divinely damned, whereas if his decisions were through choice then the city is again damaged by the pollution. By line 690 Etecoles' care for the city has vanished as has any piety and pollution is welcomed.[131] In Thebes where there is murder within the family there is a direct effect on the *polis* as a whole.

Where the *Septem* is the earliest surviving play set in Thebes, Euripides' *Bacchae*, first performed sometime after the playwright's death in 406 BC, is the latest. The women of *Bacchae* compared to those of the *Septem* have a much larger role. The god

[129] Vellacott 1979: 213.
[130] Knox 1964: 5.
[131] Vellacott 1979: 216.

Dionysos sends the women of Thebes out into the mountains to lose control, to exit their traditional sphere of the *oikos,* an action which Pentheus considers to be morally wrong.[132][133] This action is highly symbolic, it shows how Dionysos causes women to forget their duties to their family and the state. The female loss of control is central throughout the play, it shows the consequences of frenzied and 'free' behaviour, yet there is a contrast in behaviour of the women from the parados, which depicts a more controlled hysteria which is in the service of the civic religion to that of Mount Citheraeron, which shows the raw and dangerous hysteria.[134] Dionysos describes the state of women that he literally set free,[135] but importantly the god inverts the civilised through his worship, culminating in Agave tearing apart her own son.[136]

As in the *Septem,* the women of Thebes are interrupted amid a religious ritual but there is a significant difference between the two plays. In the *Septem*, the chorus are pleading to the gods to protect their city, here they have been released into the outdoors, in order to declare the divinity of Dionysos.[137] As Dodds eloquently argues, to resist Dionysos is to repress the elemental in ones own nature and when it breaks through civilisation vanishes.[138] Thus there is at the end a resolution that the god will be worshipped through the *polis* cult, rather than repressing his worship altogether[139]

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[132] Papadppoulou 2001: 27.
[133] E., *Bacch*. 216-217.
[134] Dodds 1940: 159.
[135] E., *Bacch.* 32-6.
[136] Seaford 1994: 254-255.
[137] E., *Bacch.* 445-6.
[138] Dodds 1940: 159.
[139] Seaford 1994: 255.

but the ruling family going into exile, and the conflict within that *oikos* unresolved.[140] This is a theme that is evident throughout the Theban plays, the resolution of a civic problem but the destruction of the ruling *oikos* and it helps to shape the type of dystopia Thebes becomes.

Pentheus tries to prevent the worship of the god through interrupting their activities as he fears the consequences of the actions of the women. Where in the *Septem* Eteocles is faced with an imminent threat and stops the women, Pentheus forbids the women from acting for more personal reasons. The women of *Septem* were merely threatened amid their more comparatively restrained religious rites, however in this play these women have been incarcerated in an attempt to prevent them from participating in religious frenzy. This is the culmination of a theme seen through all the tragedies set in Thebes.

The women of the *Bacchae* play an essential and predominant role within the play, they are the centre of the action, which reacts to the Theban women and not the Asian maenads of the chorus. The actions of Pentheus incite the Theban women to murder, culminating in Pentheus' head being torn from his body, in a bloody example of cult activity where the lines between human and animal are blurred.[141] Therefore Pentheus can be seen as a warning against arrogance and rejecting the will of the gods and as a warning against impiety. This all leads to the breakdown of the *polis.* It is the leader

[140] Seaford 1994: 256.
[141] Scott 1975: 336.

of Thebes who causes the Theban women to react thus, and his actions lead to his gruesome death, through angering the stranger/god.[142]

The murder of Pentheus by his mother, Agave, is testimony to how completely the women of Thebes are possessed by the god. Furthermore Seaford argues as Pentheus is killed by his mother, this action represents both the destruction of the *oikos* as well as the triumph of the maenad.[143] Goldhill sees the death of Pentheus as representing two distinct concepts, firstly Pentheus has been punished for his *hubris* and secondly Agave has been lured into the crime of child-murder.[144] This echoes earlier plays that involved intrafamilial homicide; here as in other plays, the murderer is not aware that he or she is killing a family member (e.g. Oedipus killing Laius). The image of the severed head on the end of her thyrsos underlines both her mental state and the power of the god. Girard sees the god as a binary character where men are impotent to stop his power once it is unleashed.[145] Although I agree with the latter half of this statement, where men are powerless against the god, I do not think Dionysos can be considered as a double god. It is true to say he has dual aspects but it is trite that the god has a multi-faceted 'personality' that cannot simply be described as 'double'.

[142] E., *Bacch.* 1139-40.
[143] Seaford 1994: 259.
[144] Goldhill 1986: 261.
[145] Girard and Goodhart 1977: 492.

Dionysos represents the other; he is described as coming from the lands of the east[146] into Greece to claim/reclaim his birthright. He comes as a *xenos* to Thebes and this is emphasised throughout the play, making him both the native Theban and the outsider.[147] Pentheus during the action of the play had sought to "fight corruption and preserve his city, but his defense has come close to destroying Thebes physically".[148] As Scott argues: Pentheus is unable to accommodate the wild divinity therefore he sees the actions of the women of Thebes as anarchy.[149] This is an example of the ruler seeking to act in a typical Athenian way, trying to do what is best for the *polis*, where this breaks down is the lack of understanding of the ruler and his inability to see beyond the civic.

Pentheus and Dionysos are opposites, in that Dionysos sends the women into the glades, and Pentheus desires them to be locked up and controlled. As Foley eloquently states: "Euripides represents Pentheus' inability to understand and control Dionysus not only through the king's failure to interpret his words but through his failure to discern the god within the theatrical forms that express him".[150] It is evident that Euripides has shown on the stage the danger of not understanding and realising the importance of the god as part of the *polis*. Through the death of Pentheus the leadership of the *polis* breaks down, as its leader is destroyed. Pentheus' free decision

[146] E., *Bacch*. 1-63.
[147] Seaford 1994: 254.
[148] Burnett 1970: 21.
[149] Scott 1975: 337.
[150] Foley 1980: 112.

to not recognise or worship the god leads to the breakdown of the city he rules.[151] This is a common theme in Thebes: the leader is incapacitated therefore cannot rule correctly. One of the root causes of his downfall is that Pentheus undervalues the women; he imagines them as sexual beasts overcome by lust, and dwells on this subject.[152]

Pentheus differs from Cadmus and Teiresias who see the rites as a necessary part of religion, and obey the will of the god.[153] Rather than conforming to the divine law, as Cadmus does, (although Cadmus' motivation is partly opportunistic – even if Dionysus isn't really a god, it will do the family's reputation no harm if people believe that he is),[154] Pentheus conforms to the laws of man, i.e. his rules, and sees the worship of Dionysos as an excuse for female immorality. The ruler's inability to conform to the laws of heaven is a theme in the *Antigone* also; in both cases, the outcome is the same (the destruction of the ruling house of Thebes), as is the cause, the ruler's desire to be obeyed.

The *Bacchae* is important in understanding Thebes because it shows that from just after the foundation of the city there was impiety, conflict and murder. Yet the city itself was founded in a positive manner, Cadmus, the traditional founder-figure, is portrayed (on the whole) in a good light, and in the prologue Dionysus gives him

[151] Burnett 1970: 28.
[152] E., *Bacch.* 222-3.
[153] E., *Bacch.* 331.
[154] E., *Bacch.* 333-6.

credit for having made the place where Semele died a shrine.[155] The origins of Thebes, Euripides shows, are founded in blood and conflict within the family and with the gods. Furthermore it is a location based on inversions, Euripides' shows a location where cult worship has led to the inversion of civilisation and where it is women sacrificing men.[156]

Thebes in the *Bacchae* is shown to be a negative place in a different manner from the *Septem*. The *Septem* shows Thebes as a city where the rulers tend to be overcome with a lust for power that results in war while the *Bacchae* shows a city where the ruler in his lust for control and power incurs the wrath of the gods. Both of these versions of Thebes end in death and conflict, but the cause in *Septem* is human wrath, in *Bacchae* divine wrath. Where Thebes is similar to Athens is that the rulers themselves wish the best for their city, are trying to defend the *polis*; in Thebes, however, the needs of the *oikos* supersede and oppose those of the *polis.*

[155] E., *Bacch.* 10.
[156] Seaford 1994: 295.

CHAPTER FOUR: ARGOS

This chapter is an exploration of Argos, considering whether it is portrayed as the opposite or mirror image of Athens. Like Thebes, tragic Argos produces strong female characters and three female characters will be discussed in detail: Clytemnestra, Electra and Iphigenia. The chapter will consider the role of the woman and the male hero in Argos.

In Aeschylus' *Oresteia* the theme of human sacrifice runs throughout the trilogy; this practice is abhorrent to modern audiences, and was arguably the same to Athenians as there is minimal evidence that the 5th century Athenians took part in these practices. As Burkert states in his seminal work on Greek religion, there are hints from myth of human sacrifice but this is traced back to some barbaric origin.[157] In the *Agamemnon* it is Clytemnestra's reaction to this act, and to sacrifice in general that will initiate the discussion, leading into a wider discussion.

A prominent theme in *Agamemnon* is human sacrifice, firstly that of Iphigenia by her father[158] and secondly the other characters' reactions to this, as Goldhill states: "the Oresteia is dominated by a narrative pattern of revenge".[159] This theme extends beyond the play itself with the motif of the murder of the children of Thyestes by

[157] Burkert 1985: 59.
[158] A., *Ag*. 223-6.
[159] Goldhill 1992: 26.

Atreus, a parody of a feast of reconciliation between brothers.[160] Furthermore Iphigenia is sacrificed prior to the play's start.[161] During the play Agamemnon's arrival and murder by his wife and her lover is the "pivot around which all action turns". [162] His widow delights over the murdered bodies, the scene becoming almost like a parody of sacrificial rites[163] showing that Argos is the opposite of Athens through perversion of normal ritual activity. Lloyd-Jones argues the murder of Agamemnon occurs with inevitability following the curse of Atreus.[164] Like in Thebes the ruling family is subject to a divine curse that leads to the destruction of the *oikos* but as this chapter will show, the *polis* is not destroyed in Argos.

The link between the sacrificed virgin and the unfaithful wife for whose sake she is sacrificed is emphasised at the start of the play. The chorus discusses Helen in the context of the suffering of war[165] and her "manifest destructive power" is in parallel with her sister's hidden potential.[166] The start of the play, and the mythological background, establishes Argos as a place of treacherous rulers; Atreus betrays Thyestes and feeds him his children, and Agamemnon has betrayed his own daughter. The difference in the nature of the sacrifice from Argos to Thebes is that Antigone sacrifices herself (metaphorically), and the prospect of fulfilling her role as an adult woman, in full knowledge of what she is doing. In contrast, Iphigenia is sacrificed

[160] Zeitlin 1965: 470.
[161] A., *Ag.* 201-216.
[162] Crane 1993: 117.
[163] Scodel 1996: 118.
[164] Lloyd-Jones 1962: 199.
[165] A *Ag:* 225-6, 402, 823, 1453.
[166] Goward 2005: 84.

(physically) and her father is dumb to her supplications.[167] Thus the Argive virgin is tricked, whereas in Thebes the virgin dies for her beliefs, to uphold her *oikos*. A clear contrast can be drawn between Argive trickery (Iphigenia) and the Theban overvalued *oikos* (Antigone). The manner of each young woman's death reflects the nature of her city: Thebes emulates Athens, Argos contrasts Athens.

As mentioned above it is the reaction to the sacrifice which is key in understanding the city and Clytemnestra's reaction to the sacrifice of her daughter is active, in the manner of a man. Clytemnestra transgresses her gender role, for example does not remain chaste but takes a lover, Aegisthus; she kills her husband and delights in this act of violence,[168] she rejoices in his death[169] and seizes control of the *oikos*,[170] although she ruled the *polis* to Agamemnon's return. In Thebes the woman is forced to act like a man because the man cannot, here the wife is seeking to usurp the man's position. Clytemnestra physically leaves the *oikos*, and reunites with her husband outside, bringing the private act into the sphere of the *polis*.[171] As Taplin convincingly argues, Agamemnon prepares to enter his house to praise the gods but Clytemnestra physically blocks his entrance to the *oikos*, controlling its entrance.[172] This control of the threshold is highly symbolic: the woman, rather than remaining within, is controlling access to the state and to the household, preventing the *kyrios* from taking

[167] A *Ag*: 227-30.
[168] A., *Ag*. 1400.
[169] A., *Ag*. 1416.
[170] A., *Ag*. 1707-8.
[171] Crane 1993: 119.
[172] Taplin 1999: 307.

his rightful place. This shows Argos as the place where a woman is in control rather than a man, helping to create the image of Argos as the anti-Athens.

Agamemnon is a play where there is a strong emphasis on gender roles and the *oikos*/*polis* dynamic.[173] In Argos the woman is active in her role and enters the male *polis* not out of necessity as in Thebes, but out of desire. It is evident that the greeting by Clytemnestra is in substance welcomed but the manner of delivery, by a woman, is not welcome;[174] Clytemnestra transgresses both the proper space in the *oikos* and her position as a woman.[175] As there is a female ruler of the city, it is clear that there is dissent among the citizens and at the start of the *Agamemnon* the weak link between ruling house and city is made clear[176] as the people have turned against her unlike in Thebes where the people turn to the ruler (Oedipus) to end the plague.

In *Agamemnon* it is Clytemnestra who dominates the play and her transgressions of gender roles are central in her characterisation, as Winnington-Ingram says: "Agamemnon gives the name to his play, but Clytemnestra dominates the stage".[177] Central to Clytemnestra's transgression of gender roles is her pursuit of power, which she does in two ways, through her words and her body which "constructs a monstrous reversal of the female role".[178] In the earliest parts of the play Clytemnestra is

[173] Goldhill 1992: 37.
[174] A., *Ag*. 910-911.
[175] Crane 1993: 120.
[176] A., *Ag*.16-18.
[177] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 78.
[178] Goldhill 1992:40.

portrayed as a being a woman whose heart in its hope plans like a man.[179] The woman is in charge of the city although combined with this is a strong sense of female sexuality, displayed by her taking of a lover and through the sexual connotations of her language in the descriptions of her relationship to Agamemnon[180] and Aegisthus.[181][182] Yet even in sex, Clytemnestra is like a man with the gender roles of her and Aegisthus inverted; while she guards the threshold to the house he remains within the *oikos*.[183] In the context of its performance, it would have been evident to the audience that Clytemnestra continuously was violating the "well-defined conventions which placed men and women in almost entirely separate spheres".[184] By seeking to leave her sphere intentionally and taking an active role in the *polis* Argos is being shown as the opposite of Athens; the audience is beginning to see the reversal of gender roles and the *oikos/polis* dynamic.

Goldhill argues that the *Agamemnon* is a play dominated by gender oppositions applying a structuralistic approach to his analysis.[185] It is evident that the *Agamemnon* lends itself to the structuralist interpretation of the action, as in this play there is a clear contrast between gender roles, characters and through the conflicts the action arises. Clytemnestra's hypocrisy is a form of opposition that dominates the play as her words say one thing but the meaning is opposite. Clytemnestra's boast to the

[179] A., *Ag.* 10.
[180] A., *Ag.* 968-969.
[181] A., *Ag.* 1435-1436.
[182] Goldhill 1984: 50-51.
[183] Goward 2005: 88.
[184] Sommerstein 1994: 256.
[185] Goldhill 1992: 40 and *passim*.

messenger[186] regarding her faithfulness establishes her as deceitful and "it is easy to discern the possibility of words being loaded with and emptied of truth".[187] This again represents a contrast to the Athenian woman, who was faithful and chaste, rather than seeking to appear so, as Clytemnestra does.

Returning to the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra, she claims to have killed him for vengeance yet there are many reasons for her murdering her husband mentioned in the play: the sacrifice of Iphigenia,[188] Agamemnon's infidelities,[189] the evil spirit of the house,[190] adultery with Aegisthus.[191][192] She states that she has become an Erinyes for her daughter[193] and finally Winnington-Ingram argues she is jealous of Agamemnon's status as a man because the dominance of a man is abhorrent to her.[194] The central theme to the play and its horror is that a woman slays a man,[195][196] this is further exacerbated by the relationship of the woman to the man, as Clytemnestra is in constant violation of her role within the *oikos* and *polis*. Clytemnestra murders Cassandra, lines 1465-1475 indicate Clytemnestra saw Cassandra as her husband's lover, and not the innocent victim. If the murder of Agamemnon was fuelled merely by vengeance for Iphigenia then objectively only he

[186] A., *Ag*. 605-614.
[187] Goldhill 1986: 9.
[188] A., *Ag*. 1417-18, 1432- 33, 1525-30.
[189] A., *Ag*. 1438- 43.
[190] A., *Ag*. 1475- 77, 1500- 05, 1569- 70.
[191] A., *Ag*. 1434-1437.
[192] Meridor 1987: 39.
[193] A., *Ag*. 1432-1433.
[194] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 105.
[195] A., *Ag*. 1232-1233.
[196] Goward 2005: 88.

should die. By extending the bloodshed to Cassandra, Aeschylus is able to demonstrate the Queen as the vicious woman who has filled the role of Agamemnon.[197]

Clytemnestra's murder of Cassandra can be seen as the perversion of a death ritual, and she refers to her death at line 1278 as *prosphagma,* the sacrifice that precedes the carrying out of a corpse.[198] In Thebes there were perversions of ritual, however in Argos Clytemnestra performs them for personal gain, not in an attempt to save the *polis*. In Thebes the woman performs the ritual out of necessity, in Argos it is the woman who performs them out of desire. Seaford argues that the *Agamemnon* has strong themes of perversion of ritual[199] and through this perversion, specifically the corruption of gender roles, Aeschylus is able to portray Argos as the opposite of Athens, through the action being ideologically opposed to that of Athens.

Clytemnestra's speech over her dead husband[200] can be seen either as a sacrificial or funeral libation. Her boasts of his death become a "perverted parody of a libation to Zeus."[201] Clytemnestra at this point is establishing herself as head of the household, by carrying out the funerary rites in the manner of a victorious general, and

[197] For a wider discussion of Clytemnestra usurping Agamemnon's position see Crane 1993: 132 and passim.
[198] Seaford 1994: 371.
[199] Seaford 1994: 368-382.
[200] A., *Ag*. 1372 -1398.
[201] Goldhill 1984: 89.

establishing a corrupt *oikos* with a female as its leader.[202] This reversal of the normal head of the house helps to establish Argos as the opposite of Athens; the ruling house becomes the exact opposite of what is seen as right in Athens (though of course in the 'real' Athens where the plays are performed, the idea of a ruling house is anathema). Further to this by speaking over her dead husband she is also transgressing her traditional female role and the language of the scene marks her act as excessive and indicative of her transgressive nature.[203] In Thebes, although the *oikos* becomes corrupted through incest and murder, male dominance is maintained.

The corrupted *oikos* leads to dissent among the citizens, and because the link between the people and rulers is not strong it does not lead to destruction of the *polis* as in Thebes. In Thebes, the people are affected by the ruling *oikos'* actions and suffer directly as a result, for example through the plague in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the war in *Septem Contra Thebas*. Argos in this instant does not have a legitimate ruling *oikos,* therefore the link between the people and rulers is corrupted, distant and indirect. Aeschylus redeems Clytemnestra slightly at the end of the *Agamemnon* as she saves the chorus from death, Aegisthus intends for them to be killed and her persuasion prevents this.[204][205] This is indicative of her control over her lover, further reversing the gender roles within her relationship.[206] As eloquently described by Winnington-Ingram: Clytemnestra is "depicted as an anomaly: a woman with the

[202] Hame 2004: 523.
[203] Goldhill 1984L 90.
[204] A., *Ag.* 1654-56.
[205] Sommerstein 1996: 175.
[206] Sommerstein 1996: 264.

mind and counsel of a man."[207] Whereas in Thebes, the men are weak; the women do not seek power, rather it is thrust upon them.

Clytemnestra is portrayed in the next play of the trilogy, the *Choephoroi*. In *Choephoroi* the play centres around one action, the murder of Clytemnestra.[208] Clytemnestra, even before she enters on stage, is weaker than her previous appearance in *Agamemnon*. The knowledge that she is suffering from haunting dreams indicates to Dodds that the audience sees her "as a broken woman, haunted by evil dreams, vainly seeking to appease the dead man's ghost".[209] The lamentation by the chorus expresses the ritual display of grief for the dead king, despair of the individual caught in his own destiny and importantly the wish that justice overtake the guilty.[210] Under the leadership of Clytemnestra, the chorus of slaves are unable to undertake their religious duties, and do not attempt to do so.

Clytemnestra's character in the *Choephoroi* has developed since *Agamemnon*, she has become the *kyrios* of the household: when Orestes asks that someone in authority greets him, it is Clytemnestra who enters[211] yet at the same time she offers the hospitable services for which a woman is responsible.[212] Thus Clytemnestra is placing herself in the position of both the male and female of the household.

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[207] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 101.
[208] Lebeck 1971: 93.
[209] Dodds in Lloyd-Jones 2007: 262.
[210] Lebeck 1971: 98.
[211] A., *Cho.* 663.
[212] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 116.

Electra does not respect her mother, instead she harbours an extreme hatred and resentment for her. This is yet more evidence for the corrupt nature of the anti-Athens; the family ties within the *oikos*, have broken down.[213] The distance felt between the mother and her family can be seen through the use of imagery. Clytemnestra is described as the serpent and her husband and children are eagles.[214] Orestes and Electra are fledglings, the snake is the natural prey of these two and Clytemnestra is the snake that kills the eagle, i.e. Agamemnon.[215] There is an obvious divide and therefore the appeals that Clytemnestra makes to Orestes are ignored. In begging for her life Clytemnestra uses a maternal appeal to her son[216] but this appeal is inherently absurd[217] as the children of Agamemnon are claiming to be following the "dictates of cosmic justice".[218] Thus any appeal on the basis of maternity is overridden by a wider commitment to justice for their father, and the imagery of the snake against the eagles strengthens this theme within the play. When Clytemnestra appeals to the *aidos* of Orestes by recalling how she suckled Orestes at her breast,[219] there is some hesitation by Orestes, but Pylades gives him the decisive justification he seeks.[220] This further strengthens the argument that the children of Agamemnon have few if any bonds with their mother, and in contrast to Oedipus who overvalues the

[213] A., *Cho.* 189-92.
[214] A., *Cho.* 247-249.
[215] O'Neill 1998: 220.
[216] A., *Cho.* 908.
[217] Winnington_ingram 1983:118.
[218] Podlecki 2000: 71.
[219] A., *Cho.* 896.
[220] Vellacott 1984: 155.

bond with his mother, Orestes undervalues it. In Thebes women are forced into taking on male roles, however in Argos the woman usurps the position of the eagle. The imagery clearly shows the alienation of the mother from the family unit; there is a difference of species between Clytemnestra and her family. The *oikos* breaks down in Argos because the links of the womb are not strong enough within the family, whereas in Thebes they are too strong.

In *Eumenides* Clytemnestra is present although the action is centred on the pursuit of Orestes by his mother's Erinyes. There is a tacit implication that she must have invoked the Erinyes before her death, as the dead cannot complete rituals. Clytemnestra evolves from a woman who despised plausible visions of dreams[221] to a woman whose actions are governed by a dream[222] and is finally a dream herself in the minds of her avengers.[223][224] By the time of *Eumenides* the play has evolved from a drama within the *oikos* to that of the wider issues governing the *polis*, thus the events of the final play of the trilogy are set against a wider political background.[225] Central to this political background is the wider conflicts between man and woman, with the Furies representing Clytemnestra and Apollo as the champion of Orestes and man in general.[226]

[221] A., *Ag.* 274.
[222] A., *Cho.* 32.
[223] A., *Eum.* 116
[224] Winnington-Ingram 1983:119.
[225] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 119.
[226] A., *Eum.* 625.

Aeschylus' Clytemnestra appears as a primeval character, invoking the oldest spirits to avenge her death.[227] This is indicative of her character's attitude to her son, that he must be punished for avenging the death of a family member by divine command. As mentioned above it is the death of a man at the hands of a woman that is repugnant, and death through guile and treachery so that Agamemnon was killed as if a woman by a woman who acted in the manner of a man.[228] This role reversal is a central argument of Apollo, and in the wider context of the trial it shows how the ruling *oikos* of Argos has adopted the opposite gender roles to Athens. There is a more complicated and subtle representation of Clytemnestra at the end of the play, through the character of Athena. As Winnington-Ingram argues, Athena who in all things commends the "male" condemns the man-woman for seeking to dominate and act in a manner that her domineering nature required.[229] Indeed Athena did not acquit Orestes on any basis other than her preference for the male over the female,[230] therefore although Clytemnestra's character is central, she becomes a part of a metaphor for wider conflicts.

Argos is a place without a court or justice and the play demonstrates the transition from an Argive disposition (old) to an Athenian disposition (new). The old social order of blood for blood as exemplified by Clytemnestra (and the Erinyes) not accepting the ritual purification of Orestes as a sign of atonement and instead

[227] For an in-depth assessment of this theme see Zeitlin: 1965.
[228] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 121.
[229] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 126.
[230] A., *Eum.* 735-740.

demands a life for a life and the Erinyes declaration that if they are denied their quarry they intend to inflict pain on Athens.[231] At the trial even with the acquittal of Orestes there is the wider problem of the system of retribution as represented by the furies, and their unequivocal threat to harm Athens. The audience are given a "re-education of the Furies and their consequent conversion into resident deities."[232] Through the final play of the trilogy the Erinyes justice is shown as inadequate, and is superseded by a new legal order.[233] The issue is resolved and the Areopagus is presented as a solution to the social problem of homicide,[234] yet there is a wider political context again to the final scene. In 462 BC the Areopagus had its function confined to the trial of alleged murderers, and the *Oresteia* won first prize in 458 BC. Aeschylus firstly presents the mythical foundations of the court as a homicide court.[235] By drawing attention to the foundation of the Areopagus and indeed the alliance between Argos and Athens Aeschylus has given them meaning and a value through including them in the play.[236]

In Thebes there is a blurring of the roles of women and men, but this is not an intentional blurring but rather an attempt by the women to behave in their socially defined roles, but not succeeding. Clytemnestra is an example of a woman who intentionally and deliberately leaves her gender role to become like a man and

[231] A., *Eum.* 780-782.
[232] Podlecki 2000: 77.
[233] Podlecki 2000: 77.
[234] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 129.
[235] Macleod in Lloyd-Jones 2007: 275.
[236] Macleod in Lloyd-Jones 2007: 279.

becomes the opposite of an ideal Athenian woman. In the *Eumenides* Clytemnestra is metaphor for the older order and it is the new order and the resolution of the cycles of revenge at Athens, rather than Argos, that show Athens as firstly the place of justice and secondly the place of sanctuary. As Macleod says "for if in the Eumenides Athens is above all an ideal representation of human society which pointedly reverses the social disorder of the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*, the unity of the trilogy is vindicated".[237]

Sophocles and Euripides have adapted the myth of the *Oresteia* for the tragic stage in a different manner from Aeschylus, highlighting other aspects of the story and developing the characters. Sophocles establishes Clytemnestra as the slayer of Agamemnon and lover of Aegisthus, but brings further siblings in to the Orestes/Electra dynamic. Sophocles introduces a festival that celebrates the murder of Agamemnon so, instead of acting out of revenge for her child, she celebrates her husband's death, implying more motives for her actions, and no remorse but compliancy.[238] The development of this festival indicates that Argos has become a place of misused religion, where the worship of the gods has been twisted.

Clytemnestra tries to justify her act of murder to her daughter and the audience. The Sophoclean development of an explanation (for her actions) shows the reason for the

[237] Macleod in Lloyd-Jones 2007: 279.
[238] Stevens 1978: 113.

murder but it further justifies her deed.[239] Here Clytemnestra highlights the injustice of losing a child, when there were others more appropriate to die. Clytemnestra claims that the killing of Agamemnon was just[240] since he had no right to kill Iphigenia.[241] This assertion of maternal regard must be tempered by Electra's incarceration in the palace, and her general treatment.[242] Electra's response to Clytemnestra's justification is that in her actions Clytemnestra showed a lack of *aidos* or respect for the hallowed relationship between husband and wife.[243] Both mother and daughter argue on the basis of justice to justify their positions but their applications of justice are irreconcilable.[244] Clytemnestra shows some signs of grief and remorse when she hears of the death of Orestes, however it is not enough to be completely convincing.[245][246] Indeed it is her act of killing Agamemnon that caused the distortion in family ties so the benefit of the death of her son is also terrible and evil.[247][248]

The character of Clytemnestra in Sophocles is portrayed as inconsistent in her affection. Following the false announcement that Orestes is dead, Clytemnestra leaves the stage with a laugh,[249] "the antithesis of the emotion a mother should feel at such a

[239] S., *El*. 539-45.
[240] S., *El*. 528.
[241] Blundell 1989: 150.
[242] S., *El*. 596-98.
[243] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 220.
[244] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 222.
[245] S., *El*. 770-771.
[246] Stevens 1978: 115.
[247] S., *El.* 767.
[248] Blundell 1989: 151.
[249] S., *El*. 807.

moment."[250] Clytemnestra, as in Aeschylus, is portrayed in a negative manner, for example she celebrates the death of Agamemnon with monthly festivities,[251] she refers to her past actions in a tone of complacency,[252] it is she who ill-treats Electra[253] and she too threatens to imprison Electra.[254][255] Clytemnestra is less portrayed as the woman aspiring to be a man, but rather the mother who is not a mother; she denies Orestes the status of a son, and in the words of Electra has become a non-mother.[256][257] This violation of the relationship between mother and children shows Sophocles has decided to portray Clytemnestra as the opposite of the Athenian woman and mother. The play was written at a time when the traditional role of the woman and the *oikos* were undergoing great changes, and the strong bond of familial loyalty was called into question.[258]

The presence of Clytemnestra in Euripides is only in *Electra*. In the lead up to her entrance Electra has vilified her mother, and her mother appears in a jewelled carriage contrasted to her daughter's rags. This version of Clytemnestra does not achieve the same vilified status as Aeschylus'. In fact her 'rejection' of Orestes and Electra is not as profound as in other playwrights, it is more her lover who was hostile to her

[250] Blundell 1989: 151.
[251] S., *El*. 277-281.
[252] S., *El*. 549-550.
[253] S., *El*. 189-192, 814-815, 1181, 1196.
[254] S., *El*. 379.
[255] Stevens 1978: 114..
[256] S., *El*. 1154.
[257] Blundell 1989 152.
[258] Sorum 1982: 202.

children, and she merely compromised. [259] For example, Clytemnestra saved Electra from being murdered.[260] Aegisthus is the real villain and Clytemnestra, although not blameless, does speak of the past with remorse and has a subtly different character.[261] Lloyd believes Euripides is trying to show matricide as repugnant and is critiquing the moral judgments of the myth, unlike in Aeschylus and Sophocles where the murders are justified.[262] The argument is convincing as in the other performances the treatment of her children has not reflected the attitude to the murdered Iphigenia. Clytemnestra's death in Euripides, as opposed to her actions, establish the nature of the city of Argos. The matricide is unjustified, and is shown in a negative light.

Electra in Aeschylus plays a smaller role than in other playwrights. Her negative attitude to her mother is concurrent with the theme of the trilogy and Clytemnestra is the villain. A constant character trait of Electra is the love of her father over that of her mother, she frequently refers to herself as the daughter of Agamemnon and laments his death, in the traditional Greek funeral manner.[263] She repeatedly addresses his tomb as a suppliant calling for revenge,[264] yet there is a more complicated problem that arises out of the first speech of Electra and the following stichomythy: the dilemma that arises when a just act is at once the worst of wrongs.[265] The traditional lament over the murdered man is for vengeance for his death, yet this lament cannot

[259] Mossman 2001: 382.
[260] E., *El. 24-28.*
[261] E., *El.* 1105-6 and 326.
[262] Lloyd 1986: 1.
[263] See Rehm 1994.
[264] A., *Cho.* e.g. 84-105 and 332 -338.
[265] Lebeck 1971: 103.

be uttered without committing another act of sacrilege,[266] therefore in order for Electra to seek justice for her father she must pray for an act of injustice towards her mother. This position displays of the opposition inherent within the play, justice for the mother against the justice for the father. Electra's role is slight compared to that in Sophocles and Euripides, yet she is a striking reminder to Orestes of the situation of his line, under the corrupted *oikos* of his mother and the information and impression that she gives, further adds to the portrayal of the city as the opposite of Athens.

Sophocles' *Electra* is a play centred and focused on the character of Electra, the role of the chorus is diminished, the other characters are subdued: it is Electra who is to be the dramatic centre of this play.[267] In the Sophoclean *Electra*, the protagonist and her brother do not display any signs of guilt or remorse; they do not question the command of Apollo.[268] The central focus on Electra is reminiscent of Antigone and there are striking similarities between the two plays. Both adopt extreme views balanced by a more moderate counterpart.[269] If one considers Knox's definition of the Sophoclean hero, Electra displays the key traits, she acts as a "rock against which the waves of threat and persecution will break in vain".[270] For example she expresses her public mourning and lamentation for the death of Agamemnon and calls for revenge, even though the consequences are her confinement and mistreatment.[271]

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[266] Lebeck 1971: 103.
[267] Stevens 1978: 117.
[268] Stevens 1978: 119.
[269] Lloyd 2005: 79.
[270] Knox 1964: 10-44 and passim.
[271] Wilner 1982: 68.

Wilner sees Antigone and Electra as similar representations of the woman as the hero,[272] yet although there are striking similarities, the differences in their actions are key in distinguishing the two. Firstly, Antigone is the hero, she meets her death as the hero but Electra is the victim, as by Knox's definition the victim suffers rather than acts[273] and her uncompromising nature means that she must suffer alone.[274] For example it is Electra who on the receipt of news of the death of Orestes declares she will kill Aegisthus,[275] yet she does not act, nor has she acted previously. Antigone, in contrast, declares her intention to act and does act as soon as the injustice occurs. Electra laments and waits and indeed "ultimately does not carry out her plans."[276] Thus although there are similarities between these two central characters, it is Antigone who is the active heroine and Electra who is the victim. As Stevens eloquently states: "Electra in its plot and characters has not quite the same tragic quality as Antigone or Oedipus."[277]

Sophocles' Electra, unlike Euripides', maintains nobility in her mourning, and her inability to change is a sign of this: for example her opening monody and exchange with the chorus show how she is wretched and weeping for her father. The festival is an extreme example of religious perversion and Electra's reaction can be taken in this

[272] Wilner 1982:68-69.
[273] Knox 1964: 5.
[274] Lloyd 2005: 79.
[275] S., *El*. 847-989.
[276] Wheeler 2003: 379.
[277] Stevens 1978: 119.

context. She cannot cease mourning him as he has not officially been mourned thus is not in the land of the dead.[278] This echoes Thebes where Polynices has not been conveyed to the land of the dead, but in order to allow this cross-over in Thebes the burior is sacrificed, in Argos it is those who killed him who are killed.

This uncompromising nature is a further example of her heroic status,[279] but it is also indicative of the blurring of gender roles found in Argos. Although this blur is not as pronounced as with Clytemnestra, Electra in declaring her intention to kill Aegisthus is assuming the role of avenger and replacing the presumed-dead male head of the family.[280] As Wheeler highlights, although Clytemnestra is the masculinised woman, Electra's gender-definition is more problematic as she is "pugnacious yet motherly, emotional yet rational."[281]

The Sophoclean version of this myth places Electra as the central character, her role has been transformed from one who is a mere witness to the central and inciting figure. There has been much debate as to whether Electra is noble in her mourning or hysterical verging on mad. There is not space in this thesis to discuss this aspect of her character. Instead it has been shown that Electra does not display the same sort of heroism to Antigone. Indeed she is more masculine, weakly echoing her mother's transgressions of gender roles. Her character is central in creating an opposition based

[278] Seaford 1985: 317.
[279] See Knox 1964.
[280] Sorum 1982: 209.
[281] Wheeler 2003: 383.

dystopia in Argos through blurring the gender roles. This compounded with her mother's actions shows in Sophocles' *Electra* the strong central woman seeks to increase her masculinity. The dystopia that is created has developed from that of Aeschylus into a more subtle and thoughtful one, still rife with gender oppositions and a corrupted *oikos* but unlike in Thebes, Argos is not presented as the same as Athens. They may be allusions to contemporary problems in Athens, such as the change in the values of the *oikos*, but it is not a place where the women are seeking to preserve their *oikos*. Both women are seeking to destroy the *oikos* through murdering members of it.

There are two extant Euripidean plays in which Electra appears, *Electra* and *Orestes*, in both, her character is unsympathetically portrayed. In *Electra* she refuses to take part in the religious and joyful festival; instead, she continues to wail for her dead father (first choral dialogue).[282] Euripides arranges the action in the play so that Orestes and Electra are not acting as instruments of revenge operating out of dynastic and familial interests,[283] rather they are acting out of a less noble cause. Electra is shown as the arranger of the murder, she drives the action forward, using words to lay the trap for her mother, and to warn her brother not to succumb to cowardice.[284] Electra is reminiscent of Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon*, using guile and arranging murders. Indeed in *Electra* Euripides has partially rejected the religious and familial

[282] Lloyd 1986: 2 and 7. See also Zeitlin 1970 for a discussion of the festival of Hera and its role in the play.
[283] Halporn 1983: 112.
[284] Halporn 1983: 113.

meaning of the plot[285] instead creating a new version of the myth, where the daughter seeks to kill her mother but in doing so becomes just like her mother.

Similarly Electra's plan to hold Hermione ransom in *Orestes* makes her lose any audience empathy. Until this point it was possible for the audience to feel for the children of Agamemnon, who are isolated and alone, especially in comparison with the family of Menelaus.[286] She uses the imagery of the virgin sacrifice in her initial plan to Pylades and Orestes.[287] This is an image also seen in the sacrifice of Iphigenia in Aeschylus, powerfully invoking the Greek ritual of animal sacrifice. When Electra's mother reminds her Agamemnon killed her sister she is dismissive.[288]

Argos and Thebes differ in terms of the reactions to deaths within the ruling families, and through these reactions an understanding of the city itself can be gauged. In Argos there is a bloodthirstiness surrounding maiden sacrifice, indeed the murderers in this city gloat about their actions, as Clytemnestra gloats over Agamemnon and Cassandra in Aeschylus. In Thebes, the murder of a family member is not knowingly committed (Oedipus killing Laius), or it leads to mutual destruction (Polynices and Eteocles). Euripides' depiction of the bloodlust displayed by Electra is reminiscent of the bloodlust of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, an established villain. The chorus'

[285] Halporn 1983: 102.
[286] Boutler 1962: 103.
[287] E., *Orest.* 1193.
[288] E., *El.* 1086-7.

chant about murdering Helen is chilling and yet slightly comic when read on the page. In performance, however, it is harder to say how it would have been received.

Electra's bloodthirstiness[289] is tempered by her cowardly fear of death, by contrast with her Theban counterparts. Jocasta (in Sophocles and Euripides) and Antigone (in Sophocles) do not fear death, although they are deserting their *oikos* (see chapter two). Electra, although complicit in the murder of her mother, is not noble enough to face taking her own life bravely.[290] Her desire to gain revenge upon other women (Clytemnestra, Helen and Hermione), and her ruthless devotion to her father, lead the audience to lose sympathy for her: at the extreme she becomes a remorseless murderess. Euripides is re-evaluating the myth and the previous dramatisations. Electra incites her mother's death, she encourages her brother to commit matricide;[291] other playwrights do not emphasise this fact.

Electra displays a selfishness that is found in Argos not in Thebes when she emphasises her poverty and humble state of dress. She repeatedly laments her lowered status, and highlights her status as the daughter of Agamemnon and the indignity of being married to a peasant. The resistance to comfort alienates the audience, and the chorus does not mention pitying her. This is in contrast to the Sophoclean Electra, whose inability to change displays her nobility.[292] There is a distinct difference

[289] E., *Orest.* 1302.
[290] E., *Orest.* 1045-8.
[291] E., *El.* 967-70.
[292] Kimon Chang-Gossard 2003: 261.

between the appearance of mother and daughter on stage increasing the polarity between the two.[293] Thus Electra in this play is not the noble character of the other stories but instead a bloodthirsty murderess. Any sympathy that could have been awarded to her is eroded by her desire to kill Helen and take Hermione hostage. The way she is shown by Euripides leads the reader to understand why Argos can be seen as the opposite from Athens. Here the woman leaves the *oikos,* as in Thebes, but she knowingly commits destructive acts. The women of Thebes, like Agave, who leave the *oikos* do not knowingly cause the destruction of men. This is a key difference between the two cities and is exemplified in Euripides by the example of Electra.

Women in Argos differ completely from those in Thebes, even though there are some surface similarities (e.g. in the Sophoclean portrayal of Electra). Clytemnestra throughout pleads for her life by claiming the murder of Iphigenia as her justifiable motive, yet in Aeschylus she is a more primeval character than in the later plays where she is more human, and the 'justified' matricide is called into question. Euripides' Electra develops into an extreme character and all sympathy is eroded.

Male roles in Argive tragedies will now be examined, and what they contribute to the portrayal of Argos on the tragic stage. The two major heroes of Argos are Agamemnon and Orestes; the originator of the bloodline and the curse, Atreus, must also be mentioned. Similarities can be seen between the houses of Thebes and Argos;

[293] Mossman 2001: 380.

both Laius and Atreus are subject to a curse, and tragic treatments of them concentrate on its effects and the attempts of its victims to break free of it. Throughout the plays, Agamemnon is the most prominent character, even when not on stage. Electra constantly refers to herself as the daughter of Agamemnon, and the action of the play is a reaction to his murder.

Aeschylus shows how the curse of Atreus is being fulfilled in the murder of Agamemnon. As discussed above a central theme within the play is revenge. Agamemnon must kill his daughter to gain revenge on Paris for his transgression, thus he too must transgress.[294] This indirectly leads to his death at the hands of Clytemnestra (see discussion above). Cassandra sees a further perspective, the revenge that Atreus took on Thyestes for committing adultery with his wife. Cassandra in her vision sees the furies drunk on human blood following this outrage.[295] Thus there is a violent past that leads to a pattern of transgressions and revenge, with a theme of interfamilial violence and retribution.[296]

Another of the themes of this play is the motif of the returning hero, triumphant from battle with his spoils of war. Before the arrival of Agamemnon on the stage, the chorus have recently mused on the dangers of hubris.[297] Immediately after the end of this speech Agamemnon arrives, creating the link between the two in the mindset of

[294] Goldhill 1992: 28.
[295] A., *Ag*. 1187-92.
[296] Goldhill 1992: 29.
[297] A., *Ag*. 750-782.

the audience.[298] Although his appearance is brief it is elaborately prepared,[299] the entrance of Agamemnon is the central feature of the play and it is his character that is central to the action of the play. Although the chorus has previously criticised the King, he is welcomed back. Thus the citizens maintain a link with their ruler, there is no open hostility towards him. Shortly afterwards the slave Cassandra appears in tow. He greets his land and the gods first; he doesn't greet his *oikos,* also establishing distance between the two.[300]

There are hints that Agamemnon ruled with the consent of the people, with interaction between state and populace, which contrasts with the rule of Aegisthus.[301] Thus under the rule of Clytemnestra/Aegisthus, Argos neglected and abandoned his *oikos,* and it has become corrupted as did the state.[302] The action of Clytemnestra in tricking Agamemnon into committing hubris is not as shocking considering the previous lines, where Agamemnon talks of his victories in war and is displaying his human spoil. By invoking the pride of the house of Atreus, Agamemnon is provoked into hubris, and perhaps he secretly wishes to step on the tapestry, or, as argued by Meridor, he gives in to his wife so that Cassandra will be welcomed into the house.[303] Winnington-Ingram adopts a different interpretation and sees this as a dramatic device added-in by

[298] Lloyd-Jones 1983: 65.
[299] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 81.
[300] A., *Ag.* 810-811.
[301] *A., Ag.* 844-6.
[302] A., *Ag*. 861-2.
[303] Meridor 1987: 39.

Aeschylus to show the contest between man and wife.[304] However Agamemnon's character clearly has the choice whether or not to stand on the tapestry and thus he becomes culpable.[305] Although it is equally debateable as to what he is cupable of, although it may be resolved by stating: excessive pride. By standing on the scarlet robes Agamemnon is not acting like a pious Greek but rather as the triumphant sacker of the city, who is persuaded by a woman to reject his scruples and walk on the tapestry.[306] Agamemnon acts in a manner that is opposite from the Athenians, he acts like the conqueror not the Greek. There is an element of the didactic in this as well. Agamemnon's actions are a lesson to Athens, but through the opposition. Athens can see the negative consequences of acting in a manner that is in opposition to their own values.

After his murder, the spectre of Agamemnon is present, carried alive in his children's revenge. Orestes and Electra mention his honoured memory, and the immolation of his daughter, Iphigenia, is glossed over. However it is important that Aeschylus mentions this action before the king's arrival onto the tragic stage; thus the subsequent actions are contextualised. It may be that Aeschylus wished to show Agamemnon's character slightly in the shade, but his wife, Clytemnestra, in the deepest shadows.

[304] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 90.
[305] Lattimore 1964: 39.
[306] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 91-93.

In Sophocles and Euripides, Agamemnon is the 'missing' character. It is interesting that Orestes is sent by Apollo, the enemy of Argos and supporter of Troy in the *Iliad*.[307] The implication is that Apollo sent Orestes to kill his mother as the enemy of Argos; one may also add that Apollo must have been aware of the consequences of matricide. His protection of Orestes is a counter-argument to this, and has implications for the nature of the gods in Aeschylus and in tragedy in general.

Turning to the character of Orestes in Aeschylus, the rule of Aegisthus is described in tyrannical language[308] and Orestes in Aeschylus liberates Argos from him.[309] Orestes, as mentioned above, arrives as the fledgling ready to take revenge, and there is the motif of the returning hero. Yet in taking revenge Orestes uses guile and words to deceive, coming as a stranger into the house, he is received. Aeschylus shows Orestes as the righteous avenger, and presents the audience with a justification of his matricide,[310] but a more complicated motif arises through his character. Orestes does not present a moral revulsion to killing his mother, rather a dilemma that his act will be simultaneously right and wrong.[311] In line *Cho.* 899 there is evidence of his hesitancy, or rather the realisation of the nature of the crime he must commit. It is noteworthy he does not use the word mother until line 899 when his final hesitation is translated into action.[312]

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[307] Lloyd-Jones 1983: 61.
[308] A., *Ag*. 1355, 1365 and A., *Cho*. 973.
[309] Dodds 2007: 247.
[310] A., *Cho.* 1026-31.
[311] Lebeck1971: 114.
[312] Lebeck 1971: 123.

Following his act, Orestes must find redemption, first at Delphi through ritual and purification, and secondly at Athens through judicial process where the hero must seek redemption in the Areopagus which is established by Athena as a homicide court.[313] Oedipus, Heracles and Orestes all gravitate there. Orestes is purified religiously from his guilt; the Eumenides do not accept this, as they are rooted in an older world, however through the action of the *Eumenides,* not only is the transformation from old to new completed, there is also a transformation of the image of the Erinyes into Semnae.[314] Only in Athens can justice and salvation be achieved, further, there is a transformation in the nature of the city and justice, there marks the end to the pre-civilised system of vendetta and an establishment of civilised justice.[315] In Argos the guileful words and persuasion which where used by Clytemnestra and then Orestes were changed into the good persuasion used by Athena.[316] Thus the final play becomes less about the character of Orestes but wider sociological issues, and the characters are merely representatives of the gods. Finally the Athenian-Argive alliance is given divine sanction by Apollo and a united front is presented, with Apollo declaring that he has sent Orestes to Athens to establish the alliance.[317] Therefore Athens is given a mythical foundation as being the place of resolution. In Thebes the heroes turn to Athens for sanctuary for their problems, in Argos as it is portrayed in a different manner, resolution and sanctuary are granted.

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[313] For a discussion on the wider implications of the Areopagus see Meier 1988.
[314] Lebeck 1971: 131.
[315] Podlecki 1999: 81.
[316] Lebeck 1971: 133.
[317] Meier 1988: 108.

In Sophocles Orestes acts without specific orders from Apollo, and his actions and character as a whole are more questionable. The recognition of Orestes by Electra is seen in every play concerning them; however, in Aeschylus and Euripides they appear earlier on, whereas in Sophocles it is towards the end (1224). This allows a fuller consideration of Orestes and the "tortured hesitation" faced by him.[318] One of the major features of this play is that Orestes is not the 'hero' of the play; instead it is his sister Electra. Although he commits the murders, the focus throughout is on his sister, and he can be seen as the male facilitator of these deeds. This presents Argos as opposite from Athens; the male is subject to the female, and Orestes becomes subject to Electra.

In Euripides, the emphasis is not so much on the murder itself as on its method and circumstances. The problem Tyndareus and the populace as a whole have with the murders is that they do not follow the laws of the *polis*. There is no trial; Euripides is in effect criticising the methods of revenge, and reaffirming justice in its modern form. Perhaps this is a sceptical criticism of Aeschylus, the justice of the law court is a new dispensation which resolves the old problems; Euripides suggests that formal, court-like procedures for resolving conflict must always have been there – and always have been flawed, unable to 'make it all better'. Unlike the Orestes of Aeschylus who

[318] Kenna 1961: 99.

uses the rituals of the *polis* to absolve himself of blood guilt, this Orestes belongs to the earlier generations because he does not follow the modern ways.[319]

Euripides' Orestes suffers for his actions, and his world becomes inverted and illusionary. This inversion is exemplified by his willingness to kill Helen and Hermione. Unlike in Aeschylus where Orestes is the returning hero, here he is ostracised, imprisoned and desperate, seeking revenge for the murder of his father, he is willing to murder an innocent and his group of friends are isolated. As Smith states: "the most venerable [interpretation of Orestes' character] is that Orestes is simply bad…. The characters are simply ignoble".[320] It is only the intervention of Apollo that can save them from death and this is an anti-climax, making the ending more melodramatic than dramatic.

Euripides' *Orestes* poses a problem for this argument, as Argos looks very similar to Athens. As Arrowsmith declares, *Orestes* does not fit into any specific tragic model.[321] The play emphasises the due process of law[322] and Orestes attempts to save himself through addressing in person the council of the Argives, a clear allusion to the Areopagus in Athens. The play, especially the ending, is more melodramatic than tragic[323] and appears more of a parody of Athens than its opposite. However, the play can be reconciled to the argument. Throughout this chapter I have sought to show

[319] E., *Orest.* 500-501.
[320] Smith 1967: 292.
[321] Arrowsmith 1960: 186.
[322] For example E., *Orest*. 278-279.
[323] Parry 1969: 343.

how the ruling *oikos* is not linked to the *polis* as in Thebes. Thus the ruling *oikos* is corrupted, disobeying the rule of law and justice. The *oikos* is in opposition to the Athenian-style institutions. However, as stated above, *Orestes* is an anomalous play within the tragic corpus and may indeed not show Argos as the anti-Athens, but it shows the ruling *oikos* as the opposite from the utopian Athenian style of leadership. Wright presents another reading of *Orestes* that is both interesting and convincing: that *Orestes* is thematically and intellectually albeit not narratively a sequel of Euripides' *Helen*.[324] Wright sees the play as one essentially about Helen and the Trojan war and the fate of Orestes, especially at the end of the play, is an afterthought of the playwright.[325] By seeing the play as such it becomes easier to distinguish this play from the 'typical' treatment of the myths and further adds to its anomalous status.

At this point in the discussion a wary note shall be made about Aeschylus' *Supplices*. The major problem with the *Supplices* is the remaining parts of the trilogy are lost, thus it is difficult with any authority to ascertain the outcome of the plot. The titles of the lost plays, *Aegyptii* and *Danaides* indicate firstly that this is not a play about Greeks. Indeed as *Supplices* shows, this is a play about the coming of the eastern to Greece, perhaps a parallel may be drawn with the *Bacchae* but there it was the Greek returning to Greece. At the risk of generalising it can be argued that *Supplices* is a play about Danaus' attempts to keep his daughters in spinsterhood and in the process

[324] Wright 2006: 35.
[325] Wright 2006: 45.

deceives the Argives.[326] The political structure of Argos is reflective of Athens, as the city is essentially a democratic Argos where the King actively consults with the court. Yet the city then accepts suppliants who are opposed to the very Greek concept of marriage and indeed pray for death/escape from marriage[327] thus providing a contrast between the Greek ideals and those of the non-Greeks.[328] This play presents perhaps a version of Athens, but one which accepts those women who represent that opposite values, and which eventually leads to war, the death of the king and the establishment of a tyrant.[329] *Supplices* should indeed be given further research, although the word limitations of the thesis do not allow for such. I will surmise that the play is essentially one of Greek versus non Greek values and the play begins as an Athenian style utopia and evolves into an *Oresteian* in type dystopia.

In conclusion the heroes in Argos are overshadowed by women; even in Aeschylus, Orestes is overshadowed by Athena and the Eumenides. In Thebes, men are unable to rule so women are forced into the *polis*. In Argos the men cannot rule because of the actions of a women. This displacement of power and the status quo makes Argos the anti-Athens, because it is the opposite of what should happen according to Athenian ideals. The *oikos* is corrupted through gender conflicts, and the violent exchanges of power. The women of the household are powerful and strong (Clytemnestra is a king trapped in a woman's body); the men are dependent on the women (e.g. Orestes

[326] Sommerstein 1996: 146.
[327] Gantz 1978: 283-285.
[328] Turner 2001: 27.
[329] Sommerstein 1996: 154.

needing to be spurred on by Electra and Aegisthus needing Clytemnestra to take control), or they do not respect women enough (Orestes' matricide). These plays reaffirm the need for justice and due process, a trial must occur in order for the city to break free of its more primitive past and become more like Athens. Unlike Thebes, where it is a warning, Argos is the opposite of what happens in Athens, it is the mirror image, the anti-Athens, and only resolution can be found by leaving behind the anti-Athens.

CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to re-evaluate how tragic dystopias were portrayed on the ancient stage and challenge Zeitlin's theory that Thebes was the 'anti-Athens'. In the introduction I outlined a plural vision of dystopian cities on the tragic stage and I considered the ideas of academics who wrote about modern and ancient utopias and dystopias. The introduction highlighted the varieties of dystopias and key themes found in dystopian cities and I explained that Zeitlin's work was limiting the scholarly interpretation of Thebes in tragedy. I will begin the conclusion by analysing the validity of my argument regarding Thebes. Linked to that discussion will be an evaluation of the impact of my work on the *oikos/polis* dynamic in Thebes and my reaction to the structuralist arguments. I will then consider my argument regarding Argos before I conclude by stating where my arguments fit into the current scholarly debates.

The first question to be asked is: how much have I challenged Zeitlin's arguments on Thebes as the anti-Athens? My arguments have established that the opposition Zeitlin envisaged is over simplistic, it is true to say Thebes is portrayed as a negative location on the tragic stage but I have argued that a more subtle and complicated relationship between Thebes and Athens exists. Like Zeitlin I have focused on women and the playwrights' tools for showing the negative nature of the city. I highlighted the following: that the women of Thebes attempted to act in a manner that was similar to

Athenian women, that the women of Thebes transgressed their gender roles for the sake of the *polis* and that the relationship between *oikos* and *polis* is key in understanding the nature of tragic Thebes.

I disagreed that Thebes represented the other place and I showed Thebes as a dystopian version of Athens. For example, in Thebes the women attempt to complete rituals that are essential to the good working of the *polis*, notably the burial of the war dead in *Antigone*. If Thebes was the anti-Athens then no attempt would be made to convey the soul to the other world. It is my argument that Creon and Antigone are attempting to do what is morally right for the *polis*, although it is Creon who sees the *polis* as a unit in itself, whereas it is Antigone who sees the *polis* as made up of *oikos*'.

In Thebes the *oikos* and *polis* cannot coexist although there are unsuccessful attempts to reconcile these two institutions. The women of Thebes display a desire to maintain their traditional gender roles however they are unable to do so through the actions of men. In Thebes, the women wish to stay within their sphere, but are forced through loyalty to their male relatives into male roles. This wish to stay in the *oikos* is what the ideal woman should aspire to; loyalty to the men of their household is what was expected of a good Athenian woman. Yet because Thebes is the parabolic Athens, this wish is unfulfillable because of the delinquency of men. This further strengthens my argument that Thebes, rather than being the 'other place', acts as a warning to Athens.

If men are delinquent then women will be forced to enter the *polis* and this leads to its destruction. Thebes is more analogous to Athens, the women attempt to uphold the Athenian mores, however as Thebes is a dystopian version of Athens, these cannot be upheld. The *oikos* and *polis* in Thebes try to strive towards the same ends however they cannot achieve this. It is the reconcilable nature of these two institutions that help shape Thebes as the negative hyperbole on the tragic stage.

This thesis has reconsidered important arguments regarding the structuralist approach to Thebes and I have attempted to show that it is of limited application. The problem with the structuralist approach, as highlighted in chapter two, is there is a presumption the *oikos* and *polis* cannot exist together within the city as they are diametrically opposed. I have shown to a varying extent that tragic Thebes is trying to uphold the values of the *oikos* and *polis* but is unable to do so as the two cannot work together for mutual benefit. This is a typical example of Thebes being shown as the negative Athens. If Thebes were the anti-Athens firstly there would be no attempt for these to work together for the same goals and secondly there would not be the links between the two. In Thebes there are close links between the ruling *oikos* and the *polis*. The *polis* is directly affected by the actions of the ruling *oikos*, this contrasts Argos where there is no such linkage, showing Argos is closer to being the anti-Athens.

The Argive analysis has been more problematic to my argument and has shown that a more plural approach to dystopianism in Greek tragedy is necessary. Although I

originally envisaged a triadic approach, I found the varying portrayal of Argos lends to a plural dystopian approach. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia* it is clearer that through the role of women on the tragic stage, especially in their transgressions of gender roles, Argos has become the opposite of Athens. Notably it is the woman who seeks the position and role of a man, the woman who is active and the Argive woman who acts in a manner opposite to the Athenian woman. Clytemnestra seeks to control the man, and when she cannot exert her authority she resorts to violent measures. Electra fits this analysis to a lesser extent; she is the fury who inspires the actions of Orestes. She seeks to uphold the just (Agamemnon/male-led) city, and destroy the new female-led one. The women do not attempt to do their duty but instead adopt a male role; thus Argos becomes a place of opposition to Athens.

In the later authored plays set in Argos there are more subtle differences as the nature of the dystopia evolves although at no point does Argos become a negative paradigm. Argos mostly displays values within its ruling *oikos* contrary to the Athenian ideal and the link between the *polis* and the *oikos* is not present. The ruling *oikos* are detached from the *polis* and the two do not exist together. Even in Euripides' *Orestes* the former ruling *oikos* is detached from the will of the people, and indeed in opposition to it. If Argos looks like Athens in this play then the *oikos* of Agamemnon is certainly in opposition to it.

Where the analysis is most problematic is regarding the *Supplices*. Argos appears in this place to be a warning to Athens, taking on a more Theban persona as it is a warning to Athens not to accept those whose values are opposed to Athens. It is difficult without the remaining plays to make any strong arguments as to the resolution of the action and how it fits in with my arguments. It is clear from this play that Argos is portrayed in a variety of manners and the strict approach of categorising types of dystopia is not helpful necessarily in aiding the understanding of the tragic city.

The other area of interest that has been explored during this thesis is the role of men in the tragedies, although in less detail than the role of women. The men of Thebes are unable to rule, and thereby force the women into male roles through their own inadequacy. Theban men are unable to maintain intra-familial relationships, and cannot achieve a balance between *oikos* and *polis*. The links to the women are too strong. For example, Jocasta: not only Oedipus, but the whole house of Laius itself becomes tied to this one female character. Jocasta is the key to the conflict, and the way her male offspring react to each other is the focus of the action. Between the ruling men of Thebes there is an inability to share power and a desire for control at the expense of their kin. If anything, the Theban men overvalue the female and undervalue the male family members.

The opposite appears true in Argos. Here the children or offspring overvalue the male family members and undervalue the mother. Yet the mother here undervalues everything except for her own ambitions and her desire for revenge against her husband. Clytemnestra undervalues the ties of kin. Thus in Argos the relationships within the *oikos* become subversive to Athenian society. The new king, who might be expected to be an 'alpha male', is portrayed as the submissive character, and the queen is shown as the true ruler. In both cities the male is unable to fulfil his duties to the state: in Thebes, this is because there is too much self-destruction and intra-familial conflict, in Argos it is because a woman seeks to usurp his position.

This thesis can be developed further through a more in-depth analysis of Athens in the plays considered. As the premise of the work was Athens was the utopia in Greek tragedy, there could be a greater understanding and evaluation of the role of the city in tragedy through a closer examination of the role of Athens in the plays considered. A discussion of the Iphigenia plays would aid this thesis as they would help to show how Euripides developed the story of Iphigenia and what was shown through this development.

There are a variety of approaches in academic circles to Greek tragedy. One such approach is the collectivist school which considers Greek tragedy in the context of wider social issues and mores. A defence of this approach can be found in Seaford's excellent 2000 article, and many mentions in my bibliography fall into this school, for

example Meier's *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy* and Goldhill's *Reading Greek Tragedy*. Seaford's article was a response to Griffin's 1998 attack on this position. Griffin sees the audience as "individual" and Griffin questions why "so many of our contemporaries are so determined that the creation of Greek literature, both Homer and tragedy, must be a matter of collective creation and ideologically determined content".[330] Griffin's approach is to look a specific historical events rather than collective ideologies.

This thesis fits more into the Simon Goldhill and Richard Seaford "collectivist" school of thought as it looks at the social function of the tragedy and relationship between the tragic texts and contemporary Athenian social institutions. Although I do not come to the same conclusions as many of the collectivists, I see tragedy as a reflection of society and have approached my analysis with the question: how have the playwrights used the myth to reflect society. I have not been concerned with what society thought of the myth but merely how the myth has been adapted for the audience, and what the playwrights aimed to show the Athenians.

It is apt to highlight the need for a more flexible and plural approach to the city in Greek tragedy. Applying a strict methodology for interpreting the city means many of the subtleties in the action have been missed and the complicated relationships are not explored as fully as under a more flexible approach. I end this thesis with a brief

[330] Griffin 1998: 55.

summation of my findings: Thebes tends to be more of the parabolic warning to Athens and this is mainly shown through the *oikos* and *polis* attempting to work together but failing; Argos tends to be the anti-Athens as highlighted through the ruling *oikos* acting in a manner opposite to Athens and the *oikos* and *polis* not having strong linkages.

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