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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which the dynamics of marriage presented in Athenian tragedy of the fifth century BCE affect the portrayal of three tragic wives: Sophocles’ Deianeira, Euripides’ Hermione, and Euripides’ Electra. In modern scholarship, all three of these women have often been endowed with psychological portraits, which in turn have been used to explain their motivations and actions. Believing such an approach to be too subjective and anachronistic, I analyze instead the portrayal of tragic wives against the backdrop of contemporary Athenian institutions, in particular that of marriage. I argue that the problematic nature of their marriages is expressed through the representation of the tragic heroines’ relationship with time and space around them. In turn, it is the dynamics of this relationship that define the portrayal of the tragic wives’ characters and their actions and that also give us an insight into the larger culturally-relevant problems explored in the plays.

Key Words

Women in Ancient Greek Tragedy, Ancient Greek Wedding, Ancient Greek Marriage, Ritual in Ancient Greek Tragedy, Sophocles’ Trachiniae, Deianeira, Euripides’ Andromache, Hermione, Euripides’ Electra, Electra.
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Introduction

In this thesis, I explore one particular tragic ritual portrayed in Athenian tragedy of the fifth century BCE – marriage. More specifically, I analyze the ways in which the poetics of marriage in three selected plays affect the presentation of circumstances and choices of the main heroines. The three Athenian tragedies explored here are Sophocles’ Trachiniae, Euripides’ Andromache, and Euripides’ Electra. While many Greek tragedies allude to wedding rituals and symbolism, the dramatic action of the plays selected for this study is set at the point when a wedding ritual has already taken place and the characters are now faced with its consequences. All three of these plays allude to some violation or perversion of the wedding ritual, which becomes symptomatic of the dysfunction of the subsequent order within the marriage on stage. Adopting Zeitlin’s identification of such dysfunction in Aeschylus’ Choephoroi as a “ritual impasse,” I will use this term to refer to the distortion of the social order in the plays discussed here.¹ Although all characters in the selected plays are somehow affected by the consequences of the perversion of marriage rites, I am focusing particularly on the affected women – Deianeira, Hermione, and Electra, – whose transition from bride to wife has been hindered.²

¹ For the discussion of a “ritual impasse” in the Choephoroi see Zeitlin 1996, 95: “The impasse is also manifested in the social status of the legitimate children: Electra, unwed, arrested in maidenhood, bound to the paternal hearth, and Orestes, an exile, as yet unable to cross the boundary to adulthood, a status contingent upon his assumption of his father’s name and space.”

² Another obvious candidate for this study is Euripides’ Medea. Due to the limits of this project, however, I am leaving Medea out. Unlike the three tragic wives on whom I am focusing here, Medea is not Greek. Although any new wife in Greek ideology can potentially be seen as a foreigner to the house of her husband, because of Medea’s actual Eastern origins, an analysis of her character might require a different approach. I am hoping to expand this study in the future and will then undoubtedly include Medea. For now, I am limiting myself with only occasional references to this tragic wife.
My analysis of the literary marriage representations selected for this study is structured around an understanding of ancient marriage as a rite of passage. As outlined by Arnold van Gennep in his intercultural anthropological study, on the most basic level a rite of passage has a tripartite structure and involves a separation, a transition, and an incorporation stage, each often marked by various rituals. Although this thesis is not an anthropological study of ancient Greek marriage, Greek tragedy is very much concerned with and connected to ritual. In the plays selected here, the tripartite structure of a symbolized rite of passage can also be distinguished, and its representation is accompanied by a stylized portrayal of, or allusions to, a number of Greek wedding rituals. It must be said here that van Gennep’s model has endured much criticism, some of which, however, can be used to improve the application of van Gennep’s theory to literature, rather than to discard it. Thus, Leitao argues that rather than focusing too intensely on the transition itself, Classicists should pay more attention to the groups which the participant of a rite is leaving or joining. I believe my own approach takes this concern into consideration, since my analysis of the three tragic wives in this study is often focused on their relationships with either their marital or natal families.

As Brook points out in the Introduction to her extensive study of ritual in Sophoclean drama, there is a “close analogy between ritual and narrative,” in that both “entail a predictable progression and implicate their participants in a potential change of status, which is often expressed as a function of community membership.” Because of this, as Brook and others before her observe, the rituals embedded in tragic plays

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4 Leitao 1999.
5 Brook 2018, 3.
function as a “poetic device,” able to build up and frustrate the audience’s expectations, and, significantly for this study, influence the audience’s reception of the play and its characters.\(^6\)

Various ways in which tragic ritual could potentially influence its audience have been proposed and discussed at length by scholars.\(^7\) The idea of tragic ritual affecting the audience’s perception of characters and its expectations with regards to the progression of the plot is particularly important for this study. The main heroines of the plays selected here have all endured harsh criticism and have also been defended on moral grounds. I believe, however, that an analysis which seeks to evaluate an ancient tragic character on a moral scale often says more about the scholar doing the evaluation than about the literary character in question. Such an approach inevitably includes, on the one hand, endowing literary characters with personalities of their own that extend outside and beyond the play, and sometimes, on the other hand, projecting one’s own understanding of moral concepts onto a literary character, a product of a culture (and of a person) in many ways fundamentally different from any other.\(^8\) Although no interpretation is unbiased, I believe that rituals embedded in tragic plays offer a more stable basis for understanding the plays’ questions and themes, and the characters’ actions and feelings, in so far as they are verbalized or acted out on stage. When it comes to ancient marriage, we do possess enough evidence in order to reconstruct to a

\(^6\) Brook 2018, 3 focuses specifically on ritual in Sophocles; Brook also acknowledges the influence of previous scholars on her work, such as Zeitlin 1965, 1966, Henrichs 2004.


\(^8\) Neuburg 1990, demonstrates the dangers of such an approach in his defence of a controversial passage in Sophocles’ *Antigone* (lines 904-920). Neuburg persuasively argues against endowing Antigone with a set of specific and unchanging moral characteristics.
large degree what the ideals surrounding marital rituals would be like in fifth century Athens. Although our evidence is in no way unproblematic, it still allows us to perceive many of the deviations from the ideal in a way similar to the ancient audience. In this study, I am attempting to let the ritual problems on stage direct my own perception and analysis of the plays and their main heroines.

As mentioned above, van Gennep’s theory of rites of passage provides a framework for my analysis of tragic marriage. In all three plays, the dysfunction of the social order on stage resulting from some violation of the marital rite of passage is manifest, on the one hand, within a temporal and, on the other hand, within a spatial dimension. Like any rite of passage, marriage involves a transition in time, from one successive social role to another. For women in Greek ideology this transition is marked symbolically by a change of title – from *parthenos* (“a virgin”), to *nymphe* (“bride”), to *gyne* (“wife,” and by extension a mother). In addition, because in an ideal Greek marriage a woman is expected to leave her paternal hearth and move in with her new husband in his home, marriage for her involves a physical leaving of one space, and a transition and incorporation to another. Not surprisingly, tragedy is more interested in deviations from the expected ideal. The selected plays portray or allude to some violations of the wedding ritual, symbolizing and further emphasizing the dysfunction of the subsequent marriage, around which the main dramatic action of the plays is built. Of the three plays selected here, the *Trachiniae* is the one that dwells the most on the description of Deianeira’s wedding ritual, and so the amount of scholarship devoted to it is also disproportionately large. It is true that the two plays of Euripides are not nearly as

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9 Reeder 1995, 22.
explicit in their allusions to the role of the wedding ritual in the problems of the subsequent marriages. As we shall see, however, in Euripides’ plays the ritual mistakes committed in the process of the wedding are just as important for our understanding of the subsequent problems in marriage as they are in Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*. In turn, it is the exploration of these problems in the plays that affects the playwrights’ representations of the female heroines and their actions.

**Methodology and Contents**

Tragedies often construct meaning through portraying deviations from the norm, as the norm is known to the playwrights and their contemporary audiences. As Sourvinou-Inwood points out, in order for the modern reader to be able to register these deviations, the norm must first be reconstructed with as much detail as possible from sources other than the tragedies.¹⁰ In Chapter One of this thesis, I draw on Athenian court speeches, philosophical works, and modern interpretations of ancient Greek iconographic evidence in order to reconstruct, as much as possible, the cultural expectations pertaining to the rituals that make up an ideal (or idealized) Athenian wedding ceremony. While the degree of reality with which such sources as ancient vase paintings represent wedding ceremonies and marriage is arguable, they must have been realistic enough in order to be meaningful to their ancient audience. At the same time, the idealizing aspect in these sources can provide us with a standard against which to consider the distortions presented in tragedy. As for the court speeches and philosophical works, they present us with both ideal and distorted marriages. While these speeches come mostly from the fourth century BCE, I assume that there exists a

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considerable continuity between them and fifth century ideals, and I follow the many scholars who use these texts in their studies of Classical Athenian marriage.\textsuperscript{11}

In Chapter One I focus on reconstructing the stages of an Athenian wedding process in so far as they correspond approximately to van Gennep’s stages of rites of passage, as well as some of the rituals appropriate for each stage and the symbolic meaning of these rituals. Particularly important for the analysis of all three tragic weddings selected for this study is the anthropological evidence we have on *engue* ("betrothal"), an early stage of the wedding process, in which arrangements are made between the bride’s *kurios* and her prospective husband. The guidelines regarding who is to be a bride’s *kurios* will be particularly important for my discussion of Euripides’ *Electra* in Chapter Four. Here I also discuss the Athenian expectations concerning marriages of *epikleroi*, the so-called “heiresses,” which will be significant in Chapter Three, where I focus on the character of Hermione in Euripides’ *Andromache*. Similarly, reconstruction of the incorporation stage, marked in a Greek wedding by the bride’s arrival to her husband’s home and the rituals accompanying this arrival, is also an aspect of marriage that has a central role for my analysis of all three of the selected tragedies. Finally, because in all three plays the dramatic action happens after the wedding, during the marriage proper, in Chapter One I also reconstruct the ideals surrounding a married couple’s life, in particular with regards to the performance of different roles and tasks which husbands and wives are expected to perform for the benefit of the household. The evidence collected in this chapter will inform my analysis of the tragic weddings and marriages in the three subsequent chapters.

\textsuperscript{11} E.g. Patterson 1998; Ferrari 2004.
In addition to the evidence collected in Chapter One, in chapters Two to Four I rely on comparative mythological and literary models, such as the ones presented in epic, in archaic lyric poetry as well as in Athenian tragedies. In Chapter Two, I conduct a close reading of Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*. Although the significance of the interruption of Deianeira’s wedding ritual has been extensively studied by scholars, I expand on the implications of this interruption for the subsequent marriage. In particular, I emphasize Deianeira’s lack of connection with and control over the inside of her home in comparison with the expectations surrounding an idealized Greek wife. I also analyze the ways in which time is malfunctioning in the play and in particular for Deianeira’s experience. Among the comparative literary models I rely on in this section are Penelope and Persephone. The marriage of Penelope and Odysseus as it is described in the *Odyssey*, and the marriage of Persephone and Hades as it is presented at the end of the *Homerik Hymn to Demeter* are some of the most exemplary in Greek literature, even though neither of these two marriages is unproblematic. The marriage of Penelope and Odysseus seems to be an obvious choice for comparison not only because it is arguably the most famous marriage story in Greek literature, but also because, like the *Trachiniae*, it is a home-coming story where the wife has been waiting for her husband’s return for many years. The story of Persephone and Hades is also of special interest to me, because it has a rare focus on the bride’s transition to her marital home and the establishment of marriage, as does the *Trachiniae*, which devotes considerable attention to Deianeira’s marital transition. While the epics and the hymn were written around three centuries earlier than the *Trachiniae* and refer to the customs surrounding marriage at their own or earlier times, there is still some continuity of values regarding virtue and
gender boundaries, meaningful to the fifth century audience. Many of the aristocratic ideals that the earlier literature describes would not have been entirely alien to fifth century Athens, because its society is perhaps best described as transitional from aristocratic to democratic values.\textsuperscript{12} Tragedy relies on the known ideal and often presents its distortion, while the audience’s knowledge of that ideal comes from their familiarity with earlier literature, as well as their daily experiences.

In Chapter Two, I also take a look at representations of other distorted marriages in Athenian tragedy, in order to see in what ways Deianeira’s marriage is different from or similar to those. I compare Deianeira’s position in her marriage to that of Clytaemnestra in Aeschylus’ \textit{Oresteia} and that of Medea in Euripides’ eponymous play. The parallels between Clytaemnestra and Deianeira are many: both await the return of the husband, who brings a concubine home with him, and both inflict death on that husband by means of textiles. Similarly, both Medea and Deianeira decide to act upon being betrayed by their husbands, and both use textiles to harm their husbands. While it has been argued that in his portrayal of Deianeira in the \textit{Trachiniae} Sophocles is interacting with Aeschylus’ representation of Clytaemnestra,\textsuperscript{13} the chronological relation of the play to \textit{Medea} is less clear. Nevertheless, I believe that a comparison between tragic wives in similar circumstances can provide meaningful ways for understanding their position, whether an author of a particular tragedy is consciously interacting with another specific play or not. This is especially true since the surviving Athenian

\textsuperscript{12} No political reform can change the ideology that had long been accepted in people’s minds in one day. The fifth century tragedies themselves seem to testify to this, when they explore such confronting views of archaic and classical Athens as the value of an individual man as opposed to the good of the polis, e.g. as in the \textit{Antigone}. For a fundamental discussion of this topic, see Ober 1990.

\textsuperscript{13} E.g. Garner 2015, 102-109.
tragedies are all chronologically close enough for us to assume that in their construction of meaning they rely on many of the same ideals shared by the public.

In Chapter Three, I analyze the dynamics of marriage between Hermione and Neoptolemus in Euripides’ *Andromache*. As in the previous section, I explore Hermione’s transition to a married state and her life within marriage on two levels, a temporal and a spatial one. To my knowledge, although there are important articles written on the problems associated with the way time works in the *Andromache*, the malfunctioning of space for Hermione in this play has not been sufficiently explored.

For Hermione, who is married at the right time and is physically located at her husband’s house, the place is nevertheless problematic. She does not fully belong within her husband’s household but retains too strong a connection to her natal family, emphasized by Menelaus’ almost continuous presence in Neoptolemus’ household, and manifested, partly, in Hermione’s inability to be in control of the household and even of herself in her husband’s absence. As we learn near the end of the play, the malfunctioning of Hermione’s marriage is a result of an incident in the past, that took place even before Hermione’s wedding to Neoptolemus, but which nevertheless had rendered Hermione’s rite of passage imperfect – namely, Hermione’s original *engue*, in which she had been promised to Orestes had been carelessly broken off by her father, and Hermione given away to Neoptolemus instead. This violation of the wedding ritual now manifests itself in the freezing of time for Hermione, whose father continues to be her functional *kurios*, and who is unable to produce children. In addition to relying on anthropological evidence on Athenian marriage and *epikleroi* collected in Chapter One, the comparative literary models I use in this section are Penelope, Andromache, Danae
and Antigone. I find these mythological women offer meaningful parallels for analyzing Hermione’s relationship with her natal household, and, more specifically, with her father. Penelope and Andromache represent the ideal of devotion to their husbands, while Danae and Antigone seem to symbolize a certain anxiety about a woman’s potential conflict of interest between the needs of her natal and marital households.

Chapter Four is devoted to the analysis of Euripides’ Electra. Electra, originally prevented from marrying altogether in spite of being of the right age, is eventually, as an alternative to being killed by her father-in-law, married off to a poor man, who out of respect does not consummate the marriage. I make use of Clay’s analysis of Hesiod’s cosmology, in which she establishes a link between genealogy and time, in order to explore the ways in which Electra’s unproductive marriage is symbolic of her being trapped in time. While she is at the age where she should be preoccupied with matters of her marital family, Electra is inseparable from the past of her natal family, whose events are still causing her to be almost completely defined by, on the one hand, the love for her long-gone father and for her brother and, on the other hand, hatred for her mother. In terms of the dysfunction of space, Electra brings attention to the fact that she has been excluded from the palace, and yet it is also clear that she does not belong in the house of the farmer to whom she is married. Rather than striving to create her own family, it is the inclusion back into her natal house that Electra seems to be desiring. It is from these circumstances that Electra’s character and motivations for her actions emerge. Instead of bearing and rearing children, Electra pretends to have given birth in order to avenge the past of her father. She takes an active role in killing Clytaemnestra, notably, unlike even

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Orestes, expressing no hesitation (at least not until it is too late). Once Clytaemnestra has been killed, Electra completely dismisses the fact that technically she is already married and speaks about her future marriage prospects as if never having been wedded (ca.1998-1200). As in the previous chapters, in Chapter Four I conduct a close analysis of the text and rely on the anthropological evidence on Greek marriage, especially that reflecting contemporary expectations regarding *kureia*. In addition, occasional comparisons are made with literary models, in particular with Euripides’ *Bacchae* and myths involving child exposure. Finally, the connection between married women and their households discussed in previous chapters also informs this chapter’s analysis of Electra’s circumstances.
Chapter One: Athenian Marriage

The Athenian Wedding

Greatly oversimplified, Athenian marriage of the fifth century can be understood as a process consisting of three main parts. Each part has a Greek name only approximately translated into English: engue (“betrothal), ekdosis (“giving away”) and gamos (the process of “marriage” proper). In order for a marriage to be considered legitimate, all three of these acts need to happen in proper order and must be accompanied by a number of specific rituals.\(^\text{15}\) Although the division is not clear cut, the three main marriage components can be seen as corresponding to the basic stages of a rite of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation. Before the engue, the bride lives in her natal household, under the guardianship of her male relative. Although she will stay there after the engue until the ekdosis, the engue can be seen as a turning point after which the bride’s transition to the married state begins. The culmination of this transition comes about in the ekdosis, during which the bride is both physically and symbolically transferred from her natal to her marital household in a procession called exagoge (“leading out”). The ekdosis ends with incorporation rites on the bride’s arrival to her husband’s oikos and the following consummation of marriage. Even at this stage, however, a woman’s transition to the state which symbolizes the purpose of Athenian marriage is not complete. It is by giving birth to legitimate children that a woman is able to leave behind her status as a nympha (bride) and become a gynē (“woman,” “wife”).\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{15}\) We know this partly because of the attempts to throw into doubt a marriage’s legitimacy by a claim that an engue did not take place, or a dowry was not given, or there were no witnesses to the ekdosis. See note 17 below.

\(^{16}\) Reeder 1995, 22.
Although, it seems, an *engue* does not guarantee that the arranged marriage will take place, the legitimacy of a union that was not sanctioned by an *engue* prior to its consummation could be challenged. Social historians cite fourth century court speeches that speak of the marriage’s legitimacy thrown into doubt by insufficient evidence for an *engue*. In the fifth century, tragic wives refer to their *engue* and dowry to distinguish themselves as the legitimate wives of the house. In Euripides’ *Andromache*, the Nurse addresses Hermione: “not as a spear-won bride […] but as a daughter of a noble man he [Neoptolemus] took you with much dowry” (ἐν γὰρ τὸ τί σ’ αἰχμάλωτον […] ἄνδρὸς ἐσθλοῦ παῖδα σὺν πολλοῖς λαβὼν ἐδόνοισι, 871-2, cf. 152-153, 966-967). Helen in Euripides’ *Helen*, attempting to persuade Menelaus that she is indeed his true wife, exclaims that her marriage was arranged between her father and her husband and was therefore proper: “[I] whom Tyndareus, my father, gave to you,” (ἥν σοι δίδωσι Τυνδάρεως, ἐμὸς πατήρ, 568; cf. 639-641; 722-725). During *engue*, arrangements, most importantly with regards to the dowry of the bride, are made between the legal guardian of the bride (*kurios*) and the groom or the groom’s guardian (in case the groom is under the legal age of 18). The much cited passage from Menander’s comedy describes the formula of an *engue* as the father’s “handing over” of his daughter to her husband-to-be for “ploughing” and producing legitimate children (fr.727). The aspect of “lending” inherent in the very word *enguo* (“give over as a pledge”) hints at the possibility that the

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17 At Dem. 40.24-25, the speaker points out that his own mother was “given away” (ἐκδοθείσα, 40.25) in marriage to her first husband, and only after appropriate arrangements have been made with regards to her dowry, i.e. in an *engue*: “why would he marry her without dowry?” (ἀντροικὸν αὐτὴν γῆμαι, 40.25); cf. Isaios 3.39; Just 1989, 47; Lacey 1968, 105; Oakley & Sinos 1993, 10, 132n8.
18 Rehm 1994, 11.
19 γνήσιων παῖδων ἐπ’ ἀρότωι (“for the ploughing of legitimate children”).
father does not completely give up his authority over a daughter, at least not until the
daughter has borne children.\textsuperscript{20} In this way, Brulé argues, the women of fifth century
Athens are not much different from the epic heroines, who are still referred to by their
patronymics after having been married, widowed, and taken into captivity.\textsuperscript{21} As many
scholars point out, a dowry given with a regular daughter in marriage is meant to be
managed by her husband for her own maintenance until it can be inherited by her
legitimate children, or returned to the natal family in case of a divorce.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, similar to
the bride herself, a dowry is a kind of loan that the bride’s family gives to the new
husband for him to take care of for as long as the marriage exists. Therefore, a woman’s
dowry can function as protection from divorce and, importantly, can be seen as a
permanent link to the woman’s natal family.

\textit{Epikleroi}

As shall be discussed further in this study, there is often some anxiety expressed
in Greek literature over the potential for a conflict of interest between a woman’s natal
and marital families. This anxiety can be even greater if a woman happens to be an
\textit{epikleros}.\textsuperscript{23} An \textit{epikleros} is a daughter who has no brothers and thus, in order to
preserve the wealth within the family, her father’s estate is attached to her body and
goes with her in marriage to be managed by the woman’s new \textit{kurios} until her male
children inherit it.\textsuperscript{24} In Athens at least, in order to make sure that the wealth stays within

\textsuperscript{20} Brulé 2003, 122. Even after having children a woman still retains potential for mobility, as in the case
of Pericles’ wife, whom he “passed on” to another husband after having children with her; although this
example demonstrates that after a woman has borne children, it can be up to her husband rather than her
father to remarry her.
\textsuperscript{21} Brulé 2003, 122.
\textsuperscript{22} Lacey 1968, 108; Rabinowitz 1993, 5-6.
\textsuperscript{23} For discussion of family conflicts concerning \textit{epikleroi} in courts: Lacey 1968, 141-145.
\textsuperscript{24} Fantham et al. 1994, 80; Rabinowitz 1993, 5-6.
the family, such a daughter is often married to her closest relative on her father’s side. If an epikleros is originally married outside the family to a man who has not been adopted by her father, then at the father’s death she could be divorced from her current husband by her next of kin and remarried – together with her father’s property, of course – according to his decision, whether to himself or to any other blood relative. Because of the great importance of an epikleros’ marriage for her natal family, there are various laws in Athens governing such marriages, and, in fact, those seem to be the only active rules with regards to marriage. According to Plutarch’s Solon, an epikleros’ husband was supposed to have intercourse with her at least three times a month (Life of Solon 20.2-3). Otherwise, an epikleros could leave her husband and marry her next-of-kin instead (Life of Solon 20.2-3). It is thus clear that an epikleros even more than a regular woman, in Rabinowitz’s words, “bore responsibility to two lines, her husband’s and her father’s,” and if these responsibilities come into conflict, it is always the woman’s natal family that is the priority.

Ekdosis

Once a betrothed girl is ready to produce children, the wedding celebration (ekdosis) can take place. It starts with a number of rituals meant to signify the transition into a married state for both the groom and the bride. For the brides especially, the transition to a married state is inseparable from the coming of age, and multiple inscriptions testify to the girls dedicating their childhood attributes, such as toys, to Artemis: “a girl to a girl, as is fit” (Anth. Pal. 6.280), or locks of hair, while the boys

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25 Sealey 1990, 29-30; Rabinowitz 1993, 6; Just 1989, 95-97; also Isaios 3.64, 10.12.
26 Rabinowitz 1993, 6; Lacey 1968, 141-145.
dedicate their hair locks in a coming of age ritual outside of the marriage context.  

Nevertheless, both the bride and the groom perform rituals marking their transition into a married state, such as nuptial bathing. As van Gennep has pointed out, in many cultures across the world ritual bathing is a marker of separation rites. In the case of a Greek wedding, it signifies, in temporal terms, the betrotheds’ leaving behind their unmarried state, virginity for the bride, and entering the state of fertility; while also, in spatial terms, for the bride it means leaving behind her parental home. One of the main events of the ekdosis is exagoge (“leading out”) - the physical transportation of the bride to the house of her new husband, sometimes in a chariot or a cart, followed by a torch-lit procession of friends and relatives.

**Liminality**

The state of the spouses during the exagoge - after the separation rites which mark them as not unmarried anymore but before the consummation of marriage – can be seen as a liminal stage. For the bride especially, this is a dangerous state, for she is not only making a temporal, but also a spatial transition. Not belonging in her parental household anymore, she is not yet incorporated into the house of her husband. According to Turner’s definition, “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. […] as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia.”

Mary Douglas has argued that a liminal entity is often regarded as “polluting” and

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27 Oakley and Sinos 1993, 14.
28 Van Gennep 1960, 130.
29 Although in some cases for the groom too, as sometimes, it seems, a new house could be established at marriage, as opposed to a more traditional moving of the new couple into the house of the groom’s parents (Pomeroy 1997, 28).
30 Fantham et al. 1994, 98.
31 Turner 1969, 95.
“dangerous,” as well as “in danger.” Indeed Ann Carson connects the association of women with pollution in the Greek imagination with the fact that in the world of patrilocal marriage, a woman is a “mobile unit.”

**Incorporation rites**

In order to eliminate, or at least reduce, the danger of pollution, proper rites of incorporation must be performed. One ritual common as part of incorporation rites across cultures is a shared meal. In Greece, as far as we know, the bride was given a meal on arrival at her husband’s house. The exact connotations of this ritual are a matter of debate for scholars, ranging from it being a symbol of the bride’s dependence upon her husband to the food itself being an aphrodisiac. The ritual probably serves a range of functions, all marking different and irreversible changes in the state of the bride making the transition into the new household and the new state of being a wife – financial, social, physiological, psychological and symbolic. Incorporation of a historical Greek wife into the household of her new husband is somewhat necessitated on a practical level. In Greek culture, the wife is associated with the inside of the house, where she, ideally, must stay and be preoccupied with household work. At the same time, modern historians generally believe the marriage age for girls, at least among the elite to whom the literary ideal applies most, to have been around 14-15 years old.

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32 Douglas 1996, 95-96: “Danger lies in transitional states simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to the other is himself in danger and emanates danger to others. The danger is controlled by ritual which precisely separates him from his old status, segregates for a time and then publicly declares his entry to his new status.”


34 Van Gennep 1960, 11.


37 Antonaccio 2000, 521-522.

38 Pomeroy 1997, 5.
such circumstances, Xenophon in the fourth century makes his speaker, Ischomachus, observe about his wife (Oik. 7.5):

Καὶ τί ἄν […] ἐπισταμένην αὐτὴν παρέλαβον, ἢ ἔτη μὲν οὔπω πεντεκαίδεκα γεγονυῖα ἦλθε πρὸς ἐμέ, τὸν δ’ ἐμπροσθέν χρόνον ἔζη ὑπὸ πολλῆς ἐπιμελείας, ὡς ἐλάχιστα μὲν ὄψοιτο, ἐλάχιστα δὲ ἀκούσοιτο, ἐλάχιστα δ’ ἐροίη;

“What could she have known […] when I took her [as my wife]? She was not yet fifteen years old when she came to me, and before that time she had lived under much supervision, so that she would see as little as possible, hear as little as possible, and say as little as possible.”

This passage illustrates a social reality – namely, that a young woman just married is yet unable to be the kind of wife she is expected to be in Greek ideology, i.e. the wife who takes care of everything inside the house and increases the household by working on the resources brought in from the outside, (Xenophon’s knowledge in melittology notwithstanding) “like a queen bee” (ἡγεμών μέλιτα, Oik. 7.17). This ideal of a wife is not, of course, unique to Xenophon, but is expressed as early as the seventh century in Semonides’ famous Types of Women (esp. 83-87). Xenophon’s account is especially valuable, however, because it specifies what exactly the woman is supposed to do in her position as a wife of the household. Along with being responsible for the “rearing of children” (παιδοτροφία, 7.21), the wife is supposed to be able “when given wool, to present a cloak” (ἔρια παραλαβοῦσα ιμάτιον ἀποδεῖξαι, Oik. 7.6). These things need to be done “under a cover” or “inside” (στεγνῶν, Oik. 7.21), as does the production of bread (Oik. 7.21). These duties illustrate well that an ideal Greek marriage is, in Xenophon’s own words, “a partnership” (τὴν κοινωνίαν, Oik. 7.18), where the husband

39 Although it seems unlikely that the majority of women would be unable to spin prior to getting married, as Ischomachus claims his wife to have been (Oik. 7.6)
works “in the open” (ἐν τῷ ὑπαίθρῳ, Oik. 7.20), and the wife is the one “keeping these things and working those works which must be done inside” (τοῦ σώσοντος ταῦτα καὶ τοῦ ἐργασομένου δ’ ἀ τῶν στεγνῶν ἐργα δεόμενα ἐστι, Oik. 7.21), turning the resources brought from the outside into the wealth of the household.
Chapter Two: Sophocles’ Deianeira

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the dynamics of Deianeira’s marriage affect her choices in Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*, in particular her decision to attempt to reanimate Heracles’ affection by using a cloak rubbed with the blood of the centaur Nessus, as well as the consequences of Deianeira’s actions.\(^\text{40}\) I analyze the connection between Sophocles’ portrayal of the distortion of some ritual aspects of Deianeira’s wedding rite and the subsequent dysfunction of her marriage, which can be characterized as a ritual impasse, especially with respect to Deianeira’s relation to time and physical space in the play. As shall be discussed below, throughout the play Deianeira is unable to leave her past behind but is made by the playwright to relive the experience of a bride over and over again. At the same time, her relationship with the physical space of the household emphasizes that Deianeira’s incorporation into Heracles’ *oikos* as his wife is problematically incomplete.

Before we proceed further, it is worth briefly recapitulating those events of the *Trachiniae* which will be especially significant for this study. The dramatic action of the play happens at the time when Deianeira and Heracles have already been married long enough for their son, Hyllus, to be approaching maturity. Deianeira opens the play with a monologue in which she describes the time of her wooing by a river god Achelous and then by Heracles. Throughout the play, Deianeira is returning to the time of her youth, and one of these times she describes her encounter with the centaur Nessus. The meeting

\(^{40}\) For a general discussion of the play see Easterling 1968, Zeitlin 1996; for a discussion of marriage in the play see Ormand 1999, Wohl 1998. Deianeira’s unintentional murder of her husband has produced heated discussion with regards to her guilt and moral characteristics; for a recent overview of sources on that topic and an argument in favour of Deianeira’s guilt see Carawan 2000.
takes place during Deianeira’s journey from her father’s home to that of Heracles, which I believe should be seen symbolically as her *exagoge*. It is during this process that Nessus, when carrying Deianeira across a river, first attempts to rape her and then, having been shot by Heracles, presents her with a “gift” of his blood, telling her it is a love potion. The dramatic action of the play is set at the time when Heracles tries to establish the concubine Iole in his household, seemingly as his second “wife.” In an attempt to regain his love, Deianeira sends Heracles a gift – a tunic rubbed with the centaur’s blood. Instead of being a love-potion, the gift melts Heracles’ flesh and consequently brings about Deianeira’s suicide.

In her article on the “divided worlds” of the *Trachiniae*, Margaret Kitzinger interprets Kirk Ormand’s opinion about the incompleteness of Deianeira’s incorporation into the household of her husband as an argument for Deianeira being “a character who is unable to make the natural transition from girlhood to adulthood.”[^41] Kitzinger juxtaposes this reading of the text with her own, which presents a portrait of Deianeira as a strong character who “articulates an understanding born out of female experience but applicable more generally to all humans,” such as a universal human desire for permanence and stability and an understanding of the vulnerability of these values in the face of action and change.[^42] These two views, however, are not mutually exclusive. It is indeed possible to argue, as Kitzinger does, that Deianeira’s “nostalgia for the young girl’s life typifies a natural and universal human desire for permanence in defiance of death.”[^43] This, however, does not mean that Deianeira’s transition from *nymphe* to *gyne*

[^42]: Kitzinger 2012, 115.
[^43]: Kitzinger 2012, 115.
has been flawless. As far as I understand, Kitzinger sees her own view of Deianeira’s character as in conflict with Ormand’s interpretation because of the desire to see a coherent psychological profile behind a character’s words and actions. If such an approach is taken, Deianeira’s “mature” humanistic values and concerns would suggest that she cannot at the same time be an “immature” character, who has not transitioned into womanhood. Yet Ormand’s observation about the incompleteness of Deianeira’s transition into the married state does not need to have any implications for her “maturity” or “personality.” As was implied in the Introduction to this study, I believe that we can ask what a character’s words and actions tell us about the thematic concerns raised in the play without looking for specific personality traits that would explain why this character says or does those things. In this reading, rather than having any implications for Deianeira’s personality, Ormand’s argument that Deianeira’s transition into wifehood is represented as hindered identifies the ideological problem of female mobility and the danger of transition and liminality as some of the thematic concerns of the Trachiniae.

Deianeira’s character can hardly be understood without considering the interruption of her wedding ritual, which occupies a central position in the play. Following Ormand’s interpretation of Deianeira’s journey to Heracles’ home as a symbolic representation of her interrupted wedding rite,44 I believe that the play further highlights the incompleteness of Deianeira’s transition into wifehood by portraying the problematic nature of her relationship with time and the physical space of Heracles’ oikos. In particular, although much has already been said about the distortion of the

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44 Ormand 1999.
natural flow of time in the play,\(^{45}\) I believe Deianeira’s relationship with the physical space around her needs to be explored further. I argue that the incompleteness of Deianeira’s incorporation into her husband’s oikos is manifested not only in Deianeira’s entrapment in time’s cyclic recurrences, but also in the distortion of her connection with the inside of the home. More specifically, Deianeira does not possess the full mastery of the inside of the house and its resources, which would have been expected of her in accordance with the ancient Greek ideals of womanhood.\(^{46}\) Although Deianeira does her best in perfecting her wifely position (she bears children, looks after the house in Heracles’ absence and has evidently spent much time working in the house), because of the dynamics of her marriage, she is unable to become a Penelope-like wife. In turn, as shall be demonstrated, it is precisely this lack of control over the inside of the house that leads Deianeira to the unintentional murder of her husband.

**Wedding Ritual in the *Trachiniae***

The importance of the wedding ritual and its interruption in the *Trachiniae* is evident in the play’s recurring return to the theme of the wedding. The beginning of the play introduces the theme with a description of Deianeira’s own pre-nuptial fears, her wedding, and then marriage to Heracles (6-48). The main action of the play is built around a disruption of marriage, which happens when Heracles sends home another woman to share his bed. In the end of the play, a promise of new marriage is one of the

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\(^{45}\) Segal 1977, esp. 106-107, argues for Deianeira’s subjection to the recurring cycles of time; Segal 1995, 29-31, analyzes the effects of “ancient” and “uncivilized” forces, represented by the centaur, the river-god, and partly in Heracles’ conduct on the flow of time in Heracles’ oikos; Kitzinger 2012 115, argues that Deianeira’s character represents the universal human desire for stability in the face of change, embodied in Heracles’ conduct.  

\(^{46}\) The ideological association of Greek women with the inside and its relation to reality has been explored in modern scholarship, e.g. Nevett 2011, Davidson 2011. Also see Chapter One above, as well as below in this chapter.
main themes (1219-1256), but this time it has little to do with Deianeira, who, having committed suicide in her marital bed, is absent from the last third of the play.

In the very opening of the play, Deianeira defines herself and her life exclusively in relation to her wedding and marriage. She denies the gnomic statement that one cannot understand a person’s life before that person is dead, because she believes her own life to be proving this statement wrong – she claims to know that her life is unhappy before it ends (1-5):

"There is an ancient saying among men, that you could not know fully the life of mortal men before a man dies, whether it is good or evil. But I know fully, even before I go to Hades, that the life I have is unfortunate and grievous [...]"

The experiences that allow Deianeira to make this claim all come from her position as a bride and as a wife. When Deianeira was a maiden, she suffered a “most painful affliction because of a bridal matter” (νυμφείων ὀκνών ἄλγιστον, 7-8), because a terrifying river was her “wooer” (μνηστήρ, 9). Deianeira mentions that her first suitor, Achelous, used to come to her father to ask for her hand in marriage (9-13), apparently without success: “I had a river as a wooer, who demanded me from my father” (μνηστήρ γὰρ ἦν μοι ποταμός, [...] δὲ μ᾽ [...] ἐξῆτει πατρός, 9-10). Then came another suitor, Heracles, and he won Deianeira in a contest, which should have been a thing decided “well” (καλῶς, 26). Now, however, Deianeira is not sure “if it was indeed [decided]
well” (εἰ δὴ καλῶς, 27), for in her marriage she always nourishes “one fear after another” (ἐκ φόβου φόβον, 28).

Around half way through the play, Sophocles returns to the day of Deianeira’s wedding. At 562-563, Deianeira states:

 […] τὸν πατρῷον ἡνίκα στόλον
ζύν Ἡρακλεῖ τὸ πρῶτον εὖνις ἑσπόμην

Interpretation of these lines is not straightforward and has caused scholars problems. The word εὖνις is usually rendered in translations of the play as “as a bride,” but it also means (according to Armstrong, always in literature preceding the *Trachiniae*) “bereft” or “deprived of.” Sophocles’ language might be deliberately ambiguous, hinting at the problematic nature of Deianeira’s position. On the one hand, the lines might mean something like “when I first followed a journey with Heracles as his bride at my father’s command.” On the other hand, as Armstrong suggests, the lines can be read as “when I first followed Heracles [on a journey] deprived of my father” (or “alone, at my father’s command”). Thus, at the very least the meaning of the lines is twofold. The word potentially hints at Deianeira’s loneliness. The theme of Deianeira’s isolation is also present in her description of herself as a “remote field” rarely visited by Heracles (ἄρουραν ἔκτοπον, 31-33), and, as shall be discussed below, in the imagery of her lonely death. Thus, the play seems to hint at the liminality of Deianeira’s position. Having been separated from her natal, and not fully included into her marital *oikos*, Deianeira is perpetually in a transitional state of a bride.

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Resonating with the meaning of εὖνις as “bereft” is the chorus’ comparison of Deianeira to a calf at her wedding (529-530):

κἀπὸ ματρὸς ἀφαρ βέβακεν,
ὡστε πόρτις ἐρήμα.

“And she went straightaway away from her mother, like a desolate calf.”

This comparison of Deianeira to a desolate calf is potentially problematic. On the one hand, it represents somewhat common imagery and is apt because of the amount of loss involved in a Greek marriage for the bride. As has been mentioned above, unlike for a Greek husband, because of the virilocal and exogamous nature of an ideal Greek marriage, for the woman this transition involves a significant spatial component and inevitably causes the loss of what a woman is used to, her parental home and the close bond with members of her natal family.

This feeling of loss is explored already in Sappho’s poetry. In fragment 96, the poetic persona is consoling a young woman, Atthis, over her separation with another young woman, who seems to have left for Lydia in marriage (15-17):

πόλλα δὲ ζαφοίταισ᾿, ἀγάνας ἐπι
μνάσθεισ᾿ Ἄτθιδος ἰμέρῳ
λέπταν ποι φρένα κ[α]ί σατ] βόρηται

“Often as she is wondering, remembering gentle Atthis, because of desire her tender mind […] is depressed…”

In another fragment, a woman whose female companion is leaving, presumably also for marriage, is so wrought with grief that she states: “honestly, I wish I were dead” (τεθνάκην δ᾿ ἀδόλως θέλω, fr.94.1). In turn, the woman who is leaving “weeping much”
(ψισδομένα [...] πόλλα, fr.94.2-3) confesses: “I am leaving you against my will” (σ᾿ ἀέκοισ᾿ ἀπυλιμπάνω, fr.94.5). Although these fragments seem to be referring to the intimate relationships between women who are not necessarily related, they nevertheless offer a glimpse into how literature represents the experience of young brides and those close to them, when those brides have to leave their natal communities. Nevertheless, the comparison of Deianeira to a snatched animal can potentially bring to mind not only the feelings of loss understandably experienced by brides, but also more specific imagery of a young virgin about to be sacrificed.

Although in ancient Greece a transition into an even successful and happy marriage offers many symbolic parallels with a transition from life to death, the two rites are nevertheless fundamentally different. A marriage is a transition for the sake of producing and continuing life, whereas a death is the end of that life and the stopping of time. It is possible, of course, for a young bride to be compared to an animal even when she is not going to be sacrificed, for a young woman in Greek thought is sometimes presented as an animal in need of being yoked (in marriage). Yet the comparison of a bride to an animal brings to mind an association with those tragic young women who are about to be violently “married to death” rather than to a husband. Such a comparison is especially fitting where a bride is about to be sacrificed, because she is then fulfilling a role normally performed by a sacrificial animal. In Euripides’ Iphigenia at Aulis, Agamemnon describes his feelings, while pretending that he is about to give his daughter in marriage (688-690):

ἀποστολαὶ γὰρ μακάριαι μέν, ἀλλ᾿ ὅμως

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50 Rehm 1994, esp. 3-29, provides a detailed account of similarities between the two rites.
51 Seaford 1987, 111n58 cites the references found in Greek literature.
δάκνουσι τοὺς τεκόντας, ὅταν ἄλλοις δόμοις παῖδας παραδίδῳ πολλὰ μοχθήσας πατήρ.

“Sending-aways are blessed, but nevertheless they worry the parents, when to other homes a father having toiled so much is handing over his daughters.”

To Clytaemnestra the feelings Agamemnon describes seem fitting for the occasion of a daughter’s wedding. She answers her husband: “It seems to me I too will suffer these same things with respect to her […] when I will lead the maiden out with marriage hymns” (πείσεσθαι δὲ μὲ καυτὴν δόκει τάδ’ […] ὅταν σῖν ύμεναιοίσιν ἐξάγω κόρην, 691-693). Although Iphigenia here is not explicitly compared to an animal, the parallel is obvious because in the lines cited above, Agamemnon is not telling Clytaemnestra the truth. Iphigenia is about to be sacrificed rather than given away in marriage – she is about to replace an animal normally used for sacrifice. The parallel is reinforced when at the end of the play Iphigenia is miraculously replaced on the altar by a deer (1578-1614). In Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, the chorus relate the story of Iphigenia’s sacrifice and say that she was lying on the alter like a χίμαιρα (“a she-goat,” 232). Similarly, Polyxena, about to be sacrificed on Achilles’ tomb, is referred to as a calf snatched from her mother: Odysseus “will drag her away” (ἄφελξων, Eur. Hec. 142) from her mother’s “old hand” (γεραιᾶς χερὸς, Eur. Hec. 143). Then Polyxena addresses her mother: “me, like a mountain-bred calf […] snatched from your hand” (μ’ ὅστ’ οὐριθρέπταν μόσχον […] χειρὸς ἀναρπαστὰν, Eur. Hec. 205-209). Thus, a comparison of Deianeira to a calf when she is being led away from her parents is potentially evocative of very problematic

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52 In fact, Iphigenia is replaced by an animal at the end of the play (1578-1614), but there is a controversy regarding the authorship of this ending. In support of Euripidean authorship, see Weiss 2014.
imagery, calling to mind not only a common experience of loss acknowledged by various ancient authors, but also the stories of “sacrificial virgins.” Such a comparison hints at some distortion of Deianeira’s wedding ritual and foreshadows her unnatural death to which her marriage will lead her.

There is also another problematic aspect of Deianeira’s marital experience. She envisions the life of unmarried girls as happening in a place where there is “neither god’s heat, nor rain, nor do gusts of wind throw it in turmoil” (ὡθάλπος θεοῦ οὖδ’ ὁμβρος οὖδε πνευμάτων οὖδέν κλονεῖ, 145-146). As has already been mentioned, marriage for a Greek woman involves significant anxiety over separation and fear of the unknown. Yet ideally these are eventually dealt with, on a symbolic level, at least, with the help of incorporation rituals as part of a wedding.53 What is problematic about Deianeira’s marriage is that, as Seaford has pointed out, her bridal anxiety is carried into her wedded life and is never pacified.54 Indeed, throughout her marriage, Deianeira nourishes “one fear after another” (ἐκ φόβου φόβον, 28). At the time when the events of the play are taking place, Deianeira is at the point where she is “most terrified” (μάλιστα ταρβήσασ’, 37), because she is forced to live in exile, “beside a foreign man” (ζένω παρ’ ἀνδρὶ, 40), by the fault of her husband (37-42), and because “no one knows where he [Heracles] went” (κεῖνος δ’ ὅπου βέβηκεν οὐδεὶς οἶδε, 40-41).

This distortion of Deianeira’s married life is symbolized in the distortion and interruption of her wedding rituals. Heracles’ contest with the river Achelous can perhaps be seen as a kind of engue. Although Deianeira as the bride is not present at this event (21-27) in accordance with the custom, the theme of violence inherent in her

53 This anxiety is, although scarcely, attested in Greek literature. Seaford 1987, 106n3 cites the references.
54 Seaford 1987, 119.
wooing by both Heracles and Achelous will give its colour to the rest of her life. The chorus describe the struggle thus: “there was then the clatter of hands, and of bows, and of bull’s horn all confused” (τότ’ ἦν χερός, ἦν δὲ τόξων πάταγος, ταυρείων τ’ ἀνάμιγδα κεράτων, 518-519). When it comes to the actual ekdosis, the distortion of another ritual signals the problematic nature of the future marriage. As Armstrong points out, in calling herself εὖνις, Deianeira emphasizes her loneliness on the way to her new husband’s house, a journey that is supposed to be accompanied by a procession of friends and relatives, not to mention that the husband should be near the bride.55 Deianeira identifies the crossing of the river in particular with ekdosis, when she notes that in her journey to Heracles’ house, she was carried across the river by Nessus “not with processional oars” (οὔτε πομπίμοις κώπαις, 560-561) and “not with sails of a ship” (οὔτε λαίφεσιν νεώς, 561).56 A good comparison here is offered by Sappho’s description of Andromache’s journey to Hector’s home at their wedding, as they are crossing the sea (fr.44.5-10):


“Hector and his companions are leading quick-eyed, graceful Andromache from holy Thebe and ever-flowing Placia in their ships over the briny sea. And many

56 Armstrong 1986, 102.
golden bracelets, and perfumed purple robes, painted adornments, countless silver drinking cups and ivory.”

Similarly to Deianeira, the transition Andromache makes in her wedding is symbolized by the water she is crossing, led by her new husband. As mentioned above, bathing is part of the marriage-related rituals symbolizing the transition in many cultures, including that of ancient Athens. In its literary representation, both in Sappho and in Sophocles, crossing of the water becomes the transition itself. One bank of the river can be seen as a woman’s past life as a maiden, while the opposite bank as her married life. In between, then, is the liminal space. Both in life and in its literary representations, the danger of this space can be symbolically overcome with incorporation rituals. Yet the liminal stage itself is full of its own rituals, violation of which threatens to keep the participant from the upcoming incorporation. There are at least two major differences between Deianeira’s liminal stage, represented in the journey, and that of Andromache. Andromache’s journey involves many witnesses, as is appropriate for a Greek wedding. Namely, there are Hector’s companions on the ship, and once the couple arrives at Troy, there is mention of a “crowd of unmarried women” (ὅχλος γυναίκων τ’ ἄμα παρθενίκαι, 15), of “Priam’s daughters” (Περάμοιο θύγατρες, 16), of “men yoking horses” (ἴπποις ἄνδρες ὔπαγον, 17), of a “sweet sounding pipe” (αὖλος δ’ ἀδυμέλης, 24) and of “maidens singing the sacred song” (πάρθενοι ἄειδον μέλος ἄγνον, 25-26). In other words, there is a description of a wedding procession, accompanied by many witnesses and religious songs appropriate for the occasion – something that seems to be missing from Deianeira’s marital journey completely.
Emphasized in Sappho’s description of Andromache’s wedding is also the number and the richness of gifts, which Andromache is presumably carrying with her from her parental home. Near the beginning of the play Deianeira states that Heracles has determined for her what she is to take with her as her dowry in case of Heracles’ failure to return home (161-163): “as if he was no more, he told me what was necessary to take as possession of my marriage” (ὡς ἔτ’ οὐκ ὦν εἶπε μὲν λέγεις ὅ τι χρείη μ᾽ ἐλέσθαι κτῆσιν). This might imply that Deianeira brought something with her to Heracles’ home. Yet there is no indication of any goods that Deianeira is bringing with her from her father’s house when she is first led away by Heracles. The only thing we are explicitly told she is bringing to Heracles’ house in the end is a “gift” that Nessus gives her.

If the crossing of the river represents Deianeira’s wedding procession, the only kind she gets, her acceptance of the centaur’s gift should also acquire additional subtexts. It has been argued in the past that in Deianeira’s position “merely accepting a gift from Nessus is a violation of the norm, that a woman should not accept gifts from a man who is neither kin nor spouse.” This is, of course, true, and Deianeira’s acceptance of the gift is in no way unproblematic. Yet I believe that it cannot be characterized as decidedly wrong either. As far as we can tell from the surviving Greek vases, friends and relatives attending the wedding ceremony would present the bride with gifts meant specifically to enhance her sexuality and make her more attractive to the husband. The centaur becomes the only “guest” at Deianeira’s ekdosis, and the means by which he persuades Deianeira to take the “gift” is precisely by saying that it is

57 Lyons 2003, 121.
58 Oakley and Sinos 1993, 18-20.
designed to make her more attractive to Heracles in case his passion should cool off (575-577):

ἔσται φρενός σοι τοῦτο κηλητήριον
tῆς <Ηρακλείας, ὥστε μήτιν’ εἰσιδὼν
στέρξει γυναῖκα κεῖνος ἀντί σοῦ πλέον.

“For you, this will be a charm for the mind of Heracles, so that he will not, looking at another woman, love her more than you.”

The problem, of course, is that Nessus only pretends his “gift” can help Deianeira regain her husband, when in reality it will become the cause of Heracles’ death. Deianeira’s acceptance of the centaur’s gift can be seen as another inverted aspect of the wedding ritual, which further emphasizes the dysfunction of the subsequent marriage.

In addition, before gifting Deianeira with the potion, Nessus attempts to rape her. Deianeira tells the chorus: “when I was in the middle of the stream, he touched me with his lustful hands” (ἡνίκ’ ἦ ᾿ν μέσῳ πόρῳ, ψαύει ματαίαις χερσίν, 564-565). Echoing the violent nature of Heracles’ contest with Achelous for Deianeira’s hand, this intrusion symbolically violates the sanctity of Deianeira’s ekdosis. It signals the impediment of the proper completion of the marital rite of passage and symbolizes Deianeira’s future inability to be fully integrated into the household of her new husband. Finally, it is worth considering the role that Heracles has to play in this. Given that it is up to the husband to deliver his new bride home, it is by Heracles that Deianeira has been placed in such circumstances where she can be exposed to Nessus’ attack. Heracles’ inability to fulfil his duty as a husband in this episode is a theme found throughout the play and is an important factor in the development of this tragedy.
The Homeric Hymn to Demeter

The distorted aspects of Deianeira’s wedding ritual can perhaps be better understood if we consider representations of marriage rites in other literature. The Homeric Hymn to Demeter offers a helpful parallel, for it first presents the deviation of some ritual aspects and the resulting inability of the marriage to function properly, and then uses proper ritual to restore the marriage. Persephone’s marriage to Hades does not function as such until Persephone has tasted food in the Underworld, in spite of the fulfilment of some other rituals that we know of as part of a Classical Athenian wedding.59 In the beginning of the Hymn, we learn of an enque in which Zeus has arranged to give away his daughter, Persephone, to his brother, Hades (1-4).60 Neither the bride nor her mother, Demeter, are aware of the plan, and Persephone is first lured by a narcissus, which Earth has grown “as a snare” (δόλον, 8), and then she is seized and carried away “unwilling” (ἀέκουσαν, 19) by Hades. At least in an Athenian marriage, as far as we know, the consent of the bride or her mother is not needed.61 The Archaic hymn too, as Ferrari points out, “insists” on emphasizing Zeus’ role in giving away Persephone, and therefore the legitimacy of the union. Although Hades snatches his bride off, he is originally given the permission to do so by Zeus, and it is Zeus who asks Earth to present a narcissus as a lure for Persephone.62 In spite of the proper arrangements made by Zeus and Hades, however, the hymn presents the male violence and the female resistance as preventing the marriage from functioning as a legitimate

59 I follow Ferrari (2004, 257) in assuming there is a significant continuity between the Archaic and the Classical ritual.
60 Notably, however, even at this point the fact that Zeus has promised his daughter νόσφιν δήμητρος (“secretly from Demeter,” 4) is emphasized, hinting that in this story the mother’s (and the daughter’s) consent is important for the completion of the ritual.
61 Rehm 1994, 11.
one, and this malfunction is first signalled in the distortion of some of the marriage-related rituals. As in an idealized Athenian marriage, Persephone as a bride is taken by her husband to his house “in a golden cart” (χρυσέοιςιν ὄχοιςιν, 19). And yet, this *ekdosis* is not entirely proper, because it happens secretly and with no witnesses: “not one of the immortals or of humankind heard her [Persephone’s] voice,” except for Hekate and Helios, who, although they hear the cries, are not present (22-27). In addition, the couple’s escape is not lit by torches, but instead, in her sorrowful search for her lost daughter, Demeter alone wanders the earth “carrying blazing torches in her hands” (αἰθομένας δαΐδας μετά χερσίν ἔχουσα, 48).

This distortion of the proper ritual signals the subsequent malfunctioning of the marriage. When we find Persephone in the Underworld for the first time after she has been taken, she is “strongly reluctant” (πόλλ᾽ ἀεκαζομένῃ, 343) to consummate her marriage “because of longing for her mother” (μητρὸς πόθῳ, 344). Symbolic of Persephone’s refusal to become integrated into her husband’s “household” is her unwillingness to eat. As Foley puts it, at this point Persephone “has not fully engaged in the final stage necessary to legitimize the Athenian marriage at least, cohabitation (synoikein).” Restoration, or proper establishment, of the marriage occurs when Zeus and Hades offer (are forced to offer) proper honours to Demeter and Persephone respectively (360-369). However (un)important as such honours might be in a wedding

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63 The need for publicity of a legitimate Archaic wedding can be confirmed by a few references to it in epic. Thus, at Achilles’ death, Briseis in the *Iliad* laments her lost hope of becoming Achilles’ “lawful, wedded wife” (as opposed to being his concubine) in a marriage feast celebrated in Phthia “among the Myrmidons” (19.297). See Patterson 1998, 59.
64 Although the main connotation for the torches in the *Hymn* is perhaps that of their importance in the Mysteries, especially, it seems, for the purification ceremony. See Richardson 1974, 167n48.
of mortals, in the hymn they are clearly necessary for the proper functioning of the
divine marriage. What is important is that, just as the malfunctioning of the marriage
was symbolized in the distortion of the wedding rituals, so a ritual – Persephone’s eating
of the pomegranate seed (although she is forced to do so, 406-413) – signals its
restoration now. As Lincoln points out, having eaten the pomegranate seed in the
Underworld, Persephone becomes a different person, she “has crossed a barrier from
which there can be no turning back, and nothing Demeter can do will ever make her the
same again.” This is why upon Persephone’s return, Demeter lets her know: “if you
have tasted food, you must go back again [to Hades]” (εἰ δ’ ἐπάσω, πάλιν αὐτὶς ιὸδσ’,
398). This ritual symbolizes Persephone’s incorporation into the “household” of her
husband, and truly becoming a wife. On the contrary, if Persephone has not yet tasted
food in Hades, her transition to Hades is not complete. Demeter tells her daughter that if
she has “not yet tasted food in the underworld” (μή ῥά […] πάσσαο νέρθεν […] βρώμης,
393), she will come back to live with her parents: “you will live with me and your
father, dark-clouded son of Cronos” (παρ᾽ ἐμοὶ καὶ πατρὶ κελ[αινεφέϊ Κρονίωνι]
ναετάοίς, 396-397).

Although it must be kept in mind that the marriage described in the hymn is
divine and therefore many aspects of it are different from a mortal marriage, as Foley
has shown, the myth of Persephone’s marriage to Hades is in many ways “a paradigm in

68 See n35 above for references to scholarly discussions of a bride’s partaking in food as part of
incorporation rites upon her arrival to the groom’s house at the end of the ekdosis. For a fuller discussion
of Persephone’s incorporation rites and its problematic nature see Ferrari 2004, 257 (Some of problems
Ferrari cites, however, I think, are largely due to the divine nature of the marriage, as well as to the
hymn’s main function being to present an explanation for the origin of the Mysteries).
69 Lincoln 1981, 85.
Greek art and literature for human marriage as a rite of initiation.” In this paradigm, until Persephone has eaten in the underworld, i.e. until incorporation rituals for the bride have been performed, she does not belong in her husband’s household.

**Tragic wives**

In the previous chapter I discussed the Greek expectations regarding historical (albeit idealized) wives’ responsibilities for spending most of the time in the house and taking care of the resources stored inside. Living in accordance with these expectations inevitably leads an ideal Greek wife to have a good knowledge of the house and an intimate connection with it. This connection is much explored in Greek literature starting in the earliest surviving written works, and is a popular theme in tragedy. This popularity, perhaps, suggests a certain anxiety in Greek culture as to the power with which such a connection to the house can potentially endow women. In fact, perhaps the three most famous accounts of female *metis* used to manipulate men in Greek literature, that of Penelope, Clytaemnestra, and Medea, all connect a woman’s cunning to her intimate knowledge of or connection with the house. At the same time, Greek literature in general seems interested in the power and cunning of mortal women only in so far as it has some consequences for their husbands. The connection of women with their houses gives them the power that is specifically relevant to their husbands, either to their benefit or ruin.

As early as Hesiod’s epics that record the creation myths, an ideological connection between women and trickery, and a certain anxiety in the face of this

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70 Foley 1994, 104, describes the ways in which Persephone’s wedding is more akin that of the mortals than of the other gods (for instance, in being virilocal and, in a way, exogamous).

71 Zeitlin 1996, 347, discusses the functional purpose of women in tragedy as a means for exploring “the masculine self.”
perceived connection, is evident in Greek literature. A primordial deity, Metis, a female personification of Guile itself, is perceived as a threat to Zeus, for “it was destined that from her very thoughtful children would be born” (ἐκ γὰρ τῆς εἵμαρτο περίφρονα τέκνα γενέσθαι, *Theog.* 894). Metis is accordingly swallowed by Zeus to prevent the birth of Athena from her directly, as well as a subsequent birth of a son - “lest any other of the eternal gods would have the royal honour of Zeus” (ινα μὴ βασιληίδα τιμήν ἄλλος ἔχοι Διὸς ἀντὶ θεῶν αἰειγενετάων, *Theog.* 891-892). Zeus then becomes the only god who succeeds in incorporating the female principle within himself, thus securing the eternal position of the father of the gods for himself. But the connection of *metis* and the female does not stop there. The daughter of Metis, born of Zeus, inherits her mother’s guile and becomes, in her own words, “famous among all the gods for *metis* and craft” (ἐν πᾶσι θεοῖσι μήτι τε κλέομαι καὶ κέρδεσιν, *Od.* 13.299). Although Athena is an androgynous goddess, she becomes a patron of weaving, thus within herself connecting this ideological hallmark of female and domestic labour with *metis*, initially a female principle. In addition, as scholars often note, the connection of *metis* and weaving is visible in the Greek language itself, where the word *huphainein* ("to weave") is used for both textiles and speech or poetry, and also comes to mean the weaving of plans or plots. Weaving of plots implies deceit, but in order to tell a lie or to conceal the truth one must first know the truth, and it is significant that this power of knowledge is

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72 Detienne and Vernant 1978, 65, Clay 2003, esp.23, Stocking 2017, esp. 62-63 analyzes Cronos’ and Zeus consumption of their children in the *Theogony* “not just as a means of retaining power but more specifically as a reverse-birth, that is, consumption as a male strategy in response to the threat of female reproduction,” and adds that “where Cronus consumed the Olympian children, Zeus exercises a much greater control over reproduction by consuming the very source of the threat of reproduction, the mother herself.”

73 Bergren 1983, esp. 73.
associated with the female and, through weaving, with the female labour inside the household.\(^74\)

In fifth century tragedy, the female power to manipulate and deceive, which comes with a monopolized knowledge of truth, is often presented as inseparable from the privileged access of these women to the resources of the house, which are used as instruments in fulfilling their cunning plots. Clytaemnestra, Medea, and Deianeira all use textiles in their plots to manipulate their husbands, and the representation of textiles as a symbol of artful femininity has been much explored in modern scholarship.\(^75\)

There is, however, a significant difference between the use of the household resources by Clytaemnestra and Medea as opposed to that of Deianeira. Both Clytaemnestra and Medea are akin to Hesiod’s Muses, who “know how to say many false things that [seem] equal to true sayings” (ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὀμοῖα, Theog. 27), and they are the only ones who can know whether they are saying the truth or falsehoods at any particular moment. Clytaemnestra’s monologues in the \textit{Agamemnon} are an epitome of such knowledge and speech. When the news of Agamemnon’s return is confirmed, the words Clytaemnestra speaks could easily belong to a truly faithful wife, albeit her very zeal might lend a hint of suspicion: she speaks of her eagerness to properly meet her “revered husband” (αἰδοῖον πόσιν, 600), and claims that there is no joy sweeter for a woman than to “open the gates for her husband, when a god has saved him” (ἀνδρὶ σώσαντος θεοῦ πύλας ἀνοῖξαι, 602 -604). Later, upon meeting Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra claims that her “eyes are damaged from late-night

\(^74\) On the Muses’ power to speak of either true or false things to their liking, Bergren 1983, 69-70.
vigils” (ἐν ὀψικοίτοις δ᾿ ὀμμασίν βλάβας ἔχω, 889), but now that her husband is home, her mind is “grief free” (ἀπενθήτῳ φρενὶ, 895). Not only are these claims perfectly fitting for a truly faithful wife, but some of them can ironically also be true for Clytaemnestra. After all, she has indeed been anxious to “properly” meet her husband just the way he deserves, and must be genuinely happy that with Agamemnon’s return she can welcome him into the house – in order to bring down her revenge on him. Similarly, Medea pretends to have agreed to and be supportive of Jason’s plans to marry Creon’s daughter (866-906), and makes Jason believe that she is concerned for the future of their children (908-940). Then, she offers “bridal gifts” (φερνὰς, 956) for the royal “bride” (νύμφῃ, 957). Her words apparently make good sense to Jason, who, although not keen, does not stop Medea from proceeding according to her plan. Yet Medea alone knows the true meaning of what she is saying. The things she sends are bridal gifts indeed, only they will turn the young princess into the bride of Hades, not of Jason. The gifts Medea is sending are “a finely woven peplos and a diadem of gold” (λεπτὸν τε πέπλον καὶ πλόκον χρυσήλατον, 949), while Clytaemnestra also makes use of textiles when she manipulates Agamemnon into treading upon the purple tapestry (906-949) and kills him, having ensnared him into “a boundless net” (ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον, 1126-1128).

It is perhaps not surprising that the production of textiles should be associated with a certain power, for it embodies the process by which the woman transforms the resources of raw nature, provided by the man, into items of domestic use, comfort and prestige. Because of this ability of the woman, within the house the husband and the wife are interdependent. Textiles, however, are only one of the products of female
domestic labour, and, although of undeniable importance in their connection to the weaving of plots, they can be seen as a symbol representative of the literary wives’ intimate relation with the inside of the house and its resources in general. Bakola points out Clytaemnestra’s association with the Erinys and the presentation of both as “embedded in the oikos, guarding its interior and ready to act as its avengers.”\(^76\) In the words of the chorus of the Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra is a “dreadful, inveterate, treacherous manager of the house, mindful of the child-avenging wrath” (φοβερὰ παλίνορτος οἰκονόμος δολία μνάμων μήνις τεκνόποινος, 154-155). Clytaemnestra is also referred to as the “divine spirit, who falls upon the house” (δαῖμον, ὃς ἐμπίτνεις δόμασι, 1468) and she herself evidently sees the inside of the house as her stronghold. She repeatedly contrasts the inside with the outside (as do other characters in the play), and insists on bringing both Agamemnon and Cassandra within (905-974; 1035; 1055-1056). Not only has she been “a watchdog of the house” (δωμάτων κύνα, 607) and its “guardian” (φύλαξ, 914) in Agamemnon’s absence, but the house too, in a way, is her guardian, for this is where she takes her power from. The textiles with which she destroys Agamemnon are the product of the inside of the home.\(^77\) Agamemnon explicitly identifies the tapestry that Clytaemnestra offers for him to tread upon with the house itself – he understands marking, and therefore defiling, the tapestry by walking on it as “ruining the house” (δωματοφθορεῖν, 948). Clytaemnestra herself seems to identify the resources of the household with her own resourcefulness, when she says that Agamemnon need not worry, since the house “has plenty” (ἄλις ἔχειν, 961) of “the stain of purple” (πορφύρας, 959), and “does not know how to be poor” (πένεσθαι δ’ οὐκ

\(^{76}\) Bakola 2016, 130-131.

\(^{77}\) Bakola 2016, explores the connection between textiles of the Oresteia and the wealth of the house.
ἐπίσταται, 962). What exactly Clytaemnestra implies when she is talking about the riches of the house, however, at this point is known only to her.

Medea’s connection to her house is somewhat less straightforward, but I think also present and important. Even though Medea is a foreigner in Greece, it is evident that she has been well established in her house up until Jason’s decision to remarry, and has built an intimate connection with the household. She has had “not a blameworthy life” (οὐ μεμπτὸν βίον, Med. 12), and has been loved by the citizens of Corinth (13-14), while the Nurse’s statement that Jason is only now “abandoning his children” (προδοὺς γὰρ αὑτοῦ τέκνα, 17) and Medea (17), implies that before he lent them his support, just as Medea lent him hers. Medea’s connection to her house is crucial for the fulfilment of her crime. The robe Medea sends as a gift to Creon’s daughter is not made by Medea, but comes to her from Helios (952-956). Yet by the very nature of this gift Medea connects herself with the feminine and the inside of the home, associated with textile production.78 The means by which Medea chooses to proceed with the murder – i.e. poison or magic, is chosen by her because, as Rabinowitz points out, she feels a special affinity for the use of drugs as a universally female attribute, since, she says, women are “by nature most wise” (πεφύκαμεν σοφοὶ μάλιστα, 384-385) in these things.79 Medea herself associates her “natural” female knowledge of drugs with her connection to the house. Once committed to proceeding by poison, Medea invokes Hecate, her “mistress” (δέσποιναν, 395), whom she worships “most of all the others” (μᾶλιστα πάντων, 396), and who dwells “in the very inside of the home” (μυχοῖς ἑστίας, 397). The poison with

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78 Rabinowitz 1993, discusses the “troublesome duality” of Medea and her gifts, which combines her “immortal origins as well as her existence as an ordinary woman,” p.143.
79 Rabinowitz 1993, 143.
which Medea smears her “gifts” comes from deep within the house, an area of which Medea has extensive knowledge and control, and from where, like Clytaemnestra, she takes her strength. Medea and Clytaemnestra play on the expectations surrounding the lives of ancient Greek women, and pretend to conform to them in order to manipulate those around them. On the other hand, they have genuinely perfected some of the skills that are, in Greek ideology, traditional female attributes, such as their close connection with the house and its resources, including textiles, or their use of guile to disguise their true motives. It is precisely their perfected use of these traditionally female attributes that allows Clytaemnestra and Medea to achieve their goals.

The Epic Ideal

Tragic distortion of femininity is often expressed in contrast to the epic ideal, especially that of Penelope. Penelope’s example demonstrates that use of guile and artful use of the household resources does not in itself lead to the overstepping of the boundaries of the feminine, although it might at times come dangerously close to doing so. In her guarding of the house in Odysseus’ absence, Penelope demonstrates all the qualities that mark the ideal Greek woman, including her use of guile, textiles, and her intimate knowledge of the house. For three years Penelope famously keeps the suitors at bay by weaving a cloth in the daytime and unraveling it at night (Od. 2.94-110), using textiles as an instrument to bring to life her deceptive plan. Penelope also demonstrates intimate knowledge of “the most remote” (ἔσχατον, 21.9) storeroom of her house, when she decides to try the wooers in a bow contest. The Odyssey describes in detail Penelope’s relations with the resources of the house (21.1-15; 21.42-60). The old threshold made of oak creates an impression of the heavy doors, and yet at Penelope’s
touch they “flew [open] for her” (πετάσθησαν δὲ οἱ ὁκα, 21.50), “overpowered by the key” (πληγέντα κληΐ, 21.50). Penelope has an intimate connection with the treasures hidden in this storeroom, where she spends some time weeping alone with the bow (21.55-60), of whose true qualities only she and her family members are aware.

Penelope is the one in control of the house in Odysseus’ absence, and it is in the knowledge of the hidden parts of the house, i.e., the knowledge of the secret of their marriage bed (23.177-180), that she tests Odysseus before handing over to him the control of the household. Penelope also uses her sexuality (as well as her status as the wife of the ruler of Ithaca) to excite the suitors’ hopes of marrying her, thus distracting them from quarrelling and also extracting bridal gifts from them to renew the wealth of Odysseus’ estate in the limited ways available to her.  

As Foley has argued in her analysis of the reverse sex similes in the Odyssey, in her skillful control over the house Penelope comes close to overstepping the boundary of the ideal of Archaic Greek femininity. Yet she must do so in order to guard Odysseus’ household and her own fidelity, and it is precisely through the skillful use of her feminine realm that Penelope is able to succeed.

**Deianeira and the inside of the home**

Penelope’s, Clytaemnestra’s and Medea’s skillful use of the resources of their houses allows them to successfully bring to fulfilment their goals. Although Clytaemnestra and Medea both transgress the ideal of femininity in acting against their husbands, it is precisely because of their positions as wives in their houses that they are

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80 Foley 1978, 9.
81 Foley 1978, 8. Similarly, Katz 1991 demonstrates that in the Odyssey, Odysseus’ absence and Penelope’s cunning and femininity keep the threat of Penelope’s remarrying ever-present.
able to make a sufficient (to their goals) use of its resources. On the contrary, Deianeira’s inability to achieve what she is striving for stems from her unfamiliarity with the resources of her household which is the result of the dynamics of her marriage to Heracles.

Marriage is a kind of transition that requires at least two people for its accomplishment. Already in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus expresses a sentiment that an ideal marriage is a partnership of two like-minded people (6.195-199). Similarly, according to Xenophon, the very purpose of marriage, aside from the production of legitimate heirs, is “to have the best possible partner in the household” (*Oik.* 7.11). It is also clear that, although an Athenian man of the fifth century could have had a range of extra-marital relations, such as with slaves or prostitutes, marriage is defined as the living together of a single husband and a single wife.82 In the fifth century, the very presence of the “love-triangle” plots involving concubines in tragedy (Cassandra, Andromache, Iole) with all their disastrous outcomes suggests that an exemplary husband respects his wife and does not bring concubines home. After all, the epic ideal of a husband, Odysseus, leaves his many female admirers behind and comes home alone.

Heracles of the *Trachiniae*, however, is presented as preoccupied with the far-away world of monsters and conquests, having no interest in the partnership of marriage, nor does he respect the position of his wife enough to leave his extra-marital

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82 Patterson 1991, 57, also Patterson 2012, 384. In the fourth century, Athenian orators present some evidence that having a wife and a concubine live under the same roof is considered immoral and/or can lead to a divorce (Demosth. 59.22; Plut. *Alcib.* 8.3). Plato’s suggestion in the *Laws* even goes as far as to suggest that “if a husband has intercourse with another woman or a wife with another man” the penalty should follow (784), and that the spouses are supposed to live “firmly faithful to the promises they made when they first fell in love” (840e)
affairs outside the household. It is his actions that have displaced his family in the first place. Deianeira states in the prologue (38-40):

εξ οὗ γὰρ ἔκτα κεῖνος Ἰφίτου βίαν,
ημεῖς μὲν ἐν Τραχῖνι τῇδ᾽ ἀνάστατοι
ξένῳ παρ᾽ ἀνδρὶ ναίομεν […]

“Ever since he [Heracles] slayed the strength of Iphitus, we are living in Trachis, uprooted, beside a foreign man.”

Thus, from the very beginning the play establishes that Heracles’ family, and more explicitly Deianeira, does not belong in its physical surroundings. Deianeira’s displacement and isolation is further emphasized when she says that she has lived in fear for Heracles, who “like a farmer who has taken over a remote piece of ploughland” (γῆτς ὅπως ἄρουραν ἔκτοπον λαβών, 32) only comes home to “sow” his children (σπείρων, 33). While the association of a woman and a ploughland is a common one and is engraved in the ideology of Athenian marriage, the problem is that Deianeira is a remote ploughland, rarely visited by the farmer.83 Finally, Deianeira’s liminality suggested by the emphasis on her “not-belonging” in the house of Heracles is manifested in her lonely death.84 While even Heracles calls on his immediate family at his death (ἵθ’, ὦ τέκνον [...] κάλει τὸ πᾶν μοι σπέρμα σῶν ὁμαιμόνων, “go, my son, summon for me the whole offspring of your siblings,” 1146-1150),85 on her deathbed

83 Patterson 2012, 389, finds Deianeira’s use of agricultural imagery to describe herself after so many years of life with Heracles as suggestive of the fact that “Deianeira never seems to have become a full partner with Heracles in the sunoikein of marriage – the setting up and running of a common household.”
84 On Deianeira’s isolation in her death see Rowland 2017, 19, Kamerbeek 1970, 196
85 Kyriakou 2011, 382n25.
Deianeira mentions none of either her marital or natal family.\textsuperscript{86} Significantly, having been criticized for her actions by her son, Haimon, Deianeira even describes her remaining life shortly before suicide as that of a childless woman (“and the remainder of me, being childless” καὶ τὰς ἄπαιδας ἐς τὸ λοιπὸν οὐσίας, 911).\textsuperscript{87}

The play’s emphasis on Deianeira’s isolation in her marital oikos highlights the problematic nature of her attempts to become in control of the inside of the house and its resources. Upon arriving to the house of her new husband, Deianeira intuitively tries to hide what she thinks is the source of her power, the only dowry that she seems to have brought with her – the centaur’s gift – deep inside the house: “inside the house […] I carefully locked it up” (δόμοις […] ἔγκεκλημένον καλῶς, 578-579). Deianeira’s emphasis on the inside in contrast to the chorus’ focus on the outside has been pointed out in modern scholarship.\textsuperscript{88} Just before Deianeira realizes that the gift of the centaur has destructive power, the chorus have sung of distant places (634-662). Deianeira, on the contrary, speaks of dark, “innermost” (μυχοῖς, 686) parts of the house, of a hidden “drug” (φάρμακον, 685), never touched by the light of the sun (ἄπυρον ἀκτῖνός, 685-686); she speaks of acting “secretly in a room inside the house” (οἶκον ἐν δόμοις κρυφῇ, 689), of a piece of wool that comes, explicitly, “from a sheep belonging to the household” (κτησίου βοτοῦ, 690). I do not think, as Rowland does, that Deianeira mentions the origin of the wool from the household “rather irrelevantly,” or that “the parameters of her imagination have shrunk to [the most confined of places].”\textsuperscript{89} On the

\textsuperscript{86} Kamerbeek 1970, 196. (Parallels are often drawn with the death of Alcestis, who, however, calls upon her family members, servants, and even holds hands with them, Alc. 193-195).
\textsuperscript{87} Ormand 1999, 54-55, provides a brief overview of the scholars’ attempts to understand these words. I believe that, having been accused by Hyllus, who essentially initially chooses Heracles’ perspective over that of his mother, Deianeira is, indeed, left completely alone and in this way childless in her death.
\textsuperscript{88} Rowland 2017, 15.
\textsuperscript{89} Rowland 2017, 15.
contrary, as Penelope’s example demonstrates, it is to be expected that Deianeira should focus on the innermost part of her house and to dwell on the origin of the wool from her household.

The distortion is not in Deianeira’s emphasis on the inside, but rather in that, unlike Penelope, she believes herself to have control and knowledge about the innermost area of her household while in fact having none. Deianeira emphasizes that she has made use of the resources of the household, because this is precisely what should have been the source of her power, including the power to preserve the integrity of her home. Deianeira’s desire for a connection with the inside of the home is further highlighted near the end of Deianeira’s life. The Nurse describes Deianeira as deliberately avoiding all people, and instead biding an affectionate goodbye to the house itself (903-906):

κρύψασ᾽ ἑαυτὴν ἐνθα μὴ τις εἰσίδοι,
βρυχᾶτο μὲν βωμοῖσι προσπίπτουσ᾽ ὅτι
gένοιτ᾽ ἔρημοι, ’κλαε δ᾽ ὀργάνων ὄτου
ψαύσειν οἷς ἔχρητο δειλαία πάρος…

“Having hidden there, lest anyone should see her, falling upon the altars she cried out that they would become desolate, and wept whenever she touched any of the things she used to use before, wretched woman…”

Deianeira has been taking care of the altars, working inside the house, producing textiles. She has taken care of the house in Heracles’ absence (540-542), and she has borne him children (31-33). Yet, in spite of her attempts, Deianeira is unable to become fully integrated into Heracles’ household, which in its very essence is “uprooted” (ἀνάστατοι, 39). This lack of intimacy with the innermost parts of her house is
responsible for Deianeira’s inability to achieve what she is striving for in her manipulation of the men around her. She is able to manipulate Lychas into transporting what appears to be a welcoming gift to Heracles (600-632), and Heracles into following the somewhat suspicious instructions for putting the robe on (604-609; 758-771). And yet, unlike in the story of Penelope, Clytaemnestra, or Medea, who all have a special bond with and mastery over the inside of their homes, the consequences of Deianeira’s manipulations turn out to be outside of her control and not at all what she has been hoping for.

**Deianeira and time**

The impediment of Deianeira’s transition into wifehood is also manifested in the distortion of the normal progression of time in the *Trachiniae* and specifically for Deianeira’s experience. Although Sophocles makes his Deianeira an aged woman with an almost adult son, Deianeira has not left the traumatic experiences of her wedding day behind, but instead she keeps coming back to them. This suggests that the liminal state of being, which characterizes the bride during her transfer to the husband’s *oikos*, with its uncertainty and dangers, is not a thing of the past but looms large over Deianeira’s present. In addition, as we shall see, Deianeira draws on the experiences of her wedding day in order to make judgments about the present and to act accordingly. I have argued above that Penelope, Clytaemnestra, and Medea all have a privileged access to the truth. On the contrary, as with her problematic relationship with the physical space and objects around her, Deianeira does not possess full knowledge about the true nature of the events of her past. Thus, when Deianeira bases her decision to act on her past experiences, she is unable to control the outcome.
Throughout the play, the power of time is emphasized. It has been pointed out that Achelous and the centaur are “primitive” and associated with the ancient.\textsuperscript{90} Deianeira indeed speaks of Nessus as “an ancient beast” (ἀρχαίου θηρός, 555), and the poison that she receives from him is “an old gift” (παλαιόν δῶρον, 555), which in itself is a product of Heracles’ earlier slaying of the Lernian hydra (569-567). It is this ancient gift, which is in Deianeira’s possession as the result of an encounter in the past, that now destroys her house and helps fulfill an old and violent prophecy in the present. The passing of time makes Deianeira insecure about her position, when she sees Iole’s beauty “creeping in” (ἕρπουσαν, 547), while her own is “fading” (φθίνουσαν, 548). The approaching of the time set by Heracles for the end of his labours makes Deianeira fear a lamentable outcome (176-177). In the Parodos, even the passing of time itself is seen as destructive: the Night, as she is giving birth to Helios, is “slain and despoiled” (ἐναριζομένα,” 94).\textsuperscript{91}

As mentioned, Deianeira introduces herself to the audience through the description of her pre-marital fears about her marriage and of her wedding day. She states that in the house of her father she “had the most painful fear of marriage, if any Aetolian woman [had it]” (νυμφείων ὄκνον ἄλγιστον ἔσχον, εἴ τις Αἰτωλὶς γυνή, 7-8). She goes on to say that her first suitor was a terrifying river-god, Achelous, who appeared “in three shapes” (ἐν τρισὶν μορφαῖσιν, 10), and then she describes the contest for her hand in marriage between Achelous and Heracles – a horrible sight that Deianeira herself, “struck with terror” (ἐκπεπληγμένη φόβῳ, 24), could not watch. The

\textsuperscript{90} Segal 1995, 29-30.
\textsuperscript{91} Some scholars argue there is a significant difference in Heracles’ and Deianeira’s relationships with time. Segal 1995 30-39 believes Heracles has more control over the forces of time than Deianeira has; also Kitzinger 2012, 114-117.
fear that Deianeira describes with reference to these events is not simply a feature of her long-gone past. Instead, past and present are inextricably linked as the outcome of the battle between Heracles and Achelous becomes the direct cause of Deianeira’s present fear – being married to Heracles, Deianeira is “perpetually nourishing one fear after another” (ἀεί τιν’ ἐκ φόβου φόβον τρέφω, 28). It is significant that Deianeira should place an explicit emphasis on not witnessing the events with her own eyes. Although, as mentioned above, it is likely that a historical Athenian bride would not have been present at the arrangements for their marriage, in Deianeira’s case her absence also highlights the fact that she does not have access to the full story. This sets a pattern of Deianeira’s relations with the events of the past which will be especially significant for her interpretation of the centaur’s actions. In contrast, later in the play the chorus come back to the battle of Heracles and Achelous and fill in the details (507-530), suggesting that they know more about the events of Deianeira’s wedding day than she herself does.

The ode, which in its narrative goes back to Deianeira’s wedding, is peculiarly located after the arrival of the concubine Iole to the house of Heracles. As Kraus observes, thematically such a positioning of the ode “both brings Deianeira’s marriage to a close and assimilates her to Iole (and vice-versa), both victims of a bestial love.” Indeed, elsewhere in the play, the parallels between the experiences of Iole and of Deianeira emphasize the latter’s entrapment in time’s recurrences, since, being confronted with a young concubine, Deianeira has to be reminded of the negative aspects of her own bridal days. The description of the abduction of Iole by Heracles

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92 Kraus 1991, 86-87, observes that the ode “concentrates on the preliminaries to Deianeira’s marriage rather than on Iole, an unexpected topic matched by the anomalous participation in story-telling.”
(472-489) is reminiscent of the violence of the bridal contest for Deianeira’s hand. Whereas Iole’s homeland is “levelled down by [Heracles’] spear” (καθῃρέθη […] δόρει, 478), the fight for Deianeira is characterized by “deadly clashes of foreheads and groaning on both sides” (μετώπων ὀλόεντα πλήγματα καὶ στόνος ἀμφοῖν, 521-522). Although the two situations are admittedly different, the experience of the bride in each is similar, and the chorus’ description of Deianeira during the contest can be easily applied to Iole as well: “the face of the bride contested for, piteous, awaits” (τὸ δ᾽ ἀμφινείκητον ὄμμα νύμφας ἐλεινὸν ἀμμένει, 257-258). As Kitzinger observes, Sophocles uses the same word κριτός (“chosen”) to describe both Deianeira and Iole (line 27, cf. 245 for Iole). Deianeira herself draws parallels between herself and the captured women, especially Iole. Like Deianeira, the captives are made to live in a “foreign land” (ξένης χώρας 299-300; cf. Deianeira lives “beside a foreign man,” ξένῳ παρ’ ἀνδρὶ, 40). Referring to Iole, Deianeira states: “I pity her most of all of these women” (νιν τῶνδε πλεῖστον ᾤκτισα, 312); and later explains that she does so because Iole’s “beauty has destroyed her life” (τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς τὸν βίον διώλεσεν, 465; cf. Deianeira fearing during the fight between Heracles and Achelous that her “beauty should procure pain” for her, τὸ κάλλος ἄλγος ἐξεύροι, 25). The choral ode describing the contest between Heracles and Achelous is also placed significantly just before Deianeira decides on how to act in reaction to Heracles’ introduction of Iole into the household. Immediately after the ode, Deianeira addresses the chorus, saying she wants to tell them about what she has “devised with [her own] hands” (χερσὶν ἁτεχνησάμην, 534), effectively, while they were singing. She then

94 Rowland 2017, 2.
95 For more parallels between Deianeira and Iole, see Segal 1995, 37.
returns to her wedding day, this time describing her journey to Heracles’ home and her
encounter with the centaur on the way. It is during this episode that the centaur gave her
a “gift” of his blood. Deianeira quotes the centaur’s words (569-576):

[...] παῖ γέροντος Οἰνέως,
τοσόνδ᾽ ὀνήσει τῶν ἐμῶν, ἐὰν πίθῃ,
πορθμῶν, ὅθούνεχ᾽ ύστατήν σ᾽ ἐπεμψ᾽ ἐγώ.
ἐὰν γὰρ ἁμφίθρεπτον ἁίμα τῶν ἐμῶν
σφαγὸν ἐνέγκῃ χερσίν, ἣ μελαγχόλους
ἐβαψεν οίους θρέμμα Λερναίας ὕδρας,
ἐσται φρενός σοι τοῦτο κηλητήριον
τῆς Ἡρακλείας, ὡστε μήτιν᾽ εἰσιδὼν
στέρξει γυναῖκα κεῖνος ἀντὶ σοῦ πλέον.

“Child of aged Oineus, this profit you will have from my ferryings, if you obey,
since I’ve carried you as my last passenger. For if with your hands you gather the
clotted blood from my wounds, where he dipped an arrow in black gall, the
creation of the hydra of Lerna, there will be for you a charm for the heart of
Heracles, so that he will never, looking at a woman, love her more than you.”

Within the centaur’s speech time has a special meaning. First of all, the mixture of the
centaur’s blood and the hydra’s poison is a direct result of Heracles’ past labours. In
addition, as Kraus points out, the centaur draws attention to the fact that Deianeira is his
“last passenger,” in order to make his presentation of the gift to her seem more
trustworthy.96 Deianeira too quotes the centaur’s words directly in order to demonstrate
to the chorus (and to the spectators) that she has done exactly as his instructions went.
Deianeira chooses to use the “gift,” as Kraus observes, “making a decision about the

96 Kraus 1991, 88.
Deianeira believes she knows the centaur’s motivations and the true nature of his gesture, and it is on the basis of this knowledge that she makes a decision to use his blood in order to regain Heracles’ love.

Deianeira’s interpretation is, however, misguided. Nessus’ blood mixed with the Hydra’s poison is hardly a recipe for a happy outcome and instead it ends up bringing about “the prophecy foretold long ago” (τᾶς παλαιφάτου προνοίας, 823), as well as an end to Heracles’ life that “was foreshown by [his] father long ago” (πρόφαντον ἐκ πατρὸς πάλαι, 1159). Significantly, the chorus remark that Deianeira “had no apprehension of these things, the wretched woman” (ὧν ἅδ᾿ ἁ τλάμων ἄοκνος, 841), when she was first acting. As Kraus points out, in the play the present needs to be constantly reinterpreted because of new information about the past. Having just sent the robe anointed with the centaur’s blood to Heracles, Deianeira watches the piece of wool she used to apply the poison, now warmed up in the Sun’s rays, as it “melts all into nothing and crumbles away” (ῥεῖ πᾶν ἄδηλον καὶ κατέψηκται χθονί, 698). As the bit of wool disappears, “clotted foam boils up” (ἀναζέουσι θρομβώδεις ἀφροί, 702) in its place. Notably, Deianeira comes to understand the true qualities of the liquid she has been keeping hidden for many years and has just used, as well as the true nature of the centaur’s intentions, soon after she has sent the tunic to Heracles but before we hear a report of what it has done to him. At the same time, or at least it seems so, as Lichas is on his way to hand over the tunic to Heracles, Deianeira realizes: “how could a poison of black blood not destroy him [Heracles] also?” (ἰὸς αἵματος μέλας πῶς οὐκ ὀλεῖ καὶ τόνδε;, 117-118). Although there is a possibility that Heracles has not yet put the tunic...
on, it is too late for Deianeira to prevent him from doing so. Deianeira’s helplessness in the face of the relentless progression of time, as well as the inevitable bearing that the misconstrued events of the past have on those of the present is brought out to the fore.

The epic ideal of Penelope offers a parallel in which the wife who has full control of the inside of her home, as argued above, uses that knowledge to control the progression of time (although, admittedly, in limited ways) for the advantage of the household. As Foley has shown, in the *Odyssey*, Penelope does her best to freeze or slow down time in Odysseus’ absence to preserve herself and Ithaca for her husband, by freezing her own sexuality, and essentially freezing time by secretly unravelling the robe that she weaves by day. 99 Although Penelope’s slowing down of time is necessary for the preservation of Odysseus’ household, it almost becomes a problem when Penelope is reluctant to accept the changes that have happened to Odysseus during his long absence (20.88-90):

\[τῇδὲ γὰρ ἀυτῷ νυκτὶ παρέδραθεν εἰκέλος αὐτῷ,\]
\[τοῖος ἐὼν ὅσον ἦν ἄμα στρατῷ· αὐτὰρ ἐμὸν κῆρ χαῖρ᾿ […]\]

“For this night again there lay by my side one like him, just such as he was when he went off with the army, and my heart rejoiced […]”

The threat of Penelope’s resistance to accepting the changed Odysseus is eliminated, however, when the poet’s description of Penelope as a shipwrecked sailor (ἀσπάσιος γῆ)

99 Foley 1978. Fowler 1999, 2, argues that, unlike in the *Odyssey*, where the threat to Penelope and her marriage comes from the husband’s absence and presumptive death, in the *Trachiniae*, the threat to Deianeira’s marriage comes “from the husband himself, after his return.” Although it seems to me that the difference between Heracles and Deianeira is not in that Heracles has more control over time, but in that Deianeira strives for stability, while Heracles brings instability and change into the lives of those around him.
νηχομένοις φανή [...] ὡς ἀρα τῇ ἀσπαστῶς ἔην πόσις εἰσοροώση, “as land seems welcome to the swimming [shipwrecked sailors] [...] just so was her husband welcome to her to look upon,” 23.233-240) symbolizes that she “takes the mature Odysseus’ experiences as her own,” thus accepting the change. As in the case of her intimate connection with the house, in her relationship with time too, Penelope presents an ideal example.

Penelope is successful in freezing time partly due to her skillful control of the household resources, namely, the textiles. In order to keep the suitors at bay and at the same time to prevent them from completely ravishing Odysseus’ household, Penelope promises that she will marry one of them once she has finished weaving a shroud for her father-in-law. Instead, Penelope keeps the suitors inertly waiting for three years (Od. 2.104-106):

ἔνθα καὶ ἠματίη μὲν ὑφαίνεσκεν μέγαν ἱστόν, 
νύκτας δ’ ἀλλύεσκεν, ἐπεὶ δαΐδας παραθεῖτο. 
ὡς τρίετες μὲν ἔληθε δόλῳ καὶ ἔπειθεν Ἀχαιοὺς

“And then by day she wove a great web, but at night she used to undo it, when she set up torches beside [herself]. Thus, for three years she escaped their notice and by guile persuaded the Achaeans…”

Time and physical space with its objects are linked inextricably as Penelope’s control over the progression of her weaving becomes a symbol of her (albeit limited) control over the progression of time.

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100 Foley 1978, 17.
In Deianeira’s case, her entrapment in uncontrollable consequences of the events of the past is connected to her inability to know the true nature of the physical objects (and by extension of the space in which they are kept) around her. Although Deianeira tries to use the experiences and objects of the past (the encounter with the centaur and the gift of his blood) to control events in the present and temporarily believes that she can successfully do so, the events of the past and their objects have their own meanings and powers, inaccessible to her until it is too late.

Deianeira’s marriage plays a key role in her relationship with time. Her inability to leave the day of her wedding behind is paralleled, if not caused by, Heracles’ unwillingness to stop conquering and wooing brides and make a transition to the social role of a husband. Being Heracles, Deianeira’s husband is unable to redirect his force into cultivation of a peaceful environment, settle down and turn to domestic life.

Even in her death, Deianeira is unable to escape from the day of her wedding, but instead she symbolically replicates it. Deianeira commits suicide on her bridal bed, and, in a highly eroticized manner, by a sword. The Nurse tells the chorus that she saw Deianeira “throw the spread coverings on Heracles’ bed” (δεμνίοις τοῖς Ἡρακλείοις στρωτὰ βάλλουσαν φάρη, 115-116). Then, the Nurse continues, Deianeira sat “in the middle of her bridal-chamber” (καθέζετ᾽ ἐν μέσοισιν εὐνατηρίοις, 918), and addressed explicitly her “bridal couch” (λέχη τε καὶ νυμφεῖ, 920). After that, Deianiera “loosened her robe with eager hand” (συντόνῳ χερὶ λύει τὸν αὑτῆς πέπλον, 923-924). Finally, “with a two-edged sword she struck her liver through her side” (ἀμφιπλῆγι φασγάνῳ πλευρὰν ὑφ᾽ ἡπαὶ καὶ φρένας πεπληγμένην, 9130-931). Deianeira’s loosening of her robe is not only eroticized, but is reminiscent more specifically of the bridal
anakalypteria – a gesture of unveiling often represented in Greek visual art. In addition, Deianeira’s choice of a sword as a means by which to commit suicide is also very significant since it is rather rare, with hanging being a much more common way for tragic women to commit suicide. It is true that, as Pozzi points out, dying by a sword is considered masculine in Greek thought, and it might be hinting at Deianeira’s transgression of femininity. Nevertheless, in this particular context it is also very feminine in that it is reminiscent of male penetration of the female body. In this way, even in her death Deianeira is made to relive her experiences of the wedding night. Thus, the play further emphasizes the liminality of Deianeira’s position between different stages of a Greek woman’s life, those of a nympha and of a gymnosophist.

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101 Reeder 1995, 155.
103 Pozzi 1994, 583;
Chapter Three: Euripides’ Hermione

As has been established in the previous chapters, Greek tragedy often portrays the violation of a ritual process in order to emphasize larger problems in the play. Interruption of a dramatic rite of passage manifests itself in the distortion of space and time in the play for the participant of the rite, and possibly for others around them. In this chapter, I explore the dysfunction of space and time for Hermione in Euripides’ Andromache, as a consequence of the violation of her rite of passage that is her marriage to Neoptolemus. As we learn near the end of the play, Hermione’s original engue, in which she had been promised to her cousin, Orestes (966-976), had been carelessly broken off by her father, Menelaus, and Hermione was given away to Neoptolemus instead.

Although Hermione is located within the physical space of her husband’s household, she has not fully completed the transition to her expected role there. Instead, Hermione retains too strong a connection to her natal family, and in particular, to her father, Menelaus. The area in which Menelaus’ power over his kin is in effect can be viewed symbolically as the space of his oikos. Instead of letting his daughter live under the authority of her new husband, in the sphere of influence of another man, Menelaus follows her. Significantly, throughout the whole play Neoptolemus himself is not present in his oikos and has no control over it. Menelaus attempts to fill in this power void, to move his own sphere of influence to include Neoptolemus’ household within it, and thus to retain Hermione within his power and within his own symbolic oikos. In addition, Hermione and Menelaus see the destruction of Andromache, Neoptolemus’ concubine and a mother of his child, as a way to fix Hermione’s marriage. Yet other characters in the play point out that if their plan were to succeed then Hermione would be doomed to spend
the rest of her life in her father’s *oikos*, unwanted in marriage by any other man. Thus, ironically, even in trying to establish Hermione as a proper wife in her husband’s household, the father and daughter are actually working towards restoring Hermione to her father’s *oikos.*

Time is also not working right for Hermione in the play. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, for Greek women, getting married is inseparable from coming of age. Although Hermione is married at the right time, her transition to womanhood is not complete. This is manifested most obviously in Hermione’s inability to bear a child to Neoptolemus. Significantly, in attempting to kill Andromache’s child, Hermione and Menelaus are effectively threatening to reverse the progress of time for the entire household of Neoptolemus. In addition, as shall be discussed below, the ineffectiveness of the means by which Hermione tries to gain her husband’s affection is linked to her youth. In this way Hermione is similar to Deianeira, who attempts but fails to control the dynamics within her family, and whose failure is paralleled symbolically by the disruption of her journey to her new home. Time and space become here mutually engaged in a process of distortion. Hermione’s entrapment in time in her role as a daughter, when she should be a wife and a mother, results in her inability to control the situation within her marital house in Neoptolemus’ absence. In the end, Hermione and Menelaus are unable to destroy Andromache with her son, and the consequences of these actions are outside of Hermione’s control.

The end of the play offers a hope for resolution to all its characters. Hermione undergoes a most uncertain and unstable period when she is suddenly abandoned by her father and is not yet aware of Orestes’ plans and whereabouts. Yet Menelaus’
abandonment of his daughter means that she can now be fully transferred into her husband’s oikos, thus completing her rite of passage into womanhood. This husband will not be Neoptolemus, however. With Neoptolemus having been killed off stage, Hermione is taken away from his house by Orestes, the man to whom she was originally betrothed in an engue. The prospect of their wedding at the end of the play, as well as the knowledge of the mythological account where Hermione gives birth to Orestes’ son, Tisamenus (Paus.2.18.6),\textsuperscript{104} leaves us with an anticipation that Hermione will be set in her proper place, and the natural flow of time will be restored for her. Nevertheless, this ending only offers a hope for closure rather than closure itself. Hermione’s insistence on being given to Orestes by her father, on the one hand, is appropriate, since Menelaus is now her only kurios. On the other hand, however, given the history of Menelaus’ difficulties with letting Hermione go, one is uneasy at the prospect of her having to become part of Menelaus’ oikos again.\textsuperscript{105}

**Previous scholarship**

In earlier scholarship on the *Andromache*, interpretations of Hermione are connected to the question of the meaning of the play as a whole. Much debate centers on the structure of the play, and the problem of the so-called “unity” of the plot.\textsuperscript{106} Because of the perceived importance of “unity” for a play, until recently the *Andromache* had

\textsuperscript{104} Although Pausanias does, of course, write about seven centuries later after the age of Athenian tragedy.

\textsuperscript{105} Scholars also see Hermione’s marriage to Orestes in a less positive light because of Orestes’ manipulation of Hermione. Orestes lets Hermione know that Neoptolemus has been killed only after Hermione has agreed to flee Neoptolemus’ house with him. See Conacher 1967, 169; Allan 2000, 73.

\textsuperscript{106} As Allan 2000, 40 points out: “Unfortunately, few critics ever endeavour to define what is meant by this catch-all term of praise, ‘unity’.” Grube 1961, 81, 198: “the dramatic unity of the play as a whole is not well maintained;” For defense and general discussion: Conacher 1967, 175; Mossman 1996; Allan 2000, 44-52. Papadimitropoulos 2006, 147-148 observes that the search for “unity” often comes down to identifying a single main character or theme. Kitto 1961, 230-236, argues that the play’s anti-Spartan mood is its main theme. Storey 1989, Kyriakou 1997, Papadimitropoulos 2006 argue for the familial relations of the characters to be main theme.
been largely dismissed in the modern age as a “not very good drama.” Some of those who defend the “unity” of the play see Hermione as the unifying main character and her passage from jealousy to despair as the tragedy’s main concern. Others believe the play is concerned with the separation of good and evil, and, as representative of the evil, Hermione appropriately ends up being married to evil Orestes. Others see the Spartan characters in general as evil and therefore believe the main meaning of the play to be an anti-Spartan message. There seems to have been very little said about Hermione that does not concern her guilt or innocence or the extent to which her character is central for the play and its “unity.” Even in Allan’s 2000 book that is completely devoted to the Andromache, the character of Hermione seems to be analyzed only in relation to a few specific details of the play, rather than as a whole. In this study, I am not concerned with whether Euripides’ Hermione is guilty or innocent or whether she is evil or her actions can be justified. Instead, I am attempting to analyze in what ways the character of Hermione and her circumstances are defined by the ritual poetics of marriage explored in the play. Although I am not concerned with the question of Hermione’s centrality to the plot, I believe that an analysis of Hermione’s circumstances throughout the whole play reveals more about the way Euripides uses ritual to construct meaning in the Andromache.

108 Norwood 1906, lx-lxii; Garzya 1951, 127-128 (after Allan 2000, 46); For defence of Hermione’s character see Burnett 1971, 137-138. The play is also criticized for lack of a “hero” (Grube 1961) while other scholars choose to argue for one character being the main: Mossmann 1996, Allan 2000, 46, argue for Neoptolemus as the main character; Erbse 1996, 276-279, Golder 1983, 123-133, argue for Andromache.
109 Conacher 1967, 179: “When he [Orestes] gets Hermione, we are able to feel that like has successfully called to like, and both have got what they deserve.” Webster 1967, 120 does not believe that Hermione “deserves” to be saved.
References to Hermione in earlier Greek literature and Euripides’ Choices

Myths do not constitute fixed, unchanging scripts. Instead they offer story patterns for authors to use and adapt in order to create particular meanings in any given creation of their own. Every choice that a playwright makes when choosing between different versions known to him and his audience or creating variations of his own constructs meaning. Thus, it is important to reconstruct, as much as possible, what, to Euripides and his contemporary audience, would have been familiar variations of the myths surrounding Hermione.

Among the earliest references to Hermione in the surviving literature we find an anticipation of her upcoming wedding with Neoptolemus in the *Odyssey*. When visiting Sparta, Telemachus finds Menelaus giving a wedding feast for Hermione (4.5-7):

\[ \tau \eta \tau \nu \ \mu \varepsilon \nu \ \Lambda \chi \iota \lambda \lambda \hat{o} \varsigma \ \rho \eta \zeta \iota \nu \kappa \rho \omicron \sigma \nu \varsigma \ \omicron \ \pi \varepsilon \mu \mu \nu \nu \, \kappa \alpha \nu \iota \rho \eta \tau \omicron \iota \varsigma \nu \omicron \nabla \ \pi \tau \omicron \iota \varsigma \nu \omicron \iota \varsigma \iota \varsigma \ \iota \nu \iota \omicron \nu \omicron \, \delta \omicron \omega \sigma \acute{e}\mu \acute{e} \nu \varsigma \iota, \ \tau \omicron \iota \omicron \varsigma \nu \ \delta \varepsilon \ \theta \eta \zeta \omicron \ \gamma \acute{a} \mu \omicron \nu \ \acute{e} \zeta \epsilon \tau \acute{e} \acute{e} \lambda \acute{e} \omicron \iota. \]

“The [Hermione] he sent to the son of Achilles, breaker of armed ranks: for in Troy he first promised and pledged that he would give her, and now the gods were bringing their marriage to pass.”

As Gantz points out, in this passage the upcoming wedding of Hermione with Neoptolemus is “part of a definite context, a portrait of the domestic felicity not yet vouchsafed to Odysseus and Penelope.” Gantz concludes, therefore, that Homer “can scarcely here mean us to think of any subsequent assault on the marriage bond by Orestes (who in the *Odyssey* is very much the defender of the home) and perhaps does
not know this story.” Similarly, according to the sixth century BCE poet Pherecydes (3F64a), Neoptolemus marries Hermione, and Orestes is likewise not mentioned. Even in Pindar’s fifth century accounts concerning Neoptolemus’ death there is no mention of Orestes, and Neoptolemus’ death is the result exclusively of the hero’s interactions with the god Apollo (*Nemean* 7.40-43; *Paian* 6.117-120).

It is only with the fifth century tragedians that we get the first reference to Hermione’s marriage to Orestes. The story of Hermione’s unions with Neoptolemus and with Orestes was treated by Sophocles. A basic plot description of the now lost Sophocles’ *Hermione* survives in Eustathius’ *scholia* to the *Odyssey* (*Od*. 4.5-7).

According to the *scholia*, in Sophocles’ play Hermione was promised to Orestes in Menelaus’ absence by her grandfather Tyndareus, while at the same time being promised to Neoptolemus by Menelaus at Troy. She was subsequently transferred to Neoptolemus, but after Neoptolemus was killed at Delphi by Machaereus, Hermione was restored to Orestes.112 There is no evidence in Sophocles’ play that Orestes takes part in Neoptolemus’ death, as he does in Euripides’ *Andromache*. Nor is there any evidence for Andromache’s involvement with Neoptolemus, the story of which seems to have been a whole separate mythological tradition, unconnected to Hermione, and apparently treated in the *Iliou Persis*.113 Perhaps most significantly for our purposes, there seems to be a version in which Hermione gives birth to a son whilst married to Neoptolemus (either by Neoptolemus himself or by her former groom, Orestes,

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111 Gantz 1993, 690 (vol. ii).
112 Dindorf ed. of *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Odysseam*: ἦδε θυγατρός ἁμύμονος] Σοφοκλῆς ἐν Ἐρμιόνῃ φησίν ἐπὶ ἐν Τροίᾳ τυχάνοντος Μενελάου έκδοθήναι τὴν Ἐρμιόνην ὑπὸ Τυνδάρεω τῷ Ὀρέστῃ, κατὰ δὲ ύπόσχεσιν ἠκούσας Νεοπτολέμου ἀφαφεθῆ παντὸς Οὔνδαρετα τῷ Ὀρέστῃ ταὐτῆν. πάλιν δὲ αὐτῇ συνοικήσαι τὸν Ὀρέστην Νεοπτολέμου ἐν Πόθῳ ἀναιρεθέντος ὑπὸ Μαχαιρέως, καὶ τότε τὸν Τισαιμένον γεννήσαι. 113 Conacher 1967, 168n2.
according to different versions, Schol. *Andr. 32*)

yet Euripides makes no mention of that in his play, emphasizing the unproductiveness of Hermione and Neoptolemus’ union.

It is significant that Euripides in his *Andromache* chooses to unite the stories of Hermione and Andromache and to make the conflict between these two women a central part of his play. In this chapter, the parallels between the two women highlighted in their confrontation will be used to better understand Hermione’s position in terms of how time and space function for her in her marriage. In addition, Euripides also makes a choice to present Menelaus as knowingly breaking the vow of an *engue* contract in giving his daughter to Neoptolemus. According to Euripides’ play, Menelaus had betrothed Hermione to Orestes before the Trojan War, but later changed his mind and gave her out to Neoptolemus instead. Near the end of the *Andromache*, Orestes addresses Hermione (966-970):

\[
\text{[…]} \ 	ext{ἐμὴ γὰρ οὖσα πρὶν}
\text{σὺν τῷδε ναίεις ἀνδρὶ σοῦ πατρὸς κάκῃ,}
\text{ὅς πρὶν τὰ Τροίας ἐσβαλεῖν ὄρισμα}
\text{γυναῖκ᾿ ἐμοί σε δοὺς ὑπέσχεθ᾿ ὕστερον}
\text{τῷ νῦν σ᾿ ἔχοντι, Τρῳάδ᾿ εἰ πέρσοι πόλιν.}
\]

“For you were mine to before, and you live with this man [Neoptolemus] through the evilness of your father, who, before he attacked the Trojan walls, gave you to me to have as a wife, but later to this man, who has you now, if he should sack Troy.”

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It is true that placing the responsibility for breaking an *engue* contract on Menelaus allows Euripides to highlight the baseness of his character.\textsuperscript{115} Yet this detail is significant for the present study in at least two other ways. First of all, Menelaus’ role in the arrangement allows for the quarrel in the play to be between Orestes and Menelaus himself, and thus for Neoptolemus to be physically absent from the play. In turn, Neoptolemus’ absence is crucial for understanding Hermione’s position in her marriage, as will be discussed below. Second, Menelaus’ breaking of a vow places more emphasis on the interruption of Hermione’s wedding ritual. The purity of the ritual, of course, could have been affected even if violated by Menelaus unwillingly – for in Greek tragedy the perpetrator pays the price, like Oedipus, whether a crime is committed knowingly or not. Nevertheless, Menelaus’ purposeful disregard for the vow intensifies and adds a charge of *hybris* to his crime. As a result, both he and his daughter come to pay the price through Hermione’s malfunctioning marriage and childlessness.

In Chapter One we looked at the expectations regarding the marriages of historical Athenian *epikleroi*. As has been mentioned above, in Greek marriage a woman makes a transition from one *kurios* to another, and through her dowry remains connected to her blood relatives. This potential conflict of interest is a source of much anxiety for the Greeks, which is sometimes visible in drama. The frequent appearance of concubines in Greek tragedy as faithful counterparts to unfaithful, unaccommodating to the husband, and dangerous wives can be partly explained by the concubines’ lack of attachment to their natal families.\textsuperscript{116} As Foley observes, with their families killed in wars, concubines

\textsuperscript{115} Allan 2000, 17.

\textsuperscript{116} Among such tragic concubines are Sophocles’ Tecmessa of the *Ajax*, Euripides’ Andromache of the eponymous play, and even Cassandra of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. For discussion of how Cassandra
can be “wellborn and noble, but without family or city; their loyalty is not divided between natal and marital family.” This is why Andromache in Euripides’ eponymous play can lend a reliable parallel for the reader against which to view Hermione’s “deviations.” On the other end of the spectrum from loyal concubines are free women with too strong an association with their natal families. Some of the most obvious examples include the Danaids, who, obeying the orders of their father, kill their husbands during their wedding night.

Seaford explores the stories of mythological women who are affected by their natal families to such an extent that it jeopardizes their marital relationships or prospects, such as Antigone and Danae. The fear of control that a girl’s natal family can exercise over her at the expense of her marriage sometimes manifests itself in myth through stories of the women’s physical imprisonment by or because of their natal families. Danae is famously impregnated by Zeus (or by her uncle Proteus) in a dark underground chamber, in which she is enclosed by her father as a means of preventing her from marrying and giving birth to any offspring, because it has been prophesized that Danae’s son would kill his maternal grandfather (Apollodorus, The Library 2.2.1-3). Once a daughter is married it is not clear where her, or her offspring’s, alliances will lie. Danae’s father would rather keep his own daughter perpetually in his control, to avoid the threat of a grandson, even if it means the lack of an heir.

118 Seaford 1990, 110, 76-90.
119 Seaford 1990, 110, 76-90.
120 Also Paus. 2.23.7; schol. Hom. II. 14.319.
121 For an analysis of incestuous overtones in Danae’s relations with her father and her son, see Kahr 1978, 43-44.
Antigone’s circumstances make it impossible for her to fulfil her duties both to her natal and to her prospective marital family – accommodating one inevitably means betraying the other. If she buries her brother, she knowingly commits herself to execution and thus deprives herself of marriage. If she obeys Creon and goes on to fulfill her marriage, she must abandon her duty to her natal family, her brother.\(^{122}\) This juxtaposition of mutually exclusive options that contrasts the interests of a woman’s natal and marital families is in itself a testimony to the Greek anxiety surrounding female mobility and potentially shifting alliances. Sophocles’ Antigone, for example, chooses to accommodate her dead brother, making the fulfilment of her upcoming marriage impossible, and states explicitly that she would not have risked her life for a member of her marital family, but is ready to do so for her brother (\textit{Antig.} 995-1005).\(^{123}\) Whilst the incestuous overtones in the story of Danae are not explicit, Antigone uses incestuous language when talking about her brother, highlighting her exaggerated attachment to him (\textit{Antig.} 72-75). Just like Danae, Antigone is imprisoned underground, although not in a room but in a cave. This manifests her closeness to her marital family – since they too are underground, in Hades, – and she dies before her betrothed, Haimon, can join her in her bedroom-like enclosure (the cave is referred to as \(\theta\alpha\lambda\alpha\mu\omicron\nu\), “bridal chamber,” \textit{Antig.} 804). But the imprisonment of these women underground also indicates the conflation of marriage and death, which as Seaford notes, has become “reality” for them.\(^{124}\) It is notable that in these myths a woman’s inability to be married

\(^{122}\) Although this is made more complicated by the fact that Kreon is also Antigone’s blood relative, her uncle, and her \textit{kurios}.

\(^{123}\) For contrast between Antigone’s natal and prospective marital family’s interests as a theme of the play, see Neuburg 1990.

\(^{124}\) Seaford 1990, 76.
and produce legitimate children is equated with being enclosed underground – as in death. The examples of both Danae and Antigone will be important to keep in mind when thinking about Hermione’s relationship with her father as well as with her husband, Neoptolemus.

**Dysfunction of Space for Hermione**

It is important to point out that although Hermione’s attachment to her father in the *Andromache* is expressed in an extreme form, it only exaggerates a problem already inherent in any Greek marriage, and especially in that of an *epikleros*. The play brings out the problematic nature of having a wife with too large a dowry for the status of her husband. A large dowry, not necessarily of an *epikleros*, is a source of anxiety for Greek men, visible, for example, in Plato’s utopian state, where the ban on dowries ensures that “money matters there will lead fewer women to haughtiness and husbands to a base and demeaning servitude” (*Laws* 774c). In the beginning of the *Andromache*, Hermione comes on stage richly dressed. She emphasizes that the importance of her clothes and jewelry is in that they are gifts “not of the house of Achilles nor of Peleus” (οὐ τῶν Ἀχιλλέως οὐδὲ Πηλέως ἀπὸ δόμων, 149-150), but instead, they are “from the Laconian land of Sparta” (ἐκ Λακαίνης Σπαρτιάτιδος χθονὸς, 151), given by Menelaus to his daughter “with a large dowry” (πολλοῖς σὺν ἕδνοις, 153). Confirming Plato’s worry, Hermione feels entitled to speak her mind precisely because of her large dowry: “therefore I can speak freely” (ὥστ᾿ ἐλευθεροστομεῖν, 153). Yet while her arrogance has been pointed out, it is important that it is not simply because of the richness of her attire that Hermione is so (over)confident, but precisely because these are the riches that come from her father’s estate – as opposed to being given to her by her husband. Thus, the play
emphasizes the connection of Hermione with her father, and lack thereof with her husband. Elsewhere Andromache identifies Hermione’s attachment to her father as the source of her inability to create a meaningful marriage and produce children (208 – 212):

\[
σὺ δ᾿ ἢν τι κνισθῇς, ἡ Λάκαινα μὲν πόλις \\
μέγ᾿ ἐστί, τὴν δὲ Σκῦρον οὐδαμοῦ τίθης, \\
πλουτεῖς δ᾿ ἐν οὐ πλουτοῦσι· Μενέλεως δὲ σοι \\
μείζων Αχιλλέως, ταὐτὰ τοι σ᾿ ἔχθει πόσις.
\]

“But if you are provoked to jealousy in any way, you state that Sparta is a great city and Scyros is naught, and that you are wealthy amongst those who are not wealthy; and that Menelaus to you is a greater man than Achilles. It is for these things that your husband hates you.”

In the *Odyssey*, Hermione is explicitly the only child of Menelaus and Helen (*Od*. 4.12 – 14). Although other traditions exist, according to which Hermione has male sibling(s), there is no evidence in Euripides’ play itself to suggest their existence. Thus, the play seems to suggest that Hermione is an *epikleros*.\(^\text{125}\) As an *epikleros*, Hermione should ideally be married to a close male relative of her father. In the beginning of the play, however, we find her married outside of her family and outside of Sparta, to Achilles’ son Neoptolemus. Yet Hermione’s father has not let go of her. In the opening monologue of the play, spoken by Andromache, we learn that Hermione’s father is not in his own house in Sparta, but is together with Hermione “in the house” (κατ᾿ οἴκους ἔστ᾿, 41) of Neoptolemus. Although this proves not to be true, as Menelaus has actually gone to fetch Andromache’s son (73) and only comes back at line 309, this mistake on

\(^{125}\) For versions that suggest that Hermione might have had siblings see Gantz 1993, 322, vol. I.
Andromache’s part establishes right away our understanding of who is allied with whom in the play. We learn that Hermione is allied not with her husband, but with her father – in a way actually against her husband. Also symbolic of Hermione’s alliances is the fact that whilst her father is indeed present next to her for much of the play, her husband is completely absent for the whole duration of it. It is not clear whether there was ever a connection between Hermione and Neoptolemus, for although Andromache claims that her own bed has been “pushed away” (παρώσας) by Neoptolemus since he married Hermione (29-30), the married couple has not begotten any children. It is important that Hermione claims her childlessness stems not (only) from her own inability to become pregnant, but (also) from the fact that Neoptolemus does not frequent her bed: “with your drugs I am made hateful to my husband, and my womb is dead and barren because of you” (στυγοῦμαι δ᾿ ἀνδρὶ φαρμάκοισι σοῖς, νηδὺς δ᾿ ἀκύμων διὰ σέ μοι διόλλυται, 157-158). Neoptolemus’ lack of interest in his wife’s bed is also later confirmed by Andromache, although the two women disagree on the causes (205-212). Thus, in spite of Hermione’s physical presence in Neoptolemus’ house as is appropriate for her position as his wife, she has not actually made the transition “from her father’s house” which characterizes the female experience of Greek marriage.\footnote{Konstantinou 2018, 82-83.} Hermione remains under her father’s authority, which can be symbolically understood as his oikos. As Menelaus himself claims, he feels it is up to him to be Hermione’s kurios. Even though Hermione has a husband, Menelaus believes that for a woman in a difficult situation “her affairs depend on her parents and relatives” (τῇ δ᾿ ἐν γονεῦσι καὶ φίλοις τὰ πράγματα, 676). But rather than simply taking over the role of Hermione’s kurios by claiming that he is her kin,
Menelaus attempts to incorporate the entire household of Neoptolemus, together with Hermione, under his own authority. In the beginning of the play, Menelaus is the only adult male present in Neoptolemus’ household. Once Peleus enters, Menelaus claims that he has “much more authority” than Peleus over Andromache (τῆσδε πολλῷ κυριώτερος γεγώς, 580). Then he expands his claim to include the entire household of Neoptolemus: “are not his possessions mine and mine – his?” (οὔκουν ἐκείνου τἀμὰ τάκείνου τ’ ἐμά;, 585). Meanwhile, Peleus wonders: “what? Will you come here to manage my household?” (πῶς; ἦ τὸν ἀμὸν οἶκον οἰκήσεις μολὼν δεῦρ’; 581-582). In spite of his attempts, Menelaus is unable to establish his authority over Neoptolemus’ household, and leaves, having been defeated by Peleus.

All this time Hermione is in a precarious position that can be characterized as liminal between two symbolic households, that of her father and of her husband. Although physically located in her husband’s oikos, there is no indication in the beginning of the play that Hermione is under his authority or protection. She initially shows no fear of retribution from him, and certainly does not rely on his support either (at 255 she states: “I will not wait for my husband to come,” κοὐ μενῶ πόσιν μολεῖν) – she sees Menelaus’ house as the source of her power instead (cf.147-153, where she states that she is entitled to speak up because of the richness of her Laconian bridal gifts), and it is Menelaus himself whom she calls for help. In contrast, Hermione points out that Andromache relies on Neoptolemus for support: “the son of Achilles on whom you rely” (ὁ πέποιθας παῖδ᾿ Ἀχιλλέως, 168). At the same time, although Menelaus claims that he is the one entitled to take care of his daughter and of the space in which she is located, in the end he has no right to it, as becomes clear when he is expelled from Neoptolemus’ oikos by Peleus. He
leaves, significantly, without Hermione. At this moment, the play makes it clear that Hermione, even when she has been abandoned by her father, does not belong in Neoptolemus’ house. With Menelaus expelled, the position of authority in the oikos is assumed by Neoptolemus’ grandfather, Peleus, who encourages Menelaus to take away Hermione with him: “if you don’t perish from this house as fast as possible, you and your childless daughter” (ἐἰ μὴ φθερῇ τῇς’ ὡς τάχιστ’ ἀπὸ στέγης καὶ παις ἄτεκνος, 708-709; cf. “take away your child,” ἐκκομίζου παῖδα, 639).

Hermione’s liminality between two households is significant for understanding her portrayal in the play. As Blundell states, “when women break out of the domestic interior, they tend to pass not merely into the public arena but also beyond it, entering the realms which exist beyond the civilization and order of the polis.” Among tragic women, Antigone can provide an example. She is one of the few tragic women who is said to have ventured not only outside the house, but outside the city walls in order to perform burial rites to her brother’s corpse (Antig. 249-277). In performing this duty to her family, she goes against Creon’s attempt to establish order in the polis, to which he has a right by virtue of being its ruler. Similarly, the maenads in Euripides’ Bacchae are temporarily driven by Dionysus out of their houses, and away from civilisation, into the mountains: “they live in the mountains, frenzied of their wits” (ὁρος δ’ οἰκοσι παράκοποι φρενῶν, 33). It is in these wild surroundings that in their madness they tear Pentheus apart (1169-1284). In the Andromache, we certainly find all the characters, both male and female, outside the house. This in itself does not suggest that the characters are outside of the domestic space. As Foley points out, on the tragic stage

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127 Blundell 1995, 180, following Zeitlin 1990, 68.
action takes place in front of the house, rather than inside it, but the stage can be seen as an extension of the domestic interior. Yet, as has been mentioned above, Hermione does not belong within Neoptolemus’ oikos, nor within that of Menelaus. Not being fully incorporated into either of the two oikoi, Hermione can be seen as existing “beyond the civilization” and beyond the “order of the polis.” We might view Hermione’s attempt to kill Andromache and her child, even in spite of her supplication, as an act outside of “order,” that of civilization, of a polis, and of an individual oikos.

**The Epic Ideal of Space**

The two ideal wives of epic, Andromache and Penelope, are famous for their attachment to their husbands, as well as for their lack of attachment to their natal families. Andromache is the most obvious example. In Book Six of the *Iliad*, she famously identifies Hector not only as her husband, but also as all the other most important members of her natal family (429-430):

"Εκτώρ, ἀτάρ σὺ μοί ἐσσι πατήρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ Ἦδε κασίγνητος, σὺ δέ μοι θαλερὸς παρακόιτης·

"Hector, you are to me father and queenly mother, and brother, and you are my vigorous husband."

Andromache’s actual father and brothers have been killed by Achilles (423-425), and her mother died a sudden death (425-428). Andromache’s example is the more

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128 Foley 2001, 8.
129 Another example is offered by Tecmessa, who in Sophocles’ *Ajax*, makes a similar statement to that of Homer’s Andromache (514-517): “For I have nothing to look to except you; you devastated my country by violence, and another fate took my mother and my father in death to live in Hades.” The fact that Tecmessa is not Ajax’ legitimate wife but a concubine only proves the point. It is because Tecmessa has no one left in the world but Ajax that she is able to become so resembling a perfect wife. On Tecmessa’s resemblance to an ideal wife see Ormand (1999, 110-119): “Sophocles makes the comparison to Andromache, but also
significant for Euripides’ *Andromache*, because it demonstrates that a concubine exemplifies a reliable bedmate even to a master who is the son of Achilles – the murderer of her parents and of her husband – and is himself implicated in the murder of Andromache’s son by Hector.\(^{130}\) In a way, Neoptolemus embodies or is at least closely connected to the very reason why Andromache has no other attachments and therefore has no choice but to depend completely on her master.

Penelope’s example is less obvious but also significant. It appears that her parents are still alive at the time of the *Odyssey*. Indeed, there is anxiety associated with her potential mobility. The threat, however, comes from the suitors (even if Penelope is to go to her father before being remarried), rather than from her father, who is quite absent from the picture in the *Odyssey*. Significantly, the mythological account surrounding Penelope highlights her breaking of a bond with her father in favour of Odysseus. According to the story recorded by Pausanias, when Odysseus first took Penelope as his wife, her father, Icarius, was reluctant to let go of his daughter. Unable to persuade Odysseus to stay in Sparta with him, Icarius followed along with the newlywed couple. Odysseus, then, told Penelope explicitly that she had to choose between himself and her father. To this Penelope gave a sign, covering her face with a veil, which was correctly understood by Icarius as her choice of Odysseus (*Description of Greece* 3.12.2, 3.20.10-11). This account, of course, is written down about eight centuries after the *Iliad* and about five centuries after the age of Athenian tragedy. It is
deftly undercut it, hinting that Tecmessa’s status is not as exalted as that of her epic predecessor.” Also Dué 2002, 7.

\(^{130}\) Foley 2001, 98-100, sees Andromache’s “active wifely tolerance” and Hermione’s “more contemporary views” as reflecting the “contemporary [Athenian] realities concerning marriage and dowry.”
nevertheless significant that this tradition should surround Penelope, placing her safely outside of the cultural anxiety over wives’ potential conflicting interests.

**Hermione in Time and Space in the *Andromache***

Whereas in the ideal course of an ancient Greek woman’s life her progression in space from girlhood to womanhood involves a physical transition from her father’s house to that of her husband, progression in time involves actual coming of age and is marked by a number of actions and rituals, such as dedicating her childhood toys to Artemis. Giving birth is an action that can be seen as an ideological marker of a young woman’s completion of her transition into womanhood. The appearance of a child marks a change not only for the woman who has given birth but for the whole community involved. It marks the beginning of a new generation, ensuring that the line of a particular family will continue in time.

In this way, at the beginning of the *Andromache*, Hermione’s time is standing still and boundaries between particular age groups are blurred for her. She is not a parthenos anymore, and yet she is not a mother and therefore not fully a gyne. While Andromache is addressed by Hermione herself as a “woman” (γύναι, 237), Hermione is referred to by Andromache as “young” (νέα, 238), and a “young woman” (νεᾶνι, 192). Andromache identifies Hermione’s youth as the reason for the actions that to Andromache seem unreasonable: “You are young and you speak of shameful things” (νέα πέφυκας καὶ λέγεις αἰσχρῶν πέρι., 238). Hermione is also often referred to as a παῖς (“child,” 145, 431, 663, 709) while Andromache never is – signifying not only her age, but perhaps also her lack of connection with her natal family, mentioned above. παῖς in combination with a reference to the father’s name is a standard form of address, and certainly both
Neoptolemus and Orestes are referred to in this way (cf. 545, 1171; 1041, 1085).

Nevertheless, it might be significant that on at least two occasions Menelaus identifies Hermione within the same generation as Andromache’s child. In addressing Andromache, Menelaus refers to her son and to his own daughter as παῖς:

\[ τὰ δ’ ἀμφὶ παιδὸς τοῦδε παῖς ἐμὴ κρινεῖ ("my child will decide the things about your child," 431; cf παῖδα δ’ ἐμὴ παῖς, 518). \]

At the same time, Andromache and Hermione could be easily placed within the same generational category, not by virtue of their actual age, but by virtue of sharing a “husband” and potentially giving birth to the same generation.

Meanwhile, with Andromache having given birth to a son, the survival of Peleus’ line is ensured and time in Neoptolemus’ house is moving on with no concern for Hermione. Andromache contributes to that progression against her own will, as her reminiscence of the past suggests that she would rather turn time backwards and be with her “dearest Hector” (φίλταθ᾽ Ἕκτορ, 222). On the contrary, keen to continue her own cycle of life, Hermione is frustrated about her sterility (157-158). Paradoxically, in attempting to give herself a better chance for progression in time by giving birth to a child, Hermione is in fact attempting to reverse that progression for the rest of Neoptolemus’ household. The death of Andromache’s child would erase the whole generation of Peleus’ family. Ironically, given the upcoming murder of Neoptolemus, neither Hermione nor any other woman would have been able to replace that generation, and, without Andromache’s son, Peleus’ line would have disappeared forever.

As has been stated in the Introduction, both Hermione and Menelaus claim to be acting in order to help the Hermione-Neoptolemus marriage progress in a culturally
appropriate way – for them to beget children and for Hermione to be established as the one and only legitimate wife of the household. In spite of much criticism of his unheroic character, Menelaus’ argument is not entirely unsympathetic. He comes to Neoptolemus’ house to help his own child (“I will help my kin,” τοῖς γὰρ ἐμοῖσιν γέγον’ ὠφελία, 539). He believes that while a man has strength, if a woman gets offended in her husband’s house, it is up to her natal family to defend her (675-676, cited above). This claim does indeed agree with what we know of Athenian marriage. Especially if his daughter is an epikleros, Menelaus has the right to be invested in her marriage with a husband who does not seem to be frequenting her bed. This is not to say that Menelaus’ actions in the play are unproblematic, but rather that this particular problem rises not out of his unheroic personality, but out of the real conditions pertaining to marriage in the fifth century and reflected in the play. As has been mentioned above, the vows made at an engue seem to imply that the father can indeed take the daughter back should the necessity arise.\(^{131}\) Significantly, just like Hermione, Menelaus is not interested in terminating the marriage, but rather, through the elimination of Andromache, seems eager to help it move on. And yet, if Menelaus and Hermione succeed in their plan, they will very likely achieve the opposite result. The consequences of their actions might lead not only to that Hermione’s present marriage will be ruined, but so also will be the prospects of another one. Andromache warns Menelaus that there is a real possibility that if he proceeds with his plot against Neoptolemus’ house, Hermione will be divorced from her husband and will forever stay attached to her natal family (347-348):

\[
\begin{align*}
\gammaαμεῖ \ δὲ \ \tauῖς \ \ νιν; \ \eta \ \ σφ᾽ \ \ \ανανδρον \ \ἐν \ \ δόμοις \\
\chiύραν \ \ καθέξεις \ \ πολιόν; \ \ [...]
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{131}\) Brulé 2003, 122.
“Who will marry her? Or will you hold fast to her gray-headed and without a mate in your own house?”

It is significant that Andromache explicitly emphasizes not only the threat for Hermione’s present marriage, but also her potentially having to spend the rest of her life in the house of her father. Strangely, Menelaus does not comment directly on this possibility brought up by Andromache. The verb κατέχω used by Andromache to describe Menelaus’ keeping of Hermione in his house is rather powerful. The most basic meaning is to “hold fast,” but it also has connotations of possessing, seizing, covering, and, most interestingly, when speaking of a grave – confining.\(^{132}\) One is reminded of the mythical heroines imprisoned in the dark by or because of their attachment to their fathers and brothers, such as Danae and Antigone.\(^{133}\) Although Hermione is not physically enclosed by Menelaus, like the mythical women mentioned earlier, Hermione’s attachment to her father can be seen as a symbolic imprisonment, which holds her back from being part of a productive marriage union and giving birth to an offspring.

**Ending of the Play**

Unlike most mythological women imprisoned by or because of their natal families, at the end of Euripides’ play Hermione has a real chance to escape the trap of time, the limits of her father’s authority over her, and move on as a properly married woman. At the end of the *Andromache*, Hermione learns that her current husband, Neoptolemus, has been killed by Orestes, her cousin, who now offers to “restore” Hermione to her father and then remarry her (966-985). Before Orestes shows up,

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\(^{132}\) LSJ.

\(^{133}\) Seaford 1990.
however, Menelaus leaves his “own child” to her own devices, having been threatened by Peleus (854-859). This unheroic deed on Menelaus’ part has some positive consequences for Hermione. Although Hermione laments her father’s leaving her alone, Menelaus’ gesture can be seen symbolically as a necessary separation of his daughter from her natal household. This gives some hope that eventually the flow of time will be restored for Hermione and through her for the whole family of the Atreidae.

In Homer’s epics, there is no mention of Orestes in any relation to the marriage of Hermione and Neoptolemus. Similarly, in the sixth century account by Pherecydes, Hermione and Neoptolemus are married with no connection to Orestes, but the lack of children from the union is implied in Neoptolemus’ inquiry about their prospects for children at Delphi (3F64a). The first surviving reference to competition between Neoptolemus and Orestes comes from Sophocles’ lost Hermione. In this play, it seems, although at some point promised to Neoptolemus by her father, Hermione does not actually end up marrying him, but marries Orestes, due to Neoptolemus’ death. It is interesting that it is the fifth century plays that should focus on Hermione’s reunification with Orestes as opposed to Neoptolemus. Perhaps it is not until that time that there appeared a significant preference in Athens for marrying an epikleros within the family. In the fourth century, Aristotle notes and disapproves of the Spartan carelessness in marrying off epikleroi (Politics 2.1270a28-29). As Foley points out,

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134 Gantz 1993, 690 vol. ii.
135 Ganz 1992, 690 vol ii.
136 Gantz 1993, 690-691 vol ii.
137 Humphreys 1983, 25.
138 Foley 2001, 100.
Menelaus can be the case in point for Athenian exploration of their own careful consideration for epikleroi’s marriage in contrast to Spartan excessive casualness.\textsuperscript{139}

At the end of the play, Peleus, Andromache, Menelaus and Orestes all receive a promise for continuation of their own line in the space to which each belongs. If we look at the play from Hermione’s position, time stands still until Orestes’ arrival. With his appearance Hermione is freed from her unproductive marriage, having previously also broken, albeit unwillingly, her excessive connection to her father. Although Hermione will have to go back to her father in order to get remarried, it is, on the one hand, appropriate that she should do so. Given that Hermione’s husband is dead, and also the fact that her marriage to Neoptolemus has been so incomplete that it is as if it had never happened,\textsuperscript{140} it is appropriate that Hermione should be given away in her new marriage by her father and start her transition to womanhood anew (987-988):

\[ \text{νυμφευμάτων μὲν τῶν ἐμῶν πατὴρ ἐμὸς μέριμναν ἕξει, κοὐκ ἐμὸν κρίνειν τόδε.} \]

“My father will take care about my marriage, it is not for me to decide this.”

In addition, to those who are familiar with and choose to abide by the story of Hermione and Orestes’ son, Tisamenus, ruling over Sparta, the ending of Euripides’ play should suggest a satisfactory prospect for Hermione. Orestes ends his speech with a saying that gives us hope that the proper flow of time for Hermione will indeed be restored, as well

\textsuperscript{139} “But as it is he is allowed to give an heiress in marriage to whomever he likes; and if he dies without having made directions as to this by will, whoever he leaves as his executor bestows her upon whom he chooses” (\textit{Politics} 2.1270a). For the view of the play as an anti-Spartan propaganda: Grube 1961, 38-39, 212; \textit{contra} Webster 1967, 28.

\textsuperscript{140} Storey 1989, 21, also believes that “the marriage of Hermione and Neoptolemus has in fact been no marriage at all.”
as proper space in which she truly belongs as an *epikleros*, according to the contemporary Athenian ideology: “for kinship is marvelous, and in misfortunes there is nothing better than a kin of your own house” (τὸ συγγενὲς γὰρ δεινόν, ἔν τε τοῖς κακοῖς οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν κρεῖσσον οἰκείου φίλου, 985-986).

Yet this ending is not unproblematic. Orestes’ language is reminiscent of Menelaus’ beliefs that let him feel entitled to claim authority over Hermione even in Neoptolemus’ house. In addition, in order to be properly united with Orestes, Hermione believes she needs to be “restored” back to her father first in what Storey calls a “reversed motif of the bridal procession”¹⁴¹ On the one hand, the flow of time is seemingly restored for Hermione when she is somewhat abandoned by her father and she leaves the house of Neoptolemus in anticipation of getting married to her original suitor, Orestes. On the other hand, when Hermione announces that she is to return to her father before she can marry Orestes, one is reminded of the potential difficulties Menelaus might have with letting his daughter go again. In addition, Hermione’s story seems to be problematically repeating the pattern of the story of her mother, Helen. The chorus peculiarly address Hermione as “daughter of Zeus’ daughter” (παῖς τᾶς Διὸς κόρας, 145), mindful of the link between the mother and her daughter. Like Helen, as Kyriakou observes, Hermione becomes a point of contention between two males.¹⁴² And it is this contention that brings about Neoptolemus’ downfall when he is murdered by Orestes, Hermione’s original suitor. The resemblance of Hermione’s fate to that of Helen further highlights what Kyriakou describes as “human inability to transcend the

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¹⁴² Kyriakou 1997, 17.
past by rejecting one's previous compromising self.” Andromache accuses Hermione’s mother, Helen, of being the cause of the war: ἃς ἕνεκ’, ὦ Τροία, δορὶ καὶ πυρὶ δηιάλωτον (“for her sake, oh Troy, [you were] captured by sword and fire” (105). If Helen is the cause of the Trojan war, then she is also the cause of Hector’s death (as Andromache observes, 107), of Andromache’s presence in Neoptolemus’ household as a concubine, and of Menelaus’ breaking of his promise to give Hermione in marriage to Orestes. Hermione seems to regret her mother’s fate, for when Andromache accuses Helen of bringing about Achilles’ death, Hermione answers: “are you going to keep further touching on my pains?” ἦ καὶ πρόσω γὰρ τῶν ἐμῶν ψαύσεις κακῶν; (249). And yet, Hermione’s circumstances over which she has no control make her partly repeat her mother’s experience. Similarly to the way time works in the Trachiniae, in the Andromache the events of the past have a destructive bearing on the present. The past, especially the Trojan War, looms large over the present events of this play.

143 Kyriakou 1997, 25.
144 Papadimitropoulos 2006, 153-154
Chapter Four: Euripides’ Electra

In this chapter, I analyze how the distortion of the cultural ideal in Electra’s circumstances affects her situation and her actions. I focus in particular on Electra’s relationship, on the one hand, with time, i.e. her progression from parthenos to gyne, and, on the other hand, with space, i.e. her symbolic location in the liminal stage between her natal and marital households as well as her physical location on the outskirts of Argos. While Ormand has discussed in detail the implications of Electra’s physical location for the ambiguity of her social role as a citizen woman, I believe there is more to be said about the symbolic association of Electra’s position, both in temporal and in spatial terms, with death.

In her analysis of Aeschylus’ Choephori, Zeitlin remarks that following her murder of Agamemnon Clytaemnestra recedes back into the domestic and female realm, from which she attends to Agamemnon’s grave with libations (Choe. 84-100). Clytaemnestra’s assumption of her traditionally female role nevertheless “creates a ritual impasse since the wife who owes this duty to her husband is also his murderer.”145 Zeitlin also observes that “this impasse is emblematic of the dysfunction of the social order under her [Clytaemnestra’s] regime,” and “is also manifested in the social status of the legitimate children: Electra, unwed, arrested in maidenhood, bound to the paternal hearth, and Orestes, an exile, as yet unable to cross the boundary to adulthood…”146 Thus Zeitlin identifies the key ways in which the transgressions of Electra and Orestes’ parents have created circumstances where time and space do not function for the

146 Zeitlin 1996, 95.
children in a culturally appropriate way. Zeitlin’s observation can be applied, of course, not only to the treatment of the story in the *Choephoroi*, but to any treatment of the myth which somehow impedes Orestes’ coming of age and Electra’s passage into womanhood. I choose to focus on Euripides’ *Electra* because, of the surviving tragedies that treat the story, his is the only one in which Electra is actually married, and in which an explicit connection is made between unproductive marriage and a symbolic death of the bride, rather than the more often encountered link between death and lack of marriage and marital prospects altogether. As in the previous chapters, here I rely on a close reading of the text, informed by anthropological evidence for Greek marriage. I am not conducting a full-scale comparison of Euripides’ *Electra* to the other plays that treat the story. Occasional comparisons, however, are made with elements of these and other plays concerning young marriageable women.

The *Electra* is usually dated between 420 and 410 BCE, with little success in establishing whether this play or the play of Sophocles by the same name came first. Much like the scholarship on Euripides’ Hermione, that on Electra often focuses on a moral evaluation of her character, and, much like Hermione, Electra has endured some of the harshest remarks, especially in earlier scholarship. On the other hand, a defence of her character has also been proposed. At the same time, interpretations along the lines of New Historicism have offered what I see as a more productive approach to analyzing the play. In particular, the works of Zeitlin, Lloyd, and Ormand step away

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147 Burnett 1998, 226.
149 Michelini 1987, 188: “Elektra has suffered a wound to her pride, and such a wound is a legitimate and honorable cause for revenge.”
from endowing Electra (or any other character in the play) with a psychological portrait and demonstrate how meaning in the play is created against the backdrop of contemporary institutions, such as marriage, religion, and citizenship, rather than against some universal moral ideals.150

Euripides’ *Electra* opens with a prologue delivered by a poor farmer, who explains what has happened to the surviving children of the house of Agamemnon (50-53). After Agamemnon was killed by his wife, Clytaemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus, the control of Argos passed to the murderous couple. Aegisthus attempted to murder Orestes, but the latter was saved by an old servant and sent to be brought up away from Argos. Aegisthus was apparently planning to kill Electra too, but was dissuaded from doing so by Clytaemnestra and instead he married Electra off to a poor farmer who lives in the countryside outside the city walls. The farmer (who delivers the prologue), however, has refused to consummate the marriage on the grounds that the man who gave Electra away in marriage, Aegisthus, is not in fact her proper kurios.151 In the course of the play, Orestes returns to Argos, murders Aegisthus and then together with Electra he murders Clytaemnestra. At the end, ordered by their divine maternal uncles, Castor and Polux, Orestes is exiled from Argos in order to found a new city named after himself in Arcadia (1250-1275), and Electra is given away by her brother in marriage to Pylades (1249).

Before murdering Clytaemnestra, Electra states: “He has inflicted death on me, living, twice as great as [the death] of my sister” (δἰς τὸσως ἐμὲ κτείνας ἀδελφῆς ζῶσαν,

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150 Lloyd 1986 focuses particularly on lamentation; Zeitlin 1970 – on religion and marriage; Ormand 2009 – on religion, marriage, and the implications that a woman’s role in these institutions has on her relationship to the polis.
151 On the kurios’ authority, see Levick 2012, 98-99.
Electra is referring to the fate forced on her by Aegisthus – namely, that she should be married off to a poor farmer as a means to prevent the birth of a powerful male offspring, who would avenge the murder of Electra’s father, Agamemnon. It is notable that marrying Electra off seems to be an innovation on Euripides’ part. This choice is significant, for Electra’s marriage plays a crucial part in understanding her character. Electra is insisting that her life, married to a poor man far below her own standing, is in fact equivalent to death, and perhaps even twice the death that her sister Iphigenia suffered, when she was sacrificed by her father at Aulis. Electra repeatedly characterizes her current state as equivalent to death elsewhere in the play. She addresses the corpse of Aegisthus: “when I was of marriageable age you married me to none of the nobility but to this laboring man, a marriage like death” (ἀλλ’ ἐπεί μ’ ὄρα γάμου εἶχ’, ἐξόδωκας εὐγενῶν μὲν οὐδὲνι, χέρνητι δ’ ἀνδρὶ τῷ δέ, θανάσιμον γάμον, ca. 914). She states to the yet unrecognized Orestes: “I have made a marriage, stranger, a marriage like death” (ἐγημάμεσθ᾿, ὦ ξεῖνε, θανάσιμον γάμον, 247). In case Orestes should fail to murder Aegisthus, thus failing to free Electra from her present state, she has resolved to die: “if in your wrestling match you fall in a deadly fall, I too have died and speak of me as one who is no longer living. For I will strike my heart with a two-edged sword” (ὡς εἰ παλαισθεὶς πτῶμα θανάσιμον πεσῆ, τέθνηκα κάγω μηδὲ με ζῶσαν λέγε. παίσω κάρα γὰρ τοῦτον ἀμφήκει ξίφει·, 686-688). Electra’s plan to commit suicide has received some negative interpretations in modern scholarship. It is profitable to point out, however, that it is the play itself that places a significant emphasis on the association of Electra’s position

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152 Michelini 1987, 1889.
153 Arnott 1973, 51, sees Electra’s plan to commit suicide is a “depressive side of her hysterical character.”
with death, whether it is spelled out by Electra, other characters, or achieved through various innovations to the myth (i.e. plot) and tragic conventions (and possibly stage properties). Thus, the last cited lines, for instance (i.e. 686-688), come at a point where, right after a choral ode, according to tragic convention we would expect to see a messenger describing the murder committed off stage. This frustrated expectation draws much of the audience’s attention to what Electra is saying at that moment, emphasizing once again the conflation of her position with death.

In the prologue, Electra’s nominal husband, the farmer, tells the audience about how Electra came to be in her present state (19-21):

> ἥ δ’ ἐν δόμοις ἐμεινεν Ἠλέκτρα πατρός,
> ταύτην ἐπειδή θαλερὸς εἶχ᾿ ἥβης χρόνος,
> µνηστήρες ἣτουν Ἑλλάδος πρῶτοι χθονός.

> “As regards Electra, who still lived in the house of her father, when the blooming time of youth came to her, suitors, the most noble men of Greek land, asked [her hand in marriage].”

Electra’s story starts at the moment that is most important for her current state – the moment when she becomes of marriageable age. As mentioned above, entities in transitional moments like this are often deemed dangerously polluting by societies. What is perceived as dangerous by Aegisthus, however, is the potential that Electra will complete her transition to womanhood and fulfil her main societal role as a Greek woman:

> δείσας δὲ μὴ τῷ παῖδ’ ἀριστέων τέκοι

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154 Arnott 1973, 51, who believes this further emphasizes Electra’s hysterical personality.
Ἀγαμέμνονος ποινάτορ’, εἶχεν ἐν δόμοις
Αἴγισθος οὐδ’ ἥρμοζε νυμφίῳ τινί. (22-24).

“But Aegisthus, having feared lest she bears to one of the noble men a son, who would become Agamemnon’s avenger, held her in the house and would not join her to any bridegroom.”

As discussed in the previous chapters, even a son produced of a biological daughter in her marriage to a man from a different family may be envisioned as a threat to his maternal family, in so far as he is an outsider, belonging to the family of his father rather than the natal family of his mother. This problem is often, in Seaford’s words, “expressed in the extremist logic of myth.”\(^{155}\) In the Danae myth, as mentioned, the daughter is enclosed to prevent the birth of a powerful offspring. Among the goddesses, Thetis is married off to a mortal in order to make it impossible for her offspring to surpass Zeus (Pindar, *Isth.* 8.30ff).\(^{156}\) With none of her male blood relatives being present, Electra’s potential son would be the only candidate for avenging Agamemnon. The fact that Electra’s prospective sons from a man of low social standing are not considered a threat by Aegisthus is an interesting detail and one that has received much attention from scholars, in particular in view of the play’s insistence on exploring the meaning of one’s birth and financial status.\(^{157}\) Because of their status, Electra’s sons would not become heroes and thus would not enter the heroic world to deal with

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\(^{155}\) Seaford 1990, 153-154; Kubo 1967, 18 cites some examples.

\(^{156}\) Clay 2003 demonstrates that among the gods preventing the birth of powerful offspring that could potentially threaten his rule becomes Zeus’ priority.

\(^{157}\) See Michelini 1987, 194-198: Powerless children from a wrong wedlock are as good as non-existent. Electra explains: “He wanted me to bear powerless children and so gave me to a powerless husband” (τεκεῖν μ᾿ ἐβούλετ᾿ ἀσθενῆ, τοιῷδε δούς, 267). Orestes asks: “So that you might not bear sons to avenge you?” (ὥς δῆθε παῖδας μὴ τέκοις ποινάτορας; 268).
Aegisthus – in this way they can be considered as good as non-existent. Herodotus offers some interesting parallels in his description of Persian dynasties. In Book One, a tyrant Astyages has a vision that his daughter, Mandane, “urinated so much that she filled up his city and overflowed all of Asia” (οὐρῆσαι τοσοῦτον ὡστε πλῆσαι μὲν τὴν ἑωυτοῦ πόλιν, ἐπικατακλύσαι δὲ καὶ τὴν Ἀσίην πᾶσαν, 107.1). Once the meaning of the dream has been interpreted to him by the Magi, Astyages begins to fear his daughter’s potential offspring. In order to prevent this offspring from being powerful enough to overthrow his grandfather, Astyages marries his daughter off to a Persian, Cambyses, because he believes that man “to be by far inferior to a Mede of a middle class” (πολλῷ ἔνερθε ἄγων αὐτὸν μέσου ἀνδρὸς Μήδου, 107.2). Upon Mandane’s giving birth to a boy, however, Astyages has a second vision suggesting the boy’s future power and danger (108.1-2), and decides to kill the infant (108.4). The servant ordered with this task, however, unable to murder the baby, hands him over to a cowherd, who lives, like Electra’s husband, where there are “foothills of the mountains” (αἱ δὲ ὑπώρεαί εἰσὶ τῶν ὀρέων, 110.2), and orders him to expose the child (110.3). The myth in Herodotus is interesting because it offers parallels for Electra’s story in which she can be seen as both the daughter, i.e. a (potential) mother, and the exposed infant itself. Although for now I proceed to focus on Electra’s role as a potential mother, it must be kept in mind that when a woman’s main social role is linked to producing legitimate children, her inability to become a mother can be seen symbolically as a social death. In this way, Electra shares a fate with an exposed infant, since both are excluded from the polis in order to be prevented from participating in or affecting its civilization in any way.

158 Cf. Histories 5.92b-d.
In Electra’s case, Aegisthus has every reason to expect that Electra’s child can be a potential danger to him, since the child will not even be connected to him by blood and can be stirred up by his mother to vengeance. Although Aegisthus is not Electra’s father, in his position as Clytaemnestra’s lover/husband he assumes for himself the role of Electra’s father and kurios, and thus the parallel with myths that concern biological fathers is apt here too. Aegisthus’ original response to a potential threat is enclosure: at first “he kept her [Electra] in the house” (ἐἶχεν ἐν δύμω, 23). Yet, as many myths concerning enclosed women demonstrate, this plan does not usually work. Aegisthus recognizes that when he states that even enclosed, Electra “might bear children to some nobleman in secret” (τῷ λοθραίως τέκνα γενναίῳ τέκοι, 26). As a safer alternative, Aegisthus “decided to kill” Electra (κτάνεῖν σφε βουλεύσαντος, 27). Although Aegisthus is persuaded by Clytaemnestra not to kill Electra, (“her mother saved her from Aegisthus’ hand,” μήτηρ νιν ἐξέσωσεν Αἰγίσθου χερός, 28), his original plan of action is extremely important, because it emphasizes the link, and in this case even a certain interchangeability, between Electra’s current situation and death.

Having been dissuaded from murdering Electra, Aegisthus decides to marry her out of her appropriate social status instead. Electra’s current husband, the poor farmer, announces to the audience (32-35):

[...] ὃς μὲν γῆς ἀπηλλάχθη φυγὰς Ἀγαμέμνονος παῖς, χρυσὸν εἶφ’ ὃς ἂν κτάνη, ἡμῖν δὲ δὴ δίδωσιν Ἑλέκτραν ἔχειν δάμαρτα. [...]
“[As for] the child of Agamemnon, who has been expelled from this land as an exile, he [Aegisthus] announced gold for whoever should kill him, and to me he gave Electra to have as a wife.”

In order for Aegisthus to agree to change Electra’s fate from death to an inappropriate marriage, these two options must be somewhat socially equivalent from Aegisthus’ point of view. The notion of that equivalency is also supported by Aegisthus’ unchanged plans for murdering Orestes. Although a servant manages to send Orestes away, Aegisthus is still working towards murdering him. The difference is, of course, that Orestes is male and can avenge the murder of his father on his own, while Electra, being female, is seen as the one who is able to encourage her male relatives to take revenge, rather than do it on her own. Ormand persuasively demonstrates that Electra’s position is, in fact, equivalent to exile, as she herself also identifies it when she calls herself φυγάς (“an exile,” 209).

Unable to be part of a proper family, either natal or marital, or, as discussed below, to take part in the city’s religious life, Electra is in fact deprived of her citizenship, as it is understood for fifth century Athenian women. Ormand also notes, moreover, that Electra’s exile is “divesting her of subjectivity.” I believe this hints at just how much Electra’s situation is death-like. After all, Orestes is in exile because he has managed to escape from Argos thanks to his friends, but the fate that Aegisthus is still trying to inflict upon him is death (32-33, 615-617). In other words, Aegisthus’ continuous desire to murder Orestes has not changed because Orestes’ exile is not an equivalent

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159 Both Electra and Orestes are in exile, but exile of different sorts. See Ormand 2009, 252, observes that unlike Orestes, Electra “experiences exile as a function of marital status and that of religious festival rather than of city and political identity.”

160 Ormand 2009, 252, describes women’s citizenship as understood in terms of “marital status and of religious festival rather than of city and political identity.” See also, on recognition of Athenian women as citizens with limited rights in late fifth-century Athens, Goff 2004, 183.

161 Ormand 2009, 251.
replacement for his death, while Electra’s exile, at least from Aegisthus’ point of view, is.

Perhaps the point can be exemplified by Euripides’ treatment of the story of Electra’s sister, Iphigenia, in his *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*. In Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Iphigenia is sacrificed by her father to Artemis. Although Iphigenia in the end goes to her death voluntarily, she was initially tricked into thinking that she was about to be married to Achilles. This play is interesting in itself for its conflation of death and marriage. But what is also significant is that in a version of Iphigenia’s story treated in Euripides’ *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, the girl miraculously survives being sacrificed and ends up a priestess of Artemis. In this role, of course, she stays unmarried and a virgin. Although in this play Iphigenia attempts to be reunited with her natal family and temporarily succeeds, in the end Athena decides that Iphigenia must stay a priestess of Artemis, this time, at Brauron, at the cult for virgin girls approaching marriageable age – never making the transition to womanhood. Whatever the choices made by Greek poets in their treatment of myth, they are made within the limits of some key predetermined characteristics of mythological characters. It is by enacting these predetermined characteristics that a mythological character becomes herself or himself. This is sometimes expressed in a character’s name, such as Antigone (“against kin”) or Electra (“without marriage bed”). In myth, as far as we know, there is no place for Iphigenia as a wife and a mother, and in this way it does not matter whether she is

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162 In Iphigenia’s own words, her father is about to send her “into the dark grave” (1218).
163 Gantz 1993, 322. Aside from Euripides, of poets who treat Iphigenia’s story, some choose the version where she is somehow saved from being sacrificed and ends up either immortal or a priestess (Proklos’ summary of *Kypria*, *Ehoiai* fr. 23a MW). Even if we take Homer’s Iphianassa as referring to Iphigenia, then all that is said is that Agamemnon offers her or any of her sisters as a bride to Achilles (*Il*. 9.144-47), but the union never actually happens and there is no evidence of any of these daughters ever having any children.
sacrificed or becomes a virgin priestess. The two are interchangeable in so far as both options prevent Iphigenia from taking part in procreation. Although for Aegisthus the similarity between Electra’s death and unproductive marriage matters only to the extent that Electra will not be able to rouse a male avenger (a lethal miscalculation on his part, of course), the play itself suggests similarities on a more general level.

**Time in Electra**

For the one in power, the proper flow of time implies change and eventually loss of power. In her analysis of Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Clay identifies a pattern in the creation myths where “the generative principle, identified with the female, promotes change.”

In the *Theogony* and in the mythological history of the gods in general, as a contrary force to the female promotion of generational change there is the male principle, which, Clay observes, attempts “to control and block the female procreative drive in order to bring about a stable cosmic regime.” With the birth of a new generation, the old one is challenged for supremacy. Zeus succeeds in establishing his own eternal rule when he incorporates the female principle within himself by swallowing Metis. Yet for the mortals there is no such stability. In the natural flow of time for the Atreid family, Agamemnon should have been replaced by Orestes. Before that could happen, Agamemnon is replaced by Clytaemnestra/Aegisthus, in a way that, as Zeitlin has pointed out, has created “a ritual impasse.” Not willing to be replaced by Agamemnon’s descendants, Aegisthus attempts to kill Orestes and to control Electra’s “generative principle” by confining her outside of her appropriate social group. This

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164 Clay 2003, 17.
165 Clay 2003, 18.
166 Zeitlin 1996, 95.
deprives Electra of her ability to bring about change, associated with procreation, and essentially freezes time. In this way, Electra’s position is akin to death, albeit, as it will turn out, a temporary one.

Electra’s virginity is another significant indication that the flow of time is impeded for her in the play. It is important that although Electra’s children by the farmer would have been seen as being of no significance for the heroic world of tragedy, she is nevertheless not allowed by the playwright to have them. Instead the tragedy places an emphasis on Electra’s virginity. In the prologue, the farmer states: “her this man never […] dishonoured in bed, and she is still a virgin” (ἥν οὐποθ’ ἁνὴρ ὅδε […] ἰσχυν’ ἐν εὐνῆ, παρθένος δ’ ἐτ’ ἔστι δή, 43-44; cf. Electra explains to Orestes: “never yet has he brought himself to touch me in my bed,” οὐπώποτ’ εὐνῆς τῆς ἔτλη θιγεῖν, 255). The farmer had already told us that Electra was of marriageable age when she was betrothed to him. Ideally, she should have been married and have transitioned from being a parthenos to being a gyne by losing her virginity in marriage and bearing legitimate children. Instead, Electra is trapped in the liminal stage, where she is, although nominally married, forever a virgin and childless.

Electra’s ambiguous position is also marked by the chorus’ invitation of her to the festival at the temple of Hera: “all the unmarried girls will go to the temple of Hera” (πᾶσαι δὲ παρ’ Ἥραν μέλλουσιν παρθενικαὶ στεῖχειν, 173-174). Electra answers: “I will not take a place in the chorus together with Argive brides/young women” (οὐδ’ ἐνστᾶσα χοροῖς Ἀργείαις ἅμα νύμφαις, 178-179). Electra partly justifies her refusal to participate in the festival by the lack of appropriate clothing (184-187):

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167 Sissa 1990, 87-94, for a discussion of how producing children in an illicit union does not mean transition from parthenos to gune.
Electra’s response has been interpreted as more evidence in support of her hysterical personality.  

168 Even rather recently, Raeburn sees Electra’s refusal to accept the clothes offered to her by the chorus as her unwillingness to give up sorrows “to which remedies have been presented,” and that this demonstrates her unnecessary indulgence in grief, from which “she is evidently deriving too much personal satisfaction.” 170 In Electra’s defence, Lloyd rightly points out that when Electra refuses to go to the festival drawing attention to the lack of appropriate clothing, her appearance is mostly cited as a manifestation of her inability to go, rather than the main reason for it (175-189). Yet, whilst Lloyd finds an explanation for Electra’s refusal partly in that she is “in no mood for festivals at all,” I see Electra’s drawing attention to her clothes as a manifestation of her liminal position. On the one hand, it makes clear that Electra is in a position where she does not belong: the “worn out [remains] of peplos” (τρύχη τάδ’ ἐμῶν πέπλων, 185) are not fit for “the royal daughter of Agamemnon” (Αγαμέμνονος κούρα

168 Grube 1961, 301.

169 The chorus sing: ἀλλ’ ἵθι καὶ παρ’ ἐμοὶ χρῆσαι | πολύπηνα φάρεα δῦναι | χρύσεα τε χάρισιν προσθήματ’ ἀγλαίας (“but come and use my many clothes to wear, and gold accessories for adornment, do a favour to us,” 190-193); but Electra refuses: οὐδεὶς θεῶν ἐνοπᾶς κλύει | τὰς δυσδαίμονας (“none of the gods listens to the prayers of a wretched person.” 198-200).


171 Lloyd 1986, 6.

172 Lloyd 1986, 6.
βασιλείᾳ, 186-187). On the other hand, not only is participating in a festival incompatible with mourning,¹⁷³ but it is hardly a coincidence that the festival she is invited to is a festival specifically for unmarried girls.

Before discussing this liminality further, it is worth saying a few words about the (in)appropriateness of Electra’s lament, which Lloyd sees as the main reason for Electra’s refusal to go to the festival. Lloyd’s analysis is built largely around the identification of what would have been customary mourning practices for a woman in Electra’s circumstances.¹⁷⁴ He cites a number of both tragic and epic examples to demonstrate that Electra’s lamentation is no more hysterical than that of other literary figures in similar circumstances, and it is by calling attention to her present state of misery, as a wronged child of Agamemnon, that she demonstrates the seriousness of the implications of his murder.¹⁷⁵ At the same time, Lloyd argues, it is Electra’s duty to continue inciting revenge through lamentation until her father is avenged.¹⁷⁶ Although Lloyd’s account of other mourning literary figures does show that Electra’s lament is customary, rather than exceptionally hysterical, this does not mean that her actions are unproblematic. Lloyd’s references to mourning epic figures especially, such as Laertes, remind one of the conflict between the Classical polis of Athens in late fifth century and archaic practices. Honig has persuasively demonstrated how Antigone’s Homeric lament in Sophocles’ eponymous play stands in conflict with contemporary democratic and

¹⁷³ Lloyd 1986, 7; Parker 1983.
¹⁷⁴ Lloyd 1986; also Parker 1983.
¹⁷⁵ Lloyd 1986, 4, argues against a view that sees Electra as selfish on the grounds that she opens her laments with and often refers to her own suffering (115-121, 304-313), rather than the actual murder of Agamemnon. He states (1986, 5): “it is in any case misguided to try to distinguish in a Greek lament between the sorrow of the mourner for the dead and her pity for herself.”
¹⁷⁶ Lloyd 1986, 7.
collectivist values of Periclean Athens. At the same time, one of the messages of Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi* is arguably to defend putting an end to the archaic practice of individually regulated revenge, in which female lament plays a key role, in favour of state-regulated court proceedings. Thus, although Electra’s lament may be customary, it is the custom of Archaic Greece to which it belongs. In fact, it is this association with such Archaic practices that symbolically locate Athenian women, although within their contemporary city, also in a place separate from its contemporary political practices – a gap that Euripides’ *Electra* seems to bring to the fore. Electra’s emphasis on her clothes draws our attention to the fact that Electra does not belong in the place where she is located.

The festival Electra is invited to is specifically that of Hera, celebrated by παρθενικαί (“unmarried girls”). Electra’s ambiguous position is partly caused by her liminality between different stages of a Greek woman’s life. Although she is technically married, the chorus seem to know that she is a virgin and therefore they invite her to the festival as one of them. Just over a hundred lines later, she states that she does not belong among married women either: “being a virgin, I shun married women” (ἀναίνομαι γυναῖκας οὖσα παρθένος, 311). Zeitlin also points out that the festival that Electra is invited to seems to be that of Hieros Gamos (“sacred marriage”) at the Argive Heraion. Ormand adds to this reading by pointing out that the Argive myths about Hera often involve her preventing young women from sexual activity and procreation (at least temporarily). Io, for instance, because of Hera’s jealousy, ends up being turned into

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177 Honig 2009.
178 Ormand 2009, 269, discusses the association of women with archaic institutions in contrast with contemporary democratic political values.
a heifer and is forced temporarily to wander the Earth, pursued by a gadfly. Ormand draws attention to a reading of this myth that highlights anxiety about the liminality of a *parthenos*, who, in Io’s case, is literally turned into an animal and is made to wander, thus being placed outside the confines of family, city and civilization into “belonging nowhere.” The association of Electra with virgins like Io through the cult of Argive Hera further emphasizes that the chorus’ invitation of Electra to the festival strongly highlights her liminal position.

It is notable that in Greek myths dealing with a girl’s perpetual virginity, the girl’s state is often somehow connected to her male kin. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Danae is enclosed by her father in order to prevent her from losing her virginity, and Antigone chooses to deprive herself of marriage in order to pay due rites to her brother. Similarly, Iphigenia, instead of marriage, chooses to sacrifice herself willingly for her father’s sake. In this way, Electra is similar to all these women. A father-like figure, Aegisthus encloses her in an unfitting marriage to prevent her from bearing any children that would count in the tragic world. At the same time, Electra herself, staying a virgin, chooses to identify herself with her birth father. In her state of mourning for him, her own condition mirrors that of the dead. Orestes, upon seeing her, comments that her “body is worn down by grief” (λύπαις γε συντετηκός, 240), and Electra herself observes: “with what dirt I am encrusted” (πίνῳ θ᾿ ὅσῳ βέβριθ᾿, 305). Thus, in her mourning for Agamemnon, she almost lives through the experience of a

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180 Ormand 2009, 268, notes that Io is also associated with Argos by virtue of being an ancestor to Danaus, who in some versions founds or re-founds Argos.
181 It is also notable that in contrast to her feelings for her father, Electra rejects identification with her mother, even though just as Electra herself is planning to avenge her father, Clytaemnestra too was avenging her daughter when she killed Agamemnon.
corpse. Clytaemnestra believes that Electra has always been more attached to her father: “My child, it has always been in your nature to love your father” (ὦ παί, πέφυκας πατέρα σὸν στέργειν ἀεί’, 1102). In addition, Electra sees her father’s and her own experiences as one: “the heavy woes that are mine and my father’s” (τύχας βαρείας τὰς ἐμὰς κἀκεῖον πατρός, 301). It is also notable that, having just stated that Agamemnon now dwells in the Underworld (“oh father, you live in Hades,” ὦ πάτερ, σὺ δ᾿ ἐν Ἀίδᾳ κεῖσαι, 122-123), she then sees herself as living in her “father’s bedchambers” (ἐν θαλάμοις πατρῴοις, 132-133). This is especially curious since Electra is not, in fact, living in the palace anymore and therefore it is unlikely that she refers to the actual palace where she was born. Perhaps she sees herself as sharing her father’s space in the Underworld, or maybe her father’s chambers refer to the symbolic space of a girl’s pre-marital status, which Electra has left only in name. While Electra is at the age where she should be preoccupied with matters of her marital family, she is inseparable from the past of her natal family, whose events are still causing her to be almost completely defined by the love for her long-gone father, her absent brother and hatred for her mother.

A significant element of the distortion of the natural flow of time for Electra in the play is the way in which she lures Clytaemnestra to come to her death in the farmer’s hut. Instead of bearing and rearing children, Electra pretends to have given birth in order to avenge her father’s death, an incident of the past. In order to persuade

\[\text{182} \text{ “For I burned with hatred against the mother who bore me as her daughter!” (διὰ πυρὸς ἐμολούν ἀ τάλανα ματρὶ τὰδ’, ἀ μ’ ἔτικτε κούραν, 1183-1184).} \]

\[\text{183} \text{ Since Electra is addressing Orestes here, it is possible that she is referring back to the time when Orestes left her still living in Agamemnon’s palace: “having left your sister among grievous misfortunes in her father’s chambers” (ἐν θαλάμοις λιπὼν πατρῷοις ἐπὶ συμφοραῖς Ἀγαμέμνων ἀδελφάν, 132-134).} \]

\[\text{184} \text{ Ormand 2009, 253: “Electra emphasizes home and father; these are the terms through which she understands her social identity and her current state.” For Electra’s preoccupation with her father, see also Boas 2017, 934-5, 1102-44.} \]
Clytaemnestra to come to the farmer’s hut, where she will be murdered, Electra pretends that she is actively taking part in the progression of time through her own generative principle: “[Tell her that] in childbirth I have just become a new mother of a male child” (λεχῶ μ᾿ ἀπάγγελῳ οὖσαν ἄρσενος τόκῳ, 652); and “She will come having heard of my childbirth state” (ἥξει κλυοῦσα λόχιά μου νοσήματα, 656). In reality, far from enabling the natural flow of time to progress, Electra is preoccupied with the past – her father’s death, which she is about to avenge by murdering Clytaemnestra. The means by which Electra lures Clytaemnestra to her death emphasizes how perverted the traditional flow of time has become for her.

**Space in Electra**

Just as Electra is concerned with the past of her natal family instead of that of her marital family’s present, she is also striving to go back to the palace of her father rather than to take care of a new marital household (if not of that of the farmer then at least of one of her former suitors). She identifies as “an exile from her father’s house” (δωμάτων φυγὰς πατρίων, 209), and summarizes her and Orestes’ misfortunes thus: “The bloody curses of our mother compel us [to go] from our paternal house!” (ζευγνῦσ᾿ ἡμᾶς πατρίων μελάθρων μητρὸς φόνιοι κατάρας, 1323-1324). Even at the end of the play, when Electra’s divine uncles set her up for an appropriate marriage, she laments: “what greater grief is there than to leave one’s native land?” (καὶ τίνες ἄλλαι στοναχαὶ μείζους ἢ γῆς πατρίως ὅρον ἐκλείπειν; 1314-1315). Seaford observes that in Greek culture “the woman is systematically denied the past continuity of her household of origin.” As he also

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185 Seaford 1990, 152: “It is perhaps in the light of this separation of the woman from her family of origin that we should see the distinction in the second book of Thucydides between the exhortation to soldiers (11.2) ‘not to appear worse than your fathers’ and the exhortation to widows (45.2) ‘not to be worse than your natures’.”
points out, various rituals designed to mark the complete separation of the bride from her parental home, such as a Boeotian tradition to burn an axle of the cart in which the groom has brought his bride into her new home, signify that a young woman’s attachment to her paternal household was a source of much anxiety for the Greeks. In *Electra*, a woman’s ambiguous position at marriage is problematized to its extreme – Electra identifies as one with her father, while her marital household is made to be such that she could not possibly belong there. In her longing to be included back in her paternal *oikos*, Electra emphasizes the problematic nature of female mobility and is possibly transgressing an ideal of femininity in that she is striving to be consistently anchored in the same household, that of her father.

A unifying feature of all three tragic wives discussed in this research is their lack of connection with the space in which they are located. In somewhat different ways, neither Deianeira nor Hermione can be said to fully belong to the spaces in which they are located. Euripides’ *Electra*, however, takes this to an extreme. The discrepancy between Electra’s birth status and that of her nominal husband manifests itself in their physical surroundings. The play takes place in front of the rustic house in which Electra is forced to live. This setting is significant for understanding Electra’s circumstances. It has been pointed out that the rustic location of Electra’s hut emphasizes her poverty. Being the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, Electra does not belong in such surroundings. It is notable that when the disguised Orestes appears, there

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186 Seaford 1990, 152.
187 Michelini 1987, 185: proposes that such a setting “echoes the mood and the setting of the *Odyssey,*” and thus “reasserts the domestic nature of the story,” while also introducing “a strong incongruity between the somber material and the setting, which is comedic and ‘low’ rather than heroic and ‘serious’.” Also on setting: Zeitlin 1970, 649n20.
188 Michelini 1987, 186, 193; also Zeitlin 1970, 650n21.
is not enough provision in Electra’s hut to prepare a feast (408—419). Perhaps it has symbolic significance that Electra is unable to provide for a guest from the resources of her marital household, and yet also explicitly states that she cannot hope to get any provisions from her natal household either: “We would never get anything out of my ancestral home from my mother” (οὐ γὰρ πατρῴων ἐκ δόμων μητρὸς πάραλάβομεν ἄν τι, 416-1417). The liminality of Electra’s position is highlighted by her need to look for resources from the outside: “go to my dear father’s old tutor, who pastures flocks [of sheep], having been cast out of the city […] tell him to come and bring some guest provisions for a feast” [ἔλθ᾿ ὡς παλαιὸν τροφέα μοι φίλου πατρός, ὃς […] ποίμναις ὁμαρτεῖ πόλεος ἕκβεβλημένος […] κέλευε […] ἐλθεῖν ξένιά τ᾿ ἐς δαῖτα πορσῦναί τινα, 409-414).

I believe the location of Electra’s hut also has another symbolic significance. The rustic location is reminiscent of the motif of child exposure. As Vernant points out, in myth, exposed children are normally placed in a pastoral setting: “the parents, who eject their offspring from the world of the living, entrust the infant to a shepherd to carry it away and abandon it on the heaths or the hills.” Examples include Ion, who is exposed by his mother in a “deserted cave” (ἄντρον ἔρημον ἔρημον, 1494), “dedicated to Hades” (εἰς Ἅιδαν ἐκβάλλῃ, 1496). Although the cave might not be specifically outside the city walls, for its location is described as “Pallas’ rocks to the north under the acropolis of the land of Athenians” (προσβόρρους πέτρας Παλλάδος ὑπ᾿ ὄχθῳ τῆς Αθηναίων χθονὸς, 11-12), nevertheless it is explicitly ἐρημὸν (“desert”) – a necessary characteristic if one is planning for the exposed child “to die” (ὁς θανοῦμενον, 18), and not to be found by

189 Vernant 1969, 162.
other people. The cave is associated with the wild, rather than with the civilized world of the city of Athens: Ion has been “exposed for wild animals” (θηρσὶν ἐκτεθείς, 951), his mother “banished him for birds and beasts to be eaten” (πτανοῖς ἐξόρισεν θοίναν θηρσί, 504-505). Similarly, Oedipus is exposed by his parents, because it is believed upon his birth that he would be dangerous to his father (Sophocles, OT 712-114).

Oedipus then “was cast, by hands of another, to an untrodden mountain” (ἔρριψεν ἄλλων χερσίν ἄβατον εἰς ὄρος, OT 719). In both Ion’s and Oedipus’ stories, it is the wilderness of the landscape in which the infants are exposed that is emphasized. There is a significant difference, of course, between Ion and Oedipus, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Electra, because the latter is neither an infant nor a male. Nevertheless, as mentioned, Electra is placed in the farmer’s hut, outside the city, primarily in her social role as a potential mother. Through Electra, her yet unborn child is cast out from the city and the world of the Argive royalty. On the other hand, Electra’s other important social role is that of a child of Agamemnon and, in a problematic manner, of Aegisthus. In that role, Electra, perhaps symbolically merged together with her potential male offspring, is cast outside the city and is in a way exposed. Still disguised, Orestes asks her: “Why do you live here, so far from the city?” (ἐκ τοῦ δὲ ναίεις ἐνθάδ᾿ ἑκάς, 246). Electra answers: “I have made a marriage, stranger, a marriage like death” (ἐγημάμεσθ᾿, ὦ ξεῖνε, θανάσιμον γάμον, 247). Electra’s comparison of her position to death and her readiness to commit suicide, together with Euripides’ choice to innovatively place her outside the city-walls serve to highlight the actual similarity of Electra’s position to death, rather than her “hysterical” personality. Together with Clytaemnestra, Aegisthus

190 Notably, ἔξορισεν has connotations specifically of banishment “beyond the frontier” (LSJ).
places Electra outside “the world of the living” – in the space outside the city that is also shared by graves, including that of Agamemnon. 

I offer one more reading of Electra’s physical location that could potentially give an insight into her unusually active role in the murder of Clytaemnestra. It has been pointed out that, unlike Orestes, who kills Aegisthus in the open, Electra lures Clytaemnestra to her death inside the farmer’s hut, and, what is more, by the promise of, in Burnett’s words, “an intimate household rite,”192 – that of childbirth. It is Electra who decides to bring about the murder in a place that is traditionally associated with the female and which very much replicates Clytaemnestra’s own murder of Agamemnon. 

Clytaemnestra in Aeschylus’ Oresteia kills Agamemnon not only by means of guile and textiles, traditionally associated with women in Greek thought, but also using some kind of weapon. It is not clear what weapon it is exactly, for she only states that she “struck” Agamemnon twice (παίω δὲ νῦν δίς, 1384), and Agamemnon himself cries out that he has been “struck deep inside by a mortal blow” (πέπληγμαι καιρίαν πληγὴν ἔσω, 1343).

It seems likely that Clytaemnestra is using a sword, but, in any case, this use of weaponry further highlights Clytaemnestra’s transgression of the feminine ideal. At the same time, Clytaemnestra, as has been argued in Chapter Two of this thesis, takes her power from her intimate relationship with a traditionally female realm – the inside of her house. Electra, on the other hand, although replicating Clytaemnestra’s actions in committing the murder inside, evidently does not have the same (if any) connection to

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191 Orestes testifies that Agamemnon’s grave is also located outside the city walls. He has visited the grave and also explicitly states: “I do not set foot inside the city walls” (καὶ τεχέων μὲν ἐντὸς οὐ βαίνω πόδα, 94).
193 Burnett 1998, 230: In comparison, Orestes kills Aegisthus in the open. For similarities between Electra and Clytaemnestra see Slater 1968, 180, 188.
the farmer’s household as Clytaemnestra has to her marital *oikos*. Electra, like Clytaemnestra, uses a weapon – ξίφους (“a sword,” 1225). Yet, unlike that of Clytaemnestra, Electra’s power does not stem from her connection to the *oikos*, and, of course, it is not her house-mate, her husband, whom she kills. Instead, Electra’s transgression represents the other end of the spectrum of female violence in Greek myth, symbolized in the rustic location of her hut. As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, when women are imagined outside the space of an *oikos* or of a city, in a space that is not dominated by the male, they are often associated with uncivilized violence and maenadism.\(^{194}\) Antigone was mentioned, but Euripides’ *Bacchae* perhaps offers a more apt comparison here because of the nature of violence that unconfined women perform in this play. In the *Bacchae*, when women escape to the mountains, they turn into maenads, and when men attempt to bring them under control, the maenads become frenzied. They do not simply kill a man, but they violate his corpse in a manner that defies civilized practices. Even the hunters’ ways of killing are said to be explicitly different: “hunters boast in vain of acquiring the works of spear-makers” (κομπάζειν χρεών καὶ λογχοποιῶν ὄργανα κτᾶσθαι μάτην, 1206-1207). And, of course, the hunters kill wild beasts rather than humans. On the contrary, Agave boasts: “but we with our own hands caught this thing and tore apart the limbs of this beast” (ἡμεῖς δὲ γ᾽ αὐτῆ χειρὶ τόνδε θ᾽ ἐἵλομεν, χωρίς τε θηρὸς ἀρθρα διεφορήσαμεν, 1209-1210). The maenads even tear Pentheus’ head off: “let him pin to a triglyph this lion’s head” (ὡς πασσαλέως κράτα τριγλύφοις τόδε λέοντος, 1214-1215).

\(^{194}\) Seaford 1990, 163-164.
The maenads’ violence is comparable to Electra’s treatment of her mother, although Electra is, of course, not nearly as violent. In Sophocles’ and Aeschylus’ versions, Electra fulfills her duty to her dead father by rousing Orestes to avenge him – a traditionally female, although not unproblematic, role. Significantly, neither of these playwrights places Electra outside the limits of the palace either. As far as we know, both the excessive violence and the rugged environment are Euripides’ innovations.

In Euripides’ version, Electra not only encourages her hesitant brother and comes up with the plan for Clytemnestra’s murder, but she herself helps Orestes drive the sword into their mother’s body. Electra cries out after the deed: “And I urged you on and at the same time I applied myself to the sword!” (ἐγὼ δὲ γ᾽ ἐπεκέλευσά σοι ξίφους τ᾽ ἐφηγήμαν ἄμα, 1224-1225). In taking an active part in the physical murder of her mother, Electra transgresses the constraints of cultural expectations towards female conduct, thus denying in general the order of civilization dominated by the male. Similarly, Electra’s treatment of Aegisthus’ corpse can be seen in a similar way. In the late fifth and early fourth centuries, Athenians seem to be taking pride in their respectful treatment of corpses, even if those corpses are not Athenian. Thus, Lysias in his Funeral Oration draws explicit contrast between the Theban refusal to bury the corpses of their Argive enemies, and the Athenian expedition to recover those corpses and grant them their proper rites.

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195 It must be noted that some critics believe Orestes in Euripides’ Electra cuts Aegisthus’ head off and brings it to Electra (see, for example, Conacher 1967, 207; Halleran 1985, 22). Although this reading would add to my interpretation of Electra’s violence, I believe it has been persuasively argued by Kovacs 1987 that there is no sufficient basis for amending and translating the lines 856-857 (κάρα ‘πιδείξων οὐχὶ Γοργόνος φέρων ἄλλῳ δὲν στυγεῖς Αἴγισθον, “[Orestes comes] carrying to display not the head of the Gorgon, but Aegisthus, whom you hate”) as “[Orestes comes] carrying to display not the Gorgon’s head but that of Aegisthus, whom you hate.” Nevertheless, even without the head, Electra’s violence exceeds that portrayed in the other surviving versions of her myth.

196 Raeburn 2000, 149.

197 Rosivach 1983 although focusing specifically on Sophocles’ Antigone, provides an overview of the treatment of enemy corpses in Greek literature.
regards to the behaviour of the Thebans, Lysias states that “the gods below were not
receiving their due rites and, with the altars being polluted, the gods above were sinned
against” (τοὺς δὲ κάτω τὰ αὐτῶν οὐ κομίζεσθαι ἱερῶν δὲ μιαινομένων τοὺς ἄνω θεοὺς ἀσεβεῖσθαι, 2.7). The Athenians, on the other hand, unable to recover the corpses through
diplomacy, marched against Thebes, risking their own safety. The Athenians are even
presented as doing a favour to the Thebans, since they are said to be taking care lest “by
doing wrong against the dead [the Thebans] should commit insolence against the gods”
(τοὺς τεθνεῶτας ἐξαμαρτάνοντες πλείο περὶ τοὺς θεοὺς ἐξυβρίσωσιν, 2.9). It is important,
of course, that the Argives in this case are specifically the war dead, but nevertheless
Lysias’ treatment of the story demonstrates that according to Athenian ideological
standards at the time, the dead should receive their proper rites and the gods their honours,
even if the corpses belong to the enemy side. Euripides’ Electra, similarly, expresses a
concern that if she goes on to insult Aegisthus’ corpse, or accepts Orestes’ proposal to
leave the corpse exposed for wild beasts and birds (θηρσὶ […] οἰωνοῖσιν, 896-898), the
citizens of Argos will blame her: “I am ashamed […] to insult a corpse, lest someone hurls
malice at me” (αἰσχύνομαι […] νεκροὺς ὑβρίζειν, μή μέ τις φθόνῳ βάλη, 900-902). As
Rosivach points out, Electra does not need to spell out for the audience why exactly the
Argives might blame her, because it would have been clear to them.198 Nevertheless,
Electra does go on to blame and insult the corpse for the length of about fifty lines (907-
956). The mountainous rustic location of her nominal husband’s hut strongly emphasizes
the uncivilized nature of Electra’s crime against Clytaemnestræ and against Aegisthus’

198 Rosivach 1983, 198.
corpse – the result of Electra’s forced exile into the outside of the limits of a polis and its civilization.

**Illegitimacy of marriage**

In the discussion of Deianeira and Hermione it was established that the representation of their dysfunctional marriages was somehow manifested in the violation of their wedding rituals. This is also true of Electra. Ideally, a Greek parthenos is given away in marriage by her male kin who is her kurios. Electra mentions that she used to have her maternal uncle as a suitor: “and I shun Castor, who, before he went up to the gods, wooed me, since I was his kinswoman” (ἀναίνομαι δὲ Κάστορ’, ὦ πρῖν ἐς θεοὺς ἐλθεῖν ἔμ᾿ ἐμνήστευον, οὖσαν ἐγγενῆ, 312-313). It is unclear whether Electra refers to the times when Agamemnon was still alive. Nevertheless, now that he is gone, Electra states that she is married to someone who would explicitly not have been her father’s choice: “Not the man to whom my father hoped to ever marry me” (οὐχ ᾧ πατήρ μ᾿ ἤλπιζεν ἐκδώσειν ποτέ, 249). As was cited above, it is Aegisthus who gives Electra in marriage (31-36). Yet it is unclear what legal right Aegisthus could have had over the children of Agamemnon, at least in Classical Athens. Perhaps even more importantly, Aegisthus’ position as head of the household is compromised by his association with traditionally female roles and Clytaemnestra’s with the male. Electra mentions that Clytaemnestra’s children by Aegisthus are known by her rather than his name (930 ff.; cf. Soph., El. 365). As Vernant points out, Aegisthus is a mobile unit who comes into Agamemnon’s household through a bed – a role traditionally associated with women in Greek society – and therefore Aegisthus cannot be the household’s kurios. By extension, Aegisthus is

199 Vernant 1969, 139, 141.
also not Electra’s *kurios*, and therefore his decisions concerning her marriage cannot be valid. It is significant that Electra mentions that her nominal husband has not consummated the marriage not only because he thinks himself unfit for Electra, but specifically because he does not see Aegisthus as having authority over Electra: “He thinks the man who gave me to him had no authority” (οὐ κύριον τὸν δόντα μ᾿ ἥγειται, 259). Thus, the union is only a “pretence of marriage” not only because it has not been consummated, but also because it can be considered illegitimate.

**The play’s ending**

The end of the play appears as complicated as that of Euripides’ *Andromache*. As Andújar points out, the Dioscuri are ambiguous divinities – semi-divine and “closely bound to the mortals on stage,” in part by virtue of being their kin. They appear as *dei ex machina* and make arrangements for Electra and Orestes. Neither of the siblings receives exactly what they have been striving for. Instead of becoming the ruler of Argos, Orestes is told to settle in a faraway land (1250-1275). Electra’s prospects seem more appropriate, even if they are not what she has been asking for. As mentioned above, throughout the play Electra has been striving to return to her natal household, rather than to become a wife elsewhere. At one point near the end of the play, however, Electra also expresses interest in her future marital prospects 1198-1200:

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egin{align*}
ιὼ ἵὼ μοι. ποὶ δ’ ἐγὼ, τίν’ ἐς χορόν, \\
τίνα γάμον εἴμι; τίς πόσις μὲ δέξεται \\
νυμφικάς ἐς εὐνάς;
\end{align*}
\]

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200 Andújar 2016, 166.
201 Ormand 2009, 265-267: “even as an exile, this play emphasizes that Orestes will remain a thoroughly political animal,” unlike Electra, whose new marriage will supposedly restore her to society at the same time conforming that as a woman she does not belong to this society politically.
“Woe is me! Where will I go, to what dance, what marriage? What husband will receive me into the bridal bed?”

It is significant that Electra here completely ignores the fact that technically she is already married. Once again, a problem revealed in Electra’s words is also emphasized by the play itself. As Marshall observes, if the three-actor rule is to be observed at the end of the play, with Electra and Orestes on stage, it is probably the actor who played the farmer who is now playing the role of the siblings’ divine uncle, Castor. Thus, the farmer’s character is completely eliminated by the play, and none of the other characters refers to him. In fact, like Electra, Castor ignores her nominal marriage and tells Orestes to “give Electra to Pylades as a wife for his home” (Πυλάδῃ μὲν Ἠλέκτραν δὸς ἄλοχον ἐς δόμους, 1249). This is perhaps not surprising, for not only does Electra’s previous marriage appear illegitimate but its social significance in the world of the play seems to be limited to demonstrating the dysfunction of space and of the natural flow of time for Electra’s character. Both now seem to have a real chance of being restored. This time, it is her brother, apparently having completed his rite of passage into adulthood by avenging Agamemnon’s death, who is giving away Electra in marriage. As her closest kin, he has the right to make a legitimate marriage for her, and he is marrying her off to his own friend and a social equal.

And yet the ending of the play is uneasy. The Dioscuri fail to adequately address the siblings’ and the chorus’ concerns about religious pollution (1294 ff.), and proclaim Apollo’s orders to be “unwise,” (ἄσοφοι, 1302), thus throwing the whole divine order into doubt. Significantly, a marriage between Orestes and Hermione seems to be a

203 Andújar 2016, 169.
Euripidean innovation. Electra, having expressed an interest in her own future marital prospects, once again laments the necessity to leave her paternal home and possibly the very female lot that restricts her citizenship to a role in the family and religion, preventing any political participation. To Castor’s attempt to present Electra’s new future in a positive light (“she has a husband and a home, she does not suffer pitiably except that she leaves the city of Argives,” πόσις ἔστ᾽ αὐτῇ καὶ δόμος: οὐχ ἤδ᾽ οἰκτρὰ πέπονθεν, πλὴν ὅτι λείπει πόλιν Ἀργεῖων, 1311-1313), Electra objects: “what other misfortunes are greater than to leave the border of paternal land?” (τίνες ἄλλαι στοναχαὶ μείζους ἢ γῆς πατρίας ὦρον ἐκλείπειν; 1314-1315). Like her mother Clytaemnestra, who has abandoned the traditional female mobility and instead has rendered her male partner mobile, Electra too wishes to stay fixed in Argos. Finally, as in Euripides’ *Andromache*, it is only the prospect of resolution that the end of the play offers, rather than resolution itself. In fact, in spite of the promise of a legitimate marriage for Electra, one is reminded of the etymology of her name – *a-lektros* (“without marriage bed”) – which potentially problematizes any such prospect.

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204 Ormand 2009, 268, although the mention of it is also found in Euripides’ *IT* esp.706-707.
205 Ormand 2009, esp. 267.
Conclusion

The three tragedies analyzed in this thesis all portray women placed in dysfunctional marriages. In all three cases, this dysfunction has to do with the liminality of the women’s positions. The ideological problem of liminality arises from the mobility that characterizes the lived experiences of ancient Greek women, who can never be completely anchored in any single household but through marriage either move from one *oikos* to another or at least always preserve the potential to move. The transfer of the bride from the authority and the physical space of one *oikos* to another, first during *engue* and then *exagoge*, is a symbolical hallmark of female mobility. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the plays analyzed in this study it is this very moment of transition that is characterized by violated rituals, signifying that the transfer of the bride has been hindered and emphasizing the impossibility of her proper incorporation to the marital household.

One of the ways in which the tragedies highlight the liminality of its wives is through a portrayal of an impeded progression of time. Hermione and Electra do not even have children, and while the former is thus trapped in a position of a *nymphe*, bride, the latter stays a *parthenos*, virgin, in a fake marriage. The entrapment of both in time is manifested in their exaggerated connection to their fathers at the expense of their progression into womanhood through an appropriate position in a marital *oikos*. Unlike Hermione and Electra, Deianeira has actually borne and raised children – a process that is supposed to give an ancient Greek woman as much incorporation into a marital *oikos*, through the link with her children, as she could ever achieve. Yet the play does not allow Deianeira to stay in a position of a mother and wife, and instead she is portrayed
as continuously re-living the experience of her wedding and of being a bride, until the very moment of her death.

Another way in which the incompleteness of a wife’s incorporation into her marital *oikos* is expressed symbolically in the three selected tragedies is through the dysfunctional relationship of the woman with the physical and the symbolic space around her. Some tragic wives, such as Clytaemnestra and even Medea, use their close connection with the inside of their marital homes and the household resources in order to achieve goals that go against their husbands’ interests. In Clytaemnestra’s case, her connection to the house is so perversely strong, that she ends up expelling her husband from it through killing him, and herself takes on the role of the permanent house keeper, bringing a new partner into the house through her bed. Yet in tragedy, wives cannot win. Unlike for Clytaemnestra, it is the lack of a connection with their marital households that becomes a problem for Deianeira, Hermione, and Electra. Deianeira is presented as striving to become an integral part of Heracles’ household, but is nevertheless unable to gain control over its resources, which in turn, I have argued, leads her to commit her fatal mistake. Hermione and Electra are both portrayed as trapped between their natal and marital households, not fully belonging to either. Their location outside of the confines of a single *oikos* becomes exaggeratedly expressed as their abandoning of the order of civilization and inclination to violence. I hope to have demonstrated that the portrayal of wives in the three selected tragedies is defined not by any moral characteristics of any particular heroine, but by the thematic concerns of the plays, which in turn are expressed symbolically through representations of ritual, time, and space.
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