

**The murderous relationship between
mothers and children:
the evolution of myths concerning
Medea, Clytemnestra and Electra from
Homeric epic to Seneca**

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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ABSTRACT

My thesis examines Medea, Clytemnestra and Electra as mythological case studies of the murderous relationship between mothers and children, and investigates themes of vengeance and justice in Greek and Roman poetry and drama from the archaic and classical to the Hellenistic and early imperial Roman period. My investigation looks at how these myths evolved from Greek to Roman literature against the background of evolving legal systems and interpretations of justice. This methodology provides an important contribution to our understanding of the reception of Greek myth in Roman literature, which has not received as much attention in existing scholarship compared with the classical dramatic interpretations.

I focus on Medea, Clytemnestra and Electra because they are mortal women synonymous with committing intentional homicide. Medea famously escapes unpunished from killing her children, while Clytemnestra is killed by her children in vengeance for killing her husband. These stories have not been studied together to investigate the transition of literary representations of their crimes diachronically from Greek to Roman literature and how these interact with developing societal ideas of justice. Electra is included in order to demonstrate the tensions involved in avenging kin within the family unit, especially when the murderer is a parent, and the contradictions that arise when a woman takes on the role of avenger, as Electra escapes many of the conventional punishments that her brother faces as a matricide. These characters warrant exploration from this gendered perspective because their gender contributes to their otherness in the conventional scheme of vengeance and retribution.

Clytemnestra is a victim of the early retaliatory form of justice for the murder of her husband but demonstrates the futility of vengeance because her children suffer for killing her. By contrast, Medea's escape precludes further violence. These myths demonstrate the consistent concerns regarding the unity of the family, and how the relationship between women and their mothers can be presented as a destructive motive in the cycle of violence within the family.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Context of the study

The inspiration for this thesis was my Master's dissertation investigating how and why Euripides' Medea escapes punishment. The character of Medea intrigued me not so much for the horror of her crime but for her uniqueness in escaping every interpretation of justice or punishment depicted for other mythological kin-killers in Athenian drama. I wanted to investigate other women in mythology who were capable of murder, and to establish how the literary and social context of each Greek and Roman interpretation affected the depiction of the crime and its punishment.

1.2. Aim and scope

The list is not short; there were many murderous women in Greek mythology that could be candidates for this study. I therefore set the criteria for these case studies as mortal women who commit intentional homicide. I limited the scope of the study to women who killed their kin and refined this to those where the relationship is damaged between parent and child. This list needed further refinement due to the limits of space and my desire to chart interpretations across a range of historical cultures. Therefore, my focus is on Medea, Clytemnestra and Electra as case studies due to the varied range of extant interpretations of their stories across my historical timeframe. I bring in comparable examples where relevant of other women that met these criteria; however I am unable to analyse the evolution of their mythology in as great a detail.

By focussing on female murderers, I established a research question which could address how issues of gender affected representations of justice in mythic narratives. By focussing on intentional homicide, I was able to investigate the author's depiction of individual motives and decision-making that led to the crime and assess whether this affected the punishment. Furthermore, by focussing on the murder of kin and the relationship between mothers and children I was able to assess how these issues of gender, murder and justice reflected the importance of the unity of the family unit over time.

In analysing the material diachronically from archaic and classical Greek to the Hellenistic and then on to the Roman sources I was able to compile a study which not only addressed the Roman reception of the Greek versions, which is often overlooked, but also how the evolving legal and social contexts affected the interpretation.

1.3. Literature review

There is an abundance of scholarship on many aspects of this thesis: the evolution of mythology; reception studies; revenge; justice; gender in antiquity; tragic interpretations of Medea, Clytemnestra and Electra; Athenian homicide; Stoic philosophy. This literature review provides a brief overview of some of the key scholarship that has influenced this research.

Johnston's recent work on mythology rejects the ritualist and structuralist approaches to Greek myth and focusses on the effect the narrative had on the audience.¹ Johnston's methodology uses comparativism across cultures and genres of narrative, based on the premise that the basic structures and mechanisms of human cognition have not changed much over the millennia, and that some of the techniques which convey meaning through narrative tend to endure.² Johnston agrees with Calame's pragmatic approach that performed myth received as true by an audience persuaded them to apply the ideas they encountered in their lives.³ However Johnston takes this beyond the immediate aftermath of the performance and argues that these myths cumulatively helped to create and sustain belief in the gods and heroes more generally. The context of the narration (sanctuaries, festivals) primed the audience to the ideas conveyed; thus festival and myth mutually supported one another.⁴

I find Johnston's approach in narratology and sociology more persuasive than the structuralist approach which disregards the self and the

¹ Johnston (2015a: 173-218, 2015b: 283-311, 2018).

² Johnston (2018: 1-34).

³ Calame (2003: 29-34, 89, 2009: 53-93, 98-99, 116-18). Calame observes that epinicians (Pindar) and other forms of melic poetry provided good contexts for myths that were meant to have a pragmatic effect (bringing about change in the audience or environment such as elevating a victor's status within his community, or persuading a king to let an exile return home) because they were performed in ritualised community settings.

⁴ Johnston (2015b: 288-99).

surface details; plot and the particular narrative through which a story was told were irrelevant to Levi-Strauss' version of structuralism, who instead focussed on the smaller units of the story; mythemes.⁵ Burkert discusses the weaknesses of structuralist approaches, and outlines that myths have a biological rather than logical basis, rooted in biological events such as puberty or seeking a mate or in social realities such as the hunt. His methodology, based on the assumption that originally the narrative myth and the ritual actions of the cult belonged together functionally, revived the ritualist approach that essentialised myths in order to find the original meaning.⁶ Vernant was the first in the modern study of myth to interpret the specific forms through which myths had been conveyed to ancient audiences and contextualised them within their historical and social settings.⁷ Detienne departed from this and dismantled the concept of 'myth', arguing it had never been more than a cultural construct, and started a move in scholarship which questioned 'myth' as a category.⁸ The approach of myth and ritual pairing continued, until Calame who abandoned the structural perspective and replaces it with the pragmatic aspects of 'myths'.⁹

The psychoanalytic approach has value in using myth as a means of comprehending human experience, however it discards details in the ancient narratives, similarly to structuralism, and assumes that myths reflect universal concerns of the human psyche.¹⁰ Attention has been given to the similarities and challenges between Levi-Strauss' structuralism and Freud's psychoanalytic interpretation of Greek myth,¹¹ and attempts made to combine psychoanalytic and structural methods to study Greek tragedy.¹²

I am interested in Johnston's exploration of the hyperseriality of myths, where networks of relationships embedded in myths create a coherent story world which validates each individual myth in a reciprocal way,

⁵ Levi-Strauss (1972).

⁶ Burkert (1979, 2011).

⁷ Vernant (1980). Post-structuralism has been regarded as re-introducing the historicity of myth. See Attridge, Bennington and Young (1987) and Zajko and Leonard (2006: 1-6).

⁸ Detienne (1986).

⁹ Calame (2003, 2011).

¹⁰ Zajko and O'Gorman (2013) analyse classical myth and psychoanalysis and offer a number of contexts for Freud.

¹¹ See Caldwell (1990: 342-92) for a psychoanalytic adaption of structuralism.

¹² See Segal (1978: 129-48).

becoming more credible as part of a bigger picture, which she argues enhances belief both in individual heroes and divinities and the entire cadre of the divine world. Hyperserials, whether by authorial intention or through evolution, obscure the priority of any original or dominant narrative and characters, and give verisimilitude to new tales and characters by bringing them into contact with already well established characters, e.g. bringing the emergent story of Theseus with Medea and Herakles to confirm his place amongst the great heroes.¹³

Volumes such as Zajko and Hoyle, and Trzaskoma and Smith acknowledge the importance of mythography and the ancient Greek and Roman reception of myths in their survival and evolution from the ancient world to the present day.¹⁴ Fowler's work represents a new phase in the interpretation of Greek mythology which analyses the significance of the mythographers and the ways in which they shaped the tradition.¹⁵ Cameron emphasises the importance, and challenges, of the reception of Greek myth by the Roman mythographers.¹⁶ I have taken into account Fowler and Cameron's discussions of the unreliability of attributions in scholiastic summaries and handbooks, and therefore used them with caution and compared with parallel sources where possible.

Reception theory has become an increasingly important part of the contemporary study of the ancient world, as acknowledged in Hardwick's overview of theory and practice in classical reception,¹⁷ and led by research from the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD).¹⁸ The process of reception is diachronic but also a synchronic cultural dynamic between an author and their contemporaries.¹⁹ There is now increasing scholarly interest on the ancient reception of Greek drama in the classical period,²⁰ as well as the Hellenistic and Roman world.²¹ This has influenced

¹³ Johnston (2015b: 288-306).

¹⁴ Zajko and Hoyle (2017). Trzaskoma and Smith (2013).

¹⁵ Fowler (2000, 2013, 2017: 15-27).

¹⁶ Cameron (2004).

¹⁷ Hardwick (2003).

¹⁸ Hall, Macintosh, and Taplin (2000). Hall, Macintosh, and Wrigley (2005). Hall and Macintosh (2005). Macintosh, Michelakis, Hall, and Taplin (2005). Billings, Budelmann, and Macintosh (2013).

¹⁹ Revermann (2016).

²⁰ Easterling (1997). Taplin (2007). Hall (2007). Revermann (2010). Csapo (2014).

²¹ Miles (2016). Manuwald (2016).

my diachronic approach in analysing themes of homicide, revenge and justice through the reception of these mythological characters in the classical, Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Feminist and gender theories offer integral and varied approaches to classical antiquity. Feminist classicists have been classified as pessimists (assessing antiquity through modern scales of virtue: patriarchy and oppression) or optimists (struggling to locate female agency and seeking to give ancient women a voice).²² Pomeroy's ground-breaking work examined the social history of women and the realities of women's existence in the ancient world, rather than concentrating on the images men had of women.²³ Early collections, including Foley, Cameron and Kuhrt, and Peradotto and Sullivan, addressed the apparent silence of ancient women and lack of information about them.²⁴ Feminist studies made women more visible, addressing whether they were citizens,²⁵ could read or write,²⁶ and attempting to interpret the reality of the images of women in works by men, particularly in fifth century BC Athens.²⁷ Volumes such as those of Rabinowitz and Richlin, Fantham, and Hawley and Levick progressed the importance of feminist theory for classical studies, offering feminist re-readings of classical texts, cultures, and civilizations.²⁸ The shift to gender theory was facilitated by a modified structuralism, and then a focus on sexuality in classics.²⁹ Scholarship continues to investigate the relationship between the representation of women and their actual role in the classical world.³⁰

Goldhill discusses the relationship between myth and society in his interpretation of gender conflicts in ancient Greek tragedy.³¹ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet argue that gender conflicts illustrate the real tensions between household and state in democratic Athens.³² Foley analyses female characters

²² Konstantinou (2018).

²³ Pomeroy (1975).

²⁴ Foley (1981). Cameron and Kuhrt (1983). Peradotto and Sullivan (1984).

²⁵ Patterson (1986).

²⁶ Cole (1981).

²⁷ Lefkowitz (1986). Skinner (1986).

²⁸ Rabinowitz and Richlin (1993). Fantham (1994). Hawley and Levick (1995).

²⁹ Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin (1989). See Rabinowitz and Richlin (1993: 1-20) for an overview.

³⁰ Mossman (2001). Richlin (2014).

³¹ Goldhill (1986).

³² Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988).

transgressing gender boundaries.³³ Zeitlin's influential work on the 'otherness' of female characters examines how the tragic theatre used the feminine for 'playing the other'.³⁴ Female self-assertion on her own behalf comes only at the cost of annihilating the 'other'.³⁵ Zeitlin applies the arguments of anthropologist Joan Bamberger regarding 'myths of matriarchy' to the *Oresteia*.³⁶ She argues that the *Oresteia* stands squarely within the misogynistic tradition that pervades Greek thought, a bias that projects a combative dialogue in male-female interactions and also relates the mastery of the female to higher social goals. For Bamberger, this cross-cultural category of myth justifies women's subordinate status by imagining that women once wielded cultural power over men but lost this authority through their own errors and abuses.³⁷

The number of Greek and Roman interpretations of Clytemnestra, Electra and Medea which survive attest to the interest and fascination these characters held in antiquity, and indeed modern interpretations demonstrate their continued interest today.³⁸ These characters continue to attract a vast amount scholarly research as individual figures analysed diachronically or synchronically, or in the context of analysing each genre of interpretation. Approaches include collections of papers examining the religious, philosophical, artistic and literary representations of Medea across archaic, classical, and Hellenistic Greece and imperial Rome.³⁹ There are volumes analysing one theme (infanticide) diachronically across genres from antiquity to modern day,⁴⁰ or analysing one interpretation (Seneca's *Medea*) across a variety of themes including dramatic context and reception.⁴¹ Synchronic approaches include collections looking at theoretical, political, historical, and

³³ Foley (2001).

³⁴ Zeitlin (1990: 85).

³⁵ Zeitlin (1996: 91).

³⁶ Zeitlin (1996: 88).

³⁷ Bamberger (1975). Foley (2001: 234).

³⁸ See Hall, Macintosh, and Taplin (2000), and Macintosh, Michelakis, Hall, and Taplin (2005).

³⁹ Clauss and Johnston (1997).

⁴⁰ Corti (1998).

⁴¹ Slaney (2019).

practical perspectives of Euripides' *Medea*,⁴² or in-depth commentaries such as Mastronarde and Mossman.⁴³

I have utilised a thematic approach, like that of Burnett who analyses the theme of revenge across Attic tragic interpretations of Orestes, Electra, Medea and other characters.⁴⁴ Burnett hypothesises that revenge in tragic plays would have been perceived by the audience as unproblematic, because revenge was not a problem, but a solution among early Greeks. I have adapted Burnett's method to produce a gendered approach to murder over a wider timeframe and selection of genres, in order to assess the chronological developments that may impact instantiations. Allen takes a historical-sociological approach to the theme of punishment in democratic Athens, analysing dramatic and literary sources in parallel to legal and political evidence.⁴⁵ I have utilised this historical-sociological approach in my analysis by taking into consideration the legal treatment of homicide or pollution in the context of these mythological interpretations.

McHardy argues that homicide cases were least readily associated with revenge attacks by Greek men across all sources.⁴⁶ She argues there is little evidence to prove blood feuds were rife in ancient Greece, and the family might not act without other compelling motivations (financial or political gain). Women are associated in texts with desiring blood revenge whatever the risks and rejecting compromise, compared to men who were more willing to settle and compromise.⁴⁷ McHardy also suggests the importance of securing and protecting female reproductive resources and the significance of offspring and the male bloodline are central themes in the myths of Clytemnestra, Electra and Medea. She uses the arguments of evolutionary psychologists and anthropologists, and cites examples from historical sources to lend support to her argument. I am persuaded by the importance of McHardy's methodology in analysing revenge by motivation and the individual circumstances of each case. I have therefore analysed my case

⁴² Stuttard (2014).

⁴³ Mastronarde (2002). Mossman (2011).

⁴⁴ Burnett (1998).

⁴⁵ Allen (2000).

⁴⁶ McHardy (2008).

⁴⁷ McHardy (2008: 7-9). Gagarin (1981: 18).

studies of Medea, Clytemnestra and Electra based on their motives, and then investigated the outcomes. I also take into account the seminal work of Sourvinou-Inwood on the Greek mentality towards matricide.⁴⁸ This is that the act of matricide is at once one of loyalty to the *oikos* and of disloyalty to it by restoring social order; punishing and eliminating the generator of disorder and itself bringing about new disorder.

Dramatic interpretations of mythology can contribute towards an understanding of the importance of the rule of law in Greek cultural identity of the Classical period.⁴⁹ Sourvinou-Inwood suggestively notes the importance of investigating the historical context and transmission of the myth to elucidate how they could and perhaps did affect the myth.⁵⁰ Recent scholarship has focussed on the influence that runs in both directions between the theatre of Dionysus and the Athenian courts.⁵¹ Understanding the legal context of each author can also contribute towards understanding the author's intention and the evolution of interpretations of Greek mythology and their Roman reception.

I have been influenced by this approach in reviewing the treatment of intentional homicide in classical Athens and in Rome during the late Republic and early principate. These are the key contexts of the mythological interpretations under investigation and (for classical Athens) where the most evidence is available. I also analyse the archaic and Hellenistic legal treatment of homicide, although acknowledging the fragmentary nature and lack of extant evidence. Given the volume of scholarship and the continued debate, this study will not be able to comment in detail on the many areas of controversy and differing scholarly interpretations of the legal situation in these historical contexts. However I hope that by including a legal consideration throughout my analysis of these case studies it will contribute to an appreciation of the contemporary concerns and attitudes around justice,

⁴⁸ Sourvinou-Inwood (1979).

⁴⁹ Harris and Rubinstein (2004: 1) note examples from Euripides' *Orestes* (485-7) that it is the Greek way not to wish to be above the law, and from *Medea* (536-8) of the benefit of coming to Greece from a barbarian land and learning justice and the rule of law rather than force.

⁵⁰ Sourvinou-Inwood (1979: 2).

⁵¹ Scafuro (1997). Allen (2005). Wohl (2010).

vengeance and the rule of law which may have shaped the author's interpretation of how violence can disrupt the family unit.

The evidence for judicial procedures in Greece before the end of the seventh century BC is not very satisfactory; for it consists simply of the Homeric epics and Hesiod.⁵² This indirect evidence of Homeric society is likely to portray the institutions of the eighth century BC before these poems were put into writing, although there is continuing debate on this which cannot be accommodated in this thesis.⁵³

MacDowell explains that in early times if a man was killed the usual consequence was that his family thought it their duty to kill the killer in revenge, unless he left the country in exile, and that this would result in an un-ending blood feud between the two families.⁵⁴ However Gagarin argues that the system of killing in retaliation for a homicide need not lead to vendetta, and that no homicides in the early Greek epics gave rise to vendetta and no homicide was avenged except that of Agamemnon in the *Odyssey*; and the killing of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra were not avenged in turn. He suggests the unending series of retaliatory killings imagined in the *Oresteia* was conceived by Aeschylus himself to fit the cyclical pattern of crimes envisioned in that trilogy.⁵⁵ Seaford uses examples from Homeric epic to suggest that there was little stigma attached to being a murderer because killers are accepted in new households.⁵⁶ McHardy cites the Homeric examples of exile following a homicide as a typical theme to avoid blood revenge from the relatives of the victim.⁵⁷ Phillips states that Drakon's homicide law of 621/0 BC effectively suppressed retaliatory killings over time, so that by the age of the orators homicide had been redressed through the courts and vengeance was achieved by the legal action of the victim's kin.⁵⁸

⁵² MacDowell (1978: 10).

⁵³ Gagarin (2008: 5-18). See Finley (1977), Morris (1986), Raaflaub (1997), Hall (2007: 25-6).

⁵⁴ MacDowell (1978: 19).

⁵⁵ Gagarin (1981: 18).

⁵⁶ Seaford (1994: 27-8).

⁵⁷ McHardy (2008: 16-18). See Section 3.2.1 on the importance in Homeric epic of having a son to avenge his father's killer (*Odyssey* 3.196-7).

⁵⁸ Phillips (2008: 57).

Parker's seminal and influential work on the elusive phenomenon of pollution questioned Douglas' structuralist approach to pollution as 'matter out of place'; a cognitive process of dividing things into categories.⁵⁹ Parker offers as a description that pollution is not a rationalisation but a vehicle to express social disruption and breaches of order, and that murder pollution is caused by the anger of the victim killed.⁶⁰ Osborne argues that pollution puts gods at the centre of social order, and that law and pollution beliefs are complementary, not identical.⁶¹ I apply many aspects of Parker and Osborne's work, as well as recent studies from Meinal and Salvo, in my analysis of pollution depicted in the evolving literary interpretations of these mythological murders, as well as in the consideration of the contemporary legal treatment of homicide, in order to understand the social ramifications for women who murder.⁶²

There has been a shift in the study of Roman law from viewing the *Digest* as a source of doctrine to viewing it instead as a product of history; a work of numerous jurists from different periods.⁶³ Volumes such as Johnston's demonstrate the different approaches to modern scholarship: the ahistorical focus on legal doctrine; the contextual analysis of law; or an intermediate approach.⁶⁴ The volume of Du Plessis, Ando and Tuori also reflects the nature of current scholarship in Roman law beyond doctrinal studies and into sociological and anthropological study,⁶⁵ including gender theory in the study of Roman law and society.⁶⁶ Gaughan's research on homicide in the Roman Republic asserts that murder did not become an official crime prosecuted by the state until the end of the Republic when the authority of the *paterfamilias* was diminished and many rights were transferred to the Roman emperor.⁶⁷

From the classical Athenian point of view the *oikos* was the basic family unit and a woman's *kyrios* was her protector; she could not plead her

⁵⁹ Parker (1983) and (2018) in the context of new evidence. Douglas (1966).

⁶⁰ Parker (1983: 121-5).

⁶¹ Osborne (2011: 158-84).

⁶² Meinal (2015). Salvo (2018).

⁶³ Johnston (2015: 4).

⁶⁴ Johnston (2015: 3-8). Winkel (2015: 9-24).

⁶⁵ Du Plessis, Ando and Tuori (2016). Du Plessis (2013).

⁶⁶ Perry (2016: 332-42).

⁶⁷ Gaughan (2010).

own case in court.⁶⁸ Athenian men avoided mentioning women by name in a court of law unless it was absolutely necessary for the prosecution of the case, with three main categories of exceptions: disreputable women, opposing women, and dead women. The most respectful way to refer to a woman was through her relationship with a man; through her *kyrios*.⁶⁹

Foxhall disagrees with Just in seeing women as passive victims of male ambitions, but rather that they lived in continuum with the male world of law-courts and acted upon their men to influence events there (Demosthenes 59.110-11, Isaios 12.5).⁷⁰ Gagarin follows this approach beyond the positivist and systematic view of Athenian law and brings in recent work on anthropology, suggesting litigation is not only a means of punishing violations and restoring order but an important ritual process to construct and validate the community's norms and values.⁷¹ He argues that although Athenian law regulated conflict, it did not resolve it and in some cases provided a forum for conflict, therefore law (*dikê*) resembles other forms of competition (*agôn*) in Homeric epic and so negotiates and validates an individual's standing in the community.⁷² Thur remains wary of turning to anthropological analysis before exhausting all the evidence of the Greek sources, and advocates a discussion between the two principles.⁷³

Mythology provides a level of understanding of human experience which can contribute to modern sociological studies on homicide, just as homicide studies can add value in an interdisciplinary approach to interpretations of mythology. I therefore draw on modern psychological and sociological studies on female homicide in order to contextualise some aspects of interpretation of these case studies, in particular Medea.

Hausfater and Hrdy draw together work on animal and human infanticide and place these studies in a broad evolutionary and comparative perspective through historical and ethnographic data, concluding that human infanticide is most often perpetrated by biological parents.⁷⁴ Messing and

⁶⁸ Lacey (1968: 15). Harrison (1968: 108).

⁶⁹ Schaps (1977: 329-30). Just (1989: 28)

⁷⁰ Foxhall (1996). Just (1989: 28).

⁷¹ Gagarin (2008: 4). Also Cohen (1995).

⁷² Also Osborne (1985:52).

⁷³ Thur (1996).

⁷⁴ Hausfater and Hrdy (1984).

Heeren's qualitative study compares male and female mass murderers and identifies common predisposing factors and precipitating events in child homicide including the relationship of female murderers to the victims and the way in which these murders appear to develop.⁷⁵ Gavin and Porter use case studies from around the world in their comprehensive psychological review of aggression perpetrated by modern women, and identify characteristics and contributing factors for women who commit filicide.⁷⁶ Many of these real-life characteristics and predisposing factors of women who murder their children are depicted in Euripides' dramatic interpretation of Medea. Euripides' psychological sureness of touch was noted by Easterling.⁷⁷ I use this research to demonstrate the continued relevance of interpretations Greek mythology in understanding modern human experience, and why there is such continued interest in the modern reception of these characters.

1.4. The significance of this study

Myth is a social phenomenon.⁷⁸ This thesis uses an interdisciplinary methodological approach, influenced by Johnston's methodology in narratology and sociology, and offers a gendered and diachronic approach to themes of homicide, revenge and justice throughout archaic, classical, and Hellenistic Greece, and early imperial Rome. This provides an original contribution to the analysis of these themes and these mythological characters by analysing the representations and development of Medea, Clytemnestra and Electra together from this diachronic perspective.

In doing so I reflect on the importance of the evolving social and legal contexts of each narration of the character and assess how this affects the authorial intention and mythological depictions of murder, justice and the unity of the family. This draws together approaches and theories used in existing scholarship to bring a new perspective to this material. My study fills that gap in research and engages with current thinking by advancing

⁷⁵ Messing and Heeren (2004).

⁷⁶ Gavin and Porter (2015).

⁷⁷ Easterling (1977).

⁷⁸ Fowler (2017: 24).

knowledge on how mythology encapsulates social and legal concerns about justice, revenge, and the disruption of the family unit, in the context of murder between parents and children.

My aim is to demonstrate the impact of the shift from the early archaic Greek retaliatory system of violent revenge in response to the murder of kin to the classical development of written homicide law and laws on adultery, and how this affects literary interpretations of the cycle of violence and the disruption of the household. It will also demonstrate how philosophical and, in particular, Roman Stoic concerns on the danger of anger as an uncontrollable passion influence the portrayal of these characters. The gender of these characters adds to their complexity in embodying male concerns in societies where women were marginalised. This thesis therefore also provides an important contribution to our understanding of the evolution and reception of myth in Athenian and Roman culture.

In my case studies I argue that a combination of social isolation, race, witchcraft and divine descent affects the literary representations of the consistent lack of punishment for Medea. I suggest that the character of Medea is used as a tool to outline the conventional punishments for a mother who murders her children because she shockingly escapes these punishments, but her escape precludes further violence. However, Clytemnestra is a victim of the early retaliatory form of justice for the murder of her husband, but demonstrates the futility of vengeance because her children suffer for killing her. Electra demonstrates the isolation of women stepping into the conventionally male world of vengeance and the cycle of violence because her punishment is not the same as her brother's.

Ultimately the importance of the unity of the family and the destructive threat of violence within the family unit are consistent across all interpretations. I argue that generational conflict and the deterioration or lack of a relationship between women and their mothers are presented as contributing factors for these murderous women, and that their gender contributes to their otherness in the conventional scheme of vengeance and retribution.

1.5. Overview

The thesis consists of an introduction, three further chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction in Chapter 1 outlines the aims, literature review, and significance of the study as well as the methodology.

Chapter 2 outlines the ancient source material and the intended audiences for the archaic, classical Athenian, Hellenistic and Roman interpretations.

Chapter 3 charts the evolution of the interpretations of Clytemnestra and Electra from Homeric epic to Senecan drama. I argue that Clytemnestra has consistently been associated from the earliest surviving sources in myth as a wife who betrays and intentionally murders her husband, and who is intentionally murdered by her children in vengeance for her actions. The development and interpretation of the myth therefore varies around the motives, the method, and the accomplices to the murder of Agamemnon and the murder of Clytemnestra.

I analyse the surviving archaic sources and conclude that Homeric epic provides an inconsistent picture of the agency of Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus in the murder of her husband Agamemnon. However it does attribute her responsibility for his death, and focusses on her adultery, and the vengeance taken by her son, which likely resulted in (but did not focus on) matricide. The *Nostoi* and *Cypria* of the Epic Cycle also avoid having to articulate the matricide but acknowledge that Clytemnestra was involved in the death of her husband, and that the responsibility fell to her son to avenge his death. Hesiod explicitly refers to the matricide and, like the *Cypria*, also introduces the attempted sacrifice of Iphimede / Iphigeneia, alongside the story of Agamemnon being killed by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and avenged by Orestes. I argue that these two motifs of matricide and Agamemnon's murder are linked in the archaic interpretations, even if not overtly as cause and effect.

Stesichorus is important in introducing many elements canonised in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and Pindar focusses on Clytemnestra alone as the active agent in the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra and is the first extant interpretation to focus on her motives for killing her husband. Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* presents the masculine Clytemnestra and feminine Aegisthus

betraying and murdering Agamemnon and Cassandra and provides the motives for Clytemnestra's murder of her husband. The *Choephoroi* establishes the cycle of violence within the family where Orestes kills Clytemnestra and becomes the polluted matricide. In *Eumenides*, Orestes is plagued by the Erinyes and stands trial in Athens as a result at the first trial of the Areopagus.

Electra is not represented as a murderer until fifth century BC tragedy, where she assists her brother in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, but it is clearly Orestes that commits the murder. Sophocles and Euripides make her a more integral part of the murder of her mother Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in their *Electra's* and Euripides' *Orestes*. Seneca focusses on Clytemnestra as the main aggressor in Agamemnon's murder as a result of the danger in responding to and acting on the impulse of anger.

I suggest that Sophocles and Euripides are portraying Electra's alienation by depicting her as escaping the conventional forms of punishment for intentional homicide. In contrast to other literary representations of female murderers, she does not kill herself, she does not metamorphosise, and she is not killed by anyone in vengeance for her role in Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' murder. Her isolation as a woman is especially evident in the contradictions that arise when she is portrayed as escaping the punishments her brother faces; she is not pursued by the Erinyes and does not stand trial with Orestes. She is isolated from her male *philoï* before the murder and she is isolated from the punishments of her male accomplices after the murder. I will argue that her fragmented relationship with her mother and her fragmentation from her *oikos* and *polis* through the denial of marriage and children, as conventional feminine relationships, can be interpreted as a form of punishment for her role in masculine vengeance. I draw a comparison between Electra and Medea as women who commit intentional homicide and whose lack of relationships with their mothers ultimately have an adverse effect on their role as mothers.

In Chapter 4 I analyse the evolution of interpretations of Medea as a case study of a murderous mother. I address the surviving archaic sources; Medea is absent in Homeric epic, and present in Hesiod's *Theogony* but only as the wife of Jason. The archaic epics that dealt with the Argonautic adventure do not survive, but from references in later authors it seems

Medea's main involvement was: in fleeing from Aeetes with Jason and the Golden Fleece; her association with the unintentional death of her children, linked to the goddess Hera; and her skills in drugs. Fragments from archaic poetry hint at her role in helping Jason to get the Golden Fleece, and that she eventually marries Achilles in the Elysian fields. Pindar continues the theme of her abduction and her importance to the success of Jason's quest, and her association with drugs and magic. Pindar provides our first extant reference to Medea intentionally killing someone: Pelias.

I summarise the tragic fragments which may have dealt with Medea but of which little survives, and analyse her interpretation in classical Athenian tragedy where her role as a murderer is canonised by Euripides. I conclude that Euripides innovates the unintentional death of Medea's children from archaic epic by depicting it as intentional infanticide. This becomes the canonical interpretation and is reflected throughout the later Hellenistic and Roman versions of the story. I argue that Medea escapes the conventional depictions of justice for other infanticidal parents in Athenian drama: exile, death, suicide or metamorphosis.

In Hellenistic epic, Apollonius characterises Medea as the murderer of her brother, and stresses her planning of the crime. The influence of Hellenistic interest in magic is shown through increased detail on her skills in drugs and magic, and association with Hecate.

In the *Heroides* (VI, XII) and *Metamorphoses*, Ovid avoids focussing on Medea's infamous murder of her children so that he can present a portrayal that is original and different from his predecessors. Ovid instead focusses on the murders which have received less attention in the canonical sources, such as the murder of Pelias, and her attempted murder of Theseus. However he acknowledges her familiar role as a kin-killer, the competing forces at work in her character, and her skills in magic and poisons.

Seneca portrays Medea's motives for the infanticide as revenge for her husband's betrayal, and vengeance for her murdered brother. He characterises her fluctuating emotions, which are a consistent element of her characterisation since Athenian tragedy, as she struggles between her love for her children and her desire to avenge her husband's betrayal.

In Chapter 5 I conclude that Medea famously escapes unpunished from killing her children, while Clytemnestra is famously killed by her children in vengeance for killing her husband. Electra escapes many of the conventional punishments that her brother faces as a matricide. Electra demonstrates the tensions involved in avenging kin within the family unit, especially when the murderer is a parent, and the contradictions that arise when a woman takes on the role of avenger.

For these three characters, their gender contributes to their otherness in the conventional scheme of vengeance and retribution. But it is Medea and Electra's isolation from the *oikos* and *polis* that contribute to their unique ability, unlike other mythological murderesses, to avoid death, suicide, metamorphosis, or exile as a result of the murders they commit within the family unit.

Chapter 2: Context

2.1. Ancient sources

In this thesis I am classifying archaic Greece as c.750 BC to 480 BC; the classical period as c. 480 BC to 323 BC; the Hellenistic period as 323 BC to 31 BC; Republican Rome as c.509 BC to 31 BC and the Roman principate as 31 BC to 14 AD.

My literary source material includes archaic epic (Homeric epic and the Epic Cycle) and poetry (Hesiod, Stesichorus), fifth century BC choral lyric (Pindar) and drama (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides), third century BC Hellenistic epic (Apollonius of Rhodes), and first century AD Roman poetry and drama (Ovid, Seneca). Bringing together this range of evidence makes it possible to examine the development of these characters from the archaic and classical sources to their reception in Hellenistic and Roman sources, which have not received as much attention in existing scholarship compared with the classical dramatic interpretations.

I focus on extant literary source material, including fragments where necessary, as well as inscriptions for the legal context, and pictorial evidence of vase paintings to support my argument in relation to the development of interpretations of the myths.

2.2. Intended audience

It is important to note the differences in audiences for each of the genres and contexts of the sources that I focus on as this affects the evolution of the interpretations and reception of the myth.⁷⁹ Revermann describes how reception is a complex phenomenon which manifests itself in many forms and media and provides significant insights into the recipient, whose receptivity may change over time.⁸⁰

The Homeric epics were composed orally for entertaining the aristocratic elite.⁸¹ González analyses Homeric performance from a

⁷⁹ As Bauman (1986) has observed, the performer performs for the audience and the performance is conditioned by the audience and their response.

⁸⁰ Revermann (2016: 13-14).

⁸¹ See Graziosi (2002) on the performance and early reception of Homeric poems. For reasons of space I will not enter the debate on the Homeric question: see Griffin (1977) for the view of Homer as the single poet of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; see Nagy (1990) for the view of Homer as

diachronic perspective.⁸² The rhapsode, as the performer of Homeric epic, has an effect on the creative engagement with the poetic tradition from oral tradition and festival performances to the introduction of writing and recording of performances. Currie analyses the mixed composition and complex responses of Homeric audiences and their appreciation of intertextual relationships and allusions.⁸³ Homeric themes included honour, loyalty and piety, and the Homeric interpretations of murder within the family draw heavily on these concepts and related vocabulary.

By contrast, the audience of the fifth century BC theatre of Dionysus was significantly more diverse. The concerns for issues such as ‘justice’ and ideals of gender polarity therefore affect the tragic representations and vocabulary of these characters and plots. All classes could attend the theatre where the dramas were in competition, and this perhaps influenced the depictions of the elite as more corrupt. The issue of whether women could attend the theatre in the fifth century BC has been much debated; and although some have argued for female attendance,⁸⁴ and some against,⁸⁵ the evidence is not conclusive. I suggest that if women did attend it would not have been a significant proportion compared to the predominantly male audience. Women may have attended tragedy in the theatre during Plato’s time in the fourth century BC (*Gorgias* 502b-d, *Laws* 817c, 658a-d), but the references in fifth century BC comedy to women in the audience (*Theismophoriazousai* 389-91, 395-7, *Peace* 962-7) cannot be taken as representative evidence due to the contrived and comic nature of the genre.

A proportion of the audience of classical Athenian drama, if we assume this was made up of at least a majority of Athenian male citizens, might have been familiar with the Athenian legal process. A proportion of male citizens over thirty were eligible for service as jurors in the ordinary jury-courts, the *dikasteria*.⁸⁶ Although the homicide courts were separate to

the name of the movement of this type of Panhellenic poetry, a product of a long series of compositions which gradually became fixed, rather than an individual.

⁸² See González (2013) for extensive overview and bibliography.

⁸³ Currie (2016).

⁸⁴ Winkler (1990), Henderson (1991, 2010: 15-18).

⁸⁵ Podlecki (1990: 27-43), Goldhill (1994: 347-69), McClure (1999).

⁸⁶ Harris (2010) notes the average citizen serving in the courts would have acquired extensive legal education from hearing dozens of cases each year and from serving in the council or meetings in the assembly.

these jury-courts, it did mean that some might be familiar with trials and legal arguments. An even smaller number of the audience may have been familiar with homicide law if they held the role of *ephetai*, of which 51 judged homicide cases at the Palladion, Delphinion and in Phreatto, or those who held office as archons, where a minority would go on to become members of the Areopagus. Therefore some of the contemporary audience of Athenian tragedy may have been familiar with Athenian homicide law, which would have affected how they received these dramatic interpretations of revenge and justice.

A new Greek cultural community developed in the Hellenistic period, following the expeditions of Alexander the Great, which meant that all inhabitants could identify with Greek culture even if geographically far removed from Greek cities. The Hellenistic elite invested in the widespread understanding of Greek culture and literature, including theatre and tragedy as a form of mass entertainment, which also had a political and propagandistic function.⁸⁷ This differed from the reception of myth in Athenian drama during the classical period which was tied to specific city-states.

The educated Hellenistic elite absorbed the Greek cultural identity and read Greek and Latin texts as second or third languages.⁸⁸ The intended audiences of Hellenistic literature also changed to include female readers of the upper classes who had the financial resources to have an education. Hellenistic epic was therefore for a more international and geographically broad and literate audience, which would account for an assumption of knowledge of previous interpretations and therefore more intertextuality.

The number and size of Hellenistic theatre audiences provides evidence for the mass reception of drama in the Hellenistic period, and how tragedy became a characteristic aspect of 'Greekness'.⁸⁹ The universality of Hellenistic tragedy influenced the emergence of Roman tragedy; the Romans may have been familiar with literary works of Euripides and Sophocles, but

⁸⁷ See Kotlińska-Toma (2016: 1-9) and the volume of Clauss and Cuypers (2010).

⁸⁸ Cribiore (2001).

⁸⁹ Kotlińska-Toma (2016).

it was the contemporary Greek plays they were familiar with being staged.⁹⁰ Hellenistic concerns with emotions such as love take priority over earlier themes of justice, and concepts of gender are used to articulate new ‘heroic’ versions of the myths.

Ovid’s poetry and Roman tragedy were likely written for a small elite group. Seneca’s dramas may not have been performed in the theatre at all but read by a sophisticated audience with rhetorical training who would know the Greek originals. The audience was elite, like archaic epic. Ovid and Seneca’s handling of the myths therefore reflected some of these elite concerns. From the later Republic, education for elite girls was likely fairly common but was more varied in quality than boys.⁹¹ Some imperial women challenged traditional gender boundaries and disposed of their wealth by becoming literary patronesses.

⁹⁰ Kotlińska-Toma (2016: 1-48, 281-88) discusses the differences in technique of staging the plays and themes compared to classical Athenian drama, moving to exploit increasingly political themes. Also Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980).

⁹¹ Hemelrijk’s (1999) treatment of the education and literacy of women in ancient Rome is comprehensive.

Chapter 3: Clytemnestra and Electra

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will analyse the evolution of the mythology of Clytemnestra and Electra through the key interpretations from Homeric epic to Senecan drama. I argue that Clytemnestra has consistently been associated from the earliest surviving sources in myth as a wife who betrays and intentionally murders her husband, and who is intentionally murdered by her children in vengeance for her actions. The development and interpretation of the myth therefore varies around the motives, the method, and the accomplices to the murder of Agamemnon and the murder of Clytemnestra. The structure of this chapter will therefore reflect these themes.

Clytemnestra's motives for murdering Agamemnon on his return from Troy vary depending on the purpose of each interpretation but can be attributed to four key interlocking causes:

- Clytemnestra's adulterous relationship with Aegisthus during Agamemnon's absence;
- Agamemnon's sacrifice of their daughter (Iphigeneia);
- Agamemnon's return home with Cassandra from Troy; and
- the history of violence in the house of the Atreus.

Clytemnestra's methods for murdering her husband consistently include deception and include some or all of the following:

- murder at a feast at the palace of Aegisthus;
- murder in the bath;
- murder at the hearth;
- the use of a net;
- the use of a sword;
- the use of an axe; and
- the mutilation of the corpse.

There are variations and ambiguities over the roles that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus play in planning and executing the murder which include the following:

- Aegisthus in the active role in murdering Agamemnon and Clytemnestra assisting or helping;

- Clytemnestra in the active role in murdering Agamemnon and Aegisthus assisting or helping;
- both having an active role in the murder; or
- Clytemnestra as the active or lead agent in the murder without reference to Aegisthus.

The consequence of the crime is consistently that she and Aegisthus are murdered in vengeance for Agamemnon's death. The agents of this revenge are Clytemnestra's child or children, but the interpretations vary as to whom and as to their roles. This mirrors the variations between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus's roles in the murder of Agamemnon, and Electra and Orestes represent another masculine and feminine pair where gender is used to address stereotypes regarding vengeance.

In this chapter I will analyse the key components of the myth and how each author contributes and innovates with their interpretation. Homeric epic establishes: the adulterous relationship between Aegisthus and Clytemnestra; their murder of Agamemnon; the use of the sword; Clytemnestra's murder of Cassandra; and Orestes as the avenger of his father's death. There is no mention of Electra in Homeric epic.

The interpretations in circulation at the time of the Epic Cycle contribute: the assistance of Pylades in Orestes' vengeance; Iphigeneia as a daughter of Agamemnon; and Agamemnon offending Artemis due to his boasting, resulting in the attempted sacrifice of Iphigeneia and her substitution with that of a deer.

The Hesiodic *Catalogue* introduces: Electra as a child of Agamemnon; and the sacrifice of Iphimede (not yet named Iphigeneia). Stesichorus introduces: an axe as the murder weapon; Iphigeneia as a child of Agamemnon; the recognition scene; Clytemnestra's dream; the persecution of the Erinyes; the association with Apollo; and the nurse.

Pindar introduces Clytemnestra as the sole active agent in the murder of both Agamemnon and Cassandra and presents her motives for murdering her husband as the sacrifice of Iphigeneia and her adultery with Aegisthus. Pindar presents Clytemnestra as capable of killing her own child as an infant, although this may have been introduced in Stesichorus due to the reference to

the nurse. Pindar also introduces divine support for Orestes but, unlike most later representations, this is from Ares rather than Apollo.

Aeschylus utilises elements inherited from earlier versions, especially Stesichorus, and contributes many elements which canonise parts of the story. In the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus introduces: the portent of the two eagles and the pregnant hare which led to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia; the murder in Agamemnon's palace; the use of the net; sexual jealousy of Cassandra as a motive for Clytemnestra (although I argue this is hinted at in Homeric epic); and the history of violence in the house of Atreus as a motive for both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

In the *Choephoroi*, Aeschylus introduces: the bath as the location of Agamemnon's murder; the use of the net and the sword; the mutilation of Agamemnon's corpse; the influence of Apollo in the matricide; the role of Pylades in encouraging Orestes to kill his mother at his moment of hesitation; and the inclusion of Electra in the matricide in a passive role.

In the *Eumenides*, Aeschylus contributes: Orestes' motive for avenging his father as the command of Zeus through Apollo; Orestes' persecution by the Erinyes; the legal setting of the trial and the establishment of the Areopagus; and the themes of pollution, and *dikê* as justice.

Sophocles' *Electra* innovates many aspects of the story from Aeschylus and earlier interpretations. This includes: Electra saving Orestes as an infant from Clytemnestra; situating Agamemnon's murder at the hearth / feast; Orestes and Pylades murdering Clytemnestra before murdering Aegisthus; the more aggressive role of Electra encouraging Orestes in the matricide; the absence of the Erinyes; and reference to the children of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. This is in addition to: reintroducing the axe; reintroducing Chrysothemis as a child of Agamemnon as well as Iphianassa and Iphigeneia; Iphigeneia's sacrifice being a result of Agamemnon's boast to Artemis over a stag; the agonistic style of debate between Clytemnestra and Electra; and Electra's heroic concerns of her enemies laughing at her.

Euripides' *Electra* contributes many innovations, most importantly Electra's active role with Orestes in the murder of Clytemnestra, and her encouragement of the silent Orestes during the matricide. He also introduces: the location of the story in the countryside; Electra being married to a farmer,

and then to Pylades; Aegisthus (rather than Clytemnestra) trying to kill Orestes as an infant; the motive of wealth to Electra and Orestes' matricide; and the first murder trial being that of Ares.

Euripides' *Orestes* offers further contributions to the myth, such as: Electra's more active role in the matricide; Electra and Orestes being threatened with the same punishment; the threat of stoning; the murder trial being in Argos; the return of Menelaus; Orestes, Electra and Pylades' attempted revenge on Hermione and Helen; and the conclusion that Orestes will marry Hermione, and Electra will marry Pylades.

There is evidence of a fourth century Hellenistic tragedy *Clytemnestra* by Polemaius of Ephesus (TrGF 155), who was awarded a prize for this at the Rhomaia held in Magnesia, as well as two plays concerning the house of Atreus, a tragedy *Hermione* and satyr play *Thyestes*, by Theodorus (TrGF 134) which also won awards at the Rhomaia.⁹² I will not be able to study these in detail due to limitations of space. Although the evidence is limited, the titles and victories indicate that interest in Clytemnestra and perhaps the cycle of violence and struggle for power in the house of Atreus continued to interest Hellenistic audiences.

Seneca contributes further important innovations not seen in earlier interpretations. This includes: Clytemnestra' conflict and indecision before murdering Agamemnon, and her contemplation of forgiveness; the persuasion and manipulation of Aegisthus in convincing Clytemnestra to kill her husband; the more violent portrayal of Clytemnestra cutting off Agamemnon's head and threatening to kill Electra and Orestes; and Aegisthus mutilating Agamemnon's corpse after Clytemnestra has struck the fatal blow. There is also: the more aggressive portrayal of Electra compared to the mute Orestes; the presentation of Electra and Clytemnestra separately considering suicide; the focus on emotions and anger; the presentation of Aegisthus' love for Clytemnestra; the motive for Clytemnestra murdering Cassandra due to her concern at the threat that she will pose to Electra and Orestes; and the introduction of the ghost of Thyestes and his incest with Aegisthus' mother.

⁹² Kotlińska-Toma (2016: 171-2).

The evolution of this mythic cycle throughout Greek and Roman literature demonstrates different motives for murder and aspects of justice and vengeance in each context. Each author draws out and focusses on different characters in this family cycle to depict the danger and recurring violence of betraying and murdering kin. Each interpretation is influenced by the context of its production and the author's intention. This includes: the importance of duty and loyalty in Homeric epic; the legal and political concerns regarding homicide, the distinction of motive and planning, and the concept of *dikê* as justice in classical Athenian interpretations; and the philosophical focus on emotions and the political concerns with incest and adultery in early imperial Rome.

The dangers of vengeance and adultery in violently disrupting the unit of the household are consistent throughout these surviving interpretations. The outcome of Clytemnestra's murder of her husband is that she destroys the relationship she has with her children, who ultimately destroy her. The murder of her child is one of the motives for Clytemnestra killing her husband, and ironically this vengeance provides a motive for her children to commit further violence within the family unit.

I argue that Electra's involvement in the murder of her mother is linked to her consistent association with childlessness. Her lack of a positive relationship with her mother, and her devotion to avenging her father, contribute to her childlessness. Ultimately she becomes as murderous as her own mother, but escapes the justice that Clytemnestra receives. I argue that the innovation of the Athenian dramatists, particularly Sophocles and Euripides, in involving Electra in the murder of her mother but allowing her to survive and not suffer the persecution and trial that Orestes must face is to demonstrate the varied consequences that become available through the legal treatment of homicide, rather than relying on retaliatory violence which results in death.

3.2. Homeric Epic

3.2.1. Archaic homicide

As discussed in Section 1.3, there are conflicting views on whether the archaic system of killing in retaliation for a homicide led to vendetta. Tulin convincingly argues that in the archaic community homicide was not simply a transgression against the individual, but a broader attack on the solidarity of the ancient family, therefore the response to homicide was rooted in the family's ancient right of vengeance (*poinë*) and initially handled through self-help.⁹³ Leão summarises three possible reactions to homicide in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: the killing of the murderer by relatives of the victim; the exile of the murderer from the land of the victim; or an agreement for the murderer to pay compensation to the victim's kin.⁹⁴

The trial scene on Achilles' shield (*Iliad* 9.632-6, 18.497-508) provides evidence in Homeric epic that the offer of blood-money can be accepted after a homicide. Two men in the agora seek a resolution to their dispute from a group of elders over the blood-price (*poinë*) of a man who has died, and a prize of two talents of gold was to be given to the one among them who offered a *dikê* in the most straight fashion (18.499-500). *Dikê* is used in a different sense in Homeric epic than it is in fifth century drama and law. Sealey describes it in a procedural sense of resolving a dispute without violence (Hesiod's *Works and Days* 276-80) and as a mode of proof (*Iliad* 23.570-85) as well as in a substantive sense in three ways in the *Odyssey*: *dikê* as a right (24.254-55; 19.42-3); as a duty (18.275-80); and as an actual condition (14.59-61, 19.168-70).⁹⁵

The evidence from these lines (18.497-508) is not conclusive; however I find Gagarin convincing that the man who swore to pay is likely to be the killer, and the other is most likely a relative of the victim representing him in a formal public procedure.⁹⁶ It is impossible to say conclusively

⁹³ Tulin (1996: 2). See also Glotz (1904: x-xi,47-93,225-43,299-324,372-6,425-42), Lipsius (1905-15: 6-27), Treston (1923), Bonner and Smith (1930: 1-56,192-231), Gagarin (1986: 62,89).

⁹⁴ Leão (2010).

⁹⁵ Sealey (1994: 100-105, 138-42).

⁹⁶ Gagarin (1986: 26-33, 2008: 13-19). Harrison (1971: 69-72) follows Wolff (1946) who suggests that in this passage the killer must have brought the case because he speaks first and

whether the issue was over the amount to be paid or whether it has been paid or whether it should be paid.⁹⁷ The importance of the issue for my discussion is that the need for a procedure such as this is to resolve further reprisals from the victim's family in response to homicide implies there is a threat of vendetta.

Gagarin argues persuasively that the practice of accepting blood-money and the practice of pursuing the killer into exile exist in parallel in Homeric epic but that exile is more common.⁹⁸ Gagarin calls on allusions in Homeric epic and Hesiod to illustrate the judicial process as a common activity: *Odyssey* (12.439-40) and *Iliad* (16.542) suggest that a full day could be spent in the agora hearing disputes, and that a king settles disputes and fights battles as primary benefits to his people. He uses the examples in Hesiod's *Theogony* (80-103) to demonstrate the oral judicial process, and in *Iliad* (23.566-613) to demonstrate the process of negotiation and resolution to both parties and the community. Gagarin concludes that most common result of homicide, even accidental, in the Epic Cycle and Hesiod, excluding killing in battle, is that the killer flees and goes into exile, with the threat of death if he does not, and that in most cases it is the victim's relatives that seek vengeance. He uses the examples of Hercules (*Odyssey* 21.24-30) and Oedipus (*Odyssey* 11.271-80, *Iliad* 23.679-80) who escaped exile because there were no relatives of their victims to take revenge.⁹⁹

Parker agrees that the exiles in Homeric epic (*Iliad* 23.85-8, *Odyssey* 22.27-32) are not being driven by pollution but pursuit by the victim's kin.¹⁰⁰ Seaford suggests that in some cases the killer who flees into exile does so to escape being killed in revenge by the victim's relatives, and follows Finley that the explanation for the surprising lack of vendetta in Homeric epic could be due to the exclusion of the clan which has entailed the exclusion of the

he is seeking protection from the community against the relative of the victim who is seeking vengeance for his relative's murder by the traditional method of self-help.

⁹⁷ MacDowell (1978: 18-21) suggests this blood-price as recompense for the killing could avoid any feud and close the affair, and interprets this dispute as being over whether the blood-price should be accepted or whether the blood feud should continue. The lines are ambiguous and there has been extensive debate on many aspects of this passage: see also Bonner and Smith (1930: 31-41), Thur (1996) and Cantarella (2001).

⁹⁸ Gagarin (1981, 1986, 2008).

⁹⁹ Gagarin (1981: 6-10, 2008: 27).

¹⁰⁰ Parker (1983: 115-17).

vendetta.¹⁰¹ McHardy argues that exile is the norm following a killing outside of warfare in Homeric epic, and that exile can be seen as a living death as a man can no longer provide assistance or protection to his family.¹⁰² Fleeing into exile ensured that the killer was out of sight and protected them from the wrath of the relatives of the dead man and protected the community from feuding. McHardy uses Aegisthus as the only example of a killer in Homeric epic who dies at the hands of an avenger outside of warfare, as he did not elect to go into exile.¹⁰³ She suggests that the prominence of exile as a response to homicide in mythical and historical texts suggests that Orestes' vengeance did not reflect historical practice.

Nestor articulates the important theme of a son being left behind at a man's death to avenge his father's killer (*ἐτίσατο πατροφονῆα* 3.196-8).¹⁰⁴ McHardy does not interpret this to mean that sons are motivated solely by a desire for blood revenge, but interprets the case of Orestes as an example of a son attacking the men who are threatening to take his mother, his property and his power. However McHardy notes that another commonly expressed sentiment is that it is foolish to kill the father and spare the sons (*Cypria*; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1376a6-7; Herodotus 1.155.1).¹⁰⁵

Gagarin notes that, unless there is no threat of vengeance from the victim's relatives, only divine intervention permits the killer to remain unavenged in epic (*Odyssey* 24.430-525). He suggests that Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are foolish not to anticipate Orestes' revenge and thus do not flee.¹⁰⁶ I agree with his assessment that Orestes takes revenge on both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (although the matricide is suppressed by the poet – see Section 3.2.2.) and that this indicates that an accomplice or conspirator in a homicide case was considered equally liable.

I argue that the use of compensation or exile are both conceived of as alternatives to killing the killer, and demonstrate that the judicial process is starting to be refined in this pre-literate society. Gagarin convincingly argues

¹⁰¹ Seaford (1994: 25-7). Finley (1977: 105, 1981: 243).

¹⁰² McHardy (2008). Cf. Allen (2000: 81).

¹⁰³ McHardy (2008: 16-18). Also Glotz (1904: 51).

¹⁰⁴ This theme also features in Sections 3.7.5., 3.10.4., 3.11.

¹⁰⁵ McHardy (2008: 12, 104). Cf. *Odyssey* (22.221-2), Sophocles' *Electra* (964-5), Euripides' *Electra* (19-42).

¹⁰⁶ Gagarin (1981: 7-17).

that before the invention of alphabetic writing in Greece an oral procedure for peaceful dispute-settlement had developed as an alternative to violence and self-help, and that as it became more common for the killer and victim's relatives to seek a resolution rather than violent revenge then the procedures where the community and its leaders helped parties reach a settlement became more formal and conveyed more authority.¹⁰⁷

In this context of homicide, I will also briefly discuss the treatment of pollution. Current scholarship discusses pollution as a divisive and allusive phenomenon, with opinions on both sides regarding the consistency or evolution of pollution within the ancient world. Many scholars have discussed the lack of pollution in Homeric epic. Orestes stays in Argos and Oedipus remains in Thebes despite their kin-killing (*Odyssey* 11.271-80; *Iliad* 23.679). Dodds famously postulated that the growth of the fear of pollution is central to the transition from 'shame culture to guilt culture' from the Homeric to the archaic age.¹⁰⁸ Seaford attempts to explain the lack of pollution and vendetta from Homeric epic as representing the ideology of a society of autonomous heroic households whose relations with each other (and their internal relations) could be conducted without institutions such as law-courts and purification.¹⁰⁹ Seaford suggests that the predominance in tragedy of violation of *philia* may reflect a period and social context (fifth century democratic Athens) in which reciprocal relationships between family members and other kinds of *philoï* had become problematic in a way that they were not in Homeric epic because of the emergence of new modes of social and economic life. Meinel follows this view that there is an increasing importance to pollution and links this to the rise of the polis.¹¹⁰

Lloyd-Jones, who follows Rohde, judges the Homeric poems to know nothing of any religious purification of those who have incurred the stain of blood, and suggests the phenomenon has been suppressed.¹¹¹ Lloyd-Jones

¹⁰⁷ Gagarin (2008: 19-27).

¹⁰⁸ Dodds (1951: 28-63). Visser (1984: 193-206) follows Dodds and suggests that the shame culture of Homeric epic was still alive in fifth century Athens and enshrined in homicide law and that pollution, as the invisible contagious blood, was society's reaction to crime that belongs to a shame culture.

¹⁰⁹ Seaford (1994: 28).

¹¹⁰ Meinel (2015).

¹¹¹ Lloyd-Jones (1971: 76-8). Rohde (1925: 180).

suggests this is due to authorial intent, given the dark, daemonic side of religion is also absent from Homeric epic and yet appears suddenly in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, whereas it was artistically convenient to the early tragedians to stress the darker aspects of the higher powers. However I am not convinced by his argument that belief in pollution during the fifth century had actually become weaker or that it is accidental that guilt, divine hostility and physical pollution loom larger in early tragedy than epic.

Parker attempts to solve the issue by stating that although the metaphor of pollution is absent, there are phenomena which constitute it or are explained by it such as the killer's exile, divine anger provoked by particular forms of killing, and the potential for ghostly sanctions against inactive kin.¹¹² His cautious approach distinguishes between genres (eighth or seventh century epic and fifth century tragedy) to discount the idea of an increase in the fear of pollution, and accounts for it from the emergence of a genre that extensively explores the consequences of violence within the family.¹¹³ He also suggests that the stories of Orestes and Oedipus in Homeric epic have nothing to do with what is typical or legally exemplary, and that in fifth century tragedy an Orestes of the day would perhaps have sought redress through the courts.¹¹⁴ Eck, contrary to Parker, puts forward that the notion of pollution resulting from killing (in battle) is not entirely absent in Homer.¹¹⁵ Salvo rejects the opposition of law and religion and questions the mainstream view of pollution as typical of pre-legal societies.¹¹⁶

I follow the cautious view of Parker and acknowledge the importance of distinguishing between genres when attempting to understand the perceived increase in depictions of pollution from Homeric epic to classical Athenian drama, and to note the approach of Lloyd-Jones in acknowledging the intent of the author.

¹¹² Parker (1983: 130-43).

¹¹³ Parker (1983:15-16).

¹¹⁴ Parker (1983: 137). Also Gernet (1955: 531).

¹¹⁵ Eck (2012: 106-29).

¹¹⁶ Salvo (2018: 157-69).

3.2.2. *Odyssey* and *Iliad*

From Homeric epic, our earliest extant source, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are both depicted as intentionally killing Agamemnon, although there is ambiguity over their agency and roles. Homeric epic establishes the relationship between Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, their murder of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra's murder of Cassandra, and Orestes as the avenger of his father's death. There is no mention of Electra throughout Homeric epic.

The *Iliad* makes no mention of the murder of Agamemnon, although there is reference to Clytemnestra in that Agamemnon says he preferred his concubine Chryseis to his wedded wife as she was not inferior to her in any way (1.113-15). I suggest that this comparison between Clytemnestra and a rival for Agamemnon's affection could hint at Clytemnestra's jealousy over Cassandra as a rival and his murder on his return, as depicted in the *Odyssey*. I reject the cautious view of Davies and Finglass that this is not enough evidence of enmity between husband and wife.¹¹⁷

Delcourt argues that an overwhelming misogyny accompanies the appearance of Clytemnestra everywhere; Agamemnon only names her in the *Iliad* in order to reject her.¹¹⁸ Pomeroy links the history of hostility toward women in western literature to the first generalisation that Clytemnestra's infidelity sullies even the virtuous members of her sex (*Odyssey* 11.437-34).¹¹⁹ Zeitlin similarly argues that the misogynistic tradition that pervades Greek thought is associated with Clytemnestra from its first literary expression in the *Odyssey* (24.199-202).¹²⁰

In the *Odyssey* the story of Agamemnon's death has become well known (3.193, 4.94-5) and is told to Telemachus and Odysseus at various points during the epic.¹²¹ The poet uses Orestes' vengeance of his father's murder as a *paradeigma* and the active parallelisms make him viewed

¹¹⁷ Davies and Finglass (2014: 482).

¹¹⁸ Delcourt (1959: 84).

¹¹⁹ Pomeroy (1975: 21-22).

¹²⁰ Zeitlin (1996: 88).

¹²¹ D'Arms and Hulley (1946: 213) suggest that Homer has taken Odysseus' (comparatively obscure) family and setting and made them of epic proportions in the *Odyssey*; one method of which is the constant use of the comparison of Odysseus and his family with Agamemnon and his family.

positively. Telemachus is encouraged to fulfil his duty to his father and take revenge on the Suitors, as Orestes avenges Agamemnon by killing Aegisthus (3.193-99). Penelope is depicted as the loyal and virtuous wife (11.440-55), in comparison to the adulterous and duplicitous Clytemnestra (3.263-272, 4.90-92, 24.191-202). Odysseus will eventually have a happy return home (13.383-6), unlike Agamemnon who was murdered on his return (3.231-5, 4.30-5, 4.525-37, 11.427-34). The Suitors ignore the warning against their actions and come to destruction (1.372-81, 2.138-45, 2.161-70, 20.350-70), just as Aegisthus did (1.35-43).¹²²

Goldhill suggests that although Orestes' execution of revenge is held up as an exemplary model to Telemachus (both young men are threatened in position as heir to patrimony and by a sexual challenge) it is more complex than simple paradigm due to the moral uncertainty of the matricide not being mentioned.¹²³ The change from masculine singular object of revenge to double funeral leaves a marked gap in the narrative of revenge. By contrast, Telemachus has both parents alive but will not be in sole control of *oikos*: son and father have parallel reintegrations into household. Burnett sees Orestes' action against Aegisthus as a model of filial behaviour and simply the best available example of the right expression of one's duty as a son.¹²⁴

The focus at the start of the *Odyssey* is on Aegisthus' agency rather than Clytemnestra's (1.29-43). Zeus does not mention Clytemnestra's involvement in Agamemnon's murder; only that Aegisthus had been slain by Orestes (ἔκταν'), having taken Agamemnon's wife and killed him on his return (ἔκτανε νοστήσαντα). This is despite Aegisthus being warned by the gods not to do either because if he did he would be avenged by Orestes, which could imply that this was a known version already in circulation.

The poet uses the epithet 'crafty' to describe Aegisthus (Αἴγισθον δολόμητιν 3.198). Athene, through the guise of Mentor, says that he devised a woeful death (ἐμήσατο λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον 3.194) and killed

¹²² March (1987: 84) follows D'Arms and Hulley (1946) on the *paradeigma*. D'Arms and Hulley conclude that the Oresteia-motif, as well as being used for purposes of comparison between Agamemnon and his family with Odysseus and his family, is used to represent the theme that men bring their sorrows upon themselves and blame the gods for it.

¹²³ Goldhill (1986: 149-53).

¹²⁴ Burnett (1998: 99).

Orestes' father (*ὄ οἱ πατέρα κλυτὸν ἔκτα* 3.198). Therefore the poet stresses Aegisthus' adultery and craftiness in taking Agamemnon's wife and killing him, but for Clytemnestra only stresses her adultery and not her part in the murder. However it is worth noting that the poet uniquely depicts Clytemnestra initially trying to resist the advances of Aegisthus, who attempted to beguile her with words (*Ἀγαμεμνονέην ἄλοχον θέλγεσκ' ἐπέεσσιν* 3.264). De Jong makes the important observation that referring to Clytemnestra, not by name, but in her role as wife of Agamemnon underscores the illicit behaviour of Aegisthus.¹²⁵ At first Clytemnestra is unwilling of the unseemly deed (*ἡ δ' ἦ τοι τὸ πρὶν μὲν ἀναίνετο ἔργον ἀεικέες δῖα Κλυταιμνήστρη· φρεσὶ γὰρ κέχρητ' ἀγαθῆσι* 3.265-6). Dimock translates the epithet *δῖα* as 'noble' Clytemnestra.¹²⁶ Heubeck *et al* interpret this as relating to her position or birth rather than her character, although they go on to interpret *φρεσὶ γὰρ κέχρητ' ἀγαθῆσι* as implying proper moral feeling.¹²⁷

Therefore the poet's intention may have been to demonstrate the good character of Clytemnestra and her corruption through Aegisthus' seduction.¹²⁸ It is only when the will of the gods ordained it that she is eventually overcome (*ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ μιν μοῖρα θεῶν ἐπέδησε δαμῆνα* 3.269) and willing as he is willing (*ἐθέλων ἐθέλουσαν ἀνήγαγεν* 3.272) is led to his house. I follow Heubeck *et al* rather than Dimock in interpreting 3.269 as the gods making Clytemnestra overcome, rather than Agamemnon, Aegisthus, or the minstrel. I suggest this follows the poet's emphasis on her initial resistance to Aegisthus' attempts to seduce her and demonstrates the transition to her reciprocity at 3.272. The poet therefore creates a more positive depiction of Clytemnestra as a noble woman who has fallen victim of a man's persuasion, as well as being subject to the *moira* of the gods, in contrast to her sister Helen who actively pursues adultery.

The poet avoids Clytemnestra's part in Agamemnon's murder at this point because that would highlight her murder as a result. This would depict

¹²⁵ De Jong (2001: 82). I have chosen not to use her term 'illegal' behaviour in order to avoid assuming a legal interpretation of the situation.

¹²⁶ Dimock (1995) *ad loc.*

¹²⁷ Heubeck, West, Hainsworth (2000) *ad loc.* I am not convinced by Vermeule (1966: 11) who asserts this only means Clytemnestra had good female sense, did not yield to Aegisthus' first seducing words but waited and 'increased her price'.

¹²⁸ Davies and Finglass (2014: 483).

Orestes as a matricide and diminish the aspirational role of the story for Telemachus. Nestor tells Telemachus that after Aegisthus killed Agamemnon and ruled for seven years Orestes returned and killed him. However he mentions that Orestes gave a funeral feast for craven Aegisthus (*ἀνάλκιδος Αἰγίσθοιο*) and his hateful mother (*μητρός τε στυγερῆς* 3.310). De Jong argues that this is the closest we get to a possible reference to the matricide.¹²⁹ I reject the idea that Orestes' participation in the funeral feast and, by implication, lack of pollution is evidence of the absence of matricide in Homeric epic.¹³⁰

The mention of funeral rites confirms Clytemnestra has died but the poet does not state that Orestes killed her. Denniston offers the suggestion that Clytemnestra's funeral follows her suicide.¹³¹ However I suggest there is insufficient evidence in the *Odyssey* to assume suicide instead of matricide, just because the poet highlights neither. I argue that the poet chooses not to highlight the matricide. I follow Gagarin and Willink who argue that Homer may have been aware of the matricide story even though only Aegisthus' murder is described (*Odyssey* 1.298-9, 3.311).¹³² I interpret the poet choosing to combine their funeral rites and to mention Clytemnestra's death in the context of Orestes killing Aegisthus, as his father's murderer, to mean that Orestes has killed them both.

The variations throughout the epic on Clytemnestra's agency in the murder could be a result of inconsistencies due to the nature of different stages of composition. However I interpret the instances which attribute Clytemnestra as taking part in Agamemnon's murder as evidence that the poet was aware, or perhaps introduced, Clytemnestra's role in her husband's murder but chose not to emphasise it throughout if it did not suit his purpose. Davies and Finglass similarly highlight the importance of the poet's attention to the overall narrative impact in explaining the variations in Clytemnestra's role in the murder in the *Odyssey*.¹³³ I agree that the omission of the matricide,

¹²⁹ De Jong (2001: 82).

¹³⁰ See Jebb (1907: xi) for this argument.

¹³¹ Denniston (1939: ix).

¹³² Gagarin (1981: 7-17). Willink (1986: xxxi).

¹³³ Davies and Finglass (2014: 483-4). Also Lorimer (1950: 519) on the masterly economy of disclosure in arousing curiosity and suspense previously in the narrative, only to reserve the climax of the horror (the direct participation of the wife) to be told by the murdered man himself.

and of Iphigeneia in the *Iliad*, is more likely the poet's deliberate choice than a post-Homeric development, especially given that the epics relish neither human sacrifice nor killing within the family.¹³⁴

Clytemnestra's *dolos* is highlighted in the *Odyssey* in addition to that of Aegisthus (3.198). Her complicity in Agamemnon's murder is mentioned by other characters in various degrees either alone, supporting Aegisthus in planning the murder, or as perhaps the murderer herself. Agamemnon's ghost attributes his death jointly at the hands of Aegisthus and his wife (*χερσὶ* 24.96-7) and stresses their joint agency, and her deception and assistance. He is said to have been killed with his comrades (11.388, 11.412-13) in the house of Aegisthus (11.389). He recounts that Aegisthus brought upon him death and fate and killed him with the help of his accursed wife (*ἀλλά μοι Αἴγισθος τεύζας θάνατόν τε μόρον τε ἔκτα σὺν οὐλομένη ἀλόχῳ* 11.409-10), that he was invited to his home for a feast (*οἴκόνδε καλέσσας, δειπνίσσας* 11.410-11),¹³⁵ and that he was pierced by the sword (*φασγάνῳ* 11.424).¹³⁶

Athene tells Telemachus that Agamemnon returned home and was destroyed by the treacherous plot of Aegisthus and his own wife (*ἀπολέσθαι ἐφέστιος, ὡς Ἀγαμέμνων ὄλεθ' ὑπ' Αἰγίσθοιο δόλῳ καὶ ἧς ἀλόχοιο* 3.234-5). De Jong suggests that the change in location here is due to Athene's rhetoric contrasting Odysseus' suffering away from home with Agamemnon's fate being killed at home.¹³⁷ Finglass also notes the alternate location of Agamemnon's death as at his hearth when he returned (*ἧ ἐλθὼν ἀπολέσθαι ἐφέστιος* 11.324) and suggests this may reflect an older tradition which the poet has altered for his own purposes.¹³⁸

Menelaus focusses on Clytemnestra's deception as an accomplice to the murder; he tells Telemachus that Agamemnon was killed by a man

¹³⁴ Davies and Finglass (2014: 484). Cairns (2001: 375).

¹³⁵ D'Arms and Hulley (1946: 213) note the similarity between Odysseus' slaughter of the suitors at a feast on the festival of Apollo and Aegisthus inviting Agamemnon to a feast and slaughtering him like at a banquet or wedding or festival (11.414-15). They suggest the poet intentionally used the similarity of the setting to heighten the contrast of the outcome of the action. See also Section 3.11.1. on Euripides transforming this motif for the murder of Aegisthus.

¹³⁶ March (1987: 90) suggests that the image of Agamemnon being killed like an ox at a stall (4.535, 11.411) could have suggested to later authors the idea of an axe being used, although only the sword is mentioned in *Odyssey*.

¹³⁷ De Jong (2001: 81).

¹³⁸ Finglass (2007b: 159).

through the guile of his accursed wife (*δόλω ούλομένης ἀλόχοιο* 4.90-92). He says that when Agamemnon returned from Troy his ships were almost blown to Aegisthus' land but were saved and blown home (4.515-20), therefore indicating Aegisthus was not living with Clytemnestra in Agamemnon's palace. Aegisthus lays an ambush at his palace and invites Agamemnon, bringing him to his palace for a banquet and then striking him down after the feast and having all his men killed (4.525-37). Given that Clytemnestra does not trick Agamemnon into going to Aegisthus' palace, and she is not depicted as delivering the blow that kills him, it must be assumed here that her *dolos* is her allegiance to Aegisthus and betrayal of her husband rather than warning him of the trap set for him.

This thematic use of *dolos* casts Aegisthus and Clytemnestra as negative examples, in comparison to Odysseus whose *dolos* is a positive attribute, for example to escape Polyphemus, or as a beggar, as well as Penelope's positive use of *dolos* in her weaving. Aegisthus and Clytemnestra's use of lies and deception to negative ends contributes to the *paradeigma* which casts Agamemnon and his family as negative examples of what can happen when a husband is away at war and separated from his wife for a long period of time, compared to the positive examples of Odysseus and his family.

The role of Menelaus as a potential avenger is hinted at, but the idea is not picked up again until Euripides' *Orestes*. Menelaus recounts how he was told to return home as soon as he could as he may find the murderer still alive or if Orestes has already killed him, he could join in the funeral feast (*Odyssey* 4.545-7). This shows the importance of the duty of the male relative in avenging the murder of their kin. The urgency here implies that Menelaus will want to find the murderer alive in order to kill them, and the only alternative to this scenario is that Orestes has already killed him; no other kin are suggested in taking this action.

Homeric epic introduces Clytemnestra as a murderer as she kills Cassandra as she clings to Agamemnon (*Κασσάνδρης, τὴν κτεῖνε Κλυταιμνήστρη δολόμητις ἀμφ' ἐμοί* 11.422) using the same epithet of her craftiness (*δολόμητις*) that was used to describe Aegisthus. Agamemnon bringing Cassandra home with him and introducing her to his home will be

utilised in later interpretations, particularly in Athenian drama, as one of the motives in Clytemnestra killing him. I argue that the inclusion of Cassandra's murder in this epic shows that the poet is aware of the tradition of Clytemnestra killing her husband but is choosing not to highlight it, and is hinting at Clytemnestra's jealousy at a rival.

Even though Clytemnestra's specific role in Agamemnon's death remains ambiguous, the poet has confirmed her presence during this episode, her ability to kill Cassandra, has described her in terms equivocal with Aegisthus, and outlined her decision to do nothing to help or prevent his death. The poet's unambiguous description of Clytemnestra killing Cassandra emphasises her guilt by alluding to her ill-feeling towards her husband and depicting her as capable of committing murder. At the same time the poet avoids having to discuss the resultant matricide by not specifically outlining her role in the murder of Agamemnon. Further horror is added that as Agamemnon lay dying with the sword in his chest, Clytemnestra failed to give him the important honours of burial and did not even close his eyes and mouth (11.423-6).

However the narrative here departs from the interpretation of their joint agency and attributes responsibility for his death to Clytemnestra alone without reference to Aegisthus. This is either through plotting and contriving to kill him (*κουριδίῳ τεύξασα πόσει φόνον* 11.430), or by plotting or devising evil deeds (*οὐχ ὡς Τυνδαρέου κόυρη κακὰ μήσατο ἔργα*), and actually killing her husband (*κουρίδιον κτείνασα πόσιν* 24.199-200; *πάρος δέ με πέφνε καὶ αὐτόν* 11.453). The intention is to warn Odysseus of the dangers of women and the possible welcome the hero could receive upon reaching home (11.430-4) and to contrast Clytemnestra with the faithfulness and virtue of Penelope (11.440-53, 24.191-202).

Clytemnestra's rejection of the honours a wife should pay to her husband contribute to her portrayal as an accursed wife (*οὐλόμενος* 4.90-2, 24.97). The description of Agamemnon as Clytemnestra's honourable husband (*κουρίδιος* 11.430, 11.453) also demonstrates honour as an important theme throughout the epic. Clytemnestra ignores the honour between husband and wife as well as the burial honours owed to her husband. The themes of honour, loyalty and duty are a focus in Homeric epic, perhaps a product of

the shame culture proposed by Dodds (1951), which are not as evident in Aeschylus where the focus is on concepts of justice and *dikê* (Sections 3.7 to 3.9).

The artistic evidence provides further support for the early interpretation of the murderous Clytemnestra. Davies uses artistic evidence (a pinax from Gortyn, disk seal from central Crete, and the Cretan mitra from Olympia) to persuasively argue that there was an Oresteia legend in Crete where Clytemnestra played the leading role in the murder of her husband and seizure of his throne.¹³⁹ This is supported by literary evidence (Hesiod fr.23a MW) where the sacrifice of Iphimede is a motive for Clytemnestra's revenge. This existed alongside a version or versions related in Homeric epic in which Aegisthus played a dominant role and may have been represented by artists in the first half of the seventh century B.C.¹⁴⁰

The death of Agamemnon, although gaining widespread interest in the archaic period,¹⁴¹ was not as popular in archaic and classical art as the death of Aegisthus.¹⁴² Prag convincingly suggests this could be due to the importance of the theme of revenge of the dutiful son rather than the unsettling implications of Agamemnon's death. There was a reluctance to show the resulting matricide based on the absence of evidence of the death of Clytemnestra depicted in archaic or early classical art. There is tentative evidence of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra being led to their deaths but nothing of them being killed together.¹⁴³ Where Clytemnestra does feature in artistic representations of Aegisthus' death it is to come to his rescue with the axe.¹⁴⁴

Prag concludes that it is only among the Etruscans and Romans that the death of Clytemnestra found favour, and after 458 BC the death of Aegisthus disappears from Attic art and is replaced by images of Orestes and the Erinyes. Prag suggests the struggle between Orestes and the Erinyes

¹³⁹ Davies (1969).

¹⁴⁰ Davies (1969: 236-40) also highlights the role that Cretan women play in stories of murder and usurped thrones, citing Atreus' wife Aerope who assisted his brother Thyestes in seeking to gain the throne in Euripides' *Cretan Women*, and who is mentioned in Hesiod (fr.194 and 195 MW) and Euripides' *Orestes* (18, 1009).

¹⁴¹ Prag (1985: 5).

¹⁴² Finglass (2007b: 159). Prag (1985: 5).

¹⁴³ Prag (1985: 6-43). See Sourvinou-Inwood (1979) for a detailed discussion on the Greek mentality towards matricide.

¹⁴⁴ Prag (1985: 42) rejects Delcourt's (1959: 26-7) suggestion, based on Stesichorus, that Clytemnestra was killed trying to save her lover.

would have been an exciting and visually challenging conclusion to the curse compared to the distressing theme of the death of Clytemnestra. Prag notes that the features which distinguish matricide from any other attack on a woman are the baring of the breast and the avenging Erinyes; of those known the only two which are intentional matricide are that of Orestes and Clytemnestra, and Alcmaeon and Eriphyle.¹⁴⁵

Returning to the *Odyssey*, I argue that the poet varies the interpretation of Clytemnestra as a murderer to suit different purposes in the story; the guilt of Aegisthus or Clytemnestra or both is stressed depending on speaker and audience in the narrative.¹⁴⁶ Clytemnestra is depicted as an accomplice to Agamemnon's murder to vilify Aegisthus and highlight his seduction of her. This inspires Telemachus to take action, and acts as a cautionary tale from Agamemnon to Odysseus on the danger of a plotting and adulterous wife, either jointly or without her lover. She is depicted as the murderer of Cassandra to show that jealous or adulterous women who betray their husbands are capable of violence. By contrast, Aegisthus is depicted as the sole murderer of Agamemnon as a warning from Zeus on the consequences of human arrogance, and as an inspirational story for Telemachus on the role a son can play in defeating his father's enemies.

Revenge may have been a more palatable topic for the Homeric poet to depict in these purposes than matricide, but the evidence from the *Odyssey* acknowledges Clytemnestra's role in the murder of her husband, and possibly the resultant matricide. Gagarin similarly concludes that the killing of Clytemnestra is clearly alluded to in *Odyssey* (3.310), and that she must have been killed as punishment for her part in the killing of Agamemnon and not for killing Cassandra, whose death would not be avenged in Mycenae.¹⁴⁷ The artistic evidence from the archaic period lends support to Clytemnestra's early

¹⁴⁵ *Odyssey* (11.326-7) refers only to hateful Eriphyle being responsible for the death of her husband for the price of gold. See Davies and Finglass (2014: 344-54) on the fragmentary Eriphyle of Stesichorus. Sophocles' fragmentary *Epigoni* and *Alcmeon* seem to have dealt with the matricide. See Kells (1973: 1) and Sommerstein (2012: 68-70).

¹⁴⁶ See Lorimer (1951) and Davies and Finglass (2014). I disagree with March (1987: 84-5) who asserts that it is unclear who the Homeric poet saw as the principal criminal in Agamemnon's murder because the guilt of either Aegisthus or Clytemnestra is stressed depending on who is telling the story to whom; I would clarify that the stress varies between Aegisthus, Clytemnestra, or both of them.

¹⁴⁷ Gagarin (1981: 7-17).

involvement in the murder and we can conclude from this that Clytemnestra's association with intentional homicide is consistent from the archaic to the classical Greek to the Roman interpretations.

The Homeric poet does not focus on Aegisthus or Clytemnestra's motives for killing Agamemnon or Cassandra. There are implied threats regarding the consequences of the murder; Zeus' warning to Aegisthus not to slay Agamemnon or seduce Clytemnestra for the destruction and vengeance from Orestes which would follow. This links the seduction to the murder of Agamemnon, and the vengeance of Orestes to follow.

The motive depicted is that of Aegisthus and divine influence. Zeus has used women to punish the race of Atreus through Helen and now Clytemnestra for some hatred long ago (11.435-440). Agamemnon states that Zeus plotted his death at the hands of Aegisthus and his wife (24.96-7). The divine influence due to some hatred long ago alludes to the feud between Atreus and Thyestes and the curse on Atreus' line. If this were made more explicit this could imply that Aegisthus and Clytemnestra were agents of Zeus in destroying Agamemnon, and would also elicit sympathy for Aegisthus which would not suit the poet's purpose. The conflict between Atreus and Thyestes will be discussed further in Section 3.7.3.

One significant element of the story which is ignored in Homeric epic, but is mentioned elsewhere in the Epic Cycle and which prevails in tragic Athenian and Roman interpretations of the saga, is the sacrifice of Iphigeneia. In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon's daughters are listed as Chrysothemis, Laodice, and Iphianassa, and his son as Orestes (9.142-5). The *Cypria* (PEG 24) tells us that Iphianassa and Iphigeneia were the two daughters, and Sophocles' *Electra* (157) names Iphianassa and Chrysothemis as daughters that remain alive, therefore we can conclude that Iphianassa is not a Homeric version of Iphigeneia.¹⁴⁸

The sacrifice of Clytemnestra's child is interpreted as one of the motives for Clytemnestra to kill her husband from Stesichorus, Pindar and Aeschylus onwards. I argue that the absence of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia

¹⁴⁸ See Section 3.3. on the *Cypria*. March (1987: 85) suggests that the absence of Iphigeneia and her death may have been because the poet did not know of her or because he chose not to mention it as there would be no reason to mention the dead Iphigeneia in the *Iliad* in the context of telling of the daughters' marriageability.

avoids sympathy for Clytemnestra or guilt on Agamemnon and would therefore contradict the poet's intention in using them as a contrast to Penelope and Odysseus and inspiration for Telemachus. The absence of Iphigeneia means that there is no justification for Clytemnestra's murder of her husband other than her adulterous relationship with Aegisthus, and the possible introduction of Cassandra as a rival. If Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigeneia was not known, or was chosen not to be included by the poet, then the poet's intention must have been to present Agamemnon's murder as sympathetic, and to avoid complicating Orestes' role as avenger.

3.3. Epic Cycle

The surviving evidence for the interpretations in circulation at the time of the Epic Cycle introduce some key innovations. These include: Pylades assisting in Orestes' vengeance; Iphigeneia as a daughter of Agamemnon; and Agamemnon offending Artemis due to his boasting, resulting in the attempted sacrifice of Iphigeneia and her substitution with that of a deer.

Currie discusses the modifications in transmission from composition of the cyclic epic poems (presumably seventh to sixth centuries BC) to Proclus' day (either second or fifth century AD).¹⁴⁹ Photius (*Library* p.319a30 Bekker) reports Proclus' statement that 'the poems of the epic cycle are preserved and studied by many...'. Scholars do not all accept that the poems were extant and read by Proclus. West argues that Proclus depended on a pre-Hellenistic compendium of digests of the cyclic poems which could have had a number of abridgements before it reached him.¹⁵⁰

Proclus' summary of the *Nostoi* has Agamemnon killed by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, and introduces Pylades as a companion to Orestes in avenging Agamemnon (Photius 319a21-30 Bekker).¹⁵¹ This provides brief reference to an archaic interpretation, in addition to Homeric epic, which discusses the joint agency of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in the murder of Agamemnon, and has Orestes, and Pylades, avenging Agamemnon's death

¹⁴⁹ Currie (2016: 229-30).

¹⁵⁰ West (2013b: 14-15, 23-6). See also Davies (1986: 105-106) and Fantuzzi and Tsagalis (2015: 35).

¹⁵¹ I am not convinced by Danek (2015: 371) who argues that Pylades was a traditional detail which was left out on purpose in the *Odyssey*.

without specifically mentioning the matricide. I am not convinced by March's suggestion that the placing of Aegisthus' name before Clytemnestra's implies that his part in the murder was possibly greater than hers, similarly to Orestes who is named before Pylades.¹⁵² I suggest it is safer to assume there was no distinction between their roles and that they could have as great a role as each other.

The ambiguity over Orestes avenging Agamemnon, without stating that he killed Clytemnestra, is similar to Homeric epic in avoiding explicitly mentioning the matricide. However the *Nostoi* and the *Odyssey* both acknowledge Clytemnestra's involvement in the death of her husband and that the responsibility to avenge him fell to her son. March also notes evidence that the *Nostoi* situated Agamemnon's murder at a banquet, similarly to the *Odyssey*. The Berlin bowl (4996) is inscribed depicting Agamemnon's death as described in the *Nostoi* (PEG 10). It shows Agamemnon wreathed, cup in hand, lying on a couch while Aegisthus attacks him with a sword, while Clytemnestra has Cassandra by the hair and is about to kill her with a sword, and Agamemnon's men are attacked by Aegisthus' men.¹⁵³

The earliest source for Iphigeneia as a daughter of Agamemnon and for her slaughter is the *Cypria*. Currie suggests that the *Cypria* knew of Iphigeneia in addition to the three daughters acknowledged in *Iliad* 9.142-5, and that this could be taken as an indication of the *Cypria* responding to the *Iliad*.¹⁵⁴ Due to limitations of space I will not enter the debate on exact dating; and accept the likelihood of the Epic Cycle poems being later than Homeric epic.

Proclus' summary (PEG 24) tells us that Agamemnon had four daughters including Iphigeneia and Iphianassa, and that Agamemnon offends Artemis with his boasting over his hunting skills and as a result she prevents the fleet from leaving Aulis. Calchas advises that Iphigeneia must be sacrificed to appease Artemis, where they (the Greeks) summon her (*μεταπεμψόμενοι*) to Aulis under the false promise of marriage to Achilles and attempt to sacrifice her (*ἐπιχειροῦσιν*). However, the goddess substitutes

¹⁵² March (1987: 87).

¹⁵³ March (1987: 86).

¹⁵⁴ Currie (2015: 291).

a deer before the sacrifice can be carried out and Iphigeneia is taken to Tauris to become immortal. Currie suggests that the *Cypria* could be a model for Iphigeneia's sacrifice in Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* and Sophocles' *Electra* 566-74.¹⁵⁵

This summary is evidence of an archaic interpretation that depicts Agamemnon as responsible for the sacrifice of his daughter. Although he may not have killed her himself, and although the goddess saves her, his actions result in her needing to be sacrificed. The plurals noted above could imply that the Greeks are responsible for sending for and attempting to sacrifice her, but could also imply Agamemnon's involvement. It would be strange that her own father would not be involved in sending for his daughter at the prospect of her marriage, which he would traditionally arrange.

March suggests that Iphigeneia's sacrifice was not used as a motive for Clytemnestra killing her husband because ultimately her daughter does not die, thereby removing the need for revenge on Agamemnon, whose personal guilt in the sacrifice is not stressed.¹⁵⁶ I disagree that this rules this out as a possible motive, especially based on the argument that her daughter's death happened many years before Clytemnestra's murder of her husband. I argue that the evidence demonstrates that there were interpretations current at the time of the Epic Cycle which implicated Clytemnestra in the murder of her husband (*Cypria* and *Nostoi*) and the murder of Cassandra (*Nostoi*). These interpretations add the innovation not found in Homeric epic that Agamemnon was implicated in the death of Iphigeneia (*Cypria*). Although we have no surviving evidence from an epic poet which linked these aggravating factors (Iphigeneia / Cassandra) as Clytemnestra's motives for the murder, this does not mean this did not exist as an early tradition.

Clytemnestra killing Cassandra appears as early as the seventh century BC in artistic evidence. Vermeule interprets two bronze strips from the Argive Heraion as Agamemnon's homecoming; a woman and man march in unison (possibly Agamemnon and Cassandra) and below a woman stabs another woman in the back (Clytemnestra and Cassandra).¹⁵⁷ If this is

¹⁵⁵ Currie (2015: 291). Also Gantz (1993: 586-7).

¹⁵⁶ March (1987: 87).

¹⁵⁷ Vermeule (1966: 13).

correctly interpreted, then it is the only one of its kind until after Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.

The evidence from the Epic Cycle depicts Orestes avenging his father's murder, which was perpetrated by his mother and Aegisthus, and is therefore similar to Homeric epic in not focussing on Clytemnestra's motives to avoid sympathy for her. The poet of the *Cypria* innovates with the theme that Agamemnon was a father involved in the attempted death of his daughter. I argue that this family saga is likely as early as the archaic period to have involved violent violations of the bonds between parents and children.

3.4. Hesiodic Catalogue

The Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* develops the myth by introducing characters that will become important elements in later interpretations, such as Electra as a child of Agamemnon, and the sacrifice of Iphimede (not named Iphigeneia). The *Catalogue* retains elements established in Homeric epic by presenting Clytemnestra as adulterous and associating her with the murder of Agamemnon with Aegisthus, and dying at Orestes' hand.

I will not enter into the debate on dating but will accept the widely held view situating Hesiodic poetry around the seventh century BC. The surviving fragments (fr.23a MW 13-30) list Agamemnon and Clytemnestra's children as Electra, said to rival the immortals in beauty, the lovely-ankled Iphimede, and the god-like Orestes. Hesiod therefore provides our earliest surviving reference to Electra, and depicts the sacrifice of Iphimede (rather than being named Iphigeneia) by the Achaians when they sailed to Troy on the altar to Artemis, who slays a deer and saves and immortalises her as Artemis of the way-side *Ἄρτεμις εἰνοδίης* (fr.23a MW 15-26). I am not convinced by March who does not interpret any special guilt attached to Agamemnon in the description of the sacrifice of Iphimede, and therefore does not see this as a motive for Clytemnestra to kill Agamemnon.¹⁵⁸ The motive can be implied without it having to be directly articulated in the surviving fragments. Solmsen suggests that the version in Hesiod where Artemis saves and immortalises Iphimede was not the original narrative and

¹⁵⁸ March (1987: 89)

there was likely to have also been a version known to the epic poets in which she was not saved, which is then taken up in tragedy.¹⁵⁹

Pausanias (1.43.1 / fr.23b MW) refers to the *Catalogue* regarding Iphigeneia becoming Hecate by the will of Artemis. Johnston notes the association between Hecate and Artemis in girls' transition rites, and the association between Iphigeneia and Artemis in cult.¹⁶⁰ Lloyd-Jones also discusses the variations in Iphigeneia's name.¹⁶¹ I suggest that Iphimede and Iphigeneia are interchangeable names for the daughter that is sacrificed, and that there was an association between Hecate, Artemis and Iphigeneia.

Orestes is said to avenge his father's murderer (*πατροφονεύς*) and kill his man-slaying mother (*όλεσήνωρ*). This seems to distinguish between the murderer and his mother, whilst also acknowledging that his mother took part in the killing.¹⁶² Burnett notes that the dilemma of vengeance and the hierarchy of kin was posed at least as early as Hesiod, where Agamemnon's avenger Orestes would even kill his own mother.¹⁶³ However I am not convinced that Orestes could have killed Clytemnestra as an adulteress rather than murderess.

Clytemnestra and Aegisthus were both involved in the murder of Agamemnon in the *Catalogue*, as in the *Odyssey*. This is reinforced by Clytemnestra's association with being adulterous with Aegisthus, forsaking Agamemnon for a worse bed-mate (fr.176MW). The Hesiodic *Catalogue* provides another archaic interpretation that mentions the attempted sacrifice of Iphimede / Iphigeneia alongside the story of Agamemnon being killed by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and avenged by Orestes. From this evidence I argue that these two motifs in this family saga are linked, even if the poet chooses not to overtly link them as cause and effect.

¹⁵⁹ Solmsen (1981: 357)

¹⁶⁰ Johnston (1999: 208-14).

¹⁶¹ Lloyd-Jones (1983). March (1987: 90) interprets *Άρτεμις εἰνοδίης* as another title for Hecate. Davies and Finglass (2014: 502-3) discuss the possible confusion of Pausanias between the *Catalogue* and Stesichorus.

¹⁶² March (1987: 89) notes that Aegisthus is again described as *πατροφονεύς* as in *Odyssey* 3.197. Cf. Gantz (1993: 668).

¹⁶³ Burnett (1998: 100-101).

3.5. Stesichorus

Stesichorus' *Oresteia* is dated to around the sixth century BC.¹⁶⁴ It introduces many important contributions which become crucial to the development of the myth, and especially influence Athenian tragedy and Aeschylus' interpretation. From the surviving fragments this includes: Agamemnon's death by means of an axe; Clytemnestra's dream; the recognition scene between Orestes and Electra; the nurse; the bow and association with Apollo; and the persecution of the Erinyes.

Davies and Finglass are persuasive in their analysis that Stesichorus explores the psychology of the characters and presents a more complicated moral picture than that in Homeric epic.¹⁶⁵ This may explain why the tragedians were influenced by Stesichorus' version where women are more prominent. Stesichorus is similar to the *Cypria* in depicting the attempted sacrifice of Iphigeneia at Aulis by the Greeks, and similar to Hesiod (although named there as Iphimede) in her rescue by Artemis who turns her into Hecate (215 PMG / Davies fr.178). Stesichorus focusses on the detail that Iphigeneia was lured to Aulis under the promise of marriage to Achilles (Davies fr.181a.25-7). I follow Davies and Finglass in interpreting this making the sacrifice even darker and therefore contributing a more powerful motive for Clytemnestra's wrath against Agamemnon, which combines with Clytemnestra's dream to hint at the psychological consequence of the murder and Clytemnestra's guilty conscience.¹⁶⁶

Clytemnestra has a dream of a snake with a bloodied crest out of which appeared a king in the line of the Pleisthenes (219 PMG / Davies fr.180.1-2).¹⁶⁷ March, and Davies and Finglass, see the snake as Agamemnon and the bloody headwound to suggest that an axe was used to kill him.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Campbell (1991: 3) dates Stesichorus' life from around 632 to 556 BC. West (1971: 306) suggests he was active during the period 560-540 BC. Cicero puts Stesichorus' death (and Simonides' birth) at 556/5 BC (Cicero *Resp.* 2.20), however Davies and Finglass (2014: 1-6) question the evidence to support this and agree with West that Stesichorus is unlikely to have been active after 540 BC.

¹⁶⁵ Davies and Finglass (2014: 488-91). Also Finglass (2018: 37).

¹⁶⁶ Davies and Finglass (2014: 489-90) and Finglass (2018: 32) also refer to Plutarch (*De Sera Numinis Vindicta* 554f-5a) who took it as an example of how a criminal conscience was bold before the deed but subsequently overcome by fear.

¹⁶⁷ The dream will also feature in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (514-52) and Sophocles' *Electra* (406-25, 459-60, 478-81).

¹⁶⁸ March (1987: 90). Davies and Finglass (2014: 505-6).

They convincingly argue that Stesichorus could have been the first poet to use the axe. There is scholarly debate on who appears out of the snake: Bowra, Burnett, Davies and Finglass, and Finglass see this as Orestes; During and March interpret this as Agamemnon.¹⁶⁹ I am persuaded that Orestes would have had more significance for the narrative of matricide to follow; Clytemnestra has killed the snake but the offspring will take vengeance.¹⁷⁰

The dream anticipates Orestes' matricide in this poem, which is supported by Stesichorus' introduction of the bow from Apollo (Davies fr.181.14-24 / 217 PMG). The bow implies the introduction of the Erinyes pursuing Orestes, as the bow is later used in Euripides' *Orestes* (268-9) as a gift from Apollo to protect him from the Erinyes (although a product of Orestes' hallucinations), and could also hint at the instruction of Apollo, as in the *Oresteia*. The inclusion of the Erinyes would strengthen Davies and Finglass' argument that Stesichorus' intention may have been to focus on the psychology of murder, as the Erinyes represent the terrible consequences of the matricide for Orestes.¹⁷¹

Stesichorus introduces other aspects of the story that are utilised by the tragedians, such as the recognition by way of a lock of Orestes' hair (Davies fr.181a.7-14),¹⁷² and the introduction of a nurse Laodameia (218 PMG / Davies fr.179). Robbins suggests that the name of Orestes' nurse in Stesichorus could be a variant of Laodikê from *Iliad* 9.145, and that Agamemnon's daughter Laodikê became Electra (700 PMG) after Clytemnestra's marriage to Aegisthus.¹⁷³ This is plausible given the lack of further reference to Laodikê as a daughter of Agamemnon, and the role the nurse plays as saviour of Orestes (Pindar *Pythian* 11.17, although named

¹⁶⁹ Bowra (1961:141). Burnett (1998: 102). Davies and Finglass (2014: 505-6). Finglass (2018: 32). Cf. During (1943: 106). March (1987: 90).

¹⁷⁰ March (1987: 91) follows Jebb (1907: xix) and suggests that the purpose of the dream was to remind Clytemnestra of the crime and make her send her daughter with offerings to Agamemnon's tomb for the recognition between the sister and Orestes to take place (229 PMG).

¹⁷¹ Davies and Finglass (2014: 509-10). Gantz (1993: 677).

¹⁷² See Sophocles' *Electra* 901. Davies and Finglass (2014: 508-9) convincingly suggest this meant that recognition was with Electra and she therefore featured in the poem.

¹⁷³ Robbins (1986: 7).

Arsinoia).¹⁷⁴ Electra will come to play this role in Sophocles (*Electra* 1147-8).

Pherecydes (FGrHist 3F134) also names the nurse Laodameia and tells how Aegisthus killed the nurse's child, believing it to be Orestes. It is unclear whether this was based on Stesichorus' version, and whether Aegisthus attempted to kill Orestes as an infant and Pindar switched this role with Clytemnestra to darken her characterisation (see Section 3.6 below). The reference to the nurse in Stesichorus and the summary in Pherecydes implies that Stesichorus dealt with the threat to Orestes' life as an infant, which could mean an archaic version in which Clytemnestra posed a danger to her own child.

Stesichorus located Agamemnon's kingdom in Sparta (216 PMG / Davies fr.177) compared to Mycenae (*Iliad* 2.569) or Argos (1.30) in Homeric epic. Davies and Finglass reject the view that Stesichorus was composing for a Spartan audience and suggest this was one of the locations available for a poet by the sixth century and perhaps this was a sign of independence from Homeric epic.¹⁷⁵

In his *Oresteia*, Stesichorus evokes aspects from Homeric epic (*Odyssey* 11.435-440, 3.265-6), such as the divine influence in Clytemnestra's adultery, but reinterprets the details; Tyndareus forgot to sacrifice to Aphrodite who then became angry with his daughters and made them twice-wed and thrice-wed and unfaithful (223 PMG). He also reinterprets aspects even within his own work, such as making Iphigeneia the daughter of Helen and Theseus in his *Helen* (Davies fr. 86, 191 PMG, Pausanias 2.22.6) but the daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon in *Oresteia*. This is an unusual variation in *Helen* as it removes the sacrifice of Iphigeneia as motive for Clytemnestra.¹⁷⁶ However it also demonstrates the author's quest for mythological originality to suit his specific poetic goals: in *Helen* the sacrifice is punishment for Helen's adultery; in *Oresteia* the

¹⁷⁴ The nurse is named Cilissa in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* 732, where she assists Orestes as an adult.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Bowra (1961: 112-15). Davies and Finglass (2014: 24-8) and Carey (2015: 45-62) suggest Stesichorus was a travelling lyric poet and envision a panhellenic audience.

¹⁷⁶ Gantz (1993: 291). Cf. Sophocles' *Electra* (539-41) where Clytemnestra envisages the sacrifice of the daughter of Menelaus (and presumably Helen) as a scenario that is more just than her own daughter's sacrifice at Aulis.

sacrifice is a motive for the murder of Agamemnon.¹⁷⁷ Finglass notes the parallel destructive relationship between the generations: Helen is doomed to promiscuity by the sins of her father, and in so doing dooms her daughter by her own conduct.¹⁷⁸ These generational conflicts are similarly reflected in the relationship between Tyndareus, Clytemnestra and her children. Stesichorus therefore seems to deploy Iphigeneia as a key character in the moral issues which seemed to have been the focus of his poems.

Davies and Finglass make the astute observation that this demonstrates artistic versatility.¹⁷⁹ Challenging and adapting established stories to suit the author's intentions now becomes something worth highlighting, and becomes the model for all subsequent interactive engagement with Homeric epic. Kelly similarly argues that Stesichorus' interaction with the Homeric poems is something new in the literary history of the archaic Greek world.¹⁸⁰ Stesichorus therefore innovates characterisation and key aspects of the story, which introduce motives and consequences of murder for both Clytemnestra and Orestes. These become important aspects of interpretation in Pindar and Aeschylus.

It is worth noting the possible influence of Simonides here. Vermeule suggests Clytemnestra's double axe in a scene where Orestes kills Aegisthus was probably initiated by Stesichorus, and has become a traditional feature in the Aegisthus scene since the Berlin painter's *pelike* in Vienna (figure 12).¹⁸¹ March argues, contrary to Vermeule and Prag, that it was Simonides that inspired this interpretation who would have been working at around the right time (c.556-468 BC).¹⁸² March suggests that a literary work of Simonides existed in Athens prior to Pindar, and after Stesichorus, which inspired an increased interest in vase paintings at the start of the fifth century BC depicting the death of Aegisthus at Orestes' hand. This provided the background to Pindar's ode focussing on Clytemnestra killing Agamemnon in grief for her child, and set Agamemnon's rule in Lakedaimon, similarly to

¹⁷⁷ Davies and Finglass (2014: 39).

¹⁷⁸ Finglass (2015: 83-97).

¹⁷⁹ Davies and Finglass (2014).

¹⁸⁰ Kelly (2015: 21-44). See also Burkert (2001: 92-116) and West (2011).

¹⁸¹ Vermeule (1966: 4).

¹⁸² March (1987: 92-6). Vermeule (1966: 4). Prag (1985: 102-5).

Stesichorus, compared to Mycenae in Homeric epic (516/549 PMG). March relates a parallel work to Simonides (P.Oxy.2434) which tells of a sacrifice of a female and her inconsolable mother. I am not convinced there is sufficient evidence to link a work by Simonides to the artistic evidence on Aegisthus' death and the possible influence on Pindar, especially considering Pindar's focus on Clytemnestra is at the expense of Aegisthus. Prag suggests that the revival of interest pictorially in the death of Aegisthus is due to the tyrannicidal connection in the political context as a vehicle for the anti-Alcmaeonid and anti-Peisistratid factions following the expulsion of the tyrants.¹⁸³

3.6. Pindar

Pindar introduces key contributions to the development of the myth which influence later Athenian dramatic interpretations. This includes: depicting Clytemnestra as the sole active agent in the murder of both Agamemnon and Cassandra; offering her motives for murdering her husband; and presenting Clytemnestra as capable of killing her own child as an infant. Pindar also introduces divine support for Orestes from Ares rather than Apollo.

Pindar's *Pythian 11* praises a Theban youth, Thrasydaios, for his victory in the foot-race and praises his way of life.¹⁸⁴ It is most convincingly dated to 474 BC. The scholiasts say that Thrasydaios won twice, in the boy's stadion in 474 BC and the man's diaulos in 454 BC. Some scholars argue for 454 BC on political grounds (Athenian dominance over Boeotia, the 'tyranny' of Athens hanging over Thebes, and praise of Sparta).¹⁸⁵ However I am persuaded by Finglass who summarises the issues in the debate and favours 474 BC as the more attractive date.¹⁸⁶

Recent scholarship has moved away from assuming the priority of Aeschylus over Pindar.¹⁸⁷ Instead there is acknowledgement of Pindar's

¹⁸³ March (1987: 92-3). Prag (1985: 103-5). Sigelman (2016: 86-110) discusses the historicising and moralistic interpretations of *Pythian 11*.

¹⁸⁴ See Sigelman (2016: 86-110) for interpretation of the myth as significant to Thrasydaios' victory in relation to reviving the unity of past and future.

¹⁸⁵ Bowra (1936). During (1943). Hubbard (1990).

¹⁸⁶ Finglass (2007a: 5-27). See also Wilamowitz (1922: 259). Young (1968). Robbins (1986).

¹⁸⁷ During (1943). Herington (1984).

creative innovation influencing the tragedians.¹⁸⁸ Maslov analyses Pindar from a literary-historical perspective and discusses Pindar's epinician performance as a genre that achieves poetic synchronisation within a new structure through highly self-conscious synthesis.¹⁸⁹ Spelman follows the performance-orientated approach in recent scholarship to focus on Pindar's primary and secondary audiences.¹⁹⁰

Pindar's intention may have been to present the murder of Clytemnestra as an extended negative example to contrast with the victory of Thrasydaïos and to argue moderation over tyranny.¹⁹¹ Egan suggests that Seneca (*Agamemnon* 935-9) and Sophocles (*Electra* 680-783) give Orestes athletic/agonistic attributes from a received tradition of the athletic career of Orestes which Pindar draws on to celebrate and praise the athletic victory of Thrasydaeus.¹⁹²

This is the earliest extant interpretation which presents Clytemnestra as the sole active agent in the murder of both Agamemnon and Cassandra. Clytemnestra killed Orestes' father (*φονευομένου πατρὸς*) and used the grey bronze (*πολιῶ χαλκῶ*) to send him and Cassandra to the shadowy shores of Acheron (17-22). Pindar only mentions Aegisthus when he tells of Orestes' vengeance. Orestes returns and, with the help of Ares, kills his mother and lays Aegisthus in gore (*πέφνεν τε μητέρα θῆκέ τ' Αἴγισθον ἐν φοναῖς* 36-37).¹⁹³ Finglass notes the ring composition and reversal of roles from the balancing of *φονευομένου* by *πέφνεν... φοναῖς*.¹⁹⁴ Therefore Pindar has shifted the emphasis from Homeric epic, where Aegisthus often had the active role in the murder and Clytemnestra was mentioned ambiguously. Now Aegisthus is only mentioned in the context of vengeance for the crime and Clytemnestra is the main aggressor. Phillips analyses Pindar's engagement with the

¹⁸⁸ Robbins (1986). Finglass 2007a).

¹⁸⁹ Maslov (2015: 1-35). See also Phillips (2016: 63-9) for analysis of Pindar's audiences and the variation in awareness of context.

¹⁹⁰ Spelman (2018) also identifies potential methodological problems in recent scholarship.

¹⁹¹ Young (1968: 1-26) reintroduced the idea of the myth as paradigmatic and a negative example and is followed by Nisetich (1980: 48) among others.

¹⁹² Egan (1983: 197-200).

¹⁹³ Robbins (1986: 3). Clytemnestra is killed for the husband she killed, by the son she would have killed.

¹⁹⁴ Finglass (2007a: 107-8).

Odyssey and the conflict Pindar causes in the interpretation of Orestes due to the emphasis on the matricide (*Pythian* 11.37) compared to *Odyssey*.¹⁹⁵

Pindar also introduces two possible motives for Clytemnestra to kill her husband, developing the psychological and moral characterisation from Stesichorus.

νηλῆς γυνά. πότερόν νιν ἄρ' Ἰφιγένει' ἐπ' Εὐρίπω
σφαχθεῖσα τῆλε πάτρας ἔκνισεν βαρυπάλαμον ὄρσαι χόλον;
ἢ ἐτέρω λέχει δαμαζομένην
ἔννουχοι πάραγον κοῖται;

...pitiless woman. So was it that the sacrifice of Iphigeneia at the Euripus far from her fatherland, provoked her to raise her heavy-handed anger? Or were her nightly couplings leading her astray, enthralled as she was to another man's bed? (22-25 Finglass 2007a)

This is the first extant evidence which directly links Clytemnestra's possible motives to her crime. She killed Agamemnon in vengeance for their daughter Iphigeneia's sacrifice, and because of her adulterous relationship with her lover Aegisthus. The sacrifice of Iphigeneia has already been established in the *Cypria* and Hesiod, and it is likely Stesichorus developed this into a motive. Burnett indeed argues that Pindar refers to this motive as if it were well known to his audience.¹⁹⁶ These two motives become a key part of the Athenian tragic interpretations; in addition to the motives of Cassandra, and the curse of Atreus.

There is some scholarly debate over whether Pindar puts emphasis on one motive over the other. Finglass suggests that the narrator is so overcome by Clytemnestra's crime that he clutches at possibilities for explanation, with greater emphasis on the adultery.¹⁹⁷ Sigelman persuasively argues that Pindar embraces both motives as of great importance, and draws a parallel between the syntax to convincingly argue that, in both cases, the inner world of the

¹⁹⁵ Phillips (2016: 241-55). See also Kurke (2013: 110-12).

¹⁹⁶ Burnett (1998: 102) suggests that Clytemnestra may be mourning the sacrificed Iphigeneia in the Simonidean fragment (PMG 608), although concedes there is nothing which suggests a connection to the murder of Agamemnon.

¹⁹⁷ Finglass (2007a: 11-17, 94-5). Also Hornblower (2004: 297).

oikos (daughter / mother) is destroyed by outside incursion (sacrifice far from home / another man's bed).¹⁹⁸

Pindar's language is reminiscent of Homeric epic: *δαμαζομένην* could be interpreted as Clytemnestra being tamed or overcome, like a horse, or in an erotic sense.¹⁹⁹ I suggest Pindar's intention might be to hint at Clytemnestra's initial resistance to the adultery and Aegisthus' corruption and seduction, as depicted in *Odyssey* (3.264-6).²⁰⁰

Pindar introduces another innovative aspect to Clytemnestra's characterisation, perhaps only hinted at in Stesichorus, that she is capable of killing her own child as well as her husband. In Pindar's version, Orestes was saved by his nurse, named here Arsinoia, from the hands and treachery (*δόλον*) of Clytemnestra after she killed his father. Clytemnestra's *dolos* is reminiscent of the language used in Homeric epic where deception was used to characterise her in a negative light. Burnett persuasively argues that these innovations sharpened the gender conflict by making wife kill husband on behalf of daughter and making mother threaten baby son.²⁰¹ This makes Clytemnestra a monstrous female who attacked the male. Burnett follows Sourvinou-Inwood in describing this as a perfection of inner disorder for Orestes' role; a hero who must defend the human household by attacking it and remove pollution by incurring more.²⁰²

Pindar places Agamemnon's palace at Amyclae in Laconia; compared to Mycenae in Homeric epic, Sparta in Stesichorus, and Argos in Aeschylus. Robbins suggests that Aeschylus moves the action to Argos due to the importance of Argos in the mid-fifth century BC, whereas Amyclae is close to Stesichorus' setting of Sparta.²⁰³ Pausanias (3.19.6) notes there are statues of Cassandra and Clytemnestra at Amyclae and a tomb to Agamemnon.

Pindar's intention may have been to create a complex portrayal of Clytemnestra. The sympathetic motive of her slaughtered daughter is

¹⁹⁸ Sigelman (2016: 95).

¹⁹⁹ Finglass (2007a) *ad loc.* Cf. *Iliad* (3.301, 14.316, 18.432) and *Odyssey* (3.269).

²⁰⁰ See Section 3.2.2.

²⁰¹ Burnett (1998: 102-4).

²⁰² Sourvinou-Inwood (1979: 10) proposes that the act of matricide is at once one of loyalty and disloyalty to the *oikos*; it restores social order by eliminating disorder and itself brings about further disorder. It both avoids and incurs pollution and divine help/persecution.

²⁰³ Robbins (1986: 6). See Bowra (1961: 114) on the political reasons for setting this in Sparta.

contrasted with her depiction as a pitiless mother (*νηλής γυνά* 22) capable of killing her other child.²⁰⁴ This theme of the threat to Orestes' life in infancy, and the role of the nurse, also introduces a theme adopted in later tragic interpretations where Electra saves her brother and takes on a more active role in the vengeance on their mother.²⁰⁵ Pindar demonstrates the rupture that is caused when parents rise against children from his narrative of Agamemnon against Iphigeneia and Clytemnestra against Orestes.²⁰⁶

Robbins notes the comparison between Orestes in *Pythian* 11 and Jason in *Pythian* 4 as heroes threatened with death as children and deprived of patrimony who are smuggled away and reared in exile, only to return in adulthood and bring about the death of the usurper. I take this further to compare Medea in *Pythian* 4, who is not yet cast as the murderous mother but who chooses to sever the tie with her parent to follow her passion, with Clytemnestra in *Pythian* 11, whom Pindar introduces as a potential murderous mother and who severs the ties with her child for reasons including her passion and adultery.

A further contribution to the myth is Pindar's description of Ares' divine support for Orestes. In versions from Aeschylus onwards Orestes' divine supporter is Apollo.²⁰⁷ Only in Sophocles (*Electra* 1384-5) is Ares associated with Orestes' vengeance. I suggest that Pindar is focussed on the violence of Ares as a more primitive god (see section 3.9.6 on the first murder trial) compared to Apollo who takes on a less violent role especially in the fifth century BC. Apollo will represent the controlled violence of justice in later interpretations such as Aeschylus.

²⁰⁴ Robbins (1986: 3) suggests that Clytemnestra the pitiless woman in Pindar is worse than in Homeric epic and Aeschylus because she is capable of murdering her own son. Finglass (2007a: 94) compares Bacchylides' description (5.139) of another murderous mother Althaea (who killed her son Meleager) as *ἀτάρβακτος γυνά* which may have inspired Pindar in this phrase.

²⁰⁵ Robbins (1986: 6) compares the aristocratic name of Pindar's nurse Arsinoia to the slave name of Aeschylus' nurse Cilissa (*Choephoroi* 732)

²⁰⁶ Sigelman (2016: 105).

²⁰⁷ Willamowitz (1922: 261) sees Orestes as exemplifying Delphic justice as does Egan (1983: 200) who also suggests he is a paradigm for Thrasydaios as a heroic victor in the Pythian games and as an anti-tyrant in the political context.

3.7. Aeschylus' *Oresteia*: *Agamemnon*

Aeschylus uses elements inherited from earlier sources, especially Stesichorus, throughout the *Oresteia* of 458 BC. Aeschylus contributes many innovations which canonise parts of the story, including the anthropomorphic representation of the Erinyes, the legal language, and the representation of *dikê*. In the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus introduces: the portent of the two eagles and the pregnant hare, which led to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia; the murder in Agamemnon's palace; the use of the net; sexual jealousy of Cassandra as an additional motive for Clytemnestra (although hinted at in Homeric epic); and the history of violence in the house of Atreus as a motive for both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

3.7.1. Murder of Agamemnon: method

Aeschylus continues from Homeric epic the theme of *dolos* as a negative characteristic of Clytemnestra. He focusses on her deception as a method of conquering her husband; not only through her language but through her performance. Clytemnestra uses deceptive language (587-614, 855-943) to convince Agamemnon and the Chorus of her faithfulness and hardships during her husband's absence, even portraying herself as the noble wife who tries to kill herself with the noose at news of her husband's death (874-6), and boldly proclaiming there is no deception (*οὐ δόλον* 886) in her plea (*σκηψις*) explaining Orestes' absence. Loraux succinctly compares Clytemnestra to her sister Helen as women who do not kill themselves with the knotted rope as a way out of their alleged extreme misery. Clytemnestra denies the law of femininity; she turns death away from herself and on her husband instead.²⁰⁸

Her physical performance as the dutiful wife is also deceptive. She lays out the tapestries for his entry to the house, persuading Agamemnon to walk upon them despite his shame (905-43), and once inside she is said to bathe him (1128-9); a dutiful act which disguises the method of his murder.

²⁰⁸ Loraux (1987: 8) also compares Clytemnestra to Medea who also turns death away from herself and on to her husband Jason, through murdering his new wife and children. I will explore this further in Section 4.7. Cf. Euripides' *Trojan Women* (1012-14) for criticism of Helen for not hanging a noose or sharpening a sword like a *γενναία γυνή* when longing for her absent husband.

In *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus reinterprets the theme of *dolos*, used to characterise both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra in Homeric epic (Section 3.2.2), as a feminine quality which Aegisthus attributes to Clytemnestra (τὸ γὰρ δολῶσαι πρὸς γυναικὸς ἦν σαφῶς 1636).²⁰⁹

Clytemnestra is a powerful paradigm of the plotting woman who uses deceptive language to murder her husband within the house. Zeitlin rightly notes that the same exclusion which relegates women to the inside as mistresses of the interior space equips them for deviousness and duplicity and fabricating plots. Zeitlin convincingly argues that in tragedy men are likely to enter the interior domain mostly at their peril (*Agamemnon*, *Hippolytus*, *Polymestor*) and if they successfully penetrate the interior of the house and reclaim it for their own they typically require feminine assistance.²¹⁰ Aeschylus plays with the dramatic convention of reporting what goes on in the interior space, which the audience cannot witness first hand, and innovates it through Cassandra's gift of prophecy by having her predict what will happen to Agamemnon inside, rather than rely on the contemporary convention of having a messenger report it afterwards.²¹¹

Aeschylus develops the use of *peitho* throughout the trilogy as an important theme with which to explore the war between the sexes.²¹² Although Clytemnestra uses persuasion to manipulate and deceive the masculine Agamemnon, her language does not have the same effect on the feminine Cassandra. The Chorus' repetition of *peitho* in their warning to Cassandra (πεῖθοι' ἄν, εἰ πεῖθοι'· ἀπειθοίης δ' ἴσως 1047-9) stresses the strength of Clytemnestra's persuasive rhetoric, yet this fails to dominate the

²⁰⁹ Sommerstein (2008) *ad loc* notes *Odyssey* (11.456), Hesiod *Works and Days* (67, 373-5), and Euripides' *Medea* (421-2) as just some other examples of women having greater skills in deception. Further references to Sommerstein (2008) will be to the specific lines cited, unless otherwise stated.

²¹⁰ Zeitlin (1990: 77-80). See Section 3.10.3. on Sophocles' *Electra* when Orestes requires Electra's assistance to enter the house and kill Clytemnestra.

²¹¹ Taplin (1978: 141-2) sees the Cassandra scene as the most daring stroke in the *Agamemnon* due to her freedom of vision.

²¹² Taplin (1978: 82) concisely summarises the importance of *peitho* in the *Oresteia*: Clytemnestra defeats Agamemnon in a battle between man and woman with *peitho* (940-3); Troy was destroyed by the *peitho* of Paris (385ff.); *peitho* fights for Orestes (*Choephoroi* 726ff.); but in the end Athene's constructive *peitho* prevails on the Erinyes to stay at Athens (*Eumenides* 829ff., 885ff., 970ff.).

foreign girl.²¹³ Cassandra's physical entry inside the house mirrors Agamemnon's yet she does not do so on Clytemnestra's terms or under her control.²¹⁴ In *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus portrays the feminine use of persuasion and deception as overpowering the masculine but not the feminine. Ultimately it will be Athene's use of *peitho* in *Eumenides* that wins over the feminine Erinyes.²¹⁵

Clytemnestra takes responsibility for killing Agamemnon and explains how she did it; catching him in an endless net (*ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον*) and striking him three times (1379-91).²¹⁶ I agree with Sommerstein's suggestion that Aeschylus' descriptions of the robe/net as endless (*ἄπειρον*: *Agamemnon* 1382; *ἀτέρμονι*: *Eumenides* 634-5; also *Choephoroi* 980-4, 997-1004) imagine it as something like that depicted on the Dokimasia Painter's crater (Boston 63.1246 = A6 Prag) from a decade or so earlier of a fine garment with no holes for head or arms.²¹⁷

Vermeule's landmark article analysing the Dokimasia painter's Boston Oresteia crater concludes that this must have been inspired by Aeschylus' *Oresteia* due to a number of features, particularly the net capturing Agamemnon, the use of the sword and axe, and the linking of Agamemnon and Aegisthus' deaths.²¹⁸ This dating has been rejected by Davies, who suggests the motif of the net must have been established prior to Aeschylus, given Aegisthus' depiction as a minstrel on the crater is not known from Aeschylus, and by Prag who dates the Dokimasia painter stylistically to 475-465BC.²¹⁹ Prag's thorough evaluation of the pictorial evidence concludes that there were always three figures involved: Agamemnon as victim,

²¹³ Goldhill (1986: 25). See Buxton (1982: 64) for the exploration between *peitho*, *βία* and *dolos*, and the pertinent view that women were restricted to the power of speech to persuade or deceive. As discussed above, Athenian tragedy has provided performance as an additional method of persuasion and deception.

²¹⁴ As observed by Taplin (1978: 141-2): the male king enters as a slave and the female slave enters as her own mistress.

²¹⁵ Following Winnington-Ingram's (1948) observations on Clytemnestra's masculine characteristics, and the irony that Athene represents many of these characteristics in a positive light in contrast to the negative characterisation of Clytemnestra.

²¹⁶ The number three is important in the trilogy. Aeschylus utilises this in relation to Agamemnon's death and Clytemnestra's motives in *Agamemnon*, and the three generations of violence in *Choephoroi*. See Section 3.8.2.

²¹⁷ Sommerstein (2008) *ad loc.* Prag (1985: 1-5). See also Euripides' *Orestes* (*ἀείρω* 25). Loraux (1987: 10) views the net as a materialisation of the metaphors for feminine *metis*.

²¹⁸ Vermeule (1966: 1-22).

²¹⁹ Davies (1969: 257-60). Prag (1985: 25).

overshadowed by Clytemnestra as the murderer on the left with a sword, and Aegisthus as accomplice on the right. The Dokimasia painter reverses their roles and gives Aegisthus the sword and Clytemnestra the axe, introduces the robe that traps Agamemnon, and introduces more figures.²²⁰ March suggests that Aeschylus' use of the net throughout the *Oresteia* and before Agamemnon's murder (*Agamemnon* 866-8, 1048-9, 1115-7) suggests that the audience would have been familiar and recognised the hints of this method, and suggests the net could have been an innovation of Simonides.²²¹ I do not think the fragmentary evidence supports this suggestion; if there was a literary interpretation that included the net and inspired the Dokimasia painter before Aeschylus then it has not survived, and it is Aeschylus that develops this into the powerful motif that continues throughout Greek tragedy.

Zeitlin and Lebeck offer persuasive arguments that ritual language is used to describe murder in *Agamemnon*, including Clytemnestra's description of the murder of her husband as a corrupted ritual (*Agamemnon* 1384-7). This parody emphasises the three strokes she gave him with the three libations at a festival, except Agamemnon's blood is the libation.²²² This sacrificial language is an important innovation of Aeschylus for the murder of Agamemnon and develops the theme of the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigeneia from earlier versions as a motive for Clytemnestra.²²³

Lebeck also links Clytemnestra's sacrifice of Agamemnon (1432-3) to Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigeneia, and links the image of the net thrown over Agamemnon (867-8, 1048, 1115-16, 1372-83) with the capture of Troy (355-61), to illustrate the principle that 'the doer suffers' (*παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα* 1564).²²⁴ I argue that Aeschylus' imagery of the net includes Cassandra's murder (1048, 1115-16) and this demonstrates that

²²⁰ Prag (1985: 1-9, 35-43)

²²¹ March (1987: 95-6).

²²² Zeitlin (1965: 472-3, 480-6) suggests seven slayings are all expressed in sacrificial terms: the death of the men at Troy; feast of the eagles upon hare; the actual sacrifice of Iphigeneia; the slaughter of the sheep by the lion cub; the butchery of Thyestes' children; and the slayings of Agamemnon and Cassandra. Lebeck (1971b: 75) compares the third blow as parody of the third libation offered to Zeus (1384-7) with Clytemnestra's sprinkling of lustral water suggesting bloodshed (1036-8).

²²³ I would not go as far as Zeitlin (1965: 498) that the sacrificial imagery is a manifestation of self-deception, and the characters in the *Agamemnon* are deceived into thinking they have remained the true *dikephoroi*, when in truth they are savage predators.

²²⁴ Lebeck (1971b: 76-80). 'The doer suffers' is an important principle for the *lex talionis* and justice and reciprocity and will be picked up in Section 3.7.2. and 3.7.7.

Clytemnestra's motive is not to punish Agamemnon for capturing Troy but to punish him for bringing his war-prize from Troy into their home as her rival.

Aeschylus follows Stesichorus and Pindar in introducing Clytemnestra's motives for her crime and therefore creating empathy for the audience. This provides a more complex interpretation of the character, rather than the negative paradigm of the adulterous wife of Homeric epic.²²⁵ I suggest that Aeschylus' Clytemnestra has three motives for the murder of her husband; two are explicit and one is implicit.²²⁶ The explicit motives are used as arguments to defend the crime: the first is that it is in retribution for Agamemnon killing their daughter Iphigeneia; the second is that it is in retribution for Agamemnon's father Atreus killing the children of his brother Thyestes and feeding them to him. The third (implicit) motive is anger and jealousy at Agamemnon bringing Cassandra into their home from Troy as Clytemnestra's rival. I shall now examine these motives in detail, although in no order of priority.

3.7.2. Motive one: sacrifice of Iphigeneia

Aeschylus contributes an innovation to the interpretation of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia in the *Agamemnon* (108-257).²²⁷ Rather than the boast from Agamemnon, as told in the *Cypria* (Section 3.3.), Artemis' anger is initiated through the portent of two eagles devouring a pregnant hare. I follow Zeitlin and Lloyd-Jones in interpreting this metaphor of the slaughter of the pregnant hare to represent the cyclic nature of revenge and repeated pattern of predation within the house of Atreus, and therefore the matricide to come, which Aeschylus is the first extant source to depict in detail.²²⁸ Zeitlin is convincing in her analysis that the simile of the eagles robbed of their young who turn from ravished to ravisher (49-59) represents the Atreidae, and the eagles' feast upon a pregnant hare (134-7) represents the repeated pattern of

²²⁵ Bowie (2015: 118-19) suggests Aeschylus was aware of Stesichorus' *Oresteia* from possible performance in Athens of either all or excerpts of Stesichorus' poems.

²²⁶ I suggest this ties in with the importance of the number three in the trilogy discussed in Section 3.8.2.

²²⁷ See Gantz (1993: 585) on the *Iphigeneia* plays composed by Aeschylus and Sophocles which we know little or nothing about.

²²⁸ Zeitlin (1965). Lloyd-Jones (1983).

predation. Therefore to punish the predations a new avenger will come, who will be corrupted in motive and intent, and commit acts of predation which require a new avenger.²²⁹ I suggest this pattern of predation is demonstrated in Aeschylus' depiction of Electra and Orestes as nestlings of the eagle trying to survive and hunt the prey of their father in *Choephoroi* (245-57, 500-2).

Clytemnestra's motives for killing Agamemnon are to avenge her private wrongs, but her actions also satisfy Artemis' anger,²³⁰ and will be employed by Zeus to punish Agamemnon for the crime of his father Atreus.²³¹ Aeschylus represents Clytemnestra's actions as part of a larger cycle of revenge that involves the gods, and he innovates this by representing the gods throughout the trilogy as motives, witnesses and participants in the legal context of the story.

There has been debate among scholars as to whether Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter is from necessity or his own free choice. Page argues that Agamemnon had no choice and could not be held responsible for his fatal decision at Aulis. Dodds disagrees and argues that his action was a crime. Lloyd-Jones argues both views are true and he is innocent (Zeus has taken away his wits) and guilty (he utters words that will bring down divine envy) and destined to ruin due to the curse (of Atreus). Lesky similarly argues that Agamemnon commits this under the coercion of necessity, but then desires the deed. Kitto suggests that Agamemnon attributes responsibility (*μεταιτίους* 811) to himself and the gods (Zeus) for the necessary sacrifice of Iphigeneia and the gods destroy him as a result.²³² I follow Lloyd-Jones and Lesky's interpretations of the close union of necessity imposed by the gods and the personal decision to act, as this can be taken further for my argument that Aeschylus' innovation is to articulate abstract concepts and divinities as accomplices to acts of murder.

I diverge slightly from Lesky's view that Agamemnon's and Orestes' crimes are similar in this regard. Both are compelled by necessity from the gods as well as their personal decision to act. However I suggest Orestes'

²²⁹ Zeitlin (1965: 480-6).

²³⁰ Kitto (1961: 67-74).

²³¹ Lloyd-Jones (1983). As Zeus has used Agamemnon to punish the Trojans, he uses Clytemnestra to punish the crime of Agamemnon's father Atreus.

²³² Page (1957). Dodds (1960). Kitto (1961). Lloyd-Jones (1962). Lesky (1966).

motives, in addition to avenging his father as proscribed by Apollo, are linked to honour and the unity of the family, such as his mother's adultery and his claims to inheritance. Whereas Agamemnon's motives are fear and shame of his military position (212-13).²³³ This follows McHardy's argument that the protection of female reproductive resources and the continuation of the male bloodline were significant in driving revenge in the mythical example of Orestes. However I do not agree that this was of greater significance than avenging the murder of his father.²³⁴

Although the Chorus do not describe Iphigeneia's death it is clear that she has been killed rather than saved by the goddess, as Clytemnestra accuses Agamemnon of sacrificing his child (*ἔθυσεν αὐτοῦ παῖδα* 1417). This diverges from the earlier epic interpretations in *Cypria* (Section 3.3.) and Hesiod (Iphimede – Section 3.4.) and instead follows Pindar (Section 3.6.).²³⁵ I suggest the similarity here between Pindar and Aeschylus is that these are the earliest interpretations that discuss Clytemnestra's motives; therefore the sacrifice of her daughter must result in Iphigeneia's death to warrant vengeance. Iphigeneia's death also creates sympathy for Clytemnestra and guilt for Agamemnon, which had been absent in Homeric epic because the poet appears to emphasise the exemplary or cautionary role of the characters.

Clytemnestra dismisses the Chorus' law of retribution as operative for her and uses it to formulate her own justification (1432-3).²³⁶ Clytemnestra swears a righteous oath (*γ' ὀρκίων ἐμῶν θέμιν* 1431) on *dikê* accomplished for her child (*μὰ τὴν τέλειον τῆς ἐμῆς παιδὸς Δίκην* 1432) and on Ruin (*Ἄτην* 1433) and the Erinyes (*Ἐρινύον* 1433) that helped her kill Agamemnon.²³⁷ I follow Lloyd-Jones who offers the idea that this recalls *Iliad* (19.86-94) where Agamemnon blames Zeus, Fate (*Moirai*) and Erinyes for the *ate* that caused him to take Achilles' war-prize, and that Aeschylus is linking *dikê* as justice

²³³ I follow the suggestion of Fraenkel (1950) *ad loc* that the term ship deserter (*λιπόννας* 212) would have suggested a criminal act to an Athenian audience and note the comparison with the term for military deserter (*lipotaxis*). See Section 3.8.5. on Orestes' motives. Unless otherwise stated, any further references to Fraenkel (1950) are to the specific lines cited.

²³⁴ McHardy (2008: 108-19).

²³⁵ The version where Iphigeneia is saved by Artemis is picked up again by Euripides in *Iphigeneia Among the Taurians* and *Iphigeneia at Aulis*.

²³⁶ Zeitlin (1965: 476-8).

²³⁷ I am using the translation of 1431 suggested by Page (1957) *ad loc* as "Justice that is accomplished for my child", rather than Sommerstein (2008) "Justice that was due for my child".

to Zeus and connecting *ate* with Erinyes whose role now is associated with vengeance.²³⁸ I adapt this for my argument that Aeschylus' innovation is to articulate abstract concepts and divinities as accomplices to acts of murder. Aeschylus draws a parallel between the three divinities upon whom Clytemnestra swears her oath, adapted from the divine triad in the *Iliad*, and the three motives for her crime.

The Chorus describe *peitho* as the unendurable (*ἄφερτος* 385-6) child of *ate*, in a speech that calls on many of the important themes of the trilogy: light and dark representing positive and negative (389-92); *dikê* as justice (393, 398); and bird imagery (393-4). Aeschylus is foreshadowing Clytemnestra's deception by depicting *peitho* as the method by which she will achieve *ate* for her sacrificed child.²³⁹ Clytemnestra links *ate* to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia when she alleges that Agamemnon caused calamity (*ἄτην*) for the house through treachery (*δολίαν* 1523) in relation to the much lamented (*πολύκλαυτόν* 1526) Iphigeneia that she bore to him. Reciprocity and the *lex talionis* are evoked as Clytemnestra alleges that Agamemnon is suffering for his actions (*ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχων* 1527), slain by a sword to match his deed (*ξιφοδηλήτω θανάτῳ τείσας ἅπερ ἔρξεν* 1528-9). She ignores the warning of the Chorus that she will suffer stroke for stroke (1430).²⁴⁰ Fraenkel discusses the ambiguity in Aeschylus on the weapon with which Agamemnon was murdered, concluding that the sword is mentioned at 1528 because the *lex talionis* requires that the deed and expiation must correspond; the father (Agamemnon) must die by the sword to atone for the death of the daughter (Iphigeneia) by the sword. I am not convinced by Foley, following Lloyd-Jones and West, that Clytemnestra must be saying in this passage that Agamemnon justly died by a trick because he killed Iphigeneia by a trick.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Lloyd-Jones (1962). Dodds (1951: 6-8) argues that the moral function of the Erinyes as ministers of vengeance derives from this primitive task of enforcing a *moira*. Fraenkel (1950) on *Agamemnon* 1535 suggests *Moira* safeguards the connection between cause and effect, and in this capacity is related to Erinyes and is companion to *dikê*. Garvie (1986: 126) compares *Eumenides* 1045-7 where Zeus and *Moira* work together.

²³⁹ Buxton (1982: 105-14) suggests that the genealogy of *peitho* at *Agamemnon* (385-6) is Aeschylus' invention, and disagrees with Page (1957: 103-4) on the interpretation of *Agamemnon* (205-17), arguing that it is Agamemnon's own words which persuade him.

²⁴⁰ See Section 3.7.7. on the repetition of 1430 representing the *lex talionis* and archaic legal language.

²⁴¹ Fraenkel (1950 *ad loc* and Appendix B). Foley (2001), following Lloyd-Jones (1979) and West (1990).

Foley contrasts the lack of a struggle represented for Clytemnestra in choosing between avenging her daughter and committing a crime against her husband, the legitimate king of Argos and the father of her children, with Orestes' struggle between two highly overdetermined courses of action, despite the view of the Chorus that a wife's killing of her husband is a crime requiring exile or death.²⁴² Aeschylus is presenting the dilemma of the *lex talionis* when it must be carried out by blood relations.

3.7.3. Motive two: Atreus and Thyestes

Now I turn to Clytemnestra's other main argument; that the murder of Agamemnon is part of the cycle of violence in the family of Atreus. Aeschylus innovates the motives for killing Agamemnon from Homeric epic, where this was simply the result of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra's adultery, to include a theological dimension by treating Thyestes' curse as something that remains lodged in the house with a power of its own demanding vengeance (1186-93, 1223-5, 1497ff, 1582-1611).²⁴³ West proposes that Aeschylus' intention in interpreting such demonic powers and forces is, in opposition to Homeric epic, to constitute an alternative system to the Olympian regime of Zeus. I use this argument to suggest that Aeschylus develops the concept of these external forces as 'accomplices' through the use of legal language.

This family curse is introduced through an oracular reference from Cassandra to the avenging spirits of murdered children that have returned to the house whose flesh had been eaten by their kin (1218-22). Aegisthus' role is introduced in this context of the larger conflict, and by inference his duty to seek vengeance, as Cassandra refers to revenge being planned on the returning master of the house by one who stayed at home (*ἐκ τῶνδε ποινάς φημι βουλεύειν τινὰ οἴκουρόν, οἴμοι, τῷ μολόντι δεσπότη* 1224-25).

Clytemnestra's defence is that this showdown has arisen from a long-standing conflict (*ἐμοὶ δ' ἀγὼν ὄδ' οὐκ ἀφρόντιστος πάλαι νείκης παλαιᾶς ἦλθε* 1377-78). Having been emphatic about her guilt in murdering Agamemnon, Clytemnestra then questions whether the deed was hers (1497) and claims that she is not the wife of Agamemnon (1498-9) but she has

²⁴² Foley (2001: 205).

²⁴³ West (2013a: 157-74).

become instead the ancient avenger (*ἀλάστωρ* 1501) of Atreus who gave the cruel banquet. Aeschylus uses legal language in the Chorus' response to these lines; they question who would testify (*μαρτυρήσων* 1506) that she was not responsible (*ἀναίτιος* 1505) and question whether the *alastor* was in fact her accomplice (*συλλήπτωρ* 1507-8).²⁴⁴

There is a divergence of opinion between scholars on how to interpret these lines. Many see this as an attempt to avoid responsibility for the crime. Daube sees this as a deliberate attempt to shift the legal burden of responsibility. Fraenkel does not interpret these words as a permanent denial of responsibility on Clytemnestra's part; but as a momentary lapse where she distances herself from the deed and has been overpowered. Dodds follows Fraenkel but sees this as a permanent realisation. Winnington-Ingram and Conacher see this as an attempt to avoid responsibility for her crime and deny Clytemnestra full moral agency and intent. Sommerstein takes the contradiction that she cannot have been the murderer and been Agamemnon's wife to be an incoherent attempt at denying her guilt.²⁴⁵

There are also alternative interpretations. Page interprets that it was not her hand which did the deed, but the *alastor* embodied in Clytemnestra. Neuburg rejects previous 'responsibility' interpretations, as well as that of Page, and reinterprets this as Clytemnestra not being labelled as Agamemnon's wife, but as an embodiment of the concept of vengeance. He suggests that although her deed was personally motivated by Iphigeneia's death, it was justified in the larger framework of vengeance for Thyestes. Foley also argues that this claim would be inconsistent with Clytemnestra's assertion of 'responsibility' for the crime both before and after this passage and that she continues to fear punishment for her crime. She cites Clytemnestra's assertions of responsibility for her deliberate and premeditated crime as follows: 1377, 1380, 1404–6, 1421, 1497, 1551–53, 1567–76. She also uses the comparable example in *Iliad* 19.86–144, where Agamemnon claims that he was not at fault (*οὐκ αἴτιός*) for his actions toward Achilles because he was under the influence of *ate* (moral blindness) sent by

²⁴⁴ Fraenkel (1950) notes that *συλλήπτωρ* is used in Antiphon *Tetralogy* 2.3.10 in relation to an accomplice to murder.

²⁴⁵ Daube (1939). Fraenkel (1950). Dodds (1960). Winnington-Ingram (1983: 112). Conacher (1987: 52). Sommerstein (2008).

Zeus, *Moirā* and Erinyes. However I believe the more convincing example, in comparable terms to Clytemnestra's claim about the *alastor*, is *Eumenides* (199-200) where Apollo shares *aitia* with Orestes but that does not exempt Orestes from punishment for the matricide.²⁴⁶

I find Neuburg and Foley's arguments persuasive, and do not interpret 1497-1505 as Clytemnestra attempting to absolve herself of responsibility. I follow Page who takes these lines to mean that Clytemnestra's murder of her husband is divine vengeance and that Agamemnon's death is therefore just and she is the instrument of that justice.²⁴⁷

As I have shown, Aeschylus innovated the story with the use of law court imagery at key moments throughout the trilogy. The law court metaphors in *Agamemnon* are developed in *Choephoroi* and culminate in the literal legal trial in *Eumenides*.²⁴⁸ Aeschylus develops the concept of external forces as quasi-legal 'accomplices' to murder which again becomes more pervasive throughout the trilogy. In *Agamemnon*, the *alastor* of Atreus is introduced as an 'accomplice' to Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon; in *Choephoroi*, *Moirā* also shares responsibility (*παραιτία* 910) (Section 3.8.2.); and in *Eumenides* Aeschylus introduces Apollo as an accomplice to Orestes (Section 3.9.4.).

3.7.4. Motive three: Cassandra

In Section 3.2. I suggested that Clytemnestra's jealousy at the introduction of a rival was hinted at in Homeric epic when Clytemnestra kills Cassandra. In *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus introduces the clever dramatic innovation that Cassandra acts as her own messenger and predicts her own

²⁴⁶ Page (1957) *ad loc.* Neuburg (1991). Foley (2001: 217-18, 223). See also Euripides' *Electra* (979) and *Orestes* (1668) for Orestes' remarks on confusing the *ἀλάστωρ* with the gods. Foley (2001) also argues that Greek women normally obeyed the commands of a male guardian and that, ironically, once Clytemnestra has introduced a male instigator/co-performer for her crime, she begins to undermine in a male-dominated world her earlier claim to the role of a just, autonomous (masculine), heroic avenger, and implicitly to adopt a secondary female role.

²⁴⁷ Neuburg (1991: 65-8), in support of his argument above, suggests that *ἀναίτιος* (1505) does not mean 'non-responsible' but rather that *ἀίτιος*-words can be interpreted as censure, citing examples as 100, 873 (*Choephoroi*), and 199-200 (*Eumenides*). I do not find these examples convincing enough to prove the point, except perhaps 873, however I still accept Neuburg's original argument without necessarily accepting his translation of *ἀίτιος*-words.

²⁴⁸ For further discussion of *dikē* and legal terms used throughout the trilogy, see Sections 3.7.7., 3.8.6. and 3.9.6.

murder after Agamemnon brings her back with him (1258-63). After Clytemnestra kills them both, she defends the murder of her husband as justice for her murdered child (1431-7), and then describes Agamemnon's relationship with Cassandra in terms of adultery and seduction, and insults Cassandra in relation to her sexual activity with her husband (1438-47) which demonstrates her jealousy.

I interpret these lines as a motive for Cassandra's murder and one of the contributing motives for murdering Agamemnon. Clytemnestra refers to Agamemnon as an abuser of his wife (*γυναικὸς τῆσδε λυμαντήριος* 1438), a term that would normally be used to describe a seducer of a married woman. Fraenkel compares this to *Choephoroi* 764, as does Sommerstein who notes the irony of the term. I disagree with Foley who interprets the term as Agamemnon's polluting outrage and that this could be against either Clytemnestra or Cassandra; it is Clytemnestra that depicts herself as the victim in this passage.²⁴⁹ This term would be more appropriately applied to her lover Aegisthus, especially as these lines directly follow Clytemnestra's attribution of Aegisthus' loyalty to her (1435-6).²⁵⁰ However, unlike Aegisthus, Agamemnon would not be culpable under Attic law for his adultery.²⁵¹

Clytemnestra accuses Agamemnon of having relationships with the women in Troy (1439), and describes Cassandra's role as Agamemnon's captive, prophetic bedfellow, and faithful consort (1440-2). She insults her for her alleged sexual activity (1442), asserting that they deserved what they had brought about (1443-44), and that Cassandra has added to her pleasure (*έμοι δ' έπήγαγεν... παροψώνημα τῆς έμῆς χλιδῆς* 1446-7).²⁵² Clytemnestra describes Cassandra as his lover (*φιλήτωρ* 1446) in the masculine form, perhaps insinuating Cassandra was the dominant partner,²⁵³ or to attribute to Cassandra her own active sexuality.²⁵⁴ I interpret this as inverting the gender

²⁴⁹ Fraenkel (1950). Sommerstein (2008). Foley (2001: 214).

²⁵⁰ Pomeroy (1975: 98) encapsulates the shocking nature of the double entendre of Aegisthus lighting the fire on Clytemnestra's hearth (1435-6) because a woman traditionally lit the fire on her father or husband's hearth.

²⁵¹ Foley (2001: 215).

²⁵² I follow the interpretation of Sommerstein (2008) that this is the pleasure of her revenge.

²⁵³ Sommerstein (2008).

²⁵⁴ Foley (2001: 214).

distinctions of the adulterous relationship and hinting at Agamemnon's femininity, increasing the irony by continuing the inherent comparison to the feminine Aegisthus.

Goldhill discusses the discourse of sexuality and communication and the interrelation between Clytemnestra's verbal and sexual transgressions, particularly in her scene with Cassandra. Clytemnestra's adultery, like Helen's, is a corruption of the bonds of marriage and threatens generational continuity and inheritance, institutions of the family and the relation of exchange which orders society.²⁵⁵ Winnington-Ingram goes too far in asserting that Clytemnestra's motive for hating Agamemnon was not because he killed Iphigeneia, because she loved Aegisthus, or because she was jealous of Cassandra; but because she was jealous of Agamemnon himself and his masculine status.²⁵⁶ I am persuaded by Zeitlin that Clytemnestra shatters the social norms by slaying her husband and by choosing her own sexual partner, although I do not agree that this brings social functioning to a standstill. Portrayed as a monstrous *androgyné*, she demands and usurps male power and prerogatives.²⁵⁷

Many scholars see a gradual shift in Clytemnestra's behaviour. Fraenkel identifies a gradual change that begins with her first mention of Aegisthus at 1431–35. Taplin stresses her gradual recognition that the *talio* will apply to her. Dodds sees Clytemnestra as undergoing a permanent change at the end of this play. Vickers thinks that Clytemnestra here dwindles from superhuman to normal stature, from avenger to peacemaker. Rosenmeyer sees Clytemnestra's transformation into a woman who demonstrates a new incapacity for action. Thalmann argues that once Clytemnestra's plot is known, the magnificent ambiguity of her earlier speeches is no longer possible.²⁵⁸ I agree that there is a shift in Clytemnestra's behaviour, but disagree with Foley that Clytemnestra moves from defining herself as an independent heroic agent to confessing her reliance on Aegisthus' power, and representing her act as inspired by an external, daimonic force that uncannily

²⁵⁵ Goldhill (1986: 23-4). See also Tanner (1979) and Lévi-Strauss (1966).

²⁵⁶ Winnington-Ingram (1983: 105-110).

²⁵⁷ Zeitlin (1996: 89).

²⁵⁸ Fraenkel (1962). Taplin (1977: 327–28) Dodds (1960). Vickers (1973: 387). Rosenmeyer (1982: 240). Thalmann (1985: 230). Foley (2001: 228).

resembles Aegisthus. I also reject that she allows Thyestes' cause to nearly supersede the crime committed against her daughter. My argument demonstrates that her three motives (Iphigeneia; Atreus and Thyestes; Cassandra) are not all explicit but are all valid to her as reasons for committing the murder, and that the daimonic forces are her accomplices in addition to Aegisthus.

3.7.5. Murder of Agamemnon: accomplices

I mentioned briefly above how Aeschylus develops the language and concept of 'accomplices' (Section 3.7.3.). I will now develop this further. In developing the 'accomplice' theme, Aeschylus continues the ambiguity from Homeric epic regarding the specific roles that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus play in the murder of Agamemnon. Clytemnestra initially describes herself in the first person singular as the killer of Agamemnon, implying that she murdered him alone, entrapping him in the net and striking him twice and then a third time when he had fallen (*παίω δέ νιν δίς, κὰν δυοῖν οἴμωγμάτοιμ μεθῆκεν αὐτοῦ κῶλα· καὶ πεπτωκότι τρίτην ἐπενδίδωμι* 1382-6). She attributes this to the work of her right hand (1405-6) and admits that she slaughtered him (*αἶσι τόνδ' ἔσφαζ' ἐγὼ* 1431-33). It is only just before Aegisthus' arrival that Clytemnestra refers to the murder in the first person plural, saying it was through 'us' that Agamemnon fell, died, and 'we' shall bury him (*πρὸς ἡμῶν κάππεσε, κάτθανε, καὶ καταθάσσομεν* 1552-3). Clytemnestra does not specify the other party but the audience may be expected to recall earlier traditions where Aegisthus has always been actively involved in the murder. After Aegisthus' arrival on stage, Clytemnestra implicates Aegisthus when she tries to restrain him, urging that they do no further harm (*δράσσομεν κακά* 1654), and telling the Chorus that these things must be accepted as they have done them (*ἔρξαντες καιρὸν χρῆ τάδ' ὡς ἐπράξαμεν* 1657-9).²⁵⁹

Later, when Aegisthus emerges at the end of the play he openly admits to the Chorus his role in the killing of Agamemnon, and indeed describes himself emphatically as its planner (*κἀγὼ δίκαιος τοῦδε τοῦ φόνου ῥαφεύς*

²⁵⁹ I follow the conjecture of Sommerstein (2008), rather than Page (1957) or Fraenkel (1950), who suggest 'these things must be confirmed as we have done them'.

1604).²⁶⁰ Aegisthus says that he reached Agamemnon from afar by devising harm (*καὶ τοῦδε τάνδρὸς ἠψάμην θυραῖος ὄν, πᾶσαν ξυνάψας μηχανὴν δυσβολίας* 1608-9). Aeschylus addresses and exploits gender stereotypes by first casting Clytemnestra into the masculine role of murderer, while Aegisthus is aligned with the feminine by staying home from war, renouncing the masculine heroic pursuits of war and glory (1625), occupying the female interior space (1225, 1626), and not having the courage to commit the murder.²⁶¹ Later he appropriates the masculine role of plotter.²⁶² When he does assert himself, he conforms to the stereotypical male model of *tyrannos*.²⁶³ The Athenian legal context here is helpful; women have to solicit help from men to achieve their ends as they were deemed too weak to kill a grown man on their own.²⁶⁴

A further Aeschylean innovation is Aegisthus' motive in avenging his father Thyestes, who was tricked by his brother Atreus, Agamemnon's father, into eating his own slaughtered children (1590-1602). Aegisthus uses this motive, familiar from the earlier tradition, to justify the murder of Agamemnon. I argue that Aeschylus re-introduces the important theme from Homeric epic that a father has sons to avenge him (*Odyssey* 3.196-8; discussed in Section 3.2.1.) to deliberately portray Aegisthus controversially as the dutiful son who avenges his father. Aeschylus situates the crime in the context of generational conflict; Aegisthus describes himself and Agamemnon repeatedly in relation to their fathers (*πατήρ* 1582-4, 1590-1). Aegisthus explains he was the third child of his father (1605) and was driven out as an infant (*συνεξελαύνει τυτθὸν ὄντ' ἐν σπαργάνοις* 1606).²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ Page (1957: 216) compares Aegisthus' use of *dikē* here with Clytemnestra at 1406.

²⁶¹ Zeitlin (1996: 92).

²⁶² Sommerstein (1989: 194) notes that the verb *βουλεύειν* is used four times in *Agamemnon* of Aegisthus' part in the murder of Agamemnon (1223, 1614, 1627, 1634). Note that these are all late in the play and that Aegisthus is the subject of the verb.

²⁶³ Zeitlin (1996: 92). However I disagree with her argument that Aegisthus is an adjunct to, not an initiator of, the plot against Agamemnon (1633-7, 1643-5), given his inherited motives for planning the murder as outlined below.

²⁶⁴ McHardy (2008: 13). Burnett (1998: 143). McHardy (2004) on women persuading men to act for them as could not take cases to court in Athens to achieve revenge. Pomeroy (1975: 94-5) notes some historical examples of passionate, aggressive women including a barbarian queen who contrived the murder of her husband with his successor (Herodotus 1.10-13). However even a barbarian queen does not commit the murder herself like Clytemnestra; she manipulates the male into murdering her husband.

²⁶⁵ I follow Page (1957) and Sommerstein (2008) who contradict Fraenkel (1950) in interpreting 1605 as third instead of the thirteenth child. It is unclear why Aegisthus did not

Aegisthus suppresses reference to Thyestes' adultery with Atreus' wife (1583-5), familiar to the audience (1190-3),²⁶⁶ and mirrored in his own adultery with Agamemnon's wife. He and explains Thyestes was exiled (*ἠνδρηλάτησεν* 1586). Fraenkel observes that the verb *ἀνδρηλατεῖν* is also used at *Agamemnon* (1419) where Clytemnestra suggests Agamemnon should be exiled for the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, and *Eumenides* (221) where Apollo defends Orestes from being driven from his home as a matricide. I argue that exile does not resolve vengeance in the three generations of this conflict: Thyestes and Aegisthus were exiled but returned, resulting in murder; Agamemnon was not exiled, resulting in his murder. Only Orestes breaks the pattern; he was exiled after murder, and only the intervention of the gods and the legal trial absolve him.²⁶⁷ This underlines the trilogy's theme of the danger of revenge culture; all kin of the victim must be destroyed, otherwise they will want to seek reciprocal vengeance.

Atreus' deception and Thyestes' feast of his own children result in the curse on the house of Pelops (1590-1602). It is interesting to note that, after his adultery, Thyestes is said to return from exile as a suppliant at the hearth (*προστρόπαιος ἐστίας μολῶν πάλιν* 1587) and secured for himself safety from death and from spilling his blood on his ancestral soil (1588-9). This indicates that purification or sacrifice may absolve one who has been banished; but Thyestes' crime was adultery and not murder, therefore pollution was not at issue. I therefore suggest that it was Atreus' forgiveness, in addition to Thyestes' sacrifices, that allowed his return, given Aeschylus' interpretation implies that Atreus' offer of hospitality on his brother's return was the deception that pre-empted his revenge (1590-3).

Aegisthus escaped the banquet of Thyestes and waited for his revenge as a grown man.²⁶⁸ Aeschylus presents Aegisthus' motives in the language of justice and retribution; he is insistent on *dikê* throughout his opening address (1577-1611). Aegisthus links light as bringing justice (*δικηφόρου* 1577),

return; I concur with Page (1957) who assumes from 1606 that Aegisthus was too small to make the fateful return journey with his siblings and father and remained in exile.

²⁶⁶ Sommerstein (2008). Conacher (1987: 55) also noted that Aegisthus suppresses the role of adultery, like Clytemnestra; however by contrast he does not show her awareness of the dangers of the *talio*.

²⁶⁷ Fraenkel (1950: 667).

²⁶⁸ Lloyd-Jones (1962: 187).

claims he was rightfully entitled to plan the killing (*κἀγὼ δίκαιος τοῦδε τοῦ φόνου ῥαφεύς* 1604), that justice brought him home (*τραφέντα δ' αὖθις ἡ Δίκη κατήγαγεν* 1607), and that death would be fine for him (*οὕτω καλὸν δὴ καὶ τὸ κατθανεῖν ἐμοί* 1610) now he has seen (Agamemnon) in the toils of justice (*ιδόντα τοῦτον τῆς Δίκης ἐν ἔρκεσιν* 1611).

Page contends that Aegisthus has a better case than Clytemnestra, whose case leaves a loophole for argument, and that the surviving son of Thyestes would be bound by human and divine law to kill Atreus' son in return for the murder of Thyestes' family.²⁶⁹ However it is important to note that Aegisthus' father was not killed; his siblings were. Although Aeschylus situates Aegisthus' motive in the context of sons avenging fathers in generational conflict, Aegisthus was not avenging the murder of his father. To assume Aegisthus' vengeance was for his slain siblings is to impose our view on to the text; Aeschylus emphasises Thyestes' curse as the reason Aegisthus has killed Agamemnon (1602-3). I therefore disagree with Page and Foley who argue Aegisthus would seem to have almost as good a case as Clytemnestra.²⁷⁰ Aegisthus and Clytemnestra both have slain blood kin to avenge; by the standards of vendetta justice, their cases have equal merit.

Aeschylus contrasts this potentially dutiful motive against the unsympathetic portrayal of Aegisthus as a coward for staying at home and defiling Agamemnon's bed while he was away at war (1625-6), and planning to kill him (1608-9, 1627) but not having the courage to do the deed himself (1634-5). Instead he had a woman do it and bring pollution (*μίασμα*) on the land and gods (1643-6).²⁷¹ Aegisthus' defence is that deception is the woman's job (*τὸ γὰρ δολῶσαι πρὸς γυναικὸς ἦν σαφῶς* 1636-7) but this is weakened by his use of the crude language of the bully.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Page (1957: 217).

²⁷⁰ Foley (2001: 206) also importantly notes that enmity could be inherited in classical Athens (Lysias 14.40 and Demosthenes 21.49 on *patrikos echthros*) but it was meant to be played out non-violently or in the lawcourts.

²⁷¹ See Section 3.8.5. on pollution in the trilogy.

²⁷² Foley (2001: 206). Goldhill (1984: 96-8) is also critical, more so than Page (1957), on Aegisthus' language (1591, 1629-30) and asserts that he possesses no manipulating skill with words in contrast to Clytemnestra's control of signifiers, puns and clichés. As he corrupts the exchange of marriage by his adultery with Clytemnestra, so he corrupts the exchange of language.

Aeschylus uses legal terminology for Aegisthus intentionally killing Agamemnon (*ἐκὼν κατακτανεῖν* 1613), and presents him alone as planner of the murder (*μόνος δ' ἔποικτον τόνδε βουλευῶσαι φόνον* 1614). Fraenkel believes every Athenian would have been conversant with the distinction between the most heinous sort of homicide, tried at the Areopagus, and other sorts. This may be too bold an assumption. However the following line on *bouleusis* adds to the legal terminology, and Fraenkel suggests this scene provides our oldest evidence for the concept of *bouleusis* in connection with criminal law.²⁷³ I argue that Aeschylus is dramatically exploiting the importance in Athenian homicide law that planning but not carrying out the murder with your own hand (*bouleusis*) carries the same severity of penalty as murder (Andocides 1.94, Antiphon 1.25). By making the responsibility for the murder ambiguous, initially focussing on Clytemnestra as the active agent of the murder and not mentioning anyone helping her, but then bringing in Aegisthus and making him say that he is solely responsible for planning the murder and having the act of murder referred to in the plural, Aeschylus places guilt on both of them.

This ambiguity and shift of emphasis between a female and male character for the responsibility in planning and carrying out a murder continues to be a theme in the later tragic Greek and Roman interpretations of this family cycle. It is mirrored in the shifting agency of Electra and Orestes in committing the matricide in Sophocles (Section 3.10.) and Euripides (Sections 3.11. and 3.12.). Aeschylus also questions gender roles in *Agamemnon* through the imagery of the lion, which he evolves throughout the *Oresteia*.

3.7.6. Lion imagery

Aeschylus innovates the representation of the lion, familiar from Homeric epic for martial prowess, and from the visual representation of the Mycenaean Gate with the twin lions, by introducing the pervasive use of lion imagery to characterise Clytemnestra. This deliberately inverts the stereotypes which would associate the epic animal with masculine bravery,

²⁷³ Fraenkel (1950).

and with the rulers of Mycenae, Menelaus and Agamemnon,²⁷⁴ and instead uses this to describe feminine power and to link it to adultery and murder.²⁷⁵

Aeschylus uses the imagery of the lion in the *Agamemnon* to allude to adultery: Clytemnestra is the two-footed lioness (*δίπους λέαινα* 1258) who sleeps with the wolf (*συγκοιμωμένη λύκω* 1258-9) while the noble lion is away (*λέοντος εὐγενοῦς ἀπουσία* 1259). This infers criticism of Aegisthus whose depiction as a wolf is inferior not only to Agamemnon, the lion, but to Clytemnestra herself, the lioness. Aegisthus is a different species; yet Clytemnestra is the female equivalent of Agamemnon. The image demonstrates both Aegisthus' weakness and Clytemnestra's power.

Aeschylus also innovates the representation of the lion by using it to describe Aegisthus paradoxically as a cowardly lion (*λέοντ' ἄναλκιν* 1224) who sleeps in the master's bed as his own (*ἐν λέχει στρωφώμενον* 1224). Knox suggests that *λέοντ' ἄναλκιν* is used with sarcasm; however Fraenkel discusses the problems with accepting the term lion here, and Page suspects a corruption of the text.²⁷⁶ I am not convinced by Sommerstein who follows a variant reading and translates *λέοντ' ἄναλκιν* as 'cowardly wolf', since line 1259 distinguishes Aegisthus as a wolf with the term *λύκω*.²⁷⁷ West offers the more convincing suggestion that the lion is cowardly because he does not wander far and wide but limits his territory to the comfort of the bed. She also links Aegisthus to the parable of the lion-cub (717-36) who, unlike his family, was saved from perishing as a baby.²⁷⁸ I argue that the metaphor of the cowardly lion in this passage (1223-5) associates Aegisthus to Paris through

²⁷⁴ Fraenkel (1950) at line 1224 rejects the idea that the lion was the symbol of the Atreidae based only on the Lion Gate of Mycenae, however I find his attempt at finding evidence which refers to kings termed as lions is too broad. Sommerstein (2008: xi) suggests that it is Aeschylus who transfers the kingship of Agamemnon and Menelaus to Argos from Mycenae or Sparta (earlier poets Stesichorus, Simonides, Pindar link the brothers to Sparta). However Argos is already mentioned in *Odyssey* 3.249 and 4.514-6.

²⁷⁵ See also Abbattista (2018: 203-220).

²⁷⁶ Knox (1952). Fraenkel (1950). Page (1957).

²⁷⁷ Sommerstein (2008). In *Choephoroi*, Burnett (1998: 107) interprets *λύκος* (420-2) as wolf-mother in relation to Clytemnestra, however I am more convinced by Garvie (1986) *ad loc* and Sommerstein (2008) that this refers to the rage of her children and means savage-hearted or savage-minded wolf.

²⁷⁸ West (2003: 480-4). Knox (1952) discusses how the parable of the lion-cub is significant not just in relation to Helen but also to Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Aegisthus and Orestes. Zeitlin (1965: 480-6) suggests that the lion-cub represents only the murderous impulse, while the eagles represent a triple progression from victim to avenger to that murderous impulse which is always inherent in the nature of the eagle.

the parable of the lion-cub (717-36) as an adulterous threat to the house of the Atreidae. I am not convinced by Heath, who follows Rosenmeyer, in interpreting all animal imagery, whether wolf or lion, as negative and representing the savagery of the human / animal dichotomy.²⁷⁹

Lions have also been referred to in the sacrifice of Iphigeneia: she is said to be the seed of fiery lions (*μαλερῶν λέοντων* 141) and the Greek army at Troy are likened to a raw-fed lion (*ὠμηστής λέων* 827). Knox suggests that these two contexts (the sacrifice of Iphigeneia and the slaughter at Troy) are most significant for Agamemnon's past.²⁸⁰ I suggest however that Iphigeneia's description as the seed of the fiery lions depicts Clytemnestra as the equal of the lion Agamemnon, which is reinforced by the image at 1258-9.

The symbol of the lion continues throughout the *Oresteia* but Aeschylus skilfully evolves its meaning. In *Choephoroi*, the Chorus refer to Orestes as a twofold lion (*διπλοῦς λέων* 939) when he has killed Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Garvie considers the idea that this refers to Clytemnestra and Orestes but instead settles on the more convincing idea that it refers to Orestes as the double killer of two usurpers, and that he has become a lion like his mother.²⁸¹ In *Eumenides*, Apollo rejects the Erinyes by suggesting they should dwell in the den of blood-swilling lions (*λέοντος... αἱματορρόφου* 192-4). Knox cogently argues that this final reference to the lion brings an end to its' relevance in the trilogy: Orestes is tried and acquitted by a court of law, a new institution which stands for a new concept of justice, and leaves the stage free of the curse of the house of Pelops where each generation has gone through the cycle represented by the lion-cub parable. Sommerstein adds that the lion is now only fit for darkness, like the Erinyes.²⁸²

This memorable lion imagery is then drawn on throughout later tragic Greek and Roman interpretations. The lion metaphor is used in Euripides' *Electra* (Section 3.11.2.) in relation to the murder of Agamemnon to describe

²⁷⁹ Heath (1999: 24-5). Rosenmeyer (1982: 138-40). Heath suggests the *Oresteia* traces a progression from a world where animals and humans are inextricably and ruinously woven together to the rise of a differentiated *polis* with animals, humans, and gods in their respective places, and that this is one of the meanings of *dikê*.

²⁸⁰ Knox (1952).

²⁸¹ Garvie (1986).

²⁸² Knox (1952). Sommerstein (1989). See Section 3.8.6. on the theme of light and dark.

Clytemnestra as a mountain lioness (*λέαινα* 1163-4). It represents her savagery, this time on her own without reference to Aegisthus. In Seneca's *Agamemnon* (Section 3.13.6.) the lion imagery is used to demonstrate her adultery and to characterise Aegisthus and Clytemnestra's roles in the murder. Clytemnestra is described as a lioness (*leae* 740) and Aegisthus a hyena (*marmaricus leo* 739) compared to her husband, conqueror of wild beasts (*victor ferarum* 738). The image reinforces Aegisthus as the weaker party, relying on Clytemnestra as the aggressor who has bitten the victim before he strikes the final blow (739-40). I suggest that this also represents the destructive nature of anger in Clytemnestra, as Seneca uses the example of the lion repeatedly in his treatise on anger (*De Ira* 2.11.4, 2.16.1, 3.30.1).

I also argue that Euripides later deliberately uses the characterisation of the lioness to link both Clytemnestra and Medea. Euripides uses the image of the lioness (*λέαινα*) to depict the anger and murderous nature of Medea (*Medea* 187, 1342, 1358, 1407).²⁸³ Therefore this imagery represents the threat of adultery, the inversion of gender dynamics, feminine savagery, and the danger of anger in relation to murder within the family.

I suggest there is also a comparison to be made between Medea and Clytemnestra being depicted as Scylla in relation to their role as females who destroy the male. Cassandra refers to Clytemnestra as 'some Scylla' (*ἡ Σκύλλαν τινὰ* 1233) when she foretells Agamemnon's murder, also describing her as a hellish mother (*Ἄιδου μητέρα* 1235-6).²⁸⁴ I follow Fraenkel's suggestion that Clytemnestra has been depicted as inhuman (Scylla) and then a hellish mother because she is capable of killing the father of her children and therefore entering into war to the death with her *φίλοις*, namely her children, particularly her son.²⁸⁵

Medea is compared to Scylla by her husband Jason after she murders their sons in Euripides' *Medea* (1342-3) and in Seneca's *Medea* (407-14).²⁸⁶ Sommerstein notes that Scylla had once been human and transformed after

²⁸³ See Section 4.7. See also Section 4.11. for Seneca's simile of Medea as a tigress (*tigris*) robbed of her children (*Medea* 863-4) and Section 4.2. for a possible archaic reference to the lioness linked to the murder of Medea's child.

²⁸⁴ Fraenkel (1950) discusses the lengthy debate on interpreting *Ἄιδου μητέρα*.

²⁸⁵ Belfiore (1998: 139-58) argues that harm to *philoï* is a central element to the plot of nearly all extant tragedy. See McHardy (2005) similarly on infanticide in tragedy.

²⁸⁶ See Sections 4.7. and 4.11.

killing her father (*Choephoroi* 613-22).²⁸⁷ Later sources say she did this for love of Minos who killed her for her treachery (Pausanias 2.34.7, Apollodorus' *Library* 3.15.8). Therefore the imagery of Scylla represents the monstrous female capable of killing male *philoï* and destroying bonds between parent and child.

3.7.7. Justice

As I have stated above, Aeschylus innovated the trilogy with the use of contemporary Athenian law court language and concepts, developing metaphors in *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* and culminating in the legal trial in *Eumenides*.²⁸⁸ Indeed the first image used to describe Menelaus and Agamemnon in *Agamemnon* comes from the world of the Athenian courts: *μέγας ἀντίδικος* (41) interpreted as 'prosecutor',²⁸⁹ or 'avenger' with connotations of an adversary.²⁹⁰

I shall now explore how Aeschylus develops this innovative language register in this play to explore these themes of justice and responsibility for homicide. Agamemnon relates that the gods voted on the sack of Troy with ballots in urns (814-18) similarly to the way in which juries vote in law-courts. When the Chorus hear Agamemnon's death cries they cast votes on what to do (1352-53) as jurors would, and consider whether it would be better to catch the murderers in the act while the sword was still dripping (1350-51), which could be interpreted as reminiscent of lawful homicide when catching adulterers in the act (Lysias 1.25).

After the murder, Clytemnestra defends herself from the Chorus' rebuke, much like the male accused in a trial for lawful homicide. She puts forward arguments as to why her action was justified, reminiscent of a law-court scene, using the concept of *dikê* to justify the crime. Clytemnestra is defiant to the Chorus after the murder and alleges that the work of her right hand was for justice (*τῆσδε δεξιᾶς χερὸς ἔργον, δικαίας τέκτονος* 1405-6).²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ Sommerstein (2008).

²⁸⁸ This will be discussed further in Sections 3.8.6. and 3.9.6.

²⁸⁹ Sommerstein (2008).

²⁹⁰ Heath (1999: 21). Fraenkel (1950).

²⁹¹ Garvie (1986: 167) lists Clytemnestra's claims that justice is on her side: *Agamemnon* 911-13, 1396, 1406, 1432, 1532ff., cf. 1577, 1604, 1607, 1611, Sophocles' *Electra* 528.

Goldhill uses the term ‘rhetoric of appropriation’ to describe how different characters in the *Oresteia* appeal to and appropriate *dikê* to his or her rhetoric, including Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Electra, Orestes, the Erinyes, Apollo, Athene, and the Chorus.²⁹² This view is closer to that of Vernant and Vidal-Naquet rather than Kitto who suggests that the term cannot be justice when used in these conflicting ways.²⁹³

Clytemnestra accuses the Chorus of ‘making a trial’ of her (*πειρᾶσθέ μου* 1401) as a witless woman.²⁹⁴ However she is indifferent to their judgement of praise or blame.²⁹⁵ The Chorus respond by condemning her to civic punishment: banishment (*ἀπόπολις* 1410).²⁹⁶ This recalls the contemporary Athenian legal treatment of homicide which could include exile as a punishment, although only if it was unintentional homicide, or if the accused chose exile during the trial. This was not the normal punishment for deliberate, premeditated homicide in Athens.²⁹⁷ Planning a murder, as Aegisthus claims that he has done, was treated as voluntary homicide. Voluntary homicides were tried at the Areopagus court, whereas unintentional homicides were tried at the Palladion and with different penalties.²⁹⁸ The Chorus also warns Aegisthus that he will not escape the anger and curses and stoning of the people’s hands (1615-16); however stoning was not a punishment mentioned for homicide in the contemporary context.

Clytemnestra pleads her cause like an advocate using legal language; she condemns the judgement (*δικάζεις* 1412) of exile from the city (*ἐκ πόλεως φυγὴν ἐμοὶ* 1412) and accuses the Chorus of judging her harshly (*δικαστῆς τραχὺς* 1420–21) compared to their reaction when Agamemnon sacrificed

²⁹² Goldhill (1986: 46).

²⁹³ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988). Kitto (1961).

²⁹⁴ I follow the translation of Sommerstein (2008) here.

²⁹⁵ Foley (2001: 212) interprets this as Clytemnestra asking to be praised or blamed (1403) by the Chorus but as putative equals on the terms she describes as a heroic and just (male-style) avenger, not as a woman using speech inappropriate to her sex about her husband. See Section 4.7. for comparison with Medea’s use of male heroic language.

²⁹⁶ In the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus uses exile as punishment for adultery (*Agamemnon* 1586-7) as well as homicide (1419, *Eumenides* 221).

²⁹⁷ Foley (2001: 212).

²⁹⁸ At the Areopagus, litigants claimed to be innocent; those who admitted their guilt simply received their punishment outright. See MacDowell (1963: 46–47, 60–62, 110–22) and (1978: 114–15, 120).

Iphigeneia (1417-18).²⁹⁹ She argues that Agamemnon should have been driven from the land for his polluted deed (*οὐ τοῦτον ἐκ γῆς τῆσδε χρῆν σ' ἀνδρηλατεῖν μασμάτων ἄποιν'*; 1419-20).³⁰⁰ The Chorus respond using legal language to question who would testify (*μαρτυρήσων* 1506) that Clytemnestra was not responsible for the murder. The Chorus also echo contemporary Attic legal standards in condemning Aegisthus for planning to kill intentionally (*ἐκὼν κατακτανεῖν* 1613-14).³⁰¹

I argue that Aeschylus employs the archaic principle of self-help and revenge killing as the context for the trilogy but applies contemporary Athenian legal language. The fifth century BC audience would likely have identified with the rhetoric because the importance of the family seeking vengeance for their slain kin was still enshrined in Athenian homicide law. In the contemporary legal context it was not allowed to lawfully kill the killer of the victim unless the situation met strict criteria (Demosthenes 23.53).³⁰² However, Aeschylus innovates the interpretation of Clytemnestra by creating sympathetic arguments for her in relation to her daughter Iphigeneia, whose murder warranted punishment.

The problem that Aeschylus puts to his audience is that this persuasive argument for retribution comes from a woman, and any responsibility of the family to seek vengeance for their kin would always be through the relevant adult males. Aeschylus demonstrates Clytemnestra's masculine characteristics throughout the play through her speech and action, not only from her dominant role in the murder of Agamemnon but also through her rebukes to the Chorus not to treat her like a foolish woman (277, 348, 592-3, 1401, 1661) and statements from the Chorus, Agamemnon and Cassandra on what is appropriate behaviour for a woman (483-7, 940, 1231-2, 1625, 1644-

²⁹⁹ Fraenkel (1950: 667). Foley (2001: 213). Gantz (1983) argues that the Chorus in *Agamemnon* precedes the jury in *Eumenides* as a flawed foreshadowing of what is to evolve in time; the power shifts in the trilogy from the aggrieved, to the gods, to the jury and therefore back to mankind as a social unit. I am not however convinced by his argument that this implicates the Chorus in *Agamemnon* with co-responsibility for the murderous deeds through their failure to control those deeds.

³⁰⁰ Fraenkel (1950) notes that repetitions of words which represent the *lex talionis* (*τόμμα τόμματι τεῖσαι* 1430 *Agamemnon*) are doublets of archaic legal language and compares this to *Choephoroi* (309-10, 312-13). Zeitlin (1965: 476-8) further suggests that in response to the Chorus' legal terminology, Clytemnestra uses an expression reminiscent of the law courts (1431) but substitutes *themis* for *nomos*.

³⁰¹ Foley (2001: 206).

³⁰² I will discuss this further in Section 3.7.8.

45). Therefore the difficulty in accepting Clytemnestra's actions is that they appear inappropriate for a woman. She embodies the male role of avenger, not only for her own family, but also for Aegisthus in avenging his father.

3.7.8. Athenian homicide

At this point I will briefly discuss the classical Athenian treatment of homicide in order to provide the legal context for the homicides depicted in the *Oresteia* and provide an understanding of factors that may have had an impact on the evolution of the mythical narrative.

Athenian laws on homicide in the classical period were attributed to Dracon from around 621/0 BC and were not revised by Solon (Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution* 7.1, Plutarch *Solon* 17.1) who established many laws (Herodotus 1.29.1).³⁰³ Phillips suggests that Dracon's homicide laws withstood the upheavals of tyranny, democracy and oligarchy because the concept of private vengeance is at the core of the Athenian psyche.³⁰⁴ Dracon's original homicide laws have not survived except on what survives from their re-inscription on a *stèle* in 409/8 BC (IG i3 104).³⁰⁵ Our other evidence for the Athenian legal treatment of homicide from the seventh to the fifth centuries BC is based on later sources such as the forensic speeches of Attic orators and treatises of the mid-fifth to late fourth centuries BC.

Dracon's homicide law seems to have stated that members of the victim's family up to sons of cousins were responsible for bringing forward the prosecution for homicide, and all these qualifying family members had to be willing to grant pardon, if pardon was considered for the killer, or the one who opposed it would prevail (IG i3 104, Demosthenes 43.57). Demosthenes (47.68-73) implies that only relatives of the victim, or the master, if a slave,

³⁰³ Stroud (1968: 76).

³⁰⁴ Phillips (2008: 15). Compare Sealey (1994: 43) who suggests that Solon repealing all of Dracon's laws except the homicide laws is an adequate explanation as to why the other laws lacked merit.

³⁰⁵ Stroud (1968: 35-40, 60-64) and MacDowell (1963: 6) argue that the re-inscription is a verbatim copy of the original law. Gagarin (1981: 21-29, 1986: 86-7, 145) asserts that public inscription did not mean substantial changes in substance, and the long transition from voluntary to compulsory procedure was brought about by precision of details not found before the introduction of written laws. See Volonaki (2000) and Carey (2004: 125) for the argument that homicide laws were extended without amending Dracon's laws which allowed the Athenians to believe the myth that the laws had remained unchanged.

should prosecute.³⁰⁶ There has been significant scholarly debate on this, especially due to the fragmentary nature of IG i3 104, but I am more convinced by those who maintain that the right of prosecution in a *δίκη φόνου* was legally restricted to the relatives or master of the victim.³⁰⁷ I interpret the evidence on Drakon's homicide law as reflecting the archaic culture which had evolved from a self-help, retaliatory society to one that codified a legal framework to regulate violence and respond to historical circumstances.³⁰⁸ MacDowell uses Demosthenes (22.2) as evidence that failure to prosecute a homicide was seen as impiety, although Todd and McHardy disagree and argue that it might be deemed cowardly to fail to prosecute for homicide but you could not be forced to bring a case (Antiphon 5.95).³⁰⁹

Demosthenes (23.51) uses the term *δίκαι φόνου* for homicide trials, however this term is not used in IG i3 104. Hansen suggests that *δίκη φόνου* brought by the victim's relatives was the usual legal remedy against homicides. By comparison, every citizen could bring a *γραφή φόνου* in all cases, or an *ἀπαγωγή φόνου* (as a different procedure of summary arrest) if the homicide frequented the temples and market-place, or an *ἀπαγωγή κακούργων* if the murderer was classified as a *κακούργως*.³¹⁰ The *ἀπαγωγή φόνου* may not have allowed summary execution of the offender, even if he had confessed, however it demonstrates the religious and social exclusion of the murderer.³¹¹

³⁰⁶ Compare Plato's *Euthyphro* 3E7-6A where the son intends to prosecute his father for murder, despite the victim not being a relation, due to the *miasma* involved. See Panagiotou (1974: 431-4), Kidd (1990: 215-21), Tulin (1996: 21-54), Rosivach (2017: 232-41) and Willey (2018: 113-31).

³⁰⁷ Glotz (1904), Lipsius (1905), Treston (1923), Bonner and Smith (1930), Hansen (1981), Humphreys (1991), Kidd (1990: 216-18), Tulin (1996: 21-54). Cf. MacDowell (1963: 17-18), Panagiotou (1974), Gagarin (1979: 301-23), Sealey (1983), Wallace (1989), Willey (2018) who reject this and interpret the law as ambiguous; although the obligation to prosecute was on the relatives or master, the law did not prohibit others from doing so. MacDowell (1997: 384-5) is convinced by Tulin's interpretation of Demosthenes (47.68-73) and withdraws his previous view that it was legally possible for the *trierarkhos* to prosecute even though the nurse was neither his relative nor his slave.

³⁰⁸ Tulin (1996: 2). See Humphreys (1991: 17) and Thur (2014) on the codification of homicide law as a response to actual historical situations and problems in Athenian society.

³⁰⁹ MacDowell (1963: 9-10). Todd (1993: 273). McHardy (2008: 15). Cf. Blundell (1989: 41-2), Dover (1974: 274), Harrison (1968: 78), Parker (1983: 124).

³¹⁰ Gagarin (1979: 302) suggests that Solon introduced the procedure of *graphe* where anyone could prosecute in certain cases (Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution* 9.1) compared to Drakon's time where ordinary prosecutions were *dikai*.

³¹¹ Hansen (1976: 108-12).

There is debate over whether and how Drakon's homicide law distinguished between intentional homicide and unintentional homicide. The expression used for intentional homicide was *ek pronoias* 'committed deliberately' and for unintentional homicide was *me'k pronoias* 'not from forethought' (Demosthenes 54.25-28).³¹² Homicide was intentional whenever death resulted from an act which was intended to cause harm; it did not have to be intentional only when death was the intention of the act (Demosthenes 23.50).³¹³ MacDowell suggests that the distinction between intentional and unintentional homicide takes account of the deliberation of the killer but is irrespective of the vengeance needed for the victim or the purification needed for the state.³¹⁴

Penalties and procedure for homicide differed according to whether the act was intentional, unintentional, or lawful homicide. There was some distinction as to whether the act was carried out by your own hand or only planned. There were provisions for situations in which homicide was lawful. The most serious cases were for intentional homicide committed with your own hand, which were heard at the most important of the homicide courts, the Areopagus. If the accused alleged the homicide was lawful it was heard at the Delphinion. If the homicide was unintentional it was heard at the Palladion, or in Phreatto if this was committed during exile.³¹⁵

In classical Athens the penalty for intentional homicide was death.³¹⁶ If the accused decided to go into exile during the trial after the first of his two defence speeches (Antiphon 5.13, Demosthenes 23.69), then exile was permanent (Demosthenes 21.43, Antiphon 2.69). This avoided the retribution of the victim's family who demanded the defendant pay with their life.³¹⁷ With both death and permanent exile the confiscation of the accused's property was also imposed (Demosthenes 24.7, Lysias 1.50).

³¹² Phillips (2019, 2008), Gagarin (1981: 30-7), Loomis (1972) argue for the equivalence of the positive and negative terms. Cf. Carawan (1998: 38-41) and Cantarella (1976: 84-111).

³¹³ Phillips (2019: 316, 2013: 45-6), Loomis (1972). Cf. Carawan (1998: 223-5), Pepe (2012: 87-128).

³¹⁴ MacDowell (1963: 47-59).

³¹⁵ Bonner and Smith (1930: 91-129). Harrison (1971: 36-43). Sealey (1983: 275-96).

³¹⁶ However MacDowell (1963: 110-29) argues that originally the penalty was exile even for intentional killing. See Phillips (2008: 63) on possible methods of execution for homicide. On the different methods of execution in Athens generally, see Hall (1996).

³¹⁷ McHardy (2008: 16-18). Garner (1987: 3, 106). Cf. Burnett (1998: 54) and Mossman (1995: 171).

The penalties for unintentional homicide included exile, property could be retained whilst abroad, and sacrifices and purification were required on return, with the possibility of pardon from the victim's family and return to Athens, following a procedure of sacrifice and cleansing (Andocides 1.83, Demosthenes 23.51/72, 47.71).

Lawful homicide included killing by accident (in battle or in an athletic contest), in defence (from attack or from finding a man having sexual intercourse with a female member of the *oikos*), or to punish offences to the state (such as killing a convicted murderer trying to escape, or a tyrant trying to overthrow the democracy). There were no penalties for lawful homicide and no pollution (Andocides 1.96-8, Demosthenes 20.158, 23.28, 23.53-60) although Plato states that purification was still needed from killing in battle or from an athletic contest (Plato *Laws* 865b).

There were also charges of *bouleusis* as 'planning' of intentional and unintentional homicide where this was not carried out with the accused's own hand (Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution* 57.3). Controversy exists over this; I remain convinced by MacDowell who argues that *bouleusis* could apply to intentional and unintentional homicide and that the planner is liable to the same penalty but not necessarily the same court.³¹⁸ The penalty for *bouleusis* was the same as for the act carried out with your own hand (Andocides 1.94); the penalty for *bouleusis* of intentional homicide was death (Antiphon 1.25-27; Lysias 13.56) and the penalty for *bouleusis* of unintentional homicide was exile (Antiphon 6.4).

Demosthenes (23.72) cites that those convicted of unintentional homicide depart the city within a specific period of time and fixed route, which suggests this was to afford protection to the killer from further violence or attack on their way out of the city. These provisions specifying what the family can and cannot do to the killer before and after the trial prevent violence from the victim's kin and instead encourage them to rely on the administration of the legal process to deliver justice.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ MacDowell (1963: 60-9, 125-6). Gagarin (1990) instead argues that this cannot be said conclusively and that 'planning' an unintentional homicide would be unfamiliar to most, and that in Antiphon 1 and 6 the charge is of killing intentionally or unintentionally, not planning.

³¹⁹ Phillips (2008: 29)

The homicide regulations instituted by Drakon seem to demonstrate a transition in archaic culture which had been dependent upon retaliatory killings, turning instead to legal procedure to settle disputes and satisfy vengeance. Public inscription would have given laws increased authority and put pressure on individuals to use the judicial institutions of the *polis* to settle disputes rather than resort to self-help. Drakon's homicide law, in restricting who can bring a prosecution, builds on the archaic response to homicide where the family seek vengeance on the killer, by ensuring that the family unit collectively agrees to bring a prosecution. The unity of the family in seeking justice for the victim was incorporated into these procedural details regulating reconciliation.³²⁰

Gagarin suggests the main purpose of Drakon's law was a detailed elaboration of procedure for settling disputes arising out of homicide.³²¹ Thur argues that the codification of homicide law is connected to a historical event; the sacrilege against the Cylonians.³²² Phillips' convincing summary is that the three concerns of Drakon's homicide law were: to ensure homicides resulted in trials not revenge killings; to limit participation on both sides in legal disputes over homicide; and to mandate solidarity among the victim's family.³²³

However I argue there are further aims of Athenian homicide laws. These were: deterrence (Demosthenes 54.17-19 believed the laws were in place to prevent the escalation of violence; also penalties were adjusted according to the intent of the killer);³²⁴ acknowledgement of vengeance for the victim (Demosthenes 37.59 suggests if the victim absolved the killer before their death then no prosecution for homicide could take place);³²⁵ and perhaps cleansing the state from the pollution of the murderer (Antiphon 2.1.3, 2.1.10-11: the whole city is polluted until the murderer is prosecuted; 4.1.3-5: the murder victim leaves behind the anger of avenging spirits).³²⁶

³²⁰ Gagarin (1986: 14, 79, 88-9) suggests that setting forth rules for obtaining pardon was a major innovation to protect both parties before, during and after trial.

³²¹ Gagarin (1986: 78, 139).

³²² Thur (2014: 916-24). Also Humphreys (1991: 35-40).

³²³ Phillips (2008: 56-57).

³²⁴ MacDowell (1963: 147, 1978: 109-22), Garner (1987: 35-8), Todd (1993: 271-6), Phillips (2008: 25).

³²⁵ MacDowell (1963: 148).

³²⁶ Parker (1983: 104-7).

MacDowell agrees that the Athenian attitude to pollution was that it affected the whole state and those who came into contact with the murderer, but clarifies that vengeance and purification are separate ideas (the killed person needed vengeance; the killer needs purification).³²⁷ Plato (*Laws* 865d-e) also implies that the victim haunts his killer and prevents him entering the victim's native land for a year.

Scholarship is divided over whether Athenian homicide law was cognisant of pollution. Pollution is ignored in many of the surviving inscriptions of Drakon's homicide law (Demosthenes 23.82); however it is recognised in some where the unintentional killer must be cleansed before returning from exile (Demosthenes 23.72), or where the city or jurors will be polluted (Antiphon 1.2, 3.11).³²⁸ The rule that the *basileus* cannot accept a charge of homicide in their last three months of office (Antiphon 6.38) seems to ignore the threat of pollution that the killer could bring in those three months, and the process of *androlepsiai* where a killer was extradited back to Athens also seems to ignore the pollution the killer would bring back to the state with them.

However other provisions are ambiguous and could be interpreted to take account of the polluted killer. The surviving evidence suggests that Athenian law had provisions that the killer should keep away from holy water, libations, bowls of wine, holy places, and the agora (Demosthenes 20.157-8). This could have been designed to deter future killers, or to protect the state from pollution.³²⁹ The rule that all homicide trials were held in the open air (Antiphon 5.11, Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution* 57.4, Polydeukes 8.118) could relate to vengeance and the desire of the prosecution not to share a roof with an enemy, which would have been a symbol of friendship according to Antiphon, or could be due to the fear of sharing the pollution of the killer.

MacDowell argues that pollution is caused by the act of killing, whether intended or not, and that the contradictions regarding pollution indicate that some laws originated at a time before pollution became a concern

³²⁷ MacDowell (1963: 2-4).

³²⁸ Wohl (2010: 33-43), Gagarin (2002: 58, 100) and Carawan (1998: 197) suggest that Antiphon borrows this language of pollution from drama. See Arnaoutoglou (1993) on pollution from homicide.

³²⁹ MacDowell (1963).

in Athens, and some afterwards, although there is no way to ascertain when this happened.³³⁰ Parker is cautious in noting that pollution is ignored in most surviving homicide laws, although some of the provisions regarding exile can be interpreted as a response to pollution.³³¹ Even if pollution is not an explicit concern stated in law, it reflects the need for vengeance for the victim. The removal of the killer from the state (either through exile or death) would satisfy some of these legal and religious concerns regarding the crime.³³²

Garner does not accept the suggestion that vengeance was more of a factor than pollution, citing Demosthenes (37.58-60) regarding the victim absolving the (unintentional) killer, even if convicted.³³³ Garner argues that there was a concern with pollution based on the fact that homicide trials were held in open air. Humphreys discusses the avoidance of pollution in Drakon's laws and that the boundary between secular and sacred spheres of jurisdiction hardened as the state developed.³³⁴

Osborne argues that Greek pollution beliefs and purification practices developed chronologically in parallel with the law, and that both were key mechanisms for a community to regulate itself.³³⁵ I follow Parker's cautious view, and find Osborne persuasive that the law prevented feuding by regulating the relationship between the killer and those with obligations to the person killed, whereas pollution was concerned with the relationship between the killer and the rest of the human and divine world. Intention is irrelevant to pollution (Antiphon 3.1.1-2, 3.3.8-12), and Osborne suggests that pollution in the classical Greek world reaches types of behaviour outside the sanction of formal law and invokes the gods to offers a means of resolution; purification.

3.8. Aeschylus' *Oresteia: Choephoroi*

In the *Choephoroi*, Aeschylus introduces the location of Agamemnon's murder as the bath in addition to the use of the net and the

³³⁰ MacDowell (1963: 141-50).

³³¹ Parker (1983: 105-43).

³³² Parker (1983: 118).

³³³ Garner (1987: 36).

³³⁴ Humphreys (1991: 37-9).

³³⁵ Osborne (2011: 170-84).

sword. He adds: the mutilation of Agamemnon's corpse; the influence of Apollo in the matricide; the role of Pylades in encouraging Orestes to kill his mother at his moment of hesitation; and the inclusion of Electra in the matricide in a passive role.

3.8.1. Murder of Agamemnon: method

In this play, Aeschylus continues the ambiguity from the *Agamemnon* regarding Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' roles in Agamemnon's death. He depicts both as responsible, but that Clytemnestra took the active part in the killing whereas Aegisthus plotted the deed. Orestes, the Chorus and Clytemnestra herself claim that both she and Aegisthus are joint murderers of Agamemnon (134, 556, 888, 944, 973-4). Electra and Orestes also refer to Clytemnestra only as Agamemnon's killer of (189-90, 909, 991, 1027-8).

Aeschylus introduces the bath (*λούτρων*) as the location for Agamemnon's murder (491, 999, 1070-2)³³⁶ in addition to the use of the net (492, 494, 556-8, 983-4, 997-1000, 1014-15) and the sword (1010-11).³³⁷ Seaford discusses Aeschylus abandoning the banquet and switching to the remarkable and unusual location of the bath, with the net (robe), which increases the vulnerability and horror that this perverted funerary ritual assists in Agamemnon's death. Clytemnestra employs the funeral lament, bath and robes to her living husband.³³⁸ I am not convinced with Seaford's suggestion that Aeschylus did not invent this version, based on other examples of fatal baths in myth (Pelias / Minos). These examples do not relate to Agamemnon, therefore I suggest Aeschylus could have been the first to apply the bath to this saga.

Aeschylus alludes to the murder when Orestes uses the simile of a net (506) and Clytemnestra offers Orestes a bath (670). Orestes refers to Aegisthus' sword as staining the garment which entrapped Agamemnon, and specifically asks the Chorus whether she (Clytemnestra) did it or not (1010-

³³⁶ Garvie (1986) and Sommerstein (2008) note at line 999 that *δροίτης* 'coffin' is used to describe the bath here and in *Agamemnon* 1540, and *Eumenides* 633.

³³⁷ I reject the view of Hall (2005: 53-75) that Clytemnestra calling for an axe at *Choephoroi* 889 to defend herself from Orestes means she was not the primary agent in killing Agamemnon, where the murder weapon was a sword (*Agamemnon* 1262-3, 1528). I suggest it is possible Aeschylus depicted her with different weapons at different points in the trilogy.

³³⁸ Seaford (1984: 247-54). See Alexiou (1974) for comparisons to the modern lament.

11). Fraenkel and Garvie interpret this as Aegisthus lending his sword to Clytemnestra, whereas Lloyd-Jones and Davies interpret this as Aegisthus stabbing the dead corpse.³³⁹ Zeitlin notes that the sword is a man's weapon and that women who resort to using the sword are violating the rules of gender.³⁴⁰ I argue that this demonstrates that Aegisthus was involved in Agamemnon's death through plotting and providing the means, i.e. the sword, but that it was Clytemnestra who had the active masculine role in using it to cause his death.

Aeschylus innovates the murder by depicting Clytemnestra mutilating Agamemnon's corpse (*έμασχαλίσθη* 439).³⁴¹ The Chorus allege this was to make his death unbearable (*μόρον... άφερτον* 440-2) for Orestes.³⁴² Sophocles follows this interpretation that Clytemnestra mutilated Agamemnon and uses the same term *έμασχαλίσθη* (*Electra* 442-6). Dunn provides an informative overview on the use of the word *έμασχαλίσθη* 'arm-pitted'; which only occurs in tragedy (*Choephoroi* 439 and Sophocles' *Electra* 442-6) and refers to maltreatment of the human corpse, and an intent to shame the victim or humiliate the living relative.³⁴³ By contrast, the practice of mutilation by removing *τὰ άκρα* is repeatedly used in the *Odyssey* (18.85-7, 21.299-301, 22.474-77), and literary sources from the fifth century BC to Imperial times use the term *άκρωτηριάζειν* to refer to cutting off the extremities (Demosthenes 18.296), including mutilating corpses after death (Diodorus Siculus 34/35.14.1) or disfiguring those still alive (Diodorus Siculus 4.10.3).³⁴⁴ Ceulemans and Dunn demonstrate that the accounts in the scholia

³³⁹ Fraenkel (1950). Garvie (1986) *ad loc.* Lloyd-Jones (1979) *ad loc.* Davies (1987). Further references to Garvie (1986) will be *ad loc.* unless otherwise stated.

³⁴⁰ Zeitlin (1990: 73) compares this with Loraux (1987: 12) who views Ajax's suicide as a warrior's death because he died at the hands of a man by the sword and with blood spilled.

³⁴¹ Garvie (1986) is unsure whether Aeschylus invented it or took it from another source. Cf. Whallon (1980: 133) for the suggestion this was taken from Stesichorus or another source. I argue this was Aeschylus' innovation due to the rarity of the use of the verb; it only occurs in tragedy or the lexicographers, and after this one reference in Aeschylus it only occurs twice in Sophocles, as discussed below.

³⁴² See also *Agamemnon* (1600) for the unbearable fate (*μόρον δ' άφερτον*) called on the house of Pelops.

³⁴³ Dunn (2018: 195-6). The phrase *πλήρη μασχαλισμάτων* also occurs in Sophocles' lost *Troilus* (S. fr.623 TrGF) which Sommerstein (2006: 196-211) suggests refers to the mutilation of Troilus' corpse by Achilles.

³⁴⁴ Dunn (2018: 200-1) and Parker (1984: 138) discuss the secondary meaning of *μασχαλίσματα* in relation to animal sacrifice and the parts of the animal to burn, but cannot resolve how the primary and secondary meanings of the term correspond. Dunn offers the

describing the process of *μασχαλίσματα* (cutting off the extremities and stringing them from the neck and through the arm-pits) derive from Aristophanes of Byzantium (Slater frag.412).³⁴⁵ Dunn rejects Rohde's assertion that Aristophanes' interpretation must have derived from actual knowledge, but does not go as far as Slater, who suggests that Aristophanes resorted to making it up; instead arguing that Aristophanes connected an obscure word with an obscure practice.³⁴⁶

Despite the lack of independent evidence on this process of mutilation, I am not convinced that we should reject Aristophanes' description of *μασχαλίσματα* which includes 'arm-pitting'. Dunn's argument that the practice is incompatible with the dramatic context is not persuasive; the speaker will arouse anger and desire for revenge from the mutilation, whether or not this included stringing the extremities under the arm-pits, and the mutilation of the extremities could prevent the victim's spirit in assisting the revenge with or without the 'arm-pitting'. Furthermore, Dunn uses the argument of appeasement to undermine the idea that this practice strengthens the appeal for revenge. This overlooks the credible argument of Ceulemans that the motive of averting the revenge of the murdered victim was based on Aristophanes of Byzantium (frag.412 Slater); whereas the appeasement motive is linked to the scholia to Apollonius' *Argonautica* (4.477-9).³⁴⁷

I interpret this process as an attempt to avoid vengeance for Agamemnon's murder.³⁴⁸ Therefore Aeschylus' introduction of *μασχαλίσματα* highlights the atrocity of the murder and contributes to the

plausible conjecture that *μασχαλίσματα* as a ritual term for pieces cut from the victim may have given rise to *μασχαλίζειν* in tragedy to describe cutting off extremities.

³⁴⁵ Ceulemans (2007: 100-104). Dunn (2018: 201-3).

³⁴⁶ Dunn (2018: 203-7). Rohde (1925: 582-6). Slater (1986: 162). Dunn (2018: 205) and Garvie (1986) reject the outdated view of Wilamowitz (1925: 201) that the practice involved tearing the arm from the armpit.

³⁴⁷ Wendel (1974: 286-7). Ceulemans (2007: 97-112). See Section 4.9. for Jason and Medea's mutilation of her brother Apsyrtus after his murder, and further discussion of Ceulemans' argument that a motive of averting revenge is more likely in the *Argonautica* passage.

³⁴⁸ Parker (1983: 107-8) describes the wiping off or spitting out of the victim's blood as self-protective devices of the murderers, due to the co-extensiveness of pollution and the victim's anger, and that mutilation seeks to incapacitate the victim for revenge, citing Apollonius' *Argonautica* (4.699-717, 4.477-9). Garvie (1986) and Sommerstein (2008) view this process as a way to disable the ghost from pursuit and vengeance.

theme of vengeance in the trilogy and the acknowledgement of the possible consequences for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.³⁴⁹

Aeschylus continues the monstrous imagery which began in *Agamemnon* to characterise Clytemnestra in *Choephoroi*.³⁵⁰ Prior to her entrance, the Chorus recite a series of monstrous women (585-638) including: Althaea (602-12), the mother who kills her son, in vengeance for the death of her brothers; Scylla (613-22), the daughter who kills her father by yielding to persuasion;³⁵¹ and the Lemnian women (631-8), who killed their husbands.

Later interpretations of the Lemnian women confirm the murder was out of jealousy from their husbands rejecting them and sleeping with other women. Gantz summarises the lack of surviving tragic interpretations of the Lemnian women (Aeschylus' *Lemniai*, Sophocles' *Lemniai*, Euripides' *Hypsipyle*).³⁵² In Aeschylus' *Hypsipyle*, the women refuse to let the crew land until they have promised themselves in sexual union (Radt 352). The *Iliad* refers to a son born of Jason and Hypsipyle (7.467-71) and Pindar refers to the Lemnian women as 'man-slaying' (*γυναικῶν ἀνδροφόνων* 4.251-4) and the Argonauts compete in athletic contests and then lie with them. Herodotus (6.138.4) mentions the murder of all the men on the island.

Little else survives on the murder of their husbands until Apollonius' *Argonautica* (1.609-26): Aphrodite punishes the lack of honour she has received from the Lemnian women by making their husbands reject them and prefer their Thracian captives, so they kill their husbands and the women they were sleeping with out of insatiable jealousy (*ζήλοιο... ἀκόρητοι* 1.616). They kill all the other men as well, except Hypsipyle's father, to avoid any retribution (*ἀμοιβήν* 1.619) for the murders. Apollodorus tells a similar story (*Library* 1.9.17) with the addition that Aphrodite's punishment for her lack of honour was to make the Lemnian women smell so their husbands rejected

³⁴⁹ Garvie (1986) rejects the view that Agamemnon is powerless to avenge, and concludes that the detail is added here to aggravate Orestes.

³⁵⁰ See Section 3.7.6. for Clytemnestra's comparison to Scylla in *Agamemnon*. See Zeitlin (1978: 164-5) on the metaphors of female monstrosity for Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*, and the Erinyes entering the stage as visible embodiments of these allusions.

³⁵¹ Garvie (1986) suggests that the motif of Scylla betraying her father because she fell in love with Minos could be post-Aeschylean (see Ovid *Metamorphoses* 8.6-151) therefore this should be interpreted as a bribe. See Buxton (1982: 36) on golden necklaces as instruments of erotic enticement.

³⁵² Gantz (1993: 345-7).

them. I suggest the motive of jealousy at their husbands' rejection could have been known in tragic interpretations, and therefore alluded to in this ode.

The Chorus conclude their catalogue with Clytemnestra (623-30) for her hateful union with Aegisthus and for plotting against her husband.³⁵³ I suggest that these three mythical examples of other females that destroy males within the household demonstrate the danger of feminine passion through: vengeance; persuasion; and jealousy. These three themes relate to Clytemnestra's motives in *Agamemnon* (vengeance for Iphigeneia and Atreus; jealousy of Cassandra) with the addition of persuasion, which could represent her adultery with Aegisthus. Aeschylus introducing this theme of adultery as a perceived motive for the murder makes Clytemnestra less sympathetic in this play and weakens her justification for murder.³⁵⁴ This motive is not cited by Clytemnestra herself; the allusions from the Chorus and criticism from Orestes (894-5, 905-7, 976) are reframing the crime in the context of adultery, as the opposition might do in a legal trial.

Zeitlin suggests that this ode places Clytemnestra's offence within the larger frame of the rule of women, where female aims to annihilate male, that this completes the misogynistic progression by moving from individual transgression to a collective menace that wipes out an entire race.³⁵⁵ However I argue that the focus here is less on women who rule and more on the dangerous passions which motivate them to harm the male. Garvie argues that Aeschylus is thinking beyond sexual passion (*παντόλμους ἔρωτας* 596-7), and suggests a number of appropriate interpretations of *θηλυκρατῆς ἀπέρωπος ἔρωσ παρανικᾶ* (600): love which conquers women / female love which conquers (men / marriages) / gives women power / love which lets women conquer.³⁵⁶ I suggest the emphasis is on the danger of passion to conquer the female, and in so doing to conquer the male, as demonstrated by the mythical examples in the ode on monstrous women.

³⁵³ I follow the order proposed by Sommerstein (2008) which culminates with Clytemnestra as the most abhorrent of these murderous women, rather than Garvie (1986) who argues there is progressive intensification to the mythical allusions but tentatively situates Clytemnestra between Scylla and the Lemnian Women.

³⁵⁴ I disagree with Garvie (1986: 207) that Clytemnestra's love for Aegisthus was one of her motives; she never cites it as such and *φίλτατ' Αἰγίσθου* 893 demonstrates only the adulterous relationship.

³⁵⁵ Zeitlin (1996: 93).

³⁵⁶ Garvie (1986).

Clytemnestra is then later compared to nature's horrors: the Gorgon Medusa (*Γοργοῦς*) who was killed by Perseus (831-6); and to a snake or viper (*ἐχίδνα*) who killed Agamemnon in her coils (248-9) and would make a man rot just from her touch (994-6).³⁵⁷ Sommerstein makes the pertinent note that the viper is described as killing the male during copulation, biting through his neck, and is then avenged by her young who eat their way through her womb (Herodotus 3.109). Sommerstein links this to Orestes' identification with the snake in Clytemnestra's dream (527-33, 542-50, 928).³⁵⁸ However, I would go further and suggest that Aeschylus' imagery of the decapitating female viper draws on earlier mythic interpretations of Clytemnestra killing Agamemnon with an axe to his head, as depicted in artistic evidence (Section 3.2.2.),³⁵⁹ and links the murder to sex and the theme of sexual passion.

Aeschylus then uses the snake imagery to describe both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as a pair of serpents (*δουῖν δρακόντων* 1047), and describes Clytemnestra's Erinyes as Gorgons (*Γοργόνων* 1048) wreathed with serpents (*δράκουσιν* 1050).³⁶⁰ I argue that Aeschylus is linking snake imagery to sexual passion and adultery. He is also preparing the audience for the later association in *Eumenides* between Clytemnestra's monstrous feminine qualities and the Erinyes as her feminine avengers who administer the vengeance for her death.

3.8.2. Murder of Agamemnon: motives

In *Choephoroi*, Aeschylus does not focus on Clytemnestra's three motives for murdering her husband as overtly as in *Agamemnon*. This elicits more sympathy for Orestes in avenging his father. Significantly, when confronted by Orestes (893-930), Clytemnestra does not mention the death of Iphigeneia as a justification for the murder of Agamemnon. However

³⁵⁷ Burnett (1998: 109-10). I follow Sommerstein (2008) rather than Burnett (1998) in interpreting 248-9 as the snake attacking Agamemnon rather than her children.

³⁵⁸ Sommerstein (2008), following Garvie (1986), who also connects the image of the coils of the snake (248-9) to the net-like robe in which Agamemnon was enfolded (*Agamemnon* 1115f., 1382 / *Choephoroi* 992, 999f.). Compare also Euripides' *Medea* (480-1) for the sinuous coils of the dragon that watched over the golden fleece.

³⁵⁹ The use of the axe in killing Agamemnon is picked up in later interpretations: Sophocles (Section 3.10.1.); Euripides (3.11.1, 3.12.1.); and Seneca (3.13.3.). Aeschylus uses the image of snake to describe Orestes when he is about to kill his mother in *Choephoroi* (*ὄφιν* 928).

³⁶⁰ See Prag (1985: 11) for the images of Erinyes with snakes around their arms (31a,b,c 32a).

Aeschylus hints at the slaughter of Iphigeneia early in the play; Electra mentions her slaughtered sister (238-2) when she recounts the family members she has lost and whom Orestes now represents. Electra's pity for the death of her sister acts as an implicit reminder of one motive for Clytemnestra killing Agamemnon.

Aeschylus may have chosen not to articulate this motive explicitly in *Choephoroi* to avoid further complicating the dilemma for Orestes who could be perceived as having responsibility for avenging his sister as her male relative, and would contradict the condemnation of Clytemnestra's crime.³⁶¹ However in the same speech Electra describes her hatred for her mother (240-1), showing no acknowledgment that her mother avenged the death of her sister. This demonstrates that the cycle of retaliatory violence within the family unit never satisfies but only creates further need for vengeance.

The motive connected to the history of bloodshed in the house of Atreus is however alluded to throughout the *Choephoroi* (466, 577-8, 646-52, 744-6, 803-6, 841-3, 931-3). Indeed the Chorus (1065-74) conclude the play by summarising the three generations of familial violence that have afflicted the royal house; the first involving the devouring of children (*παιδοβόροι*) (Thyestes); the second a king slain in the bath (Agamemnon); and the third involving a potential saviour (Orestes).³⁶²

Aeschylus introduces adultery as an alleged motive for the murder of Agamemnon, and in so doing also alludes to Cassandra as one of Clytemnestra's motives. Orestes taunts his mother about her relationship with Aegisthus and her preference for him over his father (894-5, 905-7, 976). The adultery is framed as a criticism not only of the betrayal of her husband but of her son Orestes who was 'sold' (*ἐπράθη*) in return for her relationship with Aegisthus (915-17). Clytemnestra's defence of her adultery is to condemn Agamemnon's own sexual 'follies' (*μάταις* 918), thereby hinting at

³⁶¹ Zeitlin (1965: 490-1) questions the inconsistency as to why Clytemnestra does not raise Iphigeneia as a justification in the *Choephoroi*, as would be appropriate in her plea to Orestes, as she does in the *Agamemnon*. March (1987: 83) suggests instead that in the *Agamemnon* Clytemnestra must be seen as right, whereas in the *Choephoroi* Orestes must be seen as right, and this justification is demonstrated in the *Eumenides* by the equal number of votes on each side, where only with divine intervention can a resolution be reached.

³⁶² Garvie (1986) notes the importance of the number three in the trilogy and Sommerstein (2008) refers back to the third libation of Zeus. See Section 3.7.1.

his relationship with Cassandra and other women in Troy. Garvie rightly notes that this one reference to Agamemnon's guilt in the play uses a less powerful argument than that of Iphigeneia, and would have been unlikely to win sympathy from fifth century Athenian attitudes, as implied by Orestes' response (919).³⁶³

On the theme of accomplices, Clytemnestra argues that Moira shared responsibility (*παραιτία* 910) for Agamemnon's murder, which develops the concept of external forces as quasi-legal 'accomplices' to murder.³⁶⁴ I disagree with Zeitlin's interpretation of Clytemnestra's motives in the *Agamemnon*.³⁶⁵ However I agree that the crimes of the males of the house (Thyestes, Atreus, Agamemnon) have progressively less significance in the trilogy. In the *Choephoroi*, the adulterous wife is now equated with the hostile mother.

3.8.3. Murder of Clytemnestra: method

The *lex talionis* is played out in Orestes' deception of his mother in order to murder her, just as his mother deceived his father in order to murder him. The deceit of Orestes and Pylades, who are welcomed as guests by Clytemnestra in *Choephoroi* (674-90), inverts the deceit of Clytemnestra who welcomes Agamemnon (*Agamemnon* 855-913). Clytemnestra exerts control but also proclaims her transgressions through her language; offering hot baths, alluding to Agamemnon's slaughter, offering bedding, and alluding to her adultery (668-71). Clytemnestra ultimately recognizes the *talio* at work in the reciprocal exchange of deceit: she and Aegisthus will die by deception (*dolos*) just as they killed through deception (888). It is now Orestes, not Clytemnestra, who uses sacrificial vocabulary of his act of slaying his mother (*σφάξαι* 904).³⁶⁶ Goldhill rightly notes the paradoxical reversal in Orestes righting the social disorder of Clytemnestra's regicide in the same

³⁶³ Garvie (1986). See also Dover (1974: 101) and Gould (1980: 38-59).

³⁶⁴ See Section 3.7.2. on this theme in *Agamemnon* (1501) and also *Iliad* (19.86-7). I disagree with Foley (2001: 231) who suggests this is only an oblique reference Clytemnestra's earlier argument in the Alastor passage; I argue this theme becomes more pervasive throughout the trilogy (discussed in Section 3.7.3.).

³⁶⁵ Zeitlin (1996: 94-5) suggests two motives: maternal vengeance was primary; and sexual alliance with Aegisthus secondary.

³⁶⁶ Foley (2001: 230). Garvie (1986).

transgressive manner; Clytemnestra won control and will lose it through the deceptive power of language.³⁶⁷

Aeschylus innovates Pylades' role in the matricide by making him pivotal when Orestes faces the dilemma of murdering his mother in order to avenge and honour his father. When Orestes confronts Clytemnestra to kill her, she bares the breast that nourished him (896-8) and his resolve wavers. He turns to his friend Pylades for guidance (899), whose decisive (and only) line reminds him of the oracle of Loxias and advises that he should fear the gods more than men (901-2).³⁶⁸ Orestes judges Pylades the winner (*κρίνω σὲ νικᾶν* 903), a response reminiscent of a jury, and is encouraged to continue (903-30). Pylades is representing Apollo in the role of the accomplice; after this scene he disappears, and Apollo takes over this part in the *Eumenides*.

Aeschylus hints at the action to follow in *Eumenides* when Clytemnestra warns Orestes of a parent's curse (*ενεθλίους ἀράς* 912) and her wrathful hounds (*ἐγκότους κύνας* 924, 1053-4) that will haunt him.³⁶⁹ Clytemnestra repeatedly addresses him as her child (896, 912, 920, 922), reinforcing her role as his mother and therefore intensifying his conflict.³⁷⁰ This is the central problem that Aeschylus addresses in the trilogy and in this central play; the conflict of revenge and the cycle of familial violence that ensues when the killer is a member of the victim's kin. Aeschylus is demonstrating the cost of the archaic system of reciprocal violence and the dangers of self-help through retaliation compared to the importance of the system of justice through the homicide courts.

³⁶⁷ Goldhill (1986: 14-15). Zeitlin (1990: 81) notes that whereas deceit and intrigue are condemned in women but seen as natural to female nature (*Medea* 834-5), if the male resorts to *dolos* and trickery it undermines his masculine integrity.

³⁶⁸ Taplin (1978: 105-6) comprehensively analyses the decisive and dramatic intervention of Pylades; it is not his silence but the breaking of that silence which gives his dramatic point.

³⁶⁹ Garvie (1986) notes this is the first reference to Clytemnestra's Erinyes in the play. The Erinyes are repeatedly conceived of as dogs (*Agamemnon* 135, *Eumenides* 132, 231, 246, Sophocles' *Electra* 1388, Euripides' *Electra* 1252, 1342, *Orestes* 260). Cf. *Choephoroi* 447 where Electra is described as a dog.

³⁷⁰ Zeitlin (1990: 81) suggests that Orestes succeeds in avenging his father and murdering his mother because he has joined forces with his sister, Electra. Only after his exchange with Electra and the female Chorus is he psychologically equipped to interpret the dream and enter the feminine domain of the house.

3.8.4. Murder of Clytemnestra: motives

There is a visual parallel between Orestes, who comes out of the palace and triumphantly displays the bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (973-4), and Clytemnestra, who did the same with Agamemnon and Cassandra's bodies in *Agamemnon* (1372-1400).³⁷¹ After killing Clytemnestra, *dikê* is repeated three times (987-90) in Orestes' justification of murdering Aegisthus and his mother, the polluted murderer of his father (*πατροκτόνον μίαισμα* 1028), and he asserts the matricide was not without *dikê* (*οὐκ ἄνευ δίκης* 1026-7).³⁷² Orestes' claim to have *dikê* implies a network of meanings and implications which also suggest the legal implications of murder and the possibility of his own punishment and the lawcourt to come.³⁷³

Aeschylus depicts three motives for Orestes to kill his mother, which parallel Clytemnestra's three motives for killing Agamemnon.³⁷⁴ In no order of priority: the first is Apollo and his oracle (299-300, 1026-33, 269-77); the second is the murder of his father (300, 974, 977-9); and the third is the loss of his inheritance and usurpation of his throne (275, 301,³⁷⁵ 479-80, 913-17, 973-4). Electra also cites inheritance as a motive for the murders; she is a slave and Orestes is in exile and deprived of his property (*ἐκ δὲ χρημάτων φεύγων Ὀρέστης ἐστίν*) while Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are spending their wealth (135-7).

Lesky argues instead for the double aspect of human action in Aeschylus' interpretation; Orestes kills his mother in obedience to Apollo, and for his father, under the coercion of necessity but then desires the deed. Garvie also suggests the double nature of Orestes' motivation: the god's orders, and his personal motivations converging in a single motivation.³⁷⁶ I

³⁷¹ Taplin (1977: 48). Garvie (1986).

³⁷² McHardy (2008: 11) notes Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1401a38-b1) who mentions that it is considered just that a woman who has killed her husband should be put to death, and for a son to avenge his father, although when the two principles are put together then perhaps the act ceases to be just.

³⁷³ Goldhill (1986: 47).

³⁷⁴ Lesky (1966). See Dover (1974: 225) on Orestes having a multiplicity of motives.

³⁷⁵ Sommerstein (2008) rejects Garvie (1986) in interpreting lines 302-4 as being linked to 301. I am not convinced by the suggestion that liberating the city follows on from Orestes' motive on his loss of inheritance. I interpret the citizens being mentioned at 302-4 in the context of insulting Aegisthus as a feminine ruler (*δουρὶν γυναικοῦν*). Garvie notes that Orestes' materialistic motivation is paralleled at 275-7.

³⁷⁶ Lesky (1966). Garvie (1986: 120).

argue that his personal motivations (his father's murder, and usurpation of inheritance) need to be distinguished as two separate motives in addition to the god's orders.

Orestes also defends the murder of both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus with an additional motive of adultery (976), justifying that Aegisthus has received the due punishment of an adulterer in accordance with the law (*ἔχει γὰρ αἰσχυντήρος, ὡς νόμος, δίκην* 989-90).³⁷⁷ In Athenian law an adulterer could be killed by the husband or son if caught in the act (Demosthenes 23.53, 55, Lysias 1.25ff.).³⁷⁸ Garvie follows Gagarin in interpreting Aegisthus' adultery as clear to everyone and therefore not requiring being caught in the act.³⁷⁹ McHardy argues that men were less likely to risk their lives taking revenge for homicide or to perpetuate a blood feud based on previous deaths, but to fight over women, property and power. However I am not convinced that Orestes' principal concern is with killing the usurper Aegisthus and taking control of the throne and family wealth, rather than on his father's death.³⁸⁰

Aeschylus portrays Electra in a strikingly passive role as an accomplice to the murder, in a similar way to Pylades; encouraging Orestes to avenge his father (142-4, 235-45) and in doing so representing the command of Apollo. Orestes takes on the masculine role of representing the slain kin and exacting vengeance on their killer, whilst Electra is absent from the middle of the play and fulfils the feminine role of being silent and staying in the house. Women in classical Athens would need a male representative in court, and surviving male kin were expected to avenge the victim. Orestes and Electra's traditional roles contrast with the relationship of powerful masculine Clytemnestra and weak feminine Aegisthus (304-5).

Apollo's directive to Orestes to avenge his father's death is to slay Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in the same manner (*τρόπον τὸν αὐτόν* 274) as

³⁷⁷ McHardy (2008: 108) interprets Orestes as an avenger protecting the male bloodline in the household by annihilating the adulterer threatening his position by siring new offspring to keep Agamemnon's children from the throne (859-65). She compares Orestes to Odysseus in re-establishing himself and his offspring in a position of power in the paternal household.

³⁷⁸ MacDowell (1978: 114, 124ff.). Garvie (1986). Sommerstein (2008).

³⁷⁹ Gagarin (1976: 189). Garvie (1986).

³⁸⁰ McHardy (2008: 107-19). Cf. *Eumenides* (757-8), Euripides' *Electra* (610-13, 10), *Orestes* (1600-7), Sophocles' *Electra* (67-72).

they slew or suffer tortures from his father's wrath (273-4, 1030-3).³⁸¹ McHardy suggests that Electra focusses more than Orestes on blood revenge and seeing Agamemnon's killers suffer the same fate as his own (345-53, 363-71), and compares Electra to Apollo in only accepting blood.³⁸² I argue that Orestes also focusses on the reciprocal nature of blood revenge (976-9), just as Electra also focuses on wealth and inheritance (135-7).

Aeschylus presents pollution through the image of blood, and demonstrates different views on the ability to cleanse the pollution from murder throughout the play. The Chorus at the start of the play question what expiation can cleanse blood (*αἷματος*) spilt on the ground (46-8). Orestes condemns his mother's libations at his father's grave because she cannot atone for his blood (*αἷματος* 521-1) and asserts that his father's blood (*αἷμα*) will be her doom (*πατρός γὰρ αἷμα τόνδε σούριζει μόρον* 927) and that she is polluted (*μιάσματα* 1017, 1028).

Orestes tells of Loxias' oracle warning the symptoms of pollution if he does not avenge his father. These include: ulcers and disease which attacks the flesh (278-82),³⁸³ Erinyes from his father's blood (*Ἐρινύων ἐκ τῶν πατρῶων αἱμάτων* 283-4);³⁸⁴ madness (*λύσσα*) and night-time terrors (*μάταιος ἐκ νυκτῶν φόβος* 288); being chased from the city (289-90);³⁸⁵ not being permitted to make libations, go to altars or be accepted as a guest (291-4); and being deprived of honours and dying in decay (295-6). These descriptions of the treatment of the polluted outcast, taking no part in communal or religious activity and not being welcome under people's roofs (291-96), mirrors some of the punishments for those who commit homicide (*Eumenides* 655-6, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* 236-41, Antiphon *Tetralogies* 1.1.10, Demosthenes 20.158, Plato *Laws* 868a, 871a).³⁸⁶ Aeschylus is articulating the paradox for

³⁸¹ Cf. *Eumenides* 462-9, Euripides' *Electra* 87-9, Sophocles' *Electra* 32-7.

³⁸² McHardy (2004, 2008: 107-9) argues this is more typical of dramatic and literary portrayals of women in revenge plots where men are willing to compromise following a death whereas women demand blood revenge. She also notes the significance that it is a female chorus in *Choephoroi* who encourage Orestes to act and express that revenge is just in this case and that each murderous stroke should be repaid with like (306-13).

³⁸³ See Parker (1983: 217-18) on skin disease as a product of a polluting act.

³⁸⁴ Dodds (1951: 42) on the power of pollution and blood-guilt being projected as an Erinyes.

³⁸⁵ Sommerstein (2008) suggests that (*χαλκηλάτῳ πλάστιγγι* 290) could allude to the collar used in execution by *apotympanismos*.

³⁸⁶ Garvie (1986). Sommerstein (2008). Parker (1983: 124-5) on the pollution from murder being produced from an unnatural act and the anger of the victim directing itself to expel the

Orestes; introducing the idea that he will suffer this threat of pollution if he does not avenge his slain kin, but alluding to the fact that if he does then he will suffer the same punishment for committing homicide, as depicted at the end of the play and in the *Eumenides*.

The bleak view of the Chorus at the start of the play (46-8) changes to one of hope that a fresh act of justice (*προσφάτοις δίκαις*) can remove the blood (*αἷμα*) of previous deeds (803-6), and that purification that drives out *ate* can banish pollution (*μύσος*) from the hearth (966-8). After the matricide, the Chorus think that the blood (*αἷμά*) on Orestes' hands is what has caused his visions of his mother's Erinyes pursuing him (1055-6) and declare that only Loxias can purify him (*καθαρμός* 1059-60).³⁸⁷ These diverging views on the purification of pollution represent the inherent cycle of violence in avenging kin and the development within the trilogy towards a legal system which removes the need for reciprocal violence.

3.8.5. Justice: light and dark

Aeschylus develops the theme of light and dark throughout the trilogy in relation to justice, life and death. Aeschylus begins the theme in *Agamemnon* by attributing the conflict at Troy to both Zeus and Night (*Νύξ* 355). Throughout the trilogy the Erinyes are associated with darkness (*Agamemnon* 462-3; *Choephoroi* 370, 1048; *Eumenides* 52, 1345), as dwellers of gloom (*Eumenides* 72, 386, 396), residing beneath the earth (*τοὺς γᾶς νέρθεν* 40-1), who are born of Night (321-2).

Justice (*δίκη*) is linked to light and dark (*Choephoroi* 61-5). The image of sunless darkness is used in *Choephoroi* (*ἀνήλιος... δνόφοι* 51-3), to describe the shroud on the house because its rulers have perished, and in *Eumenides* (*δυσάλιον κνέφας* 395-6) to describe the dwelling of the Erinyes. Garvie suggests *δεσποτῶν θανάτοισι* (*Choephoroi* 53) could refer to either the

killer from the community. MacDowell (1963: 23-6) on the proclamation by the victim's kinsmen being supplemented by the *archon basileus* who excluded the killer before the trial.³⁸⁷ Parker (1983: 218) on madness caused by blood on the murderer's hands. Brown (1983: 13-34) on the psychological realism of Aeschylus' presentation of Orestes' madness. Garvie (1986: 318) concludes that Aeschylus is emphasising Orestes' isolation as only he can see the Erinyes. Burnett (1998: 115-117) does not agree with Lebeck (1971a: 107-109) or Goldhill (1984: 99) that Orestes is in some way mad by the end of the play (1021-1062) but interprets Orestes as sane with heightened perception to see his mother's Erinyes.

death of Agamemnon, whose light has been extinguished and brought darkness on the house, or the previous violent deaths in the family.³⁸⁸ Sommerstein similarly offers both Agamemnon and other deaths in the family to refer to the rulers who have perished.³⁸⁹ I argue that the theme of the sun recalls more strongly the previous rulers' disastrous crimes, and Agamemnon as the most current ruler who has perished, and looks ahead to the current rulers who will perish. Just as darkness is linked to destruction and death (320, 413-4, 660-1, 727-8, 809-17); light is linked to life (*Choephoroi* 459, 1037, *Eumenides* 747) before a final reversal of black mother night (*Eumenides* 745).³⁹⁰

Aeschylus' use of this striking imagery may contribute towards the Erinyes' characterisation with darkness in Euripides' *Electra* (1345) and *Orestes* (408). In Sophocles' *Electra* (1493), Aegisthus implies there is dishonour if his murder happens in the dark. By contrast in Euripides' *Orestes* (821-2), the blood-stained sword used to kill Clytemnestra is displayed to the sun in dishonour. Euripides introduces the focus on Thyestes' fatal feast as driving the sun back to reverse its' course in the sky: *Electra* (699-742), *Orestes* (996-1006), *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (189-202, 811-17). Seneca picks up on this theme in his *Agamemnon* (906-9).³⁹¹

The development of reactions to transgression and moving from the destructive punishment of revenge to the institution of the law-court is essential to the *Oresteia*.³⁹² Electra distinguishes between a judge (*δικαστήν*) or an avenger (*δικηφόρον* 120) to respond to the murder of her father. Foley suggests that the relationship between the *Choephoroi* and the decorum of the lawcourt is closer than that of the *Agamemnon*. Although Clytemnestra explicitly views herself as put 'on trial' by the Chorus (*Agamemnon* 1412, 1420-21), Orestes' language is more frequently coloured by legal overtones. He tries to make his case not only by impugning Clytemnestra's character and her adultery, but with visual proof (the bloodstained robe 1010-13) and, like

³⁸⁸ Garvie (1986).

³⁸⁹ Sommerstein (2008).

³⁹⁰ See also Peradotto (1964) on the confusion of night and day and darkness and light.

³⁹¹ See Sections 3.11.1., 3.12.4. and 3.13.4. The imagery of the reversal of nature is also used to depict Medea's actions in Euripides (Section 4.7.) and Ovid (Section 4.10.3.).

³⁹² Goldhill (1986: 22). Kitto (1961).

the litigants in the Areopagus (according to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1354a18), he sticks to the point.³⁹³

Recent scholarship also posits that influence runs in both directions between the theatre of Dionysus and the Athenian courts. I am persuaded by Wohl's argument that Antiphon alludes to tropes and diction borrowed from the tragic (Antiphon 1.2, 3.4, 3.6, 3.11) and appeals to the jurors as experienced theatre-goers, inviting them to read his situation as a tragic plot.³⁹⁴ This tragic notion of blood pollution demands punishment of the responsible agent, and Wohl compares this to the *Choephoroi* (400-2; cf. 312-13). Burnett interprets the *Oresteia* as a great shift from wild, woman-made vengeance to the city's Olympianized revenge, with Orestes as the forerunner of jurors, plaintiffs, and defendants who will frequent Athene's impending establishment.³⁹⁵

3.9. Aeschylus' *Oresteia: Eumenides*

Aeschylus innovates the story in the *Eumenides* from earlier interpretations in many ways. The most important of which is to focus on Clytemnestra as the sole murderer of Agamemnon and on Orestes as the sole murderer of his mother. There is none of the ambiguity of Homeric epic or the *Agamemnon* or *Choephoroi* over the agency of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus or Orestes and Electra. Aegisthus is not a concern for this play. Aeschylus therefore focusses strongly on punishment and justice for matricide. This focus on sole perpetrators means that Electra and Pylades are not pursued by the Erinyes and do not go on trial; the focus will not shift to them until the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides.

In the *Eumenides*, Aeschylus appears to innovate by adding: the command of Zeus through Apollo as a motive for Orestes' revenge; Orestes' persecution by the Erinyes, which develops and makes concrete the abstract concepts of *dikê* and pollution; and the legal setting of the trial and the establishment of the Areopagus.

³⁹³ Foley (2001: 204-5). Cohen (1995: 84) notes that in modern vendetta cultures it is mothers who keep a piece of bloodstained cloth to stimulate their children to enact revenge.

³⁹⁴ Wohl (2010: 33-43).

³⁹⁵ Burnett (1998: 115-117).

3.9.1. Murder of Agamemnon: method

The murder of Agamemnon takes place in the bath with the net, as depicted in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*. The net is clearly foregrounded. Clytemnestra shrouds him in a richly embroidered net (*κατέκτα, ποικίλοις ἀγρεύμασιν κρύψασ’* 460-1),³⁹⁶ in which she covers him and strikes him (*φᾶρος περὲσκήνωσεν, ἐν δ’ ἀτέρμονι κόπτει πεδήσασ’ ἄνδρα δαιδάλω πέπλω* 634-5). The bath is vividly personified to ‘testify’ to Agamemnon’s murder (*ἄ λουτρῶν ἐξεμαρτύρει φόνον* 461).³⁹⁷

To focus on Orestes’ matricide as justified, Aeschylus casts Clytemnestra in the wrong and uses the theme of darkness and light to associate her with darkness, similarly to the Erinyes who are linked to black and darkness.³⁹⁸ He uses the epithet ‘black-hearted’ (*κελαινόφρων* 459) to describe Clytemnestra when she killed Agamemnon.

3.9.2. Murder of Agamemnon: motives

In *Eumenides*, Aeschylus continues the decreasing focus from the *Choephoroi* on what motivated Clytemnestra to kill Agamemnon, in order to lessen the sympathy for her. Instead he focusses on her as the sole murderer of her husband to highlight her violence and betrayal, without an accomplice.

3.9.3. Murder of Clytemnestra: method

Orestes does not deny (*οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι* 463, *οὐκ ἀρνούμεθα* 611) that he killed his mother (*ἔκτεινα τὴν τεκοῦσαν* 463, *ἔκτεινα* 588). He did so with sword in hand by cutting her throat (*ζιφουλκῶ χειρὶ πρὸς δέρην τεμών* 592). Sommerstein suggests that before the murder of his mother, Orestes referred to what he must do in vague terms and referred to the victims in the plural (*Choephoroi* 273, 304, 385, 556-7), until the climactic moment of his decision (*μητέρ’ αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν* 899 *Choephoroi*). Thereafter he calls it by its true name (*Choephoroi*: *ἐνδίκως μόρον τὸν μητρός* 988-9, *κτανεῖν τέ φημι μητέρ’*

³⁹⁶ Sommerstein (1989) suggests *κελαινόφρων* should be understood as ‘evil’ rather than ‘black-hearted’; however he accepts ‘black-hearted’ in his (2008) translation.

³⁹⁷ Cf. *δροίτη περῶντι λουτρὰ* (633).

³⁹⁸ Also discussed in Section 3.8.5.

οὐκ ἄνευ δίκης, 1027; *Eumenides*: μητροκτόνον 281) with a few vague references in the *Eumenides* to his deed (δρᾶσαι γὰρ 611).³⁹⁹

Aeschylus does not focus on the influence or help of Pylades or Electra in Orestes' crime. Orestes is depicted as the sole murderer without an accomplice, just as Clytemnestra is the sole murderer of Agamemnon. Aeschylus focusses on the act of murder rather than the planning, which was a focus in *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*. Now that the punishment for and justice of their crimes are being considered, only one murderer is acknowledged. However the issue of 'accomplices' is acknowledged when the Chorus ask Orestes on whose persuasion (ἐπίσθης) and advice (βουλεύμασιν 593) he killed his mother, to which Orestes replies it was the oracular words of the god (594). I will now discuss Apollo as motive and accomplice to the murder.

3.9.4. Murder of Clytemnestra: motives

Apollo is depicted as both the motive for the matricide and as an accomplice to Orestes, whereas Electra is absent from any responsibility. Apollo freely admits that he persuaded Orestes to kill his mother (καὶ γὰρ κτανεῖν σ' ἔπεισα μητρῶον δέμας 84) and takes responsibility for the murder of his mother (αἰτίαν δ' ἔχω τῆς τοῦδε μητρὸς τοῦ φόνου 579-80).⁴⁰⁰

Aeschylus echoes the legal context of contemporary Athens when Orestes calls Apollo his witness (μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι 594) and asks him to testify (ἤδη σὺ μαρτύρησον 609) and instruct (ἐξήγοῦ 609) whether he killed his mother with justice (δίκη κατέκτανον 610). Orestes asks Apollo to judge the bloodshed and whether he has done it justly (ἀλλ' εἰ δικαίως εἴτε μὴ τῆ σῆ φρενὶ δοκᾶ, τόδ' αἶμα κρῖνον 612-13). Apollo here performs two separate roles familiar from a trial for homicide; he has come to bear witness (καὶ μαρτυρήσων ἦλθον 576) and to act as Orestes' advocate (καὶ ζυνδικήσων αὐτός 579).

³⁹⁹ Sommerstein (1989: 163).

⁴⁰⁰ Sommerstein (1989: 255) discusses the sinister force of persuasion (*peitho*) throughout the trilogy. But at 885 Athene's use of *peitho* is for the well-being of the Athenian people, and therefore by the end of the trilogy *peitho* turns from a curse to a blessing. Buxton (1982) asserts that the resolution of *Eumenides* is not the trial but the *peitho* of Athene (794, 829-30, 885-6) which converts the hard to persuade (384) Erinyes to their new role as guardians of justice within the city.

It is not disputed that Orestes was the sole murderer of Clytemnestra. Instead it is the justification for the murder that is at issue in the *Eumenides*. When the Chorus ask if Apollo gave an oracle for Orestes to kill his mother (*μητροκτονεῖν* 202), Apollo's response shifts the focus from matricide to vengeance. He gave an oracle to Orestes to exact vengeance for what she did to his father (*ἔχρησα ποινὰς τοῦ πατρὸς πέμψαι* 203). However, Apollo tells the court that anything he ordained has also been at the bidding of Zeus (*ὁ μὴ κελεύσαι Ζεὺς* 618) to show this is a strong plea of justification (*δίκαιον* 619). By linking his oracle to the authority of Zeus, Apollo's argument supports Orestes' defence that the murder was justified. By implication this means that if Orestes did not obey the oracle he would be disobeying Zeus, and this puts pressure on the jurors to acquit him otherwise they may be disobeying Zeus.⁴⁰¹

The Chorus accuse Apollo not of being jointly responsible (*οὐ μεταίτιος* 199) but of being solely responsible (*παναίτιος* 200) for defiling the temple. Yet Orestes states that Apollo shares in the responsibility (*μεταίτιος* 465) for his crime because he foretold painful sufferings (*ἄλγη*) if Orestes did not do something to those responsible for the crime (*τοὺς ἐπαιτίους* 467). Apollo's assurance to Orestes that he will not betray him (*οὐτοὶ προδώσω* 64), will be his guardian (*φύλαξ* 64), will not be soft to his enemies (65-6), and will protect him as his suppliant (*ἐγὼ δ' ἀρήξω τὸν ἰκέτην τε ῥύσομαι* 232, 576) demonstrate the god's support as both advocate and motive.

Aeschylus uses language of military protection to describe Apollo as Orestes' guardian (64-6) which suggests the possible influence of Stesichorus, where Apollo gave Orestes a bow to defend himself from the Erinyes (fr.181a.14-24). Swift makes the pertinent note that there is a transition from the threat of literal violence (Orestes' bow) in Stesichorus, to the threat of rhetorical violence (Apollo's bow) in *Eumenides* (179-84) and that this represents the replacement of individual violence with formal justice.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹ Sommerstein (1989: 199-200).

⁴⁰² Swift (2015: 129-32).

3.9.5. Justice: Erinyes

In the *Eumenides*, the Erinyes are depicted as having the responsibility to avenge a slain mother. The consequence of Orestes murdering his mother Clytemnestra is that he is plagued and hunted by the Erinyes (46-56, 74-5, 147-8, 175, 225, 231) who drive from their homes those who kill their mothers (210). I will briefly summarise some of the earlier interpretations of the purpose of the Erinyes in ancient Greek culture.

In Homeric epic, the Erinyes are variously interpreted as protectors of justice in the universal order. Dodds argues that in all Homeric instances except one (*Odyssey* 11.279ff) the Erinyes support the claims of living persons, they never punish murder, and gods as well as men have Erinyes (Hera *Iliad* 21.412; Penelope *Odyssey* 2.135).⁴⁰³ Gantz argues that Homeric references to Erinyes seem to relate to offences between family members: *Iliad* 9.453-6 (son taking father's concubine); 9.571-2 (Althaia's son Meleagros kills her brothers); 15.204 (Erinyes support the elder brother); 21.412-4 (Ares abandoning his mother's side); *Odyssey* 2.134-6 (curses of Penelope if Telemachus expels her from the house); 11.279-80 (Epikaste's Erinyes working against her son Oedipus).⁴⁰⁴ Gagarin and Leão agree that the Erinyes of Oedipus' mother Epikaste after her suicide are a result of incest, not parricide (*ὄσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν Odyssey* 11.280).⁴⁰⁵

However, there are examples which do not fit into these categories: *Iliad* 19.259-60 (punishing those who have sworn false oaths); 19.86-7 (Agamemnon blames Zeus, Moira and Erinys for the *ate* that caused him to take Achilles' war-prize); 19.418 (they silence the horse Xanthus who violates the order of things by speaking). Lloyd-Jones adds that even beggars have their own gods and Erinyes (*Odyssey* 17.475).⁴⁰⁶ I conclude that the Erinyes in Homeric epic focus on the breakdown of family bonds and violations of order.

Therefore classical Athenian interpretations of the Erinyes evolve to focus on the murder of kin, specifically matricide. Winnington-Ingram suggests that Aeschylus imposes clarity of form and conception upon the

⁴⁰³ Dodds (1951: 1-21).

⁴⁰⁴ Gantz (1993: 13-15).

⁴⁰⁵ Gagarin (1981: 7) and Leão (2010).

⁴⁰⁶ Lloyd-Jones (1971: 30, 76).

Erinyes.⁴⁰⁷ Lloyd-Jones concludes that Aeschylus' Erinyes insist on the value of the punitive element in the government both of the universe and the Athenian state.⁴⁰⁸ Parker states that it is significant that the Erinyes do not pursue Oedipus (Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*) because they take account of his unwilling murder of his father, yet Oedipus is still polluted, like Herakles (Euripides' *Herakles*) who kills his children, because he has violated the family order.⁴⁰⁹ I suggest intention and victim differentiate Orestes from Oedipus and Herakles, who kill their kin unintentionally, and do not commit matricide. The tragic Athenian interpretations of the Erinyes also ignore female intentional homicide of kin, such as Medea's murder of her children (Euripides' *Medea*). But, most significantly, they also ignore Electra's part in the intentional matricide.

Aeschylus introduces the ghost of Clytemnestra at the start of the play, who rebukes the Erinyes for not being wrathful on her behalf, despite having been killed by matricidal hands (94-102). The use of the ghost is developed from Homeric epic where the ghost of Agamemnon warns Odysseus of the danger of returning to his wife, as he did to Clytemnestra.⁴¹⁰ Aeschylus ironically innovates the use of the ghost here by having the subject of the Homeric ghost's warning now become the ghost herself and call her avengers to action.

Orestes claims he killed his mother when he returned home from exile to avenge his beloved father (*ἀντικτόνοις ποινῶσι φιλάτου πατρός* 462-464) because she was stained with a double pollution (*δυοῖν γὰρ εἶχε προσβολὰς μiasμάτων* 600) from murdering her husband and his father (*ἀνδροκτονοῦσα πατέρ' ἐμὸν κατέκτανεν* 602). Yet the Erinyes explain why they did not pursue Clytemnestra as a woman who killed her husband, because she did not shed kin blood (211-12). Aeschylus therefore sets out at the start of this play that the vengeance the Erinyes pursue is for those slain by their kin. By contrast, Apollo argues that *dikê* protects the marriage between a man and a woman

⁴⁰⁷ Winnington-Ingram (1980: 207).

⁴⁰⁸ Lloyd-Jones (1971: 92-4) interprets *Eumenides* (517-25) as the Erinyes praising a mean between anarchy and despotism.

⁴⁰⁹ Parker (1983: 107-11).

⁴¹⁰ See Section 3.2.2. The use of the ghost is also picked up at the start of Seneca's *Agamemnon* with the ghost of Thyestes – Section 3.13.4.

and suggests that the Erinyes cannot pursue Orestes if they do not also punish those others who kill each other (217-24).

Aeschylus uses the theme of blood to emphasise throughout the play that Orestes' crime of killing a parent is worse than Clytemnestra's crime of killing a husband, because a child shares the same blood as their parent (653-4). Spilling that blood incurs the wrath of the Erinyes in a way that killing a spouse does not.

Blood is the central metaphor for Orestes' pollution and pursuit by the Erinyes, and is integral to the idea of justice and purification. Orestes is said to be polluted (40-2, 166-7, 169-70, 176-7, 280-3, 445-6, 451-2, 473-4). Blood is dripping from his hands (41-2, 204, 280, 316-17, 357), having spilt his mother's blood (653-4, 261-2), and the Erinyes are tracking him from the trail of dripping of blood (244-7). The Chorus say that a mother's blood is making them pursue Orestes (230-1); they want to drain his blood (183-4, 301-2, 359) and describe themselves as dripping in blood (365-6). The Erinyes describe themselves as avengers of blood upon the killer (319-20) and warn that Orestes must give his blood in return for his mother's blood which he spilt on the ground, and they will send him below (to Hades) so that he may suffer the penalty of matricide (264-8).

Aeschylus depicts that a sacrifice can be carried out which will rid a murderer of the pollution they carry after a murder. Orestes claims that he does not come with unclean hands (237, 445-6) and that the blood on his hands is fading and the pollution washed out because it was expelled at Apollo's hearth by the sacrifice of a young pig (280-3). He reinforces this with the assertion that people who have come close to him have not been harmed (284-6). Orestes claims that the law states that a man who has committed homicide must not speak until the blood has been sprinkled on him from a suckling pig from someone who can cleanse the blood pollution (447-50).⁴¹¹ Apollo confirms that he purified Orestes from the taint of homicide (578).

⁴¹¹ Delcourt (1959: 97) suggests the blood of a pig is used in rites of purification due to its association with female genitalia. The pig was held over the head of the subject who sits like a new-born under the organ that gave him birth. Zeitlin (1996: 104) cites Varro (*De Re Rustica* 2.4) that the same treatment was applied to homicides and those who had been mad.

Aeschylus' interpretation is therefore contradictory in that he presents Orestes as purified from the blood he has spilt, yet still pursued by the Erinyes. I suggest that this reflects the ambiguities in the surviving evidence of Athenian law regarding the cognisance of pollution in the legal treatment of homicide. There is dual purpose to Aeschylus' interpretation. Orestes' pollution and purification demonstrate the restrictions a matricide might face in his interactions with society and his relationship to the human and divine world. Whereas the Erinyes' pursuit of him represents the need for vengeance and justice for the victim. Aeschylus addresses this through the legal setting of the trial.

3.9.6. Justice: trial of Orestes

Aeschylus innovates the establishment of the Areopagus.⁴¹² Other sources have the first murder trial at the Areopagus as Ares being tried for the murder of Halirrothius (Euripides' *Electra* 1258-62, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 945-6, Demosthenes 23.66, Apollodorus' *Library* 3.14.12). Aeschylus depicts Athene establishing the court on the Areopagus in Athens with the first trial of bloodshed (681-695). This aetiology glorifies the council of judges on this hill in keeping the city safe and promoting fear in citizens to respect justice (696-708). Aeschylus further develops the metaphorical legal language introduced in the *Agamemnon* to literal legal language and setting through staging a trial.

Aeschylus depicts that punishment for murdering a parent, presumably in the absence of any trial or law court to deal with homicide, would include exclusion from public altars and the phratry (655-6) and exile (754-64). Orestes claims that the outcome of the trial will result in either death by the noose (ἀγχόνης 747) or life, represented by the theme of light (φάος).⁴¹³ I am not convinced by Sommerstein who suggests that Orestes envisages suicide here because hanging was not a form of capital punishment.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹² Sommerstein (2008: 12).

⁴¹³ This follows the Chorus' appeal to black mother night (Νύξ, μέλαινα μήτηρ 745), which recalls Orestes description of his mother at 459 – Section 3.9.1. See Zeitlin (1965: 498) and Lebeck (1971a: 132-33) on the reversal in the trilogy's last reference to Nyx and the resolution of imagery in the final scene of *Eumenides*.

⁴¹⁴ Sommerstein (2008). Loraux (1987: 8) discusses how suicide by hanging was often seen as a feminine way to die.

Among the various interpretations of the trial, I follow the theme of the conflict of masculine and feminine explored by Goldhill and Zeitlin.⁴¹⁵ Goldhill outlines the oppositions of the trial in the *Eumenides*: Apollo, Orestes, Zeus, claims of paternity, male control of the house, and Athena on one side; the Erinyes, claims of the mother, and the devaluing of ties of civic authority in favour of ties of blood kinship. Zeitlin argues that the male champions society and progress, and that the female principle moves from being a shrewd, intelligent rebel against the masculine regime in the first play, to being allied with archaic, primitive and regressive ideals in the last play. Social evolution is posed as a movement from female dominance and matriarchy, to male dominance and patriarchy. Hall suggests that the *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides* provide an aetiology not only for the court of the Areopagus but for the Athenians' exclusion of women from the political sphere and for their system of civic and domestic patriarchy.⁴¹⁶

Many scholars maintain that the transition to law is the civilising message of the trilogy. Kitto argues that Athene (*Eumenides* 681-710) echoes the Erinyes' expressions on *dikê* (490-865) to indicate a transcendent role in the advancement of *dikê* to one true justice.⁴¹⁷ Lloyd-Jones rejects Kitto's approach that the *Eumenides* depicts the transformation from vendetta to rule of law as misleading and suggests that the new court of justice is to assist, not to replace, the Erinyes. He interprets Athene's repetition of the Erinyes view of *dikê* as an analogy between the Erinyes and the court of the Areopagus; what the Erinyes, as helpers of justice, are in the universe, the court of the Areopagus is in the Athenian constitution.⁴¹⁸ Goldhill finds this problematic as it underplays the importance of the institutions of law to fifth-century ideology. However he does not follow Kitto's view that the problem of *dikê* is solved, and instead argues that tension continues in the new social order.⁴¹⁹

Kitto's view is that the law of *dikê* is not justice but requital; wrongs must have revenge; 'the doer must pay'. Zeus moves from the violence and

⁴¹⁵ Goldhill (1986: 31). Zeitlin (1996: 98).

⁴¹⁶ Hall (2013).

⁴¹⁷ Kitto (1956).

⁴¹⁸ Lloyd-Jones (1971: 94-5).

⁴¹⁹ Goldhill (1986: 48-51, 52-5). Goldhill goes on to criticise feminist and Marxist readings which repeatedly reject previous readings for their ideological bias, which he suggests shows the critic's own rhetoric is a further act of appropriation of language of *dikê* in the *Oresteia*.

confusion of the Erinyes as his agents to reason and mercy. The triumph of Athene's persuasion is the return to order from chaos. According to this interpretation, the message of the *Oresteia* is therefore a protest against blind rage and violence, despotism and anarchy, and instead appeals to mercy, tolerance and justice.⁴²⁰

Foley argues that the trial of the *Eumenides* subsumes the confusions generated within the domestic environment and shifts the audience's attention to a broader set of public and civic issues.⁴²¹ Like trials in Athens itself, the scenes of judgment in the *Oresteia* are not primarily about who committed an act, or even so much what should be done about the offence, but about the implications of the case for the community, the city, and its leadership.⁴²²

McHardy does not accept the view that the *Oresteia* examines the replacement of blood-revenge in early Greek society with 'justice' through establishing legal procedures.⁴²³ McHardy advocates instead the importance of considering motives for revenge, and argues that men were less likely to risk their lives to take revenge for homicide or perpetuate a blood feud than to fight over women, property or power. She concludes by rejecting the views of scholars that the killings in these myths are representative of vendetta in early Greek society, and instead suggests that it represents autocrats are inclined to kill their own relatives in order to attain and retain power and wealth. She interprets this as a saga of violence between elite rulers over power, rather than about how people responded to homicide prior to the institution of the law-courts.

I agree with the importance of her approach of analysing revenge by motive. However, I argue that female murderers are not interpreted as taking revenge based on their own interests, but on the reciprocal nature of avenging a wrong inflicted upon them. Dramatic Athenian and Roman interpretations often used extreme feminine emotions as a factor influencing the decision to

⁴²⁰ Goldhill (1986: 37-40). Kitto (1961: 67-95).

⁴²¹ Foley (2001: 242). Clytemnestra's defence, and the trilogy as a whole, focus strongly on this aspect of her own and others' crimes and the implications of the crime for the city. See Cohen (1995: 190) on the moral assessment of the quality of both the act and the actor.

⁴²² Foley (2001: 234). Clytemnestra has access to public power in the *Oresteia*, but her power can never be wielded for the benefit of the community, because any autonomous action by a woman threatens the status of its men; women cannot maintain in reality either social or moral independence. See also Dover (1974: 158, 292).

⁴²³ McHardy (2008: 111-12).

take revenge, contrary to McHardy's suggestion that individuals calculate the risk to their interests as a motive.

The protection of female reproductive resources and the continuation of the male bloodline are not motives for Clytemnestra and Electra. Both cite revenge for the murder of a family member as one of their motives. Their actions actually endanger their reproductive resources and the continuation of the bloodline. Clytemnestra and her accomplice threaten to kill her own children, and Electra's obsession with revenge prevents her from marrying and having children.

I find Goldhill more convincing, who argues that the *Oresteia* dramatises a movement from *dikê* as retribution to *dikê* as legal justice, and offers a myth of origin for the institutions of law. The action in the *Eumenides* therefore moves towards the institution of the law-court. Both the archaic justice system and the laws instituted by Drakon are based on the family uniting against the enemy who had killed their kin. Aeschylus' *Oresteia* demonstrates the problems the family faces in delivering justice when the enemy is also a member of their kin, and the danger of the monstrous female capable of inhabiting the masculine role of avenger.

Aeschylus also alludes to political tensions and contemporary events. In 462/1 BC, Athens' policy of alliance with Sparta was reversed and Cimon was ostracised. His opponent Ephialtes opposed Cimon's expedition to help the Spartans. Ephialtes made reforms including reducing the powers of the Council of the Areopagus. Cimon later tried to appeal the reforms of Ephialtes (Plutarch *Cimon* 15). Ephialtes' political reforms were consolidated under Pericles. Ephialtes was murdered, although no one was convicted of his murder.

Sealey discusses the difficulties in the reference in Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution* (25.2) to Ephialtes bringing charges against the Areopagites and depriving the Council of the additional powers.⁴²⁴ If, before Ephialtes' reforms, the council had exercised substantial political power then this would have been seen as a restraint on democracy. Wallace dismisses Sealey's argument and argues that Ephialtes deprived the Areopagus of what

⁴²⁴ Sealey (1964).

must have been considered significant judicial powers which restricted its competence to areas of traditional religious authority.⁴²⁵ The causes for the Athenian constitutional revolution in 462/1 BC revolve around the conflict for political supremacy that developed after 480 BC between radical democratic leaders and the powerful aristocratic Areopagos. Wallace concludes that the Areopagos served at least from the eighth century on as a site for homicide trials and remained chiefly a homicide court until Solon's reforms granted it broader powers, and may have assumed a somewhat greater role early in the fifth century, but Ephialtes' reforms again reduced its powers.⁴²⁶

In the *Eumenides*, Athene warns the citizens of innovative additions to laws which prevent the Areopagos fulfilling its function (690-706). Aeschylus' intent here could be to refer to Ephialtes' reforms as curbing the Areopagos, or that Ephialtes only abolished the added powers the council acquired illegitimately, leaving it with its original role as a homicide court. Aeschylus could have wanted the uncertainty of the interpretation to gain favour with reformers and anti-reformers alike.⁴²⁷ Sommerstein notes that the procedures followed in the trial of Orestes are closer to those of regular courts than the Areopagos. He suggests that Aeschylus was presenting not just the foundation of the Areopagos but the origin of the entire judicial system in Athens.⁴²⁸

Orestes also promises an alliance between Argos and Athens (289-91, 667-73, 762-77) and thinks Athene is in Africa to aid her friends (292-5), highlighting the recent expedition to Egypt which was the first time Athens had sent a force to Africa. Dodds argues against divorcing the political application from the underlying religious and moral ideas in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, noting that Athens at the time had passed through internal revolution and embarked on its greatest foreign adventure.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁵ Wallace (1974: 263).

⁴²⁶ Wallace (1989). See Lanni (2006) on the expertise of the personnel manning the homicide courts in general.

⁴²⁷ Sommerstein (2008: 15-20). Cf. Podlecki (1966) and Wallace (1989).

⁴²⁸ Sommerstein (1989, 2010).

⁴²⁹ Dodds (1960: 45-63). Dover (1957: 236) revives the view that the Pelopidae should be seen as mythological prototypes of the curse of Cylon, and Apollo's purification of Orestes as a prototype of his purification of Alcmaeonids.

3.9.7. Conclusion

Aeschylus innovates many aspects of the family saga in the *Oresteia* from earlier interpretations, particularly the motives, methods, accomplices, and gender roles in Agamemnon's murder. Aeschylus explores motives and accomplices for the murder of Clytemnestra, both human (Pylades) and divine (Apollo / Zeus). He provides an aetiology for the court of the Areopagus, dramatising the evolution of *dikê* as legal justice.

However Electra's role in the matricide is passive. She is therefore not portrayed as being polluted, pursued by the Erinyes, or put on trial like her brother Orestes. I will now investigate how Sophocles and Euripides innovate Electra's role in the saga.

3.10. Sophocles' *Electra*

Electra does not feature in Homeric epic; it is Orestes that avenges Agamemnon's death, and she is not listed amongst his sisters (*Iliad* 9.145-287). She is named in the Hesiodic sixth century BC *Catalogue of Women* (fr.23a.15f MW) but it is Orestes that kills Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. The sixth century BC poet Xanthus (699/700 PMG) relates Electra's name to her unmarried state (*a-lektros*: unbedded).⁴³⁰

Electra is not represented as a murderer until fifth century BC tragedy. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Electra assists her brother, but it is clearly Orestes that commits the murder and is plagued by the Erinyes and stands trial in Athens. Sophocles and Euripides make her a more integral part of the murder of her mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus in their *Electra's* and Euripides' *Orestes*. This evolution in her interpretation makes her an unsettling character as a woman acting in the conventionally masculine role of avenger. Electra becomes even more challenging as a female character willing to take part in the cycle of violence when she has male relatives (Orestes and Menelaus) who could potentially take action and avenge Agamemnon. Yet in Sophocles and Euripides she appears more extreme as a woman who she feels the responsibility to avenge her father herself.

⁴³⁰ Cropp (2013: 21-22). Wheeler (2003: 380). Segal (1981: 464). See also Aelian (4.26) and the scholia Euripides' *Orestes* (22).

I suggest that Sophocles and Euripides portray Electra's alienation not only through her unmarried status but also through her ability to escape the conventional forms of punishment for intentional homicide. This is in contrast to other literary representations of female murderers. She does not kill herself, she does not metamorphosise, and she is not killed by anyone in vengeance for her role in Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' murder. Her isolation as a woman is especially evident in the contradictions that arise when she is portrayed as escaping the punishments her brother faces; she is not pursued by the Erinyes and does not stand trial with Orestes. She is isolated from her male *philoï* before the murder and she is often isolated from the punishments of her male accomplices after the murder.

I will not enter the debate of whether Sophocles or Euripides' *Electra* preceded the other as this continues to be rehearsed by scholars without secure evidence on either side.⁴³¹ For the purposes of my argument I acknowledge the likely closeness in date of both interpretations and note the similarities and differences between their tragedies but focus on how they have each evolved and innovated the interpretation of Clytemnestra and Electra from Aeschylus, Pindar, Stesichorus and Homeric epic.

Sophocles in his *Electra* innovates many aspects of the story from Aeschylus and earlier interpretations, including: Electra saving Orestes as an infant from Clytemnestra; Agamemnon's murder at the hearth / feast; Orestes and Pylades murdering Clytemnestra before Aegisthus; the more aggressive role of Electra encouraging Orestes in the matricide; the absence of the Erinyes; and the reference to the children of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. This is in addition to: reintroducing the axe; reintroducing Chrysothemis as a child of Agamemnon, as well as Iphianassa and Iphigeneia; Iphigeneia's sacrifice being a result of Agamemnon's boast to Artemis over a stag; the agonistic style of debate between Clytemnestra and Electra; and Electra's heroic concerns of her enemies laughing at her.

⁴³¹ I follow Cropp (2013: 25-6) in noting the relationship between Euripides and Sophocles and the lack of clarity on which influenced the other. Lloyd (2005: 31) dates Euripides between 422-17 BC rather than 413 BC and suggests it is likely to precede Sophocles. March (2001: 20-2) dates Sophocles to around 410 BC. For Sophocles before Euripides, see Finglass (2007b: 1-4).

3.10.1. Murder of Agamemnon: method and accomplices

Sophocles continues the association from Stesichorus of the axe as the murder weapon (99), but situates Agamemnon's murder at both a feast (203) and the hearth (269-70). The Chorus refer to the ancient brazen axe with double edge that slew Agamemnon in shameful outrage (*παλαιὰ χαλκόπληκτος ἀμφήκης γένυς, ἅ νιν κατέπεφνεν αἰσχίσταις ἐν αἰκείαις* 484-6). Finglass comments on the memory extended to the axe (*οὐ γάρ ποτ' ἀμναστεῖ* 482-4) due to the awful act it performed and compares this to the lasting potential in the house for violent killing.⁴³² Finglass makes the comparison to the personification of the murder weapon with the Buphonia rite at the Athenian Dipoleia festival where the axe used in sacrifice was put on trial for killing (Pausanias 1.24.4).⁴³³ It is worth noting Apollonius' use of the term *βουτύπος* (*Argonautica* 4.468, 2.90-1) for Jason's role in sacrificing Apsyrtus, which Porter convincingly argues is significant in relation to the Buphonia festival, and recalls Orestes' murder of Aegisthus as a perverted sacrifice in Euripides' *Electra* (839-43).⁴³⁴ I suggest that Sophocles' personification of the weapon which recalls the same rite could therefore have influenced Apollonius in this simile.

This method differs from Homeric epic (*Odyssey* 11.424) and Aeschylus (*Agamemnon* 1529, *Choephoroi* 1010-11) where a sword is used to kill Agamemnon.⁴³⁵ But this recalls Stesichorus and visual representations of the myth, such as the Dokimasia painter (475-465 BC), which depicts Clytemnestra with a double-bladed axe in hand running to the aid of Aegisthus when he is killed by Orestes.⁴³⁶ Sophocles' reference to the double edge could also imply the responsibility of both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in the act, as Electra refers to them in the plural when she laments that her mother and her lover Aegisthus (*μήτηρ δ' ἡμῆ χῶ κοινολεχῆς Αἴγισθος* 97-8) split his head with an axe (*σχίζουσι κάρα φονίῳ πελέκει* 99).

⁴³² Finglass (2007b) *ad loc.* March (2001) *ad loc.* goes further and suggests that the axe desires vengeance for the act. Cf. the personification of Philoctetes bow that pities him (*Philoctetes* 1130-9).

⁴³³ Finglass (2007b). See Burkert (1983: 140).

⁴³⁴ Porter (1990: 266). See Section 4.9.

⁴³⁵ Kells (1973: 68). Denniston (1939: 69) notes that Stesichorus (frag.15) points to an axe.

⁴³⁶ See Section 3.5.

The Chorus describe the blow of the axe on Agamemnon, attributing cunning (*δόλος*) as the teacher and passion (*ἔρος*) as the killer (193-200). This implies that their relationship motivated the crime and cunning was used to trick their victim. By personifying the crime in this way Sophocles emphasises two roles in the murder; a teacher implies that one person was responsible for the idea and the planning of the murder, and the killer was responsible for committing the act. Yet Clytemnestra and Aegisthus suffer the same punishment. Sophocles is acknowledging the legal context where the punishment for planning a murder or committing it with your own hand, although tried at different Athenian homicide courts, could result in the same punishment. Sophocles continues the tradition of ambiguity over the exact roles which Clytemnestra and Aegisthus performed in the death of Agamemnon, and this may hint at the difficulty in proving the difference between the planner and the killer.

Sophocles diverges from Aeschylus' interpretation that Agamemnon was killed in the bath, and returns to the Homeric precedent of being killed at a banquet.⁴³⁷ Electra describes the unspeakable feast (*ὃ δείπνων ἀρρήτων* 203) where her father was dealt death by two hands (*τοῖς ἐμὸς ἴδε πατὴρ θανάτους αἰκεῖς διδύμην χειροῖν* 205-6).⁴³⁸ In *Odyssey* (4.525-37 / 11.409-13) Aegisthus lays an ambush at his own palace and kills Agamemnon and his men at a banquet he has invited him to, with the help of Clytemnestra. Sophocles innovates the interpretation of the banquet by moving it from Aegisthus' palace to Agamemnon's. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are now ruling Mycenae, and the murder is alleged to have happened in the palace at the hearth (269-70), to add further horror to the crime.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁷ Finglass (2007b: 159-60) suggests that the bath becomes the usual account in tragedy as Euripides takes it up (*Electra* 157-8, *Orestes* 367). However I suggest the divergence between the tragic poets on the location of the murder demonstrates the desire to continue to innovate, and that Sophocles even hints at Aeschylus' version of the bath in *Choephoroi* (*λούτρων* 491, 1070-2) to demonstrate his departure from it by reference to *λουτροῖσιν* (445) in place of ceremonial washing. See Seneca *Agamemnon* (875ff.) for death at the feast in Roman interpretations (Section 3.13.3.).

⁴³⁸ Finglass (2007b) *ad loc* suggests that *θανάτους αἰκεῖς* is a poetic plural (also at 779) but could refer to the killing of Agamemnon's followers at the banquet as in the *Odyssey* (11.388, 11.412-13 – Section 3.2.2.). See also Denniston (1939) on Euripides' *Electra* (484 *θανάτου δίκαν*), and Diggle (1994: 156) on the plural in *Choephoroi* (53 *δεσποτῶν θανάτοισι*). All further references to Finglass (2007b) refer to the lines in question unless otherwise stated.

⁴³⁹ Finglass (2007b: 159-60, 180) notes the Homeric resonance (*Odyssey* 3.234) of the hearth, and notes the desecration of locating the murder at such a sacred place. Cf. Euripides' *Medea*

Sophocles depicts Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as being jointly responsible for Agamemnon's murder at various points in the play up until the death of Clytemnestra. Electra asks the gods to grant them suffering in return (209-12), repeatedly referring to those who did the deed in the plural (97-9; *τοιιάδ' ἀνύσαντες ἔργα* 212).⁴⁴⁰ She complains that she has to live with her father's murderers (*εἶτα δώμασιν ἐν τοῖς ἐμαυτῆς τοῖς φονεῦσι τοῦ πατρὸς ζύνειμι* 262-4).⁴⁴¹ Parker suggests that the worst of crimes is the voluntary association with a kinsman's killer, and uses Antiphon (5.11) as evidence that the prosecutor should not share a roof with the kinsman's slayer.⁴⁴² Finglass notes Electra's similar complaints at 358, 587-8, 1188-92.⁴⁴³ Electra insults Aegisthus for being a coward who fights his battles with the aid of women (299-301) referring to Clytemnestra's complicity in the murder with him. Electra repeatedly refers to her father's murderers in the plural (357-8, 1190-2). The Chorus refer to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as the doers and partners in the deed (495-6).

Sophocles emphasises Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' role in the murder of Agamemnon depending on the purpose of the speaker. In the run up to her murder, Clytemnestra is attributed as the murderer of Agamemnon either on her own (123-5, 408, 439-41, 446-7) or jointly with Aegisthus (263-4, 266-70). Aegisthus is only cited as the murderer of Agamemnon, without reference to Clytemnestra, by Electra when she believes Orestes to be dead (951-7), and by Orestes after he has killed Clytemnestra (1495-6). Referring to both of them as murderers emphasises how persecuted Electra is in having to live under rulers who both killed her father. Whereas highlighting Clytemnestra as the murderer alone highlights the complexities within the family and the potential conflict for her children in having to kill their mother to avenge their father.

(1334) and *Troades* (262) for murders at the hearth, and *Agamemnon* (245-7, 1385-7) for the unsettling juxtaposition of libations and murder (discussed in Section 3.7.1.).

⁴⁴⁰ Finglass (2007b) on Electra's association of her own destruction and suffering with that of her father (208, 808 *ad loc*) as a common lamentation for the dead. See also Alexiou (1974: 21-22) on Electra as a literary example of female lamentation.

⁴⁴¹ Sophocles uses the theme of light and dark, similarly to Aeschylus (Section 3.8.6.) when Electra addresses Night (*ὦ νύξ* 209).

⁴⁴² Parker (1983: 122-3).

⁴⁴³ Finglass (2007b).

The disgrace of Aegisthus' actions is demonstrated in the description of him as polluted (*μιάστορι* 275-6), but also on Clytemnestra for the shame of living with the polluted murderer of her husband (272-6). Electra questions how Clytemnestra does not fear any Erinyes (276-9). Sophocles evolves the interpretation of the Erinyes from Homeric epic, where the focus was on the breakdown of family bonds and violations of order, and from Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, where their role was to avenge matricide.⁴⁴⁴

Electra describes the Erinyes as avenging not only those wrongfully killed, but also those who dishonour the marriage bed (*αἶ τοὺς ἀδίκως θνήσκοντας ὀρᾶθ', αἶ τοὺς εὐνάς ὑποκλεπτομένους* 113-16) before calling on their assistance to avenge the death of Agamemnon (115-16). The Chorus also link the Erinyes that will come to the polluting marriage (*μιαιφόνων γάμων* 493-4). This differs from the Aeschylean depiction, where the Erinyes claim not to have pursued Clytemnestra because she did not shed kin blood (*Eumenides* 211-12).⁴⁴⁵ However, the Erinyes do not appear after the matricide in Sophocles' interpretation. This will be discussed further in Section 3.10.6.

Electra goes on to describe how Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon without honour (*θανῶν ἄτιμος* 444), like an enemy (*ὄστε δυσμενῆς* 444), and mutilated his corpse (*ἐμασχάλισθη*) and wiped off the bloodstains on his head by way of ablution (*κάπῃ λουτροῖσιν κάρα κηλῖδας ἐξέμαζεν* 445-6), questioning whether this would absolve her of the murder (446-8). Finglass suggests that wiping the sword on the head is an attempt at expiation of the pollution from the murder, like spitting out the victim's blood (cf. *Argonautica* 4.477-9).⁴⁴⁶ Kells suggests that the ritual of wiping the blood on

⁴⁴⁴ Sophocles' fragmentary *Epigoni* and *Alcmeon* hint at matricide and feature the Erinyes plaguing Alcmeon for the murder of his mother Eriphyle, who betrayed his father. See Kells (1973: 1). Sommerstein (2012: 68–70) places the fragment of the *Epigoni* in the final confrontation between mother (Eriphyle) and son (Alcmeon).

⁴⁴⁵ See Section 3.9.5. for discussion of the Erinyes.

⁴⁴⁶ Finglass (2007b). See Section 4.9. Cf. Aeschylus fr.186aTrGF. Finglass notes the following examples for guilt on the head (*Eumenides* 176-7, Herodotus 1.155.3, Demosthenes 18.290). For further discussion of *ἐμασχάλισθη* see Section 3.8.1. (*Choephoroi* 439). Burkert (1992: 60-1) discusses 'wiping off' as a means of removing pollution in Greek and Mesopotamian ritual, and the fear of an unclean person meant that only after purification was 'contact without damage' possible (*Eumenides* 285).

the head of the victim is to absolve Clytemnestra of the blood guilt and transfer it back to Agamemnon for his original killing of Iphigeneia.⁴⁴⁷

Electra's attribution of blame for Agamemnon's death seems to depend on who she is talking to and what role she will have to play in avenging him. When Electra believes Orestes is alive, she blames Clytemnestra alone or Clytemnestra and Aegisthus for Agamemnon's murder. When Electra thinks she will have to avenge her father herself, it is Aegisthus alone that is the murderer. Sophocles demonstrates her underlying fear at having to spill her mother's blood by focussing on Aegisthus (who is not kin to Electra) when she thinks she will have to kill her father's murderer.

3.10.2. Murder of Agamemnon: motives

In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra's motives for killing Agamemnon were: the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigeneia; her part within the cycle of retribution in the house of Atreus; and the introduction of Cassandra. In Sophocles' *Electra*, Clytemnestra's motive is the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, although there is less focus on the deception in luring Iphigeneia to her sacrifice at Aulis.⁴⁴⁸

Clytemnestra explains to Electra that her father, alone among the Greeks, sacrificed her sister (530-3).⁴⁴⁹ She anticipates her opponent's objections and questions for whose sake he sacrificed her and says that the Argives had no right to kill her who was hers (534-6). Blundell makes the important distinction that in avenging one child, Clytemnestra has alienated at least two others.⁴⁵⁰ Sophocles depicts not only how injured Clytemnestra feels at having her daughter sacrificed, but also how ruthless she is in that she would rather have the children of her sister Helen sacrificed in her daughter's place (539-43).

⁴⁴⁷ Kells (1973: 115). Cf. *Odyssey* (19.92).

⁴⁴⁸ See Section 3.5. for Stesichorus' use of the deception of Iphigeneia and her sacrifice to increase justification for Clytemnestra's motives against Agamemnon.

⁴⁴⁹ Denniston (1939) notes that Clytemnestra claims Iphigeneia is her child more than Agamemnon's in Sophocles (530-6) and Euripides' *Electra* (1020/1045) compared to Orestes and Athene who claim the father is the true parent in *Eumenides* (658) and Euripides' *Orestes* (552).

⁴⁵⁰ Blundell (1989: 164).

Sophocles presents the irony of Clytemnestra and Electra sharing a motive but being incapable of acknowledging it. They both avenge the murder of their blood relatives, and as a result feed the cycle of violence in which one death requires another in compensation.⁴⁵¹ Electra defends her father and explains how he offended Artemis by boasting over the stag he killed in her sacred grove, and in her anger she detained the Greeks until he sacrificed his own daughter in requital (566-74). Electra's accusation that it is Artemis that is guilty (575-6) attempts to make Agamemnon less culpable. Electra's protectiveness of her father ignores any anguish over the death of her sister or her right to vengeance. Electra values her male *philoï* at the expense of her female *philoï*.

Electra provides a counter argument to defend her father if he had hypothetically sacrificed his daughter for his brother Menelaus, and asks according to what law (*ποιῶ νόμῳ*; 577-9) could he be killed. Sophocles is showing adherence to law as an argument which might justify a crime, rather than just appealing to emotional, religious or social norms. However this demonstrates Electra's hypocrisy in not addressing which law she would use as a defence for her own vengeance on her mother.

Sophocles' negative characterisation of Clytemnestra is demonstrated by her interaction with her enemies; Electra, Orestes and the Old Slave. Sophocles presents an *agôn* between Clytemnestra and Electra in which concepts of *dikê* and Clytemnestra's motivations for Agamemnon's murder are debated. He frames this confrontation between mother and daughter to demonstrate the language, technique and oratory of debate like that used in a law-court. Rhetorical questions are used (534-8), with each party putting forward suggestions, using legal language such as 'I will put it to you' (*λέξω δέ σοι* 560), which are rapidly demolished by the opposition.⁴⁵² Sophocles follows Aeschylus in situating the family saga in the contemporary

⁴⁵¹ On their similarities see Kitto (1961: 133-5) and Segal (1981: 261). Blundell (1989: 163, 172) notes that each side's belief in the absolute justice of her cause blinds them both to the endless nature of their dispute.

⁴⁵² Kells (1973: 122-3) on the *agôn* and use of *hypophora* and legal language. Cf. Quintilian (9.2.15). Lloyd (1992: 29) on Sophocles' striking use of *hypophora* at 537-47 and that this device is used so widely in tragedy that it seems to be fully assimilated in the high tragic style. Denniston (1939) notes that Aegisthus' motives for the murder of Agamemnon are ignored in the *agôn* between Clytemnestra and Electra in both Sophocles and Euripides.

Athenian context and acknowledging the framework of homicide courts. Yet Sophocles develops this further by depicting two strong female adversaries, reminiscent of the forceful Erinyes and Athene in *Eumenides*, using oratorical arguments.

Sophocles offers a number of interpretations of *dikê* throughout the play, especially between Electra and Clytemnestra. Orestes, Electra and Chrysothemis all make claims to justice at various points, highlighting the complex and self-defeating nature of using retaliatory violence and personal revenge to try to obtain justice. Orestes claims to come in justice (*δίκη*) to cleanse the house of his fathers, sped on by the gods (69-70). Chrysothemis tells Electra that justice (*δίκαιον*) lies not in what she says but in what Electra judges (338-9), eventually conceding that Electra's suggestion is right (*δίκαιον*) (466).

The Chorus predict that Justice (*Δίκη*) will come, carrying just triumph (*δίκαια*), and shall come after them, i.e. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (475-7). Electra argues with Chrysothemis over whether she should comply with her notion of what is right (*δίκη* 1037). Chrysothemis responds that there are times when being right does one harm (1042). The Chorus advise Electra to persuade Aegisthus so that he may be deceived into rushing into the hidden ordeal that Justice (*δίκας*) has ready for him (1438-41). The Chorus say that Clytemnestra is breathing forth fury (*μένος πνέουσαν*) and not considering whether she has justice (*δίκη*) with her (610-11).

Clytemnestra is accused of ruling unjustly (*πέρα δίκης*) (520-2). She openly admits to killing Agamemnon but defends this by claiming that Justice (*Δίκη*) was his killer and not her alone (526-8). It is interesting that Clytemnestra does not try to attribute blame to Aegisthus as her partner in this crime, but instead personifies *dikê* as her co-conspirator in order to defend her motives. This recalls Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (910), where Clytemnestra claims Moira shares responsibility in the murder, and *Eumenides* where Apollo is an accomplice to Clytemnestra's murder.⁴⁵³ I suggest that Sophocles is utilising the theme from Aeschylus of external forces as quasi-legal accomplices to murder.

⁴⁵³ See Sections 3.8.2. and 3.9.4.

Clytemnestra uses the rhetorical technique of asserting that Iphigeneia would agree with her justification if she were still alive (546-8) and challenges Electra to acquire a just judgement (*γνώμην δικάϊαν* 549-51). Electra accuses her of being compelled by persuasion from an evil man (*ἀλλὰ σ' ἔσπασεν πειθῶ κακοῦ πρὸς ἀνδρός* 560-2). Sophocles builds on the interpretation in the *Odyssey* that Clytemnestra was persuaded and seduced by Aegisthus.⁴⁵⁴

This argument that Clytemnestra's adultery with Aegisthus motivated her to kill her husband is also used in the *Agamemnon*.⁴⁵⁵ Sophocles does not stress Clytemnestra's adultery or jealousy at Cassandra as motives.⁴⁵⁶ However I suggest that he does follow Aeschylus in depicting her opponents reframing the crime in the context of her adultery, as the opposition might do in a legal trial. Electra insults Clytemnestra for sleeping with and having children with the man with whom she killed her father, while she has cast out her own children (585-90). She refers to Aegisthus as Clytemnestra's mate (599-600), and attacks Clytemnestra's argument by questioning whether her adultery with Aegisthus was also for Iphigeneia's sake (591-4).

Sophocles is using the *talio* of a life for a life (580-3) and foreshadowing Clytemnestra's death by having Electra use her own arguments against her. Electra remains incapable of seeing the irony of her argument that, if Agamemnon's murderers are not to pay the penalty by being murdered in turn, it would be the end of reverence (*εὐσέβεια*) for all mortals (245-50).⁴⁵⁷ Electra does not acknowledge her own possible fate in this cycle of murder and vengeance which will follow from taking Clytemnestra's life.. Winnington-Ingram cogently notes that Sophocles brings out the dreadful similarity between mother and daughter, and that violence and extremism are part of Electra's inheritance from her mother.⁴⁵⁸ I would like to take this argument further and suggest that the lack of a nurturing relationship between mother and daughter, in addition to Electra's inherited tendency towards

⁴⁵⁴ See Section 3.2.2.

⁴⁵⁵ See Section 3.8.1.

⁴⁵⁶ Guthrie (1971: 192). Lloyd (1984).

⁴⁵⁷ I follow Kells' interpretation (1973: 97) that *εὐσέβεια* (245) implies not the religious reverence but the order of society, i.e. abiding by law.

⁴⁵⁸ Winnington-Ingram (1980: 246).

violence, is what contributes to Electra's inability to create and have a relationship with her own children.

3.10.3. Murder of Clytemnestra: method

Sophocles makes his Electra a more central part of the matricide than previous interpretations by demonstrating her intent to murder her mother even before Orestes' arrival. Electra hints at Clytemnestra's death from the start (437-8). She shows no conflict over their plan as she recounts how Orestes sent her secret messages that he would come as an avenger for their mother (1154-6). This is not a crime of passion, despite Sophocles' demonstration of her heightened emotions, but one of intentional and long-planned homicide. Sophocles uses Chrysothemis to demonstrate the danger involved with planning a murder (1001-2). This represents the legal context in Athens where punishments for planning a murder were as severe as committing it with your own hand.

Sophocles' Electra becomes more independent when she loses all male *philo*i. At the start of the play she is reliant on Orestes as her method of vengeance. She calls on the gods to send her brother to help her to avenge the murder of her father (110-17) and trample upon his enemies (453-6). She is distraught at the news of Orestes' death as it has taken the only hope she had that he would avenge her and their father (808-12). Sophocles is linking her need for vengeance for her father with her hope for her own salvation. She has a dual purpose in wanting to kill her father's murderers, as they are also her oppressors. Sophocles shows the importance of male relatives in protecting women in the family unit and in pursuing the required vengeance for kin that have been killed, as Electra states that without her brother and father she must be a slave to those she hates most, her father's murderers (813-16).

Electra is reliant on Orestes and awaits his return in order to exact vengeance. She complains that they have discussed their plans to avenge their father through their letters, yet Orestes has not acted on this.⁴⁵⁹ Electra's

⁴⁵⁹ Denniston (1939: 27) notes that Electra and Orestes communicate in Sophocles (170 / 319 / 1155) whereas in Euripides' *Electra* she knows nothing of her brother before his arrival (204-5). This shows a closer bond between the siblings in Sophocles but also their complicity in planning the murder before Orestes' arrival.

frustration at the lack of a male relative to carry out revenge results in her resorting to discuss this with her sister, in the absence of male kin. Sophocles uses Chrysothemis as a contrast to Electra's masculine qualities (997-8). It is only after finding out that her brother is dead and having Chrysothemis reject her plans that Electra commits to avenging Agamemnon single-handed and alone (*ἀλλ' αὐτόχειρί μοι μόνῃ τε δραστήον τοῦργον τόδ'* 1019-20). This is reminiscent of the start of the play where Orestes explains the oracle that he should kill Clytemnestra alone by righteous hand (36-7).

Sophocles demonstrates the bond between Orestes and Electra as both siblings set out to do alone what they ultimately need each other to do. However it also depicts the strength of Electra in this interpretation. She is willing to take on the masculine role of avenger, which she has spent her life waiting for her male *philoí* to do, and to do it alone as a woman when she has no other alternatives.

Sophocles follows Aeschylus in not acknowledging the role that Menelaus could play in avenging his brother, as his only surviving male relative. A weaker interpretation of Electra could have let her wait for another male avenger, such as Menelaus. But Sophocles' Electra determines to take the matter into her own hands. Once Orestes has revealed himself, Sophocles presents Electra's bravery here in being willing to die for her cause (1318-21). This challenges the conventional passive role for women in matters of honour and vengeance. But there is irony in the strong Electra asking Orestes to direct her according to his will (*ἄρχ' αὐτὸς ὧς σοι θυμός* 1319). The intention here might be to remind the audience of Aeschylus' passive Electra in the *Choephoroi* whose only role as directed by Orestes was to not to reveal their plans and to watch the house. Sophocles contributes an original interpretation and challenges gender stereotypes by swapping their roles and casting strong Electra and weaker Orestes in the template Aeschylus set out for strong Clytemnestra and weak Aegisthus.

Sophocles innovates the way in which Orestes and Electra carry out the killings by having Clytemnestra killed before Aegisthus.⁴⁶⁰ Electra

⁴⁶⁰ Kells (1973: 3-4, 215) explains how the reversal of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' murders could contribute to a critical reading of Clytemnestra, as it does not allow the expectation of the Erinyes after her death and instead moves straight on to the killing of Aegisthus. However

watches outside for Aegisthus (1403-4) while Orestes goes inside to kill Clytemnestra. Zeitlin notes that men in tragedy require feminine assistance if they successfully penetrate the interior of the house and reclaim it for their own.⁴⁶¹ Clytemnestra calls out from the palace for Aegisthus (1409). This indicates her reliance on him to protect her, but I suggest it also asserts that he is responsible and should share in her punishment.

Sophocles' *Electra* is filled with more malice than Aeschylus' interpretation. She relishes hearing the death of her mother and is desperate to bring about their deaths, even though she does not commit the death blows herself. Wheeler suggests *Electra's* words are her weapons.⁴⁶² *Electra* rejects Clytemnestra's pleas to Orestes for pity, stating that she had no pity on him or his father (1410-12). When Clytemnestra is struck, *Electra* wishes that she is struck twice as hard if Orestes has the strength, and when she is struck again *Electra* wishes it were Aegisthus too (1415-17). I am not convinced by Sommerstein or Gellie that *Electra* goes in the palace with Orestes to commit the murder.⁴⁶³ *Electra* stands watch while Orestes goes inside, otherwise she would not need to wish that Orestes would strike twice.

Although *Electra* herself does not carry out the murder of her mother with her own hand, and it is Orestes (and Pylades) killing Clytemnestra (1398-9), it is *Electra* and Clytemnestra's voices that are heard, while Orestes is mute.⁴⁶⁴ *Electra* relies on the male to commit the act of vengeance, yet the argument and voice of vengeance are her own. Sophocles does not show the conflict for Orestes or *Electra* in killing their mother that we have seen in Aeschylus' interpretation, and makes this murder more about the battle between Clytemnestra and *Electra*, as mother versus (surrogate) mother, and their perceptions of justice versus justice.

he suggests that Sophocles is making her murder more odious by having Orestes and Pylades as trained strong young men advance on her when she is alone with no men to support her.

⁴⁶¹ Zeitlin (1990: 77).

⁴⁶² Wheeler (2003: 379).

⁴⁶³ Sommerstein (2010: 21). Gellie (1981).

⁴⁶⁴ See Seale (1982: 74) for the way *Electra* takes Orestes' place in the dialogue in this scene.

3.10.4. Murder of Clytemnestra: motives

Sophocles develops the malevolence of Clytemnestra in his *Electra* from Aeschylus' interpretation, as she is willing to kill her own child to avoid retribution for Agamemnon's murder.⁴⁶⁵ Sophocles picks up on a theme first introduced in Pindar (*Pythian* 11), and hinted at in Stesichorus, that Clytemnestra is capable of trying to kill Orestes as an infant.⁴⁶⁶ However Sophocles creates a new role for Electra as her brother's saviour (11-14, 321, 1348) rather than in Pindar where his nurse saves him.

The Old Slave says he kept Orestes safe and raised him to this stage to avenge (*τιμωρὸν*) his father's murder (11-14). Orestes' purpose in life is to avenge the death of his father, and he must reach manhood in order to do so. This is reiterated by the fact that Electra claims that Aegisthus will not allow either her or her sister to have children as this will bring trouble for himself (960-66). Therefore the females were not seen as posing the same threat as the male children.

As the play progresses, Sophocles makes Clytemnestra's murderous intentions towards her son more explicit (293-7, 601-2, 1131-7). Clytemnestra does not acknowledge that she wanted to kill her son; but admits that he posed a threat to her as an adult. She claims that Orestes turned away from her breast and became a foreigner in exile and, after he left, he reproached her for his father's murder and swore to do terrible things (774-9). Sophocles creates a less sympathetic interpretation of Clytemnestra as her alleged attempts on her son's life are pre-emptive; they are seen to be a way for her to avoid the consequences of her crime by removing her potential avenger.

Sophocles' depiction of Clytemnestra is as more of a tyrant (*δεσπότιν* 597-8) and she fears those who would rob her of her wealth and rule (648-52). This perhaps prepares the audience for the lack of retaliatory violence after the matricide. However Blundell stresses the importance of parental love

⁴⁶⁵ Denniston (1939: 29-30) has the extreme reaction that Sophocles' Clytemnestra is more repulsive than Aegisthus, compared to Euripides' *Electra*. In Sophocles she is terrified of Orestes (293), shows no remorse for her crime (549-50), is brutal to Electra (1195-6), shows some sorrow for Orestes' death, but only because it ensures her safety. Euripides shows more redeeming features; she saves Electra from Aegisthus (27), shows remorse for her husband (1105-8) and visits Electra in childbed.

⁴⁶⁶ See Sections 3.5. and 3.6.

in Greek society and the punishments for those who violated it.⁴⁶⁷ Plato counts maltreatment of parents among the worst abuses of the tyrannical man (*Republic* 574abc). Therefore there is irony in Electra's criticism of her mother, when her maltreatment of her parent could be deemed a worse abuse.

I am persuaded by Konstan and Juffras that there are also political dimensions to Sophocles' interpretation in the play; however I would not go so far as to agree that we should interpret the matricide as a positive outcome.⁴⁶⁸ Konstan argues that if Sophocles' *Electra* is dated to 410 BC then it would have followed the aftermath of the overthrow of the oligarchy of the Four Hundred and restoration of democracy in Athens. He draws a parallel between the illegitimate regime usurping power, represented by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus; the division between those oppressed and remaining in the city, represented by Electra; and those in exile plotting their return, represented by Orestes. Konstan suggests that Sophocles selected this myth about the heirs of a legitimate ruler recuperating power and represented it as positive, despite shedding kin blood to represent the restoration of the democratic institution in Athens. Juffras argues that Electra's appeal to Chrysothemis (973-85) recalls the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogiton. I am not convinced by Kells' suggestion that Sophocles was thinking of the Thirty Tyrants of 404/3 BC, who were to take over the government of Athens.⁴⁶⁹

Sophocles casts ambiguity over the divine involvement in the matricide. Orestes sought out Apollo's oracle himself and framed the question not as to whether but as to how he should exact vengeance (*δίκας*) for his father on those who murdered him (32-4), prior to getting any direction from Apollo (399).⁴⁷⁰ Orestes therefore represents the responsibility of sons to seek to avenge the death of their fathers. This may have been Sophocles' intention in depicting Clytemnestra's fear of him and attempt to kill him as an infant.

⁴⁶⁷ Blundell (1989: 41-2). Also Bowra (1944: 219) notes the blood tie uniting parent and child and how this kinship bond should overrule retaliatory justice.

⁴⁶⁸ Konstan (2008: 78-9). Juffras (1991).

⁴⁶⁹ Kells (1973: 12). Blundell (1989: 154), following Sheppard (1918), notes the ambivalent *τύραννος* to refer to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and the political disruption of Aegisthus' actions and tyrannical rule.

⁴⁷⁰ Denniston (1939: 21-25) argues that the oracle plays less of a role in Sophocles than in Aeschylus or Euripides because Orestes has decided on vengeance before consulting it and Apollo's answer means the god approves.

This same fear in Aegisthus prevents Electra and Chrysothemis from having children (964-6).⁴⁷¹ After killing Clytemnestra, Orestes says all is well if Apollo prophesied well (1425). Sophocles is acknowledging and questioning Apollo's involvement in the matricide by making Orestes cast doubt on the oracle, and therefore absolve himself from some of the responsibility of the murder.

The prophecy is that Orestes should accomplish alone, without armed men or an army, and by cunning the slaughter with a righteous hand (*ἄσκειον αὐτὸν ἀσπίδων τε καὶ στρατοῦ δόλοισι κλέψαι χειρὸς ἐνδίκου σφαγᾶς* 36-7). Sophocles depicts Orestes as similar to Aeschylus' Aegisthus in having to murder his enemy through stealth and cunning rather than physical strength (1626-7). Orestes cannot match the strength of armed men protecting Clytemnestra (1367-71). The comparison could be taken further as Aegisthus was also criticised in *Agamemnon* (1643-6) for being reliant on a woman.

In Sophocles' *Electra*, Orestes is less dominant than in the *Oresteia* or Homeric epic. Electra is the stronger and more masculine force behind the murder. This ties in with the continued inversions in this interpretation; Electra takes on Clytemnestra's roles as mother, moral avenger, and active participant in the murder, just as Orestes takes on Aegisthus' less dominant, weaker roles. Sophocles depicts Orestes needing help in accomplishing the slaughter. He has his hand on the murder weapon, but Electra contributes to the deception and cunning involved, as does Pylades and the Old Slave.

Sophocles introduces a motive regarding the money and wealth linked to the power that Clytemnestra holds and wants to retain as ruler of Mycenae. Orestes says he wants to control his riches and set his house upon its feet (71-2) which shows that he not only wants to set order back in the house of Atreus, and remove Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but in doing so he will be able to manage the wealth associated with it which he has been deprived of. Electra is also concerned with the wealth which they have been deprived of (959-60). Orestes tells Electra he is aware that their mother is evil and that Aegisthus is dissipating the wealth of their father's house (1288-91). The Chorus comment on Orestes entering the house to the seat of his father with its ancient wealth

⁴⁷¹ Section 3.2.1. on the archaic theme of the importance of sons avenging their fathers.

(1391-5). Sophocles complicates the representation of Electra and Orestes' motives as justice for their father by contributing the additional factor of personal gain and wealth.

3.10.5. Murder of Aegisthus: method

After Orestes emerges from killing their mother and reassures Electra that she is dead (1426-7), Electra then takes responsibility for dealing with Aegisthus. She tells Orestes and Pylades to leave matters to her (1436). Sophocles does not make Aegisthus as cowardly a character as in the *Oresteia* as there are no insults exchanged at his arrival and he acknowledges that he should lament for the death of Orestes (1468-9). After Orestes has revealed himself, Aegisthus requests to speak (1482-3). Kells comments on the instinctive rights of the Greeks to speak in their own defence, and how noteworthy it is when they request and are denied this right (Thucydides 2.67.4).⁴⁷²

Sophocles emphasises Electra anger and hate by denying Aegisthus this basic right of defending himself. This depicts her as a hypocrite for exhibiting the behaviour for which she admonishes her mother. Although Sophocles has implicated Aegisthus' involvement in the murder of Agamemnon, he has not focussed on Aegisthus' motive of retribution for the violence between Atreus and Thyestes. Sophocles makes Aegisthus' murder less tragic as he is given no defence for his reason for killing Agamemnon, and Electra allows him no opportunity to justify it when he appears onstage.

Electra commands Orestes to kill Aegisthus at once, and set him before those who should properly give him burial (*ἀλλ' ὡς τάχιστα κτεῖνε καὶ κτανῶν πρόθεσ ἀφεῦσιν ὧν τόνδ' εἰκός ἐστι τυγχάνειν* 1483-90).⁴⁷³ I interpret these lines to mean that Aegisthus and Clytemnestra have their own children, who would properly give them burial.

Aegisthus forewarns that there is further suffering to come by asking Orestes whether the house should witness the present and future woes of the

⁴⁷² Kells (1973: 11).

⁴⁷³ See Segal (1966: 521) on the interpretation and debate on this line. I take this to mean burial rather than exposure. I note the comparison to exposure of Aegisthus' body in *Odyssey* (3.258-60) but disagree with Lloyd (1986: 16) and Cropp (2013: 206) that Electra here suggests Aegisthus' body is left to dogs and birds rather than be buried.

Pelopids (1497-8). Yet Sophocles significantly does not depict the woes to follow for Orestes or Electra. Sophocles' intention in ending the play with the murder of Aegisthus may have been to try to remove some of the conflict an audience would feel in not seeing any punishment on Electra and Orestes for the matricide.

3.10.6. Justice

The Erinyes do not appear after the matricide in Sophocles. Blundell suggests Sophocles may not have portrayed Orestes under pursuit after the matricide due to the self-contained single play structure, and because it is Electra's play and Orestes must not upstage her.⁴⁷⁴ I agree with this suggestion but not to the extent that it means Sophocles' silence on the Erinyes infers that this is not important for the play. Rather I argue that Sophocles' silence on something expected by the audience only serves to leave an unsettling sense of expectation at the suffering to follow. I also follow an aspect of Segal's evaluation that Sophocles distinguishes himself from Aeschylus in his interest in dramatising the rich and complex character of Electra rather than tracing the fate of the house of Atreus.⁴⁷⁵

The Chorus conclude the play by addressing Orestes as the seed of Atreus, reminding the audience again of the conflict which started this cycle of violence, and concluding ironically that he has emerged in freedom from his sufferings (1508-10). I believe this would leave a sense of foreboding for an audience anticipating the Erinyes or suffering to follow from Aeschylus' interpretation. Sophocles has heightened this with hints to the children of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus which would promote an expectation of further violence.

Orestes warns Aegisthus that the punishment of death should come at once to all who act outside the laws (*χρῆν δ' εὐθὺς εἶναι τήνδε τοῖς πᾶσιν δίκην, ὅστις πέρα πράσσειν γε τῶν νόμων θέλοι, κτείνειν* 1505-7). I am not convinced by Kells' interpretation of this as executed without trial, like the Thirty Tyrants shortly to take over Athens in 404/3 BC who suspended with

⁴⁷⁴ Blundell (1989: 179).

⁴⁷⁵ Segal (1966: 476). See Griffin (1999: 78) on the emotions of the heroine Electra as the dominant theme in Sophocles compared to Aeschylus.

the courts and executed men without trial.⁴⁷⁶ However Sophocles' intention may have been to allude to the contemporary political tensions. I interpret this as stressing the importance of law and the perception that it is the death penalty, rather than revenge killings and retaliatory violence, which deters further criminality (*τὸ γὰρ πανοῦργον οὐκ ἂν ᾗν πολὺ* 1507).

Kells summarises three theories in scholarship regarding Sophocles' handling of matricide.⁴⁷⁷ The amoral theory: which avoids the moral issue of matricide. The justificatory theory: which approves of it due to Orestes' lack of hesitation before killing Clytemnestra, the absence of the Erinyes, and the reversal of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra's murders. And the ironic theory: which disapproves of it due to Apollo's oracle not being a true authorisation, the way Orestes frames the question, Orestes' doubt about the oracle (1422ff), and the killing Aegisthus in the dark (1493ff. Although the ironic theory has become the prevailing interpretation since Kells, March argues for a positive interpretation due to Apollo, the gods, and the Chorus supporting the matricide, and suggesting that revenge being an acceptable part of Greek morality.⁴⁷⁸ I follow the ironic theory and suggest that Sophocles' intention was to innovate the matricide but still subtly condemn it.

Sophocles does not depict the Erinyes pursuing Orestes, or Electra, at the conclusion of the play. But I suggest his intention was for the audience to expect them, as he mentions and hints at them throughout. Electra calls on a number of gods to help her including the Erinyes (110-16). The Chorus describe the Erinyes that will come as brazen-clawed, with many feet and many hands (*ἤξει καὶ πολύπους καὶ πολὺχειρ.... χαλκόπους Ἐρινύς* 489-91).

There are subtle allusions from the Chorus to those lying beneath the ground as living, when the blood of the killers flows in turn, drained by those who perished long ago (1418-23). This could be interpreted as Agamemnon, living through the vengeance that has been undertaken by Orestes. But I

⁴⁷⁶ Kells (1973: 12, 231).

⁴⁷⁷ Kells (1973: 1-5). See also Denniston (1939: 24-6) for the outdated view that the matricide does not raise any moral problem because the Chorus approves it (1423), Orestes has no serious doubt (1425), and there is no sign of the Erinyes. Blundell (1989) suggests that human beings act as their own Erinyes from self-destructive passions and self-defeating concepts of justice. Burnett (1998: 119-41) interprets the references to the Erinyes within the play to mean these powers are appeased by the present revenge.

⁴⁷⁸ March (2001: 15-19).

suggest Sophocles is also alluding to a depiction of the Erinyes familiar from Aeschylus (*Eumenides* 264) where they reside underground and suck the blood of the living. The Chorus describe the hounds (κύνες 1388) that pursue evil crimes going beneath the roof of the house when Electra and Orestes enter the palace (1386-8). I suggest this alludes to the Aeschylean depiction of the Erinyes as hounds (*Agamemnon* 135, *Choephoroi* 924, 1053-4, *Eumenides* 132, 231, 246).⁴⁷⁹

Clytemnestra accuses Electra of being like an Erinys, as she is so obsessed with vengeance, sucking her life-blood (783-6).⁴⁸⁰ The Chorus also refer to Electra bringing down the twin Erinyes (1080), referring to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. These hints throughout the play would have led an audience to expect the Erinyes after the matricide. Sophocles' conclusion would therefore likely have shocked the audience. This may have been his intention; to create a sense of foreboding that hinted at the continued suffering to follow. Winnington-Ingram argues that if Sophocles had wished to compare a Homeric version of the story, absent of Erinyes, or to bypass the issue then he would have avoided the theme so closely associated with his predecessor.⁴⁸¹

Sophocles innovates the story from surviving tragic and epic interpretations by suggesting Clytemnestra and Aegisthus have their own children. Gantz discusses the other sources which attribute Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as having children.⁴⁸² It is unclear if Sophocles' lost *Erigone* is about Aegisthus' daughter. In Apollodorus (*Epitome* 6.25), Orestes was brought to trial by Erigone, daughter of Clytemnestra. In Diktys (6.4), Erigone hangs herself in disappointment at Orestes' acquittal. Apollodorus (*Epitome* 6.28) also says that Orestes married Hermione or Erigone, although acknowledges the contradiction that she is both his bitter enemy and lover.

Electra refers to Clytemnestra having children with the man with whom she killed her father (585-90). Clytemnestra also refers to the children with whom there is no enmity (650-54). Although these children of

⁴⁷⁹ See Section 3.8.3.

⁴⁸⁰ Winnington-Ingram (1980: 228) suggests that Electra is both victim and agent of the Erinyes.

⁴⁸¹ Winnington-Ingram (1980: 218-28).

⁴⁸² Gantz (1993: 685). See also Sutton (1984).

Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are absent in the play, Sophocles' intention must have been for the audience to be aware that they exist. This would create even further conflict, as they would be in line to continue the rule after the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. This would also give Clytemnestra further reason to be fearful of Electra and Orestes as a threat towards her new children over the wealth and rule of the household. Yet Orestes and Electra show no concern towards them or plan to kill them. This might have surprised the audience, given the cycle of violence might continue if they sought vengeance on Orestes and Electra for killing their parents.

Sophocles subverts what his audience might expect to see as justice. Sophocles evolves the story from earlier interpretations by acknowledging and hinting at the expected events yet depicting significant variations. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are murdered, but in reverse order. Orestes kills his mother, but is not conflicted. The Erinyes are referred to, but do not appear after the matricide. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus have children, but they do not feature in the cycle of vengeance. This perhaps implies that the *talio* of a life for a life disrupts the family unit, and highlights the importance of seeking justice through the law.

3.10.7. Electra: sister and mother

Sophocles depicts Electra as a mother-figure to Orestes in the absence of the nurturing they would both expect from their own mother (1145-6, 1194-6). This makes Electra more sympathetic than Clytemnestra. Segal describes Clytemnestra as the mother who is 'no mother'.⁴⁸³ Sophocles' Electra creates new roles for herself as a mother and a murderer, in the absence of those that she would expect to take on those roles. By portraying Orestes as slow to return to Electra and avenge his father, Sophocles creates a role as avenger for Electra. By portraying Clytemnestra ignoring her maternal duties, he creates a role for Electra that she has been unable to fulfil herself as a mother.

Sophocles emphasises the irony of Electra's maternal role as she laments that she is unmarried (188) and has no children (960-66). Orestes also

⁴⁸³ Segal (1966: 490).

laments Electra's unmarried status and offers sympathy for Electra's unmarried miserable way of life (1183).⁴⁸⁴ Sophocles is therefore presenting Orestes as a substitute child to Electra in the absence of being able to have her own children (413). Electra in her subverted maternal role complains that her nurture of Orestes is unrequited if he is dead (1143-5).⁴⁸⁵

Sophocles' accentuates her isolation; depriving her from achieving her female contribution to the *oikos* and *polis* as wife and mother, and situating her in a household that has no *philoï*. Electra's lack of these fundamental relationships mirrors her mother Clytemnestra who will find the household empty of *philoï* when her children murder her (1404-5). Contrary to Finglass, I argue that Sophocles demonstrates the anxieties of the dysfunctional *oikos* whilst also commenting on disrupted tensions in the *polis* and depicts Electra's isolation from both.⁴⁸⁶

Sophocles shows an opposition between male and female relationships within Electra. Electra places the value of her life on her male relatives; without the survival of father and brother she loses the will to live (818-21, 1051-2, 1168-70).⁴⁸⁷ She finds no value in her female relationships; she has no maternal relationship with her mother, takes no comfort in her sister Chrysothemis, and does not acknowledge any need to avenge her sister Iphigeneia.

Electra compares herself lamenting for her father to the nightingale who slayed her young (107-9) and who mourns for Itys (145-50), as well as Niobe in her rocky tomb (150-52).⁴⁸⁸ The Chorus also compare Electra's lament for her father's fate to the grieving nightingale (1075-80). McHardy notes the association of women with encouraging blood revenge in their laments, leading to their depiction in literature as bloody avengers.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁴ Classical Greek epitaphs particularly emphasise the tragedy of young girls dying before marriage, as if they had not had a chance to fulfil a woman's natural goal in life (*telos*).

⁴⁸⁵ Blundell (1989: 41, 150) notes the tragedy of old parents with no offspring to care for them. I suggest this is reminiscent of Medea's complaint of wasting the nurture of her children in Euripides' *Medea* (Section 4.7).

⁴⁸⁶ Finglass (2005: 201-3) suggests that Sophocles differs from Aeschylus in focussing on the *oikos* rather than the *polis*.

⁴⁸⁷ Segal (1966: 479) suggests Electra is trying to overcome her death-in-life. Scodel (1984: 80-3) discusses the confusion between the living and the dead.

⁴⁸⁸ See Section 4.8. on Procne who slays Itys and turns into a nightingale.

⁴⁸⁹ McHardy (2004).

I suggest Sophocles is using the comparison with the nightingale to demonstrate the inversions Electra represents in avenging her father. By evoking a mother who murders her child to avenge the husband's misdeeds, he is contrasting the cycle of violence in Electra's family, where a mother kills the husband to avenge the child he killed. The severed bond between parent and child is key to both families but the motives and consequences are inverted.

The nightingale theme also hints at the mythic cycle of the house of Atreus. The violence within the house of Atreus was one of Clytemnestra's motives in the *Agamemnon*, but ignored in Sophocles. Thyestes is tricked by his brother into eating his own children, which recalls the fate of Itys fed to his own father. In these examples, children are murdered to punish the crimes of their fathers. By contrast, in Electra's family her father is punished for crimes against his child.

Sophocles' Clytemnestra focusses on Iphigeneia as her motive for murdering her husband. This fits the theme of the nightingale mourning her child. However Sophocles inverts this by having Electra lament like the nightingale, rather than Clytemnestra. Electra therefore inhabits her mother's role again by casting herself as the mourning parent, when instead she is the mourning child. This further highlights her childlessness and presents her as adopting her missing male *philo*i as surrogate children.

Sophocles characterises Electra with many masculine characteristics in this play and develops the interpretation of Clytemnestra from the *Oresteia* by shifting the focus to Electra as the female avenger that challenges stereotypes.⁴⁹⁰ Electra is brave, willing to risk her life to avenge her father, and is concerned with the fame of her actions (984-5, 977-80). She is also concerned that her enemies are laughing at her (1153-4).⁴⁹¹ Her brother Orestes shares these concerns with her and wants to put a stop to their enemies' laughter (1294-5). However her sister Chrysothemis struggles to restrain Electra's masculine heroic desires (997-8).

⁴⁹⁰ See Wheeler (2003: 383) on Electra as motherly and emotional yet rational. By contrast, Burnett (1998: 140-1) suggests Sophocles makes Electra a ridiculous avenger; absurd, monstrous, useless, defined by what she is not; a reification of paradox and disorder.

⁴⁹¹ See Section 4.7. on Medea's similar heroic concerns.

In their *agôn*, Electra and Clytemnestra both refer to their male protectors; Electra threatens the arrival of Orestes and Clytemnestra threatens Aegisthus' return.⁴⁹² However Sophocles has shown that neither of these women need their male protector; they have assumed the masculine role in vengeance and rhetoric and have violated the family unit as a result. They both use Agamemnon as their motive but for different reasons. In Sophocles' play, responsibility is placed with Agamemnon and his father Atreus for beginning the violation of bonds of *philia*, but it is prolonged by their female descendants.

Sophocles depicts Electra's passion and anger throughout the play. The Chorus warns Electra against grievous anger (*ὑπεραλγῆ χόλον*) and excessive anger against enemies (*ἐχθαίρεις ὑπεράχθεο* 176-8) and warn Electra to say nothing in anger (*ὀργήν* 369). Chrysothemis warns Electra not to indulge her useless anger (*θυμῶ* 330-1) and to restrain her passion (*ὀργήν* 1011). Electra accuses Clytemnestra of being carried away into anger (*ὀργήν* 628) when in fact Electra is just as guilty of this. Sophocles does not depict any punishment following Electra and Orestes' murder of their mother. However I argue that Electra's anger and masculine obsession with justice and vengeance have contributed to the disruption of her social and biological roles as a woman. Sophocles creates an Electra with heroic masculine attributes, preoccupied with honour and courage, yet also prone to her emotions and marginalised as a woman.⁴⁹³

Sophocles innovated the role of Electra in her relationship with, and murder of, her mother. Electra inhabits some of the masculine strength previously depicted for her brother. Sophocles therefore uses gender to build on the innovations in Aeschylus' representation of retribution, justice and familial violence. Orestes' pollution, pursuit by the Erinyes, and trial in the *Eumenides* demonstrate the cost of the archaic system of reciprocal violence within the family unit. Sophocles' surprising conclusion avoids any of these

⁴⁹² I disagree with Blundell (1989: 172) that Electra's masculine task is defying her female *physis* and killing Aegisthus, in comparison to Clytemnestra's masculine task of killing her husband. I suggest Electra's entry into the masculine space is in taking on the responsibility for vengeance herself.

⁴⁹³ See March (2001) and Winington-Ingram (1980: 239) on Electra as a Sophoclean hero. Blundell (1989: 180) notes the different emotions that overcome Electra in her exchanges with Orestes and Clytemnestra and that she has lived gratifying her *thumos*.

consequences for Electra or Orestes. Blundell concludes that familial revenge on enemies loses the function of summary justice with the advent of a working legal system and creates friction by competing with codified justice.⁴⁹⁴

I argue that Electra's fragmented relationship with her mother and her fragmentation from her *oikos* and *polis* through the denial of marriage and children, as conventional feminine relationships, can be interpreted as a form of punishment for her preoccupation with masculine vengeance. I draw a comparison between Electra and Medea as women who commit intentional homicide and whose lack of relationships with their mothers ultimately have an adverse effect on their role as mothers.

3.11. Euripides' *Electra*

Euripides contributes many innovations in his *Electra*, most importantly Electra's active role with Orestes in the murder of Clytemnestra, and her encouragement of the silent Orestes during the matricide. Euripides alludes to and subverts many of the previous traditions. He introduces: the location in the countryside; Electra being married to a farmer, and then to Pylades; Aegisthus (rather than Clytemnestra) trying to kill Orestes as an infant; the motive of wealth to Electra and Orestes; and the first murder trial being that of Ares.

Euripides differs from Sophocles in depicting Aegisthus rather than Clytemnestra trying to kill Orestes as a child, and Electra does not save him but the Old Slave (14-17). Aegisthus' fear of male offspring demonstrates the continued importance since Homeric epic of having a male relative to avenge murdered kin.⁴⁹⁵ Aegisthus' anxiety over Electra having a son who would avenge Agamemnon's death results in her seclusion in the palace and his attempt to kill her (19-30).⁴⁹⁶ Aegisthus is then removed from the action of the play, and Euripides introduces some elements of sympathy for Clytemnestra as she saves her daughter Electra. However Clytemnestra's

⁴⁹⁴ Blundell (1989: 58).

⁴⁹⁵ See Section 3.2.1.

⁴⁹⁶ Kubo (1967: 18) notes the familiarity of myths of a cruel parent persecuting his or her daughter in fear of a possible grandchild, and situates Clytemnestra within this framework as a cruel and fearful parent. It is in fact Aegisthus that fulfils this role more dangerously than Clytemnestra.

attempt at maternal protection is tempered by her concern for public opinion (28-30, 643, 1013-17). She shares this characteristic with Electra (902-4); they both fear public opinion, and use sophisticated rhetorical techniques. Similarly to Sophocles, their similarities make them evenly matched in the *agôn* which complicates the perception of justice. Euripides makes Clytemnestra more ambivalent and vulnerable than Aeschylus, but he equally introduces unsympathetic elements to her character, particularly in her justification of the murder of Agamemnon.⁴⁹⁷

Another innovation is in having the traditionally 'unwedded' Electra marry the farmer (31-42, 44, 267). However Electra's tradition in myth of childlessness and virginity remains intact. Euripides situates her within the traditional role of a wife within the *oikos*, but deprives her of sex and children, and removes her religious and social connections to the *polis*.⁴⁹⁸ Her dysfunctional marriage in Euripides' interpretation is ironic because it makes her even more isolated. This increases her bitterness and frustration more vehemently towards Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and contributes to her motives for murder as she has little to lose. Her obsession with her own situation subordinates the obsession with her father which is so prominent in Aeschylus and Sophocles.⁴⁹⁹

Euripides moves the setting of the play and the murders to the countryside and the 'ordinary' rustic world rather than the backdrop of the palace. This differs from Aeschylus and Sophocles; Electra is no longer a member of the royal household and is in a remote and isolated physical location far from the community of Argos. Removing Electra from the palace emphasises her isolation from the *oikos* and the *polis*.⁵⁰⁰ Zeitlin proposes that Electra's refusal of participating in the public festival (304-13) is a sign of her inner isolation as well as her isolation from the civic life of the *polis* and alienation from the community.⁵⁰¹ I disagree with Cropp that Electra's grief

⁴⁹⁷ Cropp (2013: 4).

⁴⁹⁸ Zeitlin (1970: 650-65) persuasively argues that Euripides juxtaposes Electra's marriage to Clytemnestra's. Clytemnestra is gratified in three elements of the marital relationship: children, social status and sexual passion; whereas Electra is emphatically not.

⁴⁹⁹ Cropp (2013: 10) asserts that Electra is preoccupied with sex and this colours her attitude to Clytemnestra's relationship with Aegisthus.

⁵⁰⁰ Winnington-Ingram (1969).

⁵⁰¹ Zeitlin (1970: 648-9).

isolates her from the festival and the matricide will forever exclude her; I suggest that her lack of punishment means she will not be excluded forever.⁵⁰² It is this remoteness, coupled with the isolation from her *philoï* (she has no relationship with her mother or brother and no sisters appear in Euripides' play) and the loneliness of her dysfunctional marriage that contribute to Euripides' bitter characterisation of Electra.⁵⁰³

3.11.1. Murder of Agamemnon: method

Euripides utilises the ambiguity in the tradition of the myth since Homeric epic regarding Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' roles in the murder of Agamemnon. Euripides' *Electra* has more in common with Sophocles' *Electra* than Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in shifting the emphasis between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' roles in Agamemnon's murder, depending on the purpose of the speaker.

Euripides shifts attribution of responsibility between them to suit the direction of the play. In the build up to the murder of Aegisthus and the immediate response, Electra and Orestes blame Aegisthus as the killer of their father, and their accusations focus on Clytemnestra's infidelity. Once Orestes has killed Aegisthus and Clytemnestra arrives, the focus returns to Clytemnestra as the agent of their father's death. Euripides is innovative in not featuring Aegisthus as an active character in the play and only coming on stage as a corpse. In doing so Euripides ignores Aegisthus' motives for killing Agamemnon and shifts the focus on to what motivates Clytemnestra to murder her husband.

Euripides utilises many aspects of Agamemnon's death from across previous interpretations. Electra refers to Agamemnon being killed in a snare and in the bath (154-8), similarly to Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (Section 3.8.1.). He is killed with an axe (160-1, 279), reminiscent of Stesichorus and Sophocles (Sections 3.5. and 3.10.1.), and a sword (164-5), reminiscent of Homeric epic (Section 3.2.2.).⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰² Cropp (2013: 18).

⁵⁰³ Torrance (2011: 179) sees Electra as a dysfunctional woman and wife, living in an unconsummated marriage.

⁵⁰⁴ Cropp (2013: 148) follows Kovacs (1996: 100) in interpreting this as for Aegisthus' sake.

Early in the play both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are accused of killing Agamemnon by the Farmer (10), Electra (90), and Orestes (276). But then Clytemnestra's role in the murder becomes more passive. The focus shifts to her adulterous relationship with Aegisthus (479-81), reminiscent of the ambiguity of her role in the *Odyssey*. The Chorus claim the gods will send her the judgement of death for this (*τοιγάρ σοί ποτ' οὐρανίδαί πέμψουσιν θανάτου δίκαν* 482-5).⁵⁰⁵

Electra insults her mother for her oriental luxury and refers to Aegisthus alone as the killer with murderous hands (314-22).⁵⁰⁶ Euripides casts Clytemnestra as unsympathetic for her hubris in dishonouring Agamemnon and sharing power with the man who killed him. Once Electra and Orestes begin to plan the murder after the recognition scene, it is Aegisthus who they focus on as their father's killer. Euripides builds up the audience's anticipation of a confrontation with Aegisthus as their enemy, which they will not get to see. Euripides makes Aegisthus as mute as Pylades; both have a hand in murder yet are side-lined in the play. Euripides' focus is on the dramatic confrontation between the avengers and victims who share blood within the family unit. Electra suggests to Orestes that he has drawn the first murder trial (*πρόσθεν εἴληχας φόνου* 668).⁵⁰⁷ Euripides' use of legal language situates the drama in the context of the Athenian law-courts. I suggest that this challenges the audience to evaluate the murders against contemporary ideas of justice.⁵⁰⁸

Electra attempts to justify Orestes' murder of Aegisthus by continuing his depiction as the agent of Agamemnon's death. She refers to Aegisthus as her father's killer (869) and as the enemy who destroyed hers and Orestes' father (884-5). She complains of how Aegisthus destroyed her life and took her father away from her (914) and accuses Aegisthus of shamefully marrying

⁵⁰⁵ I follow Denniston (1939: 109) and Cropp (2013: 175) in interpreting 480 as referring to Clytemnestra's adultery rather than Helen.

⁵⁰⁶ Cropp (2013: 158) compares the association of luxury with tyranny and hubris and the reference to Phrygia with barbarism. See Thucydides (1.130) on a Spartan king perverted by a Persian lifestyle.

⁵⁰⁷ Kovacs (1998) *ad loc.* Kells (1966).

⁵⁰⁸ Cropp (2013: 188) notes other legal terms used for punishment of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (484, 953-4). Kells (1966: 51-2) compares this to Demosthenes (21.120) and Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution* (57.2)

her mother and killing her father (916-7).⁵⁰⁹ The Chorus interpret this as mighty justice (*Δίκη*) and support Orestes' terrible actions as a result of Aegisthus' terrible deeds (957-8).

The Chorus refer to Clytemnestra killing her husband (745-6) but Electra does not attribute blame to Clytemnestra alone until after Orestes has killed Aegisthus (970). Electra accuses her of killing her father (1065-8, 1093-5) and the Chorus allege that Agamemnon cried out at her as the woman who killed him (1148-9, 1150-54). Euripides' shift in focus incriminates Clytemnestra but remains problematic for the audience in interpreting the matricide as justice.

Euripides uses the metaphor that justice flows backwards and has indicted Clytemnestra for the faithlessness of her bed (*παλίρρους δὲ τάνδ' ὑπάγεται δίκαια διαδρόμου λέχους* 1155-6). This focusses on her adultery as warranting punishment, before going on to condemn Clytemnestra for killing her husband with her own hand, seizing the axe herself (*ὄζυθήκτω βέλει κατέκαν' αὐτόχειρ* 1159-60). This recalls the legal context and consequences for committing, and not just planning, murder with your own hand. The metaphor also recalls previous intra-familial crimes which reverse the natural order, such as Thyestes' seduction of Atreus' wife, which reversed the course of the sun (699-742).⁵¹⁰ Euripides avoids articulating the murder and feasting on Thyestes' son, which sent the sun reversing its' path through the sky.

3.11.2. Murder of Agamemnon: motives

Euripides describes Aegisthus as Thyestes' son (773) as a subtle reminder of the larger cycle of violence and vengeance inherited from Atreus and Thyestes to Agamemnon and Aegisthus. But Euripides avoids focussing on Aegisthus' motives, including the inherited violence of the house of

⁵⁰⁹ I follow Kovacs (1998) which suspects the portions of the speech between 914-15 as an interpolation. These describe: Aegisthus' ambush on Agamemnon when he was off his guard, with a woman as his helper; Electra's complaints of her marriage like death; and the attempts to kill Orestes in exile and deprive them of their home.

⁵¹⁰ Euripides uses this metaphor of the reversal of the sun in *Orestes* (996-1006) and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (189-202, 811-17). Compare also Euripides' *Medea* (410-11, 846-50) for rivers running backwards. Seneca utilises this imagery in his *Agamemnon* (906-9) to portray the characters as representatives of their criminal ancestors whose deeds affected nature and turned the sun backwards. See Sections 3.12.4, 3.13.4. and 4.7.

Atreus, unlike Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.⁵¹¹ This makes Aegisthus' murder more sympathetic.

Euripides continues the theme in his *Electra* from previous interpretations of Clytemnestra using the sacrifice of her daughter as justification for the murder of her husband.⁵¹² Clytemnestra explains that Agamemnon enticed her child Iphigeneia to Aulis with the prospect of a marriage to Achilles, only to slit her throat as a sacrifice (1020).⁵¹³ I argue that Euripides omits the reasoning for the sacrifice (to appease Artemis) because mentioning the gods' involvement in this sacrifice would highlight the dilemma her husband faced and would weaken Clytemnestra's argument. Using the theme of revenge for the sacrifice of her daughter depicts Clytemnestra's crime as vengeance for slain kin. This mirrors the murder Electra and Orestes are going to commit in revenge for their father.

However Euripides undermines Clytemnestra's potentially sympathetic argument by offering an alternative justification for Agamemnon's murder of Iphigeneia. Clytemnestra suggests that it could have been forgivable if Agamemnon had killed her child to save many, or the city, or their other children (1024-6). But this was not the case; it was for Helen's promiscuity and for Menelaus being unable to appropriately deal with Helen's betrayal (1027-9). Euripides uses a hypothetical syllogism for Clytemnestra to postulate a condition which would substantiate Agamemnon's position, then explains the condition was not fulfilled so that this position collapses. Lloyd outlines Euripides' frequent use of the hypothetical syllogism and the similar phraseology to Lysias, evoking the atmosphere of the courtroom.⁵¹⁴ This rhetorical device and forensic associations therefore frame

⁵¹¹ See Sections 3.7.5. and 3.8.2.

⁵¹² Euripides deals with the sacrifice of Iphigeneia in his *Iphigeneia in Aulis* by having her exchanged with a deer, which may have been known from the Epic Cycle and Hesiodic *Catalogue*. Proclus' summary of the *Cypria* (PEG 24) includes Artemis' substitution of Iphigeneia with the deer before the sacrifice (Section 3.3.). In the *Catalogue*, Iphimede was substituted with a deer (Section 3.4.). In *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (9-26) she is taken to Tauris and becomes a priestess to Artemis.

⁵¹³ Denniston (1939: 176) discusses the problem of Euripides' language here implying that Agamemnon left home with Iphigeneia to Aulis. I suggest the importance here is his complicity in having her brought to Aulis to be sacrificed.

⁵¹⁴ Lloyd (1992: 32-6) suggests this is especially evident in Euripides' plays of the 420's, but the lack of forensic speeches delivered during his career hampers the investigation into his relationship with contemporary rhetoric. See Bateman (1969: 168-70) for analysis of Lysias' use of the hypothetical syllogism. Compare *Medea* (488-91) as another example.

Clytemnestra's defence of the murder of her husband within the context of the Athenian lawcourts. This also characterises Clytemnestra as having no sympathy towards her sister Helen; she is willing to criticise her unfaithfulness to demonstrate the strength of her argument against Agamemnon.

Zeitlin discusses the theme of distorted marriages in the play; Helen's adultery; Thyestes' seduction, and the pretext of Iphigeneia's marriage to Achilles.⁵¹⁵ Mossman notes that at lines 1018-29, Clytemnestra focusses on a series of marriage alliances: Tyndareus' expectations when he gave her in marriage to Agamemnon; the false hope of Iphigeneia's marriage to Achilles; and the dysfunctional marriage of Menelaus and Helen.⁵¹⁶ Mossman is persuasive that this weakens the impact of Clytemnestra's own adultery by stressing the abuses of marriage and the dysfunctional alliances which damage the *oikos*. I also suggest this serves to highlight the dysfunctional marriage of Electra to the farmer and that the alliance isolates her from the *oikos* in not producing children.

Euripides' Clytemnestra is complex in that she values some female *philoï* (her daughter Iphigeneia) at the cost of others (her sister Helen and her daughter Electra). This innovates the representation of Clytemnestra from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, where the sacrifice of Iphigeneia is one of her motives and she does not acknowledge any situation in which the sacrifice would have been acceptable.

Clytemnestra's rhetorical technique does not elicit sympathy. I follow Micheline that the devices in Clytemnestra's argument destroy her conviction.⁵¹⁷ But I suggest for a different reason: by giving priority to sexual jealousy over her sacrificed daughter as a just motive for murder. She asserts that it was not because of vengeance for her sacrificed daughter that made her kill Agamemnon, but because he brought the prophet Cassandra back to his home to have as his bed-fellow at the same time as his wife (1030-4). Zeitlin views Clytemnestra as the callous and unnatural mother who, despite loving protestations for her daughter Iphigeneia, abandons and outcasts Electra and

⁵¹⁵ Zeitlin (1970: 650-65). See also Micheline (1987: 215).

⁵¹⁶ Mossman (2001: 380).

⁵¹⁷ Micheline (1987: 220).

Orestes, and claims that the Phrygian slaves have compensated her for the loss of Iphigeneia (1000-3) and that she could have overlooked the sacrifice of her daughter if Agamemnon had not introduced Cassandra to the house.⁵¹⁸ I disagree with Lloyd's interpretation that the subtlety of Clytemnestra's argument is in refusing to settle on one reason for killing Agamemnon.⁵¹⁹

I suggest that Euripides is innovative in placing more importance on Clytemnestra's sexual jealousy than the sacrifice of her daughter, whereas in Pindar and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* it is ambiguous which of her motives (if any) has priority. Euripides' simile of Clytemnestra as a mountain-lioness (*λέαινα* 1163-4) recalls the lion imagery of the *Agamemnon* where Clytemnestra's adultery with Aegisthus is likened to the lioness mating with an inferior beast.⁵²⁰ However Euripides uses it instead in the context of her role in the murder of her husband.

The feminine theme of sexual jealousy at the introduction of a rival would not have been a sympathetic legal argument to justify murder.⁵²¹ It would likely remind the audience that Clytemnestra killed Cassandra as well as Agamemnon, as depicted in the *Odyssey* (11.421-3) and *Agamemnon* 1035-1330). Clytemnestra is not unique as a wife who is threatened by her husband's introduction of a love rival in the *oikos*, and whose response involves murder. Deianeira, in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* (531), and Medea, in Euripides' *Medea* (1354-7, 1366-8), punish their husbands, either through their own death or demise. But only Medea escapes punishment; Clytemnestra is killed by her children, and Deianeira kills herself.⁵²²

Euripides employs another elaborate rhetorical method of argument for Clytemnestra; *reductio ad absurdum*. Clytemnestra uses this hypothetical role-reversal to question whether, if Menelaus had been abducted, she would be justified in murdering Orestes in order to preserve her sister's husband, and asks whether Agamemnon would have put up with that (1041-5). Cropp draws comparison with Sophocles' *Electra* where Clytemnestra suggests that Menelaus should have sacrificed one of his own children rather than one of

⁵¹⁸ Zeitlin (1970: 663).

⁵¹⁹ Lloyd (1992: 62-3).

⁵²⁰ See Section 3.7.6. for an overview of lion metaphors of Clytemnestra and Medea.

⁵²¹ Pomeroy (1975: 86-7).

⁵²² I will discuss this further in Section 4.7.

hers (537-45). Euripides' Clytemnestra therefore reverses not the sacrifice of their children but the masculine and feminine roles in Menelaus' marriage, drawing attention to the double standards for men and women.⁵²³

Euripides is using rhetoric in tragedy to evoke the style of the Athenian law-courts and explore the complex nature of the dilemma. Lloyd discusses how *reductio ad absurdum* is common among the early orators, such as Lysias, and the philosophers.⁵²⁴ Clytemnestra is arguing as though presenting her case to a jury. She questions how it would be wrong for Agamemnon to be killed for killing her child yet right for her to suffer at his hands (1043-5).

Clytemnestra pre-empts the criticism of her opponent that she killed Agamemnon with the help of his enemy, Aegisthus. She claims that she turned to the only option available to her; Agamemnon's foes (1046-8). Her argument here attempts to justify her adultery with Aegisthus because she needed his help to kill Agamemnon.⁵²⁵ Euripides characterises her as calculating in having a relationship not for love but to achieve her revenge. This also depicts her as the mastermind behind the murder and that Aegisthus merely helped her. Clytemnestra emphasises that no-one who loved Agamemnon would have shared in his murder with her (1047-50). This casts Electra and Orestes in an unsympathetic light as the audience knows that they will be capable of killing one they love.

The chorus are hostile to Clytemnestra and claim her definition of justice is shameful (*ἡ δίκη δ' αἰσχροῦς ἔχει* 1051) and that a woman should agree with everything from her husband (1052-4). Lloyd suggests that this emphasises Clytemnestra's isolation, and that the Chorus respond inadequately to the situation in reducing the problem to a matter of correct wifely behaviour.⁵²⁶

⁵²³ Cropp (2013: 219).

⁵²⁴ Lloyd (1992: 31-2) identifies a notable parallel between Lysias and Euripides in their use of this method of argument when Orestes (*Orestes* 566-71) evokes the absurdity of wives being allowed to get away with killing their husbands, and Euphiletus discusses the consequences of adulterers not being punished (Lysias 1.36). See also *Orestes* (508-11) among other examples of *reductio ad absurdum* in Euripides' plays.

⁵²⁵ Cropp (2013: 219) notes the comparison between this and Sophocles' *Electra* (591-4) where Electra introduces this argument herself in order to refute it; another example of *hypophora*.

⁵²⁶ Lloyd (1992: 65).

Euripides gives Clytemnestra and Electra comparable rhetorical skill in the *agôn*. Electra insults and condemns Clytemnestra, accusing her of killing the best of men in Greece and using the excuse that she was killing her husband in return for her child (1060-8). Arnott suggests that Electra's view of Clytemnestra having little affection for her children (61, 207-12, 265) is prejudiced and distorted when in fact it was Clytemnestra that saved Electra from death (27-8, 650-8, 1123-39).⁵²⁷ Electra alleges that Clytemnestra was looking to be adulterous and did not want Agamemnon to return (1069-79). Electra's attention to Clytemnestra's hair and vanity is used to contrast her own shabby appearance with shorn and dirty hair (148, 184, 241, 335). Mossman discusses the visual contrast between Clytemnestra and Electra and the association of sexual misconduct and misappropriated wealth.⁵²⁸

Attacking her mother rather than defending her father is Electra's best line of argument.⁵²⁹ By focussing on dismantling her mother's argument in this way Electra does not have to attempt to justify her father's sacrifice of her sister, as she does in Sophocles. Euripides therefore avoids this problematic line of argument, but also removes sympathy for Agamemnon by not addressing the role of the gods as motives for the violence. Artemis ordained the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, just as Apollo prophesies the matricide to Orestes.

Euripides makes Clytemnestra less sympathetic by suggesting her jealousy over Cassandra made her kill Agamemnon more than her pain over Iphigeneia. Electra continues to attack this line of defence by interrogating Clytemnestra's motive regarding Iphigeneia until it collapses.⁵³⁰ Electra questions Clytemnestra's treatment of her children and appropriation of Agamemnon's wealth (1086-93). Electra's rhetoric is persuasive, but her argument does not cast her in a favourable light. She offers no sympathy for her sister and describes her existence in life as twice the death of Iphigeneia (1092-3).

⁵²⁷ Arnott (1981: 184).

⁵²⁸ Mossman (2001: 380).

⁵²⁹ Lloyd (1992: 67).

⁵³⁰ Lloyd (1992: 33) proposes that lines 1086-93 and 1030-4 are subtle examples of the hypothetical syllogism, in comparison to 1024-9.

Electra uses Clytemnestra's own argument against her. She proposes that if murder decrees murder (*φόνον δικάζων φόνος* 1093) and Clytemnestra killing Agamemnon was just, then Orestes and Electra's crime of killing Clytemnestra will also be just (*εἰ γὰρ δίκαι' ἐκεῖνα, καὶ τὰδ' ἔνδικα* 1096). However Electra does not acknowledge the potential vengeance and cycle of violence which follows from this line of argument. Euripides attributes children to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus without having them appear or respond to the murder of their parents (62-3), similarly to Sophocles. Electra uses this to highlight her mistreatment, without acknowledging the irony that any offspring of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus would pose a threat to Electra and Orestes in avenging their parents, just as they have done for avenging Agamemnon.

Clytemnestra does show some remorse for her crimes (1106) and states that her plotting has made her wretched (*οἴμοι τάλαινα τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων* 1109). Euripides depicts that she is far more involved than just plotting; she was an active participant in Agamemnon's death, killing her husband with her own hand (1159-60), just as Electra has her hand on the weapon that kills her mother (1224-6).

Euripides transfers motifs from Clytemnestra, Orestes and Pylades in the *Oresteia* to Electra in this play, and from Agamemnon to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Torrance follows Zeitlin regarding the visual allusion of Clytemnestra's entrance on the carriage being modelled on Agamemnon's entrance with the Trojan Cassandra in *Agamemnon*.⁵³¹ There are also textual allusions in Clytemnestra's commands to the Trojan slaves to get down (*Electra* 998-9) like her command to Agamemnon (*Agamemnon* 906) and Cassandra (*Agamemnon* 1039). Clytemnestra receives a royal welcome (*Electra* 988-97) and is lured to her death by deceptive speech. Cropp also notes the shift in the emotional balance between the avengers and the victims.⁵³² I argue that Euripides emphasises the condemnation of the matricide through the parallels with the murder of Agamemnon in the *Oresteia*, and demonstrates the cyclical pattern of crimes in these retaliatory killings.

⁵³¹ Torrance (2011: 190). Zeitlin (1970).

⁵³² Cropp (2013: 23).

3.11.3. Murder of Aegisthus: method and motives

Euripides deliberately departs from earlier versions to surprise the expectant audience. Orestes' murder of Aegisthus is separated from the murder of Clytemnestra. This differs from Sophocles and follows Aeschylus in concluding with the matricide in order to emphasise the conflict of the children and the potential pursuit of the Erinyes. Torrance convincingly suggests that the story of the fall of Orestes as he chases a fawn during the recognition scene is an inverted image of the Aeschylean Orestes being hunted like a fawn by the Erinyes (*Eumenides* 111, 246).⁵³³ Torrance argues this is a metaphor for the fate of Orestes and his psychological fall as he prepares to commit the matricide.

Euripides initially frames Orestes' dilemma as to how he can punish the man who slew his father, and his mother who shares the unholy union with him (599-600). This places guilt on his mother only for her adultery. This is ironic as the murder of Aegisthus is less problematic, and reminiscent of the *Odyssey*, as Orestes avenges his kin by killing the hubristic ruler that usurped and killed his father and stole his wife.

Electra is preoccupied with a concern over money, heightened compared to Sophocles, and that Aegisthus has inherited Agamemnon's wealth at the cost of Agamemnon's children (935-45). Electra is emphatic that Orestes must kill Aegisthus (684-7). She warns that if he fails and dies then he condemns her to death too. I suggest this is more due to the inevitable retaliation from Aegisthus at the attempt on their lives than a suicidal response from Electra at losing her brother, which differs from Sophocles' Electra. Euripides has cast her into the masculine aggressive role and in so doing has reversed the Aeschylean interpretation; her brother is in the feminine role that needs repeated encouragement and instruction (693). She regards Aegisthus' death as the return of justice (*ὦ θεοί, Δίκη τε πάνθ' ὀρώσ', ἤλθές ποτε* 771), but Orestes will question this justice by the end of the play.

When the messenger reports that Aegisthus has been struck down by Orestes, he describes Aegisthus as Agamemnon's killer (763-4) and that

⁵³³ See Torrance (2011: 189) for a summary of Euripides' allusions to Aeschylus in the recognition scene.

Orestes claimed he had taken vengeance on his father's murderer (*φονέα δὲ πατρὸς ἀντετιμωρησάμην* 849-50). Yet Orestes is not depicted as heroic. The messenger describes how Orestes killed Aegisthus by striking him in the back during a sacrifice when he was bending down (*πᾶν δὲ σῶμ' ἄνω κάτω ἤσπαιρεν ἠλέλιξε δυσθνήσκων φόνῳ* 842-43). Porter suggests the problematic nature of Orestes' deed is the athletic and heroic terms in which it is portrayed.⁵³⁴ I suggest that Euripides has transformed the Odyssean motif and set up situations reminiscent of the earlier tradition of the myth to repeatedly surprise the audience with a different outcome.⁵³⁵

3.11.4. Murder of Clytemnestra: method and motives

Electra dominates Orestes as an instrument more than an agent in the matricide. Euripides does not have Clytemnestra see Aegisthus' corpse like Aegisthus sees hers in Sophocles. His focus is on Electra's emotions and it is she that reacts to Aegisthus' body after his murder.⁵³⁶

There is no confrontation between Orestes and Clytemnestra before her murder, as in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*. The moral dilemma is instead between Electra and Orestes.⁵³⁷ McHardy and Foley argue that female characters are associated with desiring revenge for its own sake and disregarding peaceful settlements, and prioritise the private arena of the family compared to men preferring the common good.⁵³⁸ Women in non-tragic texts are depicted avenging their kin against enemies of the family, whereas tragedy exaggerates normal behaviour and women typically desire and exact blood revenge against *philoï*.⁵³⁹

When Orestes questions how he can kill both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, Electra asserts that she will manage her mother's death (646). This shows the same agency as Sophocles' Electra (1436) who takes responsibility for dealing with Aegisthus after Orestes and Pylades have

⁵³⁴ Porter (1990: 258). Also O'Brien (1964: 23), Kubo (1966: 23), Zeitlin (1970: 655-9).

⁵³⁵ See Section 3.2.2. for the comparable murder at a feast in the *Odyssey*. See Goff (1991), Goldhill (1986) and Tarkow (1981) for Orestes as the flawed hero who fails to live up to Homeric or Aeschylean models.

⁵³⁶ Cropp (2013: 13).

⁵³⁷ Lloyd (1986: 18-19) argues Orestes is no more indecisive in Euripides than he is in Aeschylus.

⁵³⁸ McHardy (2008: 37-9). Foley (2001: 286-8).

⁵³⁹ McHardy (2005). Belfiore (2000).

killed Clytemnestra. The murders are reversed but Electra's control has not. Electra's strength and aggression are a foil for Orestes' weakness and indecision (276-9, 967-70). Electra encourages Orestes when he questions his confidence in Apollo's oracle. Her technique is to avoid addressing his concerns about the consequences of the matricide and instead to only address the parallel issue of not avenging their father (968-78).⁵⁴⁰

Electra's willingness to die for her cause (280) differs from other interpretations; her life is not dictated by her male *philoï* as it is in Sophocles. Electra fixates on the deprivation of the relationships she longs for in the *oikos* and *polis*. She does not assimilate her brother as a surrogate child, like in Sophocles' interpretation. Instead it is Orestes who seems to value her and see the loss of his sister as a punishment (1308-10), whereas Electra places more grief at having to leave her native land (1314-15).

Euripides outlines the conflict between Electra and Orestes when confronted with the matricide. Electra describes Clytemnestra as the mother who gave her birth (966) to draw on the physical bond between mother and child, which they intend to break. Electra mocks Orestes' hesitation and pity (967-9) despite the paradox of Apollo's oracle telling him to kill someone he must not kill (973). Euripides evokes the hesitation of Orestes and the sympathetic image of Clytemnestra exposing her breast to demonstrate the maternal bond in the *Choephoroi* when they try to kill her (1206-9). When Orestes strikes the fatal blow, stabbing her through the neck, he shields his eyes with his garments (1221-3). This is reminiscent of maidens who veil their eyes from horrors.⁵⁴¹ Electra urges him on. She does not actively take part until the final blow when she puts her hand on the sword (*ἐγὼ δέ γ' ἐπέκλευσά σοι ζίφους τ' ἐφηψάμαν ἄμα* 1224-5). This recalls Clytemnestra with her hand on the murder weapon (1159-60). The Athenian law-courts stressed the importance of punishing those who planned homicide as well as those who carried it out with their own hand.⁵⁴² I argue that Euripides' Electra

⁵⁴⁰ I follow Cropp (2013: 212) over Denniston (1939: 168) in interpreting *φεύζομαι* (975) as exile rather than standing trial.

⁵⁴¹ Apollonius of Rhodes depicts Medea veiling her face in the *Argonautica Book 4* to avoid seeing the blood of her brother spilt. See Section 4.9.

⁵⁴² See Section 3.7.8.

both plans and takes part in the matricide. However, at the conclusion of the play the consequences for Electra differ to Orestes.

Scholarly debate continues over Euripides' treatment of the myth. Some criticise the matricide and depict Electra and Orestes as unheroic.⁵⁴³ Euripides' interpretation of Electra is seen as bitter and self-pitying,⁵⁴⁴ and her repeated complaints of her status and poverty are not always seen as valid.⁵⁴⁵ Electra's insults over Aegisthus' corpse have been interpreted as distasteful and therefore make her a less pleasant character than Sophocles' Electra.⁵⁴⁶ Whereas others take Electra's lamentations and grievances seriously, including her loss of royal status, humiliating marriage, prolonged virginity, childlessness, poverty and physical deprivation.⁵⁴⁷ I agree that Orestes is less heroic and Electra is more pitiful and hateful than in previous interpretations, but argue that this does not lessen the horror of the matricide or the paradox of the justice they must enact for their father.

3.11.5. Justice

Despite the anti-heroic characterisation, Electra and Orestes show remorse for the matricide. Electra regrets what she did as the most terrible of sufferings she brought to pass (1226). Orestes questions the justice of Apollo's oracle as obscure (1190-1) and laments his banishment (*φόνια δ' ὄπασσας λάχε' ἀπὸ γᾶς Ἑλλανίδος* 1192-3). Electra's focus remains on her isolation from marriage (1198-1200). Electra is obsessed with her social situation and segregation from the feminine roles to which she feels entitled in the *oikos* and *polis*.

Euripides uses the Dioscuri as *dei ex machina* to conclude the play. They question Apollo's oracle and the paradox of avenging kin with reciprocal violence, suggesting the treatment Clytemnestra received was just

⁵⁴³ Knox (1979: 250-74).

⁵⁴⁴ Conacher (1967: 204-6).

⁵⁴⁵ Kitto (1961: 33). Arnott (1981: 184).

⁵⁴⁶ Lloyd (1986: 16) defends Euripides' Electra who does not respond to Orestes' invitation to maltreat Aegisthus' corpse. I disagree with Lloyd's interpretation that Electra suggests doing so in Sophocles' *Electra* (1487-90). I argue that Electra's account of Aegisthus is necessary as he does not appear alive in the play, and is therefore not abused like in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and in Sophocles' *Electra*.

⁵⁴⁷ Cropp (2013). Michelini (1987: 187-94). Lloyd (1986). They are also not critical of Euripides' treatment of Orestes' hesitation.

(*δίκαια* 1244), but their act was not (1244-8). Castor orders for Pylades to take Electra home as his wife, and for Orestes to leave Argos behind and not tread the city's ground (1249-54).⁵⁴⁸

Euripides alludes to the well-known theme of Orestes' pollution and persecution by the Erinyes from Aeschylus, although absent in Sophocles and in Homeric epic.⁵⁴⁹ However it is the Keres that will pursue him for killing his mother. Cropp and Denniston identify the Keres with the Erinyes here (as in Hesiod's *Theogony* 217-22).⁵⁵⁰ Cropp outlines the associations with Aeschylean elements of the Erinyes in *Electra*: hounds (1342-5; *Choephoroi* 924, 1054; *Eumenides* 111-3, 131), snakes (1256, 1345; *Choephoroi* 1049; *Eumenides* 128), and dark skin (1345; *Agamemnon* 462; *Choephoroi* 1048; *Eumenides* 52).

Orestes must go to Athens to sit on trial for murder where the votes will be equal (1254-67). Euripides continues to subvert the conclusion from the *Oresteia*. Orestes will found a city in Arcadia (1266-75) and Pylades will leave the country and go home with Electra, and bestow great wealth on the Farmer (1284-9). The Dioscuri conclude that Orestes is not polluted (*μυσαράϊς*) with the murder (1294). Euripides depicts Apollo as responsible for the matricide (1266-7, 1296-7, 1302).⁵⁵¹ However the ending remains problematic for the audience; if Orestes is not polluted then why is he pursued by the Erinyes and why does he have to leave the city in exile and stand trial?

The conclusion is also problematic because Electra avoids the pollution and exile for spilling the blood of her kin, despite being the more aggressive partner in the crime and the instigator of the murders. Furthermore, unlike Orestes, she did not receive the oracle from Apollo to murder her mother. Therefore Electra does not have the support of a divinity as a potential advocate and motive for her crime, as Orestes did in the *Oresteia*.⁵⁵² Conacher argues that Euripides' Electra acts independently of supernatural motives and

⁵⁴⁸ I suggest that Cropp (2013: 234) oversimplifies the issue that most homicide would result in exile pending purification, due to the victim's wrath and the killer's pollution threatening the community.

⁵⁴⁹ Orestes' exile and pursuit by the Erinyes is not in the *Odyssey* because the matricide is not explicit, although he presided over the burial of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (3.306-10). It did not feature in Pindar, although persecution is hinted at in Stesichorus (217 PMGF).

⁵⁵⁰ Cropp (2013: 234). Denniston (1939: 204).

⁵⁵¹ Conacher (1967: 199-212). Cropp (2013: 239).

⁵⁵² See Section 3.9.4.

is instead motivated by passion, without even having the ordinary human motives of Sophocles' *Electra*.⁵⁵³

Castor's response is that their acts were in common from the ruin of their ancestors (1303-6). Euripides' epilogue attempts to resolve the play by reintroducing themes from the larger structure of the myth which have been disposed of elsewhere in the play.⁵⁵⁴ The motives of Atreus and Thyestes are recalled, as well as that of Apollo's oracle.

Electra's marriage to Pylades (1311-13, 1340) is actually providing her with the relationship and connection that she has so desperately wanted and been deprived of throughout the play. Electra is alienated from the conventional forms of punishment for intentional homicide (exile and trial) which Orestes suffers, and she remains isolated from her brother and her native land. Euripides replaces the certainty of Apollo's oracle, implementing the will of Zeus in *Eumenides*, with being accepted but not understood (1245-8, 1301-7). Cropp concludes that reason is defeated by emotion as Electra's *thumos* and Orestes' weakness have driven them to commit a grievous wrong due to their own natures as well as divine intent and their own circumstances.⁵⁵⁵

Although Orestes kills his mother, in accordance with the existing tradition, in Euripides' interpretation Electra grasps the sword (1225). In portraying her *thumos* as a decisive factor, Euripides makes Electra comparable to Medea or Hecuba; driven by extremes of suffering and alienation to extremes of vengeful brutality.⁵⁵⁶ I take Cropp's argument further and suggest that Euripides' *Electra* shares some similarities to Euripides' *Medea* in her escape from conventional forms of punishment. I argue that they both lack a positive relationship with their mother and both, ultimately, lack a relationship with children as mothers themselves.

⁵⁵³ Conacher (1967: 199-212).

⁵⁵⁴ Gellie (1981: 8-9).

⁵⁵⁵ Cropp (2013: 11, 25).

⁵⁵⁶ Cropp (2013: 11). McHardy (2008: 37-9) uses Hecuba as an example (*Iliad* 24.194-216) to demonstrate that female characters are depicted with such a strong desire for blood revenge that it makes them act in excessive ways. Cf. Herodotus (4.165-205).

3.12. Euripides' *Orestes*

Euripides' *Orestes* offers further contributions to the myth, such as: Electra's more active role in the matricide; the return of Menelaus; Electra and Orestes being threatened with the same punishment; the threat of stoning; Orestes, Electra and Pylades' attempted revenge on Helen and Hermione; and the conclusion that Orestes will marry Hermione. Euripides demonstrates his awareness of previous interpretations of the myth by reintroducing and altering some elements, such as: Agamemnon's murder in the bath with the net and axe; the murder trial in Argos; and the family history of violence.⁵⁵⁷ Euripides' *Orestes* departs from Aeschylus, Sophocles and his own *Electra* in a variety of ways in regards to the interpretation of justice and punishment for Clytemnestra's murder, which I will outline below.

Euripides' *Orestes* is dated to 408 BC.⁵⁵⁸ Many scholars argue that it reflects the contemporary political situation in Athens under a restored democracy in the aftermath of the oligarchic regime of 411 BC and the spate of litigations involving exile, disfranchisement or judicial murder.⁵⁵⁹ Many regard the conclusion as problematic.⁵⁶⁰ Aristotle condemned the *deus ex machina* as not springing organically from the plot (*Poetics* 1454a37-61). However, some scholars defend Euripides' conclusion in the context of the dramatic action of the play.⁵⁶¹ Hall discusses the authorial power over the narrative and the profound political statement, and Papadimitropoulos argues for the importance of Apollo's epiphany in interpreting the play.⁵⁶²

3.12.1. Murder of Agamemnon: method

Euripides is versatile in acknowledging and reinterpreting previous interpretations of Agamemnon's murder. Euripides follows Aeschylus in depicting Clytemnestra's method for killing Agamemnon as the net and the bath. Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon in an endless (*ἄπειρος*) woven garment or net (*ῥφασμα* 25-6). This recalls the net in the *Oresteia*

⁵⁵⁷ Zeitlin (1980) discusses texts talking to texts in *Orestes*.

⁵⁵⁸ Willink (1986: xxii-iii).

⁵⁵⁹ Conacher (1967: 220-1). Euben (1986). Willink (1986: xxii-iii). Hall (1993).

⁵⁶⁰ Verrall (1905: 257). Arrowsmith (1958: 110). Zeitlin (1980: 69). Euben (1986: 243). Dunn (1996: 172).

⁵⁶¹ Conacher (1967: 224). Winnington-Ingram (1969: 132-4).

⁵⁶² Hall (1993). Papadimitropoulos (2011).

(*Agamemnon* 1115, 1382; *Libation Bearers* 1015) and imagery in Euripides' *Electra* (154).⁵⁶³ Euripides follows Aeschylus that Clytemnestra murdered Agamemnon in the bath (360-7), as in his *Electra* (154-8, 1148-54),⁵⁶⁴ rather than the Homeric (*Odyssey* 4.525-37, 11.409-13) or Sophoclean (*Electra* 203-8) versions where he is ambushed at a feast.⁵⁶⁵ However Euripides also alludes to Agamemnon being killed with an axe by Clytemnestra (496-7). This is reminiscent of Sophocles' depiction of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus splitting his head with an axe (*Electra* 97-9, 484-6) which may have first appeared in Stesichorus (Section 3.5).

3.12.2. Murder of Agamemnon: motives

Euripides does not focus on Clytemnestra's motives for killing Agamemnon in the *Orestes*. In the *Agamemnon* these were: Iphigeneia; the house of Atreus; and jealousy at Cassandra. In Sophocles, it was revenge for the sacrifice of Iphigeneia. In *Electra*, Euripides innovated the myth by putting priority on Clytemnestra's adultery as a motive more important to her than the sacrifice of Iphigeneia. In *Orestes*, the main theme is the dilemma that the matricide places upon her children. Clytemnestra's guilt in killing her husband is therefore stressed rather than any defence of her motives.

Euripides' Electra is not as aggressive or bitter as she is in *Electra* and does not want to elaborate on why her mother killed Agamemnon, claiming it is unfit for a maiden to discuss in public (26-7). Euripides casts Clytemnestra in a critical light to heighten the dilemma of the matricide. Clytemnestra is characterised as unholy (*άνόσιος* 24, 518-19) and criticised by Electra and compared to Helen as hated by the gods (*θεοῖς στυγουμένην* 19-21).

Euripides is the only source to introduce Helen's daughter Hermione into the care of Clytemnestra to raise during the Trojan war (62-6). Therefore if Euripides had focussed on Clytemnestra's motives then this could have been problematic as the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigeneia could have been

⁵⁶³ See Sections 3.7.1. and 3.8.1.

⁵⁶⁴ Willink (1986: 84).

⁵⁶⁵ See Sections 3.2.2. and 3.10.1.

avenged by sacrificing Helen's daughter Hermione, instead of Agamemnon.⁵⁶⁶

3.12.3. Murder of Clytemnestra: method

Euripides continues the representation from his *Electra* that both Orestes and Electra were involved in the matricide. Clytemnestra bared her breast to Orestes before he slaughtered her (839-43), following the tradition of their confrontation, and that Aegisthus was killed first (561-3), from the *Oresteia*. Orestes is characterised as the murderer of his mother (*μητρὸς ὄς φονεὺς ἔφου* 74) whereas Electra is characterised by her unmarried status (*παρθένε μακρὸν δὴ μῆκος Ἥλέκτρα χρόνου* 72) consistent with Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electra* plays. Electra is less dominant in *Orestes*. She admits that she had a part in the murder of Clytemnestra, however she mitigates this by saying her part was such that a woman may have (*κἀγὼ μετέσχον, οἷα δὴ γυνή, φόνου* 32).⁵⁶⁷ However, Euripides reveals that she had her hand on the murder weapon (1235).

Euripides uses the dichotomy of holy and unholy to describe the matricide. Orestes describes himself as the killer of his mother to Menelaus (392) and the Chorus (546-7), emphasising the dilemma that his actions make him both holy (*ὄσιος* 547) for avenging his father and unholy (*ἀνόσιός* 546) as a matricide. Orestes' unholy sacrifice (*ἀνόσια* 563) of his mother is put in contrast to the vengeance due to his father (*ἀλλὰ τιμωρῶν πατρί* 563, 826-30).

Peels-Matthey analyses the semantic relationship between *ὄσιος* and *ἀγνός* in Athenian theatre, embodied in the metaphor of purity equalling morality.⁵⁶⁸ She argues that Euripides' use of the metaphor in *Orestes* in relation to the *ἀγνός* (1604) of Orestes' hands, but not his mind, is remarkable because Euripides is applying this term to thoughts rather than actions. The metaphor of moral disqualification is continued with the description of Menelaus' lack of mental purity (*ἀνόσιος* 1211).⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ See Section 3.11.2. on Euripides' use of the *reductio ad absurdum* for this argument.

⁵⁶⁷ Willink (1986: 85) notes the wry sense of Electra's claims that not everyone found the murder of Clytemnestra glorious (30) when in fact those who applauded the killing are a minority (923-30). However her comment prepares the audience for the debate in the Argive assembly on how to respond to the matricide; a complete innovation of Euripides.

⁵⁶⁸ Peels-Matthey (2018).

⁵⁶⁹ Peels-Matthey (2018: 93-109). See also Parker (1983: 111).

Orestes diminishes Electra's role in the murder and absolves her from guilt by telling her that, although she consented, it was he who shed his mother's blood (284-5). However Tyndareus holds the opposite view; that Electra deserves to die more than Orestes for her role in putting him in a rage with stories of Agamemnon's death and Clytemnestra's affair with Aegisthus (615-20). This is the first time the planner has been interpreted as more culpable or warranting more severe punishment than murderer in the matricide.

In the Athenian legal context, planning intentional homicide could result in the same punishment as committing it with your own hand. Electra's role is described more as one who plans or incites the murder rather than the one who commits it with their own hand. This is reminiscent of Aegisthus' ambiguous role in Agamemnon's murder in Pindar (Section 3.6.) and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (Section 3.7.5.). However, Euripides reveals later in the play that Orestes killed his mother (*ἔκτεινα μητέρ' . . .* 1235) but Electra put her hand on the sword (*ἠψάμην δ' ἐγὼ ξίφους* 1235). This is consistent with her portrayal in Euripides' *Electra* where she has her hand on the weapon that kills her mother. This recalls the ambiguity between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' roles in Agamemnon's murder, depicted since Homeric epic and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Euripides' intention may have been to mirror the threat of equal punishment for Electra and Orestes just as Clytemnestra and Aegisthus suffered the same punishment.

3.12.4. Murder of Clytemnestra: motives

In Orestes' forensic defence of his action he uses the argument that he is a public benefactor for putting a stop to women being brazen enough to kill their husbands (566-70). Orestes claims he had a just cause to kill his mother (*μισῶν δὲ μητέρ' ἐνδίκως ἀπόλεσα* 572) because of her adultery (572-8) and that she killed his father to avoid any punishment (*ὡς μὴ δίκην δοίη πόσει, ἐζημίωσε πατέρα κάπεκτειν' ἐμόν* 578).⁵⁷⁰

Euripides puts more emphasis on the lineage of the family to demonstrate the inherited history of kin-killing. Orestes' lineage is traced

⁵⁷⁰ I disagree with Willink (1986: 177) that this rhetoric is unlikely to advance the Athenian audience's sympathy.

back to Tantalus (5-10) who begot Pelops, father of Atreus, who was destined for strife through warring with his brother Thyestes (11-14).⁵⁷¹ The reference to Tantalus' fate at the beginning of the play serves as a paradigm of the dramatic action to follow, until the appearance of Apollo (1625).⁵⁷² In *Odyssey* (11.582-92) Tantalus is tormented by hunger and thirst. Euripides follows the myth in Alcman (79 PMG), Archilochus (frag. 91 West), Alcaeus (frag. 365 PLF), and Pindar (*Olympian* 1.57-8, *Isthmian* 8.10-11) that Zeus hung a great stone over Tantalus' head and that he lives forever in the fear that it will fall.⁵⁷³ O'Brien notes the analogy between the plight of Tantalus and that of a criminal under sentence of public stoning. There are numerous and emphatic references to the threat of stoning of Electra and Orestes (50, 442, 536, 564, 614, 625, 863, 914, cf. 946).⁵⁷⁴

The family lineage to Tantalus and the killing of Myrtilus by Pelops brought the curse onto the house (985-95).⁵⁷⁵ The Chorus pick up on the Tantalid history and the curse of the house of Atreus, the golden lamb and the slaughtering of children (807-18) which led to the sun changing its' course (996-1006).⁵⁷⁶ Euripides uses the theme of the reversal of the sun to demonstrate Orestes and Electra's part in the family cycle of kin-killing. Orestes' sword, covered in Clytemnestra's blood, is displayed in light of the sun (*ἀνὰς ἀελίοιο* 821-2). Electra blames Eris for reversing the sun (*ἀλίου μετέβαλεν* 1001-4),⁵⁷⁷ and bringing further deaths to her and Orestes in the house (1007-12). The metaphor of streams reversing is also used in Euripides' *Medea* (410) and *δίκαια* flowing backwards in *Electra* (1155-6).⁵⁷⁸

Euripides employs the murderous banquet motif throughout this family saga. There could have been a tradition of Tantalus trying to serve his son Pelops to the gods at a banquet (*Iphigeneia in Tauris* 386-8, *Helen* 388-

⁵⁷¹ I agree with Willink (1986: 83), following Di Benedetto (1965), who sees line 15 as an interpolation due to the clumsy triple naming of Atreus.

⁵⁷² O'Brien (1988). Cf. Webster (1967: 252).

⁵⁷³ O'Brien (1988: 32-5).

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. *Agamemnon* (1616) for the threat of stoning to Aegisthus.

⁵⁷⁵ O'Brien (1988: 35-40) suggests that Euripides contrasts the fortunes of Menelaus and Orestes (349-51) who are both descendants of Tantalus (1434-4).

⁵⁷⁶ See also Euripides' *Electra* (699-742) discussed in Section 3.11.1. Cf. Verrall (1905: 216, 263) and Kitto (1961: 343) on criticism on the utility of the Chorus in the *Orestes*.

⁵⁷⁷ Willink (253-6) discusses the difficulty in interpreting the lines and that it implies eastward and westward motion.

⁵⁷⁸ See Sections 4.7. and 3.11.1.

89).⁵⁷⁹ This theme continued with Atreus devouring his own children at a banquet (807-18).⁵⁸⁰ Orestes and Electra reverse this theme of murderous parents by murdering their own parent. Euripides impinges the mythical past on the human present, whilst also constructing the 'modern' social context and the murder of Clytemnestra.⁵⁸¹ This develops an interface between divine will and human responsibility.

3.12.5. Murder of Clytemnestra: accomplices

Euripides gives Pylades a more substantial role than in earlier surviving versions. Euripides makes Pylades an accomplice and transfers the language of Electra, as the accomplice urging on Orestes, to Pylades (*ἐγὼ δὲ γ' ἐπεκέλευσα κάπέλυσ' ὄκνον* 1236).⁵⁸² Orestes confirms that Pylades was his accomplice in his mother's blood (405) and Pylades admits he is unholy from joining Orestes in killing his mother (765-7). Pylades joined in the killing (*συγκατέκτανον*) and plotted the whole deed (*πάντ' ἐβούλευσ' ὄν*) for which Orestes and Electra are being punished (1089-90). Pylades even suggests killing Helen to hurt Menelaus and instructs Orestes on how to do so (1105-7) and reassures him of the good plan he is concocting (*ἄκουσον δ' ὡς καλῶς βουλευόμαι* 1131).

Pylades claims to have been driven away from his home in exile by his father Strophius (765) who calls him unholy (*άνόσιος*) for jointly undertaking in killing their mother (*συνηράμην φόνον σοι μητρός* 767).⁵⁸³ This admission shows that Pylades was involved in the murder, although not defining his exact role. Pylades explains that he is not scared of the Argives trying to kill him as well because he is from Phocis, not Argos, and therefore does not fall under Argive authority (771-2).

⁵⁷⁹ Gantz (1993: 534) discusses the lack of evidence of this version until Lykophron (152-55) and Ovid *Metamorphoses* (6.403-11).

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. Agamemnon's murder at a banquet in *Odyssey* (11.410-24) and Sophocles' *Electra* (203). See Sections 3.2.2. and 3.10.1.

⁵⁸¹ Fuqua (1978: 8).

⁵⁸² Willink (1986: 285) notes the violent overtones of *ἐπεβούλευσα* from contemporary Athenian politics.

⁵⁸³ Kovacs (2007: 260-2) discusses the responses to the contradiction between 763-7 and 1075-7, dismissing that Pylades' banishment was not permanent, or that Orestes was thoughtless and egotistical. Cf. Willink (1986: 264-265). Kovacs and offers the plausible suggestion that 1075-7 are an interpolation and should be removed.

3.12.6. Justice: Menelaus and Tyndareus

Euripides innovates the representation of the punishment for Electra and Orestes in *Orestes*. The city has decreed that no one is to receive them or speak to them because they are matricides (*μητροκτονοῦντας* 46-8). The Argive assembly meets and votes that both Orestes and Electra are to suffer the same punishment; to die by either be stoning or by the sword (846-865).

Euripides innovates the play by introducing Menelaus and Tyndareus, who have been absent in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and his own *Electra*.⁵⁸⁴ As male kin, they could have been avengers for Agamemnon or Clytemnestra, as their slain kin. Menelaus would have had a responsibility as an adult male to avenge his brother Agamemnon and punish Clytemnestra, as depicted in Homeric epic (*Odyssey* 4.545-7). Instead the responsibility throughout the tragic interpretations has fallen to Agamemnon's son Orestes. The audience might assume Menelaus' inclusion in the *Orestes* would therefore provide a potential sympathiser to Orestes. However Euripides further surprises the audience by making Menelaus unsavoury and unsympathetic, despite Orestes being his kin and seeking his help.

Tyndareus threatens to incite the Argive assembly to stone Orestes and his sister to death (612-14). Euripides utilises Tyndareus as a character with the responsibility to avenge the death of his daughter Clytemnestra, as her only surviving male relative, other than her killer Orestes. The references to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' children in Euripides' and Sophocles' *Electra*'s suggest there could have been other surviving kin to avenge her.⁵⁸⁵ However there are no extant interpretations which depict the children of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus seeking vengeance for the murder of their parents.

Euripides explores the issue of *philia* through the introduction of Menelaus, who fails to live up to Orestes' expectations, as a contrast to consistently faithful Pylades. Euripides situates Menelaus' relationship with the main characters in terms of reciprocity. Orestes says Menelaus is kin and owes his father a debt of gratitude (243-4), presumably for his allegiance in Troy, but by association Orestes hopes this will extend to helping them.

⁵⁸⁴ Kitto (1961: 346) comments on the absence of Tyndareus on the Athenian stage.

⁵⁸⁵ See Sections 3.10.5. and 3.11.2.

Rather than defending Orestes and Electra in avenging his brother Agamemnon, Menelaus is ambiguous and unsympathetic (482, 484).⁵⁸⁶ Aristotle twice criticises the unnecessary villainy of Menelaus in the *Orestes* (*Poetics* 1454a 29, 1461b 21).⁵⁸⁷

Under the cycle of revenge and retaliatory familial, the audience might expect Menelaus to be grateful of Orestes and Electra's murder of Clytemnestra. It is surprising that Menelaus expected to embrace Orestes and his mother upon returning (370-3) and that he regards Clytemnestra's murder as unholy (*ἀνόσιον φόνον* 373-4) and a grievous wrong (*δείν'... κακά* 375-6). The reference to the bath (360, 367-8) might make the audience assume he had already found out about the death of his brother and Clytemnestra's involvement.

Menelaus ironically notes that it is a Greek custom to honour blood relatives (486), despite not having honoured his own. Euripides refers to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia at Aulis, as a technique for Orestes to remind Menelaus that he could be asking for the death of Hermione in recompense for this sacrifice (651-9). This strengthens Orestes' argument by making what Menelaus owes them seem less of a burden than the death of his daughter. Orestes reminds Menelaus that if he allows Orestes and Electra to die then Agamemnon's house will have no children left (660-4). However this does not acknowledge his sister Chrysothemis, who is mentioned earlier (23) but otherwise absent from this play.

Euripides makes Menelaus a man of words and not action (718, 740). Euripides highlights his failure at any traditional responsibility as kin of a murdered victim by having him articulate what should be done and then completely fail to do it. He does not avenge the murder of his brother Agamemnon, or attempt to help his kin who avenged Agamemnon. Instead Menelaus leaves them to deal with the consequences of the wrath of Tyndareus and the Argives alone. Euripides' intention may have been to contrast Menelaus' cowardice against Pylades' bravery, who is loyal to

⁵⁸⁶ Winnington-Ingram (1969: 135) stresses the calculating nature of Menelaus as a politician who would like the throne for himself.

⁵⁸⁷ Lloyd (1992: 114).

Orestes and Electra throughout all their ordeals despite not being a blood relation (750-5, 769).

Euripides uses the *agôn* between Tyndareus and Orestes to explore contemporary ideas of justice against the backdrop of heroic myth. There are frequent allusions to the legal context (48, 440, 756, 799) especially in the trial of the Argive assembly.⁵⁸⁸ Winnington-Ingram argues that Euripides' pervasive use of rhetoric catered to the Athenian audience; a large section of which were accustomed in the law-courts with being presented with a clear statement of the facts of a case.⁵⁸⁹

Tyndareus claims that Orestes did not consider justice (*δίκαιος*) or the law (*νόμος* 494-5) in killing his mother. Tyndareus suggests Orestes as prosecutor should have imposed a penalty for bloodshed consistent with divine law to expel his mother from the house (*χρήν αὐτὸν ἐπιθεῖναι μὲν αἵματος δίκην ὅσῃαν διώκοντ', ἐκβαλεῖν τε δωμάτων μητέρα* 500-2).⁵⁹⁰ I disagree with Willink's assertion that, although Tyndareus' emphasis is on expulsion, his words are consistent with the stoning of an outcast wife.⁵⁹¹ This penalty for bloodshed is echoed later on in Clytemnestra's decision not to lay a penalty on herself (*οὐχ αὐτῇ δίκην ἐπέθηκεν* 576-8). Willink suggests that this indirectly supports Orestes' claim that the execution was legitimate, and notes the irony that Clytemnestra inflicted the death penalty on Agamemnon rather than the penalty on herself, calling to mind the famous suicide of (another wicked woman) Phaedra.⁵⁹²

Tyndareus' disagreement with Orestes (491-539) has been seen by some scholars as absurd and anachronistic.⁵⁹³ Lloyd-Jones argues that Tyndareus' suggestion that Orestes launch a criminal prosecution in the courts is wholly inconceivable in the circumstances envisaged by the two older tragedians.⁵⁹⁴ Lloyd discounts these objections because the ambiguity

⁵⁸⁸ Lloyd (1992: 114).

⁵⁸⁹ Winnington-Ingram (1969: 136).

⁵⁹⁰ Compare *τὸν Ἑλένης φόνον διώκων* (1534) on prosecuting Helen's murder.

⁵⁹¹ Willink (1986: 169, 335).

⁵⁹² Willink (1986: 169, 178). Compare also *αἵματος τινύμεναι δίκαν* (322-3) on the Erinyes exacting the penalty for bloodshed. Willink (1986: 139) compares this to Euripides' *Medea* (*δίκην τῶνδ' ἀντιτίσασθαι κακῶν* 261) on punishing her husband for his wrongs.

⁵⁹³ Grube (1941: 383). Easterling (1985: 9). Winnington-Ingram (1969: 133) assesses the Argive assembly threatening to execute the murderers by judicial process as an anachronism.

⁵⁹⁴ Lloyd-Jones (1971: 154-5).

of νόμος could be intelligible in the heroic world.⁵⁹⁵ I follow Porter and argue that the suggestion of prosecuting Clytemnestra follows contemporary Athenian styles of forensic argument and suggests for the first time using the law as an alternative to revenge.⁵⁹⁶

Euripides' innovation is to reflect the contemporary use of the law courts onto the tragic cycle in a way that differs from Aeschylus. Euripides addresses the cycle of retaliatory violence that comes from murderous conduct (*μυαιφόνον* 524) and the paradox this places on Orestes (504-24, 538-9). Euripides' conception of justice, resolving this through the legal trial in Argos, is modelled on the Athenian assembly.⁵⁹⁷ However, Euripides departs dramatically from the Aeschylean trial on the Areopagus; Orestes is condemned to death rather than acquitted.⁵⁹⁸

3.12.7. Justice: Erinyes

Euripides follows Aeschylus in presenting Orestes pursued by his mother's Erinyes. However Euripides innovates his interpretation by not presenting them physically on stage and focussing instead on their psychological persecution of Orestes. Orestes is afflicted by madness (*μανία* 326, 400, 530-3) and driven to madness (*ἀναβακχεύει* 338) from the dreadful goddesses (*δεινός* 399, *σεμναί* 410, *ἀλάστορ* 337) pursuing him (35, 226, 236, 252-60, 400, 791, 830-40, 844-5) because of kindred bloodshed (411, 421). Di Benedetto deletes line 38, which names the goddesses as Eumenides, who work to create this fear. I follow O'Brien who posits that it contradicts line 37 by naming the goddesses Electra does not want to name.⁵⁹⁹

Orestes feels guilt for the matricide (395-8). Willink analyses *ἐπεὶ δ' ἀμαρτοῦσ' ἤσθητ'* (576) as an intellectual view of remorse as awareness of error rather than sense of pollution, and compares it to *ἢ σύνεσις, ὅτι σύννοια δεῖν' εἰργασμένος* (396) for Orestes' awareness and remorseful distress.⁶⁰⁰ When asked what is causing him madness, Orestes

⁵⁹⁵ Lloyd (1992: 115) notes the alternative version that Ares' trial for killing Halirrhothius was the first murder trial (Euripides' *Electra* 1258-63).

⁵⁹⁶ Porter (1994: 110-13).

⁵⁹⁷ Vidal-Naquet (1988: 335).

⁵⁹⁸ Hall (1993: 266).

⁵⁹⁹ Di Benedetto (1965). O'Brien (1988: 37).

⁶⁰⁰ Willink (1986: 150, 178).

refers not to the externalised agents of madness referred to earlier (37-8, 256), but to *σύνεσις*; an inner consciousness. Menelaus fails to grasp this; he understands Orestes' plight in terms of something external destroying him.⁶⁰¹ Rodgers compares this to Agamemnon's attribution of blame to Zeus, Fate (Moirai) and the Erinyes who walk in darkness for the *ate* which compelled him to take Briseis from Achilles in the *Iliad* (19.86-7).⁶⁰²

Euripides echoes the *Eumenides* in questioning why Clytemnestra has Erinyes to fight for her while Agamemnon has none (580-5). Papadimitropoulos suggests that Tyndareus is characterised as an Erinyes, as both are dressed in black (321, 457).⁶⁰³ Pylades has no fear of being contaminated with Orestes' madness *λύσσης* (793). If the concern of the goddesses is with the shedding of kindred blood, as in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, then that might address why Euripides does not depict them pursuing Pylades, because he was not related to the victim. But this does not explain why they are not depicted in plaguing Electra.

In the *Orestes*, Euripides makes the criticism of Apollo even stronger than previous interpretations.⁶⁰⁴ Apollo's oracle to Orestes to kill his mother is repeatedly criticised as unjust and hateful (160, 165, 191). Electra asks why she should speak of Apollo's injustice (*ἀδικία* 28) that he persuaded (*πειθεῖ*) Orestes to kill his mother (29-30). Orestes blames Apollo for making him commit the unholy deed (*νόσοις* 282). He claims that Apollo ordered him to murder his mother (*οἴβος, κελεύσας μητρὸς ἐκπρᾶξαι φόνον* 415) and that it was in obedience to him that he killed her (594). Euripides does not focus on whether Orestes sought the prophecy, as in Sophocles' *Electra* (32-4). Therefore there is less emphasis on Orestes' agency in seeking out how he should exact vengeance.

⁶⁰¹ Rodgers (1969: 253-4) suggests that this shows a shift in emphasis on how judgement was passed on past actions and a growing awareness of the inner self.

⁶⁰² See Sections 3.7.2. and 3.8.2. Agamemnon regards his actions as a result of *ate* as something external to him which therefore makes him blameless. Compare also Euripides *Hippolytus* (317-18) when Phaedra tells her Nurse her hands are clean but her heart is stained (*χεῖρες μὲν ἀγναί, φρήν δ' ἔχει μίασμά τι*) where the Nurse cannot comprehend that the *miasma* is internal.

⁶⁰³ Papadimitropoulos (2011: 503-4).

⁶⁰⁴ Cf. Euripides' *Electra* (1244-8). Lloyd-Jones (1971: 154-5) argues that Euripides in *Electra* and *Orestes* criticises the older poets' approval of the matricide.

Euripides follows Sophocles with the depiction that Agamemnon would not have told Orestes to kill his mother, for all the suffering it would bring him, as it would not bring him back from the dead (285). Denniston notes that Sophocles and Euripides are original in suggesting that Agamemnon may not have wanted his children to kill Clytemnestra.⁶⁰⁵ Orestes' rhetoric that Apollo is unholy (*ἀνόσιος*), acted wrongfully and should be put to death (595-6) is classed as absurd by Willink.⁶⁰⁶ But I suggest Euripides is combining inherited ideas on justice and revenge, ordained by the gods, with the legal language of homicide.

Both Electra and Orestes are threatened with the same punishment. Despite Electra being less aggressive in this play, she is still characterised by her bravery. At the prospect of being killed it is Orestes, not Electra, who suggests they should kill themselves by the noose (a very feminine means of suicide) or the sword (1035-6). Electra is prepared to kill herself with a sword (1041-2) after suggesting that Orestes kill her rather than one of the Argives, which she perceives as an insult (1037-8). This demonstrates her typically masculine concern with honour and the views of her enemies, consistent with her interpretation in Sophocles' *Electra* (1153-4).⁶⁰⁷

3.12.8. Electra: childlessness

Electra is consistently characterised by her childlessness. Euripides describes her as unwed and childless (*ἄγαμος ἐπὶ δ' ἄτεκνος* 206). Euripides' Electra recalls Sophocles' Electra in lamenting how, as a woman, she will survive alone without a brother, father, or friend (*ἀνάδελφος ἀπάτωρ ἄφιλος* 310). This is a deliberate echo of Andromache's lament for Hector as husband, brother and father to her (*Iliad* 6.429-30). Euripides further innovates his interpretation from *Electra*, where the famously un-wedded Electra was married to the Farmer, to *Orestes* where she is again betrothed to Pylades (1078-80, 1092-3, 1207-8) as their trusted *φίλος* (1155-8).

⁶⁰⁵ Denniston (1939: 29-30). Cf. Sophocles' *Electra* (400).

⁶⁰⁶ Willink (1986: 181).

⁶⁰⁷ See also Section 4.7. on Medea.

Apollo's appearance *ex machina* imposes order and restores many aspects of the earlier interpretations.⁶⁰⁸ Orestes must go to Athens to stand trial on the Areopagus and will be acquitted (1643-52). However he is then destined to marry Hermione (1653-57) and ultimately rule Argos (1660-1). Euripides continues the innovation he introduced in his *Electra* that the *deus ex machina* tells Orestes to give Electra in marriage to Pylades (1658-9). I argue that it remains problematic for the audience to interpret the marriage of Electra to Pylades as a punishment, especially given her complaints at being unmarried prior to Orestes' arrival. Papadimitropoulos notes the lack of condemnation for Pylades, who helped to instigate the murder, and that the happy life he is foretold of with Electra seems more like a reward (1659).⁶⁰⁹ The ending therefore remains problematic.⁶¹⁰ However, it is unknown what place the *Orestes* occupied in its tetralogy. O'Brien suggests that a play in which the principal characters escape harm and find happiness in the end is suitable for fourth position in a Euripidean production.⁶¹¹

Euripides' emphasis on the lineage of the Tantalid family and the inherited history of kin-killing reinforces the arguments of Tyndareus about the futility and pollution of retaliatory killings. When evaluated alongside the rhetoric, agonistic style, and advocacy of the law as an alternative to revenge, this demonstrates Euripides' skill in utilising ideas and language from the contemporary legal context to reinvent the myth with new debates and conflict.

The outcome remains consistent: Clytemnestra is killed by her children, and her children are punished. But the punishment has taken a different direction. Euripides introduces male kin as potential avengers but who do not kill the murderers in revenge. There is less differentiation between the gender of the avengers or the murderers; Electra's role in the murder is ambiguous, and for the first time she is threatened with the same punishment and social isolation as Orestes. But ultimately her punishment only relates to

⁶⁰⁸ Willink (1986: xxxvii) discusses the dramatised transition of Helen's passing from mortality to immortality as paradoxical; the killing is successful in that the mortal Helen perishes.

⁶⁰⁹ Papadimitropoulos (2011: 504).

⁶¹⁰ Verrall (1905: 256-60) does not believe the happy ending was part of the original play. Conacher (1967: 224) and Arrowsmith (1958: 110) also discount the epilogue.

⁶¹¹ O'Brien (1988: 45). *Alcestis* stands as a precedent.

her feminine role and her position within the *oikos*. Euripides is consistent with previous interpretations in representing Electra without any children, despite her marriage. She may not have to go on trial in Athens like Orestes, but her isolation from her mother and her community in Argos can be interpreted as isolating her as a woman.

Electra's characterisation throughout Athenian classical tragedy is as one of the intentional murderers of her mother. Although the depictions vary regarding her exact role and the consequences of the matricide, some elements are consistent, particularly in Sophocles and Euripides. Electra is isolated from her mother, the *oikos* and the *polis*, and takes on the masculine role of avenger. She escapes the conventional forms of punishment for intentional homicide and does not suffer the same justice as her brother. I argue that her gender contributes to her otherness in the conventional scheme of vengeance and retribution. I shall now explore how the characterisation of Clytemnestra and Electra evolves in Roman interpretations.

3.13. Seneca

Seneca's life in the first century AD was impacted by the judgements and tyrannical behaviour of the *princeps* and the power and influence of the individuals in the imperial court. His life spanned the rule of Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero.⁶¹² He was tutor in rhetoric and advisor to Nero during the early years of his reign. This included writing his accession speeches and encouraging him to govern following the model of Augustus (Suetonius *Nero* 10.1.2 / *De Clementia* 11.2), in contrast to the ways of Claudius.⁶¹³

It is difficult to date Seneca's tragedies. Tarrant and Buckley argue that we should not assume all of Seneca's tragedies were written in the Neronian period, and that it is likely they were composed throughout his career and could just as easily be Claudian, Gaian or Tiberian.⁶¹⁴ Fitch convincingly argues on stylistic and metrical grounds that the plays can be

⁶¹² Braund (2015: 26).

⁶¹³ Ker (2015: 109-11).

⁶¹⁴ Tarrant (1976: 7). Buckley (2013).

divided into three groups, with *Agamemnon* being one of the earliest plays, and *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* as the latest plays.⁶¹⁵

I am not convinced by Nisbet's argument that Seneca would have avoided some of the snide allusions to the Julio-Claudian court, such as a triumphant ruler killed by his forceful wife in *Agamemnon*, during the early years of Nero's reign.⁶¹⁶ Nisbet suggests that the plays must pre-date these events rather than be politically motivated by them, and that most of the plays must have been composed during the years 49-54 AD. I argue that Seneca would not have avoided such subtle allusions to the political scandals of the day in his choice of mythical plots in his tragedies. Seneca makes overt allusions to political rulers in the Republic and principate throughout his philosophical works, as examples to aspire to and avoid (*De Clementia*, *Apocolocyntosis*, *De Beneficiis* and *De Ira*).⁶¹⁷ The boundary between stage and reality was sometimes blurred. Nero's desire to perform in public resulted in him singing and performing the role of Orestes the matricide (Suetonius *Nero* 21.13), despite the irony of his own order for the murder of his mother Agrippina.⁶¹⁸

Seneca contributes important innovations to this myth not seen in earlier interpretations. These include: Clytemnestra's conflict and indecision before murdering Agamemnon; her contemplation of forgiveness; the persuasion and manipulation of Aegisthus in convincing Clytemnestra to kill her husband; the more violent portrayal of Clytemnestra cutting off Agamemnon's head and threatening to kill Electra and Orestes; and Aegisthus mutilating Agamemnon's corpse after Clytemnestra has struck the fatal blow. Seneca also contributes: the more aggressive portrayal of Electra compared to the mute Orestes; the presentation of Electra and Clytemnestra separately considering suicide; the focus on emotions and anger; the presentation of Aegisthus' love for Clytemnestra; the motive for Clytemnestra murdering Cassandra due to her concern at the threat that she will pose to Electra and Orestes; and the introduction of the ghost of Thyestes and his incest with Aegisthus' mother.

⁶¹⁵ Fitch (1981: 289-307).

⁶¹⁶ Nisbet (2008: 348-72).

⁶¹⁷ Griffin (1976: 182-221).

⁶¹⁸ Littlewood (2015: 166).

There are many different interpretations of the relationship between Seneca's philosophy and Stoic ideals and his tragedies.⁶¹⁹ I do not intend to rehearse those debates here, but will touch on some of the Stoic elements of Seneca's *Agamemnon* which contribute to Seneca's characterisation of Clytemnestra, particularly the conflict depicted in her before killing her husband, which differs from previous versions. I follow Star's approach in engaging with Seneca's philosophy and tragedy through the rhetorical language of his tragic characters.⁶²⁰

Hall discusses the diachronic reception of Clytemnestra from Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, including Latin sources I have not been able to accommodate in this thesis, such as Accius' second century BC *Clytemnestra*.⁶²¹ Firstly I will briefly draw some conclusions on the Roman treatment of homicide in order to take into account the legal context of Seneca's interpretations of these murderous mythological characters.

3.13.1. Roman homicide

The evidence of the Roman treatment of homicide has survived from jurists, who compiled laws from the second and third centuries AD and the fifth century AD under Justinian, and from literary sources, focussing on the trials of the upper classes. It is difficult to determine the detail of all the laws that were in place throughout the Republic and the principate due to the lack of primary evidence. Acknowledgement must be made of the problems of authenticity and interpolation of the jurists from possible additions given the centuries between the legal context and the time of recording.⁶²² However the surviving evidence suggests that criminal law in Rome began with the regulation of private retaliation, and to define and manage religious pollution.⁶²³

⁶¹⁹ Nussbaum (1993: 97-149). Schiesaro (1997: 89-111). Fitch (2002: 22-3). Littlewood (2004: 23-5).

⁶²⁰ Star (2006: 207-44).

⁶²¹ Hall (2005: 53-75).

⁶²² Robinson (1997: 19-49).

⁶²³ Lintott (2015: 303).

The concept of kin-murder (*parricidium*) is historically earlier to murder in general.⁶²⁴ Death was likely to be a punishment for intentional homicide.⁶²⁵ Homicide in general (excluding kin-murder and dangers to the community as a whole) was not a public offence until around 86-81 BC.⁶²⁶ Sulla's *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* in the first century BC brought together two older courts to become the single murder court (*Digest* 48.8.1). This followed the public violence and murders of the civil war and proscriptions of 88-83 BC, and took over jurisdiction of parricide (Cicero *de Inventione* 2.19.58).⁶²⁷ The extension of public status to all forms of intentional homicide suggests an attempt to shift the legitimate use of violence from private to state jurisdiction. Riggsby suggests this is part of a broader trend towards a more powerful and centralised state during the late Republic and early empire.⁶²⁸

The penalty was death or exile (Polybius 6.14.7), and this was administered through *poena cullei*.⁶²⁹ This involved being sewn into a sack with a dog, monkey, snake and a rooster and thrown into the sea (*Digest* 48.9.9 Modestinus, Cicero *Pro Roscio* 70). Cicero interprets this exceptional punishment as depriving the perpetrator of the elements (sky, sun, water, and earth) as his victim had been, yet not able to pollute the river or wild animals. Lassen suggests that by letting the offender drown, the Roman soil was spared the pollution of their remains.⁶³⁰ Therefore the surviving evidence suggests that the crime of killing parents or close relatives, or maliciously causing such a person to be killed, remained a concern in the first century BC due to the

⁶²⁴ See Cloud (1971) on Numa's murder law (Festus p.247 L) during the monarchy, with a view to regulating or abolishing the family vendetta. Cf. Kunkel (1962) and Mommsen (1899).

⁶²⁵ Evidence of Numa's law claims the punishment for an unintentional killer was to provide a ram to the agnates of the victim's family, in place of his head (Festus / Servius *Eclogues* 4.43). See Gaughan (2010: 10, 60-2) and Calore (2004). Unintentional homicide also involved the spilling of the blood of a ram in the fifth century BC Twelve Tables (Cicero *Pro Tullio* 22, *Topica* 64), which was likely a substitute for the blood of the offender.

⁶²⁶ Cloud (1969: 258-86). Robinson (2007: 34). Gaughan (2010). Riggsby (2016: 316-17, 1999: 50-55).

⁶²⁷ Robinson (2007: 33). Cloud (1969).

⁶²⁸ Riggsby (2016: 316-17).

⁶²⁹ There is debate about when this punishment first came into use in the third century BC. See Cloud (1971: 27-36), Cantarella (1991: 274-9), and Egmond (1995: 159-192). The first examples are 101 BC (Livy *Periochae Librorum* 68, Cicero *Ad Herennium* 1.13.23) and 80 BC (Cicero *Pro Sextio Roscio Amerino*).

⁶³⁰ Lassen (1993: 147-62).

legislation and the severe punishment, which removed the killer from the community.

Legislators of the late Republic sought to protect the family through the *lex Pompeia de parricidiis* (*Digest* 48.9.1 Marcian, *Institutes* 4.18.6). This was passed around 55 or 52 BC, and included a person who killed his or her father, mother, grandparent, sibling or patron (Paul *Sententiae* 5. 24) with the punishment of the *culleus*.⁶³¹ Lassen suggests this did not minimise the extent of paternal power because a father's murder of a son was a legal right (*ius vitae necisque*); yet *parricidium* is used to refer to a father's murder of his child (Livy *History of Rome* 3.50.5, 8.11.7).⁶³² The notion of vendetta and self-help was built into the laws in the Twelve Tables. The *paterfamilias* was responsible for private issues, the behaviour of the family and executing punishment during the Republic (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 2.26-7, Dio 37.36.4).⁶³³ There are arguments that there is a mythical quality to the legal force of the *paterfamilias*' power of life and death over those subject to him in his family (*vitae necisque potestas*), with disparities between the theory and practice of the evidence.⁶³⁴ Augustus reaffirms the power of the *paterfamilias* in his moral legislation, which suggests that this aspect needed revival by the time of the principate. Women could be killed by their families when tried and convicted of a crime that warranted capital punishment (Livy 39.18, 48, Valerius Maximus 6.3.8), although there are few recorded instances.⁶³⁵

The role of the *paterfamilias* in being responsible for the family, and therefore playing a role in any necessary punishment for crimes committed, might be complicated if he was the victim. Therefore Seneca's *Agamemnon*, where Clytemnestra murders her husband and head of the household, might reinforce to the contemporary audience the importance of the public institutions to deal with parricide trials (Gaius *Institutions* 1.9.2) which could administer justice without self-help or private retaliation.

⁶³¹ Cloud (1971). Riggsby (1999: 52). Bauman (1996: 30). Robinson (2007: 46).

⁶³² Lassen (1993: 152-3).

⁶³³ Gaughan (2010: 62-66). Harries (2007: 106).

⁶³⁴ Harris (1986). Saller (1994). O'Hara (1998: 210-16). Shaw (2001: 32-77). Cantarella (2016: 420).

⁶³⁵ Gardner (1986: 5-11).

Gender did not affect who could be accused of a crime. A woman was subject to her male agnates and could be handed over to her family for execution or exile if convicted by a public court (Livy 39.18.6). However, Robinson suggests that some groups were considered to have diminished liability including women, minors and country-dwellers, if ignorant of the law (*Digest* 2.1.7.4).⁶³⁶

An accomplice could be held equally liable as the main offender (*Digest* 47.10.15.8), especially in cases of the murder of parents. They would be liable to the same penalty as the main offender even if unrelated to the victim, according to the Antonine jurist Maecian (*Digest* 48.9.6-7).⁶³⁷ Although an intention to kill was necessary, the motive was irrelevant, and a lack of premeditation might reduce the liability (*Digest* 48.5. 39.8). Self-defence was only a defence if minimum force was used (*Digest* 48.8.9) and passion might be taken into account to reduce the penalty but did not affect the criminal liability (*Digest* 48.8.1.5).⁶³⁸

Seneca's treatment of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, where Clytemnestra is the aggressor in the murder but Aegisthus also stabs and mutilates the body, may reflect these legal concerns about the agency and active roles in a murder affecting punishment. This was also reflected in the classical Athenian legal context and dramatic interpretations.

Seneca refers to the punishment of the sack in his philosophical works in condemning the parricide to the traditional punishment of the sack (*De Ira* 1.16.5). Seneca also comments in *De Clementia* (23.1) that Claudius had more men sewn up in the sack (as parricides) in five years than there had been in all time. This not only provides some evidence of the legal situation in this period, but also illustrates Seneca's philosophical perspective that sins repeatedly punished are sins repeatedly committed, and that harsh punishment does not necessarily reduce the occurrence of the crime.

Seneca suggests that the crime of parricide began with the law against it because the punishment of the sack was so common that it pointed out the possibility of the crime, whereas the wise man would ignore the outrage as

⁶³⁶ Robinson (1995: 15-21).

⁶³⁷ Bauman (1996: 117).

⁶³⁸ Robinson (1995: 15-21).

incredible. This reflects Cicero's assertion (*Pro Roscio* 70-2) that Solon had no fixed punishment for a man who killed his father because he thought no one would be guilty of such a crime, and for fear that it would suggest rather than prevent it. Any kind of assault on a parent was considered unthinkable in classical Greek culture: 'father-beaters' end up in Plato's river of fire in the underworld; and Pheidippides' assault on his father in Aristophanes' *Clouds* is the catalyst that leads his father Strepsiades to burn down the Phrontisterion school.⁶³⁹ Cicero uses Orestes as a mythical example to demonstrate the horror and fear that such an impious offence as parricide would cause on the offender. He claims the suffering of the perpetrator is caused not by the Furies but by their conscience and the moral implications of their crime (*Pro Roscio* 64-73).

Seneca asserts views in his philosophical works, targeted specifically at the emperor, that the prime purpose of punishment was deterrence. This was linked to public safety from the removal of the criminal from society, and that death is the extreme penalty and should be a warning (*De Ira* 1.6.2-4, *De Clementia* 1.14.1). He distinguishes between deterrence; punishing a man to make the rest better, and public safety; to remove bad men (*De Clementia* 1.22.1-2).⁶⁴⁰

Murder and parricide had serious consequences from the monarchy through to the Republic and principate. The surviving evidence suggests that the punishment of intentional murder was likely the death of the offender. This was possibly carried out by the *paterfamilias* earlier in the Republic, if the offender was a member of his family, or sentenced by one of the standing courts later in the Republic and into the principate. The evidence for the punishment of parricide also highlights how horrific the crime of kin-killing was in Roman society, and therefore how important the unity of the family was to the *res publica*. Seneca's intention in his *Agamemnon* might have been to demonstrate the futility of vengeance through the cycle of violence and kin-killing. Seneca's interpretation of Clytemnestra killing her husband could have recognisably been dealt with through the legal system at the time to administer justice for homicide. Seneca's portrayal of Clytemnestra's

⁶³⁹ Bauman (1996: 72 n.27).

⁶⁴⁰ Robinson (2007: 182).

motives, although important for creating sympathy for the character, would have been irrelevant in the legal context. However I argue this would have been relevant in the context of Seneca's philosophical concerns regarding uncontrollable passions.

3.13.2. Adultery

In addition to the cycle of violence and revenge killings in this myth, Seneca examined some of the tensions and consequences of adultery, which had been a highly relevant concern in the Roman political climate since Augustus.⁶⁴¹ Adultery amongst the Julio-Claudians had been a concern since at least Augustus' era. Seneca knew from personal experience that accusations of adultery were often used to remove enemies. He was exiled to Corsica in 41 AD on a charge of adultery with Julia Livilla on the orders of Claudius, although instigated by Claudius' wife Messalina (Dio 60.8.5). His return from exile can be linked to the new influence of Agrippina the Younger, who engineered making Seneca tutor her son Nero. Seneca's subsequent wealth and positions of power in Nero's regime followed from 54 AD onward.

Adultery did not occupy the same category of seriousness as parricide in Roman consciousness until Augustus' *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* decreed in 18-17 BC that such cases should be tried before a *quaestio*; a court that investigated crimes against the state (*Digest* 48.5.1).⁶⁴² Cantarella discusses how the last two centuries of the Republic had been centuries of war. This included the devastating second Punic War where the male population had been decimated and many women had lost their fathers and husbands, which affected the economic and social situation for women.⁶⁴³ In this context, Augustus introduced new legislation on marriage and adultery. The aims of which were to address the morals of the upper classes, increase the birth rate, and police sexual behaviour.⁶⁴⁴ This new legislation introduced

⁶⁴¹ Treggiari (1991).

⁶⁴² Gloyn (2017: 154). Bauman (1996: 32) notes that this *quaestio perpetua* set up to hear accusations of adultery had the longest life and heaviest workload of any jury-court in the principate (*Digest* 48.5.6.1, 50.16.101).

⁶⁴³ Cantarella (2016: 426).

⁶⁴⁴ Fantham *et al* (1994: 299-308).

a radically new principal; that sexual crimes, previously punished by husbands and fathers as a family matter, were now prosecuted by a public trial.⁶⁴⁵

A husband's rights were most severely curtailed.⁶⁴⁶ He was no longer allowed to kill an adulterous wife (*Digest* 48.5.23.4). However he could kill her lover if caught in the act in the husband's house and if the adulterer belonged to a number of prescribed classes, and he must then divorce his wife (*Digest* 48.5.25.1, *Codex* 9.9.4). The legislation retained the right of the *paterfamilias* to kill his own daughter and her lover if caught in the act of adultery, but it must be in his or her husband's house and he must kill both of them; if he only killed the adulterer he would be liable for murder (*Digest* 48.5.21, 23.3, 24).⁶⁴⁷ The jurists attempted to explain the difference between the punishments the husband and father could administer. 'The father is motivated by concern for his children's interests, the husband by passion' (Papinian *Digest* 48.5.23.4).

Bauman persuasively concludes that the restrictions on the right to kill were intended to steer husbands away from vengeance towards regular adjudication.⁶⁴⁸ Ulpian cites the *Iliad* (9.340), that not alone among living men do the sons of Atreus love their wives (*Digest* 48.5.14.1), to justify the extension of the legal control of adultery. The jurist therefore seems to acknowledge the emotions involved in cases of adultery and the possibility that love could counteract offended honour.⁶⁴⁹ This may have been applicable to Menelaus, who forgives Helen, but the example is significant because Agamemnon was not given the opportunity to forgive his wife. Clytemnestra and her adulterous lover Aegisthus killed him and therefore pre-empted any vengeance he might exact for their crime.

If the husband or father did not catch the wife and adulterer in the act then a prosecution was open to them, or to any adult male citizen after sixty

⁶⁴⁵ Daube (1972). Richlin (1981). Cantarella (2016: 427, 1996). Harries (2007: 98) suggests this provided 'double institutionalisation' for Roman elite families by reinforcing in legislation the values and handling of the problem by the social institution of the family.

⁶⁴⁶ Cantarella (2016: 427).

⁶⁴⁷ Bauman (1996: 32).

⁶⁴⁸ Bauman (1996: 34).

⁶⁴⁹ Harries (2007: 100).

days (*Digest* 48.5.30.6-7).⁶⁵⁰ The *lex Iulia de adulteriis* continued the concern around the conjugal fidelity of the married woman, rather than a husband who was unfaithful to his wife (*Codex of Justinian* 9.9.1), unless it was with another respectable woman (*Codex* 9.9.22/24/28). A wife could not prosecute her husband for adultery (*Digest* 48.5.16).⁶⁵¹ The husband that chooses to be adulterous with a man who was not freeborn, or a woman who was not married, of good birth, or a *matrona* would not have been subject to these punishments. This concern was consistent with the Athenian legal context where a man is only penalised if he is adulterous with a citizen woman.⁶⁵²

The penalties under the *lex Iulia* could also include exile (Paul *Sententiae* 2.2.6.14) and financial penalties for the wife and lover. The woman convicted of adultery could not remarry (*Digest* 48.5.30.1) and her marriage became void (*Digest* 34.9.13). A man convicted of adultery could not witness formal acts of law (*Digest* 22.5.14).⁶⁵³ Seneca's innovative contribution in the *Agamemnon* is the love represented between Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, which is not focussed on in earlier Greek interpretations. Aegisthus is willing to die to try to convince Clytemnestra of his love. Seneca's intention for this representation could be understood from the legal context where the adulterous man risks his legal and political rights, and therefore life as a Roman citizen, for the relationship.

Richlin argues that women being killed for this crime was a rarity given the lack of evidence.⁶⁵⁴ Harries and Cantarella discuss the lack of success of this legislation (Seneca *Ad Helviam* 16.3, Suetonius *Tiberius* 35, Tacitus *Annals* 2.85, 3.25) and the resentment that was caused from

⁶⁵⁰ Richlin (1981: 382) discusses the jurists' interpretations of the freedom a third party would have in making this allegation. Ulpian (*Digest* 48.5.27) states the third party can only accuse if the husband accuses first, or if they accuse the husband of *lenocinium*. Whereas Papinian (*Digest* 48.5.40.1) suggests the third party can do it without accusing the husband. Fantham *et al* (1994: 306) suggest the law permitted women to bring third party accusations against adulterous husbands.

⁶⁵¹ Treggiari (1991: 199-200, 285, 299-319) on the double standard from the Greek and Roman tradition that extra-marital intercourse was forbidden to women.

⁶⁵² Scafuro (1997: 206-12, 232-8) analyses Roman comedy (Plautus' *Amphitryo* and *Mercator* 817-29) for representations of the inequality women suffered where deceitful behaviour is grounds enough for divorce compared to their husbands' lack of punishment. Cf. Euripides' *Electra* (1035-40).

⁶⁵³ Robinson (1995: 58-67). See Daube (1972) and Richlin (1981) for discussion of the legal punishments on the wife and adulterer.

⁶⁵⁴ Richlin (1981: 399 no.5).

attempting to move family jurisdiction into the public domain.⁶⁵⁵ The importance of the legislation for my argument is to demonstrate the increasing social and legal concerns regarding adultery in the principate, and the ideology that this damaged not only the family but the community.

The adultery of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus was a consistent element of the mythological story transferred from archaic and classical Athenian to imperial Roman interpretations. It represented the Greek and Roman social and legal concerns for the chastity of the wife. Pompey compares his wife to Clytemnestra and her lover to Aegisthus due to her betrayal of him whilst he was away on campaign (Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 50.1). Seneca's intention in exploring their adulterous relationship may have reflected the contemporary Roman treatment of adultery, and how this impacted the fundamental concerns of the legitimacy of children, the unity of the family, and the force of the state.

Seneca criticises the husband who has a mistress yet demands chastity from his wife (*De Ira* 2.28.7, *Epistle* 94.26) and uses Odysseus and Penelope as role models for husband and wife (*Epistle* 88.7-8).⁶⁵⁶ Seneca represents the Stoic view in his philosophical work that women are the moral equals of men, and that the roles of husband and wife were equal (*De Beneficiis* 2.18).⁶⁵⁷ Therefore his intention in his dramatic interpretation of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus may also have been to criticise the lack of equivalence in the adultery legislation.

Seneca's tragic interpretation of Fortuna bringing down kings (60-72, 101-2) foreshadows the downfall of Agamemnon, who will be killed on his return home from his triumph in Troy. It also acts as a warning for Clytemnestra of the consequences to come from her and Aegisthus' victory over Agamemnon, as the Chorus go on to warn of citadels plunged into ruin for their crimes and the loyalties of marriage abandoning palaces (77-81).⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁵ Harries (2007: 99-100). Cantarella (2016: 427).

⁶⁵⁶ Treggiari (1991: 215-16).

⁶⁵⁷ Gloyn (2017).

⁶⁵⁸ Tarrant (1976: 5, 181-88, 288).

3.13.3. Murder of Agamemnon: method

Seneca utilises elements which remain consistent from the tradition of the myth. These include: Clytemnestra's deception of Agamemnon and her people at Agamemnon's return; the cycle of violence and vengeance from Atreus and Thyestes' crimes as a motive; and both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' involvement in Agamemnon's murder. However, Clytemnestra's role is more masculine and violent than Aegisthus as she deals the death blow.

Seneca innovates the murder of Agamemnon by combining elements from Homeric epic, such as Aegisthus as the principal agent in the murder, and classical Athenian tragedy, such as the cowardice of Aegisthus. Seneca portrays Aegisthus's cowardice during the murder. He is a half-man who stabs Agamemnon with trembling hand and freezes (*haurit trementi semivir dextra latus, nec penitus egit: vulnere in medio stupet* 890-1). Aegisthus delivers a glancing blow rather than the death blow which implies effeminacy (Juvenal 6).⁶⁵⁹ He then mutilates Agamemnon's dead body, with Clytemnestra assisting in the stabbing (*ille iam exanimem petit laceratque corpus, illa fodientem adiuvat* 904-5).⁶⁶⁰

This is in contrast to Clytemnestra as the main aggressor with a double-bladed axe (*armat bipenni Tyndaris dextram furens* 897-900) who cuts off his head (*pendet exigua male caput amputatum parte*, 901-3).⁶⁶¹ The weapons include those represented in Athenian tragedy and Homeric epic. The sword (used by Aegisthus in *Odyssey* 11.424, and Euripides' *Electra* 164-5; and by Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon* 1529 and *Choephoroi* 1010-11) is used by Aegisthus. The axe (possibly used in Stesichorus 219 PMG; used by both in Sophocles *Electra* 99, 484-6; and used by Clytemnestra in Euripides' *Electra* 160-1, 279, and *Orestes* 496-7) is used by Clytemnestra. Seneca also utilises the net/robe (892-6). The murder is more violent and gory than in Athenian tragic representations and Seneca demonstrates his reputation for indiscriminate gore.

⁶⁵⁹ Tarrant (1976: 341). Cf. *Agamemnon* (1625), and Lucan's account of the death of Pompey (8.550ff).

⁶⁶⁰ Tarrant (1976) *ad loc* notes that attacking a dead enemy is traditionally the act of a coward. Cf. *Iliad* (22.371).

⁶⁶¹ Tarrant (1976) notes the gladiatorial language (*habet, peractum est!* 901).

Seneca draws on the theme of Agamemnon's murder as a sacrifice from the *Oresteia*, using the simile of the bull (*qualisque ad aras colla taurorum popa designat oculis antequam ferro petat* 898-900).⁶⁶² Seneca foreshadows the murder when describing a sacrificial victim falling at the altar when Clytemnestra thinks about Agamemnon's return (579-85).

3.13.4. Murder of Agamemnon: motives

Seneca's Clytemnestra differs from Athenian tragic portrayals, where she is resolute in her intended crime. Seneca instead depicts conflicting emotions over whether she should kill her husband Agamemnon. Clytemnestra is even willing to risk her own life in the process (192-202). This is reminiscent of Medea's indecision and internal struggle in Euripides' *Medea* over whether to kill her children (1021-80, 1078-80).⁶⁶³ Seneca's intention in depicting Clytemnestra's fluctuating psychological state, similarly to his *Medea*, might be to demonstrate the danger of anger as an uncontrollable passion and the importance of mercy. This is also discussed in his philosophical works (*De Clementia*, *De Ira*).⁶⁶⁴ Seneca's philosophical concerns and advice regarding *ira* are less focussed on gender and more focussed on impulses, impressions, actions and judgements.⁶⁶⁵

Seneca's *De Ira* defines and denounces anger and gives advice on how to avoid it.⁶⁶⁶ This is relevant for his tragic interpretation of *Agamemnon*. There are overlapping themes of kin-murder and revenge inciting anger (1.2.2) and questions over the sanity of those who murder those who are dear to them (3.3.3). Seneca argues that *ira* comes from weakness, and is the most eager of the passions (*affectus*) for revenge and therefore is unfit to take it.

⁶⁶² See also Section 3.11.3. for the perverted sacrifice of Aegisthus in Euripides' *Electra* (839-43) and Section 4.9. for the perverted sacrifice of Apsyrtus in *Argonautica* (4.465-8).

⁶⁶³ See discussion in Section 4.7.

⁶⁶⁴ *De Ira* and the *De Clementia* frame themselves as deeply political texts. There are references to families being wiped out root and branch in *De Ira* (1.19.2, 3.2.4), which is relevant for the cycle of familial violence in the *Agamemnon*. Also that in anger men have stabbed those they love and embraced those they have slain (2.36.6), which is relevant for Medea who slays and embraces her sons.

⁶⁶⁵ Manning (1973: 170-77). Asmis (1996: 68-92). Levick (2002: 134-55). Nussbaum (2002: 283-326). The Stoic view was that men and women were equally capable of virtue. See also Musonius Rufus *Discourse* 3.

⁶⁶⁶ Sandbach (1975).

He recommends being led by duty and judgement and not by impulse and fury (1.12.1-5).

The Stoics define anger as the desire for retribution against someone who has done an undeserved justice (Diogenes Laertius 7.113) or the desire to retaliate against one who has committed an injustice (Stobaeus 2.91.10 = SVF 3.395).⁶⁶⁷ According to Lactantius (*De Ira Dei* 17.13) Seneca defines anger as a burning desire to avenge a wrong, and Posidonius defines it as a burning desire to punish him by whom you think yourself to have been unfairly harmed, or an incitement of the mind to damage him who has done damage or wished to do damage.⁶⁶⁸ Seneca says that in anger we assent to the impression that we have received a wrong; a judgement has been made to condemn someone's deed and this is followed by the quest for revenge as action.⁶⁶⁹ Seneca states that anger involves assenting to both the impression that one has been wronged and the impression it ought to be avenged (*De Ira* 2.1.4).⁶⁷⁰ Seneca's philosophical viewpoint may have influenced his interpretation of anger and revenge as motives for Clytemnestra to kill her husband and for Electra and Orestes to kill their mother.

Seneca depicts the uncontrollable nature of anger as it is never willing to surrender its judgement even if it is wrong (1.17.7). Anger refuses to be ruled (1.19.1), cannot be governed (1.9.2-3), and could sweep a man anywhere (3.25.4) The sentiment that vengeance will bring about more injuries than the original offence (3.27.1) is relevant to the familial vengeance central to the house of Atreus which motivates the actions of Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, Electra and Orestes. Seneca's Clytemnestra is motivated by anger but, in contrast to previous interpretations, she attempts to overcome her anger at Agamemnon and return to him as his faithful wife. However, she ultimately follows where her anger leads her; to the murder of her husband.

⁶⁶⁷ Vogt (2006: 62).

⁶⁶⁸ Cooper and Procope (1995: 20).

⁶⁶⁹ Long (1974: 176). The Stoics believed emotions were assents to impressions, and impulses were generated through an act of assent (SVF 3.171-5) to an impression which describes action to be done. According to Chrysippus, impulses become passions if they are excessive (SVF 3.479) and passions are false judgements (SVF 3.466,80). See Vogt (2006: 73-4) on emotions and their actions being irrational because the agent has not assented to an impression which presents a specific course of action, and therefore cannot know where this assent will take them.

⁶⁷⁰ Graver (2007).

Seneca's Clytemnestra vacillates between arguments for and against murdering her husband. This portrays more vulnerability and potential sympathy for Clytemnestra than in previous interpretations, by outlining her fears and doubts and potential for virtue in addition to her anger and desire for vengeance.⁶⁷¹ Clytemnestra begins by arguing that the better path is closed to her (108-9) which implies that she does not want to murder her husband and is aware of a *melior* (alternative).⁶⁷² But she feels she has no choice because she has been unfaithful to him and chastity and loyalty are lost to her (110-13) and that the safest path for crimes is through further crimes (115).⁶⁷³ I do not agree with Boyle that the cyclic nature of crimes and history determines her fate; but instead that Seneca's intention is defining Clytemnestra as a product of her anger and need for vengeance.⁶⁷⁴

Clytemnestra and the Nurse exchange arguments regarding whether she should or should not stay faithful to Agamemnon, like a living declamation which explores a philosophical dilemma, just as the rhetorical exercises studied in Rome at the time would have done.⁶⁷⁵ The dilemma facing Clytemnestra and the cycle of violence and vengeance in the myth were popular themes in which to practice declamatory speech. Quintilian (III.11.4) states that the case of Orestes killing of his mother Clytemnestra and his justification on the grounds that she killed his father was one of the most common of the rhetorical handbooks. Seneca the Elder also includes Agamemnon's deliberation over whether he should sacrifice Iphigeneia (*Suasoriae* 3).

The Nurse embodies Clytemnestra's fears regarding her infidelity (155-73) but for each argument the Nurse proposes, Clytemnestra has a counter-argument which demonstrates the injustices she has suffered from her husband. Seneca uses many rhetorical devices in the Nurse's speech to attempt to persuade Clytemnestra not to kill her husband Agamemnon (203-

⁶⁷¹ I agree with Tarrant (1976: 16) that Seneca may have wished to present a more sympathetic and complex portrait of Clytemnestra, based on Euripides and Ovid, by adding this scene.

⁶⁷² Compare Ovid *Metamorphoses* (7.20-21): *video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*.

⁶⁷³ Compare similarity to Seneca *De Clementia* (1.13.2): *scelera enim sceleribus tuenda sunt*.

⁶⁷⁴ Boyle (1997: 34-5).

⁶⁷⁵ Bonner (1949: 15). Cf. Medea as a common mythological example cited in early imperial rhetorical declamations in the Greek handbooks of 'preliminary exercises' (*progumnasmata*).

25). This includes the use of three imperatives to command her to control her emotions (*frena... siste... cogita...* 203-4).⁶⁷⁶ Seneca contrasts Clytemnestra, characterised as lacking in self-control, with Agamemnon, characterised as a superior conqueror. He uses similar vocabulary of control in *De Ira*: *reprimere impetum* (1.7.2-4), *spernere... repugnare* (1.8.1), *inhibere impetum* (3.10.1-2), *imprerare... compressa* (3.13.7). As a woman, crafty deception (*furto*) is the only weapon available to her against a hero who has overcome the military prowess of the Greek and Trojan heroes he fought.⁶⁷⁷ The cumulative effect the Nurse's repetition, along with the assertive tone and practical and moral considerations, culminate in a speech of Roman declamation.⁶⁷⁸

Clytemnestra tells the Nurse that she will proceed wherever anger (*ira*), pain (*dolor*), and hope (*spes*) take her (142-4).⁶⁷⁹ I argue that Seneca is using the inverted relationship between them to represent the Nurse as reason trying to overcome Clytemnestra's anger (127, 130, 203, 224-5) through her commands and imperatives to control her impulses (*impetus*) and passions (*adfectus*).⁶⁸⁰ Clytemnestra does seem to acknowledge the Nurse's arguments, as her speech to Aegisthus thereafter shows her regretting her plan and wanting to turn back to be loyal to her husband (239-43). However Aegisthus convinces her otherwise. Seneca's intention may be to demonstrate that once anger has been unleashed there is no escape from it. Hall follows Tarrant in interpreting the psychological reversals as evidence of the manipulative and controlling figure of Aegisthus.⁶⁸¹

Seneca uses fire as a metaphor for anger as unpredictable and uncontrollable throughout *De Ira* (2.6.4, 2.19.1-3, 2.35.5, 3.1.1, 3.4.1, 3.13.2, 3.41.3).⁶⁸² Seneca also uses fire and sea metaphors to describe Clytemnestra's

⁶⁷⁶ Tarrant (1976: 212). Seneca uses similar language of restraint and control from the Nurse to Medea in *Medea* (381): *resiste et iras comprime ac retine impetum*, and *De Ira* (3.1.1). Tarrant also notes that the Nurse's reply is a *suasoria* in miniature with symmetrical structure and declamatory argument.

⁶⁷⁷ See Section 3.2.2. for Clytemnestra's *dolos* in Homeric epic.

⁶⁷⁸ Wilson (2007: 426-8).

⁶⁷⁹ Cf. Seneca *De Ira* (1.7.2-4. 1.8.1).

⁶⁸⁰ See *De Ira* (1.11.8) on wisdom making a long inspection and moving slowly compared to the rashness of *ira*.

⁶⁸¹ Tarrant (1976). Hall (2005: 68).

⁶⁸² See Tarrant (1976: 202) for nautical parallels in his other philosophical works that demonstrate the lack of control (*Epistles* 94.67, 16.3). Littlewood (2004: 63-4) convincingly proposes that the dramatic reality of Agamemnon is made up of flames, boats and waves.

emotional state (126-38; *iramque flammis* 260-1) and conflicting emotions which she has no control over (138-44).⁶⁸³ The physical effects of emotions are described by Seneca (237-9, 710-25) in a way that is not as detailed in Athenian tragedy, but that is reminiscent of the Hellenistic interpretation of Medea in Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*. It is typical for Seneca to use natural imagery of the sea, storms and winds as he is a scientist as well as a philosopher. The nautical imagery for Fortuna is common elsewhere in his work (*Epistle* 8.3-4; Fortuna plunges us under and dashes us on the rocks) and in Roman literature (Horace *Odes* 1.35.1-16; her support is sought as mistress of the deep by whoever provokes the sea).⁶⁸⁴

Seneca contributes an original interpretation of Clytemnestra here by having her defend Agamemnon's infidelity and tell Aegisthus that forgiveness (*venia*) should be granted to one who needs it (262-7).⁶⁸⁵ This portrayal of a forgiving Clytemnestra is in stark contrast to the vengeful Clytemnestra. I argue that Clytemnestra's jealousy over Cassandra as a rival has been one of her motives for killing Agamemnon since Homeric epic.⁶⁸⁶ Seneca's Medea also makes excuses for Jason before determining on her revenge for his actions (*Medea* 137-49). I therefore disagree with Braund that there is no forgiveness in Seneca's tragedies.⁶⁸⁷ Seneca explores forgiveness, but Clytemnestra and Medea's forgiveness is ultimately overcome by their anger.

Clytemnestra initially commands her soul to arm herself (*accingere anime*) in planning her war and striking first (192-3) and is reminiscent of Seneca's Medea commanding her soul to action.⁶⁸⁸ Seneca surprises the audience with the sudden self-restraint and *clementia* she then shows (262-7) at being willing to forgive Agamemnon. This demonstrates just how much she is struggling to control her emotions and manage the conflict between her desire for revenge and her fear of her actions.

⁶⁸³ Sea and fire metaphors are also used for Seneca's *Medea*. See Section 4.11.

⁶⁸⁴ Compare Seneca's imagery for Medea's anger as whirling and more powerful than the sea, and that Medea herself is more evil than the sea (*Medea* 362-3, 392, 407-14, 939-43).

⁶⁸⁵ Schofield (2015: 68-80). Seneca goes further in *De Clementia* than *De Ira* and presents mercy as the policy the *princeps* should follow in administering justice.

⁶⁸⁶ See Section 3.7.4.

⁶⁸⁷ Braund (2012: 79-96).

⁶⁸⁸ See Section 4.11.

Seneca employs the theme of fear of the mistress replacing the wife as one of the factors that Aegisthus uses to manipulate Clytemnestra. Aegisthus fuels her jealousy of Cassandra by planting fear about her potential power as Agamemnon's mistress (253-9). He warns her that she has no avenue of escape to return to if she is set aside by her husband (268-83). This recalls Deianeira's fear of the power of the mistress Iole over her husband Hercules in Ovid's *Heroides* 9. Aegisthus scoffs at the chance of mutual forgiveness (*mutuam veniam*), criticising the rules of kings who are biased judges (*iudices*) to others but fair to themselves (267-72).⁶⁸⁹ Seneca uses legal language throughout (*venia, iudices*). Seneca also uses the language of the judge (*iudex*) throughout *De Ira* (1.14.2-3) in the context of judging one's own actions against the actions of others. This represents the idea of a moral judge as well as a legal judge, and the importance of the internal trial and daily self-examination (3.36.1-4), and judging, prosecuting and defending oneself (*Epistle* 28.10).

Seneca depicts Iphigeneia as a motive for Clytemnestra's anger against Agamemnon. Clytemnestra recounts the murder (*nece*) of Iphigeneia as the sacrifice that released the unnatural (*impias*) fleet (170-3) and started the war, under the pretence of Iphigeneia's wedding to Achilles (158-9, 162-70). Seneca uses the metaphor of a bridal altar for the sacrificial altar; creating the ironic image of Agamemnon as the father of the bride making sacrificial prayers at the altar when in fact his daughter will be the sacrifice (166-7).

Seneca's Clytemnestra criticises Agamemnon's actions at the start of the war as well as during and on his return from war. Seneca presents her motives in a chronological narrative order, as a case might be presented in court. Clytemnestra moves her argument from her daughter's murder at the start of the war to Agamemnon's relationships with captives during and after the war (174-91). Seneca characterises her as bitter as she criticises her husband for his infidelities with women at the camp in Troy (185, 188-9, 190-1). She rebukes his hypocrisy in stealing one from another man, hinting that he is no better than his enemy Paris (186-8). This could be regarded as assenting to the impression that Agamemnon's actions must be avenged and

⁶⁸⁹ Inwood (2005: 201-23).

that she must punish him.⁶⁹⁰ This is reminiscent of Clytemnestra's anger and sexual jealousy towards Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. However Seneca depicts this more clearly as a motive for Agamemnon's murder.

I argue that Seneca's intention in outlining these injuries from her husband, after Clytemnestra's first announcement of her conflicting emotions of fear, jealousy, lust and pain, is for the audience to interpret them as motives.⁶⁹¹ Afterwards Clytemnestra proceeds in describing her plans for the crime (192-202). Shelton argues that Clytemnestra was motivated by anger, jealousy, lust and fear.⁶⁹² Hall similarly suggests Clytemnestra is a neurotic adulteress and that her dominant motives are sexual passion for Aegisthus and sexual jealousy of Cassandra.⁶⁹³ I do not interpret her lust as her dominant motive, but agree that the other three emotions motivate her: anger, jealousy and fear. I am not convinced by Lavery's argument that Seneca's Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon because he is in the way of her desire for Aegisthus.⁶⁹⁴ Her passion is motivated by her anger at her injuries from Agamemnon. Seneca's interpretation of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' relationship is not shown as a contributing factor other than through fear of discovery. I agree in part with Tarrant that Clytemnestra plots the deed to avenge Iphigeneia, but disagree that this is to satisfy her own sexual vanity.⁶⁹⁵

Seneca is unique in introducing the protection of Electra and Orestes as a motive. Clytemnestra uses the unconvincing argument that her children will have more troubles in the future from a stepmother (Cassandra) if she does not act (196-9). However Clytemnestra also hints at her fear of her children as holding her back from committing the murder of their father (195-6). I suggest that this implies Clytemnestra's fear of vengeance from her children. Seneca demonstrates the dangers of familial vengeance in *De Clementia* (1.8.7) when explaining how a cruel king increases his enemies by trying to remove them because they are replaced by their parents and children.

⁶⁹⁰ Star (2012).

⁶⁹¹ Compare the agonistic debate in Euripides' *Electra* where Electra attacks Clytemnestra's motives for murder.

⁶⁹² Shelton (1983).

⁶⁹³ Hall (2005: 66-7).

⁶⁹⁴ Lavery (2004).

⁶⁹⁵ Tarrant (1976: 4).

Seneca also explores Aegisthus' motives for Agamemnon's murder. Seneca focusses on Aegisthus' family history, which has not been featured in as much detail in archaic or classical Athenian interpretations. Seneca innovates the play with the ghost of Thyestes (1-11). Thyestes hints at the gruesome feast he had, and then recounts how he ate his three children because of his brother Atreus (22-7). The appearance of Thyestes' ghost reflects the increased Roman fascination with ghosts and hauntings in the later Republic and early empire, in comparison to Greek interest in the theme.⁶⁹⁶ The ghost of Thyestes presents the impending death of king Agamemnon as the reason for Aegisthus' birth (45-9). Seneca therefore introduces Aegisthus' motives as part of the generational cycle of violence.

Seneca also introduces a new theme of incest, which has not been a feature in previous interpretations. Fortuna made Thyestes have intercourse with his daughter (29-36). Thyestes was therefore both father and grandfather to Aegisthus. Seneca reminds us of the family feud throughout the play by referring to Agamemnon as Atreus' son (410) and to Aegisthus as Thyestes' son (907), defining them by their roles within the warring family unit. The characters are portrayed as representatives of their criminal ancestors. Their deeds famously affect nature and reverse the course of the sun, as depicted in Euripides' *Electra* (699-742), *Orestes* (996-1006), and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (189-202, 811-17).⁶⁹⁷ Seneca continues the theme from Euripides and describes it as a Thyestean course (907-9). Fortuna features as a powerful force throughout *Agamemnon*; Thyestes blames Fortuna in defiling him because he ate his children and had intercourse with his daughter (27-36).

Incest was a crime under custom rather than specific statute in Rome, although it could have been subsumed under the sexual offences of the *lex Iulia*. Incest focussed on marriage to women from groups that were forbidden (*Digest* 23.2.39.1), specifically those related more closely than the fourth degree (*Institutions of Justinian* 1.10.4).⁶⁹⁸ Accusations and political slurs of incest were common in the late Republic as well as in the principate, and cases

⁶⁹⁶ Tarrant (1976: 159) notes that Thyestes displays characteristics of the traditional revenge-ghost as well as those of the prologue-ghost. See also Hickman (1938) and Felton (1999) on the Stoic belief in the existence of ghosts.

⁶⁹⁷ Littlewood (2004: 222). See Sections 3.11.1. and 3.12.4.

⁶⁹⁸ Robinson (1995: 54-7).

are mentioned where a mother has an unnatural passion for her son, causing him to commit suicide, and the mother to be exiled for ten years (Tacitus *Annals* 6.49). The fear of incest was a way of articulating a moral judgement on someone. This was especially relevant at a time in the Julio-Claudian period when the *gens* and succession by birth were a preoccupation within the imperial family, and when there were famous rumours of incest between Nero and his mother, as well as Caligula and his sister.

Seneca's tragedies are a product of his experience, from his political career within the principate, and the influence of Augustan literature and Stoic philosophy.⁶⁹⁹ Interest in tyrannical behaviour and the destructive potential of passion are features not just of Senecan drama and declamation but of Athenian tragic plots and Latin poetry before Seneca.⁷⁰⁰ His interpretations of murderous women in the mythic plots he told are shaped by these political and philosophical considerations, as are his suggestions of justice for these crimes.

3.13.5. Suicide

Seneca portrays another new element to Clytemnestra's character; that she considers suicide (199-202). Clytemnestra's willingness to die to destroy her opponent is paralleled in Euripides' *Electra* (1078) and *Medea* (816) and reflects the attitude Seneca describes in *De Ira* (3.3.2).⁷⁰¹ However Clytemnestra has not been depicted as being willing to kill herself in archaic or classical Greek interpretations. Seneca portrays her opponent, Agamemnon, as a tyrant (995, 251-2). Seneca's presentation of suicide as an option for Clytemnestra to achieve her vengeance is likely to have been influenced the Roman concern with suicide, especially at a time when this was enforced by emperors.

Seneca himself had personal experience of these concerns. There are accounts that he was ordered to commit suicide by Caligula in 39 AD for pleading well before the Senate in the emperor's absence. But he was saved

⁶⁹⁹ Tarrant (1978: 213-263) discusses the influence of the Augustan poets and the later Greek dramatic form on Senecan drama rather than dependence on fifth century BC tragedy.

⁷⁰⁰ Tarrant (1995: 228-9).

⁷⁰¹ Tarrant (1976: 211). Seneca's *Medea* also claims she desires death when the Nurse warns her that she will die (*Medea* 170).

either from a mistress of Caligula (Dio 59.19.7-8) or by Agrippina (Tacitus *Annals* 12.8.2) on account that he would soon be dead due to his ill health.⁷⁰² Nero also imposed suicide as a penalty for many of the elite that offended him. Seneca's influence over Nero was linked to the power of Nero's prefect Burrus, whose death in 62 AD pre-empted Seneca's own fall from grace with the emperor. Seneca eventually committed suicide at the order of Nero in 65 AD when he was implicated in the Pisonian conspiracy (Tacitus *Annals* 15.56-65).⁷⁰³ Braund suggests that Seneca's suicide is modelled on Cato the Younger (*De Providentia* 2.9-12) and on Socrates for the choice of poison in the form of hemlock, and that the offering to Jupiter Liberator is borrowed from Plato's *Phaedo*.⁷⁰⁴

Seneca's intention in the *Agamemnon* may also have been to represent the Stoic importance and praise of suicide as a method of escape or freedom, especially as refuge from the torture of a tyrant or from Fortuna (589-95, 996).⁷⁰⁵ This Roman attitude to suicide as a means of political resistance and escape differed greatly from the view presented in Athenian tragedy of suicide as a womanly and unheroic act.⁷⁰⁶ Plato represents a morally disapproving view of suicide when he describes the act as unmanly cowardice and that the punishment was the isolation and lack of respect for the burial and grave (*Laws* 9.873c-d). The only circumstance Plato describes which might justify suicide is to be compelled by intolerable misfortune (τύχη) beyond endurance.

Seneca differs from Athenian tragedy by also presenting Aegisthus' devotion to Clytemnestra as an excessive emotion like Clytemnestra's anger. Aegisthus considers his own death, firstly to achieve his ends (233), and then

⁷⁰² Griffin (1976: 52-54).

⁷⁰³ Cassius Dio (62.25.1-2) offers an alternative account of Seneca's less dignified death assisted by soldiers, compared to Tacitus' account where Seneca offers the image of his life (*imago vitae suae*) to his friends, cuts his veins and uses poison and a steam bath to kill himself, offering a libation at his death to Jupiter the Liberator. See also Griffin (2008) and Ker (2009).

⁷⁰⁴ Braund (2015: 15-17). Cf. Thrasea Paetus' suicide at Nero's command (Tacitus 16.35.1-2, 16.34-5).

⁷⁰⁵ Cf. Seneca's *Epistle* (4.3-9, 13, 26.8-10, 70.7) and *De Providentia* (6.6-8). Sandbach (1975: 156-7). Hill (2004). Reydams-Schils (2005). Hammer (2014: 296).

⁷⁰⁶ Loraux (1987: 7-11) notes that the Greeks used the same words for suicide as for the murder of parents; *autophonos* (Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1091) and *autocheir* (Euripides' *Orestes* 947).

as a method to demonstrate his love for Clytemnestra. He offers to open his breast with a sword if she commands him to do so (303-5).

Seneca therefore presents very different motives for their contemplation of suicide. Clytemnestra's motive to kill her enemy is more political and masculine, whereas Aegisthus' motive to prove his love is more feminine, despite Seneca depicting him as more violent in this interpretation. This shared trope therefore emphasises their different characterisations and Seneca's methods of challenging gender stereotypes.

3.13.6. Aegisthus

Seneca innovates the play by portraying a more dominant Aegisthus. He introduces Aegisthus and Clytemnestra's interaction before the murder of Agamemnon. Clytemnestra fluctuates from her desire for revenge to her desire to be loyal and chaste to her husband (239-43). Aegisthus manipulates her and uses his rhetorical skill by employing moral, emotional and political arguments to prey on her fears and insecurities and break down her arguments to convince her to kill her husband (244-52). He depicts Aegisthus as manipulative and persuasive, encouraging Clytemnestra to kill her husband, in contrast to being weak and appearing only after the murder. Clytemnestra is indecisive and has conflicting motivations, in contrast to her strength and clear purpose in earlier interpretations.

Seneca provides a new and unusual interpretation of the characters and their relationship. Clytemnestra insults Aegisthus as an exile in comparison to the king (288-91).⁷⁰⁷ Clytemnestra shuns Aegisthus for the incest that caused his birth (292-4) and for his adultery and treachery, ordering him to leave (295-301). This reflects Roman concerns regarding the sexual immorality of tyrants and their abuse of power. Seneca presents Aegisthus' devotion to Clytemnestra (302-5). Clytemnestra's indecision, coupled with Aegisthus' manipulation, results in her loyalty and she joins forces with him (306-9).

Seneca focuses on Aegisthus' motives rather than just using him as an accomplice or a prop to Clytemnestra, as in previous interpretations. Seneca

⁷⁰⁷ Exile was a real concern for Romans at the time when political power and punishment were controlled at the whim of the emperor.

chooses to introduce Aegisthus right after Clytemnestra's dilemma. Aegisthus addresses his spirit (*animus* 228-9), showing the same internal conflict that Clytemnestra faces over the murder they intend to commit. Seneca alludes to Aegisthus and Agamemnon's family history and the feud between Atreus and Thyestes, and that Aegisthus is fearful of the task he is destined to complete (226-7). However Seneca is original in depicting Aegisthus' bravery in being prepared to die in order to achieve his goal (229-33). This could be influenced by the Stoic philosophers who accepted death through their own suicide. Seneca therefore transfers to Aegisthus the motive of Atreus and Thyestes and the family history of vengeance.

Seneca's rhetorical skill can be seen in his depiction of the calculating and manipulative Aegisthus. Aegisthus' family feud (45-9, 226-7) is shown as his motive for wanting to kill Agamemnon. But Aegisthus does not use this reason in his persuasion of Clytemnestra. Instead Aegisthus calls Agamemnon a cowardly leader and a brave father (235-6). This rhetorical paradox immediately recalls Agamemnon's murder of Iphigeneia; brave for sacrificing his own daughter, cowardly for doing it to appease the Greek army waiting to sail to Troy. This plays on Clytemnestra's emotions and her pain over the murder of her daughter, knowing it will incite her anger towards her husband. This rhetorical attack on Agamemnon, like a blame exercise listing what is morally wrong with an opponent, helps Aegisthus to manipulate a weak and vacillating Clytemnestra. Aegisthus persuades Clytemnestra by inciting her motives for revenge rather than using his own.

Seneca also portrays Aegisthus as a coward, consistent with his characterisation in Athenian tragedy (Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1626-46). He is insulted by both Clytemnestra (298-9) and Electra (927) for achieving his goals through adultery rather than openly. Metaphors of a hyena are used to describe Aegisthus, which make him seem inferior to Clytemnestra who is described as a lioness (738-40).⁷⁰⁸ Seneca's metaphor of Clytemnestra as a lioness is significant. Seneca mentions the lion in relation to anger throughout

⁷⁰⁸ Tarrant (1976) discusses the potential of line 739 being spurious. See Hendry (2000) for the convincing interpretation of *marmaricus leo* as a wolf or a dog, indicating a hyena. See Section 3.7.6. for discussion of Aeschylus' use of lion and wolf imagery in relation to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Euripides uses lion imagery to depict both Clytemnestra and Medea. See Sections 3.11.2. and 4.7.

De Ira: that even the mighty lion is fearful (2.11.4); that the lion is prone to anger where impulse (*impetus*) takes the place of reason (*ratio*) (2.16.1); and how easily irritated lions are (3.30.1). Animal similes were often used as philosophical devices by the Stoics to compare human vices and virtues, and were considered as closer to humans as a device for demonstrating virtues than the Greeks would have done. Seneca's Clytemnestra as the lioness in *Agamemnon* therefore plays into her portrayal as the aggressor in her husband's murder, motivated by anger rather than reason.

While Aegisthus is characterised as cowardly in relation to the murder of Agamemnon, he is aggressive to Electra. He deals her the harsh punishment of being buried alive in a cave, reminiscent of the death of Antigone, and even the contemporary Vestal Virgins. Aegisthus refuses Electra's wish for death because he does not want to give her what she wants, and he claims only an inept tyrant punishes by death (994-5). Aegisthus earlier referred to Agamemnon returning as a tyrant (251-2). Seneca's depiction of Aegisthus as a tyrant alludes to contemporary concerns regarding the unchecked power of the ruler. Seneca's treatise on anger discusses how the hasty punishments issued by a tyrant cannot be undone and can be more damaging to the tyrant's safety (*De Ira* 2.23.1) and that a tyrant's wrath is stirred by murder because we see other's vices before our own (2.28.8).⁷⁰⁹ Seneca also elaborates on this in *De Clementia* where he states that mercy (*clementia*) differentiates a tyrant and a king. A tyrant rules through fear (1.12.1-4) and the cruelty of the king can increase his enemies rather than remove them, because the parents, children, relatives and friends replace those that are killed (1.8.7). Therefore Seneca's criticism of the tyrant also hints at the vengeance that can follow from murder.

3.13.7. Conclusion

Seneca's philosophical and rhetorical context has shaped his interpretation of *Agamemnon*. Clytemnestra is more sympathetic as she vacillates between arguments for and against murdering her husband, and shows her vulnerability by outlining her fears and doubts. In portraying a

⁷⁰⁹ See also *De Ira* (3.13.7) for the great evil in anger when it wields the power of powerful men.

weaker Clytemnestra compared to previous Greek portrayals, Seneca has created a stronger Aegisthus who manipulates Clytemnestra and is more violent in killing Agamemnon.

Clytemnestra ultimately remains the main aggressor in Agamemnon's murder, and Seneca demonstrates this is the danger in acting on the impulse of anger. Seneca's depiction of the moral and psychological conflict in Clytemnestra is unique. Clytemnestra is a character consistently associated with adultery and the murder of her husband from the earliest sources. Throughout each interpretation she has come to symbolise some of the fears and concerns associated with a powerful adulterous female and the cycle of violence that comes from familial vengeance. Seneca develops the role of her accomplice to demonstrate how dangerous adulterous love and manipulation can be on the family unit and how it can disrupt the state.

Electra's role in Seneca's *Agamemnon* is similar to previous interpretations in that she saves Orestes, who has no speaking role. She describes herself as a mother to him, hinting at the absence of his actual mother Clytemnestra. Electra fiercely wants to avenge her father's death and believes Orestes' safety is more important than her own.

In the contemporary Roman legal context, Aegisthus' relationship with Clytemnestra depicted in Seneca's *Agamemnon* would have equated to a criminal offence. Whereas Agamemnon's relationship with Cassandra, as a barbarian slave, would have had no legal implications. In the early Republic it was likely to have been the family of the deceased victim which tried to seek justice. Therefore Aegisthus' motive in avenging his siblings might have been understandable for an audience. Clytemnestra's additional motive was Agamemnon's sacrifice of her daughter Iphigeneia, for which she could have brought a charge against him. But because she takes matters into her own hands, it means that she is then liable for punishment as she has the intention to kill. Aegisthus as accomplice would be as guilty and subject to the same punishment as the murderer. Therefore, although a Roman audience might be sympathetic to Clytemnestra's motive of avenging her daughter, there might not have been much sympathy for Clytemnestra's death as a result of her crimes.

The contemporary philosophical concerns regarding tyranny, family and revenge are highly relevant to this interpretation. Seneca extols in his philosophical treatises that acting on anger and seeking revenge can lead to much worse consequences than the original offence. This is a fundamental theme throughout the Greek and Roman interpretations of Clytemnestra and Electra and the murders they commit. I will now move on to explore the consequences for Medea and the infamous murders that she commits.

Chapter 4: Medea

4.1. Introduction

Medea is a mythological character who has become synonymous with infanticide. Yet it is not only the murder of her own children but the repeated acts of murder that are important aspects of her characterisation. In various mythical versions, she kills not only her sons but also her enemies and her kin. Fascination with her character developed from the Greek into the Roman world, and continues today, with tragic interpretations of her story still being performed in the theatre and film across the world.⁷¹⁰ The modern reception of Medea has included her reinterpretation not only as a victim of patriarchal oppression but a champion of women's emancipation.⁷¹¹

In this chapter I shall analyse the ancient interpretations of Medea's character diachronically through the archaic, classical, Hellenistic and Roman periods. I shall discuss her motives and the consequences of the murders she commits, and how the cultural context of each literary interpretation affected her characterisation and the perceived justice for her crimes.

Medea is not mentioned in Homeric epic. The references in early archaic epics link Medea to the unintentional death of her children, through the influence of the goddess Hera. I argue it is possible Medea is also linked to the death of Pelias. She has skills in magic in some sources, and a consistent theme is the gods' support of Jason's quest, and that Jason takes Medea with him. In the Hesiodic *Theogony*, Medea is only referred to as the wife of Jason.

Fragments of archaic poetry hint at Medea's involvement in Jason's quest, and provide unique evidence of Medea's final outcome in marrying Achilles in the Elysian Plain. Pindar provides the earliest surviving reference to Medea as the murderer of Pelias. Pindar continues Medea's association with drugs and magic, and elaborates on her seduction to ensure Jason's success in his tasks for the Fleece, and her abduction to Greece.

⁷¹⁰ For modern adaptations see Hall, Macintosh and Taplin (2000) and Hall and Macintosh (2005: 435, 489, 511-19). For an overview on twentieth century adaptations see McDonald (1997: 297-99).

⁷¹¹ In addition to the modern dramatic reception of Medea, for example on the London stage from 1845 where the deaths of children were avoided (Hall, Macintosh and Taplin 2000), literary interest in Medea in the late 1860's represented her unambiguously as the killer of her children. McDonagh's research (2003: 164-5) suggests this was a new way in which child murder figured in evolutionary discourse as a heroic act or for social adaptation.

Evidence from fragments of classical Athenian tragedy and vase paintings indicate that Medea is linked to the murder of her brother and Pelias, and the attempted murder of Theseus during this period. Euripides' *Medea* canonises her as the intentional murderer of her children. Her motive is to avenge Jason's betrayal, and Euripides introduces the struggle Medea faces before the murder, as well as characterising her with many masculine heroic concerns. Her association with drugs continues, and Euripides innovates her escape from punishment on the chariot of the Sun.

In the Hellenistic epic *Argonautica*, Apollonius develops the theme from archaic epic of the importance of Medea's role in ensuring Jason's success, and emphasises her skills in drugs, persuasion and association with Hecate. Apollonius' depiction of Medea's struggle over her emotions is evolved from the Euripidean portrayal of the moral conflict of the infanticide to instead focus on the intervention of the gods, particularly Hera and Eros, in her seduction. Apollonius innovates the murder of her brother Apsyrtus from classical Greek versions, as he is killed as an adult by Jason, with Medea planning the killing and deceiving him. Although divine manipulation sets the context for her escape, I argue that Medea's personal motives of love for Jason and fear of capture influence her to murder her brother. Both Medea and Jason require purification as a consequence of the murder.

Ovid's awareness and intertextuality with his literary predecessors is evident as he only hints at the conventional crimes Medea has become synonymous with from Greek interpretations. In *Heroides* VI he focusses on her violence and betrayal of her brother and father. In *Heroides* XII he depicts Medea's isolation and vulnerability and avoids the detail of her murder of Apsyrtus and Pelias to offer a more sympathetic portrayal, whilst also demonstrating her skills in magic and foreshadowing the murder of her children. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid follows Apollonius in portraying Medea's vacillating emotions over whether to assist Jason, and avoids characterising her as a kin-killer, focussing instead on magic and metamorphosis and her barbarian status. He innovates the murder of Pelias by providing Medea with the dragon-drawn chariot in Iolchus rather than just to escape Corinth. Ovid uses this device for Medea to escape justice for the

murders she commits in Iolchus and Corinth and fly to Athens, where she ultimately escapes in a magic mist.

Seneca characterises Medea as the murderer of her brother, and hints at the infanticide throughout the play. He continues the theme of her vacillating emotions and develops this in the context of Stoic concerns regarding uncontrollable passions. Seneca follows the portrayal in Euripides that there are no gods present in the play, and that Medea's motive for the infanticide is to avenge Jason's betrayal. However he develops the idea that Medea's murder of her children is in response to the vengeance needed for her brother and introduces this as a motive. Medea again escapes any conventional form of punishment and flies off triumphant on her chariot.

Throughout the Greek and Roman interpretations, Medea is consistently characterised as essential in ensuring Jason's success in obtaining the Golden Fleece. I argue that Pindar's intention in depicting her increasing importance and power, as a foreign princess from Asia Minor, may have been to represent the danger of the east and the changing dynamics of power around Greece and Asia Minor. The historical context of fifth century BC Athens may have impacted the representations of Medea and symbolically identified her with the invading Persians. Euripides' intention may have been to shock the audience by presenting a kin-killer who escapes the conventional legal and dramatic punishments for homicide, but who also gains empathy from the Athenian audience. The importance of Eros and the interest in magic in the literature of the Hellenistic period is evident in Apollonius' interpretation of her motives and ability to escape punishment. The theme of trespassing established boundaries was a very Roman concern in the first century AD and Ovid's intention may have been to reflect the historical context and expanding empire in her repeated escape from justice. Seneca also reflects this theme in her escape, and depicts her motives in the contemporary philosophical and rhetorical context of his interpretation.

I argue that Medea's social isolation, barbarian status, witchcraft and divine descent, as well as the author's intention and the social, historical, philosophical and legal context, contribute to her consistent characterisation as escaping justice for intentional homicide throughout Greek and Roman sources.

4.2. Archaic epic

These earliest surviving sources illustrate the variety of strands of interpretation of Medea already in circulation in the archaic period. She is characterised in some sources with skills in magic, but importantly no source identifies her with intentional homicide, for which she becomes known in later classical sources. The emphasis is instead on the will of the gods in ensuring Jason's survival and bringing Medea with him.

Medea is not mentioned in Homeric epic. She is linked to Jason in Hesiod and other early fragmentary sources, and always leaves Colchis with Jason after his tasks. She is presented as being of increasing importance in Jason's tasks, as she is not left behind by Jason but taken as his wife.⁷¹² She is therefore a significant figure, even before the fifth century BC.

Although Medea is not mentioned, there are references to Jason and the Argo in Homeric epic. In the *Odyssey*, Circe mentions that his voyage on the Argo from Aeetes' kingdom was the only ship that survived passing the *Planktai*, and that this was due to Hera's support (12.59-72). Aeetes is mentioned as the brother of Circe and child of the Sun-god in *Odyssey* (10.135-9), but no reference is made to his daughter Medea. The Argo is referred to as known to all (*Ἄργὸν πᾶσι μέλουσα* 12.70). In the *Iliad*, Jason is mentioned as the father of Euneus (21.40-1, 23.746-7), his son with Hypsipyle in Lemnos (7.467-9) and is described as shepherd of the people (*ποιμένι λαῶν* 7.469).

The lost *Argonautica* was an early epic version of the Argonautic myth, although we can only speculate about Medea's role. Huxley states that the early *Argonautica* was known before the Homeric epics, as hints and details of Jason's wanderings are found in the *Odyssey* (12.70, 10.108, 10.137-9) and *Iliad* (7.467-9, 23.747-8).⁷¹³ Graf argues that the epic versions of the Argonautic myth from the archaic period were less authoritative than the myth itself because they have not survived.⁷¹⁴ However, I am not convinced that the lack of evidence of the epic versions of this myth implies

⁷¹² In comparison to 'helper maidens' such as Nausicaa, who is not taken with Odysseus (*Odyssey* 6), or Ariadne, who is abandoned by Theseus (according to Pherecydes FGrHist 3F148) after having fled from Crete with him.

⁷¹³ Huxley (1969: 60).

⁷¹⁴ Graf (1997: 30).

a lack of authority for these interpretations, as the survival of so many archaic sources is scarce.

In the eighth century BC the epics *Corinthiaca*, ascribed to Eumelos,⁷¹⁵ and the *Naupactia* seem to have dealt with parts of Medea's story.⁷¹⁶ The *Naupactia* dealt with the Argonautic story and events in Colchis. There are references to the heroes who volunteered to undertake the task of yoking the bulls,⁷¹⁷ and the escape of Jason and Medea from Aeetes.⁷¹⁸ Aeetes invited the Argonauts to dinner and plotted to set fire to their ship and kill them, but Aphrodite intervened by making Aeetes desire his wife instead, in order that Jason could escape. Medea leaves with the Argonauts as they flee the palace and brings the fleece with her. Therefore in this epic there was no dragon that guarded the fleece, as it was kept in the palace, and it seems that Medea does not use any specific skill to obtain the fleece, as she does in later versions.⁷¹⁹ The *Naupactia* also dealt with events in Iolchus and the death of Pelias.⁷²⁰ Jason is said to leave Iolchus for Corcyra after Pelias' death, and that his elder son, Mermerus, was killed by a lioness on the mainland opposite Corcyra, although nothing further is mentioned of his other son Pheres.

There is no indication as to how Pelias died, therefore we do not know whether or how Medea was involved in his death in this version. However, it is significant that only Jason, and presumably both sons, emigrate from Iolchus and yet Medea is not mentioned. I argue that this indicates that Jason left without her, which could be due to her actions in Iolchus. This would parallel Jason's reaction to Medea's actions in the *Corinthiaca*, where he leaves for Iolchus without her.

This early epic also offers its own tradition regarding Medea's children, as they do not die as children in Corinth but survive with their father.

⁷¹⁵ For references to Eumelos as the reputed poet of the *Corinthiaca*: Pausanias *Description of Greece* (2.1.1, 2.3.10), scholiast to Pindar *Olympian* (13.74f Drachmann), scholiast to Euripides *Medea* (9 Schwartz), scholiast to Apollonius of Rhodes (3.1354-56a Wendel).

⁷¹⁶ Pausanias (10.38.11) explains that the *Naupactia* has been ascribed as the work of either a Milesian man, or a Naupactian man called Carcinus, although he believes that it makes more sense for it to be the Naupactian. Huxley (1969: 68-9) argues that it is possible for it to have been composed by a Milesian poet performing in Naupactus. However I suggest that a Naupactian as the poet is more convincing.

⁷¹⁷ Scholia to Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* 3.515-21 (PEG 4) and 3.523-4 (PEG 5).

⁷¹⁸ Scholia to Apollonius (4.66a, 4.86-7 Wendel, PEG 6, 7, 8).

⁷¹⁹ Huxley (1969: 71-2) notes that Jason could have had to kill the dragon before bringing the fleece to the palace, as in Herodorus (FGrHist 31F52).

⁷²⁰ Pausanias (2.3.9).

There is no evidence from this epic of Medea's skills in magic or murderous behaviour that become prominent in later interpretations. The emphasis is on Jason as the hero. However it is significant that this early interpretation indicates that a child of Medea is killed by a lioness, as Medea is described in tragic Athenian and Roman interpretations as a lioness in the context of infanticide.⁷²¹

The *Corinthiaca* links the Argonautic story and Medea's heritage to Corinth. It refers to Aeetes originally leaving the rule of Corinth (or Ephyre) and then departing for Colchis, and that the rule eventually fell to Medea who was summoned from Iolchus with Jason.⁷²² Eumelos puts at least three generations between Aeetes and his daughter Medea. When Aeetes left the rule of Corinth it passed through four different rulers before Medea was given sovereignty. Graf suggests that Eumelos was possibly trying to combine two sets of king-lists which were incompatible because he had to insert four generations between Aeetes and Medea as father and daughter.⁷²³

The *Corinthiaca* significantly differs from later interpretations in relation to the way in which Medea's children die in Corinth. In Eumelos' epic, Medea left each child as it was born in the shrine to Hera in the hope that it would become immortal. However they all died and, as a result, Jason then leaves her for Iolchus and she departs for Corinth.⁷²⁴ Therefore, in Eumelos' epic, Medea unintentionally kills her children.

Gantz details the variations on Medea unintentionally causing the death of her children from the scholia to Euripides' *Medea* 264 (Schwartz).⁷²⁵ One version ascribed to Parmeniskos (possibly 2nd century BC but using earlier sources) is that Medea had seven sons and seven daughters, and the

⁷²¹ See Section 3.7.6. for an overview of Medea and Clytemnestra's characterisation as a lioness.

⁷²² According to Pausanias (2.3.10, PEG 5). See also Simonides (545 PMG), and the scholia to Pindar *Olympian* (13.74f Drachmann), and Euripides' *Medea* (9 Schwartz) for Medea as queen of Corinth. Huxley (1969: 61) suggests that Eumelos linked local Corinthian cult with the Argonautic story in the *Corinthiaca* to improve Corinth's reputation in epic.

⁷²³ Graf (1997: 34-5).

⁷²⁴ Pausanias (2.3.11). The scholia to Pindar *Olympian* (13.74g) provides a possible explanation for Medea leaving her children in the temple: Zeus is said to have fallen in love with Medea but she resists out of respect for Hera, and so Hera promises immortality to her children. However, after their death, the children are honoured with a cult in Corinth. Gantz (1993: 368) notes that although this provides some answers to the situation, it is not clear why Hera did not keep her promise and the children were allowed to die.

⁷²⁵ Gantz (1993: 369-73).

Corinthians were unhappy with Medea ruling Corinth. The children took refuge at the altar to the temple to Hera Akraia, but the Corinthians killed them there. A plague then ensues and propitiation is made. In another version that Didymos ascribes to Kreophylos (possibly a 7th century BC poet or 4th century BC historian), Medea kills Creon with drugs and then leaves her children on the altar to Hera Akraia for protection before she flees to Athens, but the Corinthians kill the children and blame the death on Medea. Gantz concludes that these stories indicate that within the tradition of Medea's children dying in Corinth, there were two variations prior to Euripides; one where Medea unintentionally killed them and one where the Corinthians did.

Pausanias (2.3.6-7) describes the spring of Glauce in Corinth and the tomb of Medea's children, and relates another version concerning the death of Medea's children in which her two sons were stoned to death by the Corinthians for the gifts they gave to Glauce. As a result, the children of Corinth suffered until a cult was established and yearly sacrifices were made to them. Graf concludes that, although the details about Medea's children vary (for example, in their number) in these versions, they all depict the children dying and Medea being innocent of their deaths, and explain the aetiological significance of the Corinthian rituals to Hera Akraia.⁷²⁶

The epic *Nostoi* refers to Medea's powers of rejuvenation and the rejuvenation of Jason's father Aeson by placing drugs in a golden bowl (fr.7 PEG). The later sixth and fifth century sources also attest to Medea's skills in rejuvenating Jason himself (Simonides fr.548 PMG, Pherecydes FGrHist 3F113a).⁷²⁷ Griffiths suggests that rejuvenation carries dark associations with the Underworld.⁷²⁸ However I am not convinced this also affirms her divine ancestry, as the Corinthian Medea is unable to immortalise her children.⁷²⁹

The consistent features in archaic epic are the gods' support of Jason's quest, and that Jason's quest includes taking Medea with him. It is notable that Medea is not depicted as a murderer in these early sources. But she is still linked to the death of her children, albeit unintentionally, through the influence of a goddess. Medea is linked to death and murder, as she not only

⁷²⁶ Graf (1997: 35).

⁷²⁷ Graf (1997: 34).

⁷²⁸ Griffiths (2006: 15).

⁷²⁹ Graf (1997: 35).

caused her children's deaths (*Corinthiaca*), but she may also be the cause of Pelias' death (although this is not explicitly stated in the *Naupactia*). There is no evidence to indicate whether or how she killed Pelias in the *Naupactia*, only that Jason left Iolchus (without Medea) after Pelias died.

There is a close relationship between Medea and Hera, as the goddess seems to be instrumental in the death of Medea's children in Eumelos' epic. There is also the aetiological link between the Corinthian cult to Hera and the death of Medea's children,⁷³⁰ and the connection to Medea through Hera's ongoing support of Jason.⁷³¹ Hera's relationship to Medea is significant, as Hera is the goddess of marriage and childbirth and is often characterised through her wrath against Zeus' liaisons with other women. These characteristics make her similar to Medea, whose abduction and marriage to Jason are her defining characteristics in early archaic epic, as is her wrath from Jason's abandonment of their marriage in later classical tragic and Roman interpretations.

The death of Medea's children is a consistent theme from the archaic Greek to the Roman sources. As the threat and interaction with Persia increased in the late archaic to the classical era, I suggest so did Medea's characterisation as a murderer.

4.3. Hesiodic Theogony

Medea appears in Hesiod's *Theogony*, although not named, in a brief reference as the wife of Jason (992-1002). Hesiod uses the epithet shepherd of the people (*ποιμένι λαῶν*) for Jason, as in the *Iliad* (7.469). Jason led her away (*ἤγε*) from Aetes and brought her to Iolchus by the will of the everlasting gods (*βουλήσσι θεῶν αἰειγενετῶν*), and with whom he had a son, Medeios.⁷³²

⁷³⁰ Johnston (1997: 44-70) discusses the connection between the death of Medea's children and the Corinthian cult of Hera Akraia, and suggests that Medea was a similar goddess, displaced by Hera, who developed into the folkloric paradigm of the reproductive demon, and later the killer of her own children.

⁷³¹ In later sources Hera's support for Jason is combined with her wrath against Pelias (see Section 4.9. on Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*).

⁷³² Medeios becomes known as Medos in some later sources (Apollodorus *Library* 1.9.28, Hyginus *Fabulae* 27) and is referred to as the son of Medea and Aegeus, who gives his name to the territory of Media.

Medea's inclusion in Hesiod's *Theogony* could suggest that she was originally a goddess. West argues that her inclusion meant she was immortal; however he clarifies that she was a heroine rather than a true goddess.⁷³³ West also notes that she lived among men and had a tomb at Thresprotia, and went to Elysium with Achilles (discussed in Section 4.4.). Krevans follows West's assumption that Medea's inclusion in the *Theogony*, without a divine father for her son, must mean she is the divinity.⁷³⁴ I am not convinced that her inclusion demonstrates her status as a goddess. There is divine heritage in Medea's genealogy in Hesiod and Homeric epic: Medea is Aeetes' child (*Theogony* 992) and Aeetes is brother to Circe and child of Helios (*Odyssey* 10.135-9). I argue instead that it is her divine heritage, her position of power as a princess in the non-Greek world, and her status as a woman taken (albeit willingly) to Greece, that have provided the opportunities for ancient interpreters to connect her to local cults and foundation myths, such as the cult of Hera Akraia.

4.4. Archaic Poetry

Fragments survive from elegiac and lyric poetry of the mid-seventh century BC which mention Medea and Jason. Mimnermos tells of how Jason would not have been able to complete the tasks set him by Pelias to journey to Aea and bring back the Golden Fleece.

Fragment 11 West:

οὐδέ κοτ' ἂν μέγα κῶας ἀνήγαγεν αὐτὸς Ἰήσων
 ἐξ Αἴης τελέσας ἀλγινόεσσαν ὀδόν,
 ὑβριστῆι Πελίηι τελέων χαλεπῆρες ἄεθλον,
 οὐδ' ἂν ἐπ' Ωκεανοῦ καλὸν ἴκοντο ῥόον:

Fragment 11a West:

Αἰήταο πόλιν, τόθι τ' ὠκέος Ἡελίοιο
 ἀκτῖνες χρυσέωι κείαται ἐν θαλάμωι
 Ωκεανοῦ παρὰ χεῖλος, ἴν' ὄϊχετο θεῖος Ἰήσων.

⁷³³ West (1966) *ad loc.*

⁷³⁴ Krevans (1997: 71-82).

However the fragments do not include what it was that allowed Jason to complete these tasks. This could be an early reference to Medea's involvement. It could also refer to the involvement of the goddesses Hera, as depicted in the *Odyssey* (12.59-72), or Aphrodite, as in the *Naupactia*. Griffiths argues that Mimnermos' intention here was to interpret the power of love as the motivation for Medea to help Jason.⁷³⁵

According to the scholia to Apollonius of Rhodes (4.814-15 Wendel), Ibycus (PMGF 291), followed by Simonides (PMG 558), told of Achilles' marriage to Medea after his arrival in the Elysian Plain.

ὄτι δὲ Ἀχιλλεὺς εἰς τὸ Ἠλύσιον πεδῖον παραγενόμενος
ἔγημε Μήδειαν πρῶτος Ἴβυκος εἶρηκε, μεθ' ὃν Σιμωνίδης
(fr. 558)

This is unique evidence for the final outcome for Medea, which is not canonised in any interpretation and is not drawn on in later interpretations other than Hellenistic literature (*Argonautica* 4.811-15).⁷³⁶ Noussia-Fantuzzi suggests it is telling of Ibycus' amorous poetics that he adopted a post-Iliadic and post-Cyclic attention to the erotic life of Achilles in the afterworld.⁷³⁷ I argue that Medea's entry into the Elysian Plain is not evidence of her divine status; I suggest her divine heritage and marriage to the hero Achilles could explain this.

4.5. Pindar

Pindar refers to Medea in *Olympian* 13, when recounting the legends of Corinth, and summarises that she put her love for Jason before that of her father in order to save the Argo and its crew (47-54). But it is *Pythian* 4, Pindar's longest ode, which is the first extant source which deals with Medea and the story of the Argo in some detail.

⁷³⁵ Griffiths (2006: 15).

⁷³⁶ See Section 4.9.

⁷³⁷ Noussia-Fantuzzi (2015: 447). See also Fantuzzi (2012: 1-20).

Pythian 4 was composed in 462 BC to commemorate the victory of Arkesilas IV of Cyrene in the chariot race. However, the victory is only briefly mentioned and the majority of the ode is devoted to the Argonautic myth and the genealogical connection between Arkesilas IV, Battus I, and one of the Argonauts, Euphamos. The unique tripartite structure, complexity, and depth of this epinician evokes elements of epic.⁷³⁸

There is a political aim to the ode, which was likely to have been commissioned by the exiled Demophilus, as it concludes with a plea to Arkesilas for his recall. Braswell argues that Pindar would not have been able to include a plea for Demophilus in the ode (which was likely to have been performed in Cyrene) unless Arkesilas had already agreed to his recall, therefore *Pythian* 4 is a demonstration of the king's clemency, and the plea is guaranteed to be successful.⁷³⁹ Johnston describes how Pindar praises those qualities of Demophilus that will convince Arkesilas to allow his return but argues that it is unclear whether the plea for return was granted.⁷⁴⁰ If it was granted then Pindar's ode would demonstrate his generosity, rather than the pragmatic purpose of epinician odes as argued by Calame.⁷⁴¹

Medea is a key figure in the ode. She prophesies to the Argonauts (9-58) that Euphamos will become an ancestor of Cyrene (Libya), after having founded his race on Lemnos (251-7), who later colonise the island of Thera (Kallista Island). His descendant Battus I (seventeen generations later) will lead a colony from Thera to Cyrene (4-8) after having received a similar oracle from the Pythian priestess.⁷⁴² Therefore, Pindar compares Medea's prophetic skills with that of the Pythian priestess.

She is depicted as a powerful figure, whose words have an immobilising effect on the crew of the *Argo* (57-8), similar to the effect of the Delphic oracle (73-4) or the omens from Zeus (199-200). I argue that this subtle comparison between Medea and the divine highlights her power as a mortal woman inspired by the gods, rather than any divine status. I interpret

⁷³⁸ Sigelman (2016: 111-35). Nagy (1990) argues for the mutual influence of epic and lyric, rather than linear development.

⁷³⁹ Braswell (1988: 5-6).

⁷⁴⁰ Johnston (1995: 201, 2015a: 185).

⁷⁴¹ Calame (2003, 2009).

⁷⁴² Felson (1999: 1-31) discusses the double performance of the ode; first to Demophilus in Thebes and second to Arkesilas in Cyrene.

line 11 as ‘speaking with immortal inspiration’ rather than ‘from her immortal mouth’. She is also described as the mighty (*ζαμενής*) daughter of Aeetes and mistress (*δέσποινα*) of the Colchians (9-10).

Pindar depicts Aphrodite’s assistance as integral in bringing Medea from Colchis to Greece. She teaches Jason prayers and charms in order to seduce Medea and sever her ties to her family, abandon her sense of shame, and make her long to go to Greece (213-19). This echoes *Odyssey* 10, where Hermes gave Odysseus a magical tool to control and seduce Circe.⁷⁴³ Faraone discusses the confusion around the *iunx*, an erotic charm given to Jason by Aphrodite to seduce Medea.⁷⁴⁴ Faraone suggests that this relates to a magical effigy designed to transfer the bird’s mad, tortured state to the victim. Pindar connects the torture of the victim with her escape from the family; but he replaces the direct influence of a divinity (Aphrodite or Eros) with a human employing a divinely inspired magical charm.⁷⁴⁵ Johnston rejects this and interprets the *iunx* as an aural tool whose voice was associated with deception, danger, and the destruction of those it affected.⁷⁴⁶ Johnston argues that Pindar underlined the reasons that Jason had failed to control Medea, but also intimated that persuasion that tricked (*peitho dolia*) had no place in the ‘quest’ of the fifth-century hero or ruler.

Medea’s passion is initially depicted as directed towards Greece, geographical movement and leaving her homeland behind, rather than passion for Jason. This reflects Pindar’s historical context, in which there was increasing trade and movement between Greek and non-Greek cities in the later archaic and early classical period. This might have influenced Pindar’s interpretation of Medea’s abduction as passion not just for the Greek hero but for Greece itself. Medea’s passion therefore ensures Jason’s success, as she reveals how to pass the tasks set by her father Aeetes.

Pindar emphasises her skills in drugs and magic, already established in archaic epic. She prepares a mixture, which protects Jason’s safety (220-2, 233). In return, Jason promises Medea marriage, and they agreed to enter into

⁷⁴³ Segal (1986: 15-17).

⁷⁴⁴ Faraone (1993: 1-19).

⁷⁴⁵ Faraone (1999: 57) argues that Pindar’s description of the *iunx* spell (*Pythian* 4.213-219) reflects the actual use of *agoge* spells in classical Greece.

⁷⁴⁶ Johnston (1995: 177-206).

sweet union together (223). Pindar describes how Jason accomplished yoking the bulls and ploughing the land (232-7), but does not include the task of defeating the earth-born men, instead moving on to the task of defeating the dragon guarding the Fleece. Pindar then abruptly concludes the story as he is on the point of describing the dragon that guards the Fleece (243-5). He summarises that Jason killed the dragon with the help of Medea's cunning (*τέχναις*); and that Medea helped in her own abduction, the slayer of Pelias (*κλέψεν τε Μήδειαν σὺν αὐτᾷ, τὸν Πελλιοφόνον* 250-1). Braswell notes that Pindar's rapid transitions between parts of the Argo story and omission of certain parts are characteristic of choral lyric, in contrast to epic.⁷⁴⁷ Sigelman suggests that the poet reappears at this point and asserts his authorial intentions, immediately addressing Arkesilas.⁷⁴⁸

Pindar continues the characterisation from elegiac and lyric poetry that Medea is integral to Jason's success in the tasks for the Fleece. He depicts her as wanting to be abducted. Importantly, Pindar provides the earliest surviving reference to Medea as the murderer of Pelias, which was only hinted at in archaic epic. Pindar does not specify by which method Medea killed him. However I argue that, given Pindar's depiction of Medea's cunning and skills with drugs in this ode, the poet's intention was to hint that she killed Pelias by these means. Pelias is characterised as deceitful and cunning to Jason (95-100, 109-110, 156-67), which I suggest was the motive for his murder. Hera's hatred of Pelias is not specified here as her motive for assisting Jason's voyage (184-7). It is Aphrodite, rather than Hera, who assists in bringing Medea from Colchis to Greece. There is no indication of the consequences for Medea from committing this murder.

This characterisation of Medea as Pelias' killer may have already been known to Pindar. Hesiod notes that it was the will of the gods that Jason take Medea (*Theogony* 993), although it is not clear whether the will of the gods was for Jason to take away Medea so that he could marry her, or so that she could destroy Pelias. The *Naupactia* also mentions Pelias' death after Jason and Medea had returned to Iolchus, although there was no attribution of blame for his death.

⁷⁴⁷ Braswell (1988: 26).

⁷⁴⁸ Sigelman (2016: 125-6).

Pindar stresses Medea's role in the Argonautic adventure, as her assistance is not only essential for Jason to obtain the Golden Fleece, but she also advises the Argonauts to carry the Argo over land (26-7) and warns them how to deal with the clod of earth they have received (40-2) on their journey from Colchis. Pindar has made her role not only more powerful, by assisting in the success of the voyage and of Jason's tasks, but she is now characterised as a murderer.

I suggest that Pindar utilised elements of Medea's story, such as her association with the death of her children and the death of Pelias, which were hinted at but not developed in the surviving evidence from the archaic period, and evolved her into an intentional murderer. As a foreign princess from Asia Minor, Medea may have represented to Pindar's audience the potential danger of the east, when Persia had recently tried to extend its dominance, and an alliance of Greek cities had fought to defeat it. Braswell discusses the political unrest in Cyrene in 462 BC at the time of the commission of *Pythian 4*.⁷⁴⁹ The dependence of Battus IV and Arkesilas IV on Persia in order to maintain their political power was weakened after the Persian wars, and after 480/479 BC Persian intervention to support the king against the local aristocracy was less likely. Mitchell argues that the Pythian victory would have helped to gain support from Greece, which could no longer have been sought from Persia, although Braswell thinks this is unlikely and suggests that the victory would only have impressed the rebellious subjects in Cyrene.⁷⁵⁰

I argue that the political unrest in Cyrene reflected the changing dynamics of power in the areas around Greece and Asia Minor following the Persian wars. This might have affected not only Pindar's intentions in *Pythian 4*, to praise the greatness of Arkesilas and his divinely chosen rule, and therefore his choice of the Argonautic myth, but also the characterisation of Pelias as the tyrant and Medea as the dangerous foreign princess with divine heritage.

⁷⁴⁹ Braswell (1988: 2-5).

⁷⁵⁰ Mitchell (1966: 109). Braswell (1988: 4).

4.6. Tragic fragments

There are a number of tragedies of the classical period which dramatised the different parts of Medea's story, but which have either been lost or of which little survives.⁷⁵¹ Sophocles' *Scythai* may have dealt with the return voyage of the Argonauts (fragment 547 Radt) and noted that Medea and Apsyrtus did not have the same mother (fragment 546). Sophocles' *Colchides* dealt with the events in Colchis, and places the death of Apsyrtus in the house of Aeetes before Medea flees (fragment 343 Radt). Sophocles' *Rhizotomoi* ('Root-cutters') and Euripides' *Peliades* are titles that indicate these plays would have dealt with Medea's murder of Pelias. Fragments of the *Rhizotomoi* (534-6 TrGF) depict Medea cutting roots and preparing a potion. Sophocles and Euripides' *Aegeus* plays would likely have dramatised Medea's attempts on Theseus' life whilst in Athens with Aegeus. Euripides' play mentions a wife scheming against earlier children (fragment 4 Nauck) and that a dangerous task was set (fragments 9-11). Sophocles' play mentions the capture of the Marathonian Bull (fragment 25 Radt).⁷⁵²

Sourvinou-Inwood's influential iconographic and semantic analysis of a group of fifth-century BC Athenian vases show Theseus, sword in hand, pursuing a woman which she identifies as Medea.⁷⁵³ She persuasively argues that Medea is the polarisation of the negative traits of the female in the Greek collective representations, and that in the historical circumstances (c.460's to 440's BC) these images symbolise the Greek victory over the Persians. She suggests that fifth century Athenians would have had a culturally conditioned response to this, and similar scenes of mythological paradigms for the Persian Wars, and would therefore symbolically identify Medea with the invading Persians.⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁵¹ The following fragments and titles of these tragedies dealt with aspects of the Argonautic adventure, although these episodes were unlikely to have included Medea: Aeschylus' *Argo* (fragments 20-21 Radt), *Cabiri* (fragments 95-97a Radt), *Hypsipyle*, *Lemniai*, Sophocles' *Lemniai*, Euripides' *Hypsipyle*. See Gantz (1993: 342-5) and Section 3.8.1. on analysis of the surviving details of the Lemnian women.

⁷⁵² Gantz (1993: 255-6).

⁷⁵³ Sourvinou-Inwood (1979, 1990).

⁷⁵⁴ Sourvinou-Inwood (1979: 9-10, 53, 1990: 393-445). See also Boardman (1982: 5-15).

4.7. Euripides' *Medea*

The tragedy that has survived, and which has canonised Medea as the mother who deliberately murders her own children, is Euripides' *Medea*. In this play, performed in 431 BC at the Dionysia in Athens, Medea has settled with Jason in Corinth and had two sons. Medea was linked with Corinth from archaic epic and there is already a tradition in which she, unintentionally, causes the death of her children there. However, Euripides innovates the mythological narrative by depicting Medea deliberately killing her children in Corinth. The historical context is significant, at a time when relations between Athens and Corinth were so hostile.⁷⁵⁵

There is some debate over whether Euripides was the first to innovate the myth to make Medea deliberately kill her children, or whether this was imitated from a previous interpretation. Murray, Page, Buttrey, Worthington, Rehm, and Zerba are among the scholars who argue that Euripides innovated the story with the deliberate filicide.⁷⁵⁶ Schlesinger, Mastronarde, and McHardy are among those uncertain of whether Euripides was the first to introduce this form of the infanticide into the myth, due to the loss of competing sources and evidence, but agree that he canonised this version.⁷⁵⁷

Some ancient sources suggest that Euripides copied an earlier *Medea* from Neophon. The hypothesis to Euripides' *Medea* (TrGF 15 T2) claims that Dicaearchus in his *Life of Greece* and Aristotle in his *Commentaries* stated that Euripides passed off Neophon's drama as his own and made modification to it. The Suda (v218 = TrGF 15 T1) and Diogenes Laertius (3.134 = TrGF 15 T3) also refer to Neophon as the author of Euripides' *Medea*.

The fragments ascribed to Neophon that do survive show similarities with Euripides' version. These fragments deal with: the Aegeus scene (scholia *Medea* 666 = TrGF 15 F1), in which it is explained that Aegeus came to Medea for her to interpret the oracle he received in Delphi; Medea's monologue (Stobaeus *Anthology* 3.20.33 = TrGF 15 F2), showing her internal

⁷⁵⁵ Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* (1.31-45). See Mossman (2010: 11) on the impending outbreak of the Peloponnesian war and Corinth as an enemy of Athens.

⁷⁵⁶ Murray (1906). Page (1938). Buttrey (1958). Worthington (1990). Rehm (2002). Zerba (2002).

⁷⁵⁷ Schlesinger (1966). Mastronarde (2002). McHardy (2005).

struggle over the decision to kill her children; and Medea's prophecy for Jason's death (scholia *Medea* 1386 = TrGF 15 F3), in which Jason will die by hanging.

Page argues that Neophron imitated Euripides, based on the language, style and metre of the fragments of Neophron, and that Aristotle (*Poetics* 1461b) criticises the Aegeus scene in Euripides, not Neophron.⁷⁵⁸ Thompson refutes Page and suggests that Neophron's interpretation is prior to Euripides' because Aristotle's *Commentaries* would have been unlikely to confuse the two versions.⁷⁵⁹ Thompson suggests that the Aegeus scene is not explained in Euripides because it was explained in Neophron, and that Euripides' version only requires two actors, which is using an older structure for tragedy than Euripides would normally use. However I find Mastronarde more persuasive than Thompson or Michelini.⁷⁶⁰ Although there may well have been a Neophron producing tragedies prior to Euripides and that this tragedian composed a *Medea*, there is little comparative evidence to prove that the fragments ascribed to Neophron are in fact from the fifth century tragedian; they could therefore be a later interpretation wrongly attributed to him.

I argue that Euripides canonised this version in which Medea deliberately killed her children. I suggest it is likely that Euripides' version came before Neophron's, given that there is not sufficient evidence to date the fragments ascribed to Neophron as pre-431 BC, and because Aristotle (*Poetics* 1453b) refers to this aspect of the play as being Euripides' portrayal. The scholia to *Medea* 9 (Schwartz) also ascribes a story to Parmeniskos where the Corinthians pay Euripides to move the blame for the children's death from the Corinthians to Medea. Although doubtful, this story also suggests that Euripides is credited with introducing Medea as deliberately killing the children.

In Euripides' play, Medea finds out that Jason has abandoned her and broken the oaths he made to her by marrying a Greek princess. In a series of interactions with the men in this story (Creon, Jason and Aegeus) Medea manages to secure a day before she is sent into exile from Corinth. In that

⁷⁵⁸ Page (1938).

⁷⁵⁹ Thompson (1944).

⁷⁶⁰ Mastronarde (2002). Michelini (1989).

time she is able to confirm a place of refuge in Athens after she leaves Corinth, and to formulate and execute a plan which leaves not only the princess and Creon dead, but also Jason's two sons. The shocking elements of this story are not only that Medea deliberately kills her own sons in vengeance for Jason's treatment of her, but that she is able to escape triumphant at the end of the play to Athens, without suffering any pollution, exile, trial or death.

McHardy suggests that exile is the usual response for all killers outside of warfare and lists mythical examples of exile for kin-killing.⁷⁶¹ However I do not interpret Medea as being exiled for kin killing (166-7, 1333-4). The exile was decreed by Creon before the murders she commits and was therefore a contributing circumstance to the kin-killing, not a response to it. This was also not typical exile as she already had a benefactor, Aegeus, who agreed to accept her in his city of Athens, therefore avoiding the social exclusion associated with exile.

Therefore, Euripides' intention may have been to depict Medea's destructive power through her ability not only to commit her crimes but also to survive them unscathed, where other female murderers in myth are punished. Foley notes the popular assumptions about women as moral agents in Athenian tragedy.⁷⁶² This includes: susceptibility to *eros* (Euripides' *Medea* 569-75, *Trojan Women* 665-68, *Hippolytus* 967-70); being incapable of doing good (*Medea* 407-9); and being expert at taking revenge (*Medea* 263-66, *Andromache* 911, *Ion* 843-46). Foley convincingly argues that when tragedy gives moral autonomy to assertive female characters like Medea, Clytemnestra, Antigone, or Phaedra, it simultaneously and often anachronistically reminds the audience of what is expected of Attic women in everyday life.⁷⁶³ I agree that the author's intention in creating tragic negative feminine stereotypes may not be to enforce cultural ideals, but to challenge them using fictional characters. Hall makes the pertinent observation that every tragic woman who becomes transgressive is either

⁷⁶¹ McHardy (2008: 15).

⁷⁶² Foley (1981, 2001: 115-16).

⁷⁶³ See also Just (1989) and Gould (1980).

temporarily or permanently husbandless and lacks the authority of a sanctioned *kyrios* (Phaedra, Clytemnestra, Electra, Antigone, Medea).⁷⁶⁴

I shall now consider Medea's motives. Medea kills her children to punish Jason, and justifies her infanticide on the grounds that it is in retaliation for the crimes that Jason has inflicted upon her. He has betrayed his oaths of marriage (492-5, 1351-5, 1391-2), deserted her and their children (510-15, 791-3, 1401-2) and remarried a younger Greek bride (1354-7, 1366-8). Violence and rage caused by sexual infidelity are strongly masculine characteristics, which make this play an inversion of gender roles as Medea takes on masculine qualities in enacting her revenge.⁷⁶⁵

Medea kills their children to hurt Jason and punish him for this betrayal (816-7, 1364-70). This in turn ensures that he has no future offspring as she has also killed the princess, who would have been his only other hope for children (803-6). Medea kills the princess and Creon not only to punish Jason for his betrayal and extinguish his hopes for a family, but also to prevent the princess and Creon from mocking her and to punish them for their insult to her over the new marriage and for the threat of exile (804-10, 1354-7).

Euripides depicts the struggle Medea faces in deciding to kill her own children in her famous monologue (1021-80). Many scholars regard this as ultimately a struggle between two different parts of her character: her passion (*thumos*) and her reason (*bouleumata* 1078-80). There have been many interpretations of the meaning of these terms in this context. These include: her passion is stronger than her reason;⁷⁶⁶ the struggle between her maternal love and desire for revenge;⁷⁶⁷ her heart (determined on revenge) is master over her (revenge) plans;⁷⁶⁸ her passion overcame her logic;⁷⁶⁹ her anger is stronger than her control.⁷⁷⁰

Contrary views are that this is a struggle between two different Medea's rather than different emotions within her. Burnett interprets this as a struggle between Medea's masculine honour-orientated self and feminine

⁷⁶⁴ Hall (2010: 23).

⁷⁶⁵ McHardy (2008: 61-4).

⁷⁶⁶ Kitto (1961). Snell (1964). Schlesinger (1966). Bongie (1977).

⁷⁶⁷ Easterling (1977).

⁷⁶⁸ Foley (1989).

⁷⁶⁹ Syropoulos (2001).

⁷⁷⁰ Rehm (2002).

hearth-orientated self.⁷⁷¹ Pucci suggests that Medea becomes master of her less authoritative self, whereas Lawrence proposes that Medea becomes two people as the agent and victim of the agent.⁷⁷² Foley pertinently notes that emotion and desire can play a proportionally greater role in the representation of ethical positions adopted by women, in conformity with social stereotypes, and that female behaviour in Athens was more closely scrutinized, controlled, and criticized than that of their male counterparts.⁷⁷³ I suggest that Euripides' intention is to show that Medea has the potential to do both good and bad, and that it is her destructive need for vengeance which overpowers her emotional restraints and influences her decision to murder her sons.

Euripides uses the imagery of the lioness (*λέαινα*) to depict the anger and murderous nature of Medea. The Chorus fear her angry reaction if they approach her, like a lioness with cubs (187). After she has murdered their children Jason describes her as a lioness rather than a woman (1342, 1407). Medea triumphantly describes herself as a lioness (1358) in response to Jason's insults and defends her actions against Jason's betrayal, the threat of exile and her enemies laughing at her. Therefore Euripides uses the term ironically as it initially likens Medea's anger to that of an animal protecting its young, but is also used after she has killed her children to demonstrate the savagery and monstrosity of her actions.⁷⁷⁴ Mossman argues the lioness imagery negates the masculine savagery depicted in the earlier image of Medea likened to an infuriated bull (*ταυρομένην* 92).⁷⁷⁵ Jason also calls Medea more savage than Scylla in this passage (1342-3).⁷⁷⁶

I argue that there are parallels between Aeschylus' Clytemnestra and Euripides' Medea. Both Aeschylus and Euripides use imagery of lionesses to represent feminine savagery, anger and gender dynamics (*Agamemnon* 1258, *Medea* 1358).⁷⁷⁷ Euripides also utilises the image of Scylla to emphasise

⁷⁷¹ Burnett (1973).

⁷⁷² Pucci (1980). Lawrence (1997).

⁷⁷³ Foley (2001: 118) suggests women are probably more vulnerable than men to the dictates of 'shame culture' although she does not regard this as more primitive than 'guilt culture'.

⁷⁷⁴ Bongie (1977: 35).

⁷⁷⁵ Mossman (2010: 34-5). Boedeker (1997: 131) links this to the fire breathing bulls Medea harnessed for Jason (478), recalling his betrayal as the cause of her anger. Battistella (2013) notes the parallels in imagery and revenge.

⁷⁷⁶ See Section 4.11. for imagery of Medea as Scylla in Seneca's *Medea* (407-14).

⁷⁷⁷ See Section 3.7.6.

Medea as the female who can destroy the male, like Clytemnestra (*Agamemnon* 1223).

Euripides characterises Medea with many important Greek concerns and beliefs, such as fear of being mocked by her enemies (797, 1049-50, 1354-6) and harming her enemies and helping her friends (807-10), which can be interpreted as masculine. Many scholars regard this characterisation as demonstrating not only Medea's isolation but also the wider problematic nature of heroism, by giving the ideals of Greek male heroes to a foreign woman and, in doing so, displaying a threat to civilised life from within.⁷⁷⁸ Knox argues that Medea is presented by Euripides as a heroic character in the style and language of Sophocles, describing her as heroic in regard to her determined resolve, passion, anger, daring, glory, isolation, having been wronged, and her fear of her enemies laughing at her.⁷⁷⁹ Bongie and Foley also argue that Euripides displays heroic values in Medea, like Sophoclean Ajax or Homeric Achilles, through her concern with honour.⁷⁸⁰ Rehm argues that Medea is struggling against male heroic ideals, but ultimately succumbs to them and that these notions blind her from the full extent of her actions.⁷⁸¹ McHardy likens Medea to the Greeks' concern with the way they are mocked by the Trojans: specifically with Achilles before his revenge against Hector, as Medea also contemplates suicide and refuses to eat (24, 145-7, 226-7); and to Odysseus, in calculating the specific costs and benefits of her actions.⁷⁸²

Dover uses lines 807-10 in *Medea* as a comparison to Xenophon (*Memorabilia* 2.6.35) who commends the virtue of those who excel in harming enemies and helping friends.⁷⁸³ Blundell's important analysis of the Greek popular thought of helping friends and harming enemies interprets this as one of the ethical issues dramatically presented in tragedy.⁷⁸⁴ It pervades thought from Homeric epic onwards and survives in the Roman period. Euripides' portrayal of Medea's ethics is therefore masculine: harming

⁷⁷⁸ Easterling (1977). Bongie (1977). Foley (1989).

⁷⁷⁹ Knox (1977).

⁷⁸⁰ Bongie (1977). Foley (1989, 2001: 243-68).

⁷⁸¹ Rehm (1989).

⁷⁸² McHardy (2008). Cf. *Iliad* 18.23-34, 19.205-14, *Agamemnon* 399-402, 412, Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis* 370-2, 1264-6.

⁷⁸³ Dover (1974: 180).

⁷⁸⁴ Blundell (1989).

enemies as personal revenge is applauded in terms of manly honour (Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1367a20-23).⁷⁸⁵ Mossman disagrees and argues that Medea is a multi-faceted heroic character rather than a masculine one and, unlike Clytemnestra, is never described as like a man.⁷⁸⁶

I argue that Euripides created a multi-faceted Medea imbued with a complex mixture of masculine and feminine ethics and emotions. The poet's intention could therefore have been to create a character who the audience can empathise with but who ultimately challenges gender dynamics and ideas of justice.

These heroic preoccupations motivate her actions as much as her jealousy and hurt at being abandoned. She fears being mocked by her enemies, therefore she is willing to cause herself grief in order to hurt her enemies and prevent them mocking her (1361-2). Euripides depicts her paradoxical morality; by killing her enemies she condemns her children to death because she refuses to risk her children being killed by her enemies in retaliation, therefore she will kill them herself (781-2, 792-3, 1060-1, 1240-1). Bongie and Easterling assert that while Medea's children live she is still vulnerable to Jason, and that through killing them she eliminates that threat.⁷⁸⁷ Rehm claims that through her preoccupation with her enemies Medea dooms herself to think just like them, resulting in her inability to see the horror of her crimes.⁷⁸⁸

Euripides also characterises Medea with feminine concerns. These include the unfair position of women in regard to marriage (230-51), and the difficulties faced without the protection of a husband, father or brother, highlighting her previous crimes in which she betrayed her family and homeland for Jason (166-7, 257-8, 386-8, 442-3, 483, 506-8, 604, 799-801). Corti suggests the psychological motive for killing her children is connected to Medea's guilt over her betrayal and abandonment of her father (800-4), and that her regret over her previous actions indicates a wish that the children had never been born.⁷⁸⁹ However, as I will discuss in Section 4.8., I suggest a

⁷⁸⁵ Cf. Antiphon 2.a.8, Demosthenes 59.12.

⁷⁸⁶ Mossman (2010: 32-6). Cf. Zeitlin (1990: 67).

⁷⁸⁷ Bongie (1977: 50). Easterling (1977: 186-7).

⁷⁸⁸ Rehm (1989: 109-13).

⁷⁸⁹ Corti (1998: 45).

more convincing psychological motive for Medea's filicide is her social isolation as a result of Jason's betrayal and the breakdown of the *oikos*, in addition to her isolation from her natal family as a result of her previous murders of Apsyrtus and Pelias.

I am not convinced by the view that Medea's barbarian descent makes her capable of infanticide.⁷⁹⁰ Euripides does not depict the Chorus, Creon or Aegeus focussing on it. It is Medea herself who emphasises her foreignness (255-6, 591-2) as does Jason (536-41). Jason alleges that no Greek woman would dare to do this (*οὐκ ἔστιν ἦτις τοῦτ' ἂν Ἑλληνίς γυνή ἔτλη ποθ'* 1339-40) and that Medea has benefitted more by coming to Greece and leaving her barbarian land, as she has learnt justice and the rule of law rather than force (*πρῶτον μὲν Ἑλλάδ' ἀντὶ βαρβάρου χθονὸς γαῖαν κατοικεῖς καὶ δίκην ἐπίστασαι νόμοις τε χρῆσθαι μὴ πρὸς ἰσχύος χάριν* 536-8). Euripides' intention here is perhaps to present the irony that Medea commits her most barbaric crime in Greece where she escapes the rule of law.

Hall argues that Medea's barbarian identity did not appear until the fifth century BC, and that tragic drama perpetuated stereotypes and altered heroic figures.⁷⁹¹ Sourvinou-Inwood discusses the effect that Euripides' *Medea* had on depictions of Medea on vase-paintings, and argues that her oriental costume appears post-430 BC.⁷⁹² Euripides challenges the audience by characterising Medea with Greek concerns that Athenians could empathise with in regards to heroic honour (807-10), revenge (1354-6), oaths (492-5), and the position of women (230-258). This was in the context of the Persian wars in 490 and 480 BC, and the dangerous threat the Persians had posed to the Athenians, as well as the impending threat of the Peloponnesian war with Sparta in 431 BC. Euripides' intention may have been to subvert the stereotypes of the dangerous barbarian as well as the heroic Greek, at a time in classical Athens when contact with Asia Minor had increased, and political stability between Greek city-states had deteriorated.

Euripides does not emphasise Medea's skills in magic in this play, but does continue her association with drugs from archaic epic (*Nostoi* fr.7 PEG)

⁷⁹⁰ Page (1938) argues the outdated view that Medea was able to kill her children because she was a foreigner and describes her as a typical barbarian and foreign princess.

⁷⁹¹ Hall (1989: 54, 103).

⁷⁹² Sourvinou-Inwood (1997: 253-96).

and poetry (Pindar *Pythian* 4.233, Simonides fr.548 PMG, Pherecydes FGrHist 3F113a).⁷⁹³ Although her poisons cause the gruesome deaths of the princess and Creon (783-90, 805-6, 1125-6, 1186-1221), Medea's skills in drugs are not as prominent in Euripides as in later Hellenistic and Roman interpretations. Medea does not attempt to use her magic to rejuvenate her sons, as she was able to demonstrate to Pelias' daughters, or to win Jason back, but rather she uses them to kill her rival. Syropoulos convincingly suggests that Medea's use of magic in Greece is only to do harm, for example to Pelias, the princess and Creon.⁷⁹⁴ Even if Euripides presented her skills in magic more explicitly, this would be unlikely to allow an audience to morally accept her escape from punishment.⁷⁹⁵

I shall now examine the outcome of Medea's infanticide, and the perceived lack of justice. Euripides' portrayal of masculine pride and ethics does not mitigate the lack of punishment that he presents for Medea, because male heroes suffer from the consequences of their deeds.⁷⁹⁶ I disagree with Knox's suggestion that Medea escapes the consequences of her actions, unlike Sophoclean heroes such as Ajax, Oedipus, and Antigone, because the gods are on her side.⁷⁹⁷ Medea is comparable to Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in perverting justice through the excess of language and ideology appropriate to a heroic male warrior, and both speaking for their sex.⁷⁹⁸ However Medea escapes the revenge that Clytemnestra receives for her crime.

Euripides does not depict persecution from the Erinyes of Medea's children or any mention of pollution. Instead the Chorus describe Medea herself as an Erinys prior to her killing her children (*ὦ φάος διογενές, κάτειργε κατάπαυσον ἔξελ' οἴκων τάλαιναν φονίαν τ' Ἐρινὸν ὑπαλαστόρων* 1258-60). I follow Mastronarde in interpreting this as 'remove her through the agency of

⁷⁹³ Hall (1989). Graf (1997). See Conacher (1967) for the view that previously Medea had been a folktale barbarian and witch.

⁷⁹⁴ Syropoulos (2001).

⁷⁹⁵ Knox (1977: 284-6) argues that the use of poison does not characterise women as witches. For example, Deianeira in Sophocles' *Trachinae* uses drugs to try to win back Heracles and Creusa in Euripides' *Ion* uses drugs, but the playwrights are not characterising them as witches.

⁷⁹⁶ Knox (1964, 1977) discusses Sophoclean heroes that suffered death or injury.

⁷⁹⁷ Knox (1977).

⁷⁹⁸ Winnington-Ingram (1948). Foley (2001: 212).

avenging deities' rather than Page's 'fury driven by an avenging demon'.⁷⁹⁹ Yet significantly Euripides does not represent Medea being pursued by any Erinyes or *alastor* of her murdered children. Instead, Jason suggests that he has suffered from the *alastor* that was meant for her (1333-5) for the murder of her brother. Burnett importantly notes that Medea, like the Erinyes of the *Oresteia*, will find a place in Athens and the audience of Euripides' play will see her propelled toward their city in her dragon chariot.⁸⁰⁰ I reject Mossman's suggestion that, like Electra and Orestes in Sophocles' *Electra*, the mention of the Erinyes despite their absence in the play implies to the audience they will punish Medea in turn.⁸⁰¹

The role of the gods and Zeus as protectors of oaths is referred to throughout the play (20-3, 160-2, 170-1, 205-10, 492-5, 1391-2).⁸⁰² Burnett refers to the archaic belief that breaking oaths incurred the punishment of the Erinyes in the same way as kin-murder.⁸⁰³ Burkert notes that castration and destruction of his family line are punishments for the oath-breaker.⁸⁰⁴ Kovacs argues that Medea is used as an agent of Zeus to punish Jason for breaking his oaths and that in turn she is punished for the murder of her brother by destroying her own children.⁸⁰⁵ Euripides' intention may have been to depict Jason's broken oaths as an insult to the gods, but I am not convinced that Medea is depicted as an agent of Zeus. Even if the audience accepts that murder was a valid punishment for breaking oaths, Medea's action might incur pollution, exile or death, regardless of whether or not a god was responsible. For example, Orestes takes vengeance against Clytemnestra as ordained by Apollo/Zeus in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and yet he still suffers pollution, persecution by the Erinyes, and a trial as a consequence. In Euripides' *Herakles* and *Bacchae*, Herakles and Agave suffer divine-sent

⁷⁹⁹ Mastronarde (2002) *ad loc.* Page (1938) *ad loc.*

⁸⁰⁰ Burnett (1998: 223).

⁸⁰¹ Mossman (2010: 349-50) also notes other tragic characters depicted as Erinyes: Helen (*Agamemnon* 749), Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (Sophocles' *Electra* 1080), Cassandra (*Trojan Women* 457).

⁸⁰² Cf. Kovacs (1993: 51-3).

⁸⁰³ Burnett (1973: 13). See Section 3.9.5. I conclude that the Erinyes in Homeric epic focus on the breakdown of family bonds and violations of order.

⁸⁰⁴ Burkert (1985: 251).

⁸⁰⁵ Kovacs (1993: 59-69).

madness when they murder their children, and yet they are still punished with exile.

Medea's refuge in Athens with Aegeus is therefore important in securing mortal acceptance after such a heinous crime, as there would be no acceptance or welcome anywhere otherwise, as was the case for Orestes, Herakles and Agave. Johnston notes how chilling Euripides' introduction of a friendly Corinthian encounter between Aegeus and Medea (*Medea* 663-762) might have been for the Athenian audience, who knew Medea will later try to murder the heir that she promises she would help Aegeus to sire.⁸⁰⁶ Johnston uses this as an example of a crossover in the hyperseriality of myths which thrive on the unexpected introduction of a character the audience does not expect and makes the audience feel complicit with the narrator and buy into the narrative.

Medea's triumph over Jason is more important to her than any shame she may feel for her actions (1397-8). At the end of the play Euripides does not depict any contemplation of suicide out of remorse for her crimes.⁸⁰⁷ Medea only wishes for death at the start of the play in response to Jason's betrayal (96-7, 144-7).

Instead Euripides concludes the play with Medea in the role of the *deus ex machina*. The *deus ex machina* (god on the machine) was used in Greek tragedy in the fifth century BC, mainly by Euripides, to bring a close to the play and to explain or justify the action that had occurred and to prophesise the future for the characters. The machine used was a crane that brought the divine character on to the stage at a higher level than the characters on the stage and roof of the *skene* building.⁸⁰⁸ This therefore distinguished visually the difference in status between mortals and gods. Cunningham suggests that it is possible that the crane was not introduced until after 431 BC, and that the relevance is that Medea appears on high in a position of a god.⁸⁰⁹ However, I agree with Mastronarde who argues that the

⁸⁰⁶ Johnston (2015b: 299-306). See also Gantz (1993: 255-6) on Theseus and Medea in Athens.

⁸⁰⁷ Loraux (1987: 8-11) states that suicide via hanging was a way for women to kill themselves without incurring the pollution of their blood on anyone else.

⁸⁰⁸ Mastronarde (1990: Appendix 2) discusses the placement and mechanics of the crane behind the stage building.

⁸⁰⁹ Cunningham (1954: 152).

crane was in use in 431 BC and was not an innovation in *Medea*, and so would have been a conventional device recognised by the audience at the time of the play.⁸¹⁰

Aeschylus' divine characters are often present on the stage throughout his extant plays, therefore when Athene appears as the god on the machine in the epilogue of *Eumenides* it has a different dramatic effect to Euripides' use of the device, where the god intervenes from outside the action. The speech of the gods in the epilogue also indicated the difference in their knowledge and power over those of the human characters. Dunn categorises the features of the *deus ex machina* in the epilogue into two groups of gestures.⁸¹¹ The first is: gestures of authority (the god's entrance and exit through the air, expressions of awe from the watching characters, proclamation of identity from the divinity, and their representation of the authority of Zeus or fate). The second is: gestures of efficacy (a command to mortals, an explanation of unresolved events, and acceptance or endorsement by the mortals of the divine command).

The device is used in the epilogue of nine plays of Euripides and in all of these the character in the machine is divine.⁸¹² Although there is no explicit reference to Medea's entrance through the air on the machine (1314-22), it is accepted that she did appear on high due to her reference to the chariot and Jason's inability to reach her (1320-22, 1402-4). Mastronarde discusses the less effective possibility of Medea's chariot on the roof of the *skene* building.⁸¹³ The lack of an announcement is not a convincing argument that the crane was not used. Often the *deus ex machina* was not announced if the god abruptly had to intervene (for example, Athene in *Suppliant Women* and *Iphigeneia in Tauris*; Apollo in *Orestes*; the Dioscuri in *Helen*).

⁸¹⁰ Mastronarde (1990: 268-72). Dunn (1996: 37-8) and Mastronarde (1990: Appendix 1) outline examples of possible plays of Sophocles and Aeschylus that used the convention. Sophocles did not often use this device; Euripides could be seen as his influence as a competitor.

⁸¹¹ Dunn (1996: 29-37).

⁸¹² Thetis in *Andromache* (1226-72); Athene in *Suppliant Women* (1183-1228), *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (1435-89) and *Ion* (1549-1618); the Dioscuri in *Electra* (1233-1356) and *Helen* (1642-79); Apollo and Helen (mute / goddess) (1625-90) in *Orestes*; Artemis in *Hippolytus* (1282-1439); and Dionysus in *Bacchae* (1329-51). Euripides' *Herakles* is an exception; Iris and Madness appear together as gods on the machine (and exit separately) in the middle of the play (815-84).

⁸¹³ Mastronarde (1990: 264-74).

Euripides therefore innovates the play by presenting Medea in this role. She is a mortal who appears on the machine at the end of the play, and who exhibits many of the functions of the god. She appears at a higher level and stops the violence below (1317-20), justifies revenge (1351-60), and orders burial for the dead (1394). She prophesies the future (1386-8), makes the foundations of a cult (1378-83), departs to a far destination (1384-5), issues commands (1319-20), and appears vindictive and merciless (1396-1404).⁸¹⁴ Collinge argues that the Sun answers the Chorus' plea (1258-60) by taking Medea away on the chariot.⁸¹⁵ However, I am not convinced that the support of Medea's grandfather constitutes divine intervention, which is significantly absent in the play. By presenting Medea on the crane with the authority of a *deus ex machina*, I suggest that Euripides has shown her to invade the sphere of the divine, and questions her mortal status by the end of the play.⁸¹⁶

Some scholars therefore regard her as a becoming a divine figure or superhuman force; losing her humanity after flying off with her children's bodies on the chariot.⁸¹⁷ Worthington unconvincingly suggests that the symbolism of Medea flying off on the chariot represents her transformation from human back to folk-tale fiend.⁸¹⁸ Burnett is more persuasive in her argument that Medea is entirely human.⁸¹⁹ Burnett compares her initially to Clytemnestra in her passionate will being in agreement with the curse that uses her, but then made to discover within her mortal gendered self another passion that resists the daimonic power. Zeitlin argues that Medea's departure on the dragon chariot of the Sun suggests there can be no place for her in the social structure down on earth.⁸²⁰ She suggests Medea insists on the binding nature of the compact she made on her own with a man, as a woman who

⁸¹⁴ Knox (1977).

⁸¹⁵ Collinge (1962).

⁸¹⁶ I am not persuaded by Dunn (1996: 40-1) who distinguishes her as a 'demonic epiphany' in which a mortal character displays unusual influence and transforms into a divine voice due to their uncontrolled passion.

⁸¹⁷ Schlesinger (1966), Bongie (1977), Worthington (1990), Hall, Macintosh and Taplin (2000), and Zerba (2002) argue Medea has become a god at the climax of the play. Murray (1906), Cunningham (1954), Palmer (1957), Burnett (1973), and Knox (1977) state that Medea becomes something more than human, like a demonic force, by the end of the play.

⁸¹⁸ Worthington (1990).

⁸¹⁹ Burnett (1998: 206).

⁸²⁰ Zeitlin (1990: 70).

defends her right to honour and self-esteem in terms suspiciously resembling those of the male heroic code.

The gods do not appear in the play. I suggest this is because Medea has superseded them, and Euripides depicts this through her appearance on the chariot of the Sun at the end of the play in the position of the *deus ex machina*. The gods' alliances have been brought into question because both Jason (915, 918-9, 1323-4, 1327-8, 1373, 1389-90, 1405) and Medea (20-3, 160-2, 170-1, 205-10, 492-5, 1391-2) claim that they have their support. But it is only Medea who receives material help from the gods and is not shown to suffer their wrath. Jason breaks his oaths to the gods and by the end of the play he has been punished by having his children and new bride killed, effectively extinguishing his family line.

I am not suggesting that the gods are on Medea's side, nor that she has become divine herself. Although Medea is a descendant of the Sun and flies off on the chariot, I argue that this does not constitute an apotheosis and that Medea does not become a god. Instead she moves between the mortal and divine realm. There is no mortal figure that can reach her, and there is no divine figure in the play to control her. Euripides is showing Medea to invade the divine sphere as an exceptionally powerful mortal, with the help of her divine ancestor. This emphasises her destructive power as a dangerous woman in the position of a god and out of reach of mortal punishment.

McHardy argues that strong masculine revenge for sexual offences combines with excessive feminine vengeful desires to create one of the most notorious revenges in Greek literature.⁸²¹ I would add that Medea's notoriety in Euripides' canonical interpretation is emphasised by the lack of conventional punishment or justice for the murders she commits. Mastronarde discusses the futility of speculating on whether the reason that the tetralogy that included *Medea* came third in the competition that year was because the *Medea* was so shocking.⁸²² Unfortunately the evidence is lacking on the accompanying plays or competitor's productions. However, I think that it is possible that the content of the *Medea* could have contributed to its reception

⁸²¹ McHardy (2008).

⁸²² Mastronarde (2002: 3-6).

in the competition, given that it portrayed a murderer escape unpunished to Athens.

Euripides follows Pindar in making Medea the killer of Pelias, and introduces Medea's betrayal of her father and murder of her brother. However he does not go into any detail of these past crimes (6-10, 166-7, 476-87, 1332-5). I propose that, throughout the Greek and Roman interpretations, Medea's relationships with the male figures in her life, whether intimate, familial, or civic, are destroyed through murder or betrayal. Her husband, brother, father, sons, and enemies all suffer as a result. Euripides highlights this association with murder. I suggest that a cycle of violence and betrayal emerges in Euripides' interpretation. When in love with Jason, she murdered and ended relationships for his benefit. When she lost his love, she murdered and ended relationships to hurt him.

Medea's killings are therefore a consequence of love, and Medea chooses to deceive and betray those that she claims to love. Euripides portrays that, at the start of their relationship, it is her love for Jason that motivates Medea to betray and abuse the trust of the men in her family, in order for Jason to succeed in his tasks and take her away with him. Whereas at the end of their relationship, she murders her children to make Jason suffer for betraying her love and the oaths he made to her. She ends their relationship as parents, just as he ended their relationship as husband and wife.

Euripides innovates the unintentional death of Medea's children from archaic epic into intentional infanticide. This becomes the canonical interpretation and is reflected throughout the later Hellenistic and Roman versions of the story.

4.8. Infanticide

In order to understand how the tragic audience may have responded to Medea's infanticide, I shall briefly examine the Athenian treatment of infanticide from a dramatic and social perspective, with reference to modern research on infanticide for comparison. However I do not intend to impose Athenian laws directly onto the context of the play.⁸²³

⁸²³ Cf. Murray (1906) who argued that Medea and Jason were not legally married due to Pericles' citizenship law 451/0 BC that dictated both parents must be Athenian citizens in

A brief comparison of infanticide in Athenian tragedy demonstrates that jealousy and betrayal in relationships are motives, especially for mothers, to kill their children whereas madness and oracles from the gods are motives for both mothers and fathers. Tereus rapes his wife's sister, Philomela, and cuts out her tongue. Philomela then tells her sister Procne through weaving it into a robe, and they kill Procne's son Itys and serve him to his father Tereus to eat. Tereus pursues Procne and Philomela, and they all transform into birds (Sophocles' *Tereus* fr.585, 586, 595 Radt).⁸²⁴ Tereus becomes a hoopoe, Philomela a swallow, and Procne a nightingale. Aeschylus also refers to Tereus' wife as a nightingale in *The Suppliant Women* (58-67), who killed her child (although the name of Tereus' wife is not Procne but Metis). The nightingale is a paradigmatic symbol of mourning (Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1148-50, Euripides' *Helen* 1107-12, Sophocles' *Electra* 107-9, 145-52, 1075-80) and tragic lamentation.⁸²⁵ In both interpretations, Tereus' wife metamorphosises. I interpret this as a form of justice for the murder of her son; her human life ends with her metamorphosis into a bird, just as the death of the murderer can be interpreted as justice for the victim.⁸²⁶

Themisto planned to kill the children of her husband Athamas from his other wife Ino, but Ino swaps the children and Themisto accidentally kills her own children instead (Aeschylus' and Sophocles' *Athamas* plays and Euripides' *Ino* are lost; cf. Hyginus *Fabulae* 4 for Euripides' *Ino*). It is significant that the murder is accidental, and that it is jealousy of a husband's other relationship that results in a mother inadvertently murdering her own children. The consequence of their death is that, when Themisto discovers the truth of her actions, she commits suicide. Athamas is then sent mad by Hera and kills his son Learchus, and Ino kills their other son Melikertes by jumping into the sea with him.

order for children to have citizen status. See Sealey (1990: 14-9) and Todd (1993: 177-9) on Pericles' citizenship law.

⁸²⁴ Cf. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 6.424-74.

⁸²⁵ See Suksi (2001: 646-658). Cf. *Odyssey* 19.518-24, Apollodorus *Library* 3.14.8. See Section 3.10.7. on Electra mourning like the nightingale.

⁸²⁶ Burnett (1998: 177-91) suggests that Procne was forced to deny her own nature in obedience to a patriarchal imperative stronger than even that of her womb. Cf. Sophocles *Ajax* (627-30), Demosthenes 60.28.

The divine-sent madness therefore motivates Athamas to kill his own child, as well as possibly chasing his wife Ino, who consequently kills their other child and commits suicide. Euripides also provides an alternative version in *Medea* (1282-9), in which Ino is sent mad by Hera and kills herself and her two children by jumping from a cliff. Therefore it would seem that in both of these tragic versions, divine-sent madness is the cause of Ino's murder of her child, either due to her own madness or from fleeing her husband's madness. Although it is unclear from the tragic sources what the outcome is for Athamas, I suggest that Ino's suicide can be interpreted as justice. McHardy analyses filicidal mothers in tragic plots (Ino, Medea, Procne, Althaea, Iliona, Astyoche) and suggests that in several of these the filicides were tragic inventions, and the filicide was associated with madness (divinely or emotionally generated) as an expression of the Dionysiac nature of tragedy.⁸²⁷

In Euripides' *Bacchae*, divine-sent madness is the motive for Agave's murder of her son Pentheus. Agave is sent into a state of frenzy by Dionysus and rips Pentheus apart with her sisters, believing him to be an animal. This is in retribution for Pentheus' dishonour of Dionysus, and the maltreatment of Semele. The revenge of one son for his mother is taken on another mother through her son. Agave is in ignorance of her actions and events have to be explained to her after her madness ends, and consequently she goes into exile (1330-92).

Herakles also kills his children whilst motivated by divine-sent madness in Euripides' *Herakles*. Hera sends this madness in retribution for his mother Alkmene's union with Zeus. She causes Herakles to kill his three sons and his wife, believing them to be the sons of his enemy Eurystheus. Similarly to Agave, Herakles is in ignorance of his actions until they are explained to him, and his punishment is also exile, although he does eventually receive purification in Athens.

Agamemnon kills his daughter Iphigeneia because of the will of the gods (Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, Sophocles'

⁸²⁷ McHardy (2005).

Electra).⁸²⁸ Although in some tragic versions of this story Iphigeneia is saved (Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*), Agamemnon is murdered by his wife as a result of sacrificing his daughter, despite his actions being commanded by an oracle from the gods.

I would classify these examples into two categories: personal motives and divine motives. The influence of the gods, either through sending madness or an oracle, was a divine motive for parents to (often unintentionally) kill their children. This was often as punishment for the god being insulted, although not necessarily insulted by the parent in question. Personal motives included betrayal or jealousy on the part of the parent, where the mother killed her child as punishment for the deceit of the husband or jealousy of the husband's other relationships.

From these examples of parents that kill their children, I argue that the consequences of infanticide are that the parent suffers a form of punishment that can be interpreted as justice for their crimes. Those that had divine motives suffered death (either their murder or suicide) or exile (a form of social death). Those that had personal motives suffered death (by suicide) or metamorphosis. Euripides presents Medea's motives for infanticide as personal, yet she does not suffer death or metamorphosis as a result.

In legal terms in classical Athens the exposure of an infant did not count as homicide, and there were no legal restrictions prohibiting exposure or abandonment.⁸²⁹ It was the status of the child rather than the intent of the parent that differentiated between infanticide (*paidoktoneo*, *teknoktoneo*) and exposure (*ektithemi*, *apotithemi*, *ekballo*). Exposure was an act of leaving infants outside to die or to be found and rescued by others, and was committed on the infant that was not yet a part of the family unit.⁸³⁰ Patterson follows Parker in associating pollution with the exposure of a child, and asserts that purification was not necessarily an indication of immoral or illegal acts (pollution was also incurred from childbirth and sexual intercourse).⁸³¹

⁸²⁸ See Sections 3.7.2. and 3.10.2. This is either because Agamemnon was hunting in Artemis' precinct (Sophocles' *Electra* 563-73) or because he did not sacrifice Iphigeneia previously (Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris*).

⁸²⁹ MacDowell (1978: 91).

⁸³⁰ Golden (1981).

⁸³¹ Parker (1983: 354-6). Patterson (1985: 106).

Golden suggests that the pollution of dead children is not as strong of that of adults because children have not properly entered into society yet.⁸³²

The child was not accepted by the family until the fifth day after the birth at the *amphidromia*, when the father would run around the hearth with it,⁸³³ and then on the tenth day at the *dekate*, when it was named.⁸³⁴ I argue that Euripides depicts Medea's sons as accepted members of the family (557-65). Although they are not named in the play, they are acknowledged by their father (914-21), they are old enough to have a tutor and they can speak, albeit offstage (1273-8). Therefore a classical Athenian audience would likely have perceived their deaths as intentional homicide, for which the legal penalties included exile and death.

It is hazardous to reconstruct the social customs of infanticide in classical Athens without explicit evidence, or to make assumptions based on modern data.⁸³⁵ However, a comparison with modern research on infanticide and child homicide reveals some interesting parallels to Euripides' interpretation of Medea. Scrimshaw's ethnographic and historical analysis of modern human infanticide suggests that infanticide often occurs early in the infant's life because they will not yet have the status of a 'real person' in the society, and that it is far more difficult to deliberately kill a child who has been around for several years.⁸³⁶ Research into cases of infanticide in modern North America indicates that the frequency of child homicide committed by parents significantly drops as the age of the child increases, with the maximum occurring in infancy.⁸³⁷

Gavin and Porter differentiate between infanticide (murder of an infant older than 24 hours and younger than 12 months), and child homicide (older than 12 months).⁸³⁸ They suggest that child homicide is most often a crime by mothers over 25 years old, who are no longer dependant on their

⁸³² Golden (1988: 154-7).

⁸³³ Burkert (1985: 255). Todd (1993: 179, 209 note 11).

⁸³⁴ See MacDowell (1978: 91) for the legal importance of this event for the father acknowledging the paternity of the child.

⁸³⁵ As Engels (1980) and Golden (1981) have done, however their suggestions are illustrative of the possible levels of infanticide.

⁸³⁶ Scrimshaw (1984: 440-9).

⁸³⁷ Daly and Wilson (1984: 495-7 "Figure 1"). However the sample used by Messing and Heeren (2004) reverses this trend.

⁸³⁸ Gavin and Porter (2015).

parents, and may involve a degree of premeditation and issues such as revenge against the child's father.⁸³⁹

Social and psychological studies in modern America have also drawn conclusions about the contributing factors to women committing child homicide. These include: social isolation; losing their domestic status and position in the family; and the belief that they have an unassailable proprietary right as mothers to their children's lives.⁸⁴⁰ This mentality was evidenced in cases where mothers killed their children and then committed suicide, expressing ideas about not being able to leave their children behind.⁸⁴¹ Medea is referenced as a cultural model and example of a filicidal woman in western mythology which legitimates this matriarchal corollary to patriarchal ideology; the idea of mothers owning their children. Another example is the Mexican myth of La Llorona; a spurned wife who, angry and vengeful toward her unfaithful husband, kills her two children and then wanders the earth crying while searching for them.⁸⁴²

I argue that Euripides' psychologically complex interpretation of Medea therefore demonstrates many of the psychological and social contributing factors in real-life cases of child homicide. Medea is socially isolated and has lost her position within the family: she has lost her husband; she has barbarian status in Greek Corinth; she is threatened with exile; and she has severed her links to her natal family, including her father and brother as protectors. The homicide is premeditated and is an act of revenge against the children's father. Medea kills them to cause Jason pain (1370).

The children are innocent victims, and this emphasises the cruelty of the crime.⁸⁴³ Once Medea has killed them, she leaves Corinth for her promised refuge in Athens (1384-5). Euripides constructs Medea's originality not just in being capable of killing her children, but in escaping any of the consequences of female infanticide depicted in tragic interpretations. Ino and

⁸³⁹ Gavin and Porter (2015: 102-22). Cf. Scrimshaw (1984: 442-8). Hall (2010) also notes the comparison between modern data on maternal filicide and the image of the child-killing mother created by Euripides.

⁸⁴⁰ Messing and Heeren (2004: 123-58). Also Daly and Wilson (1988).

⁸⁴¹ Messing and Heeren (2004: 153).

⁸⁴² Gavin and Porter (2015: 122). Messing and Heeren (2004: 123-58).

⁸⁴³ See Section 3.7.8. on Athenian homicide where victims who were not innocent and had injured the murderer could only have been classed as lawful under specific circumstances.

Themisto commit suicide after mistakenly killing their children.⁸⁴⁴ Procne metamorphosises. Agave goes into exile. By contrast, Medea flies off triumphantly to Athens.

Jason, as the surviving family of the boys, is unable to enact any vengeance on Medea as their killer (1329) because he cannot reach her due to her elevated position on the chariot (1402-3, 1411-2) above the mortal realm. The chariot gives her the means to escape to Athens unharmed. The promise of asylum in Athenian drama is a key factor that ensures mortal help after the spilling of kin blood.⁸⁴⁵ By the end of the play Medea does not suffer any conventional Athenian legal (trial, exile, death) or dramatic (trial, exile, metamorphosis, suicide, death) interpretations of justice for intentional homicide.

Euripides challenged conventions and created provocative representations of women. He innovated an element of Medea's story from archaic interpretations; that her children died, and transferred the responsibility on to her as their mother. His unique interpretation of Medea is that she is a mother capable on intentionally murdering her children, and escaping any punishment for it. However her escape precludes further violence or retaliatory vengeance. Euripides may have been reflecting some of the importance of the legal treatment of intentional homicide, given the continued importance and almost mythical status of Drakon's homicide laws, and the upheavals of Ephialtes' reforms and the powers of the Areopagus within his lifetime.

Euripides' Medea avoids the established legal, religious and dramatic punishments for kin-killing and homicide. Euripides explores Medea's motives and associates her with intentional murder and masculine heroic ethics. However he also depicts her feminine associations as a witch and princess, her emotional conflict, and her social isolation as a foreigner and barbarian. I argue that Euripides does not depict any justice for her actions, and that her gender and social exclusion contributes to her otherness in the conventional scheme of vengeance and retribution.

⁸⁴⁴ Messing and Heeren (2004: 123-58) note the suicide of the offender as a similarity between male and female mass murderers.

⁸⁴⁵ Contrast Theseus' promise to Herakles of purification, asylum and honour in Athens in the *Herakles* with Agave's lack of refuge from exile in the *Bacchae*.

Euripides' intention may have been to shock the audience by presenting a kin-killer who is not only gloriously triumphant, and can move between the mortal and divine world to escape punishment, but who can also gain empathy from the Athenian audience.

4.9. Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*

I shall now examine how the story of Medea evolves in surviving Hellenistic interpretations. Firstly, I consider the change in legal context in Hellenistic Greece. It remains challenging to piece together a coherent picture of Hellenistic law, given the broad geographical spectrum and diverse nature of communities. Most evidence for law in Hellenistic Greek cities comes from inscriptions and documents, and Athens provides the best evidence for the continuity of private law which seemed to be maintained in other Greek cities, along with traditional features of legal procedure.⁸⁴⁶ Ptolemaic Alexandria was a self-governing state with its own councils and assemblies closely controlled by the king and his administration. Perhaps, as a result, there is very little legislation, particularly publicly displayed legislation, that is found in abundance in other Greek cities. The abundance of papyri that survives from Ptolemaic Alexandria that contributes to an understanding of the legal context includes royal edicts and decrees, as well as contracts and official records. However, it does not provide the same evidence of interpretation of the law provided by the Attic orators.⁸⁴⁷

It is therefore challenging to investigate the social and legal response to homicide in this context. The absence of information has led some scholars to suggest the figure of the polluted murderer disappeared after the fourth century BC, and was absorbed into a more sophisticated legal system.⁸⁴⁸ Salvo makes a valuable assessment of the consequences of homicide in the Hellenistic period.⁸⁴⁹ She acknowledges the problematic reliability of the historiographical accounts (Plutarch *Alexander* 50-52; Arrian *Anabasis Of Alexander* 4.8.1-9; Seneca *De Ira* 3.17.1, *Epistle* 83.19; Livy 40.20-4) and the

⁸⁴⁶ Boegehold (1995). Habicht (1997). Rhodes and Lewis (1997: 473-563). Rubinstein (2004). Gagarin (2008: 226-7).

⁸⁴⁷ Rhodes and Lewis (1997: 461-9). Gagarin (2008: 232-41).

⁸⁴⁸ Parker (1983: 322). Harris (2015: 13). Salvo (2018: 157).

⁸⁴⁹ Salvo (2018: 157-69).

narrow circumstances of the two royal examples. Salvo rejects the opposition of law and religion and argues persuasively for the consistency of blood pollution, albeit subject to negotiation.

In the absence of further surviving evidence on the contemporary treatment of homicide in the Hellenistic context, I therefore focus on the social and literary factors that influenced the evolution of the Hellenistic interpretations of Medea. In this section I shall analyse Medea's portrayal as developed in Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*.⁸⁵⁰ The *Argonautica* is likely to have been composed in Alexandria in the mid-third century BC, when Apollonius held the post of Head of the Royal Library.⁸⁵¹

The Hellenistic period generated a new political and social situation; the defeat of Persia brought with it a fascination with the east, and the fate of individuals was increasingly affected by the personal urges of rulers.⁸⁵² The conquests of Alexander the Great meant that many aspects of Greek culture, including drama and literature, were cultivated, performed and read across a wide geographic and ethnographic area. Alexandrian literature, in comparison to Athenian drama which was created for the masses, was written principally for aristocratic patrons.⁸⁵³ Apollonius was working under Ptolemaic patronage, and would likely have appreciated their political interests as well as an assortment of literary traditions in Alexandria at the time.⁸⁵⁴

The culmination of social and literary influences from Greek and Egyptian cultures, as well as the extensive collection of papyri in the Library of Alexandria, contributed to Apollonius' depiction of Medea as an epic helper-maiden turned powerful witch and murderess in this epic. Pomeroy analyses the emergence of the feminine perspective as one of the trends of Alexandrian literature.⁸⁵⁵ Gutzwiller discusses Medea's psychological bifurcation as a murderess sorceress and a naïve teenager driven by love, and suggests that this reflects the cultural audience coming to terms with women's power and privilege and the new roles played by Hellenistic queens in

⁸⁵⁰ See Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980) and West (2007) on Carcinus' fourth century tragedy *Medea*; analysis of which could not be accommodated in the scope of this thesis.

⁸⁵¹ See Hunter (1989: 1-9, 1993: 1-3).

⁸⁵² Kotlińska-Toma (2016: 25).

⁸⁵³ Pomeroy (1984: 42). Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004).

⁸⁵⁴ Mori (2008: 9-11).

⁸⁵⁵ Pomeroy (1984: 41-82).

Egypt.⁸⁵⁶ I suggest that Apollonius includes subtle comparisons to female figures in epic and tragedy, as well as to the powerful royal Hellenistic women in the contemporary context, such as Arsinoe II.

The epic is divided into four books and focuses on the voyage of Jason and the Argonauts in the quest for the Golden Fleece. Book 3 deals with Jason's ordeals in Colchis, including the tasks that Aeetes sets for him and the fundamental assistance he receives from Medea in completing them. Book 4 then tells of Jason's escape from Colchis with Medea, their murder of her brother Apsyrtus, their marriage, and their voyage through other lands and obstacles on their way back to Iolchus with the Argonauts.

In this interpretation of Medea, there are hints and references to the events that a reader (familiar with classical Athenian drama and Euripides' *Medea*) will know occur later in the story in Corinth. Jason's eventual abandonment of Medea and her subsequent murder of their children are foreshadowed at various points in this epic. Apsyrtus is compared to a child with Medea before his murder (4.460) and there is a threat of handing Medea's child over to her enemies (4.1110). There are references to her future grief (3.840, 4.65), abandonment (3.1128, 4.90), and Jason's ungratefulness (3.1115, 1122-5, 4.195, 4.1030-40).

By the time of Apollonius' interpretation Medea is already established as an intentional murderer. Apollonius develops Medea's role from surviving archaic epic to make her more crucial in this epic for the success of Jason's quest to obtain the Golden Fleece. Apollonius' Medea, as hinted at in archaic poetry and Pindar, is also integral in assisting the Argonauts' escape from Colchis and overcoming obstacles on their voyage home. Her skills in drugs and magic and her relationship with Hecate are also heavily emphasised in this interpretation, as well as her ability to manipulate and deceive.

In order to obtain the Golden Fleece, Aeetes sets Jason the tasks of yoking the fire-breathing bulls, ploughing the field, sewing the teeth of the serpent and fighting the crop of warriors that emerge (3.400-20). Jason is a favourite of Hera. His uncle Pelias, who set him the challenge of obtaining the Fleece, is hated by Hera for not honouring her. The goddess therefore

⁸⁵⁶ Gutzwiller (2008: 74 -84).

ensures Jason's success by requesting that Aphrodite bid her son Eros to make Medea fall in love with Jason and offer her help (3.25-30, 3.85-90). Apollonius represents the Olympian goddesses as a parallel to the powerful Hellenistic women at the royal court. Clauss suggests that this scene is a portrayal of the goddesses as Hellenistic women at court and of Eros as an overindulged child.⁸⁵⁷ Mori notes that Arsinoe II was publicly associated with the Olympian goddesses by the Alexandrians.⁸⁵⁸

The power of Eros is central to Medea's actions and the development of the story, and depicted as superior to military action, as Athena cannot suggest another course of action that would ensure Jason brings the Fleece back to Hellas (3.10-20). Eros becomes an increasingly important figure in the romance literature of the Hellenistic period, in comparison to Aphrodite's role in tragedy of the classical period. Hunter stresses how the themes of *eros*, drugs and words are important to Medea's narrative, and that her character explores the inter-relations between magic, *eros* and rhetoric.⁸⁵⁹ Pendergraft suggests that Apollonius' characterisation of Eros is radically different from later literary and artistic representations; the deity evokes no awe or reverence but is instead an unpleasant child (3.90-99 114-30, 145-55).⁸⁶⁰ She convincingly argues that Apollonius makes the audience take the deity seriously because his toy is nothing less than the universe, and that this figure of Eros represents the non-traditional and anti-heroic ethos of the *Argonautica*. Fantuzzi suggests that Eros' shooting is a metaphor to designate the psychological process of falling in love, and as such it was commonplace in both erotic and non-erotic Greek poetry.⁸⁶¹

The first mention of Medea in the epic immediately identifies her as a powerful figure; only through her assistance can this task be achieved (3.10-20). Hera does not elaborate on why the daughter of Aeetes is the only person that can ensure Jason brings the Fleece back to Hellas, but merely describes

⁸⁵⁷ Clauss (1997: 152). See also Beye (1982: 125-8) and Campbell (1994).

⁸⁵⁸ Mori (2008: 28).

⁸⁵⁹ Hunter (1993: 59-60).

⁸⁶⁰ Pendergraft (1991: 95-102). Faraone (1999: 46) argues that the god Eros is the primary source of painful tortures in archaic and classical Greek thought, in addition to Pan and Hecate. Cf. Euripides' *Medea* (1167-77).

⁸⁶¹ Fantuzzi (2008: 287-310). See Kanellou (2017) on the power of Eros from archaic erotic poetry to Hellenistic literature.

her as skilled in drugs (*πολυφάρμακον* 3.27).⁸⁶² Medea's association with the supernatural through her knowledge of drugs therefore mark her as superior to any other mortal in assisting Jason's quest, even the physical might of the Argonauts themselves. The goddess Hera uses Medea as a tool to achieve her aims; not only in ensuring that she assists Jason in bringing back the Fleece, but that by returning to Iolchus with him Medea will also destroy Pelias (3.1135).

Medea, under the influence of Eros (3.275-98), falls in love with Jason and advises him on how to overcome the tasks that her father has set for him. Initially, Medea battles with her feelings for this stranger, and has internal struggles between giving in to her love for Jason, or honouring her family and avoiding shame (3.443-71, 3.636-44, 3.740-3, 751-800). Her indecision is also demonstrated through her physical movement back and forth (3.645-55). Beye suggests that Apollonius uses her bedroom as the place of her virginity.⁸⁶³

Apollonius' depiction of Medea having to deal with her conflicting emotions is reminiscent of Euripides' portrayal of her inner moral conflict prior to killing her children in *Medea* (1021-80). But Apollonius departs from Euripides' interpretation by heavily involving the intervention of the gods into the story. It is Hera's intervention in the *Argonautica* that makes Medea change her mind and decide not to kill herself but to help Jason (3.801-21). This departs from the philosophical reasoning of the character depicted in Euripides. In Apollonius she has become a pawn in a conflict of the gods rather than a character battling the moral conflict in her soul.

Medea provides the means for Jason to accomplish the tasks that Aeetes has set for him. When they meet, Jason is able to flatter Medea, and Apollonius depicts him as utilising his beauty and his skills in persuasion in convincing Medea to help him. Jason uses Ariadne as an example of another maiden who assisted a Greek hero in his challenge, and conveniently avoids mentioning Theseus' subsequent abandonment of her (3.975-1006). Medea gives Jason the drugs and instructs him on how to overcome the obstacles and protect himself, making a sacrifice to Hecate (3.1026-62). Medea requests

⁸⁶² Beye (1982: 132) notes that Circe is also described by this epithet in *Odyssey* (10.276).

⁸⁶³ Beye (1982: 135-6).

that Jason does not forget her (3.1105-17), and Jason promises that he will marry her (3.1120-30). Throughout this encounter Apollonius is foreshadowing Jason's future abandonment of Medea in Corinth, as depicted in Euripides. Through comparison with Ariadne, and the promises of gratitude and long-lasting marriage, Apollonius is demonstrating the irony and shallow character of Jason as none of these promises come to fruition. The depiction of Jason and Medea in Colchis when they were in love allows the audience to contextualise the later episodes of their story, and understand Medea's motives for revenge in Corinth after an ungrateful Jason abandons her for a younger bride.

Medea contemplates killing herself in fear of her father's reaction, but Hera once again intervenes to ensure that Medea leaves with Jason (4.18-23). This shows Medea's heightened sense of moral shame in Apollonius, as she considers suicide. This is reminiscent of the solution for women in Athenian tragedy to commit suicide when they have no other options available to them.⁸⁶⁴ This differs from Euripides' interpretation where Medea only briefly wishes for death in response to Jason's betrayal (96-7, 144-7) but chooses to plot to kill her enemies instead. Hunter interprets Medea's movement towards Jason in Books 3 and 4 as a journey.⁸⁶⁵ Apollonius alludes to marriage and funerary ritual through gestures such as kissing her bed and cutting her hair as Medea leaves her virginal chamber (4.26-33). The simile used of a girl going into slavery as a prize of war evokes Medea's future diminished status when she has no support from family and no-one to protect her when exiled from Corinth.

Apollonius' Medea is heroic and powerful, often overpowering Jason. Aeetes instantly suspects Medea's involvement when Jason accomplishes his tasks, highlighting her skills compared to Jason's lack of traditional heroic prowess (3.1188-90). Apollonius depicts Jason as unable to survive on his own natural strength or cunning (3.1041-51), and the other Argonauts initially volunteer to take on the tasks on Jason's behalf, in case he was not brave enough to do so (3.506-20). Apollonius portrays Medea's cunning and bravery in overcoming the dragon (4.83-91), using powerful drugs and her

⁸⁶⁴ Loraux (1987).

⁸⁶⁵ Hunter (1993: 65-6).

stare to overpower and control the formidable creature whilst Jason steals the fleece (4.145-66).

DeForest asserts that Medea takes the place of Herakles as the hero, and Jason is only given heroic strength through Medea's magic.⁸⁶⁶ Beye argues that Jason only seems to be the hero until Medea's moral dilemma, at which point she emerges as his equal.⁸⁶⁷ Apollonius explores the complexities of their characters, and therefore Jason shows both acts of heroism as well as an incapacity for heroism. Clauss argues that Jason is cast in the role of the traditional hero but, unlike Herakles, is dependent on others in his contests. His skill is in making deals with foreigners and utilising the skills of others to succeed.⁸⁶⁸

I argue that Apollonius depicts the complexities of both Jason and Medea's characters. They are not one-dimensional but show elements of different 'types'. Jason is the 'hero' of the story who accomplishes the tasks assigned to him, with a divine patron in Hera and a group of heroes following him. However, he is markedly different from the traditional hero in that his skill is with words rather than brute strength, unlike Herakles. He is often compared to Odysseus through scenes that are reminiscent of Homeric epic, but in which he is far more reliant on others than his own cunning.⁸⁶⁹ Mori discusses the comparison between Jason and Alexander the Great as young leaders, confronting political opponents during foreign campaigns, who marry eastern princesses, and survive prolonged travel.⁸⁷⁰ There are also differences between them, in regards to Alexander's battle lust and Jason's lack of it. I suggest that Apollonius' intention myth have been to reflect the contemporary political context as well as the heroic mythical past.

Similarly, Medea is cast in the role of the 'helper-maiden' and compared to Nausicaa, but with significant differences in regard to her power and the level of help she can provide, as well as the fact that she is not left behind. Clauss compares Nausicaa (*Odyssey* Book 6) and Medea (*Argonautica* Book 3) and outlines the differences between the helper-

⁸⁶⁶ DeForest (1994: 107-24).

⁸⁶⁷ Beye (1982: 124-41).

⁸⁶⁸ Clauss (1997: 149-51).

⁸⁶⁹ Clauss (1997: 173-7).

⁸⁷⁰ Mori (2008: 19).

maidens in relation to the level of help they can provide, their dreams, journeys towards the hero, speech, and shame.⁸⁷¹

These events lead up to Medea's betrayal and murder of her brother Apsyrtus. She flees her father in fear of her life for having helped Jason, and her brother tries to bring her back to Colchis under the orders of Aeetes. Eros has inspired Medea to fall in love with Jason, and Hera has motivated her to help him and consequently to flee with him. I argue that Apollonius presents divine manipulation as the context of Medea's murder of her brother (4.411-13). However, the plan to deceive Apsyrtus and lure him into a trap so that Jason can kill him is conceived by Jason and Medea, rather than from the gods.

The Argonauts are surrounded by the Colchians, so the Argonauts trick them into thinking they will return Medea, when in fact they intend to kill their leader Apsyrtus. Jason recommends that the agreement with Apsyrtus be turned to *dolos* (4.404).⁸⁷² When Jason reveals his plan to Medea, there is no longer any hesitation, as in Book 3. Medea provides the plan for how to bring about her brother's destruction and tells Jason to kill him (4.419-20). She will send a message to Apsyrtus to meet her and trick him into believing that she wants to return with the Fleece (4.411-44). Medea is depicted as deceitful and uses not only her powers of persuasion but also her skills in drugs to trick Apsyrtus, as she sends drugs through the air with her message to him (4.442-4).

Apollonius demonstrates her awareness that she has already lost the support from her male kin and her only protection now is from Jason. She tells Jason in her desperation that she is now his daughter, wife and sister (4.368-70). These are the family members she has lost to be with him. It is also reminiscent of Andromache's words to Hector when she tells him that he is mother, father, brother and husband to her (*Iliad* 6.429-30). I argue that Apollonius is deliberately echoing this Homeric epic depiction of Andromache, one of the most praised women of epic (other than Penelope), with Medea, as one of the most hated women.

⁸⁷¹ Clauss (1997: 160-77).

⁸⁷² Dyck (1989: 462).

Apollonius innovates the murder of Apsyrtus from classical Greek versions. According to the scholia to *Argonautica* 4.233, Pherecydes (FGrHist 3F32) told that Apsyrtus was killed as a child and Medea butchered him in the course of her escape with Jason, throwing the pieces of his body into the sea in order to slow down the pursuit of her father Aeetes. Apollodorus describes a similar story (*Library* 1.9.24). The death of Apsyrtus is also said to have taken place before Medea fled in Sophocles' *Colchides* (fragment 343 Radt) and at her own hearthside before boarding the *Argo* in Euripides' *Medea* (1334). Bremmer notes the significance that in the earlier sources it is Medea herself who kills and dismembers her brother, which increases the horror of the murder by having her strike the blows herself.⁸⁷³

Apollonius makes Apsyrtus an adult, commanding a fleet, and killed by Jason in the temple to Artemis. Dyck convincingly argues this increases the sympathy for Medea, torn between two forces, and divides responsibility between Jason and Medea.⁸⁷⁴ Apollonius draws upon a variety of sources in the account of the murder of Apsyrtus, with elements from Athenian tragedy blended into a predominantly Homeric and epic context.⁸⁷⁵ Newman and Zanker suggests that Apollonius is modernising notions of heroism in epic to be realistic for the Alexandrian audience.⁸⁷⁶ This yields a particularly interesting example of the *arte allusiva*, beloved by the Alexandrians.⁸⁷⁷

The murder is regarded as unheroic because it is committed through stealth rather than open attack.⁸⁷⁸ Medea does not strike the deadly blows herself. She tries to look away and cover her face with her veil to avoid seeing the blood spilt, but as Apsyrtus dies he stains her veil and robe with his blood (*αἷψα δὲ κούρη ἔμπαλιν ὄμματ' ἔνεικε, καλυψαμένη ὀθόνησιν, μὴ φόνον ἀθρήσειε κασιγνήτοιο τυπέντος* 4.465-7). Porter suggests this was influenced

⁸⁷³ Bremmer (1997: 85).

⁸⁷⁴ Dyck (1989: 60-70).

⁸⁷⁵ Beye (1982). Porter (1990: 261-2). See Giangrande (1967: 85-97) on Alexandrian allusion to Homer.

⁸⁷⁶ Zanker (1987: 197-201). Newman (1986: 94-103) discusses the influence of not just Callimachus but also Hesiod, the Homeric hymns, and Pindar in formulating Apollonius' new techniques, and praises Apollonius in the skilful renewal of the epic dialect and technical merit of the epic poem presented to the learned Alexandrian audience.

⁸⁷⁷ See Mota Diniz (2016: 55-68) on the *arte allusiva* as a procedure analogous to modern intertextuality, and the influence of Medea in *Argonautica* on the representation of the same character in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book VII.

⁸⁷⁸ Porter (1990: 264). Bremmer (1997: 84). See Parker (1983: 132-3) on ancient views on killing by stealth. See Mori (2008: 188 note 1) on scholars who regard the crime as unheroic.

from Orestes' similar act when slaying Clytemnestra (Euripides' *Electra* 1221-3).⁸⁷⁹ Hunter notes that Medea's attempt to veil her eyes is thought to evoke a fifth century BC painting of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia where Agamemnon's head was veiled because his grief could not be adequately presented (Pliny *Natural History* 35.73).⁸⁸⁰ Pavlou discusses the development of the symbolism of the veil from the veil of innocence to sexuality and shame, to the veil sprinkled with family blood, and finally to the bloody peplos of the Talos episode.⁸⁸¹ This graphically reflects Medea's transformation from an innocent adolescent to a fearful witch. Zanker suggests that Apollonius' gruesome depiction of Apsyrtus' death foreshadows the murder of her children to come, as portrayed in Euripides' *Medea*, and evokes the troubled atmosphere that pervades the murders of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra in Euripides' *Electra*.⁸⁸²

Medea is clearly polluted from her crime in Apollonius' interpretation. Even without the physical stain of her victim's blood, Medea's involvement and planning of this murder mark her guilt.⁸⁸³ Mori suggests that, although Jason delivers the fatal blow, the 'blood guilt' falls on Medea who is literally and ironically stained with her brother's blood.⁸⁸⁴ I argue that it is Medea's relationship to the victim and the location which incurs divine wrath. Apollonius introduces an Erinys who saw and disapproved (4.475-6). Apollonius highlights the impiety of this act of murder, not only because Apsyrtus is killed in the temple to Artemis, but because Medea kills a member of her own family.

The murder alludes to a sacrifice in the temple, through the simile comparing Jason to the slaughterer sacrificing a bull (*βουτύπος ὧς τε μέγαν κερεαλκέα ταῦρον* 4.468).⁸⁸⁵ This recalls the murder of Agamemnon in Homeric epic, who is killed by Aegisthus (and Clytemnestra) as someone kills an ox at its stall (*ὧς τίς τε κατέκτανε βοῶν ἐπὶ φάτνῃ, Odyssey* 4.535,

⁸⁷⁹ Porter (1990).

⁸⁸⁰ Hunter (2015: 146-7). Porter (1990: 265).

⁸⁸¹ Pavlou (2009: 183-202).

⁸⁸² Zanker (1987: 200). Porter (1990: 260-66).

⁸⁸³ Parker (1983: 106-8).

⁸⁸⁴ Mori (2008: 217-18).

⁸⁸⁵ Bremmer (1997: 85).

11.411).⁸⁸⁶ Apollonius also draws on Euripides' *Electra* through the sacrificial imagery. Orestes kills Aegisthus whilst he is sacrificing to the Nymphs, thus becoming the victim in this perverse sacrifice (*Electra* 839-43).⁸⁸⁷ Hunter notes that both Orestes (in *Eumenides* 280-1, 452) and Jason must receive purification for their actions by having the blood washed off (4.557-61).⁸⁸⁸ However Hunter does not address the ambiguity of Orestes' pollution at the conclusion of Euripides' *Electra*.⁸⁸⁹ There is also vivid detail of the actual murder (*Electra* 842-3 / *Argonautica* 4.471-4).⁸⁹⁰

Porter makes the compelling argument that there is further significance to the use of the uncommon term *βουτύπος* (4.468), also used at 2.90-1 (*ἐπ' ἀκροτάτοισιν... πόδεσσι*).⁸⁹¹ This is the sacrificial priest at the Bouphonia festival who strikes down the ox at the precinct of Zeus Polieus and then flees. The simile demonstrates the savagery and dehumanising violence of the gesture, envisioning Jason rising up on tiptoes, like Orestes (*Electra* 839-43).⁸⁹² Ceulemans also argues that Apollonius places the murder in the sacrificial context due to the location (Artemis' temple) and the comparison of Jason to the sacrificial priest (*βουτύπος* 4.468) who would kill the ox stealthily from behind.⁸⁹³ I am not convinced by Mori who argues that, although this death is reminiscent of animal sacrifice (with Jason as the slaughterer and Medea as the priestess), the similarity of the murder to a sacrifice because of its' location is only superficial.⁸⁹⁴

Jason cuts off Apsyrtus' extremities (*ἐξάργματα τάμνε θανόντος* 4.477), licking the blood three times (*τρὶς δ' ἀπέλειξε φόνου* 4.478) and spitting it out through his teeth three times (*τρὶς δ' ἐξ ἄγος ἔπτυσ' ὀδόντων* 4.478). This is described as the 'proper way for slayers to expiate treacherous

⁸⁸⁶ Hunter (1993: 61). Hunter (2015) *ad loc* also compares *Agamemnon* (1126-8) and Euripides' *Electra* (1142-4).

⁸⁸⁷ Porter (1990: 255-6).

⁸⁸⁸ Hunter (1988: 449).

⁸⁸⁹ Cf. Parker (1983: 104-143).

⁸⁹⁰ Foley (1985: 44) suggests that the vague and terrifying sacrificial deaths of the *Oresteia* are replaced by gross specificity, as the agent of Apollo's will turns butchery into murder and a claim for his lost throne.

⁸⁹¹ Porter (1990: 266-70).

⁸⁹² Michelini (1987: 214).

⁸⁹³ Ceulemans (2007: 106-7).

⁸⁹⁴ Mori (2008: 220). Mori also unconvincingly suggests it is not a 'corrupt sacrifice' because Jason does not claim to be sacrificing Apsyrtus, like Clytemnestra does of Agamemnon in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1433).

murders' (*ἡ θέμις ἀθέντησι δολοκτασίας ἰλάεσθαι* 4.479). Hunter convincingly argues that the dismemberment of Apsyrtus recalls the version where Medea cuts up Apsyrtus as a child and throws the pieces overboard (Apollodorus 1.9.24), also evoked from the verb (*τάμνε*) and the location (Tomi).⁸⁹⁵ Hunter also notes the importance of the number three in magical rites, associated with Hecate and the Underworld, and that the repetition suggests following ritual prescription. The poet interrupts the narrative, typical of Hellenistic poetry more generally, but unlike Homeric epic, to lay down this religious law (*θέμις*).⁸⁹⁶

The three instances of *maschalismos* in Greek literature are Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (439), Sophocles' *Electra* (444-6), and Apollonius' *Argonautica* (4.477-9). Apollonius does not use the word *maschalismos*. Ceulemans' thorough analysis concludes that two different (and incompatible) motives are suggested to explain the *maschalismos* ritual, both later elaborated upon by ancient scholiasts and lexicographers who use the term, and who may not have been clear on the subject.⁸⁹⁷ These two motives are: to avert the revenge of the murdered victim (based on Aristophanes of Byzantium);⁸⁹⁸ or for appeasement (based on the scholia to Apollonius' *Argonautica* 4.477-9).⁸⁹⁹

Ceulemans persuasively argues that the motive of averting revenge is more likely in the *Argonautica* passage and that Apollonius did not intend to suggest the appeasement motive. This is based on the context: *θέμις* (4.479) relates to spitting as expiation (*ἰλάεσθαι*) instead of mutilation; and *ἐξάργματα* (4.477) denotes the sacrificial context (following 4.464-70) rather than appeasement. Jason and Medea also continue to need purification after the mutilation (4.557-61, 4.585-88) and are only purified by Circe (4.659-752). Jason commits a further contamination straight after the mutilation by burying Apsyrtus (4.480-1) in a method not proper for Colchians (3.202-9).⁹⁰⁰ I

⁸⁹⁵ Hunter (2015: *ad loc*). See Sections 3.8.1., 3.10.1., and 3.13.3. for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' mutilation of Agamemnon.

⁸⁹⁶ Griffin (1986: 38-9).

⁸⁹⁷ Ceulemans (2007: 97-104).

⁸⁹⁸ Lloyd-Jones (1971: 75). Slater (1986: 162). Bremmer (1997: 84). Johnston (1999: 157-9).

⁸⁹⁹ Jebb (1907). Rohde (1925: 584-5). Wendel (1974: 286-7). Vermeule (1979: 236).

⁹⁰⁰ Ceulemans (2007: 104-112).

therefore interpret the mutilation as a self-protective device to avoid vengeance from the victim.

Apollonius depicts both Jason and Medea as culpable in the killing, and both requiring purification. Zeus was angry at what they had done and devised that they should be cleansed by Circe, and not return home until having endured endless suffering (4.557-561). Jason and Medea sail on to Aiaie to be purified by Circe, who makes sacrifices and offerings to Zeus and the Erinyes (4.690-720).⁹⁰¹ Circe is sister to Aeetes (4.680-4) and both are children of Helios. Circe does not condone what they have done, but does not punish Medea further because she is a suppliant and a member of her family, but instead sends her away (4.740-50). Therefore, although Medea is polluted by her crime, she is also able to be purified, due to the presence and intervention of the gods in this epic, and her divine heritage.

Apollonius has developed the depiction of Medea from surviving archaic epic, in which the help that she provides to Jason is not explicit. In Apollonius' Hellenistic interpretation, she is not only integral to the success of Jason's mission, but she plans and executes the murder of her brother with Jason. Yet they are both cleansed of the pollution that follows.

Medea's characterisation as an intentional murderer has been established since classical Athenian tragedy. It is not only the intentional murder of her children in Euripides' interpretation, but the intentional murder of her brother. Apollonius highlight her powers in drugs and associations with Hecate, as well as her skills in persuasion and manipulating those around her. Medea manipulates her sister Chalciope (3.730), her maidservants (3.900), and her brother Apsyrtus (4.415) in order to achieve her aims. I suggest that her motives in this interpretation are love and fear. She is in love with Jason and therefore willing to abandon her family to be with him, and is so scared of the repercussions of abandoning her family that she is willing to kill her brother to avoid the consequences of returning home. I am not convinced by Mori who suggests that the murder of Apsyrtus is blamed on the influence of uncontrollable Eros, in addition to Medea's fear and the Argonauts being outnumbered.⁹⁰²

⁹⁰¹ Parker (1983: 370-4).

⁹⁰² Mori (2008: 187-96, 216).

Medea's characterisation in the *Argonautica* encompasses and challenges stereotypes. She is the helper-maiden like Nausicaa and Ariadne, but is not left behind and is more brave and powerful than the male epic hero. She is skilled in drugs and a priestess to Hecate who can devise how to overcome ferocious beasts and tame fearsome dragons, yet she is also a young woman who runs scared with her handmaidens at the sight of a snake.⁹⁰³ She intentionally murders her kin, and yet is purified from the traditional pollution associated with such a crime.

The twofold aspect of Medea's character in the *Argonautica* has led to much debate between scholars. Some accuse Apollonius of inconsistency in her portrayal.⁹⁰⁴ Others analyse the presentation of Medea as a whole.⁹⁰⁵ I agree that the seeming inconsistencies in Medea's character are due to the development that she goes through in Books 3 and 4.⁹⁰⁶ Dyck concludes that Apollonius was not trying to integrate the two 'halves' of Medea's personality, but to adumbrate her tragedy at Corinth and give Medea all the attributes of a tragic heroine.⁹⁰⁷

Apollonius is unique in including the story, only recounted in the poetry of Ibycus and Simonides, that Achilles will marry Medea in the Elysian fields (4.811-15). Fantuzzi notes that in the Hellenistic era, Lycophron's *Alexandra* also mentions Achilles' polygamous relationships with Helen (143, 171-3) and Medea (although this is on the island of Leuce: 174-5, 798).⁹⁰⁸ Therefore there seems to have been increased interest in the erotic life of Achilles in Hellenistic literature which included this relationship with Medea.

These ambiguities surrounding the final outcome for Medea in various interpretations up until this point make her a unique figure in Greek mythology as an intentional murderer who escapes justice. I argue that her divine heritage, coupled with her association with magic and drugs, are a

⁹⁰³ Hunter (1993: 12).

⁹⁰⁴ Wilamowitz (1924: 202). Beye (1982: 51) suggests she even displays 'Jekyll and Hyde perversity'.

⁹⁰⁵ Hunter (1987).

⁹⁰⁶ Phinney (1967).

⁹⁰⁷ Dyck (1989).

⁹⁰⁸ Fantuzzi (2012: 18). Hunter (2004: 439-40) stresses the ambivalent poetic status of the *Alexandra* as a proto-generic form (of early tragedy) and a contemporary deconstruction or fragmentation of that form.

catalyst for interpreters to challenge and shock audiences. Apollonius' intention is to demonstrate that Medea's power and destructiveness are strengthened by her skills in magic. This reflects the Alexandrian context of this epic, which was characterised by a renewed interest in magic.⁹⁰⁹ His interpretation of the manipulative Olympian goddesses (3.1-160) and the skilful young queen Arete (4.1070-1220) represent that women had increased power in Alexandrian royal courts.⁹¹⁰

Apollonius' depiction of the death of her brother is shocking and brutal. Yet Medea once again survives this crime and escapes punishment, receiving purification from her pollution with Jason, and continuing on their voyage. Although the gods are present in the *Argonautica*, unlike Euripides' *Medea*, I argue that the divine motive only sets the context; they kill her brother for their own personal motives. Medea is also able to kill the giant Talos through her incantations and her spells (4.1640-90). Her motive for his murder is survival and helping Jason on his journey home. I propose that Apollonius follows Euripides in the cycle of Medea's motives for murder. When in love with Jason, she commits murder for his benefit. When he betrays her, she commits murder to hurt him. I shall now explore how the interpretation of Medea evolves in Roman sources.

4.10. Ovid

The extant Roman sources I will focus on are Ovid's *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses* in the late first century BC to the early first century AD, and Seneca's *Medea* in the first century AD. Manuwald's valuable article demonstrates the intertextuality between Latin writers and their earlier Greek predecessors, outlining the reception of the popular myth of Medea in Latin literature (Martial 5.53, Horace *Art of Poetry* 119-24).⁹¹¹ This includes surviving sources for Roman Medea's that could not be accommodated within the scope of this thesis. For example, Ennius' tragedy on Medea, and its

⁹⁰⁹ Luck (1985: 44) confirms the abundance of magical papyri in Greek and Latin from the Hellenistic period, and that Apollonius and Theocritus were both Hellenistic poets who contributed to literature describing magic.

⁹¹⁰ Hunter (1993: 161) suggests that any readers from the Ptolemaic court would not fail to notice a similarity between the Phaeacian royal couple (Alcinous and Arete) and the Ptolemaic ruling couple (Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II).

⁹¹¹ Manuwald (2013: 114-135).

closeness to Euripides' *Medea* (Cicero Fin.1.4-5, Fam. 7.6) with nuances for Roman audiences. Pacuvius' *Medus*, which dramatises the less well-known sequel (Hyginus *Fabulae* 27). Accius' tragedy on the Argonautic journey (Cicero Nat. D. 2.89), which focuses on the development of sea travel, and Valerius Flaccus' epic *Argonautica*.⁹¹²

Ovid's engagement and intertextuality with his literary predecessors in the Augustan and Republican period as well as the Hellenistic and classical period is evident. Ovid demonstrated an awareness of the many variants of the stories he chose to tell. Mythical narrations were handed from poet to poet with the later text relying on and answering the older one. Graf suggests Homer was the master-text; narrations of tragedy had their source in epic poetry, and learned Hellenistic poets in Greece collected relevant myths into collections that became master-texts for Romans.⁹¹³

Ovid continued the engagement with Greek poetry that his predecessors such as Catullus and Horace began. He used and revised the techniques of those who had gone before him, such as the narrative techniques of Callimachus or the language of Virgil.⁹¹⁴ Ovid also revised and expanded his own work, such as the extant *Amores*, *Fasti* and *Heroides*, and moved between different genres throughout his career, often retelling stories from different viewpoints. Ovid demonstrated his interest in Medea as a mythological character as she features throughout his work in the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses*, as well as references in the *Remedia Amoris*, and the tragedy he devoted to her, his lost *Medea*. Ovid's generic ambition was a possible motive for his venture into tragedy. *Medea* was apparently his only tragedy and elicited grudging admiration from Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.98) and was regarded as one of the pre-eminent specimens of Roman tragedy by Tacitus (*Dialogus* 12.6).⁹¹⁵

In the *Heroides* the heroines wrote letters to loved ones from a position of abandonment. This provided tropes which Ovid inhabited in his own exile. Ovid and the addressee (reader) in his exile poetry is like that of the heroine who is temporally frozen, anticipating meaning from the epistles

⁹¹² See also Boyle (2006) and Manuwald (2010, 2016).

⁹¹³ Graf (2002: 110-16).

⁹¹⁴ Tarrant (2002: 19-29). Hardie (2002: 38).

⁹¹⁵ Tarrant (2002: 17).

and seeking a response from the reader who can guarantee their well-being.⁹¹⁶ Ovid refers to the invention in his poetry regarding the *Heroides* (*Ars Amatoria* 3.346) and that he pioneered this type of poem which was unknown to others and original in relocation and elaboration.⁹¹⁷ In the *Heroides*, Medea features in *Hypsipyle to Jason* (VI) and *Medea to Jason* (XII), with an emphasis on motives rather than the deeds themselves, and characterising Medea as both victim and perpetrator.⁹¹⁸

Both letters are addressed to Jason and concern his abandonment and betrayal of marriage oaths to two different maidens who have helped him and with whom he has had children. Ovid provides complementary portrayals of Jason's faithlessness and manipulation of women and love in order to achieve his goals. These two letters depict Jason leaving behind a trail of betrayed maidens who have assisted him. This prompts the reader to wonder whether Creusa would have eventually come to the same fate, had she survived in Corinth.

4.10.1. Heroides VI

In Hypsipyle's letter to Jason, Ovid offers a new perspective by examining a rival to Medea who has not been explored in such depth in extant sources before, except in Apollonius' *Argonautica* (1.609-909).⁹¹⁹ The potential love triangle between Hypsipyle, Jason and Medea in the Argonautic story may have been well-known from Athenian tragic versions that dealt with this theme, such as Aeschylus' *Hypsipyle*, Sophocles' *Lemniai* or Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, but unfortunately these have not survived.

Evidence from fragments of Euripides' *Hypsipyle* suggest that Hypsipyle was a mother in danger. She was separated from her twins, abducted by pirates, and became a nursemaid. Her infant ward Opheltis was killed by a snake, resulting in the boy's mother Eurydice, as the vengeful mother, binding and planning to kill her. Acts of consolation, unsuccessful and successful, were a theme; the mythological counter-exemplum of Procris,

⁹¹⁶ Kennedy (2002: 229-30). Habinek (2002: 59).

⁹¹⁷ Tarrant (2002: 19).

⁹¹⁸ Manuwald (2013: 129-35).

⁹¹⁹ Tarrant (2002: 19).

who killed her husband, is used to demonstrate Hypsipyle is living with her misfortunes (752h.2-9). She is rescued by a mortal man Amphiaraus (757.72).⁹²⁰ Kim argues that the elements of consolation in *Hypsipyle* anticipate the structure of the philosophical consolation genre, and that this was an anti-revenge drama where Euripides demonstrates what can happen when vengeful women take good advice.⁹²¹

In contrast to these fragments and to Apollonius, Ovid focuses on Hypsipyle's betrayal. He depicts Hypsipyle as having been abandoned after Jason made marriage oaths to her in the presence of the gods (VI.41-46) and promised as he departed that he would be faithful to her and return to raise their unborn child (VI.61-4). In the *Heroides*, the writers turn to their letter to attempt to overcome the separation from their addressee. A feature of Ovid's innovation is the poetics of writing in isolation and demanding an adequate response; an awareness of absence whilst simultaneously working to eliminate it.⁹²²

Ovid's explores Hypsipyle's abandonment in her letter to Jason; however he also uses it as a comparative portrayal of Medea. Ovid's heroines self-consciously model themselves on and identify with each other when the circumstances of one are known to the other.⁹²³ Ovid uses Hypsipyle's first reference to Medea, as a *barbara...venefica*, to highlight Medea's skills in magic as an important element of her characterisation (*nec facie meritisque placet, sed carmina novit diraque cantata pabula falce metit* (VI.83-84). Ovid depicts Medea as a powerful witch (*Colchisque...venenis* VI.131; *veneficiis* (VI.150). He uses irony in Hypsipyle's assertion that Medea has used magic and poisons to steal Jason's love.

Love is one force that Medea cannot control with her spells. This is shown in previous interpretations such as Apollonius' *Argonautica* where her skills in magic have no power over the influence of Eros (3.275-98). In Euripides' *Medea*, her power over drugs is used for revenge rather than to

⁹²⁰ Bond (1963). Cf. Apollodorus *Library* 3.6.4, Hyginus *Fabulae* 74, 273.6, Pindar *Nemean* hypoth.2 (scholia iii I Drachmann), Pindar *Nemean* hypoth.3,4.

⁹²¹ Kim (2009: 9-22). Cf. McHardy (2004: 114).

⁹²² Kennedy (2002: 220-1).

⁹²³ Kennedy (2002: 228).

prevent Jason's abandonment (384-5).⁹²⁴ Therefore Ovid creates different layers to Medea's portrayal. Hypsipyle's jealousy creates negative imagery and distrust of Medea through fear of her magical powers. Yet it also hints at the lack of control and isolation Medea faces in her situation which she cannot prevent even with her use of magic.

Ovid demonstrates the similarities between Hypsipyle in *Heroides* VI and Medea in *Heroides* XII through his use of repetitive themes and language as well as irony and foreshadowing. Both have: come from divine ancestry (VI.113-18; XII.1, 25-8, 191); had the opportunity to let Jason perish rather than assist him (VI.51-5; XII.73-4); fallen in love with him and bore him two children (VI.119-22; XII.192); been abandoned by him (VI.19-22; XII.134-40);⁹²⁵ want him to return to them (VI.111-12; XII.193, 197-8); and threaten to murder their rival (VI.149-50; XII.178-82). Ovid also highlights the important differences between the two abandoned maidens. Despite Hypsipyle having received the same injury from Jason as Medea, she does not contemplate killing her children to punish Jason for his betrayal as Medea does. Ovid alludes to Euripides' *Medea* when Medea sends her sons as ambassadors to the princess under the pretence of reconciliation and to avoid exile, when in fact they are bearing the items Medea will use to murder her rival (956-7, 969-75). This reminds the reader of the difference between Hypsipyle and Medea's intentions for the use of their children (VI.125).

Ovid provides a violent and gory description of Medea's crimes in Colchis (*spargere quae fratris potuit lacerata per agros corpora* (VI.125-30). Ovid innovates previous interpretations as he combines Apollonius' version (4.467-79), where Apsyrtus was killed on land, with other versions in which he was taken as a child and cut up and thrown into the sea in order to slow down the Colchian's pursuit, as cited in Pherecydes (FGrHist 3F32) and Apollodorus (1.9.24).

⁹²⁴ See Ogden (2009: 126) in relation to comparable sketches of witches in Latin poetry: drawing down the moon, prowling around cemeteries, controlling natural elements, and use of voodoo dolls (VI.85-92).

⁹²⁵ Seaford (1987: 106-30) analyses the theme of the wedding ritual subverted in Athenian tragedy as the death of the unmarried girl. Ovid's depiction is instead of the wedding ritual as death for Medea as the rival.

Hypsipyle considers killing her rival as part of her revenge; however she also demonstrates that she has restraint. Ovid's intention may have been to contrast his vengeful Hypsipyle with Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, who is the victim of a vengeful woman, Eurydice. The imagery used of Hypsipyle splashing Medea's blood on her face and on that of Jason is reminiscent of the pollution of Medea's previous crimes in Apollonius when Jason kills her brother Apsyrtus and Medea's veil is splashed with his blood (*Argonautica* 4.465-76). Ovid shows Medea's notoriety in Hypsipyle's description of how she would kill her because her name alone symbolises murder. Hypsipyle claims that she would be a Medea to Medea (*Medeae Medea forem* VI.149-51). Hypsipyle is so obsessed with Medea that she takes on her characteristics, and her letter is as much to Medea as his current object of his desire as to Jason.⁹²⁶

Hypsipyle's vengeance requires that Medea will lose two children and her husband (*utque ego destituor coniunx materque duorum, a totidem natis orba sit illa viro* VI.155-6). Ovid describes Medea in the context of the male kin that she has injured and will injure; her brother, father, children and husband (*quam fratri germana fuit miseroque parenti filia, tam natis, tam sit acerba viro* VI.159-160). Ovid portrays pollution and exile as the punishments Hypsipyle wants Medea to receive. She prays that Medea should wander as an exile (*exulet et toto quaerat in orbe fugam* VI.158), hopeless and with no resources, polluted and bloodied by her crimes, and go through the air when she has exhausted land and sea (*cum mare, cum terras consumpserit, aera temptet; erret inops, exspes, caede cruenta sua* VI.161-2). I argue that Ovid is emphasising that Medea escapes justice for her crimes because she avoids pollution and exile through the repeated use of the dragon chariot which takes her out of reach of any vengeance.

Kennedy convincingly suggests that the external reader's knowledge comes from Ovid's source texts, such as Homeric epic, Euripides, Catullus, and Virgil, and many letters have obvious specific canonical texts which correspond to the dramatic and verbal detail in the *Heroides*.⁹²⁷ Ovid

⁹²⁶ Kennedy (2002: 221-2).

⁹²⁷ Kennedy (2002: 225). When the end anticipated by the writer does not correspond to the end assumed by the external reader the result is a sense of irony determined by the source texts.

foreshadows here what happens to Medea in Corinth in Euripides' *Medea* when Jason abandons her and she kills her children, leaving Corinth through the air on her dragon-drawn chariot (1321-22). However, the curse is ironic as Medea does not wander as a polluted exile but is received in Athens, as depicted in Euripides' *Medea* (1384-5) and which Ovid foretells in the *Metamorphoses* (VII.402-24). In *Heroides* VI Ovid therefore articulates exile and pollution as some of the punishments that Hypsipyle and the reader might expect for such a kin-killer.

4.10.2. Heroides XII

Ovid moves the reader forward in time in Medea's letter to Jason when they are in Corinth. Jason has abandoned Medea and their sons and instead marries the princess Creusa. Medea begins almost mid-sentence and narrates the story of Jason's tasks in Colchis. Ovid continues Medea's importance in helping him to succeed in his tasks and win the Golden Fleece (XII.7-18, 29-50, 93-108). She fell in love with him (XII.55-66) and Jason persuaded her with oaths of marriage (XII.67-92). Ovid emphasises that Medea has sacrificed her father, homeland, throne, virginity, mother, sister, and her brother for Jason (XII.109-116). Ovid depicts Medea repeatedly reminding him of her sacrifices, her assistance in his tasks, and how she saved his life (XII.93-100, 105-8, 173-4, 194-6, 199-203). These are reminiscent of Medea's arguments in Euripides' *Medea* (476-82) and Apollonius' *Argonautica* (4.1031-44).

Ovid portrays Medea as isolated and vulnerable because she has been abandoned and lost her throne, her native soil and her husband, who had replaced all else to her (XII.161-2). I argue that this portrays Medea's isolation in the context of the sacrifices she has made for Jason. Ovid follows Apollonius (4.368-70) in ironically subverting the language of Andromache from Homeric epic (*Iliad* 6.429-30) to contrast one of the most praised women with Medea as one of the most hated women.⁹²⁸ This also reflects Medea's isolation as depicted in Euripides where she cannot return to her homeland because of her betrayal; in helping Jason she has created enemies

⁹²⁸ See Section 4.9.

elsewhere (502-8). Ovid continues some of the familiar Euripidean themes of Medea's characterisation, such as her extreme and competing emotions when considering whether or not to help Jason (XII.57-61), which is also depicted in Apollonius (3.616-664).

Ovid does not elaborate on the characterisation of Medea as a powerful witch that he began in *Heroides* VI. Instead he only briefly mentions her power over drugs and spells that aided Jason in his tasks (XII.97, 107-8). I suggest that Ovid's intention is to make a more sympathetic portrayal of Medea, rather than focussing on the negative stereotypes associated with witchcraft. Ovid shows her vulnerability because she feels abandoned by Hecate (XII.167-8) and elicits sympathy through the idea that Medea has been corrupted from her former innocence through her contact with Jason; that he was the downfall of her soul (XII.31-2). Ovid only hints at Medea's foreign and barbarian status (*barbarica...manu* XII.70; *barbara* XII.105-6).

Heroides XII does not focus on the crimes that Medea has already committed. Ovid only alludes to the murder of her brother Apsyrtus, avoiding the detail by portraying Medea as feeling so much shame that she cannot bear to write of what her hand did. Ovid hints that Apsyrtus was torn to pieces, although this time not specifying whether on land or at sea (XII.113-16). Therefore Ovid chooses not to elaborate on this part of the episode, having already hinted at the murder in Hypsipyle's letter (VI.125-30). Ovid relies on the reader's knowledge of previous interpretations, for example Euripides depicts him having been killed at Medea's hearth (1334-5) whereas Apollonius depicts the ambush from Jason and Medea on land during their pursuit (IV.467-79). Therefore Ovid acknowledges Medea's association with kin-killing but does not dwell on the associated pollution or vengeance.

Ovid portrays the negative aspects of Medea's character through subtle allusion rather than by explicitly narrating the gory murders she commits. Ovid alludes to the notoriety of Medea's murder of Pelias (XII.129-32). He chooses not to reveal any of the gory details of Medea's false rejuvenation of Pelias or the deception of his daughters in stabbing him to death. Instead he highlights Jason as the cause of her crimes and for whom she been driven to commit these murders (XII.131-2).

Ovid uses Medea's rhetoric in relation to her crimes to focus on her lack of humanity. Hardie argues that Ovid's foregrounding of rhetoric as verbal display and performance can be understood within the contemporary context of early imperial culture.⁹²⁹ The relationship between the emperor and subjects can be seen in visible ways through speeches to and from the emperor, as well as shows in the amphitheatre, and architectural monuments.

Medea questions the gods and their divine will (*numen ubi est? ubi di?* XII.119). She wishes that she and Jason had received the punishment they deserved; not for the murder of her brother, but for Jason's deceit (*fraudis*) and for her eagerness to trust (*credulitatis* XII.119-20). Ovid presents Medea with the unconvincing argument that her abandonment and the loss of her husband, in addition to the loss of her throne, country and home, are sufficient sacrifice to the shades of her dead brother (XII.159-62). Ovid is using this rhetoric to demonstrate the deficiencies in Medea's character such as her lack of remorse and her distorted perception of justice. She attaches more guilt to Jason's betrayal of her love than to her own betrayal and murder of her brother or the justice that this crime deserves.

Ovid foreshadows the methods in which Medea will kill her children, Creusa and her father (XII.180-2), as depicted in Euripides' *Medea*. In Euripides, she uses a sword as a weapon to kill her sons (1236-50, 1277-8) and sends gifts to the princess embedded with drugs that cause her to be consumed in fire and Creon to perish with her (1186-1217). Ovid hints that the children will be a target for Medea's revenge by focussing on their likeness to Jason (XII.189-90) and that they represent their marriage (XII.192, 198). She hints at how abhorrent her crimes will be as she acknowledges that she may repent or loathe what she will do (*facti fortasse pigebit* XII.209-10) but she justifies this because she also repents her regard for a faithless man. Ovid's Medea finds the treachery of her husband comparable to the act of murder.

The only specific gods referred to in the letter other than Hecate are those upon which Jason makes his oath; the Sun, Artemis, and Juno. Ovid does not depict the role of the gods in Medea's assistance to Jason or focus

⁹²⁹ Hardie (2002: 38).

on the reasons that Medea has so much power over Jason's success in his tasks. This is in contrast to the *Argonautica* where Apollonius portrays the scheming of Hera, Athene, Aphrodite and Eros in causing Medea to fall in love with Jason and help him so that the Fleece can be taken back to Greece and Pelias can be punished (3.1-153). Throughout the letter Ovid is ambiguous regarding the divine influence on Medea. His intention may have been to depict her actions as more sinister because she chooses to help Jason and betray and murder her kin.

However Medea refers to the unnamed god who embroils her heart, and something that is working in her soul (*viderit ista deus, qui nunc mea pectora versat* 3.211-12). I suggest that this could imply divine manipulation in Medea's emotional response and therefore in her motives. Ovid concludes with a sympathetic tone whilst also warning of the malevolence Medea is capable of and which she cannot control.

4.10.3. Metamorphoses

In the *Metamorphoses* the emphasis is on love and transformation. Ovid elaborates on particular segments of the traditional story, developing themes of magic, while summarising other well-known aspects.⁹³⁰ Ovid overlaps some elements of Jason and Medea's story with that covered in the *Heroides*, particularly Medea's assistance in Jason's tasks in Colchis (VII.115-19, 135-8).

Ovid also introduces details that he chose not to include in the *Heroides* to suit his purpose in this epic. For example, the rejuvenation of Jason's father Aeson in Iolchus, Medea's murder of Pelias, Medea's flight from Corinth to Athens, and her attempted murder of Theseus. Ovid chooses not to mention Medea's murder of her brother Apsyrtus in the *Metamorphoses*, despite the fact that his bloody dismemberment would have fitted the theme of violence to the body found throughout the epic. Interest in death and dismemberment was always a defining feature of epic and early imperial Latin literature was notorious for a fascination with grotesque pain

⁹³⁰ Manuwald (2013: 127-8).

and violence.⁹³¹ Ovid provides only the briefest mention of the murder of the princess and Medea's sons in Corinth, as these episodes were hinted at in the *Heroides*, and his *Medea* would likely have dealt with these episodes more extensively.

Ovid begins these episodes in Book VII with Medea's internal debate and conflicting emotions over whether or not to assist Jason in his tasks (VII.11-71). Ovid describes her reason being unable to overcome her madness (*ratione furorem vincere non poterat* VII.9-11). Medea is pulled in different directions by love and reason (*aliudque cupido, mens aliud suadet* VI.19-20). She can see the better route but follows the worse (*video meliora proboque, detiora sequor* VII.20-1). Medea's language illustrates Ovid's fascination with intentionality and shows a character caught in crisis and the importance of actions and choices.⁹³²

This dilemma echoes Medea's struggle between her passion and her reason in Euripides over whether or not to kill her children (1021-80). Medea acknowledges that some god is opposing her (*nescio quis deus obstat* VII.12) but, similarly to the *Heroides*, Ovid is ambiguous again as to which god might be involved. Medea vacillates between different arguments in the declamatory style (VII.51-55).⁹³³ The language used here (VII.69-73) is reminiscent of Dido's language and criticism of white-washing her offence in Virgil's *Aeneid* (IV.171ff). Ovid's intention may have been to link Medea to Dido as another maiden abandoned by a hero, and position his work as a counterpart to Virgil's *Aeneid*.⁹³⁴ Medea is overcome at the sight of Jason; her passion is renewed and she agrees to help him (VII.74-97). These scenes are also reminiscent of Medea's vacillating emotions in the *Argonautica* (3.616-1130) regarding her feelings for Jason and her decision over whether or not to help him. However Apollonius clearly attributes responsibility for Medea's dilemma to Hera as the god orchestrating this with the assistance of Eros, in contrast to the lack of any clear divine influence in Ovid.

⁹³¹ Hardie (2002: 41).

⁹³² McKinley (2001: 19-20).

⁹³³ Hardie (2002: 36-7). Seneca the Elder reminisces about declamation schools of the early Augustan period and that Ovid was a good declaimer (*Controversiae* 2.2.8-12).

⁹³⁴ Tarrant (2002: 24-26) suggests that Ovid controls Virgil's famous creation by redistributing Dido's language to his poem.

In *Heroides* XII the theme of sight and eyes was important in Medea falling in love with and helping Jason (XII.9-10, 31, 33, 35-6, 49, 59-60). This theme of sight, eyes and the gaze is repeated in the *Metamorphoses* in relation to Medea's love for Jason (VII.34-5, 72-3, 83, 86-8, 147-8). It also relates to things that are inappropriate for others to see, such as Medea's secret rites or Pelias' daughters' attack on their own father (VII.254-6, 340-2).

Ovid does not mention the death of Apsyrtus at all and the episode in Colchis ends with Jason taking the Golden Fleece and Medea home to Iolchus (VII.155-8). I suggest that this is due to the familiarity of this episode in Ovid's other work including the *Heroides* and (likely) his *Medea*. Ovid's intention may have been to avoid focussing on Medea as a kin-killer in the *Metamorphoses*. He instead focusses her characterisation on magic and metamorphosis.

Ovid elaborates on Medea's use of magic and witchcraft (VII.176-8) more than in previous extant interpretations. Medea waits for the full moon and performs her rites at night in flowing robes, barefoot with streaming hair (VII.257-8). Ovid describes the immobilising effect she has over men, birds and beasts and the silence this brings (VII.179-88).⁹³⁵ This control of nature such as drawing down the moon, bringing forth ghosts, and sending streams running back to their sources (*ripis mirantibus amnes in fontes rediere suos, concussaue sisto* VII.199-200) was considered unnatural and associated with witches. Ovid also referred to the power of Medea's magic in stopping and drawing back the flow of streams in the *Heroides* (*illa refrenat aquas obliquaque flumina sistit* VI.87).

This language echoes Euripides' imagery of rivers flowing back to their sources to represent the horror of the Chorus as Medea begins to reveal her plans for murder (*Medea* 410-11). This image of nature reversing its' course has been used in classical Athenian tragedy to depict the horror of kin-killing in relation to both Medea and Clytemnestra. Euripides uses it to depict

⁹³⁵ Ogden (2009: 90-1) notes that Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson comprises much material that is typical of necromantic evocation, and argues that Lucan's *Erichtho* uses strikingly similar methods to reanimate a corpse for necromancy, therefore it is likely both are drawing from a lost tradition.

the sun reversing its' course due to the crimes of Atreus and Thyestes (*Electra* 699-742, *Orestes* 996-1006, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 189-202, 811-17).⁹³⁶

Ovid innovates the story and provides Medea with her dragon-drawn chariot in Iolchus (VII.218-19) rather than only when leaving Corinth, as told in Euripides' interpretation. The dragons also serve to demonstrate Medea's power as they have been rejuvenated just by the scent of the herbs she has collected during the flight (VII.236-7). The Pelias episode differs from previous interpretations because Ovid does not attribute Medea's motive for the murder of Pelias to anything but malice (*doli* VII.297-9).

In the *Argonautica*, Pelias did not honour Hera, and was a threat to Jason. He set him the challenge of obtaining the Fleece in the hope of destroying him (1.1-17), therefore Hera sent Medea to Greece in order to punish Pelias (3.1131-6). Ovid creates a less sympathetic portrayal of Medea because he does not attribute any divine motivation to her actions or that she even acted on Jason's behalf. Instead Ovid depicts that she acts out of pure malevolence in murdering Pelias. Medea is represented as deceptive because she manipulates and tricks the daughters of Pelias. She goes to Iolchus under false pretences, pretending that she has fought with Jason, presumably to win sympathy with Pelias as his enemy (VII.297-9). She manipulates Pelias' daughters into begging her to rejuvenate their father by befriending them and recounting her ability to rejuvenate Aeson (VII.299-308).

Ovid continues the characterisation of Medea as a barbarian (*barbara* VII.144, 276) in the *Metamorphoses*. He highlights her foreignness and trickery during the murder of Pelias by using epithets for her such as Colchian (*Colchide* VII.296, 331), Phasian (*Phasias* VII.298), crafty Colchian (*callida...Colchis* VII.300-1), and deceptive daughter of Aetes (*fallax Aetias* VII.326). To aid the deception, Medea rejuvenates an old ram into a lamb to convince the daughters of her ability to rejuvenate Pelias, which introduces a further metamorphosis and demonstrates Medea's powers in witchcraft (VII.309-21).⁹³⁷

⁹³⁶ See Sections 3.11.1, and 3.12.4. It is also used in Seneca's *Agamemnon* (907-9) – Section 3.13.4.

⁹³⁷ Compare the version cited in Diodorus Siculus (4.50-2) where Medea disguises herself as an old woman and tricks Pelias with false transformation of herself as well as a false transformation of a ram to convince him that she can rejuvenate him.

Medea prompts Pelias' daughters to stab him under the pretence that they are being dutiful to him (VII.331-40). Ovid's use of paradoxical language highlights Medea's deception of Pelias' daughters (*his, ut quaeque pia est, hortatibus impia prima est et, ne sit scelerata, facit scelus* (VII.339-40)).⁹³⁸ Ovid links the daughters of Pelias to Althaea as a woman who also kills her kin, and subtly compares Althaea to Medea (VII.476-7) because she will also knowingly kill her own child. Hardie suggests the repetition highlights that the blood shed in revenge is almost as closely akin to Althaea's as the blood that she has avenged and shows the underlying conflict between her duties.⁹³⁹

Medea delivers the final violent blow which ensures Pelias' death, and escapes from Iolchus without facing any retribution for this murder. Ovid innovates the story by allowing Medea to escape on her winged dragon chariot. Ovid has already introduced the chariot in Iolchus for Medea's flight to Thessaly, and chooses to use this device again for her departure back to mainland Greece (VII.350-90).⁹⁴⁰ Ovid does not focus on the events that occur in Corinth and instead sums up in four lines Medea's actions, familiar from Euripides' interpretation. The Colchian's poison burnt the new wife and the royal palace (VII.394-5), she drenched her impious sword with the blood of her children and, after committing this vengeance, she fled Jason's sword (VII.396-7). The reader must therefore assume that Medea and Jason arrived in Corinth separately.

Ovid uses the reader's knowledge of the previous interpretations of Medea and Jason's story in Corinth, not only from Athenian tragedy but also from his own *Heroides* and (lost) *Medea*, to utilise only the briefest of hints in order to cover the essential elements of this well-known episode. McKinley is persuasive in arguing that Ovid compresses the portrayal of Medea's final atrocities and is more interested in depicting events leading up to and following these acts in order to analyse Medea's motivations and psychology.⁹⁴¹ Ovid follows Euripides in having Medea fly away again on

⁹³⁸ Cf. VIII.476-7.

⁹³⁹ Hardie (2002: 43).

⁹⁴⁰ McKinley (2001: 22-7).

⁹⁴¹ McKinley (2001: 21).

her winged dragons to Athens (VII.398-401) and escape justice, as she did in Iolchus after she committed murder.

Ovid then moves on to Medea's episode in Athens with Aegeus who not only receives her, which Ovid notes was enough to condemn him (*excipit hanc Aegeus facto damnandus in uno*), but he marries her as well (VII.402-3). Medea attempts to destroy Aegeus' son Theseus with her poisons (VII.406-7). Through her cunning she manipulates Aegeus into presenting this poison to his son (VII.419-20). However Aegeus recognises Theseus and dashes the poison away before he drinks it (VII.421-3). Ovid concludes this episode and the story of Medea with her ambiguous escape in a mist from her incantations (*effugit illa necem nebulis per carmina motis* VII.424) and does not specify where she flees to or what happens to her thereafter. Habinek pertinently notes that the *Metamorphoses* is a poem of transformation; each metamorphosis is final but the movement from story to story is ceaseless, and this undermines the ambition of Augustus to achieve permanent control.⁹⁴²

Each portrayal of Medea in Ovid's work has many layers and Ovid chooses to highlight or ignore certain aspects of her characterisation depending on his intended purpose within each poem. In *Heroides* VI, Ovid depicts a negative portrayal of Medea because the sympathy is aimed at Hypsipyle as her rival and the abandoned heroine. Ovid focuses on Medea's worst crimes in the context of her violence and betrayal of her male kin: her father, brother, sons, and husband. Ovid uses a comparison with Hypsipyle to demonstrate that Medea is not unique in mythology as a maiden whose husband has abandoned her and her children, but that she is unique in how she responds to this situation.⁹⁴³

Hypsipyle deals with the same betrayal from Jason and yet does not respond with the murder of their children as Medea does, despite sharing characteristics with Medea that single them out from other maidens, such as their foreign status, and royal and divine heritage. Despite Jason's acts of ungratefulness and treachery to both of them, Hypsipyle's letter emphasises that Medea's crimes are unparalleled as she kills her children in revenge. Ovid

⁹⁴² Habinek (2002: 52).

⁹⁴³ Compare the other letters from similar abandoned heroines throughout the *Heroides*: II Phyllis to Demophon; V Oenone to Paris; VII Dido and Aeneas; X Ariadne to Theseus.

highlights Medea's betrayal of her brother and father by comparing her with Hypsipyle who did not kill her kin and betray her father, even when surrounded by other Lemnian women who chose to murder the men in Lemnos. Hypsipyle's accusations about what Medea is capable of with her spells also associate Medea with witchcraft and represent the Roman fear and mistrust of magic by marking her as an outsider. Ovid's intention in depicting Medea as foreign and a barbarian might have been to reflect some of the contemporary concerns around dangerous foreign women, after a period of upheaval when the foreign Cleopatra assisted Antony in civil war.

In *Heroides* XII Ovid portrays more sympathetic elements to Medea and focuses more on her psychological and emotional state than on the well-known crimes themselves. Ovid hints at the murder of her brother and Pelias and foreshadows her murder of her children and the princess. However he chooses not to focus on these and instead demonstrates her negative characteristics by depicting her psychological and emotional flaws such as her lack of guilt and her distorted sense of justice.

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid continues to present the layers to Medea's character and elicits compassion from depicting her internal struggle over whether or not to help Jason. He avoids any mention of the murder of her brother or any detail of the murder of the princess or her children. To counterbalance this he demonstrates her destructive and powerful skills in magic and her ability to repeatedly escape justice and punishment for murder through her use of the dragon chariot to fly away from the scenes of her crimes. Ovid avoids focussing on the conventional crimes that Medea has become synonymous with in Greek interpretations. His portrayal of Medea is original and differs from his predecessors by focussing on murders which have received less attention in the canonical sources, such as the murder of Pelias and her attempt on Theseus. Yet Ovid also acknowledges her familiar role as kin-killer and the competing forces in her character.

Ovid focuses on Medea's use of magic and poisons in all of his extant work. He depicts her power over herbs and spells (*Heroides* VI) and how this aids Jason's tasks as well as her crimes (*Metamorphoses*) but also shows the limitations that it cannot prevent Jason's betrayal of her love (*Heroides* XII). The use of poison was treated seriously in the Roman legal context and

homicide-related offences such as poisoning (*veneficium*) seem to have been tried in a public venue in Rome even prior to the *questiones perpetuae* of the mid second century BC. The decision for cases to be tried in public seems to relate to the disruption to the Republic, and the association between *veneficium* and magic lasted into the empire.⁹⁴⁴ The Roman legal context for Ovid's reader would have had severe consequences for murder, as discussed in Section 3.13.1. The Roman system of law was formulated on vengeance and the family of the victim would have sought justice, likely through the death or exile of the murderer.

Medea's association with Hecate and witchcraft contribute to her ability to escape justice, as she escapes Athens in a magic mist in the *Metamorphoses*. But it is the use of the dragon chariot which Ovid presents as a key element in escaping retribution from Pelias' murder and the murder of her children and the princess. Although the Sun is mentioned as her grandfather, Ovid does not address how Medea obtained the chariot in his poems, in contrast to Euripides where Medea claims her grandfather has given her the chariot.

The gods remain absent from the action and Ovid is ambiguous regarding their involvement in Medea's motives. Instead Medea seems compelled by her own personal motives and conflicting emotions. She is depicted as a powerful witch who can ride through the air, as predicted in Hypsipyle's letter and shown in the *Metamorphoses*, and avoids justice by breaking boundaries beyond the land and sea and flying out of reach. The theme of trespassing established boundaries was a very Roman concern especially in the first century AD, and Ovid's intention may have been to reflect some of historical context of the expanding Roman empire. I conclude that Ovid's portrayal of Medea as foreign, barbarian, and skilled in magic, combined with her isolation having betrayed her homeland and male kin, and been abandoned by her husband, contribute to her 'otherness' and allows her to continue to escape conventional justice as an intentional murderer.

⁹⁴⁴ Gaughan (2010: 69-84).

4.11. Seneca

I shall now examine Seneca's portrayal of Medea. Seneca's *Medea* was composed around the mid-first century AD in Rome. There is no firm date for the composition or performance of this drama. Fitch asserts convincingly that *Medea* was composed around 50 AD.⁹⁴⁵ This is based on: metrical features; indications in other works; the awareness of exotic places and peoples on the borders of the Roman empire; and the comparison between the passions depicted in Senecan drama and the contemporary passions of the imperial court (the lust of Messalina, ambition of Agrippina, madness of Gaius, ultimate lust for power). Benton astutely notes the parallels between the Argo's first voyage (372-9) and Roman imperialism, through borders being dissolved, the mix of cultures, and the desire for exoticism and wealth, and that Seneca is suggesting that this brings the moral decline of Rome.⁹⁴⁶

Seneca's interpretation focuses on events in Corinth. Seneca innovates the depiction from that of Euripides' *Medea* by having Medea murder her children onstage. She subjects Jason to watch one of their deaths, out of reach on the roof of the house, before flying off on the chariot of the Sun. Fitch argues for the likelihood that this drama was performed due to the conventions of performance drama, and the primacy of action rather than verbalisation in the text, for example when Medea kills the first of her sons (969-75).⁹⁴⁷

Seneca characterises Medea as manipulative and deceptive during her scenes with Creon (179-300) and Jason (431-559). He highlights Medea's rhetorical skill and persuasive speech to achieve her goal (285-300).⁹⁴⁸ Seneca continues the consistent portrayal since archaic Greek poetry of Medea's importance in Jason's tasks. In her exchange with Jason, Medea angrily reminds Jason of all that she has forsaken for him in order to help him gain the Golden Fleece (447-89) and argues that he is guilty of her crimes because everything that she has done was for his sake (497-503). Jason's vulnerability due to his love for his children provides Medea with the means

⁹⁴⁵ Fitch (2002: 10-14).

⁹⁴⁶ Benton (2003: 282).

⁹⁴⁷ Fitch (2002: 19-21).

⁹⁴⁸ Boyle (1997: 20-25) discusses the contemporary use of rhetoric in the education of young Romans, and the declamatory mode of expression in Senecan tragedy.

for revenge (544-50). Medea deceives him and then reveals her renewed anger and plan to send the poisoned robe and necklace to the princess (556-78).

Seneca does not focus on Medea as a barbarian, although there are references to Medea as untamed and savage (102-4, 190-1, 467-70) with wild customs of loose hair and bare feet (752-3). Seneca follows Apollonius and Ovid in emphasising Medea's skills with magic and her association with Hecate. Medea is renowned for her use of deadly herbs (269-70) and she calls on Hecate's assistance throughout the play (6-7, 577-8, 750-1, 770, 787-96, 833-4, 839-42), noting that it is always for Jason that she summons the goddess (812-6).

Medea's use of magic and spells is highly descriptive (675-739). Medea recounts the resources that she has used and how she has overpowered nature in order to poison the gifts for Creusa with deadly fire (740-842), running the Phasis back to its source (*violenta Phasis vertit in fontem vada* 762). This image of nature reversing its' course has been used in classical Athenian tragedy to depict the horror of kin-killing in relation to both Medea and Clytemnestra, and recalls rivers running backwards in Euripides' *Medea* (410-11, 846-50).⁹⁴⁹ Seneca now extends this imagery to include Medea's use of magic and the murder of her rival. Seneca does not go into great detail on the deaths of Creusa and Creon, only that they have been killed through the gifts, that the fire has destroyed the palace, and that it is so powerful that water only feeds the flames (879-90).

Throughout the play Seneca draws attention to Medea's previous crimes which she committed for Jason as a girl in Colchis (44-5, 48-9, 53-5, 121-2, 127-9, 135-6, 498-503). This includes the capture of the Golden Fleece, the murder of her brother Apsyrtus, and the murder of Pelias (124-5, 130-5, 275-80, 447-58, 465-76, 486-9, 910-14). Seneca differs from earlier interpretations by distinguishing between Medea and Jason's guilt in the death of Pelias. Jason is innocent as his hand did not touch the sword and was not stained with blood (*potest Iason, si tuam causam amoves, suam tueri: nullus innocuum cruor contaminavit, afeit ferro manus proculque vestro*

⁹⁴⁹ See Sections 3.11.1., 3.12.4., 3.13.4., 4.7. and 4.10.3.

purus a coetu stetit 262-5). By contrast, Medea is accused of being the architect of the wicked crime (*Tu, tu malorum machinatrix facinorum* 266).

The Nurse notes that she will outdo her past violence (393-4, 670-2) and Medea believes that her previous deeds for Jason have hardened her to committing crime and were trivial in comparison to what she can now achieve (563-4, 903-15). Fyfe convincingly suggests that Medea's maturation from virgin to mother corresponds to her maturation in crime and that her previous crimes were only training in comparison.⁹⁵⁰

Medea's references to herself in the third person (166-7, 171, 516-8, 910) are metatheatrical. I argue that Seneca is depicting the power of a character who can recognise her own fame and mythology within the text, just as the audience can see Medea transforming into the character that they know she will become. Fyfe is persuasive that Medea's use of the third person to elaborate on her crimes is a way to mythologise herself as well as to distance herself from her crimes.⁹⁵¹

Benton argues that the use of the third person (166) is significant as Medea is seeing herself from the Corinthians' view and recreates herself in that image (171) in order to manipulate the stereotype.⁹⁵² However I would not go so far as to agree that, through playing the part of Medea and enacting revenge, she becomes truly barbaric and the role takes on a life of its own (910). Littlewood suggests that Medea shows self-sufficiency in her consciousness of her own myth (171) and fulfils the role she already knows; to provide order in a chaotic world, where there are no gods to defend her rights and no sure moral authority.⁹⁵³ Fitch similarly argues that Medea reaches her full self and potential (910) and that this is not only metadramatic but also alludes to the root of her name (*Med-* or *Met-* meaning cunning intelligence), however the possibility of any real selfhood is precluded because Medea is torn between conflicting passions and identities.⁹⁵⁴

Seneca hints at the idea of infanticide from the start of the play as Medea claims that her revenge is born (*parta iam, parta ultio est: peperit* 25-

⁹⁵⁰ Fyfe (1983: 78).

⁹⁵¹ Fyfe (1983: 80).

⁹⁵² Benton (2003: 277-9).

⁹⁵³ Littlewood (2004: 9, 45-6).

⁹⁵⁴ Fitch (2002: 339).

6), and that she can commit greater crimes because she has given birth (*maiora iam me scelera post partus decent* 50). However it is not explicit that Medea intends to kill the children. Fitch suggests the possibility that wounding Jason through the children is subconscious at first (25, 549) and could be realised through abduction or the children taking after the parents, and it is not until Act 5 that infanticide as revenge becomes explicit.⁹⁵⁵ I am not persuaded by Fyfe who argues that the idea of child murder comes as a surprise to Medea in Act 5, or that Medea kills the first child before she realises it and then becomes indifferent to suffering and rejects morality in killing the second child.⁹⁵⁶

I argue that Seneca draws out what his audience knows will happen by hinting at it throughout the play. There is no Aegeus scene, which helps to confirm the importance of children and finalise the idea of murdering her children in Euripides' play. Instead Seneca builds up the anticipation through Medea's vacillating emotions and plans at the start of Seneca's play. Medea links her revenge to giving birth (25-6, 50) and Jason admits his emotional attachment to his children (544-50). Medea reveals her plans to kill the princess and prepares the poison, as she braces herself for having to shed her own blood (808-10) and wants to give her sons a final embrace after they have delivered the fatal gifts (845-8).

It is only when Medea has discovered that the princess and Creon are dead (879-90) that Seneca finally confirms the intended infanticide and that Medea's children will pay for their father's crimes (924-5). Seneca follows Euripides in portraying Medea's struggle over whether she can kill her children (926-71). However Seneca innovates the murder as Medea kills one son onstage (970-1). She then climbs to the roof with his dead body and the living son in order to be out of reach of the Corinthians (*parantur arma, meque in exitium petunt* 972).

Medea has another brief internal struggle over what she has done (982-91) but then finds further pleasure from her crime when she realises it will hurt Jason even more by making him watch the death of his other son

⁹⁵⁵ Fitch (2002: 337-8).

⁹⁵⁶ Fyfe (1983: 85) also suggests Medea's language directs her emotions through repeated questions and broken sentences (916ff).

(*derat hoc unum mihi, spectator iste* 992-3). Medea kills their second son out of Jason's reach on the roof (1018-19) and flies off on her chariot (1022-25), causing Jason to doubt the existence of the gods as a result of her crimes (*testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos* 995-1027). Benton suggests that there are parallels between Medea's pleasure in making Jason watch the murder of his child and the Roman desire to stage violent spectacles as signs of power (Seneca *De Ira* 2.33.3-4, 2.5.4-5, 3.18, 3.20).⁹⁵⁷ Seneca's intention may therefore have been to highlight some of the barbaric elements of Roman society. Littlewood argues that Medea's pleasure in the spectacle of this horror is one degree removed because she delights in Jason's pain as a helpless spectator.⁹⁵⁸

I conclude that Seneca portrays two motives for Medea to murder her children. The first is revenge for Jason's betrayal. She wants to rob Jason of what he values most (544-9) just as she will be robbed of her children in exile (947-51). It will also recover all of the things that Jason deprived her of before he abandoned her; her homeland, family, virginity, and royal status (119-20, 207-9, 982-4), and will avenge his betrayal (1006-8) and the pain it has caused her (1010-13, 1019-20).

The second motive is vengeance for her betrayal of her brother and father (*fratri patrique quod sat est, peperit duos* 957). Seneca develops the portrayal from Euripides (*Medea* 1258-60, 1333-5) that Medea's murder of her children is somehow in response to the vengeance needed for her brother. Seneca makes this more explicit, depicting the Erinyes influencing her hand (*repetit invitam manum antiqua Erinys* 951-3). Medea sees the Erinyes of her brother approaching and demanding vengeance, and she kills her son to placate them (958-71).

Seneca only depicts Medea as pursued by the Erinyes at this point, despite having referred to her brother's murder throughout the play. Medea has a dual role: she is the murderer of her brother, and therefore must satisfy his Erinyes (*frater est, poenas petit. dabimus, sed omnes. fige luminibus faces, lania, perure, pectus en Furiis patet* 965-6). But she is also her brother's surviving kin, who should take vengeance for his death. I suggest that she

⁹⁵⁷ Benton (2003: 280).

⁹⁵⁸ Littlewood (2004: 11-12).

embodies the male role of avenger for her slain brother, but rather than suffer death herself she finds a new victim, her son, to placate his Erinyes.

In Section 3.9.5. I discussed the evolving associations of the Erinyes from Homeric epic to Athenian tragedy. I concluded that Aeschylus develops the Erinyes to focus on matricide. Seneca follows Euripides in depicting them avenging the murder of kin. However, this is problematic as Seneca does not portray any Erinyes of Medea's murdered sons. Littlewood unconvincingly suggests that Medea assumes the role of a revenging tragic Fury. However I argue that she cannot embody both the crime and the punishment of the murders she commits, especially as only the vengeance of her brother is addressed, whilst ignoring the vengeance needed for her sons.⁹⁵⁹

Medea's fluctuating emotions are a consistent element of her characterisation since classical Athenian tragedy, where she struggles between her love for her children and her desire to avenge her husband's betrayal. Seneca depicts Medea as being pulled in different directions by these emotions; that anger is leading her one way and love another (937-9). This reflects the interpretations in Euripides (*Medea* 1021-80), Apollonius (*Argonautica* Book 3) and Ovid (*Metamorphoses* VII.11-71) of Medea's conflict between her passion and reason.⁹⁶⁰ Seneca demonstrates her awareness of her passion and impulses to anger but acknowledges that she cannot control them or ignore them (916-19). Medea does not know what the outcome of her anger will be, yet she is still willing to follow wherever it leads (953).⁹⁶¹ Seneca depicts her as turning one way and another (123-4) and uses sea metaphors to demonstrate the conflicting currents whirling her from side to side (939-42). The allusion to the sea demonstrates the uncontrollable danger she poses depending on her fluctuating emotions, like the powerful and dangerous force of the sea which is moved by the changing currents.

Medea struggles back and forth between her anger and her love as a mother, stating that anger retreats and the mother returns (927-8). She repeatedly addresses her spirit (*animus*), commanding it to bear down on anger and draw out her old aggression (*incumbe in iras teque languentem*

⁹⁵⁹ Littlewood (2004: 16, 37).

⁹⁶⁰ See also Sections 4.7., 4.9. and 4.10.3.

⁹⁶¹ Gill (1997: 213-41) suggests that akratic surrender to passion generates a kind of madness and that Medea urges herself to anger and assents to reasons which trigger a mad reaction.

excita, penitusque veteres pectore ex imo impetus violentus hauri 902-4). Her spirit must prepare for her ultimate crime (*ultimum, agnosco, scelus animo parandum est* 923-4). She addresses her mad rage (*furor* 930) and questions why her spirit vacillates (937). Medea also addresses her pain (*dolor* 951), claiming that killing two sons is not enough for her pain (1010-11), and after killing the second son she states that she has no more to offer her pain (1019-20).

Seneca develops Stoic themes such as controlling passions, similarly to his depiction of Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon*.⁹⁶² Littlewood argues that Medea is a morally ambivalent avenger who speaks as a Stoic, as she claims to have risen above Fortune (520) and shows disdain for the wealth of kings (540-1).⁹⁶³ However I am not convinced that her use of Stoic rhetoric is a misrepresentation because she is a tyrant herself. Instead I suggest that this exposes the weaknesses of her victim, Jason, who is trapped between angry royal powers (444, 490-1, 494) and is un-Stoic in his failure to resist tyrants. I agree that Senecan tragedy does not portray Stoic heroes and is not controlled by Stoic thinking; the absence of positive examples shows that it is not didactic, but it suggests the Stoic fortitude that victims should display.⁹⁶⁴

The Stoic philosopher Chrysippus (as reported in Galen *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* 4.2.8-27) takes Medea's monologue in Euripides' tragedy (1078-80) as an example of excessive *pathos*, where there is acknowledgement that what someone is doing is wrong but cannot act otherwise. It is also taken as an example that all human beings are capable of virtue and can recognise rationality even when *pathos* separates them from it. Gill argues that Chrysippus seems to indicate that *pathos* can be irrational and therefore reject or disobey reason (4.2.10-12), but also that *pathos*, as an excessive impulse, is a conscious choice but that it then becomes out of control (4.2.14-18, 4.6.35).⁹⁶⁵

⁹⁶² Manuwald (2013: 130). See Section 3.13.4.

⁹⁶³ Littlewood (2004: 37-40).

⁹⁶⁴ Fitch (2002: 22-3). Littlewood (2004: 23-5).

⁹⁶⁵ Gill (1983: 136-49).

Seneca uses the Nurse as the embodiment of reason in the same format as for Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*.⁹⁶⁶ The Nurse tries to convince Medea to control her impulses and her anger. She tells Medea to control her impulsive rage (*siste furialem impetum* 157), to curb her anger and control her impulses (*resiste et iras comprime ac retine impetum* 381). But Medea states that it is difficult to turn the mind (*animus*) from anger once aroused (203-6). This recalls the argument Seneca uses in *De Ira* that anger must be rejected at the start because once it is admitted, reason cannot help (1.8.1), and that anger is a weapon that is difficult to draw back (2.35.1).⁹⁶⁷

There is similarity between Seneca's depictions of Medea's and Clytemnestra's motives for murder in that they let their previous crimes motivate them to commit further crime (*Agamemnon* 115).⁹⁶⁸ Medea claims that through crime she gained her home, and through crime she must leave it (55). She convinces herself that her crimes must urge her on (129-30). However Medea states that her former crimes were not from anger (*ira*) but from love (*amor* 135-6). This is to differentiate between her motives for her previous murders, which she claims were for Jason's benefit, to those she will commit in Corinth, which will be in response to Jason's rejection of her. I argue that Seneca follows Apollonius in depicting the cycle of violence and betrayal which emerged in Euripides' interpretation. When in love with Jason, Medea murdered and ended relationships for his benefit. When she lost his love, she murdered and ended relationships to hurt him.

Seneca uses the simile of Medea as a tigress (*tigris*) robbed of her children (863-4) when the Chorus describe how she struggles to control her love and anger. I suggest that this animal imagery recalls the metaphors of lions used to describe Medea and Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Euripides' *Electra* and *Medea*, and Seneca's *Agamemnon*.⁹⁶⁹ I argue that the metaphors of the lion (and here the tiger) demonstrate Medea and

⁹⁶⁶ See Section 3.13.4.

⁹⁶⁷ Guastella (2001: 197-219) also notes the language of the Roman divorce courts in Seneca's *Medea*.

⁹⁶⁸ Also Seneca *De Clementia* (1.13.2). See Section 3.13.4. for Clytemnestra's motives and fluctuating psychological state.

⁹⁶⁹ See Section 3.7.6. on lion imagery.

Clytemnestra's masculine characteristics as well as their anger and murderous intent.

Seneca uses fire as a metaphor for Medea and for her revenge to demonstrate how destructive and uncontrollable her anger can be (387, 410, 412-15, 531-2, 489, 591, 670-2, 735, 818-19, 825-30, 838-9, 858, 885-7, 888-90). Seneca also uses fire as a metaphor for the danger and uncontrollable nature of anger in *Agamemnon* and in his philosophical works, as it can begin from a small flame, be fed by other factors, and cause a great deal of damage once it spreads.⁹⁷⁰

Seneca uses metaphors and similes of the sea and fearsome monsters to describe Medea, similarly to Clytemnestra. Medea is an evil worse than the sea (362-3), her anger is a wave (392) and her conflicting emotions over whether to kill her children are like currents of the sea whirling from side to side (939-43). Medea compares herself to Scylla and Charybdis and states that no river, ocean or sea could halt her anger (407-14). This is reminiscent of the comparisons to Scylla used in Athenian tragedy for Clytemnestra (Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1233) and Medea (Euripides' *Medea* 1342-3).⁹⁷¹ I argue that Seneca is using the imagery of Scylla to represent the monstrous female capable of killing male *philoï* and destroying bonds between parent and child.

Seneca therefore draws comparisons between the punishments that the Argonauts suffered through conquering the sea (595-669) and the punishment that Jason will suffer through bringing Medea back as the prize of that voyage, demonstrating her destructive power like the sea. Fyfe argues that the Argo has breached nature's laws and that Medea is the penalty of that voyage and nature's instrument of justice.⁹⁷²

Fyfe suggests that Medea's exit on the chariot into the aether shows her dehumanisation due to lack of human contact, and that she is destined for the elements she has become.⁹⁷³ Littlewood notes that Medea's deeds challenge what is acceptable and threaten the limits of criminality because no judge intervenes to punish her and she is raised to the level of the gods

⁹⁷⁰ See Section 3.13.4. and *De Ira* (2.6.4, 2.19.1-3, 2.35.5, 3.1.1, 3.4.1, 3.13.2, 3.41.3).

⁹⁷¹ See Sections 3.7.6. and 4.7.

⁹⁷² Fyfe (1983: 87).

⁹⁷³ Fyfe (1983: 85).

unpunished, which collapses the moral and physical framework of the universe.⁹⁷⁴ Littlewood also argues that Medea becomes her own god in defying these moral and physical frameworks. However I disagree that Seneca's intention in presenting Medea flying through the air on her chariot was to symbolise that she had become a divinity or had metamorphosised.

There are no gods present in the play. Medea's grandfather the Sun is the only figure of divine support, through the presence of the chariot, however the god does not actually appear, and her lineage could explain her access to this vehicle. The character of Aegeus does not feature in Seneca's interpretation and, unlike in Euripides' drama, there is no promise of refuge in Athens for Medea after she has committed her crimes. Instead, Seneca focuses on Medea's ancestry to the Sun as her grandfather (28-30, 209-10, 570-2) and the chariot of the Sun as the method of escape. Medea's aerial flight is a theme in many versions of her story: Euripides' *Medea* (1320-22, 1402-4), Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (7.218-37, 350-90, 398-99) and Seneca's *Medea* (1022-5). Buxton unconvincingly suggests that her gesture in Seneca of dropping the bodies from the chariot to Jason (compared to retaining them in Euripides 1402-4) demonstrates she is no longer a mother.⁹⁷⁵

Medea refers to her grandfather witnessing the outrage of the new marriage and questions whether the Sun can still rise each day, and asks that she is allowed to ride in her ancestral chariot, hinting at the doom that she spells for Corinth (28-36). Seneca is therefore playing on the audience's knowledge of the myth not only by making the vehicle of Medea's escape explicit from the start, but by actually verbalising Medea's desire to ride in it. Furthermore, the Chorus warn of the dangerous precedent of Phaethon whose desire to drive the chariot of his father the Sun led to his death when he could not control it (599-602).⁹⁷⁶

I suggest that Seneca's intention was to symbolise the danger of trespassing established boundaries, like the Argonauts who traversed the sea and were punished for removing the established boundaries of the world (364-72, 595-669). Fyfe suggests that Medea's anger is a destructive elemental

⁹⁷⁴ Littlewood (2004: 22-5).

⁹⁷⁵ Buxton (2010: 2-39).

⁹⁷⁶ For a surviving version of this myth, see Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.750-2.400).

force juxtaposed with the story of Phaethon driving the Sun's chariot and Jason sailing the Argo, as they released elemental forces that they could not control.⁹⁷⁷ Medea is able not only to fly off triumphant on the chariot (1022-25) but also to escape punishment for breaking the moral boundaries of killing her kin.

The Roman interpretations are consistent with the earlier Greek versions depicting Medea escaping the justice received by other kin-killers; there is no death, exile or trial as a result of the infanticide. Fitch pertinently notes that the gods are absent, unconcerned or unable to prevent moral outrages in Senecan tragedy because Seneca is concerned with the inner and outer forces that destroy humans.⁹⁷⁸ Seneca's philosophical and rhetorical context has shaped his interpretation. However Seneca challenges the audience because Medea is not an example of the negative consequences that come from acting on anger.⁹⁷⁹

Seneca follows Ovid in removing the gods from the action of the story and instead compels Medea through her own personal motives and conflicting emotions. In the Roman legal context it was likely to have been the family of the deceased victim which tried to seek justice. Medea's ability to ride through the air as a powerful witch enables her to avoid justice by flying out of reach of Jason, who would avenge his kin, and the Corinthians. Seneca's intention may have been to represent Roman imperialism through the theme of trespassing established boundaries.

⁹⁷⁷ Fyfe (1983: 89).

⁹⁷⁸ Fitch (2002: 25).

⁹⁷⁹ Seneca suggests in *De Ira* (3.26.2) that the greatest punishment of wrongdoing is doing it due to the torture of remorse.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Medea's murder of her children would likely have shocked Athenian audiences and continued to shock subsequent audiences and readers throughout Hellenistic Greece and Rome. Even modern audiences remain troubled at the idea of a mother capable of killing her children. However, I argue that it would have been even more disturbing for the ancient audience that she flies off triumphant after this intentional murder and never suffers the punishment or justice that other kin-killers face as a result of their crimes.

This differentiates Medea from Clytemnestra, who is associated with intentional homicide from the earliest extant sources. Homeric epic and the Epic Cycle link Clytemnestra to the murder of her husband, and this continues to be an element of her characterisation throughout archaic poetry, classical Athenian drama, and Roman drama and poetry. Another element of her mythology that is consistent in every interpretation is that she dies for her crime; her child or children murder her, and this is interpreted as justice.

By contrast, Medea is linked to the unintentional death of her children from extant archaic sources, but is never linked to any punishment, even from Euripides when her murder of the children is canonised as intentional. Throughout Greek and Roman interpretations she continues to be linked with murder yet is synonymous with escaping justice. Her final outcome is ambiguous as she eventually marries Achilles in the Elysian fields.

The murderous relationship between Clytemnestra and Electra demonstrates the transition from revenge culture and retaliatory violence to utilising legal systems to obtain vengeance, and situates feminine roles within these systems of vengeance. Clytemnestra is a victim of the early retaliatory form of justice for the murder of her husband, but her children suffer for killing her. Electra and Orestes demonstrate the changing systems of responding to murder. But in punishing their mother as the generator of violence and disorder, they bring about further violence and disorder. I argue in this thesis that Medea's escape from justice is shocking, but it precludes further violence and therefore demonstrates the futility of revenge culture.

Medea's murder of both of her children ensures there are no other offspring to avenge their deaths, and her position above Jason on the chariot

of the Sun allows her physically and metaphorically to transcend his reach. Jason is the surviving male kin of the victims and the traditional responsibility to avenge their death would fall to him. However, Medea has weakened his position socially by murdering the king and the princess who would have been his allies, and has ensured he has no future offspring, who might have inherited the responsibility to seek vengeance. By flying off out of his reach to a different city she has transcended the norms of revenge culture. There are no male kin to avenge the slain children other than Jason, and Medea has defeated him and therefore eliminated the traditional avengers.

Each interpretation is influenced by the context of its production and the author's intention. This includes: the importance of duty and loyalty in Homeric epic; the legal and political concerns regarding homicide, the distinction of motive and planning, the concept of *dikê* as justice, and the danger of the east in classical Athenian interpretations; the social interest in magic and the east in the Hellenistic period; and the philosophical focus on emotions and the political concerns with incest, adultery, and trespassing established boundaries in early imperial Rome.

I draw a comparison between Electra and Medea as women who commit intentional homicide and whose lack of relationships with their mothers ultimately have an adverse effect on their own roles as mothers. Electra escapes many of the conventional punishments that her brother faces as a matricide. This demonstrates the contradictions that arise when a woman takes on the role of avenger. Medea and Electra's isolation from the *oikos* and *polis* also contribute to their unique ability, unlike other mythological murderesses, to avoid death, suicide, metamorphosis, or exile as a result of the murders they commit within the family unit.

These myths demonstrate the consistent concerns throughout Greek and Roman societies regarding the unity of the family, and the evolving responses to murder and interpretations of justice. These characters warrant exploration from this gendered perspective because their gender contributes to their otherness in the conventional scheme of vengeance and retribution.

Abbreviations

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- Drachmann *Scholia Vetera in Pindari Carmina*, (1903-27) ed. by A.B. Drachmann, Leipzig: Teubner.
- FGrHist *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*, (1968) ed. by F. Jacoby, Leiden: Brill.
- iG *Inscriptiones Graecae*, (1873-), Berlin: De Gruyter.
- MW Hesiod, *Theogonia Opera et Dies Scutum: Fragmenta Selecta*, (1990), ed. by F. Solmsen, R. Merkelbach, and M.L. West Oxford.
- PEG *Poetae Epici Graeci: testimonia et fragmenta*, (2007) ed. by A. Bernabé, Berolini: Walter de Gruyter.
- PLF *Poetarum Lesborium Fragmenta*, (1955) ed. by E. Lobel and D.L. Page, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- PMG *Poetae Melici Graeci*, (1962) ed. by D.L. Page, Oxford: Clarendon.
- PMGF *Poetarum Melicorum Graecorum*, (1991) ed. M. Davies, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- P.Oxy *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, (1898-) ed. B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, London: Egypt Exploration Society.
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- SVF *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, (1964) ed. by H. von Arnim, Stutgardiae: Teubner.
- TrGF *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, (1971-2004) ed. by B. Snell, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.

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