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# **Honour and Revenge**

**A Study of the Role of Honour in Euripides' *Medea* and *Hippolytus***

**with Reference to A Selection of Contemporary Societies.**

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**at the University of Natal: Pietermaritzburg. December 1998.**

**I hereby certify that this is my own original work and has not been submitted for examination in any other university.**

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## **Preface**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people who helped to make this thesis possible. Firstly, the staff of the Classics Department of the Pietermaritzburg Campus of the University of Natal, who supported me both with their friendship and with the loan of research material. Secondly, my supervisor, Mr. Mike Lambert, who guided and corrected each revision of this thesis as it developed.

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## INTRODUCTION

My purpose in this study is twofold. Firstly, I intend to examine the existence of honour in Greek society by an analysis of its presentation in works of Greek literature. In order to achieve this, I shall first examine the values of the Homeric, heroic society so that a picture of the code of honour that was used in those times, might be established. This code of honour provided the foundation upon which later honourable behaviour was based and from which it grew; it is, therefore, a necessary addition in a study such as this. Then, I shall proceed to a study of Euripides' *Medea* and *Hippolytus*, two plays that firmly incorporate the motif of honour and revenge.

Secondly, I intend to examine a few examples of modern societies. The purpose of this is to ascertain whether any relationship between archaic, classical and contemporary cultures can be established. Shared values and beliefs will be examined in order to determine any possible similarities between cultures and societies that are chronologically separated by hundreds of years.

# PART ONE

## 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF THEATRE

This thesis is based on the premise that the study of Greek tragedy can be used to reveal some of the values and concerns of its audience. Therefore, the first requirement is to justify this premise.

Tragedy was the Athenians' central popular literary genre<sup>1</sup>. It was a broadly popular art form with plays that were directed towards a considerable segment of the populace. It has been argued that the way in which the theatre and its productions were structured is indicative of its popular focus and its place within the democracy.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the very development of tragedy coincided with the evolution of Athenian democracy and that city's growth into a major power. Although the theatre was not actually an invention of the democracy, by the fifth century it had become closely identified with the official life of the democratic polis. It was presented annually at

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Padel: In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self. Pg. 5.

<sup>2</sup>

J. Gregory (Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians)  
Pg. 5ff.



the festival of Dionysus<sup>3</sup> - a state-sponsored festival- the programme was arranged by a polis official (the eponymous archon)<sup>4</sup> and the production of the plays was financed by a wealthy citizen. In accordance with the democratic principle of accountability, after the event an assembly offered the mechanism by means of which any irregularities connected with the festival could be examined.

The democratic aspect of theatre could also be seen in the composition of the chorus, judges and audience. The chorus comprised ordinary Athenian citizens and the judges were chosen by lot. After Pericles had established a fund to offset the price of admission, attendance was subsidized by the state. This made it possible for poorer people to attend the plays as well, another sign of its importance to the people and its place within the democracy - measures were taken to ensure that everyone, not just the rich, could attend. However, the question of whether or not women were allowed or able to attend has not yet been resolved conclusively.<sup>5</sup> This would obviously affect

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<sup>3</sup> Bieber: The History of the Greek and Roman Theater. Pg. 96.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>

Sarah Pomeroy in Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity, notes that while it seems probable that women did attend dramatic performances, there is also evidence to the contrary. She also makes the valid point that women who did not have slaves to look after their infant children would probably not have been able to attend a full day's performance, or even to see one play. Furthermore, she comments that it is interesting to note that, absent or present, women do not seem to have been noticed by the  
(continued...)

the understanding of theatre as being directed to an audience representative of the populace as a whole. Naturally, the absence of women would detract somewhat from our conception of a true democracy, but it would probably not have posed too significant a stumbling block for the average male Athenian's understanding of a democracy, as women were excluded from many of the features of Athens' democracy - for example, the political ones. Therefore, the possible absence of women does not affect the fact that the theatre would have been viewed as a very democratic institution by the majority of the male-dominated populace.<sup>6</sup> To a large extent, it can be assumed that the plays were intended to be addressed to a popular audience in the sense that it was a body representative of the Athenian populace.

Furthermore, city business was suspended for the duration of the festival. This reveals the very public nature of the festival and the general participation of the people that it involved. It is difficult from a contemporary perspective to envisage a

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<sup>5</sup>(...continued)  
ancient authorities. (Pg. 80).

<sup>6</sup>

Certainly, it was men who were responsible for the development and transmission of myths, especially via literature. We cannot be exactly sure of the extent of the role that women played in the creation and evolution of the earliest myths, but the crystallization of mythology in the literature of Classical Athens was the task of men. Perhaps this male emphasis was largely responsible for the heroic code that was presented in tragedy, but this heroic code will be discussed in greater detail at a later stage.

similar such event taking place, or even to gain an accurate perception of what such an event would entail. We have no comparative form of entertainment that involves the population in this way and that reflects upon their very lifestyle. The strong public nature of the festival and the participation that it involved, to the extent of the temporary closure of city businesses, reveals that the development of the theatre was indeed a product of the democracy, even if its actual creation was not.

The democratic structuring of the theatre dictated to some extent the style of the plays that were produced. The presence of a popular audience drawn from different walks of life - not just the rich or the educated, etc. - offered the dramatist a unique opportunity to address the entire population on issues that were of concern to them both as individuals and as members of various groups within the audience. It would be reasonable to assume that since the plays were in many ways linked to the democracy, the characters that they depicted would be drawn from the common people and would be representative of the 'average' citizen. It was the aristocratic ethos that associated worth with birth and wealth, in addition to placing individual achievement over communal effort. These attributes seem a far cry from a democratic principle. The individualistic qualities that had once constituted excellence in a hero could prove to be problematic in a democratic society in which the community was supreme. In this way, the inherited aristocratic code was out of touch with public

policy. However, as Gregory<sup>7</sup> argues, the strength of tradition remained firm, in spite of the development of the democracy. The old values that were enshrined within the realms of myth and poetry, were still admired and respected by the Athenians who looked to the past as a 'source of validation'<sup>8</sup> for their own society. Gregory further comments that historians have noted, with regard to Athens, that 'the accepted scale of values remained aristocratic throughout' and that the democracy 'never acquired a language of its own'<sup>9</sup>. Aristocratic and heroic values continued to be upheld in Greek tragedy, even though it existed within the context of a democracy. Both aristocrats and the common people could benefit from the system of values that retained the glamour and authority of the heroic past, but which was still accessible and appropriate to the people of the day.

Ken Dowden<sup>10</sup> comments that "tragedy extracts from mythology the themes it wishes". There was an abundance of mythological tales from which playwrights could select the themes for their plays. This potential for variation was also, in many cases, increased by the fact that several common mythological stories

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<sup>7</sup> J. Gregory: Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians. Pg. 8.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* Pg. 186.

<sup>10</sup> The Uses of Greek Mythology. Pg. 164.

had more than one accepted version. Hence, it is logical to assume that such an abundance of mythological material would lead to a very diverse selection of topics for the various tragedies; however, among the extant Greek tragedies that we have today, we find that this is often not the case. In fact, we even find different tragedians addressing the same tale (as with those approaching the issue of Electra and Orestes in their roles as matricides) , each adding his own personal mark through the particular focus that he chooses to adopt for his version. In the case of plays dissociated from one another in terms of actual stories and protagonists, we still find similar and repeated themes occurring time and time again. This should lead us to question the reasons behind these similarities. Why is it that, despite such an abundance of potential mythological material, playwrights often chose similar stories or themes? The audience would have been well acquainted with the tales that were chosen for the plays. Therefore, we can probably safely assume that it was not the suspense of an unpredictable or unknown plot that held the audience's attention - something else was responsible for this. That something must have been the actual presentation of the play. The audience must have been interested in the way in which the familiar story was presented and/or adapted. What changes had been made? Where were the emphases placed? How were the characters and their situations presented? What was the focus of the play? What inherent 'message' did it contain?

These questions must have been the issues that attracted the audience, either consciously or subconsciously. Since a familiarity with the story and its outcome would have detracted from *that* particular means of suspense, the audience must instead have appreciated the various emphases and messages within the play. In this way, the people must have comprised a rather thoughtful audience insofar as they were considering more than the mere story; rather, they were considering and analysing its presentation and meaning.<sup>11</sup>

The use of well-known tales, then, must have presupposed a deeper focus of the play than the mere portrayal of a story that was already known to all. When we take this into consideration along with the fact that, from the wealth of mythological material that was available to the playwrights, repeated themes were used, we are led to believe that there was a reason for this. I feel that it is reasonable to assume that these common themes were issues which would have been of concern to the audience, or at least which would have interested the audience. This would suggest that an idea

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It is not my intention with this statement to deny the Classical Greek audience the ability to enjoy a theatrical production in much the same way as the majority of contemporary spectators do. It is reasonable to assume that they too appreciated plays for their entertainment value - however, I do feel that a foreknowledge of the plays' stories and endings must have given a new dimension to the audience's appreciation of these plays.

of the audience's collective and individual values can be ascertained from a study of popular and repeated themes.

It is further important to remember that Greek plays were performed only at certain festivals and that dramatists competed against each other for the highly esteemed prize which was awarded to the victor. It seems that the importance which the qualities of honour and reputation held for the Greeks is to be observed even in this - the Greeks tended to believe that if artists (just as is the case with athletes) desire the honour of victory and fear the humiliation of defeat, those who are incompetent will be discouraged from participating, while those who are competent will be driven to do their best to perform well.<sup>12</sup> Hence, the whole community will benefit from their efforts as the standard of productions will naturally be much higher. A number of the Greek values inherent in the society can be seen in this; their competitiveness, preoccupation with honour and fame, and the communal spirit.

The fact that the plays were aimed at securing a prize influenced the playwrights in their selection of material and in the manner in which the plays were performed. Although the judges had to swear an oath in which they promised to carry out their duties honourably, it is unlikely (and perhaps naive) to believe that they could have remained totally indifferent to the reactions, favourable or hostile, of the

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<sup>12</sup> K.J. Dover and Others: Ancient Greek Literature. Pg. 51.

audience - after all, the judges could hardly have failed to hear the applause or its noticeable absence!

It would seem that the playwrights were well aware that the judges could be influenced by the reactions of the audience, and they often made obvious bids to secure the favour and attention of the audience. The comic poets were rather more open about this - some going so far as to scatter tit-bits amongst the audience - while the tragedians were more subtle, competing against each other and vying to win the approval of the Athenian audience through the inclusion of passages designed to be attractive to the audience. An example of this can be observed in the frequent passages extolling the many virtues of Athens and its people in Greek tragedy.<sup>13</sup>

Accepting that the plays were aimed at winning the first prize, and that to do so, a playwright had to select the appropriate mythological material from the vast array of possibilities and to present it in a favourable way, we can safely assume that the concerns of the audience and their attitudes would have been reflected in the play that this playwright chose to produce. Few dramatists could afford to ignore or defy the sentiments and prejudices shared by their audience.

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<sup>13</sup> *cf.* Euripides' *Medea* 824 - 849.



Although Greek tragedy was written for the general populace, it was aimed at a specific type of audience, that is an audience that could relate in some way to the drama presented to them and to the issues that were unfolded in these plays. Typical reactions of the popular audience would have been conditioned by the likes, dislikes, admirations and disapprovals common to the fifth century audience, known to the poet and, indeed, counted upon by him.<sup>14</sup> Amidst the drama of Greek tragedy can be found many and various social concerns which were prevalent amongst the members of the audience present at the production of these tragedies. This would make a study of Greek tragedy beneficial in revealing to us the issues and social concerns that occupied a Classical Greek audience, and should, therefore, help to explain better the people of that time. It may also help to clarify some of the values that influenced their lives and, thus, to explain (and perhaps, to a certain extent, justify) behaviour which may at first glance seem alien to us. After questioning some of the values and issues that were important to the Greeks, we may even find that some of them are not so dissimilar from our own thoughts. Dover comments on this in his introduction to Greek literature, and specifically, in this extract, to Greek tragedy:

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<sup>14</sup> David Kovacs: The Heroic Muse: Studies in the Hippolytus and Hecuba of Euripides. Pg. 6.

Those inclined to conclude ... that Greek tragedy is not about people and that it therefore has nothing to say to us are recommended to suspend judgement until they have read (or better, seen) a Greek tragedy and have reflected on it. ... there is a sense also in which they are different languages available for the description of the same experiences and passions. Hatred of our parents and children, lust for revenge on a brother, self-destruction in preference to suffering the humiliation of irremediable injustice, are all recurrent phenomena in human history; their nature as experiences transcends the centuries.<sup>15</sup>

In this way, Dover notes that many of the themes and issues handled in Greek tragedy are timeless, even if the mythological characters are not. The motifs of passion, anger, pride, the murderous desire for revenge, despair, and so forth represent emotions that have been felt, and will continue to be felt, throughout the ages. The setting might change, the feelings will not.

The stories and themes used for Greek tragedy were drawn from the common stock of Greek myth. The focus is less on the individual and specific personalities of the characters involved, than on a broad representation of these characters and a more

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K.J. Dover: Ancient Greek Literature. Pg. 54.

specific interest in the situation and action. The story in itself had relatively little significance; therefore, it remained to present an examination of the *situation* in which the various characters found themselves and the ways in which they dealt with this, that is, their *actions*. The focus was on the characters themselves, their personalities, decisions and actions, rather than on the tale with which the audience would already have been familiar<sup>16</sup>. Hence, for the most part, the emphasis is placed rather on what could be called stance or attitude than on deep character analysis.<sup>17</sup> In this way, Greek tragedy was often less interested in familiarizing the audience with the characters as people than we are today in modern plays or films. Rather, the audience was invited to consider and to share in the issues and problems facing the characters.

Dover<sup>18</sup> makes the comment that, even today, every picture, statue, play or film that we see, and every novel that we read, affects us in some way. We cannot avoid being influenced by these external means. Each of these contributes to the

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<sup>16</sup>

Aristotle notes that the most important part of tragedy is the arrangement of events and actions (Poetics vi.12). This is what constitutes the tragedy itself as, without the situation and action, there could be no tragedy. The second most important element of tragedy is the representation of character - how the people involved in the tragedy think and act (Poetics vi.19 - 20, 24).

<sup>17</sup> David Kovacs: The Heroic Muse: Studies in the *Hippolytus* and *Hecuba* of Euripides. Pg. 5.

<sup>18</sup> K.J. Dover and Others: Ancient Greek Literature. Pg. 59.

development of moral character, just as much as - often more potently than - our practical relations with people and things. In much the same way, the Greeks would have been influenced by the plays that they watched - they would have considered, questioned and reflected upon the various issues presented in the plays, even if they were not consciously or intentionally doing so. It is not an uncommon theory that Greek tragedy as a whole was intended by the playwrights and accepted by its original audience, as a vehicle for moral questions, lessons and warnings.<sup>19</sup>

In the *Frogs*, Aristophanes portrays Aeschylus and Euripides participating in an 'αγών, competing for the title of the best tragedian. Each describes his own brand or form of tragedy, and this is illustrative of some of the significant aspects of tragedy. It helps us to understand some of the popular views on tragedy, its structure, purpose and uses. (For just as tragedy was a popular and democratic form of theatre, so was comedy - both were produced at the same festivals).

In the *Frogs*, Euripides argues his case by claiming that he has substituted a more 'democratic' form of tragedy<sup>20</sup>, one that is free of cumbersome staging and obscure language<sup>21</sup>. He claims that his tragedy is more accessible to the people and

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<sup>19</sup> K.J. Dover: Ancient Greek Literature. Pg 59.

<sup>20</sup> *Frogs*: 951: μὰ τὸν Ἀπόλλω· δημοκρατικὸν γὰρ αὐτὸ ἐδρῶν

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* 937 - 960; 956 - 960.

more relevant to their daily life. This makes it more open to the spectators' discrimination and judgement. Aeschylus, on the other hand, argues that he has incited the Athenians to courageous action, while Euripides has made people worse because his characters display moral weaknesses that inspire the audience's imitation<sup>22</sup>. Both tragedians agree on the purpose of tragedy - it is there to improve and teach the people. Euripides says that the mark of a tragedian is his 'skillfulness and admonitions' in improving the people in the cities. Aeschylus concurs on the didactic function of tragedy saying that 'for children it is the schoolteacher who instructs; for grown-ups, it is the poet'<sup>23</sup>. While the two playwrights disagree on the best method, they both believe that the purpose of tragedy is to instruct and to improve the people. This reveals two important traits of tragedy. Firstly, it emphasizes the democratic aspect, as both playwrights are shown to be concerned with the improvement of the polis. Secondly, if the tragedians used tragedy as a means to instruct their contemporary people, surely we too can use Greek tragedy in order to learn more about these people. Surely, some of their values and concerns are to be found in the works that were designed to educate the people and to encourage them to reflect upon their own society and ideals? Indeed, anthropologically or

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* 1013 - 1017; 1026 - 1027; 1078 - 1088.

<sup>23</sup> Frogs: 1054 - 1055.

psychologically oriented scholars<sup>24</sup> have also viewed Greek tragedy as the battleground of conflicting value systems within society. The role that tragedy plays in establishing, questioning, confirming and representing, the values adopted by the society, is obvious. This would mark Greek tragedy as an instructive and useful medium not only for the Greeks for whom it was originally intended, but also for us as a tool by which we might examine their value system.

Furthermore, according to Plato and Aristotle as well, tragedians played the role of moral educators of society, not as preachers, but as explorers and questioners of values that puzzled them as much as their audiences.<sup>25</sup> If the Greek tragedians and their audiences could utilize the medium of Greek tragedy to promote better understanding of their own society, surely we too cannot ignore the value of this literary form? Surely too, we must be wary of expecting all the answers to unfold before us; if the Greeks themselves were puzzled and curious about the values of the society and times in which *they* lived, how much more cautious should we be about finding the 'one true answer' to all our questions? Perhaps the most that we can sensibly do is to examine and question much as the Classical Greeks seemed to have done, in an attempt to arrive at a reasonable, justifiable and plausible conclusion.

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<sup>24</sup> *cf.* Dodds, Holkins, Vernant, Gouldner and Slater (Segal:22).

<sup>25</sup> Elise P. Garrison: Groaning Tears: Ethical & Dramatic Aspects of Suicide in Greek Tragedy. Pg. ix.

## *The Development of Tragedy*

Tragedy probably originated as an extension of choral lyric, with the gradual addition of first, one actor, later followed by two and then three<sup>26</sup>. As was the case with epic, choral lyric had always used the myths of the heroic age for its predominant themes. This tradition was continued in tragedy. It was possible for the tragedian to use a more topical theme if he chose (for example, Aeschylus' Persians dealt with the defeat of Xerxes, king of Persia, an incident which had taken place only eight years before the production of the play). However, although there was the option for contemporary themes to be used, it was an option that was seldom taken. It would seem that public taste did not encourage the poet to produce a play that did not involve the re-enactment of a significant past event.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the same themes appear over and over again in Greek tragedy - mythological tales of great heroes, heroines and famous events.

Tragedy was a peculiarly Athenian invention in the classical period and became increasingly admired as the supreme poetic form. It also comprised the beginning of serious drama in the western world. Its flowering and fading took place practically

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<sup>26</sup> Aristotle: Poetics iv.16 - 17.

<sup>27</sup> K.J. Dover and Others: Ancient Greek Literature. Pg. 53.

in one century, the fifth century B.C. and the three poets of this period whose plays still survive today, were recognized by the Athenians of the next century as having achieved a 'classic' status. Many other tragic poets are known to us by name and citations, but in the course of the fourth century new work was gradually replaced in favour of revivals of fifth-century masterpieces.<sup>28</sup> The three tragedians who achieved this long-standing success were Aeschylus (who produced his first plays about 490 B.C. and died in 456) Sophocles (who first produced in 468 and died at the end of 406) and Euripides (whose career runs from 455 until his death early in 406). It is the last of these, namely Euripides, whom I have chosen as the focus of this study, having selected two of his plays, *Medea* and *Hippolytus*, to analyse.

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* Pg. 51.



## 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF HONOUR

### 2. 1: The Greeks - A Shame-Culture?

Before discussing the plays themselves and the issues contained within them, the driving force and motivations behind the actions of their protagonists, need to be examined and considered. I believe that the principle and ideal of honour is largely responsible for dictating much of the hero's behaviour and, accordingly, this issue will need to be discussed first.

One basic anthropological theory used to distinguish certain societies and to account for their particular emphases on different values, is that of a shame-culture as opposed to a guilt culture<sup>29</sup>. In order to understand the emphasis placed on honour within Greek society, we first need to examine the elements of a shame-culture, since this the category in which the Greeks of the classical and earlier periods, are most often considered to belong. The two distinctions of shame and guilt are used to differentiate between societies whose attitudes are based on opposing value systems, and who can, therefore, exhibit and laud very different behaviour.

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<sup>29</sup>E.R. Dodds: The Greeks and the Irrational.Pg.17.

Placing peoples into known categories helps to tell us more about those people, to illustrate which values they hold as important and which modes of behaviour they ideally seek to emulate. This, therefore, helps us to explain some of their behaviour and the motivation behind it. Of course, caution must be used. Within any group of people, there are still individuals with individual values, and such categorization inevitably leads to generalization and the submerging of individual character traits. However, while being aware of this danger, we can still acquire a general feel of the values shared by the majority of the population. For example, we can look at our own society and perceive that there is a general feeling that cold-blooded murder is bad - although of course, there will be those who feel differently. Yet the overall feeling from the majority of people will be that cold-blooded murder is bad. While acknowledging individual differences of opinion, we can still ascertain more general views and values of a specific populace.

It is further important to note that the Greeks, as is the case with any society examined over a prolonged period of time, were a developing people. Values and ideals changed with the progression of time - this too makes it more difficult to establish one pure set of values which dictated behaviour over the whole period. However, my interest lies predominantly in the values of the heroic age. I will first be considering the value system revealed in the works of Homer. Then, I shall

examine the value system that seems to be apparent in Classical tragedy. While Classical tragedy was obviously produced a long time after Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the majority of the characters and themes in these tragedies, were extracted from the Heroic Age. Therefore, many of the values remain the same, although we do often find a second value system - often revealed by the more 'common' characters, as opposed to the 'heroic' ones - existing alongside this heroic emphasis.

Generally speaking and with particular reference to the Heroic Age, the Greeks are considered to have belonged to a society with shame-culture values. The existence of a shame-culture implies an emphasis on outward appearance, fame and reputation and these features guide the behaviour of those people to whom an honourable reputation is important. This is in opposition to a guilt-culture in which the emphasis is on one's own awareness of one's wrongdoing, rather than placing importance on how other people may judge one's behaviour. In short, the difference between shame and guilt depends upon the audience - external for shame, internal for guilt.

Cairns<sup>30</sup> quotes from Ruth Benedict<sup>31</sup> in order to clarify this distinction between shame and guilt cultures:

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<sup>30</sup> *Aidos: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature.* Pg. 27.

<sup>31</sup> *The Sword and the Chrysanthemum* (London: 1947)

True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behaviour, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin. Shame is a reaction to other people's criticism. A man is shamed either by being openly ridiculed and rejected or by fantasizing to himself that he has been made ridiculous. In either case it is a potent sanction. But it requires an audience or at least a man's fantasy of an audience. Guilt does not. In a nation where honour means living up to one's own picture of oneself, a man may suffer from guilt though no man knows of his misdeed and a man's feelings of guilt may actually be relieved by confessing his sin.

Although the different value systems involved in shame and guilt cultures can be quite complex and multi-faceted in some instances, the basic distinction between the two can be simply explained in a general fashion. Arnold Buss<sup>32</sup> defines the differences between shame and guilt simply as follows: guilt involves a feeling of sin or evil. (One might say or think "I *am bad*, I have transgressed"). Shame, on the other hand, involves exposure - causing one to say things that might be like, "I have failed"

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<sup>32</sup> Self-Consciousness and Social Anxiety. Pg. 159.

or "I have been *caught* cheating". In short, guilt involves self-hatred while shame is concerned with social anxiety.<sup>33</sup>

From this, it can be ascertained that, to a large extent, the difference between shame and guilt rests on the perspective and the viewer of one's actions. If the focus is angled inwards towards oneself, considering one's own feelings of wrongdoing, then this would involve an emotion of guilt. If, however, the focus is angled towards oneself from an outward perspective - considering one's actions from the perspective of another - then a feeling of shame would be involved. Guilt is a more private emotion, whilst shame depends largely on the opinions of others and one's awareness of these opinions.

There is clearly a substantial distance between the different ways of thinking in the two respective cultures. This difference between these two opposite types of culture and value systems, can lead to difficulties when a person who lives according

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Furthermore, Dover (Greek Popular Morality: 220-1) comments that Greek words that imply guilt insofar as they require the inclusion of the word 'conscience' when translated into English, usually refer more to a fear of punishment by others than to the recognition that one has fallen below one's own standards. Furthermore, the Greek acknowledgement of a crime committed by oneself, is indicative more of an intellectual awareness than of a moral concept, since it refers to the knowledge that one has committed this crime ( *σύννοια ἐμαυτῷ* ) rather than to any 'guilty' feeling caused by this criminal action. Therefore, even the Greek understanding of guilt, was not the equivalent of our own in its lack of a focus on moral belief.

to the values of one culture attempts to understand someone else who is using an entirely different value system. (Some of these difficulties are evident among different characters in some of the Greek tragedies that will be discussed later on in this study). Furthermore, as a modern audience - which is often understood to be closer to a guilt culture than to a shame-culture - we too might often disagree with the motivations and actions of the various heroes and heroines whom we examine in any study of Greek legend. However, we must take care when criticising these heroes/heroines - are we criticising them according to their value system or our own? For it would be incorrect to judge them according to our value system, a system with which they were unfamiliar.<sup>34</sup>

To return to the shame and guilt cultures, issues of shame and guilt are influential in determining people's behaviour. The way in which one would judge one's actions, will naturally determine the nature of those actions. Thus, an understanding of shame and guilt values, and an appreciation of their concomitant behavioural patterns, can help in attaining a clearer perception of a given society.

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To use a modern example, this could be compared to the institution of a retroactive law, punishing people for a wrongdoing committed in a time when the offending action was sanctioned by law (or public opinion) - clearly, such punishment and condemnation could be regarded as unjust; similarly, it would be wrong to judge the Greeks according to our own value system, which would have been alien to them.

It is for this reason that the distinction between shame and guilt cultures is one that is often raised when discussing the various motivations for specific behaviour in different cultures. This distinction helps us to understand and to qualify the values used by a particular culture to govern its functioning.

It has been argued and accepted that the Greeks comprised a shame-culture society, particularly with reference to the Heroic Age<sup>35</sup>. During this age emphasis was placed on individual achievement and status. It has also been argued that Greek society gradually developed towards a guilt-culture, moving away from its earlier shame-culture values, over time<sup>36</sup>. However, as we shall observe at a later stage in this study, the Classical Greeks who enjoyed the tragedies which we shall be studying, continued to adhere to some shame-culture values. As is chronologically sensible, we shall first examine the values adhered to in the Heroic Age. These values are clearly revealed in the works of Homer.

Hooker<sup>37</sup> questions the assumption that Homer's works reveal a society based on shame-culture values. While he agrees that Homeric society did not live according to guilt-culture values, he feels hesitation about placing this society into the

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<sup>35</sup> Dodds: The Greeks and the Irrational. Pg.17.

<sup>36</sup> Dodds: *ibid*: Pg. 28ff.

<sup>37</sup> Homeric Society: A Shame-Culture?

shame-culture category. His reasoning for this rests on the understanding of shame as an emotion that is manifest in the idea of 'losing face' in front of others. He acknowledges that this fear of 'losing face' is certainly real for Homeric heroes, but he questions that it is their strongest motivation. Rather, he argues, the search for fame and glory, are the key factors motivating a hero's actions. This distinction between the prohibitive idea of 'losing face' and the driving force of acquiring glory, causes Hooker to doubt that Homeric society represented a shame-culture. However, I would be inclined to question the vast distinction that Hooker makes between 'losing face' and acquiring glory. Yes, they are two different concepts - but clearly they are linked. 'Losing face' entails embarrassment before others and is, for this reason, to be avoided; the acquisition of glory entails pride and acclaim before others and is, therefore, to be sought. These two seemingly different concepts are two sides of the same coin. Both are heavily reliant on the judgement and opinion of an external audience for their significance, and both are, therefore, indicative of the existence of a shame-culture. Despite Hooker's doubts, I believe that we can still safely turn to the heroes of Homer's writings to view the workings of a shame-culture and its inherent value system.



## 2. 2: Homer's Value System

### 2.2.1.: Introduction to Homer's World

Adkins<sup>38</sup>, in a review article of Havelock's work on justice from Homer to Plato, discusses the theory that epic is a form of cultural encyclopaedia. Havelock's argument stems from the acknowledgement that, in preliterate societies, the transmission of cultural data depends on memory. Only a narrative form of material is sufficiently memorable - hence, the epic must be a narrative work, making use of available plots of which the most memorable are those involving military conflict or the return of a hero. By the phrase, 'cultural encyclopaedia' Havelock wishes to denote a work from which the composer's own generation and those which follow can obtain advice about culturally acceptable behaviour in most, or all, situations. Adkins notes that the composition of a cultural encyclopaedia cannot be assumed to have been the sole purpose of Homer's writings; however, he does acknowledge that there is evidence that the Homeric poems did indeed perform the function of a cultural encyclopaedia. Therefore, although we may support Adkins' view that a cultural

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<sup>38</sup> A. W. H Adkins: 'The Greek Concept of Justice from Homer to Plato' in Classical Philology Vol. 75. 1980. Pg. 259ff.

encyclopaedia was not the sole function of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, we can also take note of Havelock's theory that these epic works served as 'instruction manuals' for the composer's contemporary and future generations. Assuming this point, we too can use Homer's works to observe and define acceptable and recommended behaviour for the Greeks of the Archaic period, and, further, to acquire a better understanding of their motivations. Homer's works can serve to provide us with a useful and beneficial insight into the people described in them and those who appreciated these works.

Historically, Homer's world is said to represent the Heroic Age<sup>39</sup>, which is identified with the Mycenaean civilization of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. (c. 1600 - 1100). The society that Homer used as the subject for his *Iliad* was driven by a concern for personal honour and the competitive ambition 'always to be the best' (VI 208)<sup>40</sup>. Indeed, the hero of the *Iliad*, Achilles, had been advised by his father 'always to be bravest and best and excel over others' (XI. 784)<sup>41</sup>. This advice forms the basis of a

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Silk: Homer: The *Iliad*. Pg.1.

<sup>40</sup>

αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων: 'always to be the best and bravest and to remain distinguished above others'.

<sup>41</sup>

the same phrase as the one in Book VI, is used here:  
αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων

competitive ideal in which it is the hero's first and most important task to assert his own honour and greatness and to show himself to be better than those around him. As J. Frank Papovich <sup>42</sup> notes, 'the quality that most often characterized a man with ἀρετή was his success alone, with the means of his success counting for little or nothing.' This demonstrates the importance of achievement and fame, and helps to clarify some of the actions of the heroes, in a world which demands of them excellence rather than moral rectitude.

For this reason, the aristocratic heroes of Homer's work often acted in a highly individualistic fashion, putting their own fame, glory and honour before the common goal (for example, consider Achilles' withdrawal from the Trojan War which will be discussed in greater detail at a later stage). Silk<sup>43</sup> comments that being the 'best' implies *mutual recognition* - hence, the emphasis on *public* acclaim and reputation. Achieving this is very clearly a public aim rather than a personal goal insofar as the achievement acquires its value through its public reception and acknowledgement. A good or noble deed performed privately will not earn the fame of a public display and is, therefore, of lesser value as far as the typical Homeric hero is concerned. Public acclaim is one of the essential ingredients of a shame-culture, in which, in the words

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<sup>42</sup> J. Frank Papovich: Focusing on Homeric Values. Pg. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Silk: Homer: The Iliad. Pg. 29.

of Silk, 'the chief sanction that they recognize is the risk of losing face with their peers'.<sup>44</sup> We shall observe in what ways this tends to guide and dictate the behaviour of Homer's heroes in his *Iliad*.

Silk<sup>45</sup> notes that the main characters of the *Iliad* - Hector, Achilles, etc. - are thought of first as heroes and then as Trojans or Achaeans. Their heroic stance and behaviour are their most notable characteristics and features, while their origin is secondary as far as their identification is concerned. This displays the emphasis on heroism as a distinctive and outstanding trait, a trait which, significantly, is considered to be more important than their place of origin. Heroism and achievement are the features by which the warriors are defined, rather than their place of origin. This is important when one considers the ostensible theme of the *Iliad*. The *Iliad* deals with the Trojan War - two peoples fighting against each other. Surely then, it is reasonable to assume that the most important descriptive information of a hero would be his place of origin? According to Silk, it is not. His heroism is his most distinctive, interesting and noteworthy feature, and this should go a long way towards showing the true underlying theme of the *Iliad* - the aristocratic ethos of heroism. As Silk phrases it, the poem, in addition to being an expression of triumphant Hellenism, is more

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<sup>44</sup> Michael Silk: Homer; The *Iliad*. Pg.29.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* Pg. 69.

importantly and fundamentally 'an expression of a *heroic ideology* which is served impartially by Achaeans and Trojans alike'.<sup>46</sup>

Heroic behaviour and its precepts is also an issue in Homer's *Odyssey* although it is portrayed in a different way; however, the essential, key elements underlying the tale and the actions of its hero, remain the same. Since the context of the action has changed (our heroes are no longer at war) the style of heroic action must of necessity likewise adapt. While the *Iliad* defines heroism as the readiness to meet death on the battlefield, the *Odyssey* defines a hero as one who is prepared to go through life enduring hardship and suffering (Finkelberg). Therefore, heroic values and behaviour are still observable in the *Odyssey*, and we shall examine these later.

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Silk: Homer: The *Iliad*. Pg. 69.

### 2.2.2.: *The Iliad*

#### Apollo's Anger

Book I of the *Iliad* opens with Apollo *dishonoured*<sup>47</sup> and vengeful. To a large extent, this sets the tone for the *Iliad*. Apollo's anger at the dishonour with which he has been treated, and his desire for retribution, leads him to inflict a dread plague upon the Greeks, the source of his dishonour. In order to appease the god, Agamemnon is compelled by public decision to relinquish his prize, Chryseis. Agamemnon's response to this is to confiscate Briseis, Achilles' rightful prize. Achilles is dishonoured by this action (see below) and reacts accordingly, by withdrawing his forces from the Trojan War in pique and revenge.

Therefore, the chain of events that form the focus of the *Iliad*, is set in motion and perpetuated by the concern for honour, and the vengeful desire that arises from the realization of losing face. Clearly, this was considered to be an important issue - as would be expected in a shame-culture society - and should be examined further.

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<sup>47</sup> *Iliad* 1.11 - 12: οὐνεκα τὸν Χρῦσῆν ἠτίμασεν ἀρητῆρα

'Ατρεΐδης: 'because the son of Atreus had *dishonoured* his priest, Chryses.' The god Apollo is treated with disrespect by the dishonouring of his representative on earth. This idea is reinforced at *Iliad* 1.94 (ἠτίμησ').

## The Famous Quarrel

The *Iliad* opens with the much-discussed quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, a dispute which ultimately results in Achilles withdrawing his men from the Trojan War thereby dealing a hefty blow to the Greek side. An action resulting in such severe and significant consequences for the Greeks in general, must surely have been attributed some seriousness by Homer's Greek audience. Therefore, it would be beneficial for us to ascertain the motivations behind the quarrel and the reasons for Achilles' implacable rage.

The ostensible reason for the quarrel is Agamemnon's appropriation of Achilles' spoils of war, the girl Briseis, as compensation for his own similar war-prize, Chryseis. However, Agamemnon and Achilles, as leaders of their respective divisions of the army, would have been frequently entitled to battle spoils - hence, similar replacement women would surely not have been scarce. Why then should there have been such a fuss with far-reaching consequences over women who, if truth be told, were not all that important to the men concerned anyway? There was not. The argument arose because of the slight to Achilles' honour. Achilles says as much when he explains the situation to his mother and asks that the gods punish the Greeks with defeat in war:

γνώ δὲ καὶ Ἀτρεΐδης εὐρὺ κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων

ἦν ἄτην, ὃ τ' ἀρίστον Ἀχαιῶν οὐδὲν ἔτισεν

(I.411-12) <sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, if the loss of Briseis was the main reason for Achilles' anger, then surely her restoration would have removed the cause for resentment? Agamemnon offers to return Briseis, and if Achilles wants her back, then he should accept her and the quarrel would be resolved.<sup>49</sup> A simple solution if Briseis were indeed the reason behind the quarrel. But the truth is that the loss of Briseis is *not* the cause of the quarrel and her simple restoration to Achilles cannot resolve the issue. Agamemnon's appropriation of Briseis infringed strongly upon Achilles' honour, and such a significant slight would be impossible to resolve by means of such a simple solution as the return of Briseis. Surely then, in Achilles' refusal of Agamemnon's offer to return Briseis to him, we can perceive that the quarrel and its cause runs deeper than a war-prize.

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<sup>48</sup>

“Then the widely ruling Agamemnon, son of Atreus, would realize that it was madness to *dishonour* the best of the Achaeans”

<sup>49</sup> Richard Jenkyns: Classical Epic: Homer and Virgil. Pg. 21.



Camps gives a list of possible circumstances that can be responsible for diminishing one's honour, one of which is the infringement of a person's rights<sup>50</sup>.

Achilles is upset because of what he sees as a personal infringement of his rights, and thus, a slight to his honour. It is not so much the loss of a slave-girl or concubine that upsets Achilles so fiercely that he withdraws from the Trojan War - which in itself provided an opportunity for the acquisition of personal achievement and glory<sup>51</sup> - as the demeaning treatment he has received from Agamemnon. Briseis was Achilles' rightful prize; her loss comprised more than the simple loss of a slave-girl - it constituted an actual loss in honour. Briseis is Achilles' 'prize of honour'<sup>52</sup>. Hence,

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<sup>50</sup> W.A. Camps: An Introduction to Homer. Pg. 7.

<sup>51</sup>

Any battle provided a host of opportunities for achieving personal fame and success, by the conquest of one's enemy in combat. Therefore, we can appreciate the significance that Achilles attributed to Agamemnon's dishonourable behaviour, since it motivated Achilles to sacrifice one of his big chances for honour. Presumably, Achilles believed that the personal insult he had publicly received from Agamemnon had cost him more in honour than he could have gained on the battle field in the intervening time.

<sup>52</sup>

*Iliad*: 1.161: γέρας: Achilles refers to Briseis as his γέρας which Liddell and Scott translate as 'a gift of honour' (s.v.). Furthermore, Schein (The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad. Pg 71.) examines the basic meaning of the word τιμή (honour). It refers to a 'price' or 'value' in a physical and tangible sense. Therefore, Schein continues, this word can be used in referring to a woman like Briseis who was a gift of honour from the army to Achilles.  
(continued...)

the loss of Briseis involved a loss of the accompanying honour which she would have brought Achilles. Austin<sup>53</sup> notes that through Agamemnon's act (which Austin actually refers to as *hybris*) Achilles was so stripped of honour that there was no chance of salvaging his being, particularly in a warrior society, in which being is identified with honour. Austin further comments that the only way in which Achilles could have regained this honour, is through the medium of revenge - an option which was denied to him by the message and prohibition of Athene (*Iliad* 1.207 - 214).

Thus, the irretrievable loss of his honour was the cause of Achilles' withdrawal from the Trojan War and the significant setback that the Achaeans suffered as a result of the loss of their best warrior. This provides just one example of the importance of honour to the Greek (and especially Homeric community) and it forms the beginning, and most of the central theme of Homer's great work, the *Iliad*.

Achilles' mother, Thetis, clearly states the real reason behind the quarrel and Achilles' subsequent withdrawal:

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<sup>52</sup>(...continued)

Hence, the removal of Briseis was in fact tantamount to the removal of honour from Achilles.

<sup>53</sup> Norman Austin: Meaning and Being in Myth. Pg. 140.

But now King Agamemnon has *dishonoured* him...Avenge him, Zeus, Olympian judge. Give the advantage to the Trojans until the Greeks honour my son and strengthen the honour owed to him.<sup>54</sup>

Not only does Thetis reveal the true reason for the quarrel by highlighting the dishonour that Achilles has suffered, she also shows the importance of revenge for such dishonour. It seems from her statement that she values the honour(τιμή) and revenge due to Achilles, more than a Greek victory over the Trojans. This demonstrates one of the characteristics of the hero, namely his individualistic attitude. Furthering his own glory is more important than any notions of patriotism. The two objectives may coincide and, while serving his own goal of personal achievement, he may well serve his country at the same time; this, however, is not his chief concern.

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<sup>54</sup> *Iliad* I. 506-510:

... ἀτάρ μιν νῦν γε ἀναξ ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνων  
ἠτίμησεν· ...

ἀλλὰ σύ πέρ μιν τίσον, Ὀλύμπιε μητίετα Ζεῦ·  
τόφρα δ' ἐπὶ Τρῶεσσι τίθει κράτος, ὄφρ' ἄν Ἀχαιοὶ  
υἷον ἐμὸν τίσωσιν ὀφέλλωσιν τέ ἐ τιμῇ.

Likewise, Patroclus states that Agamemnon "paid no *honour* to the best of the Achaeans".<sup>55</sup>

Both Achilles' mother and his closest friend believe that the true reason behind Achilles' withdrawal from battle, is the dishonour that he suffered at the hands of Agamemnon. More than this, to a large extent, they support Achilles in his behaviour and believe that his pique and anger are justified. Thetis asks Zeus to punish the Greeks in response to Agamemnon's behaviour<sup>56</sup>. Patroclus exhorts the Myrmidons to win glory for Achilles in order to show Agamemnon that he was foolish to dishonour Achilles.<sup>57</sup> Achilles' behaviour was viewed in a different manner by his contemporaries, than we, as a modern audience, might be inclined to consider it. While many of us could possibly support Achilles in his resentment at having his prize stolen from him, a modern reader might well be inclined to criticise Achilles for his apparent lack of patriotism and his desertion of his army and country which needed his help so desperately. However, we must be careful not to let more modern views obscure the true meaning. Achilles was under no legal obligation to fight for the

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<sup>55</sup> W.A. Camps: An Introduction to Homer. Pg. 70.

<sup>56</sup> *Iliad* I.508 - 10.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* 16.269 - 274.

Greeks. Furthermore, while love and support for one's country and people, was indeed an admirable quality, the furthering of personal ambition was a praiseworthy trait. Silk<sup>58</sup> notes that the heroes of Homer's *Iliad* were not restricted by the disciplines of teamwork. He argues that despite the fact that the Trojans were fighting for a communal cause and the Achaeans were fighting to avenge a national disgrace, for the most part the heroes on both sides were fighting as *individuals*, in the pursuit of individual glory. For this reason, Achilles' pursuit of honour was an admirable characteristic, and his anger at Agamemnon's public slight to this honour, is very understandable, and, in light of the values of a shame-culture, justified.

### **Hector's Demise and Dishonour.**

There is another remarkable, if horrifying, episode in the *Iliad* - that of the death and subsequent fate of Hector<sup>59</sup>. This episode is often familiar even to those who are not Classical scholars, partly, perhaps, because of its striking horror and brutality, and partly because of a universal acceptance that there should be respect for the dead. It was an important episode in the *Iliad* - respect for the dead was a Greek value as well

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<sup>58</sup> Michael Silk: Homer: The *Iliad*. Pp. 72ff.

<sup>59</sup> *Iliad*: 22.326 - 404.

as a more modern one, and Achilles' actions would no doubt also have horrified a Greek audience. Because of the notoriety and significance of this episode, it too deserves consideration.

Achilles' anger at Hector was immense, so much so that not even Hector's death could assuage it. Achilles needed more than that to compensate for the loss of Patroclus. He needed something that would fully show the extent of his anger and would permanently punish Hector for the loss that Achilles had suffered because of that man.

Death in itself was not as serious to Homeric Greeks as it is to us today. After a hero's death, he could expect to be honoured and revered by people (especially if his death had occurred in battle and he had, thus, died nobly and bravely). Several heroes even attained a divine status. Although heroes often had divine blood and special relationships with the gods, they were still limited by human biology - they had to die. After death, however, the hero could achieve full heroic status when he was honoured as if he were a god.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, Hector's death needn't have been an entirely catastrophic event, and Achilles - as a hero himself - would have been well aware of this. Granting Hector a

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<sup>60</sup>

Walter Burkert: Greek Religion. Pp. 203 - 208; Norman Austin: Meaning and Being in Myth. Pp. 110-111.

noble, heroic death and a possible divine status, would hardly have fulfilled his need and desire for a devastating revenge. Clearly, something more was needed.

That something was to be found in the total degradation of Hector and his corpse. Achilles mistreated and mutilated Hector's corpse, and, for a while, denied him the funeral rites he needed. The denial of funeral rites comprised a significant form of dishonour and it is used elsewhere in Greek tragedy as a means of retribution. For example, Sophocles' *Ajax* portrays Menelaus intending to deny Ajax burial as a suitable retaliation for the dishonour that Ajax attempted to inflict upon him and the other warriors.<sup>61</sup> Ajax had already committed suicide; therefore, vengeance could not be sought by means of his murder. It seems further, that it was not sufficient for Ajax to have killed himself in shame; as was the case with Hector, something more than the mere death of the hero was needed. Again similarly to the situation with which Achilles was faced, that retribution was to be found in the denial of proper funeral rites. In these two examples, therefore, we can observe the importance and necessity with which the Greeks regarded a proper burial<sup>62</sup>. It entailed far more than a merely convenient way of disposing of a dead body - it involved honour, respect and a lasting

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<sup>61</sup> Sophocles: *Ajax*: 1057 -1070.

<sup>62</sup>

Consider Antigone's insistence on obtaining a proper burial for her brother - a conviction so strong that she is prepared to die for it.

dignity. Deprivation of all these qualities would inflict a severe blow on a hero's honourable status in the afterlife as well as the present.<sup>63</sup>

Death rites preserved the body which would otherwise fall victim to the forces of nature and would suffer the disrespect inflicted upon it by vultures and wild beasts.<sup>64</sup> Proper funeral rites were also required to enable the hero to attain epic status. Austin<sup>65</sup> describes the Greek view of death in brief detail: "only through its proper monument and memorial can the warrior's corpse be transmuted into the regenerative *agathos daimon* of the hero cults or given its status, in epic, as the signifier of the victory of the metaphysical over the physical".

Achilles' appalling treatment of the dead Hector's body would have dishonoured him and denied him the respect he deserved as a noble warrior and fellow hero. At last Achilles' desire for revenge was satisfied. Instead of giving Hector just respect as a fellow warrior, he had dishonoured him, and he himself knew just how painful such dishonour could be, especially to a hero to whom honour was all-important.

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<sup>63</sup>

For example, consider Aeschylus' Choephoroi, in which the importance of a proper burial is often mentioned: 96-7, 430-43, 444, 483-5).

<sup>64</sup> Norman Austin: Meaning and Being in Myth. Pg. 214.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. Pg. 149.



Therefore, Achilles' actions towards the dead Hector reveal and confirm some important facts about the hero. One of these is the inclination towards vengeful behaviour when the hero deems it necessary. In this case, Achilles' grief and anger over the death of Patroclus lead to his desire for revenge against Hector. The second heroic feature that this episode reveals is the importance of honour, both in life and death. In a contemporary world, it could well be believed that Patroclus was avenged after his killer's death; therefore, the 'just retribution' would have ended with the death of Hector. However, in the heroic world, lasting fame and reputation were important to the hero. Hector died with these intact. Furthermore, I have already noted that death was not viewed in as serious a light as it is in many cultures today. On the contrary, death in battle could endow one with a noble and heroic reputation - a great honour for a warrior, whose life revolved around fighting, and ultimately, death. This was what was responsible for necessitating Hector's degradation in order to satisfy Achilles' desire for revenge. Therefore, the role that honour played in the hero's life can be seen, in this episode of the *Iliad*.

### 2.2.3.: *The Odyssey*.

Jenkyns<sup>66</sup> comments that the *Odyssey* represents a dual Odysseus - the trickster of folktales and the hero of epic song. For the most part, it is the heroic aspect of Odysseus that concerns us in this study, although it is interesting to note this ambiguous characterisation of Odysseus as one who adapts to the situation, and uses either brains or brawn as necessary.

Just as Odysseus is representative of two different types - trickster and warrior - so the world of the *Odyssey* is also ambiguous. There is the world of magic and monsters through which Odysseus must successfully navigate in order to arrive safely back home. There is also the 'real' and more sober world, with very realistic problems to be overcome. Odysseus adapts to each of these accordingly. When happening upon a problem of the former sort, he responds by using cunning and trickery; when faced with a problem of a more domestic and 'real' nature, he uses the weapons of the ordinary man, or of the hero with whom we are familiar - force and battle.

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<sup>66</sup> Richard Jenkyns: Classical Epic: Homer and Virgil. Pg. 36.

Odysseus returns home from battle and his long travels to discover the suitors who have invaded his home and are propositioning his wife. Their arrogant invasion into his home and advances towards Penelope, display a disregard for the respect due to a man's property - his home and his wife. In this way, the suitors dishonour Odysseus; so, Odysseus' reclaiming of his rightful property constitutes a reclaiming of his honour and re-establishment of his proper status.

The Homeric poems are concerned with a social organization and value system that were based firmly on the *οἶκος* or the household, which was the highest form of political, economic and social organization.<sup>67</sup> There were no political hierarchies or governing bodies to safeguard and protect the individual or clan. The preference in much of Europe at that time was for a looser form of social and political organization, such as that of a chiefdom. The society which Homer portrays operated as a series of small, practically autonomous units, each self-sustaining. They had as their leaders, chieftains (*βασιλείς*) to whom the responsibility for the preservation of the community in the face of constant outside aggression fell. The autonomy of the *οἶκος* and the lack of any higher authority, dictated that the preservation of the *οἶκος* often

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<sup>67</sup> See J. Frank Papovich: Focusing on Homeric Values. Pg. 50, and D. Brendan Nagle: The Ancient World: A Social and Cultural History. Pp. 78, 89ff.

necessitated the martial abilities of the warrior, or ἀγαθός. This warrior was often described as having the quality of ἀρετή. This ἀρετή comprised the power or ability to succeed in some action, and its highest use commended the successful warrior, or ἀγαθός.

The *Odyssey* offers an illustrative example of the political isolation of these οἴκοι and the responsibilities that rest on their leaders' shoulders. The situation in Ithaca displays the difficulties that can afflict a chieftain when its leader is absent for a prolonged period of time and his relatives (in this case, his son) are unable to maintain the family's position of authority and leadership. Other local chieftains begin immediately to encroach upon that leader's household - in this case, that of Odysseus. Telemachus finds himself unable to cope successfully with this invasion of the suitors, who infringe upon Odysseus' household and wife<sup>68</sup>. The return of Odysseus himself is required in order to restore the position of that family.

As the warrior responsible for his οἶκος, Odysseus was obliged to protect his property and household from the hostile invasion of the suitors. It was his duty both as the head of the household and as an ἀγαθός. It was required in order for him to re-establish his position of authority and honour. Although the situation is far different

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<sup>68</sup> See for example: *Odyssey* I.245 - 251.

from that facing Achilles in the *Iliad*, the same issues compel Odysseus to act in the way that he does and re-assert his proper position of honour within the οἶκος.

Similarly to Achilles, Odysseus shows the characteristics of hero, although often in a different way from that of the warrior hero of the *Iliad*. The vocabulary used to describe Odysseus is also indicative of his status as a hero. He too, is accredited with various epithets and formulae which designate him as a hero, such as δῖος (eg. Odyssey 13.56, 63), which can be translated as divine, god-like, worthy and noble.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, in the Odyssey, Odysseus is referred as ἄεθλος six times.<sup>70</sup> Finkelberg notes that the only other individual hero who is credited repeatedly with this description is Heracles - one of the most well-known heroes of Classical mythology. Finkelberg further comments that there are fifteen epic uses of ἄεθλος and its cognates - six of these describe the life-experience of Odysseus, and five pertain to that of Heracles. Therefore, in this way, the 'atypical' hero, Odysseus, is compared

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<sup>69</sup> Liddell and Scott: s.v.I

<sup>70</sup> *Od.* 1.18, 4.170, 241, 23.248, 261, 350.

to the famous hero, Heracles.<sup>71</sup> This use of vocabulary suggests that Odysseus was intended by Homer to be seen in a heroic capacity.

Schein<sup>72</sup> states that heroes assert their greatness by the brilliance and efficiency with which they kill. In the *Iliad*, the heroes are often described according to their warrior tendencies and their abilities on the battlefield - for example, consider warriors like Achilles and Hector whose greatness lies largely in their superior fighting talents. Therefore, Odysseus' heroism is reflected in the manner in which he dispatches the suitors. He excels as a warrior against the suitors and restores his honour, both by ousting them and reclaiming his place in the household, and by the very manner in which he does it - for example, note the emphasis given to Odysseus' stringing of his bow<sup>73</sup>, a task which the suitors were unable to accomplish. In Bowra's discussion on

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<sup>71</sup> Finkelberg's article provides further similarities between Odysseus and Heracles, and is well-worth consideration in this regard for the comparison which it makes between these two famous men who share the qualities of heroes but who acquire them through different means. (Odysseus and the Genus 'Hero').

<sup>72</sup> The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's *Iliad*. Pg. 68.

<sup>73</sup> *Odyssey*: 21.404 - 411.

the creation of heroes and their corresponding eras,<sup>74</sup> the various features and characteristics that combine to make a hero, are discussed.<sup>75</sup> Heroes are thought to be superior in physical strength, courage, endurance, control over their bodies and their willingness to sacrifice themselves for honour and fame. (They can also be seen as semi-divine, with one immortal parent.)

Using these as the distinctive features of a hero, we can further examine Odysseus. It is true that Odysseus is not a hero in the same sense as Achilles, but then the situation is also different. The Achilles we see is a warrior fighting on the battlefield in the Trojan War where he has ample opportunity to demonstrate his fighting prowess. The Odysseus of the *Odyssey* is faced with a different set of circumstances, but these circumstances still require heroic behaviour. Odysseus is compelled to fight for his property and restoration of his honour. Just as the Achaean army was besieging the Trojans for their gross violation of the accepted laws and codes of conduct of hospitality in their abduction of Helen, so Odysseus was faced with the suitors' violation of *his* house.

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<sup>74</sup> 'The Meaning of a Heroic Age' in The Language and Background of Homer. (Pp. 22 - 46).

<sup>75</sup> It is interesting to note that these features remain strikingly similar even amongst differing cultures. For example, Bowra refers to cultures of Western Europe, the Slavonic World, Asia, India, Polynesia and Africa, all of which share a history of heroic cults, and who placed emphasis on the same features defining these heroes.

Furthermore, in the *Iliad*, we noted that the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles stemmed from the competitive values of Homeric society; similarly, these were elements in the struggle between Odysseus and the suitors. Both wished to establish their own place of honour - the suitors by taking over Odysseus' role in his home, and Odysseus by reaffirming his role. These competitive values represent a striving towards individualism, personal recognition and honour, or ἀρετή, and are often indicative of heroic principles. Therefore, in this respect, Odysseus too is a hero.

A hero was noted for his physical strength which was believed to be superior to that of other mortals. This brings to mind the famous 'bow scene' in the *Odyssey*. The bow is impervious to the suitors who find themselves unable to string it. However, it poses no such problem for Odysseus, who strings it easily 'as a man skilled at the lyre and in singing, easily strings his lyre around a new screw ... so Odysseus quickly strung his mighty bow.'<sup>76</sup> In this way, Odysseus demonstrates both his superior physical strength inasmuch as it allows him to accomplish effortlessly tasks which are impossible for the suitors.

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<sup>76</sup> *Odyssey* 21.406 - 409:

ὡς ὅτ' ἀνὴρ φόρμιγγος ἐπιστάμενος καὶ ἀοιδῆς  
ῥηϊδίως ἐτάνυσσε νέω περὶ κόλλοπι χορδὴν,  
ἄψας ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἐυστρεφὲς ἔντερον οἴος,  
ὡς ἄρ' ἄτερ σπουδῆς τάνυσεν μέγα τόξον Οὐδυσσεύς.



### 2.3. The Enduring Spirit of A Hero

*'It is an excellent thing...to receive in exchange for mortal labours an immortal fame'. (Diodorus Siculus)*

A hero's success in life was reflected by his fame after death. Warfare provided an opportunity for the hero to win everlasting fame amongst future generations and to be recalled with awe and respect in oral poetry, literature and art. This was the goal towards which the typical Homeric hero strove - to be remembered and admired in the future. It was for this reason that death was not as significant to the Homeric hero as it might have been to others who did not share the desire for this fame and glory after death.<sup>77</sup>

The various meanings of the word ἥρωες help to reveal some of the important features of a hero, and the way in which Homer perceives them.<sup>78</sup> From the Bronze Age, through the Archaic and Classical periods, a man who had been exceptionally powerful in his lifetime, might be considered to continue to live after his death, to be powerful in the earth at the site of his tomb and to protect the social group that

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<sup>77</sup> For example, see my discussion on Hector's death (page 42).

<sup>78</sup> See Seth L. Schein: The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad. Pp. 47 - 49, 69ff.

worshipped him and paid tribute to him according to the tradition of hero cults.<sup>79</sup> This was the typical view of the hero and his status after death.

However, Homer portrayed the hero in a slightly different manner. Homer's heroes, as depicted in the *Iliad*, were great warriors who lived and died in the pursuit of honour and glory. Homer does not discuss the continued existence of mortal warrior-heroes after death.<sup>80</sup> For a Homeric warrior, death was final. The only reward for a Homeric hero is the glory of celebration in epic song. This perpetuation of one's valour through the art forms of future generations was the goal towards which Homeric heroes strove.

Despite the seeming disparity between the above two views of a hero, they share certain important features. In the first, a great warrior is rewarded for his heroic efforts by being granted an afterlife and by being worshipped in this afterlife; in the second, his reward is fame in the re-telling of his tale. Both views stress the continuation of the glory and status of the hero after his death. In both, the hero continues to be

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For a clear example of this in Greek tragedy, we can consider Sophocles' Oedipus in Colonus, in which the formerly despised and polluted Oedipus becomes a powerful spirit and a protector of the community after his death. See also Emily Kearns, The Heroes of Attica: Pp 47ff. And Walter Burkert, Greek Religion: Pp. 206 - 207.

<sup>80</sup> Seth L. Schein: The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad. Pg. 69ff.

treated with admiration and awe after his death, and, therefore, his honourable status is perpetuated and even enhanced by his death. Therefore, the differences between these two views need not concern us as much as the similarities, since it is the aspect of the hero's honour and fame that we are concerned with for the purposes of this study.

This Heroic obsession with being the best and being *recognized* as the best by both one's contemporary comrades and future generations, was responsible for dictating much of the heroes' actions and behaviour. A hero was considered to have been successful if he was recalled, and perhaps even held up as a model for emulation, by those who came after him. This view persisted long after the Homeric era even if its implementation may have changed through the ages, and we shall analyse it when considering the Greek tragedies which are the main focus of this study. Even Alexander the Great commented on the importance of being favourably recognized in future song; when this leader left Troy, he laid a wreath at Achilles' tomb in the plain, as Arrian (c. AD 150) states, 'calling him a lucky man, in that he had Homer to proclaim his deeds and preserve his memory.' (Wood: 30). Even in Alexander's lifetime, a preoccupation with future glory existed, Alexander understood the value of being remembered by future generations.

## 2.4 Heroic Vocabulary

Another way in which we can analyse heroic values and codes is to examine the vocabulary used when referring to heroes. This type of language study can also be used to examine the fuller context of the concept of vengeance and its different facets. Therefore, let us consider heroic vocabulary by examining it in Homer's works, since he is the poet to whom much of the literature dealing with the Heroic Age is attributed.

One of the most outstanding qualities for which a hero strove to be recognized and remembered, was that of ἀρετή. This is a complex word with numerous different meanings, among which the commonest are 'goodness', 'excellence', 'valour', 'prowess' and 'nobility'<sup>81</sup>. When analysing the intended meaning of ἀρετή we must be alert to the possibility of infusing our chosen interpretation with modern Western values. For example, if we choose the interpretation of 'goodness' to translate ἀρετή, we could suggest to a modern reader that the hero described as having 'goodness' was of a morally good and pure character. However, to the Greeks, the quality that was most often understood as characterizing a man with ἀρετή, was his success, while the

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<sup>81</sup> *Liddell & Scott: s.v.*

means employed to acquire this success was far less important.<sup>82</sup> Hence, even from this one simple example, the dangers of allowing our own values to influence our choice of translation and thus, to change the deeper meaning of the description as it stands in the Greek, can be observed.

Ἀρετή, therefore, as understood by the majority of its Greek audience, would have suggested the ability to succeed in some action. As is to be expected in a society in which it was the responsibility of the local warrior-chieftan to protect his οἶκος in the absence of any organized higher authority, the greatest form of ἄρετή was granted to the successful warrior - the ἀγαθός.

Battle provided an opportunity for the aspiring ἀγαθός to increase his status by the acquisition of ἄρετή. It was in combat that the hero could prove himself and earn recognition amongst his colleagues as an ἀγαθός.

Closely connected to the idea of ἄρετή is the concept of τιμή. It is interesting to note that one of the acceptable definitions of τιμή is 'that which is paid in token of worth or value'<sup>83</sup>. This clearly conveys the idea that τιμή is something which is

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<sup>82</sup> J. Frank Papovich: Focusing on Homeric Values. Pg. 49.

<sup>83</sup> Liddell & Scott :s.v.

*earned* and which reflects one's personal value. We have already noted that one's value and standing can be quantified by the concept of ἀρετή, which in turn is largely indicative of one's ability in battle. Therefore, τιμή can be understood as being earned by success in battle.

Τιμή is further translated as 'honour'<sup>84</sup>; so it is clear that honour is something which is both earned and which can be used as a measure of one's worth. This is helpful in acquiring a fuller understanding of the whole concept of honour. When a hero is dishonoured in some way, he loses his rights to something which he has earned - he is deprived of something that is rightfully his. He also loses social standing - τιμή is used as an assessment of one's personal worth; consequently, a decrease in τιμή must result in a decrease of this worth, and hence, a decrease in stature. This helps to illustrate the importance of honour to a hero and to provide an explanation for the overriding anger which a hero might feel at what he perceives to be an attack on his τιμή. This attack involves far more than a mere hurtful insult - it changes his status before the eyes of the community in which he has earned his rightful position of respect. This reveals the importance of honour to a hero. Papovich notes that it is τιμή that distinguishes a prosperous ἀγαθός from a beggar insofar as it involves all

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<sup>84</sup> Liddell & Scott :s.v.I.

the qualities attributed to an ἀγαθός - property, rights and status.<sup>85</sup> Once again the importance of τιμή insofar as it serves to define the hero, can be noted.

It is further important to note that τιμή can also be translated as a 'penalty' or 'compensation'<sup>86</sup> while the related verb τιμάω means both 'to honour' and 'to pay a penalty'<sup>87</sup>. The idea of honour, therefore, is closely connected to the idea of payment and penalty. This idea can be strengthened by a brief consideration of related words. The verb τιμωρέω is translated both as 'to help' and 'to assist one who has suffered wrong, to avenge him'<sup>88</sup> - the emphasis is clearly on the concept of vengeance here. Again, τιμωρία is translated as 'assistance' and particularly, 'assistance to one who has suffered wrong' as a form of 'retribution or 'vengeance'.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, the belief that if one's honour is eroded, a penalty must be paid by the relevant offender, is revealed. This is a concept that is responsible for many vengeful actions, and particularly those examined in this study.

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<sup>85</sup> J. Frank Papovich: Focusing on Homeric Values. Pg. 51.

<sup>86</sup> Liddell & Scott: s.v. II & III.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid: s.v. I & III.1.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid: s.v. I & II.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid: s.v. I & II.

Another concept that is essential to an understanding of the Greek value system, is that of φιλία. Strictly translated as 'friendship'<sup>90</sup> this word actually has much deeper connotations than this. As Papovich<sup>91</sup> explains, since no ἄγαθός could be entirely self-sufficient, he depended on other ἄγαθοί. The ἄγαθοί were bound together by a system of φιλία which distinguished them from the rest of the world in what formed a type of heroic code and bond. When a hero travelled away from his οἶκος, there was no higher authority to protect his rights or even his life. The hero would find it necessary to come as a suppliant to another ἄγαθός in the hope of being treated as a φίλος. This relationship of dependancy between traveller and ἄγαθός is conveyed in the word ξενία which refers to the hospitality offered by an ἄγαθός to a suppliant traveller. Thus the concept of φιλία created obligations for the ἄγαθοί, which, in a world lacking a higher authority to oversee such matters, formed part of a mutually beneficial relationship. Therefore, φιλία and its concomitant obligations were important concepts in the Greek heroic world.

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<sup>90</sup> Liddell & Scott: s.v.

<sup>91</sup> J. Frank Papovich: Focusing on Homeric Values. Pg. 52.



The requirements of φιλία and the consequences of failure to comply with them, can be observed in Greek literature. For example, Medea rightly claims that Jason is indebted to her because of her assistance to him; a large part of her anger stems from the fact that Jason fails to respond in kind to her. According to the stipulations of φιλία, Jason is obligated to Medea for her help and should treat her accordingly. This is just one example of the extent of the importance of φιλία.

The various words discussed above illustrate some of the emphases that exist in a heroic world and, therefore, show some of the values that were adhered to by its heroes.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

In the above section we have examined the values of a heroic society and observed its emphasis on honour, particularly by means of a consideration of the works of Homer. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* represent a society of the Heroic Age and a study of these works can, for this reason, help to reveal certain facets of daily life and thought within this age. We do, however, need to exercise some caution since Homer wrote these two great works some time later than the Heroic Age which he describes.

It is almost inevitable that his writings will have been influenced by his experience of the time in which he was living. Therefore, we have to be aware of this potential for confusion.

However, the fact remains that heroic values can be observed in the works of Homer. Whether they were the heroic values of the Trojan War or of Homer's own period, they are still observable in their own right as heroic values. These values formed the basis of the Heroic Age which in turn often forms the basis of Greek tragedy.

In the previous section, we further observed the importance of theatre and its function within Greek society. For the purposes of this study, it is Greek tragedy which bears the focus. In Greek tragedy too, we meet heroes who date back to long before the Classical period in which the plays were performed. Just as Homer was writing of a time several hundred years before his own, so the Classical tragedians, with a few exceptions, used as the background to their plays, heroes from a time long gone. Therefore, we encounter the same potential problem of two different possible value systems arising in these plays. Despite this, however, we are nevertheless able to observe the heroic values and attributes and to comment on their significance. This is what we shall do in the next section.

## PART TWO - GREEK TRAGEDY

One can hardly fail to notice the frequency of violent acts in Greek tragedy and it is interesting to question the reasons for such a concentration on violent acts, such as those involved in suicide and vengeance. It is true that the very genre encourages violent acts. Tragedy would hardly fulfil the promise inherent in its name if no tragic events took place during its course<sup>92</sup>. While tragedy does not, of necessity, require violence, the issue of death is a frequent one in Greek tragedy.<sup>93</sup> Death is an accepted,

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Aristotle defines tragedy as a representation of men in action, by means of which emotions such as pity and fear are aroused, so that there may be a catharsis (Poetics: vi.2 - 3). This shows us firstly that tragedy is intended to be representative, to some extent at least, of real life, and secondly, one of the purposes of tragedy - to arouse such emotions as sorrow in the audience so that some form of catharsis may take place. Hence, events which evoke these emotions are a fundamental and essential element in tragedy.

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This could, perhaps, be attributed to the way of life in Greek society. These were a people frequently involved in battles and disputes, in a time of conflict. Psychologically, this manner of life which surrounded them would almost certainly have influenced their thinking and expectations in such a way that violent acts may have been the clearest manifestation of tragedy for these people. There is also the possibility that the emotions aroused by the viewing of a tragedy, could result in a form of catharsis for the members of the audience.

if sorrowful, part of human life and is, therefore, addressed in these plays. Death which occurs as the result of a tragic event or situation is an obvious topic of tragedy. This simple reason could be an explanation for the frequency of deaths in Greek tragedy.

Secondly, the tragedians were dealing with myths that would have been familiar to the audience; they could hardly have deviated from the tragic tale to supply a happy ending, and still hope to please the members of the audience and the judges who had come in expectation of a tragedy. This would have dictated in part the tragic course that the plays had to take.

These are simple, yet important reasons for the violence of Greek tragic tales, and should not be overlooked in favour of more involved ones. However, I believe that it is the case that there is also a more serious motivation for this violence, one which pervades Classical Greek society in general, and which affects more than just the characters in the plays. There were certain 'rules' of society - perhaps, unwritten to some extent, but nevertheless, familiar - which encouraged certain modes of behaviour in certain situations for those who wished to be heroic.

We have discussed the motivations and ideals guiding a hero's behaviour above. Homer provides us with an ideal extant work with which to analyse heroic goals and behaviour, as his epics focus on the aptly named 'Heroic Age'. However, the heroic

principles which we observe in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are not confined to the writings of Homer; in this study, I hope to prove that they are evident and indeed prominent in Classical Greek tragedy as well, and that they were equally responsible for guiding the actions of tragic heroes as they were for Homeric heroes. Lombard comments on the development of the concept of αἰδώς from the time of Homer to the fifth century B.C.<sup>94</sup> It seems that although moral terms continued to have their traditional meanings that had been established in the Homeric Age, they increasingly tended to describe the inwardly centred attitude of an individual (which Lombard refers to as `reflexive αἰδώς), rather than to define his position in society. However, although this may have been the case in real life, Lombard comments that in Euripides, at least - and Euripides is the main playwright discussed in Lombard's article - references to αἰδώς tended to depend on the conventional and traditional meaning. Evidence of the reflexive usage of αἰδώς in Euripides is rare and we can, thus, examine these tragedies in the light of a heroic value system.

The burden on a hero is an onerous one. A hero is allowed no compromise, no lapse in heroic behaviour and attitude, and no forgiveness should such a lapse occur -

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<sup>94</sup> "Aspects of *Αἰδώς* in Euripides". Pg. 5.

even if the fault was not his (or hers). Because of their uncompromising attitude, heroes are often seen as loners, unable to relate fully to 'normal' people, who were often unable even to understand the heroes' motivation.<sup>95</sup> When a situation arose from which there was no honourable escape, the hero often had to take the only heroic way out - revenge or suicide. Less heroic characters might suggest and recommend what to us (and them) seem more palatable remedies for the situation, but to the true hero, such remedies were intolerable and would result in a loss of honour and reputation. The heroic option often led to tragic situations (often to the death of the hero) but, judging from the way in which this is handled in the plays, this was preferable to dishonour.<sup>96</sup>

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For example, consider Achilles' behaviour in the *Iliad* and his refusal to accept Agamemnon's compensatory gifts. Achilles has his reasons for acting the way he does and will not relent. In this, he stands alone. Although many characters in the *Iliad* agree that he was wronged, they also advise that he accept Agamemnon's offers of compensation. His refusal to do so sets him apart from the others. Hence, we can perceive an example of heroic individualistic behaviour in this episode from the *Iliad*.

<sup>96</sup> Perhaps a remnant of this ideology can be seen in our cliché'd saying 'Death Before Dishonour'?

## PART THREE - REVENGE IN EURIPIDES

### 3.1 An Introduction

Perhaps it is in the plays of Euripides that we see the concept of vengeance and its causes, dealt with most fully. This is understandable as Aristotle regarded Euripides as τραγικώτατος<sup>97</sup> (most tragic), even though he believed that there were flaws in certain areas of this playwright's work<sup>98</sup>. For this reason, Euripides is a logical candidate for a study in the harsh realities of revenge and its consequences. In some ways, Euripides can be regarded as a playwright who examined the psychological motivations of his characters and who questioned the issues that were raised by the well-known themes that he chose for his plays. It is this constant inquiry into the reasoning of his characters that adds an extra dimension to the plays of Euripides and that often helps to reveal some of the motivations and principles that existed in the background. It is true that Euripides often seems to be questioning - and

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<sup>97</sup> Aristotle: Poetics xiii.10.

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Ibid.

sometimes even criticising - accepted and traditional values; however, to a large extent this is irrelevant to this study. Euripides' approval of these values is not required for us to ascertain whether they were accepted by the people and in what form they existed. Indeed, the fact that Euripides seemed to believe that they merited investigation, shows us that they existed and that they were of significant importance to warrant such examination. Euripides' apparent interest in the various psychological factors that motivated his characters makes him a prime candidate for a study such as this in which my purpose is to analyse some of the psychological motivations for specific actions, and it is for this reason that Euripides and his plays will bear the main focus of this section of my study.

## 3.2. MEDEA

### 3.2.1. An Introduction

δόμον τε πάντα συγγέασ' Ιάσονος  
ἔξειμι γαίας, φιλτάτων παίδων φόνον  
φεύγουσα καὶ τλᾶσ' ἔργον ἀνοσιώτατον.



ὄυ γὰρ γελα̂σθαι τλητὸν ἐξ ἐχθρῶν, φίλαι..<sup>99</sup>

To those who are familiar with Greek mythology and legend, the name of Medea is synonymous with one of the most heinous of crimes a woman can commit - the murder of her own children. If Euripides' purpose in writing his plays was to stir his audience to questioning and a deeper consideration of the myth with which they were familiar, then he has succeeded with this play at least. Even today the debate has not subsided nor have the various issues which the play raises been conclusively resolved. Medea could be seen as a heartless woman of stone who murdered her children in anger and in order to punish her husband for his betrayal of her. We could also view her with some sympathy; while criticising her murder of her own children, the difficulty of her decision could be acknowledged, and the emotional trauma that she endured because of the choice that she finally made can be observed. Whatever

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*Medea* 794-797: 'Having destroyed Jason's entire home, I shall leave this land, fleeing the murder of my dear children and enduring this most wicked deed. But, friends, the laughter of my enemies is not to be endured.'

Unless otherwise stated, all references to the Greek text of *Medea* are taken from Elliot's edition, as cited in the bibliography. (Translations are my own unless otherwise stated).

The above quotation, which makes mention of both Medea's fear of the laughter of her enemies and her desire for vengeance, sums up many of the themes in the play.

reaction Medea's choice may provoke in a particular reader, the issues in the play remain largely the same. Whether or not Medea truly struggled emotionally with her decision and whether or not she felt genuine pain at the killing of her children, her reasons for the choice that she made remain the same. The only factor that changes is the relative difficulty she may have had in reacting to these reasons. Therefore, the relative justification that Medea may have had for her actions in moral terms, is not the topic for my discussion here; rather, I am interested in her *own* justification and reasons.

Medea makes her reasons for her actions perfectly clear. Jason has acted unfairly towards her and dishonoured her, by placing her in a position in which her enemies may laugh at her. This is not to be tolerated and revenge is the answer.

A Classical Greek audience would probably not have baulked at the idea of vengeance against Jason. For the Greeks, retribution, whether publicly or privately obtained, was an essential component of justice.<sup>100</sup> Vengeful acts were not the attacks on law and order that a modern audience might perceive them to be - in fact, they had strong links with the principals of justice, particularly with respect to the Homeric Era, but also in the context of the democracy and the plays that were produced at that time.

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<sup>100</sup> J. Gregory: Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians. Pg. 107.

Medea's decision to exact vengeance from Jason would not necessarily have been viewed as deserving of criticism; however, the methods she used might have been. The killing of her children sets her apart as an unnatural mother and as a threat to the accepted order of society. But, this is another matter and one which is not overly important to this study. What we need to examine in this study is the way in which acts of vengeance, not the specific methods that were chosen, were viewed.

### **3.2.2 Medea's Voice**

In order to get the best perspective on Medea's views, the first logical place to turn would be to what she herself has to tell us. As the central figure in the drama, it is Medea who voices most of the views on revenge in this play. If we examine what she has to say, we shall see that to a large extent, she expresses heroic values and uses them as guidelines and justifications for her behaviour. We shall see that it is her pride that has been injured by Jason's betrayal and her perception of herself in the eyes of others. She may also be deeply hurt in her love for husband and 'broken-hearted', but this we cannot ascertain for certain from the text. What we can be sure of is her realization of her decreased social standing and the public humiliation that she is certain to suffer as a result of Jason's rejection of her in favour of a new and socially

more-important woman.<sup>101</sup> It is Medea's awareness of her future decreased standing in society that leads her to contemplate revenge, and that overcomes her love for her children and any maternal instinct that she might have. Thus, her proud nature proves to be stronger than other instincts and feelings.<sup>102</sup>

Our first personal<sup>103</sup> introduction to Medea begins at line 96. Here we are introduced to a distraught woman who wishes for death. The impression of her grief widens at lines 111 when Medea introduces us to the idea she has been treated with injustice and dishonour. She also at this point mentions the chilling wish that her

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Perhaps in this too, an interest in social esteem and value in the eyes of others, can be assumed. Although Jason owes his loyalty to Medea for her many former services, he has chosen to reject her so that he may marry a woman of greater social standing, who will help to improve his own status in the community. In this individualistic and self-serving attitude and the emphasis placed on position within society, Jason seems to display heroic traits. These would certainly concur with the heroic behaviour of setting out on a quest and battling monsters, etc. in his search for the Golden Fleece. However, Jason's readiness to break his oath to Medea, and even his use of Medea to accomplish his mission, seem to detract from this heroic side. Hence, we cannot categorize Jason as a purely heroic character, using this example alone as proof.

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Similarly, we saw Homer's Achilles suppress his desire to fight with the Greeks in the Trojan War and to win glory there, because of his injured pride and dishonour. Likewise, it could be argued that Medea suppresses her desire to love her children, because of the dishonour that she suffered.

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I use this term to indicate speeches made by Medea, as opposed to descriptions of her given by other characters in the play.

children and husband should die; however, she has not yet suggested that she should be the instrument of this desired death, and there is nothing to prevent us from accepting this outburst as merely an angry exclamation at this point. She continues to express the wish to die at lines 144 - 147.

In her cry to Themis and Artemis at line 160, Medea again tells us that she has been wronged. We gradually begin to see the emphasis turning away from the grief that Medea feels at losing her husband to another woman, and being replaced by the anger and indignation of being betrayed, wronged and dishonoured. We shall see this idea developing with the progression of the play, until the idea of anger at her dishonour totally supplants that of her misery at the loss of her love.

Medea clearly expresses some of her heroic values in the vocabulary that she chooses to use in her first speech to the Corinthian women (214 - 266). Here, she describes a divorce not as sad but οὐ ... εὐκλεεῖς (236) or 'lacking in respect'. It is important to note that the various meanings of εὐκλεεῖς suggest something that is good or decent when viewed by others, with some of the more common meanings being 'of good report, famous, glorious'<sup>104</sup>. Therefore, Medea uses the vocabulary of shame-cultures and heroes when she chooses this word to describe her impending divorce. It is not the loss of her husband that she fears, but the way that this will

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<sup>104</sup> Liddell & Scott: s.v.

appear to others, and the resultant humiliation and dishonour that she will experience. Furthermore, in this speech, Medea says that marriage to a good husband is ζηλωτός (243), meaning 'enviable'. Bongie states that this actually implies 'enviable in the opinion of others'<sup>105</sup> - again, one can observe the emphasis that Medea places on the views of other people, even when it is not her explicit purpose to tell us of this side to her personality.

Next, we see what up till now has been the mere wish that Jason might be punished for his wrongful behaviour develop into Medea's intention to be the instrument for that vengeance (261 - 262). Having expressed the heroic values that we examined above, Medea now decides to act in true heroic fashion and exact revenge from her enemies, just as Homeric heroes do.

After the departure of Creon, we learn more of Medea's plan and of her reasons for seeking vengeance. Medea is quick to assure the chorus that she would never have lowered herself to begging favours of Creon if she had not had a plan in mind. (In this eagerness to explain herself, the value that Medea places on public opinion can be observed once more - Medea wants to ensure that the chorus understands her reasons for fawning on Creon, so that the behaviour which she sees as degrading will not be misinterpreted by the chorus).

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<sup>105</sup> Heroic Elements in the Medea of Euripides: Pg. 37.

An important contribution to the understanding of Medea's character can be observed in lines 374 - 406, in which most of the elements comprising Medea's heroic character are present. Firstly, Medea voices her plan to kill Creon, Glauce and Jason.<sup>106</sup> Secondly, in debating the various possible methods of attack that she could adopt, Medea emphasizes the importance and necessity of success. Bongie stresses that the most essential feature for identifying a man with ἀρετή is success.<sup>107</sup> It is success along with the concomitant honour, status and renown, that distinguish an

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<sup>106</sup> It is interesting to note that there is no mention of the murder of the children yet. There could be several reasons for this omission. It could be to ensure the chorus' indirect assistance which exists as a result of their silence. However, the chorus of Greek tragedy does not generally involve itself in determining the action of the play, but rather resigns itself to commenting on this action. Therefore, the extent of the chorus' ability to direct the action is questionable. Secondly, the idea might not have occurred to Medea at this stage and, indeed, Page (xxix) suggests that Aegeus' problem of childlessness later in the play, was responsible for suggesting to Medea the idea of making Jason childless. Thirdly, it seems that Euripides invented the murder of the children (Sorkin Rabinowitz: 126) - this could be a means of suspending the climax until a more dramatic note in the play. A Greek audience would have been relatively familiar with the stories that were presented to them - a change such as this one could have added an element of suspense, surprise and shock, and, thus, increased the overall effect. Fourthly, Elliot (118) suggests that Euripides deliberately misleads the audience into trusting in the safety of the children by making Medea name Creon, Glauce and Jason as her targets. Just as the third point that I mentioned above would add an element of surprise, so would this diverting of the audience's attention away from the real targets.

<sup>107</sup> Heroic Elements in the Medea of Euripides : Pg. 30.

ἀγαθός; on the other hand, failure and the resultant disgrace and ridicule, are to be feared and avoided.<sup>108</sup> Medea notes that if she is unsuccessful, she will make herself an object of ridicule to her enemies - this, for obvious reasons, must be avoided at all costs. It is further interesting to note that, in common with other famous heroes, it is not death that Medea fears. While she says that her capture would most probably result in her death, this does not worry her. The problem according to Medea is that her death would mean that she had failed in the mission that she has set for herself, and thus she would make herself vulnerable to the laughter of her enemies<sup>109</sup>. At a later stage in the play, Euripides' portrays Medea's calm attitude towards death when she states that she is prepared to die (393), provided that she can carry out the murder of her enemies. As mentioned above, this lack of a fear of death is often associated with and attributed to the famous heroes.

In the same speech, we learn of Medea's pride in her parentage and ancestry. Her father was a king and his father was a sun-god (406). We learnt earlier that heroes

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<sup>108</sup> A good example of this is Sophocles' Ajax who seems less concerned and horrified with the dreadful act that he had intended to inflict upon his own people, than with the fact that he had failed and opened himself up to public ridicule.

<sup>109</sup> This preoccupation with success and the fear of a failure that would incur the laughter of one's enemies, is not peculiar to Medea. It is a feature which we can observe in many heroes - for examples in Euripides, see *Her.* 284-6, *Ba.* 842, *Or.* 1159 - 60.



often had one immortal parent; furthermore, heroes were usually of noble descent. Therefore, in Medea's proud emphasis on her family, both the emphasis she places on her descent and her indirect comparison of herself to famous heroes, is shown.

The next speech in which Medea clearly voices her opinions is her tirade against Jason (465ff.). She accuses him of unmanliness (466) and shamelessness (472) - both are dread insults in the context of heroic values. When Medea intends to condemn someone in the harshest way possible, she does so by attacking the character trait that she considers most essential - their heroism.

Medea's awareness of her precarious status as a foreigner is pitifully evident when she accuses Jason of abandoning her because as a 'barbarian' she was not suitable or respectable for him. (591 - 592). This illustrates her focus on respectability in the eyes of others and, presumably because of this focus, she assumes that Jason must have acted in the way that he did because he too was concerned with appearances.<sup>110</sup>

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However, even if we accept Medea's reasoning that Jason therefore chose a new wife because of a desire for greater respect, this does not mean that we can excuse Jason on the grounds that he was acting according to his honour in wanting to increase his respectability amongst the community. We must remember firstly that it was not honourable for a hero to break an oath. Secondly, Jason was indebted to Medea for her former assistance. Therefore, his behaviour cannot be easily excused by using the reasoning that he was acting in a heroic manner by seeking to  
(continued...)

After establishing a secure refuge with Aegeus, Medea tells the chorus her full plan, telling them first that her enemies deserve to be punished (767) in response to the wrongs that they have dealt her. In fact, Medea equates her plan for vengeance with justice, by using *δίκη* when referring to her intention<sup>111</sup>. We should remember too that it was the duty of a hero to benefit those connected to him by ties of blood or friendship and to harm his foes.<sup>112</sup> (Even Jason ascribes to this philosophy<sup>113</sup>, although he doesn't seem to appreciate fully its existence within Medea.) Therefore, here too Medea is equating herself, by expressing the correctness of punishing her enemies, with heroes and the system by which they live their lives.

Furthermore, for the first time, she states clearly her intention to kill her children (792). Her reasons for this, admittedly, seem a little confused. Firstly, she tells us that she would not leave her children behind to be insulted (782), and here, again, Medea's

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<sup>110</sup> (...continued)  
improve his status.

<sup>111</sup> *Medea*: 767: *νῦν ἐλπὶς ἐχθρῶν τοὺς ἐμούς τείσειν δίκην*  
'Now there is hope that my enemies will pay justly'.

<sup>112</sup> Bongie, Pg. 33.

<sup>113</sup> *Medea*, 920-1: *Ἴδοιμι δ' ὑμᾶς εὐτραφεῖς ἥβης τέλος*  
*μολόντας, ἐχθρῶν τῶν ἐμῶν ὑπερέρους*  
( 'When you are grown up and in your prime, I shall  
gladly watch you being on top of my enemies' ).

heroic aversion to allowing herself or those dear to her - her φίλοι - to be dishonoured in any way, can be noted. Next, however, Medea tells us that she intends to kill her children in order to prevent anyone from taking them away from her (793). This seems to be a strange line of reasoning. If Medea kills her own children, she will still be deprived of them, and, thus, her murderous act will have achieved nothing. Her intention must be exactly what she states it to be - she will kill her children in order to prevent *anyone else from taking them away from her*. In accordance with her heroic tendencies, Medea intends to be in control of her own fate rather than at the mercy of anyone else. If she is going to lose her children, then she will ensure that this as a result of her own actions as opposed to an event which takes place with her helpless and ineffectual. In order to satisfy the heroic element of her personality, Medea needs to be in control, and to act rather than be acted upon.

Medea's third reason for killing her children is that it is the action that will cause Jason the most pain (817). Again Medea's heroic characteristics are at work here. She must avenge herself on Jason in the most successful way possible. If the murder of her children will achieve this aim, then this what she must do, despite the

pain that it will cause her.<sup>114</sup> Medea must endure this pain and she will, for the reward for her actions will make it all worthwhile. As Medea tells us, the reward is a life of glory (810). To a hero, fame is the goal, not happiness - Dodds, with reference to the *Iliad*, notes this point.<sup>115</sup> The murder of her children will not bring Medea happiness, but rather its polar opposite, and she is aware of this. However, it seems that the advantages of the fame and status that she will acquire, outweigh the disadvantages of pain and suffering for the rest of her life.

### 3.2.3. Medea through the eyes of Others.

The perception of Medea by the other characters in the play serves to give us an interesting insight into the different views and values that are operating behind the scenes. Medea's heroic stance is examined in this study, and, in order to put it into perspective, we shall now consider the opinions of some of the less 'heroic' characters.

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Similarly, we saw Achilles sacrifice his chance to win honour in the Trojan War, by his withdrawal from battle (Rieu: 27). This choice of his also resulted in future pain with the death of Patroclus (Rieu: 337 - 8). (Of course, unlike Medea, who knew that her act would cause misery for her, Achilles could not have foreseen the death of Patroclus). Sometimes, the requirements of honour dictate difficult decisions.

<sup>115</sup> The Greeks and the Irrational: Pg. 29.

In many ways these less heroic characters are representative of the 'ordinary' or 'average' person, and, to a large extent, they express the same views that most of us would feel we could believe in. In contrast to them, heroes and heroines are the extraordinary people. People can respect and revere them - although they may not necessarily like them or approve of their actions - but they often cannot understand or relate to them. Awe can stand firmly in the way of empathy and can create a great divide between the hero and the 'ordinary' person. In Greek tragedy we frequently witness situations in which this divide causes confusion between the hero/heroine and other characters. This illustrates the different ways of thinking and, therefore, the different value systems that are being used by the respective characters. For this reason, we can appreciate the usefulness of analysing the values of the 'ordinary' characters, as it is through the use of contrast of these different character types that we can better understand each individually. For the purpose of this study, however, my interest lies mainly in acquiring a deeper understanding of the heroic personality. However, this personality type cannot be viewed in isolation. As discussed earlier in this study, many of a hero's motivations lie in his obsession with his appearance before others; this would dictate the necessity of observing all the characters in the play - taking 'the others' into account, as it were. Let us, therefore, consider the way in which other characters in Euripides' play view Medea.

Our first view of Medea is given by her nurse. This nurse appears to be sympathetic to Medea, and to share her condemnation of Jason's behaviour. The nurse seems to imply that Medea was Jason's saviour (1 - 8) and she goes on to say that Medea has been shamed and betrayed by Jason and that Jason is indebted to Medea for her services. These are important points to note as they are all arguments that Medea uses to justify her anger and revenge against Jason. Hence, at this stage in the play and as far as these issues are concerned, the nurse is in full agreement with her mistress.

The nurse is further aware of a sinister side of Medea's personality. She says that Medea hates her sons (36)<sup>116</sup> and that she fears that Medea might be planning something dreadful (37). The nurse also acknowledges - wittingly or not - that Medea possesses heroic values, when she says that Medea's nature is angry and independent (103-4).<sup>117</sup> Perhaps, however, one of the most revealing descriptions of Medea, given by the nurse is that Medea is *δεινή* (44). This word has a wide range of meanings and is sometimes difficult to translate for this very reason. Among its various possible

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<sup>116</sup> στυγεί δὲ παῖδας οὐδ' ὀρώσ' εὐφραίνεται

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*Ἀυθάδης* implies self-willed and stubborn (Liddell & Scott: s.v.) - we have already seen that this independence and stubbornness are personality traits of the hero.

renderings are 'fearful, terrible, powerful, strange, marvellous, clever and skilful'.<sup>118</sup> (Incidentally, very few of these possibilities are of the type commonly applied to a woman, so perhaps even in this way, Medea is set apart as different). I stated above that it can be challenging at times to decide upon the appropriate interpretation of this word. The best way to select a suitable translation is by viewing the word in its context. We should, therefore, examine the relevant lines in the *Medea*:

δεινή γάρ· οὔτοι ῥαδίως γε συμβαλὼν

ἔχθραν τις αὐτῇ καλλίνικον οἴσεται.

*For she is formidable<sup>119</sup>; No-one who joins battle*

*with her will carry off the victory prize easily.*

(44-5)

The nurse clearly states that Medea will not easily be beaten and that she will not give up without a fight. This could also imply the idea of vengefulness. The nurse, then, clearly has quite an accurate understanding of Medea and her character.

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<sup>118</sup> Liddell and Scott: s.v. I, II, III.

<sup>119</sup>

I have chosen this translation of *δεινή* as it implies several of the acceptable translations into English.

Taking these two lines into account does help to narrow the choice of possible translations for *δεινῆ* a little, although it also still leaves a number of options open. The suggestion that any enemy of Medea will have to work hard for a victory over her, could imply that she is powerful as well as skilful. The implication of possible revenge would allow for the interpretation of 'terrible' and 'fearful'. We could even argue for the choice of 'strange' as it was indeed unusual for a woman to seek vengeance. Therefore, there are many acceptable translations for *δεινῆ*, a discovery which does not bring us any closer to *one* answer. Perhaps this is not so much the problem as the point. All of the acceptable translations could serve to describe Medea perfectly; perhaps there is no more need for us to limit ourselves to one interpretation with which to portray Medea, than there was for Euripides. Perhaps it was Euripides' intention to choose a word that was deliberately ambiguous and that embraced different facets of Medea's character, a word which was applicable and potent in all its implications.

That the nurse fully appreciates the potential violence of Medea's nature can be seen in lines 98 - 110, in which she warns the children not to approach their mother. At this point in the play, Medea has given no indication of any intention to kill her children; indeed, Medea hasn't even come out in person and so far, we have heard only lamentations from her, not plans. We cannot even be sure at what point in the play Medea herself conceived the plan to kill her children - there is certainly no definite



indication from Medea herself that this is her intention at this stage in the play. Yet the nurse warns the children to stay away from their mother. The nurse clearly perceives that Medea's anger might well be stronger than her maternal instinct - it happens that the nurse's chilling idea was right.

So it would seem that the nurse was able to formulate an accurate judgement of Medea and her anger. For this reason, her opinion and descriptions of Medea have merit and are interesting to observe. By using the character of the nurse to deliver hints and suggestions of Medea's future behaviour, Euripides both creates an element of suspense and familiarizes us with Medea's character. In this particular instance, the suspense felt by the audience would have been genuine, and similar to our own interpretation of suspense. It seems that Euripides was responsible for inventing Medea's murder of her children<sup>120</sup>; therefore, in this case, the audience would have been unsuspecting of this added detail and, as a result, would have been more shocked when the nurse's forebodings were proved correct.

The chorus too is well able to conceive of the potential for violence in Medea's nature. At lines 176 - 184, when they speak of Medea's βαρύθυμον ὀργάν (‘indignant anger’) and λῆμα φρενῶν (‘her mind's temper’), they warn the nurse to

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Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz: Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women. Pg. 126.

approach Medea with reason before she harms those inside - this must refer to the children. It is true that the chorus may have been influenced by the nurse's misgivings, but the fact remains that they do not seem to experience any difficulty in believing the nurse, nor do they attempt to gainsay her.

The chorus's fear of Medea's violent potential could well have been strengthened by the nurse's introduction to her mistress (1-45). Several important factors that contribute to a deeper understanding of Medea's character are described in this prologue. The nurse reminds us that Medea deliberately persuaded the gullible daughters of Pelias to kill their father, without their knowledge. From this we can deduce that Medea does not find the idea of murder - particularly if it enables her to achieve her aim - entirely abhorrent. The brief overview that the nurse gives us of the events that took place after the arrival of Jason, should also serve as a reminder of Medea's murder of her brother, Absyrtus, in order to facilitate their escape from her pursuing father. This shows us that not only is Medea not adverse to murder, but she can also tolerate the murder of her own family members. Both these murders were inspired and carried out because of Medea's love and passion for Jason - what could she be capable of were she to be denied that love? This is the question that is indirectly raised and the play in its entirety gives us the answer.

In addition, the nurse tells us that Medea refuses to eat and is 'wasting away' in tears. At line 8, we were told that Medea was struck by her love for Jason. All these descriptions are indicative of powerful and passionate emotions, and thus show us the extreme nature of Medea's character.

Creon's conversation with Medea also reveals a little about her perception in the eyes of others. Creon openly admits that he fears Medea<sup>121</sup> (282-289). In a world and age dominated by the fearless hero and male warrior, this must have been quite a striking confession for a ruler to make so openly - that he feared the ability of a woman to harm him and his family. Creon too has realized Medea's potential for violence. He has also heard rumours that suggest Medea's anger and intended revenge, and it is notable that he takes these rumours seriously. He attributes credibility to them, rather than disregarding them as simple gossip, to such an extent that he decides to banish Medea before she can carry out her plans. He sees her as a definite threat, and this is significant.

Creon also tells us that Medea is intelligent and skilled in 'evil arts'<sup>122</sup>. Creon recognizes that Medea's nature is able to accept violence and that her ability is capable of carrying it out.

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<sup>121</sup> 282: δέδοικά σ'

<sup>122</sup> 285: σοφὴ πέφυκας καὶ κακῶν πολλῶν ἕδρις

The chorus also provides an interesting addition to an understanding of Medea as perceived by others. They frequently agree that Medea is justified in her anger against Jason and that vengeance on him would be appropriate and even just<sup>123</sup>. It is interesting and a little surprising to note that even after the chorus has been made aware of Medea's plan to kill the children - a plan to which they are highly opposed - they still believe that vengeance on Jason would be just<sup>124</sup>. Even when they abhor the chosen method of vengeance, they do not deny the necessity and the correctness of retribution.

Furthermore, their reasons for disliking Medea's plans for killing her children are interesting to examine. While they seem to be concerned that the children should not be punished for the failings of their father, the largest part of their concern seems to lie with Medea. They recognize the pain and guilt that she will suffer as a mother if she murders her own children, and this is the argument that they use most often to dissuade Medea from her terrible plan<sup>125</sup>. The chorus, therefore, seems to be rather

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eg. 267: ἐνδίκως γὰρ ἐκτείση πόσιν: 'you will justly get vengeance on your husband'.

<sup>124</sup> 1232: ἐνδίκως: 'justly'

<sup>125</sup> Consider, for example, the following: 846 - 865 in which the pollution and suffering that Medea will incur as a result of such a murder, is discussed; 991 - 1001, in which we are told that as a result of Jason's behaviour, Medea will kill her children and suffer misery thereafter; 1251 - 1257 - again, we hear of the pollution that Medea will incur.

sympathetic of Medea in her plight and never to turn completely against her, despite acknowledging that the murder of her own children is inherently wrong. In addition, they strive to discourage her from her plan more out of concern for her own welfare than for that of her children and the undeserved murder that they will suffer. In this we can observe both the chorus' support of Medea and their deep belief that vengeance on Jason is deserved and just.

Lastly, we need to examine Jason's views on Medea. He too notes Medea's capacity for anger (447) as well as intelligence (529). Obviously, then, these are qualities which are clearly noticeable in Medea. Furthermore, Jason recognizes the heroic need for fame since he himself desires this form of public recognition.<sup>126</sup> Jason justifies his treatment of Medea and even praises it, because it enabled her to acquire fame. It is not quite clear exactly what Jason's reasons were for making this point. It could be nothing more than a natural comment for one who strives towards heroic values, to make - Jason could be judging the situation in which he has placed Medea according to his own heroic desires. In other words, he would wish for the fame that Medea has now acquired; consequently, he assumes that she must be satisfied with it

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542 - 544 - Jason states that the most important asset as far as he is concerned, is fame (544: εἰ μὴ πίσσημος ἢ τύχη γένοιτό μοι) which outranks wealth and the musical ability even of Orpheus). We have already seen that this is typical of a heroic personality.

as well. This could be one explanation. What is unclear is whether Jason was certain that he was correct in making this assumption and intended to do so, or whether it was merely coincidence that he chanced upon the value system that Medea adhered to as well. If it was the former, then this would show that Jason had correctly identified Medea's heroic nature by recognizing that she too yearned for public recognition. If this is the case, then it affects a later argument used by Jason.

Jason attributes Medea's rage to her jealousy of another woman and the commonly-held belief that women were sexually rapacious - therefore, he asserts the enforced abstinence from sex has caused her anger<sup>127</sup>. If Jason recognizes Medea's heroic personality, as speculated above, then this is a deliberate attack on that personality and an attempt to deny her her heroism.<sup>128</sup> Jason then would be choosing to ignore Medea's reasons for anger - reasons which are particularly valid when Medea is attributed a heroic personality. These reasons include the humiliation which she suffers as a result of Jason's betrayal and abandonment, and the debt which Jason owes her for her former help according to the conditions of *φιλία* - the heroic concept which we examined earlier. If Jason chooses to ignore or summarily dismiss these

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<sup>127</sup> Medea: 569 - 573.

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Medea's heroic character traits will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

aspects, which are particularly important for a hero, then he denies Medea her heroic personality. This is the reason why the significance of Jason's statement in lines 569 - 573 is dependent on his recognition of Medea's heroism. If he failed to recognize this aspect of her character then these lines form little more than a customary expression of the ways of women as seen by many men - in other words, Jason would be reflecting popular beliefs towards women, but there would be little other significance that we could attribute to his statement. If, however, Jason recognized the heroic side of Medea's character, which would strive for public recognition, then lines 569 - 573 would constitute a deliberate denial of the heroism. Jason would be attacking Medea in one of the most effective ways that he, as a hero who values his heroism, knows - he would be depriving her of her heroic personality and relegating her to the position of the 'ordinary' woman.<sup>129</sup>

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Personally I feel that there is strong reason to believe that Jason did recognize Medea's heroic personality, for a number of reasons. Jason, by this stage, has been through a number of adventures with Medea, during which time she has rescued him, helped him to complete his mission, and killed firstly in order to facilitate their escape, and secondly, in an act of vengeance. These actions would seem to me to provide a strong clue to Medea's heroic nature. Furthermore, by the opening of the play, Medea and Jason have spent a fair amount of time together. I find it highly unlikely that Jason would not by this stage have become closely acquainted with Medea's true nature. It is quite possible that Euripides would have expected this to be so.

Jason's remark must have had an effect on Medea. She responds in kind (623 - 625) by commenting that he too cannot bear to be away from his new bride. With this statement, Medea implies that Jason too cannot abstain from sex for any significant period of time. In this way, she denies him the heroism that he would deny her. Worse still, she equates him, the hero, with a woman<sup>130</sup>. If he is unable to exercise self-control and abstain from sex, then he is exhibiting qualities commonly attributed to women.

When Jason discovers Medea's murder of his sons, he calls her a 'hated woman' or an 'abomination' (1323: ὄ μῖσος) who is hated by gods and mankind in general. Again, he tries to deny Medea's heroic nature and intention (1338) when he attributes her murder of the children to sexual jealousy. Perhaps Jason's continual attempts at depriving Medea of her heroism are responsible in part for her mocking prophecy of Jason's unheroic death (1386 - 1388).

Jason struggles to comprehend fully Medea's reasons for murdering her children. We have already noted the way in which he attributes her anger and revenge to sexual

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Self-control included the ability to hold out against hunger, thirst, sexual desire and long sleeplessness (eg. Xenophon in his *Memorabilia*:iv.5.9 describes a lack of self-control as the inability to hold out against these bodily demands) and was attributed to the hero. Conversely, a lack of self-control, and, thus, an inability to resist any of these factors, was thought to be a feminine weakness. It was considered masculine to resist and feminine to yield.



jealousy and frustration. Furthermore, he cannot believe that Medea loved her children, using the argument that if she loved them so dearly, how could she bring herself to kill them (1398)? This is a fair assumption and many of us today would no doubt attribute validity to this argument. However, we can observe in the play the emotional struggle that Medea experienced in deciding to kill her children, and witness the pain that such an action caused. In spite of all this, Medea went ahead with her plan, because her heroic nature would allow her no other alternative. Jason has difficulties in perceiving this, however.

In conclusion then, most of the main characters in the play are aware of Medea's capacity for violence; some are further able to attribute this to the heroic tendencies which they observe in her nature. Therefore, the opinions of these characters are noteworthy insofar as they help to provide a fuller picture of Medea and, particularly, Medea as she was observed by those around her.

#### **3.2.4. Medea the 'Hero'**

Gellie<sup>131</sup> comments on the many heroic aspects of Medea's character, noting that

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<sup>131</sup> The Character of Medea. Pp. 15ff.

she displays the same self-esteem and social awareness, as well as the readiness to commit violent acts, that Homeric heroes do. It is true that the weeping and desperate Medea that we are introduced to at the beginning of the play, a woman who wants nothing more than to be left alone so that she may die, develops with the progression of the play into a deceitful, cunning and collected nemesis for Jason. She displays a chilling intelligence in the detached manner in which she carefully examines the various methods of revenge, resultant circumstances and possible avenues of escape, finally hitting upon the most effective means of achieving her goal. She becomes the tactician, the strategist, rather than the abandoned and desperate wife, and the key to this metamorphosis is her injured pride. Her actions are prompted and governed by her desire for revenge, more than any other desire, and this is the key to understanding Medea and her motivations. At the opening of the play, we see a woman who is distraught because of her husband's betrayal and abandonment of herself. This woman is superseded by the angry and vengeful woman who guides the entire action of her play. Medea becomes one who is not acted upon, but who acts. No longer is she the 'typical', subservient woman who allows others to dictate the events in her life; through the course of the play, she dictates events in the lives of others. In this, she adopts many typically 'masculine' traits. It was a woman's place to be governed by the men in her life, not to acquire a position in which she was responsible for determining

her own fate, and, even worse, the fate of the male members of her family. Medea becomes the aggressor - a typically male role - and, in the attitudes and values that she displays, she becomes in many ways, a 'hero'.

Furthermore, the reasons behind Medea's revenge reveal more about her character. As mentioned above, the play opens with a woman weeping over the loss of her husband to another woman. Assuming that Medea was the 'typical' woman, if the loss of her husband was causing such an excess of grief, the logical plan of action would be an attempt to win him back. This would be the expected course of events.

We can obtain a clearer picture of Medea's motivations here by examining her furious speech to Jason (465 - 519). Not once in this speech does Medea cite a broken heart as the cause for her grief and anger. She lists her reasons clearly: Jason owes a large debt to her for her repeated efforts to help him in the past. In helping him, she has lost her family and her country, so the cost has proven to be high. According to the bonds of *φιλία* - a heroic custom - the benefits that Medea has conferred on Jason, obligate him to return the favour and respect. The fact that instead of this, he has betrayed and abandoned her, is the cause for her anger, not her 'broken heart'. In this speech, she never once mentions love or misery at its demise. However, repeatedly she emphasizes the debt that Jason owes her, a debt that he has failed to repay or to reward. This is the reason for her anger.

We can further disprove love as her motivation by examining another point that Medea makes in this speech. She states that if she had failed to bear children for Jason, then his action of deserting her would have been understandable. (With this statement, Medea is enunciating the common ideology that understood marriage as a means to acquiring children, rather than a romantic attachment<sup>132</sup>.) Surely, if Medea's strongest motivation was her love for Jason, then the presence of the children would not have made a difference? However, the point here is that Medea has more than fulfilled her duties as a wife to Jason with the bearing of these children - this, in addition to her assistance in his heroic quests - and that he has failed to act accordingly as a husband in his position should. In this way, he has acted dishonourably towards her, and this is the reason for Medea's anger.

In this way, Medea's actions are not motivated by any desire to reclaim Jason's love, but to avenge herself on him and to prevent her enemies from laughing at her. These are not the motivating factors of a "woman in love", whose interest would revolve around attracting her husband once more to herself.<sup>133</sup> (While Medea may indeed love Jason, this does not seem to be the issue that is concerning her here). These

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<sup>132</sup> Pomeroy: Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves. Pg. 60, 64.

<sup>133</sup>

Consider, for example, Sophocles' *Deineira*, whose unfortunate and unintentional murder of her husband, was caused by her misguided actions in attempting to win back Heracles' love, not as an act of vengeance.

are the actions of the typical hero, who places an honourable reputation above all other concerns and who will do anything to avoid a fall in stature within the community. Medea's instincts as a wife - in this case, a betrayed wife - are overpowered and replaced by her instincts as the typical 'hero'.

There are many other occasions in the play when Medea displays heroic traits. Her dread of the triumphant laughter of her enemies is one easily distinguishable feature. Her constant referrals to the intolerable laughter of her enemies<sup>134</sup> is one very clear indication of the value that she places on social standing. She tells us that she can endure anything, even the murder of her own beloved children, provided that she does not have to endure the laughter of her enemies.<sup>135</sup> This is clearly a heroic value.

Medea also tells us that she will be *καλλίνικος* (765) once she has achieved her goal in exacting a dire revenge upon Jason. This too seems indicative of a (masculine) heroic value system and, indeed, Gellie<sup>136</sup> notes her confident assumption that she will prove to be superior to her opponents, her readiness and aptitude for physical violence and her preparedness to resolve her wounded pride with murder, stating that these are the familiar traits of the epic hero. Indeed they are, and they are

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<sup>134</sup> eg. *Medea*: 383, 797, 1049.

<sup>135</sup> See the quote at the opening of this chapter.

<sup>136</sup> *The Character of Medea.* Pg. 16.

displayed in the works of Homer on numerous occasions, admittedly, though, by men, not women.

The unrelenting side of Medea's character is another Homerically heroic character trait, as is the part of her which could be seen as self-sacrificing, depending on how Medea is judged. If she is seen as a heartless woman who feels nothing at the murder of her children, then the following point is invalid. However, if she is understood as a mother who feels pain at her murder of her own children, but goes ahead with this deed anyway, then the argument stands firm.<sup>137</sup>

Heroes are often seen as unrelenting in their determination, and self-sacrificing. Once dishonoured, they stand by their decision even if the alternative or the possible compensation offered, seems to be the better option to the 'ordinary' (i.e. the non-heroic person). This can be observed in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer. In the *Iliad*, when Achilles is approached by Agamemnon's deputation, offering an extremely generous compensation in order for Achilles to return to the battlefield

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I am inclined to believe Medea when she repeatedly states that she does not want to kill her children and that doing so will cause her immense and enduring pain. Her emotional and mental anguish is apparent in the play and I believe that this emotion is genuine. Medea shows no pain or remorse at the killing of Glauce or Creon, nor at the suffering that she causes Jason. Why then would she go to such lengths to fabricate sorrow and emotional indecision at the killing of her children, if she neglected to do so with regard to her other murders?

(Rieu: 168), Achilles stands by his refusal not to rejoin the Achaean army (Rieu: 169 - 172).. Sheer stubbornness? Some might say so. But the truth is that Achilles took the stand that he did against Agamemnon, because of the infringement upon and diminishing of, his honour. While Agamemnon's deal and offer of compensation is generous, it does not lessen the effect of the dishonour inflicted upon Achilles as Agamemnon does not offer to right his wrong. Therefore, for Achilles to accept it now would be to disregard - and perhaps, in a way, even to accept and condone - the insult which he has suffered and to betray his sense of honour. It would be to go back on the heroic ethos on which Achilles structures his entire behaviour, to undermine his values and principles, and to do an injustice to the very code that epitomizes the hero, and Achilles as a hero. While some may criticise Achilles for this perceived stubbornness, in many ways Achilles would not be the hero that he is acclaimed to be, if he had have given in to Agamemnon. He would have diminished in the eyes of those who would judge him according to Homeric heroic terms and values, and probably would not have had the lasting memory that he has even today.<sup>138</sup> Achilles' 'stubbornness' is part of

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Even today, especially amongst those who are not involved in the field of Classics, Achilles is most often remembered for those deeds which are typically 'heroic'. Most people whom I have consulted on the issue, mention either Achilles as a great warrior, or Achilles as the victor over Hector, and his disrespectful treatment of Hector's corpse. As mentioned earlier in this study, these both fall under the heroic value system that epitomizes Achilles. Rightly or  
(continued...)

what serves to make him a hero; therefore, if we are going to respect heroes, we must be a little careful about criticising Achilles' too harshly for his rejection of Agamemnon's offer. While it is true that in the interests in harmony and good relations, Achilles probably should have accepted Agamemnon's offer, harmony and good relations were not always foremost on the hero's list of priorities. We have already observed that in many ways the hero was essentially individualistic and self-serving, so this is to be expected.

Another example of the way in which heroic ideals can compel a hero (or heroine) to make self-sacrificing choices<sup>139</sup>, is seen in Achilles' decision to kill Hector. Achilles was warned that his own death would follow shortly after that of Hector.<sup>140</sup> When faced with the choice of living a long, ignominious life, or dying in such a way as to acquire glory and a lasting name for himself, Achilles, the true hero, chose the

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<sup>138</sup> (...continued)

wrongly, they contribute to the living memory of Achilles the hero.

<sup>139</sup> This 'self-sacrificing' element can lead to confusion as I have been describing heroes as essentially self-serving; self-sacrificing seems to suggest a completely opposite type of behaviour. However, we must remember that the self-sacrificing actions that a hero may choose, often are self-serving, as they will benefit the hero in some way - for example, they may win him glory. The fact that they may also benefit others (as would be the case if a hero were to risk his life in fighting a threatening monster, or in a war) does not detract from the way in which these actions also serve to further the hero's own cause.

<sup>140</sup> *Iliad*: 9.410 - 16.



latter. Knowing full well that his decision would result in his own death, he still continued with his intent, and in doing so, chose the heroic route. Once again, he could not compromise his heroic values, even if the alternative would seem the better choice to most people faced with the decision between life and death.

Homer's *Odyssey* also provides us with an example of this heroic stubbornness or principle of non-compromise. One of the suitors, Eurymachus, offers Odysseus compensation to the value of twenty oxen each, bronze and gold, as well as the reimbursement of the food and drink that was consumed by the suitors.<sup>141</sup> Odysseus rejects this offer, even though it would have further enriched him. For to accept the offer, would be to sacrifice his honourable ideals for something monetary and physical, and this he will not do. His honour has been infringed by the presumptive behaviour of the suitors and it cannot be restored at the cost of oxen and precious metals. While the 'ordinary' person out there might be tempted to accept Eurymachus' offer and earn riches for himself, the true hero cannot, for that would be to put a price on his honour. (It could, perhaps, be considered to be a 'sell-out' in the true sense of the word).

Therefore, the element of non-compromise and unrelenting - even merciless - behaviour, in two of the most famous Greek heroes, can be seen here. The options that these heroes choose, are often different from those which the 'ordinary' person would

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<sup>141</sup> *Odyssey*: 22.55 - 59.

take, and this is one of features that distinguishes them and sets them apart as heroic. We have already seen that Medea demonstrates many heroic characteristics, and we can use this trait of unrelenting, uncompromising behaviour to analyse her 'heroism' as well. While the deeds that Medea commits are indeed heinous and contrary to the perception of the instincts of a mother, she commits them under the influence of the precepts of a hero. In this respect, she is similar to Achilles and Odysseus who also allow their behaviour to be guided by their heroic values. Although Medea's actions are terrible, it seems unfair to condemn her as a monster, while at the same time, crediting Achilles and Odysseus with the status of heroes.

Medea does not relent. Once she has decided upon a course of vengeful action, she ploughs consistently along, doing whatever is necessary to achieve her ultimate goal. She secures the grace of an extra day in Corinth from Creon, Jason's brief - and misplaced - trust, and a place of refuge to which she might flee after her dreadful deed is done. In this, she sees to it that she has cleared a way for her intended revenge with no obstacle to hinder her. The only obstacle that she does come against is herself and her own emotions, when she comes to the most difficult part of her plan.<sup>142</sup> Her

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<sup>142</sup> Her most difficult enemy, or obstacle, to overcome, is herself. She realises the pain that the murder of her children will cause her and hesitates in her dread deed; (*Medea* 1021 - 1080 deals with her indecision and awareness of her future pain). Nothing else has presented such a difficult obstacle to overcome as her own love for her children and her  
(continued...)

maternal instinct almost stands in the way of the murder of her children and she has a rather tortured debate with herself in which two opposing sides of Medea's character do battle with each other - Medea the mother and Medea the avenger. It is only when she remembers why it was that she decided to embark on such a dire plan of revenge in the first place, that her purpose is strengthened once again, and she is convinced that her original intent was the correct one and the one that must prevail.<sup>143</sup> The reason for her vengeful plan was Jason's disregard of her, and, more importantly, - what this disregard amounted to - his dishonouring of her. This dishonouring leads Medea to take a non-compromising stand, in which any compromise would be to diminish her own honour and to concede victory to Jason. No hero - or, in this case, heroine - could allow this to happen and still retain their status of unquestioned honour. Therefore,

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<sup>142</sup>(...continued)

pain at having to kill them. There were problems and difficulties in her plans - such as the potential of being caught in the act and becoming an object of laughter to her enemies (*Medea* 378 - 385) - but she easily and readily found a way around these problems in her planning. In this way, Medea maintained control of the situation and of external events; however, she finds it considerably more difficult to control her emotions which are manifest in her love for her children. In this way, it is Medea herself that represents the obstacle that is the most challenging for her to overcome.

<sup>143</sup>It is important to note that it is Medea's fear of the laughter of her enemies, and, therefore, her adherence to the values of a shame or heroic culture, that drives her on and strengthens her dreadful purpose. This fear of her enemies' laughter and her own subsequent loss of reputation and 'face' proves to be stronger than her maternal love, and is, indeed, her strongest emotion.

according to Medea's way of thinking, she must continue with her original intent, despite the pain that it might cost her. In this way, her heroic character and her striving towards a typically male heroic ideal, is responsible for the subjugation of the 'womanly' virtue of motherhood. Medea has placed her heroic ideals before all other things. This will cause her great suffering<sup>144</sup>, but she sees no alternative which could avoid the sacrifice of her honour, and such a sacrifice would be intolerable to any hero to whom honour is all-important. She must adopt a stand of no-compromise, which she does even though the alternative would seem more palatable to the 'ordinary' person. Once again, the differences between the 'ordinary' person, and the hero are evident, and we see that the heroic path is not always the easiest one to take. Lasting fame and glory come at a high price.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>Bongie (Pg.32) comments that Medea probably suffers more than any other Greek tragic hero. Ajax and Antigone sacrifice their lives, Oedipus his sight and home, Heracles his humanity and Philoctetes his goal of revenge, but only Medea sacrifices her own children and her role as their mother.

<sup>145</sup>

It is important to remember that one of the true goals of the hero is to be remembered by future generations. (Refer back to page 55). Granted, Medea is generally not remembered favourably by most; however, in her mind, Medea did not want to suffer humiliation at the hands of her enemies, nor to be met with laughter. She obtained her wish - she may not be the world's most endearing character, but neither is her name greeted with laughter, and she was, and still is, remembered.

### 3.2.5. Medea and Jason

Medea judges Jason according to her own heroic value system, and, when judged this way by *her* standards, he fails to pass the test. When he comes to address Medea, offering her a condescending diplomacy, she criticises him harshly in anger.

ὦ παγκάκιστε, τοῦτο γάρ σ' εἰπεῖν ἔχω,

γλώσση μέγιστον εἰς ἀνανδρίαν κακόν·

ἦλθες πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἦλθες ἔχθιστος γεγώς;

....

οὔτοι θράσος τοδ' ἐστὶν οὐδ' εὐτολμία,

φίλους κακῶς δράσαντ' ἐναντίον βλέπειν,

ἀλλ' ἡ μέγιστη τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις νόσων

πασῶν, ἀνάιδει'.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>L 465 - 467; 469 - 472. 'Traitor! That's what I have to say to you, the worse name one's tongue can use for such unmanliness. You have come to me? You have come although you are the most hateful person to me? ... This is not courage or bravery, that, after you have mistreated your friends, you can look them straight in the eye. This is the worst of all the diseases that a man can have - *shamelessness!*'

The insults that Medea hurls at Jason are designed to hurt. She attacks his manliness, the very essence of a hero, and accuses him of shamelessness. Considering the importance that Greek heroes attached to the whole concept of shame, this was a serious accusation. What must have made the insult even more painful is the fact that to a large extent, it was true (and Jason must have been aware of this). Jason's reason for his desertion of Medea and his betrayal of the oaths that he swore to her, was his intended marriage to Glauce, a union that would secure wealth and political position for him. In order to obtain this marriage, Jason had to break his oath to Medea - this is something which a hero should not do. Jason therefore displayed unheroic behaviour in order to obtain wealth. We have already seen that a hero should never 'sell' his heroic beliefs for monetary gain. This is precisely what Jason did, and Medea knows it.

In contrast, Medea's actions are guided by the principles of a heroic value system, and, accordingly, by the restraints of a sense of shame. As a hero, Jason's actions should be guided by similar values, but Medea, in her accusation that he lacks this sense of shame, denies him one of the features that define a hero. As mentioned above, when judged by Medea's (heroic) standards, Jason comes off second best.

Jason's defeat by Medea is made visible at the close of the play. Medea's triumph is visually represented by her physical position above Jason, in her chariot.

Medea has elevated her status above that of Jason by her defeat over him, in depriving him of all that is important to him, both as a person and as a hero. This metaphorical rise in position is balanced and emphasized by her physical position above his head.

This physical change in position is further interesting in light of a previous comment made by Jason. When addressing his sons, Jason had uttered the wish that he might see them triumphant over his enemies (920 - 921)<sup>147</sup>. Instead of using a verb with the idea of 'being triumphant' or 'defeating', Euripides specifically chose to use the comparative adjective 'ὑπέρτερος'. This conveys the meaning of height insofar as it is commonly translated as 'over' or 'above', and, therefore, metaphorically as 'nobler', 'stronger' and 'triumphant'<sup>148</sup>. While this adjective can be translated as 'triumphant' its root suggests an elevated height, a position of being above something else - a position which would naturally be advantageous. I believe that Euripides chose this word deliberately in order to express Jason's wish that his sons might be victorious over and *rise above* his enemies. This is the goal that is important to Jason.

With this in mind, we can return to the final scene of the play, in which Medea is positioned *above* Jason. Jason recognizes success and victory in the metaphorical

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<sup>147</sup> Ἰδοίμι δ' ὑμᾶς εὐτραφεῖς ἡβῆς τέλος  
μολόντας, ἐχθρῶν τῶν ἐμῶν ὑπερτέρους  
'May I see you when you have fully grown up and are in your  
prime, rising above my enemies.'

<sup>148</sup> Liddell & Scott s.v.

and symbolic elevation of one person over another. At the close of the play, the victorious Medea is physically positioned above Jason. She has risen above her enemy in triumph. When this is examined in conjunction with lines 920 - 21, it acquires a further dimension and deeper meaning, and grows in its effectiveness.

The different respective demeanours of Jason and Medea are also indicative of the change, and indeed reversal, in their respective positions. Jason is distraught, shocked and without resource, while Medea is triumphant, gloating and secure. It seems that she has even overcome the pain caused by her murder of her children; the sweet glory of victory has evaporated her grief. By the end of this chilling play, Medea is the victor<sup>149</sup>, the one who now has success and who will later acquire everlasting fame, the ultimate ambition of the true Homeric-style hero. Jason will not even be granted a heroic death, a point Medea makes with notable relish. He will die not as a hero, but as a layman or worker, struck by a fallen plank from his Argo. The ship that was once the tool for his heroic quest in life, will contribute to his most unheroic death. Truly, he has lost everything that could have mattered to him, and there is no hope that he will regain any of it in the future. His children, his future family, even his hopes for

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At line 45, the nurse told us that no-one who fought against Medea would easily consider themselves to be *καλλίνικος* and Jason, to his misfortune, has learnt this for himself.



a heroic death,<sup>150</sup> are all lost, and Jason is left alone with his grief, mocked by the triumphant, laughing Medea, physically elevated above him, who knows all too well how painful and grating an enemy's laugh can be.

### 3.2.6. Conclusion

Euripides presents a Medea who is governed by her passions and a deep-seated, Homeric-style heroic honour. While such a strong emphasis on the precepts of honour is in itself not unusual, its presence in a woman is. In accordance with common beliefs of the time, regarding women, Medea shows a highly passionate and emotional nature. Her grief and her anger swell easily to immense proportions and encourage her to seek revenge. However, although these character traits are interesting both in developing a full picture of Medea and in adding to a study on common perceptions of women, they are not solely the cause of Medea's diabolical revenge. Indeed, the stronger driving force is Medea's heroic tendencies coupled with her sense of justice. We have observed the obligation that Jason owed Medea, according to the heroic bond of *φιλία*. Jason's blatant disregard of this obligatory respect amounts to an injustice done to Medea, and

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all of which would have been instrumental in obtaining *κλέος* for him.

a failure to comply with the heroic code that she - along with other heroes - lives by. Perhaps the fact that Medea was a woman was a factor which caused Jason to fail to view her deeds and the resultant bond formed as heroic - women were not commonly perceived as heroic and this would, therefore, negate the necessity of complying with the unwritten conditions of *philia*. However, this reasoning - even if it is applicable - does not protect Jason from the vengeful wrath of Medea.

It is interesting to note that Medea is not alone in her belief that Jason's actions were wrong and that he will be justly punished for them. The chorus comments on this repeatedly<sup>151</sup> and Aegeus notes that Jason was wrong for committing such deeds (699). Consequently, it is not only a distraught and overly-passionate Medea who accuses Jason of wrongdoing and who believes that Jason will be justly punished. She is joined by the chorus and by Aegeus, king of Athens, a city which interestingly enough is frequently portrayed as the home of justice and civil order in Greek tragedy<sup>152</sup>. This helps to refute the notion of Medea as merely a raving and irrational woman who makes unfounded and unjustified assumptions regarding Jason. She is supported by

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<sup>151</sup> eg. 267, 578, 1231 - 2.

<sup>152</sup>

Vellacott in his introduction to his translation of *Medea* comments that the tragedians promoted the ideal of Athens as a city of justice and integrity. This view is supported by the evidence of the plays themselves - for example, Sophocles depicts Athens and her representatives as protectors of justice in his *Oedipus at Colonus*.

others in the play who, while they might not approve of her chosen method of revenge, still acknowledge the justice of it.

Therefore, it is the heroic code of honour that dictates Jason's obligation to Medea - the disregard of this obligation equates to an injustice which various characters in the play agree should be punished. The idea of revenge is also prompted by heroic concerns and these heroic tendencies overrule the other noteworthy side of Medea's character, namely her emotions, and particularly those she has as a mother. Medea's decision to take revenge on Jason is further persuaded by the possible consequences of failure to take this revenge - her decreasing standing in the community and particularly among her enemies, which is embodied in their laughter.

Medea's heroism, therefore, ensures her vengeance against Jason and her triumph over him. It defeats her maternal instincts which should lead her to protect her children, not harm them. It would seem, then, that her heroism is stronger than any other of her personality traits, and is her most noteworthy feature. Hence, we can observe the significance of heroism and the actions which it can prompt, in this play.

### 3.3: Hippolytus

#### 3.3.1 An Introduction

ἡ δ' εὐκλεῆς μὲν ἀλλ' ὁμῶς ἀπόλλυται  
Φαίδρα· τὸ γὰρ τῆσδ' οὐ προτιμήσω κακὸν  
τὸ μὴ οὐ παρασχεῖν τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἐμοὶ  
δίκην τοσαύτην ὥστε μοι καλῶς ἔχειν.<sup>153</sup>

In addition to the idea of revenge, there are many different themes and issues at work in the *Hippolytus*, although they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, many are interdependent and it is therefore difficult to view these in isolation. For this reason, I shall be examining several of them in this study, particularly those which cannot successfully be separated from each other. For example, Aphrodite's insistence on human worship of the gods (herself, in particular), Phaedra's incestuous passion as

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*Hippolytus*: 47 - 50. "Phaedra will die, albeit with a good name. For I will not consider her misfortune more important than to acquire sufficient justice from my enemies to satisfy me."

Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own.

well as her concern for her reputation, and Theseus' fatal cursing of his son, while separate issues, are all inter-connected; hence, I will be considering each of these and their context within the play.

However, in accordance with the purpose of this study, my main interest lies on the topic of revenge and its possible connection to the ethic of honour. This will be the underlying theme behind my study of the various topics in the play, possibly to the exclusion of certain aspects which, while interesting in their own right, might not be relevant for a study of this nature. Therefore, for example, while the play deals with such issues as proper worship of the gods and its opposite, as well as the dangers of excess, both in chastity and lust, these issues will not be dealt with separately, but will be considered only insofar as they have an influence on the topic of my study.

It is interesting to note that Euripides composed two plays on the topic of Hippolytus and that this was the second. The first, *Hippolytus Kalyptomenos*, portrayed a lustful Phaedra with no sense of shame<sup>154</sup>. She approached Hippolytus with her incestuous advances in person and, when rejected, accused him falsely of rape in person. She committed suicide only after her guilt was revealed.

This first *Hippolytus* was unsuccessful and it apparently shocked and scandalized its audience. We have very little of it remaining in extant form so a

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<sup>154</sup> Vellacott (*Euripides: Medea and Other Plays*: Pg. 18.)  
Lawall (*Euripides' Hippolytus*: Pg. 8).

detailed analysis is impossible. However, we can ascertain a rough sketch of Phaedra's character. She was blatant in her approach and, unlike the second Phaedra, she did not battle with her conscience or take measures to act according to her position and reputation. This Phaedra shocked audiences, possibly in part because of the natural fear of the problems that such a sexually rapacious woman could cause in real life, particularly with regard to legitimacy, and possibly too because of the danger of a woman - or any person for that matter - who was ungoverned and unguided by a sense of conscience and shame.

In contrast, the Phaedra of the second *Hippolytus* shows herself to be concerned about her reputation and, hence, about her honour. Unlike the first Phaedra who killed herself only when found guilty, this second Phaedra decided to commit suicide before Hippolytus was even made aware of her passion for him. Her suicide was not the desperate act of one condemned as guilty, but rather a means to prevent herself from yielding to her passion, which would not only constitute incest but would also prove detrimental to her reputation in the eyes of others - an issue which we shall see is important in this play. Phaedra chooses an 'honourable' exit to her difficult situation, namely that of suicide. We have already seen that death in itself was not the ultimate tragedy in Greek epic and drama. Suicide in particular offers one the ability to choose an end to some form of suffering and often represents the only honourable escape from

a seemingly intolerable situation. Phaedra joins the ranks of the heroes when she chooses this escape<sup>155</sup> and is, therefore, in good company as far as honour is concerned. She lives fighting for the preservation of her honour and dies in an attempt to preserve it. Despite the fact that in many ways she fails because she is found to be false, she nevertheless displays a concern for her reputation and this is one of the signs of heroic and shame culture values.

Therefore, the second play introduces a Phaedra who is at least concerned with the values of society and with maintaining her reputation. It seems that the audience found this Phaedra more tolerable (even though she would be remembered in a most unfavourable light) as Euripides won one of his rare four first prizes for this play. Somehow a woman who was at least concerned with the preservation of her reputation through adherence to the accepted value system of the time, was more palatable than one who blatantly and unabashedly contravened the standards of the time in her sexual rapaciousness. Using this evidence, we can probably safely speculate about the importance of valuing one's reputation and adhering to certain conventions, as far as the members of the audience were concerned. Certainly they seemed to have preferred the second *Hippolytus* and its inherent message far more than the first.

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Eg. Sophocles' Ajax who commits suicide after his disastrous murder of sheep becomes public knowledge, and Euripides' Heracles who considers suicide after his unintentional murder of his family (*Heracles* 1130 - 1155).

### 3.3.2 Aphrodite

ἄ δ' εἰς ἔμ' ἠμάρτηκε τιμωρήσομαι

Ἰππόλυτον ἐν τῆιδ' ἡμέραι;<sup>156</sup>

In the prologue, Aphrodite sets the tone as well as the scene for the play. As part of her own introduction, she tells us that she is 'great' and 'well-known' both among mortals and gods<sup>157</sup>. Therefore, we immediately see Aphrodite's pride in her position and the respect which it grants her. Aphrodite places value on the reputation which she has as a powerful goddess, and this reputation must be maintained. Her reputation, particularly among mortals, depends on their proper respect and worship of her. It follows that any neglect in this piety could potentially result in a lessening of Aphrodite's reputation as a powerful and widely-respected goddess. For this reason, she will favour those who honour her - except for the occasional 'necessary' casualty, like Phaedra - and destroy those who arrogantly and defiantly disregard her<sup>158</sup>. Here, Aphrodite's reasons for her terrible punishment of Hippolytus are given in the very

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<sup>156</sup> Hippolytus: 21 - 22.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid: 1: πολλή μὲν ἐν βροτοῖσι κοῦκ ἀνώνυμος  
.....οὐρανοῦ τ' ἔσω

<sup>158</sup> Ibid: 3 - 6.



beginning of the play - she will fight to preserve her honour and she sees Hippolytus as neglecting to pay her the respect and honour due to her<sup>159</sup>. Hippolytus' refusal to pay Aphrodite the honour which she deems necessary, is perceived by her as tantamount to an act of war against her. She describes Hippolytus as 'a youth who is warlike towards herself'<sup>160</sup>. An act of neglect and dishonour is perceived as a declaration of war, which would seem a rather exaggerated philosophy to many modern western readers, but not entirely unfeasible or incredible to a Classical audience. The use of warlike terminology to describe Hippolytus' disrespectful behaviour towards Aphrodite, should alert us to the significance of such an act. This is no small transgression, but rather one which will be viewed and treated with great seriousness, and which will, thus, require - in Aphrodite's eyes - a fitting retaliation. The matter of dishonour is indeed a grave issue.

Hence, Aphrodite's concern is the preservation of her honour. This is an important theme in the play and we shall meet it again in the discussion on Phaedra. It is noteworthy that the issue is raised this early in the play - the preservation of personal honour and reputation particularly in the eyes of others, will come to be a driving force in the *Hippolytus*, as it is indeed here the cause of Aphrodite's vengeance.

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<sup>159</sup> *Hippolytus*: 21: "...ἡμάρτηκε τιμωρήσομαι".

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*: 43: "... ἡμῖν πολέμιον νεανίαν".

Therefore, even in this example alone, the connection between dishonour and vengeance can be drawn. Honour and reputation are important qualities, and their infringement can become the justification, or at least the cause, of vengeful action.

It seems too that dishonour carries more weight than honour. Phaedra honours Aphrodite but this will not prevent her from being used by the goddess in her vengeful plot. Aphrodite acknowledges that Phaedra will die because of this revenge (47-8), but this does not stop her from going ahead with her plan, or cause her even the slightest hesitation. When she has to choose between favouring her faithful devotees and punishing her enemies, her innocent subjects come second<sup>161</sup>. Therefore, it appears that dishonour is more harmful and undesirable than honour is beneficial and desirable, as far as one's reputation is concerned. The need for revenge arises in order to combat and rectify this lapse in honour and respect, despite the fact that faithful followers might also suffer in the process. The possible suffering experienced by the innocence in the quest for revenge is justified by the need to reestablish the proper respect and honour. Aphrodite even almost justifies the death of Phaedra; while Phaedra must die, she will

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Halleran (*Gamos and Destruction in Euripides' Hippolytus*: pg. 116) comments on this very point, stating that 'divine vengeance carried greater weight than innocent suffering'.

at least die with honour - and this, as we know, is more important than life<sup>162</sup>. It seems that Aphrodite is almost suggesting that Phaedra's death is not that catastrophic at all, since she will retain her good reputation and Aphrodite has already explained to us the importance of that.

Finally, it is interesting to note one other point that can be observed when considering Aphrodite's speech and again when we meet Artemis at a later stage in the play. Aphrodite tells us that the gods too have pride and enjoy the honour that is conferred upon them by humans<sup>163</sup>. Furthermore, her actions show that the gods are not above vindictive and vengeful behaviour. In this way the gods are accredited with human character traits. For them too the infringement of their honour is intolerable and is punishable by some form of vengeful retribution.

### 3.3.3 Artemis

The cycle of vengeance will continue through the actions of Artemis who

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<sup>162</sup>

Of course, Phaedra will actually lose her honour and reputation as well once she is revealed to have accused Hippolytus falsely. Interestingly enough, Aphrodite does not mention this, yet as the goddess who foretells the action of the play, she must surely have known.

<sup>163</sup> *Hippolytus*: 7 - 8.

resolves to destroy Aphrodite's next favourite in retaliation for the death of Hippolytus. Artemis shares the same interest in honour and reputation as many of the other characters; she wishes to tell Theseus the truth about Hippolytus in order that he might die with a good name<sup>164</sup>. Furthermore, she describes the death of Hippolytus by the planning of Aphrodite and the necessity of her allowing it in accordance with Zeus' rules, as a dishonour or a shame to herself<sup>165</sup>. The fact that she was compelled by the laws of Zeus to stand back and allow Aphrodite her vengeance, seems to be more significant to her as a dishonour than as a cause for grief (although to be fair she does appear to grieve for Hippolytus as well). However, it is important to note that she describes this enforced neutrality as a dishonour and resents it as such. Artemis too feels the need for honour and recognizes its importance.

Despite this, there seems to be little conclusive evidence to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Artemis is intent on vengeance because of a perceived dishonour. While she is shown to value honour, she does not specifically tell us that

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<sup>164</sup> *Hippolytus*: 1298 - 99; 1307.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*: 1331 - 1334:

ἐπει, σάφ' ἴσθι, Ζῆνα μὴ φοβουμένη  
οὐκ ἂν ποτ' ἦλθον εἰς τόδ' αἰσχύνης ἐγὼ  
ὡστ' ἄνδρα πάντων φίλτατον βροτῶν ἐμοὶ  
θανεῖν ἐᾶσαι.

she will kill Aphrodite's favourite because of a slight to her own honour. Her intended revenge could be the result of numerous other factors and emotions, such as grief and anger. It is my personal belief that since Artemis has shown herself to be aware of the importance of honour, there is good reason to believe that this is the motivation - or at least one of the reasons - behind her intended future act of revenge; however, this cannot be argued conclusively from the scanty evidence that she gives us in her speech. We shall have to turn to the other characters in the play for a more definite and substantial line of argument.

### **3.3.4 Phaedra**

#### *Our First Impressions*

Phaedra, along with Aphrodite, provides one of the best examples of shame-culture values and honour in this play, and we shall attempt to analyse to what extent this influences her decision for vengeance in accordance with the purpose of this study. Phaedra's behaviour and speech reveal a woman who is concerned mainly with her reputation and with the way in which she is viewed by others. It is of importance to her that she maintains a certain public status, and much of her

behaviour is dictated by this aim. This concern appears to form a stronger motivation than does any reasoning on moral grounds; in this way, Phaedra's behaviour fits quite well into the category of shame-culture values since it is defined more on the basis of what is *seen* to be correct than what genuinely *is* correct.

Our first introduction to Phaedra reveals a woman who is concerned with her physical appearance and thus with the way in which she appears before others<sup>166</sup>. She chooses to describe her arms as beautiful, thereby drawing our attention to one of her physical qualities. We can assume from this that she considers the impression that she makes upon others - in this instance, by means of her outward and physical appearance - to be of importance. Her emphasis lies on the outward appearance of beauty and this is one of the criteria by which Phaedra feels people are judged.

It is interesting that Euripides has chosen to make this our first introduction to the Phaedra of his play. It gives us our first indication that Phaedra's attitudes and behaviour may be influenced by shame-culture values insofar as she considers outward appearances rather than inner values to be important; however, we shall

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<sup>166</sup>*Hippolytus* 200:

λάβετ' εὐπήχεις χεῖρας, πρόπολοι.

'Hold my hands, with their *beautiful* arms, attendants.'

have to examine this example in conjunction with the other evidence in order to confirm this assumption.<sup>167</sup>

After Phaedra's delirious outbursts in which she expresses her wish to enjoy the same outdoor pursuits as Hippolytus, she feels embarrassed and requests that the nurse hide her face from view with her veil once more:

μαῖα, πάλιν μου κρύψον κεφαλὴν,

αἰδούμεθα γὰρ τὰ λελεγμένα μοι.

κρύπτε·

'Nurse, hide my face again, for I am ashamed

at what I have said. Hide it.'

(243 - 245)

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Physical attributes were frequently used as defining adjectives for a wide variety of characters ranging from divinities to mortals, particularly heroes. (For example, Homer has Athena as 'the goddess with flashing eyes' and Hera as "the white-armed goddess). The use of such epithets is a common feature of epic, and its use is continued in Greek tragedy. Therefore, Phaedra's comment on the beauty of her arms, need not necessarily be attributed any more significance than this.

The shame that she feels at having spoken her inappropriate wish out aloud where others might hear is what we might expect from someone who is concerned with her perception in others' eyes. Her wish to revel in outdoor and typically masculine pursuits, is inappropriate for a woman and especially one of her class. She is a respected member of the nobility and as such has a certain dignity and status which must be maintained. Should her inappropriate wish be heard by others, this dignity could be eroded. She would be observed behaving and speaking in a manner not suitable for one of her class. The impropriety of her wish is compounded by the fact that her speech has a ring of madness to it.<sup>168</sup> This too would be detrimental to the composed and dignified facade which Phaedra must maintain, especially before others.

The nurse herself recognizes the risk involved to one's reputation in voicing inappropriate thoughts out aloud - she cautions Phaedra not to speak so heedlessly while other people are about, lest they hear and possibly consider Phaedra to be

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Her wish to join the hunt (expressed by her use of hunting vocabulary such as *θηροφόνους*, 'the killing of wild beasts', and others) brings to mind the Bacchic revels such as those described in Euripides' *Bacchae*. These revels involve women in a maddened trance in which they hunt wild animals. It is for these reasons that Phaedra's wish to be hunting with a fierce horse beneath her, has a certain sound of madness to it.



showing herself to be on the brink of madness<sup>169</sup>. It is interesting to observe that the nurse does not here question the actual meaning of Phaedra's words, merely the fact that she has spoken them aloud. Phaedra's desires are clearly inappropriate for a woman of her class - aristocratic women who behaved according to their position and status, did not go hunting with, or like, the men - yet the nurse's warning rebuke makes no comment on this aspect of her speech; her concern is with their expression. Phaedra has publicly announced her inappropriate desires and this is the disturbing matter. Phaedra's behaviour can now be witnessed by others and her inappropriate desires will not be able to be concealed. This seems to be the nurse's main concern, and it is indicative of a very public value system in which one's values are defined by the audience that views them.

So great is the shame that Phaedra feels once she becomes aware of her public outburst, that she desires to be hidden from the scrutiny of others by means of her veil. She hides her face and the evidence of her shame from the people around her by means of the veil. In this way, the use of the veil seems to represent a physical

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<sup>169</sup> 212 - 214:

ὦ παῖ, τί θροεῖς;

οὐ μὴ παρ' ὄχλῳ τάδε γηρύσει,

μανίας ἔποχον ρίπτουσα λόγον;

`My child, what are you saying? Don't speak before this crowd, words that are thrown out and carried along by madness.

covering of shame and a way of concealing one's thoughts and actions from others. This is important if we consider it in the context of shame and guilt value systems. A guilt-value system - such as that upon which many contemporary societies would seem to be based - would require that the wrongful action itself be avoided, or, if this is too late, corrected or atoned for in some way. The situation could not be resolved by covering up the action or by pretending that it had never really happened; one's conscience would still recognize the fault inherent in the action. In contrast to this, shame-culture values define one's behaviour according to the way in which it is perceived by others. An action becomes bad when it is witnessed by others and judged by them to be wrong<sup>170</sup>. Hence, if this action were to be concealed from others, then it would lose its element of wrongness. This is the value system under which Phaedra operates and according to which she guides and structures her behaviour. When she perceives herself as having acted in a shameful way before others, she covers her face and hides the embarrassment which is evident there - this is her way of covering up or concealing the shameful action. Her response to what she perceives as shameful behaviour is to hide it rather than to address it. We can

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Refer back to Buss' discussion on shame values as being represented by such thought patterns as 'I have been *caught* doing something wrong' - page 24. (Self-Consciousness and Social Anxiety).

now begin to formulate a clearer picture of Phaedra as an adherent to the values of a shame culture.

Phaedra's concerns about Theseus are also indicative of her attitude. She recognizes the wrongfulness in her passion for Hippolytus and hesitates to confess it to anyone - as we would expect from a woman such as Phaedra on the basis of the picture that we have acquired of her so far. She recognizes that this passion for Hippolytus could constitute an injury against her husband and Hippolytus' father, Theseus. She states her wish, therefore, not to commit this wrong against Theseus, which is a reasonable enough desire, but it is the manner in which she expresses this wish that is revealing. Phaedra hopes that she will never be *seen* to wrong her husband (321)<sup>171</sup>. Once again, her choice of words is highly revealing of her character type. She does not say that she hopes never to wrong her husband - which is what we would be justified in expecting her to say<sup>172</sup> - but that she hopes that she

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<sup>171</sup> μὴ δρῶσ' ἔγωγε κείνον ὀφθείην κακῶς

<sup>172</sup>

Particularly considering the fact that Phaedra is suffering from this passionate infatuation not through her own will but because of the machinations of Aphrodite whose intention cannot be prevented, even by Artemis as we discover later in the play; a woman inflicted with an unconquerable and unwanted desire for a man other than her husband, caused by the interference of a god, could well be expected to wish that she might never do anything to injure her husband since her potential wrongful actions are neither deliberate nor intentional. A woman in this position would have no desire  
(continued...)

is never seen to do so. This does not necessarily exclude the possibility that Phaedra genuinely does not want to betray her husband in any way, but it does show us where her emphasis lies. She seems to be more concerned with the consequences of any wrongful conduct being observed and discovered, than those resulting from it actually taking place.

As before, we can observe the essential elements of a shame-culture and its values. An action acquires its 'sinfulness' through public awareness, rather than because of its inherent wrongfulness. The emphasis is placed on the importance of not being *caught* committing some act of wrongdoing; this often seems to be more important a goal than actually not committing the crime or sin<sup>173</sup>.

Phaedra wishes her problem or 'wrongdoing'<sup>174</sup> as she herself refers to it, to remain her own private knowledge. She argues that since this wrongdoing does not affect the nurse in any way, then the nurse should leave her alone with it and not attempt to discover it. This too could be indicative of the shame-culture values

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<sup>172</sup>(...continued)

to hurt her husband as her actions would not be entirely of her own volition.

<sup>173</sup>

I use the word 'sin' loosely to refer to an act of wrongdoing without implying the moral and religious connotations which are often associated with this word when met in the Judaeo-Christian context.

<sup>174</sup> 323: ἀμαρτάνω

which seem to dominate and direct Phaedra's life. She would prefer her problem to remain private and not open to public scrutiny. Hence, she would prefer that her problem were not *seen* by others. However, we should be careful not to condemn Phaedra outright on this aspect. It is not uncommon in modern times too, for people to deal with their problems privately and to value this element of privacy, despite the fact that many modern Western cultures are considered to be closer to guilt-cultures than to shame-cultures. This concern for privacy in certain delicate decisions is not necessarily indicative of a personality-type similar to that of Phaedra. On the other hand, it may well bear certain traces of a shame-culture within it. Our own culture is not considered to be completely a guilt-culture - it does still share some values that would derive from a shame-culture system.

Therefore, from this digression, we can assume that Phaedra's wish for her problem to remain her own private dilemma, could be another factor that is indicative of her adherence to shame-culture values.

' Αμαρτάνω<sup>175</sup> in itself is a revealing word for Phaedra to use. Liddell and Scott define it firstly as 'to miss' and specifically as 'to miss the mark' . It is further translated as to 'fail' particularly 'to fail one's purpose'.<sup>176</sup> All these common

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<sup>175</sup> *Hippolytus*: 323.

<sup>176</sup> Liddell & Scott s.v. I.1 & 2.

interpretations carry the implication of failure; when one misses one's target - be it a physical or metaphorical one - one fails to achieve one's goal and aim. Since the heroic, shame-culture system is based on the goal of personal achievement, we can deduce the further implications of this. If personal achievement is the main goal, and the means by which the heroic personality gains public recognition and acclaim, then personal failure must entail the opposite of this - public discredit. Similarly, if public glory is the ultimate goal of the heroic personality, then public failure must be the event which the heroic personality would most desire to avoid. Phaedra sees herself as having failed. She has failed to live up to the standards imposed on a woman of her status and class and this will bring her public discredit and disrepute.

According to Phaedra's way of thinking, she has not 'sinned' insofar as our definition is concerned<sup>177</sup>, but rather has failed. To one living under the confines of a shame culture, this failure brings along with it worse consequences. The only redeeming feature of this failure is that it is currently unknown to the public and is Phaedra's secret. To acknowledge her 'sin' out aloud and to so to bring it to the attention of others, would be to expose her failure. In order to maintain her reputation and status, she needs to ensure that it stays that way. Hence, her

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i.e. that of the Judaeo-Christian context which incorporates elements of moral wrongdoing.

reluctance to tell even her trusted nurse and confidant. Hence too, the drastic action that Phaedra feels compelled to take at a later stage in the play, after she has made her terrible confession and especially once Hippolytus is made aware of it.<sup>178</sup>

The nurse continues the idea of failure, perhaps deliberately in order to reach Phaedra on her own level.<sup>179</sup> The nurse tells Phaedra that if she fails it will be because of her mistress.<sup>180</sup> It seems likely to me that the nurse has recognized Phaedra's use of the word *ἁμαρτάνω* as a sign of her preoccupation with failure, or rather, with the avoidance of failure. As a ploy to convince Phaedra that she is empathic with her mistress, the nurse addresses Phaedra in a manner which she knows her mistress will understand and to which she will be able to relate. This, she

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Perhaps, Phaedra's later action serves as one of the best illustrations of the differences between her notion of shame and the Judaeo-Christian notion of guilt and sin. The latter viewpoint tends to view a sin as something that is morally wrong. Had Phaedra committed suicide in order to prevent herself from committing some sin, then she would not have compounded her wrongdoing by implicating Hippolytus. However, if it was her shame she was conscious of, as opposed to any form of sin, then her accusation of Hippolytus would serve to exonerate her from any guilt and to preserve her reputation. This is what she deemed important and this is not the behaviour of one suffering from a sense of guilt but rather from shame.

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The nurse is a far more 'ordinary' personality than Phaedra insofar as she does not share Phaedra's heroic inclinations. Therefore, the nurse may be using Phaedra's own logic in order to encourage her to reveal her troubles.

<sup>180</sup> 324: ...ἐν δὲ σοὶ λελείπομαι.

hopes, will encourage Phaedra to reveal her problems to one whom she perceives as being able to understand them. However, this brings about no change in Phaedra's attitude.

Line 329 is highly revealing of Phaedra's ideals. She tells the nurse that the matter or her conduct, will bring her honour<sup>181</sup>. This is a difficult concept to understand as it is stated, but Phaedra's intentions can be deduced. It is not the actual matter (i.e. Phaedra's love for Hippolytus) will bring her honour, but rather her handling of it. She will not reveal the source of her misery, and thus, by keeping her passion to herself, she will prevent it from becoming a matter of shame.<sup>182</sup> It will not be honourable in the strict sense of the word, as Phaedra will acquire no honour from her silence; rather she will prevent the besmirchment of her reputation and will, thus, retain the honour that she already has.

This is confirmed by Phaedra's statement in line 331 to the effect that she is devising or creating something noble out of what is shameful.<sup>183</sup> What exactly is Phaedra doing to create this noble situation? The answer is quite simply that she is

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<sup>181</sup> ... τὸ μέντοι πράγμα ἔμοι τιμὴν φέρει.

<sup>182</sup>

Once again we see that the shameful aspect of her lust lies not in the lust itself, but in its public acknowledgement - another indication of shame-culture values.

<sup>183</sup> ἔκ τῶν γὰρ αἰσχροῶν ἐσθλὰ μηχανώμεθα



keeping quiet. By not revealing her dishonourable or shameful thoughts, she is retaining her honour in the eyes of others and this is sufficient for her. As we have already noted, it is not her illicitly lustful thoughts that are dishonourable; however, public awareness of them would be.

This in itself helps to reveal to us the vast differences between our Western culture and that of Euripides' time. When we speak of someone doing something honourable, we *usually* have some actual deed in mind. Concealing one's potential wrongdoing is not what we would in most circumstances, consider to be honourable or noble behaviour. Self-preservation, and particularly, the preservation of one's appearance before others, is not generally considered to be a basis for honour and esteem.<sup>184</sup>

Line 332 once again reveals the nurse addressing Phaedra on her mistress' level. She uses the highly logical reasoning that if Phaedra has found a way to generate honour for herself, then surely that is all the more reason for her to share it

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This is not to say that the wish to preserve one's good appearance before others is lacking in today's society. On the contrary, it is still very present and people generally attempt to avoid behaviour which would cause them embarrassment. However, in our Western culture, we generally don't refer to this avoidance of embarrassment as a means to honour. There are still some cultures of our own time that lean more closely towards the idea of the preservation of one's reputation as a means to honour, but a selection of these will be discussed at a later stage.

with others and make it public. This would be a very true line of reasoning were it not for the fact that Phaedra's honour will arise from silence and not from speech. Her honour is dependant on her remaining silent; this is the crucial hinge in the reasoning of which the nurse is ignorant. Contrary to what seems logical, Phaedra's speech will in no way add to her honour - rather, it will destroy it - and Phaedra is well aware of this. Hence, she is in no hurry to reveal her thoughts.

Line 335 is perhaps one of the most crucial in this play as far as Phaedra is concerned. It is in this line that she makes her decision to speak and to confess her lust for Hippolytus. Once she has passed this point, there can be no turning back, and the chain of events that takes place in the remainder of the play, is now set in unstoppable motion.

Considering the significance of Phaedra's decision to speak, it is reasonable to question her motives for doing so. Although Phaedra's intention is to confess to the nurse alone and not to allow Hippolytus to learn of her passion, she must realize that as soon as another person besides herself is privy to this very private and dangerous knowledge, the risk to herself and her honour is greatly increased. Despite this, she decides to tell the nurse. The immense import of this decision necessitates examination of her reasons.

Phaedra herself tells us her reasons.<sup>185</sup> Once again, the familiar driving force behind her actions is that of shame. Perhaps in this context the feeling is somewhat closer to respect than to shame, but the fact remains that once again a form of the verb *αἰδέομαι* is used. While Phaedra is ashamed to reveal her feelings to her nurse, she is also ashamed to mistreat the woman who has shown her so much kindness and loyalty. For, while the heroic code dictates self-preservation and advancement, it also calls for loyalty and good conduct towards one's friends. Phaedra chooses to honour her nurse, her friend, by revealing her feelings; unfortunately for Phaedra, the nurse acts in the way she feels is best and, misguidedly, relays the information to Hippolytus.

However, despite her eventual decision to confide in her nurse, Phaedra still hesitates before committing her thoughts to words, as she realises the full import of this. She delays and speaks in riddles, referring to the unfortunate loves of certain members of her family. She further wishes that the nurse could be the one to speak out aloud her own confession. This is a curious statement. If only the nurse and

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<sup>185</sup> 335: δώσω· σέβας γὰρ χειρὸς αἰδοῦμαι τὸ σόν.

Phaedra are going to be privy to this secret,<sup>186</sup> then what difference would the actual speaker make? The fact would still remain that the nurse would be aware of Phaedra's secret. I believe that the reason for Phaedra's wish is her fear of putting her terrible desire into words and confessing the sin as her own. Once she has spoken it out aloud, there can be no further concealment<sup>187</sup> of the existence of the secret. More significantly, once Phaedra herself has confessed to it, she can no longer deny it as her own. It would not be an unfounded accusation made by someone else - i.e. the nurse - but her own confession, which she would have to acknowledge as her own. This would grant it the element of truth and disallow any further pretence at honour that Phaedra might have before her nurse.

This line of reasoning is continued in line 352. Here Phaedra jumps on the fact that it was the nurse who spoke Hippolytus' name out aloud rather than she

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I am ignoring the presence of the chorus here, as they generally fulfill little more than the role of observers taking no physical part in the action of the play. In any case, irrespective of whoever speaks Phaedra's secret - the nurse or Phaedra herself - makes no difference as far as the chorus is concerned. They would know the truth either way.

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Of course, this is as far as the nurse is concerned; Phaedra does not suspect that Hippolytus will soon discover the truth as well.

herself, as if that changed the significance of the admission.<sup>188</sup> In this we can observe the seriousness of confessing to a crime and admitting the sin as one's own. This act prevents any further concealment of one's shameful deed or thought. It is, therefore, corrosive to one's honourable status, if we accept the understanding of honourable behaviour as that which is *witnessed* by others as honourable, as opposed to the modern western notion of an internalized sense of honour.

### *Phaedra's Decision and Justification*

A deeper insight into Phaedra's thoughts begins with line 373 in which she begins a lengthy discussion of her passion and its effect on her. She starts by telling us that it is not only the foolish or wicked who suffer from misfortune<sup>189</sup>. This serves a greater purpose than merely offering us an insight into philosophical issues. Phaedra is ensuring that her audience knows that she is not a deficient person by nature and that her predicament and passion were not of her own choosing. As she

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<sup>188</sup> σοῦ τάδ', οὐκ ἐμοῦ, κλύεις.

You heard these things from yourself, not from me.

<sup>189</sup> Hippolytus 377 - 9.

tells us, bad things often happen to those who are sensible and decent people.<sup>190</sup>

Therefore, before Phaedra commits herself to her confession, she informs those listening that similar things happen to good people, and not only to those who are bad or deserving of such misfortune. Once again, Phaedra's concern with her appearance before others can be observed - before admitting her troubles, she wants to ensure that everyone understands that they are not of her doing or creation. Furthermore, by establishing the fact that such misfortunes happen to decent people, Phaedra suggests to us that she too must be decent.

However, Phaedra has a stern admonition for those who would be weakened by their misfortunes and succumb to temptation. While the temptation itself can affect anyone, it is the ability to resist it that is the mark of a worthy person. Phaedra will fight against this temptation as any noble person would, and she has no patience for those who would yield to it.

Having in this way acquainted us both with the vulnerability of all people to temptation and with the need and duty for honourable people to resist it, Phaedra proceeds to detail her own actions, with this insight into honourable behaviour as the background to her revelations.

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid: 379.

Once stricken by her passion for her stepson, Phaedra's first action in her own words, was to discover the 'right way' of handling the situation<sup>191</sup>. While I do not wish to over-estimate the importance of one word here, I do think that Phaedra's usage of the word *καίρος* is interesting and, perhaps, noteworthy. Among the many possible meanings for *καίρος* printed in Liddell and Scott, are 'due measure' and 'advantage'.<sup>192</sup> Both of these interpretations would fit Phaedra's personality very well. The first would demonstrate her preoccupation with doing what is due or fitting to her status and reputation, while the second would match the heroic ethos of doing what is advantageous to one. Phaedra demonstrates many aspects of a heroic personality with her preoccupation with her reputation before others. *Καίρος* could have been chosen deliberately by Euripides to emphasize these personality traits of Phaedra's, once again. *καίρος* also has an element of exactness about it - it refers to the 'right' time or the 'exact or critical time'. Inherent in these meanings, there could be the idea that there is *one* right way of dealing with Phaedra's situation. All of these possibilities would indeed be relevant to a developing picture of Phaedra as created by the playwright but we must still be careful of attaching too much emphasis to isolated words. *Καίρος* can also refer to an organ of the body and a

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<sup>191</sup> *Hippolytus* 386.

<sup>192</sup> s.v. I and IV.

season in the year.<sup>193</sup> Therefore, while there are advantages inherent in examining a word closely, care must be taken not to do so out of context. We shall be better equipped for a well-founded discussion of Phaedra, by studying the relevant sections of her entire speech here.

After a brief digression into a philosophical contemplation of suffering and whom it descends upon, Phaedra tells the chorus and nurse of her own suffering and her plans for dealing with it. The digression itself is interesting, not only for its content, but also for its inclusion. Why would Phaedra preface the confession of her passion by such a digression? Surely it must be to deny the justification for any possible future criticism or negative reactions that might arise in response to her intentions and their expression? She tells her audience that it is not only the wicked or the foolish that experience unforeseen sufferings, thereby ensuring that we don't judge her harshly to be one of this group. Next she tells us that there are some that do not act appropriately to their sufferings for a variety of reasons; this is a precursor to her telling us how she intends to act. She will not ignore the passion, nor yield to it. This puts her in automatic contrast to that bad group of people who would act in this way. We are then more inclined to judge Phaedra favourably.

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<sup>193</sup> Liddell and Scott s.v. II and III.



After this digression, Phaedra tells us her plans and the thought pattern behind them. Her first plan was 'to keep silent and to hide her passion'.<sup>194</sup> This is typical of a shame-culture value in which a deed is not considered to be damning unless it is publicly known. If Phaedra were to conceal her passion successfully, then she would remain uncriticised and her reputation would be intact. However, we cannot condemn Phaedra outright on the basis of this statement alone. I believe that many people in a similar situation would be inclined to share Phaedra's sentiments that she would rather her illicit passion did not become a matter of general knowledge. However, how many people would go to the extent that Phaedra does?

We next discover that on the persistence of her passion, Phaedra decides that the best option for her is to die.<sup>195</sup> The reason is given indirectly a few lines further.

Phaedra tells us that both the act and the yearning for it are 'shameful'.<sup>196</sup> Her choice of words here is indicative of her character type and the thoughts that must have been going through her mind. In order to understand this, perhaps we should consider how we would describe such a potential relationship between stepmother and stepson. According to a moral standpoint, it would be wrong or sinful,

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<sup>194</sup>

*Hippolytus*: 394. (Text taken from <http://hydra.perseus.tufts.edu>. hereafter referred to as 'The Perseus Site').

<sup>195</sup> *Hippolytus*: 401. (The Perseus Site)

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*: : 405. (The Perseus Site)

according to the law, it could be illegal (depending upon the country concerned), and according to a personal standpoint, it would depend largely on the person concerned and the values that he / she has accepted as their own. Those people who would define it as 'shameful' or 'disgraceful' would be, albeit perhaps unwittingly, expressing shame-culture values. The term 'shameful' refers to an act which brings one shame, and shame is reliant on the action being judged by other people. 'Disgraceful' refers to a diminishing of grace or that quality which contributes to one's reputation.

This is how Phaedra describes her passion - not as sinful or wrong, but as 'δυσκλέα'<sup>197</sup>, something which detracts from her reputation and diminishes her in the eyes of others. This damage to her reputation is the reason why at first she resolved to be silent, when there was a possibility that her passion could be concealed from others, and then when she discovered that she could not keep it under control, why she decided that the only option still available to her, was her death. The emphasis on her reputation is highly indicative of shame-culture values.

This perception of Phaedra is reinforced by line 420<sup>198</sup> in which Phaedra states that she wants to avoid being *detected* or *caught* dishonouring her husband or

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<sup>197</sup> *Hippolytus*: 405. (The Perseus Site).

<sup>198</sup> The Perseus Site.

children. It is not the guilt inherent in indulging her passion that she fears, but the consequences of being caught indulging it. This differentiation is an important one when distinguishing between shame- and guilt-culture values.

Phaedra confirms her concern in line 430 <sup>199</sup> when she again expresses the wish that she might never be *seen* among those who behave badly.

More important to Phaedra than the gratification of her illicit desire, is the preservation of her reputation, as shown by lines 488 - 9, in which she requests that the chorus suggests a way for her to maintain her good reputation rather than saying things that they think will be pleasing to her. We can give Phaedra credit for not indulging the idea of yielding to her passion; however, her reasons for her abstinence could be considered as dubious by many modern standards. She is not refusing to yield because of the inherent wrongness of such a passion, but because of the damage which its public exposure could do to her reputation. Hence, according to some modern ways of thinking - eg. the Judaeo-Christian ideology - her reasons are less than honourable. The deterrent as far as Phaedra is concerned is

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

the fact that people might discover and condemn her for her actions, not the knowledge that such actions would be morally wrong.<sup>200</sup>

### *The Turning Point*

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly the turning point for Phaedra, the point beyond which she can no longer hope to uphold her reputation in any way and must choose death. There are several moments in the play which point to this decision but the exact moment at which her purpose is unchangeable is difficult to define conclusively.

Phaedra is certainly ailing at the beginning of the play and tells us that death would be preferable to the sufferings which she is enduring.<sup>201</sup> The nurse, too,

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<sup>200</sup>

It is interesting to note the way in which our own modern and western culture differs from that of Phaedra. According to heroic values, Phaedra's actions would be acceptable as fame and a good reputation was all-important. According to many western values which stem more closely, though not entirely, from a guilt-culture, Phaedra's choice would be more laudable were it based on a sense of what is right and wrong rather than a fear of what others might think should her actions become publicly known.

<sup>201</sup> eg. *Hippolytus* 248 - 9.

recognizes Phaedra's disinterest in life and living.<sup>202</sup> However, despite this, at this stage of the play, we have no conclusive evidence that Phaedra intends to kill herself. She has said that death would be preferable to her sorrows, but this is not an actual expression of an intention to kill herself. The nurse believes that Phaedra intends to die, but then at this stage, the nurse knows very little for certain of what Phaedra is thinking or planning, since Phaedra has not been forthcoming about her thoughts.<sup>203</sup>

At a later stage in the play, Phaedra does tell us that once she found herself unable to control or overcome her passion for Hippolytus, she considered her death the best option available to her.<sup>204</sup> This statement would seem fairly clear and indisputable. However, I believe that there is possibly another side to it. While death has been at issue before this stage, Phaedra hasn't yet expressed her actual resolve to die quite so clearly until now. What has changed? Is it purely coincidental that she chooses this moment to make such a definite statement of her intentions?

I believe that in light of Phaedra's heroic leanings and her concern with her reputation, her revealing of her dreadful secret to her nurse has sealed her fate, as it

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<sup>202</sup> eg. Ibid: 277.

<sup>203</sup> eg. Ibid: 271 - 277.

<sup>204</sup> Hippolytus 401 - 2.

were. While her possible suicide has hovered in her thoughts up until this stage, the nurse's knowledge of her passion for Hippolytus, has made this potential for suicide a fixed and inescapable eventuality.

I believe that this theory is confirmed by Phaedra's reactions to the nurse's telling Hippolytus her mistress' passion. Phaedra overhears this conversation and her response is clear: "I am dead".<sup>205</sup> At this point, Phaedra realises that she no longer has any possible way of retaining her good reputation while living - to maintain it even after her death will be difficult, but she attempts to respond to this challenge with her actions at a later stage in the play. The nurse has effectively destroyed any hope that might still have existed for Phaedra to preserve her reputation and fame, and now Phaedra realizes that she has no further choice but to die. Thus, this is the point at which definitive evidence of Phaedra's intention to die is given. "I am now dead" is a clear and rather indisputable indication of this resolve. Phaedra does not tell us that she could die, or may die, or even that she wants to die; rather she expresses it as though it had already happened, an action which has already taken place, and which, therefore, cannot in any way, be reversed or altered.

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Hippolytus 575: ἀπωλόμεσθα

It is for these reasons that I believe the turning point for Phaedra is most likely the point at which she recognizes that she can no longer maintain her noble reputation while alive. This is initiated when the nurse becomes privy to her secret and cemented when Hippolytus is told of it.

This would concur with the image of Phaedra as an 'heroic' personality insofar as she will do whatever is required to preserve her appearance before others and estimation in their eyes. She must now do what is necessary to retain her reputation. Throughout Greek literature, and for the purposes of this study, most particularly in Greek tragedy, there are examples of the way in which heroic personalities act in order to redeem their failing reputations. In Sophocles' *Ajax*, the hero kills himself after his public humiliation while Jocasta (Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*) hangs herself after her 'sin' is revealed to herself and others. Whatever the background to the various heroic suicides in literature, their perpetrators take the only option that they believe is open to them, that of their own death.

However Phaedra's death will not preserve her reputation. Theseus is due to return, and the nurse and Phaedra suspect that Hippolytus may well reveal the truth to his father. The chances are that were this to happen, Phaedra would die a cursed and hated woman with her good reputation left in shreds. Phaedra needs to think of some plan beyond her death in order to preserve her good fame. The scheme that

offers itself to her is to destroy Hippolytus' reputation - this will in turn not only preserve her own reputation, but perhaps even increase it so that the whole situation will turn in her favour. For, firstly, with Hippolytus defamed, no-one will believe any accusations that he might make, and so Phaedra's good reputation will remain intact and unblemished. Secondly, if it is believed that Phaedra's suicide was as a result of Hippolytus' shameful and incestuous assault on her person, then Phaedra will be recorded as a woman who did the right thing after being dishonoured in such a way. In this way, Phaedra would actually acquire a good fame. She would restore and even enhance her reputation through this scheme.

Apart from Phaedra, there are only two others in the play who are aware of the truth - the nurse and Hippolytus.<sup>206</sup> With Hippolytus defamed and his reputation destroyed, and he, thus, made untrustworthy and unbelievable, this leaves only the nurse to betray the truth behind Phaedra's actions. It would seem that despite the nurse's betrayal of Phaedra's secret to Hippolytus, Phaedra trusts her and relies on her not to reveal her secret a second time. This trust is not misplaced as the nurse does indeed keep Phaedra's secret concealed from then on. Thus Phaedra's plan seems secure.

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Once again, I am ignoring the chorus since it does not play a significant role insofar as changing the course of events in the play is concerned.



## *The Suicide 'Note'*

What better retaliation than an accusation from the grave? The facts of a suicide note seem validated by the suicide itself. For if the note were untrue, then what reason would there be for the corpse that now exists where once there had been a living person?

Phaedra uses the device of a 'suicide note' to accuse Hippolytus of a sexual assault upon her person. This is a highly powerful form of accusation made believable by the existence of a corpse. Furthermore, as Artemis herself notes<sup>207</sup>, there is no method by which one might cross-examine the dead person in order to verify or disprove any accusations that they might have made. This too lends a strength to a suicide note as a form of accusation.

With Hippolytus defamed in this way, who would believe his seemingly wild accusations of Phaedra's supposed lust for himself - were he to break his oath and speak of this, that is? Any protestation of innocence or counter-accusations as

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<sup>207</sup> Hippolytus: 1336 - 7.

regards Phaedra, that he might care to make, would be seen as desperate measures to free himself from blame and to shift the blame on to someone else.<sup>208</sup>

In this way, Phaedra's purpose is served. Her reputation for noble, chaste and decent behaviour is preserved and at this point it seems that she will be remembered as the epitome of a good and honourable wife. Hence, her objective has been fulfilled.

However, could there be another reason behind the accusations which Phaedra makes, or at least a 'spin-off' which she finds not unpleasant? I believe so. Not only is Phaedra's public appearance at risk with Hippolytus' knowledge of her passion, but her private sense of honour is damaged by his disgust, horror and rejection of her and her feelings.

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The truth of this is shown in the confrontation between Hippolytus and his father, which begins at line 902, in which Theseus refuses to believe his own son's claims of innocence. Theseus trusts his wife before his son, and this in itself is interesting, considering the common distrust of women and their ability to be truthful. Despite this, Theseus places his wife's statements over those of his son. The only reason for this would appear to be the force behind a suicide note. As discussed above, the existence of a corpse seems to give credibility to the note and the accusations contained within it, regardless of how implausible they might seem to Theseus in any other situation.

Phaedra is a woman of a great passion. In this way she is much like Medea whom we have observed as a woman of extreme emotion.<sup>209</sup> When in love with Hippolytus, she was suffering delusional behaviour and longing to die. She was refusing to eat<sup>210</sup> and was wasting away through a lack of food. We have already seen similar behaviour exhibited by Medea when she too was desperate and saw no way out of her sorrow and predicament.<sup>211</sup> (See page 87 for evidence of Medea's self-starvation). Medea and Phaedra exhibit similar behavioural traits when suffering and particularly, when faced with situations for which they see no immediate solution. Both these women experience extreme emotions and react accordingly.

Medea's situation and extreme emotions led her to plot a dire revenge upon those who had caused her predicament. Now, in another play by Euripides in which he presents another woman experiencing extreme passions and even exhibiting them in same manner - that is, through starvation and a temporary disinterest in life - is it so far-fetched to believe that Euripides could make this heroine act in a similar

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<sup>209</sup> See page 87 for a discussion of Medea's powerful emotions.

<sup>210</sup> Hippolytus: 275, 277.

<sup>211</sup> See page 87 for evidence of Medea's self-starvation.

fashion to Medea? Medea's resource was vengeance; could not Phaedra's be the same? I believe it could.

Not only will Phaedra's note serve to rescue and preserve her reputation,<sup>212</sup> it will also serve to destroy that of Hippolytus in the eyes of his father. This is her plot of vengeance. The relations between a father and son - even an illegitimate one - were very important, and Phaedra manages to destroy these and even to cause Hippolytus' death as the result of his own father's curse.

In actual fact, Phaedra's plan of vengeance is more successful than her attempt to preserve her reputation. By the end of the play, Theseus has discovered the truth and Phaedra is revealed as a fraud; her reputation is destroyed in the end and so her elaborate plans were in vain. However, even though Theseus finally comes to realise the truth and father and son are reconciled, Phaedra's vengeance continues to be successful at the close of the play. No amount of truth can change the fact that Hippolytus, a fine youth who lived his life chastely and honourably, is dead and it is his father who caused that death by his curse. Hence, the effects of Phaedra's vengeance linger long after her reputation has been destroyed. Just as Medea killed Jason's children, so Phaedra has brought it about that Theseus' son has

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At least, this is Phaedra's intention. In truth, once the reality of the situation is known, Phaedra's reputation will once more be ruined, but, despite this, her intention was that the note would preserve her public fame.

died at the hands of his father. The parallels between the two plays are obvious in this aspect at least. While in the *Medea* it was the father that Medea wished to punish, and in the *Hippolytus* our protagonist wishes vengeance upon the son, the fact of the deaths of two sons are the same in both cases.

Theseus' reaction to the suicide note is ironic in several ways. Firstly, Theseus tells us that Hippolytus has in an act of sexual assault, *dishonoured* his wife<sup>213</sup>. (εὐνής can, of course, refer to 'wife', 'bed' or, by inference, to 'sexual relations' so Theseus could be implying that Hippolytus has appropriated his rights, in a manner of speaking, by extracting from Phaedra sexual 'rights' that Theseus perceived as belonging to him alone. This would be another act of dishonourable behaviour towards Theseus). Phaedra had indeed felt dishonoured by Hippolytus' rejection and harsh words, but it was not Hippolytus who had dishonoured her. Her note has ensured that Theseus believes that her dishonour had as its cause, Hippolytus, and that Hippolytus will be punished for his 'dishonouring' of her as she would have wished. The reality of the situation is that the facts have been horribly misconstrued

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<sup>213</sup> *Hippolytus*: 885 - 6:

Ἰππόλυτος εὐνής τῆς ἐμῆς θιγεῖν  
βίαι, τὸ σεμνὸν Ζηνὸς ὄμμ' ἀτιμάσας

and misinterpreted but the point remains that Phaedra will get her desire regardless - Hippolytus will be punished for his 'dishonourable' actions towards her.

Secondly, Theseus cannot believe Hippolytus' affirmations of innocence - as mentioned above, a suicide note is an extremely believable mode of accusation. Theseus longs for some means whereby honesty and truthfulness could be verified<sup>214</sup>. His implication is obvious: he trusted in Hippolytus and now feels that his trust was misplaced. However, we, as the audience or reader, know that his trust was in fact not misplaced and that it is only now when he chooses to believe Phaedra over Hippolytus, that he is deceived. This is just one more of the ironies caused by Phaedra's note, a note which has served to confuse reality and fiction for the protagonists of this drama.

Hippolytus realises the value of honour and is perhaps aware of at least some of Phaedra's reasoning behind her schemes. In order to convince his father of his innocence, he wishes that he might die *without honour* if he is a guilty man<sup>215</sup>. This

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<sup>214</sup> Hippolytus: 925 - 931.

<sup>215</sup> Hippolytus: 1028 - 1031:

ἢ τὰρ ὀλοίμην ἀκλεῆς ἀνώνυμος  
καὶ μήτε πόντος μήτε γῆ δέξαιτό μου  
σάρκας θανόντος, εἰ' κακός πέφυκ' ἀνὴρ.  
τί δ' ἤδε δειμαίνουσ' ἀπώλεσεν βίον

cannot be a wish to be taken lightly but must rather have considerable significance. Hippolytus is arguing for his honour, his relations with his father, his good name, and perhaps even his life - certainly his life as he knows it - at this point. Therefore, he would not use a trivial or insignificant wish to prove his innocence. This must be one of the most significant wishes that he could use, considering what he is fighting for. If we examine this wish of his, we shall see that it does indeed make mention of various aspects which were of considerable importance to the heroic characters of the time. For example, Hippolytus mentions the prospect of being exiled and unburied after death, as well as that of being nameless or lacking any fame. These were important things, as was the feature of honour, which Hippolytus includes in his wish. Hippolytus has linked the aspect of honour with the other significant items in his list; this surely means that he attributes it with equal importance.

However, Phaedra and Hippolytus have different types of honour. Phaedra's honour is inextricably bound to her public appearance and must be preserved at all costs, no matter what dishonest behaviour might be required in order to preserve it. Hippolytus' honour is closer to the guilt-culture idea of honour. He has sworn an oath not to reveal Phaedra's passion for him and there is no possibility of his breaking this oath, not even in order to resolve the terrible situation in which he now finds himself. He will not betray his own moral code, even if the price that he must

pay is his public disgrace, exile and death. In the end, of course, it is Hippolytus' honour that is proven to be the longer-lasting and more steadfast. Phaedra is revealed as a fraud while Hippolytus is shown to be a truly honourable character. The differences between these two types of honour, however, does not fall within the realms of this study; suffice it to say that Hippolytus, too, understands the significance of honour and the way in which it can guide one's conduct.<sup>216</sup>

Hippolytus seems to have some understanding of Phaedra's true motives which is obvious since he, along with the nurse, has the most knowledge of what is actually happening. He tells Theseus somewhat cryptically that while Phaedra has acted in a modest or self-controlled manner, she has not in fact been modest<sup>217</sup>. He realises that Phaedra's modest behaviour is fake and that it exists in order to preserve her good reputation in the eyes of others, in this case, Theseus. While her actions have served to make her seem modest, her actual behaviour was dishonest and dishonourable. Hippolytus is aware of this, but in a world which relies on the importance of appearances and with the existence of the powerful form of evidence in the suicide note, he remains alone in this awareness. This is a society in which

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Euripides may well have been illustrating two different conceptions of honour in order to promote thought on the matter; unfortunately, it is not within the scope of this study to examine this possibility.

<sup>217</sup> Hippolytus: 1034.



appearances reign supreme and Hippolytus' more enlightened mode of thinking is not shared by his peers. To those around him, it is appearances which are important. It was Phaedra's concern for her own public appearance that prompted her suicide and false accusations. It is this fixation with appearances which will ensure Theseus' punishment of Hippolytus, as Theseus will believe the story that *appears* to be true and will, thus, trust Phaedra over Hippolytus. Therefore, the possible consequences of the heroic concern with appearances can be observed, in these aspects of the play as well.

### 3.3.5. The Truth Revealed

Theseus' first reaction to the news of Hippolytus' imminent death is one of joy and a sense of justice achieved.<sup>218</sup> He feels that Hippolytus' death is deserved in light of the crimes which he believes his son has committed. It is interesting to note the vocabulary and expressions used by Theseus when referring to these supposed wrongdoing of Hippolytus. He speaks of Hippolytus as 'the man who shamed' (or

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<sup>218</sup> Hippolytus: 1169 - 1172.

`dishonoured') `me'.<sup>219</sup> He does not use the terms that we would be justified in expecting. Theseus believes that Hippolytus was responsible for raping his wife and for causing her to commit suicide. It would be reasonable for us to expect him to use terms that imply a sense of wrongdoing or crime. We would expect him to refer to Hippolytus as `the man who sinned against me' or `the man who committed a crime against me'<sup>220</sup>. On the contrary, Theseus tells us that Hippolytus *dishonoured* or *shamed* him. Theseus sees the alleged assault on his wife as a form of personal dishonour, and therefore, as an action which will decrease his own reputation and standing. Is this the reason for Theseus' terrible anger against his son? We cannot discount Theseus' sorrow at the news of Phaedra's death, but it is noteworthy that Theseus uses terms describing his infringed honour to refer to his son's alleged crime. This would suggest that his anger at Hippolytus stems from a feeling of outraged honour and that this was the force behind his harsh treatment and utter condemnation of his son. We can note, too, the emphasis on Theseus himself. While his sorrow for Phaedra is obvious, it is clear that the focus is on the outrage suffered by Theseus and the way in which his honour has been diminished. Phaedra almost

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid: 1172: ἔπαισεν αὐτὸν ῥόπτρον ἀίσχύναντά με

<sup>220</sup>

It would also be reasonable to expect some comment such as `the man who sinned against my wife'. It is, after all, Phaedra who has supposedly been attacked.

becomes a secondary victim with Theseus taking the central position. It is Theseus and his honour that has been attacked. Hence, Theseus, too, operates under a code of honour which dictates that shameful behaviour, particularly that which infringes his honour and respect, cannot go unpunished and unavenged.

Theseus later states that since Hippolytus was his son, he cannot feel actual joy at the news of his death.<sup>221</sup> However, he nevertheless insists on seeing Hippolytus for himself so that he might convict him of his wrongdoing.<sup>222</sup> It is at this point that Artemis appears to reveal the truth to Theseus and Aphrodite's vengeance is complete. We saw that Aphrodite opened the play with a plan to humble Hippolytus and to exact vengeance upon him in payment for his neglectful and respectful behaviour towards her. In this way, we observed that it was a feeling of outraged honour and public loss of face that had set the entire chain of events inexorably in motion. As the play draws to a close, we witness the final devastating effects of Aphrodite's scheming.

Artemis tells Theseus the truth of the situation and accuses him of being responsible for Hippolytus' death<sup>223</sup>. She tells Theseus that he should feel shame for

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<sup>221</sup> Hippolytus: 1259 - 1260.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid: 1265 - 1267.

<sup>223</sup> Hippolytus: 1287.

his actions<sup>224</sup> and so yet again, the idea of shame is used. Artemis has come in order to restore Hippolytus' good reputation<sup>225</sup>. Hippolytus was Artemis' favourite and she now wishes to act accordingly towards him. One of the actions which she must carry out for Hippolytus, is to clear his name. In this way, his reputation can be restored and he will die and be remembered with a good name. He will die εὐκλέης (1299) - 'of good repute, famous, glorious', according to the possible translations offered by Liddell and Scott.<sup>226</sup> To the participants in a heroic society, this would have been important, as we have noted previously. The gods and goddesses share this interest in the heroic code with humans - as can be seen in the indignation and consequent vengeful schemes of Aphrodite, which were caused by feelings of dishonour at the hands of Hippolytus.

Artemis does not completely blame Phaedra for her actions and recognizes Aphrodite's role in the happenings, as well as that played by the nurse.<sup>227</sup> Another factor which Artemis recognizes is that of Phaedra's motivations for her suicide and

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid: 1291: δέμας αἰσχυνοθείς

<sup>225</sup> Ibid: 1298 - 9:

ἀλλ' εἰς τόδ ἤλθον, παιδὸς ἐκδειῖξαι φρένα  
τοῦ σοῦ δικαίαν, ὡς ὑπ' εὐκλείας θάνηι

<sup>226</sup> s.v.

<sup>227</sup> Hippolytus: 1300 - 1306.

accusations of Hippolytus. She clearly and undisputedly states that Phaedra acted in the way she did because she was afraid that she would be 'disgraced' or 'put to shame'.<sup>228</sup> Liddell and Scott translate ἔλεγχον with various meanings, most of them including the implication of disgrace - for example, 'dishonour' and 'shame'.<sup>229</sup> Therefore, Artemis believes that Phaedra's concern for her own sense of honour, was the driving reason behind her actions, and this would confirm what we have noted previously.

Artemis is understandably deeply upset by Hippolytus' death as he was 'ἄνδρα πάντων φίλτατον βροτῶν' (1333) to her - 'the most loved of all mortals'. However, it is interesting to note the terms with which she describes her loss. Rather than saying that she is sorrowful or perhaps even angry, she tells us that she has been dishonoured.<sup>230</sup> She states that were she not fearful of Zeus, she would never have accepted such a dishonour. Artemis sees Hippolytus' death as a personal affront which constitutes a dishonour to herself. This is unusual language with which to refer to the death of a loved one and we would not be unjustified in finding it a little strange and jarring. However, to Artemis it is logical and acceptable. By

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid: 1310: ἢ δ εἰς ἔλεγχον μὴ πέσει φοβουμένη

<sup>229</sup> s. v.

<sup>230</sup> Hippolytus: 1332.

depriving her of her most favoured mortal, Aphrodite has treated Artemis with disrespect. Hence, Artemis' loss is treated as an issue of honour rather than as one of grief and bereavement.

### **3.3.6. The Never-Ending Cycle**

The need for honour and respect brings with it a compulsion for vengeance when that quest for honour is thwarted. The sense of threatened honour provokes the need to take action either to restore that honour in some way or to avenge its loss. On occasion, the two coincide.

When it proves impossible to rectify the situation and to resolve the disrespect afflicted on one, then the option that remains available is that of revenge. This can serve two purposes. Firstly, it is a form of retaliation. It is a means of striking back at the offender and of making them suffer in similar fashion. Secondly, it can help to restore one's lessoned honour somewhat. The attacking position of avenger strengthens one and gives one the ability to deprive the offender of their own honour as well. Disrespectful behaviour cannot be allowed to go unpunished and so the cycle of revenge, once initiated, often continues. Hence, honour-driven individuals can find themselves caught up in an indefinite pattern of retaliation. They will seek

vengeance, only to find that their vengeful act provokes a similar attack, which they, in turn, must address, and so it continues, until something happens to break the pattern. This is a common motif in Greek tragedy. A classic illustration of this is the violent behaviour of Agamemnon's family as described by Aeschylus. From Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter, to his own death at the hands of his wife and her eventual murder by Orestes, each violent act provokes another in a cycle which seems to have no possibility of ending. It is only when something monumental happens that a limit is set - in this case, the intervention of the gods.

Euripides could easily have ended his *Hippolytus* after the reconciliation between Theseus and his dying son. This would have made a complete tale and would have ended the play effectively. However, Euripides did not do this. Instead, he used an ending which would leave the play 'unfinished' in some ways, as the story is incomplete and the close of the play becomes more chilling. We are left with the knowledge that there will be another vengeful murder in the future as Artemis will strike back at Aphrodite. As we observed with regard to the beginning of the play, the gods are not immune to 'human' emotions. Their need for respect and honour is just as great. Aphrodite's elaborate plan of vengeance was initiated at her impression of being dishonoured; now, Artemis too, will retaliate for an act of

disrespect with one of vengeance. The gods firmly occupy a heroic stance in this respect.

### **3.3.7. Conclusion**

This play shows the extent to which characters' actions are governed by the need for public recognition of their worth. Some seem more immune to this need than others. Hippolytus himself often acts according to his innate belief of right and wrong, as opposed to many of the other characters in this play. Hence, when accused and challenged by his father, Hippolytus does not betray the nurse's confidence in order to save himself. While this might help to clear his guilt and, thus, to restore his good name - a priority for a 'heroic' personality - he will not break an oath and thereby betray his own inner sense of right and wrong. Hippolytus, therefore, directs his actions by an internal realization of right which is completely unrelated to the appearance of his actions. In this aspect of his personality, Hippolytus differs from the other characters of the play.

We have witnessed the manner in which issues of respect and reputation guide the behaviour of the various other protagonists in this play. Not even the immortals are immune from this desire for honour and public acclamation, as we



have observed through the actions and intent of Artemis and Aphrodite. Phaedra is the character who best displays the qualities of a 'heroic' personality in her overriding concern for her public appearance, a concern which takes precedence over any other form of reasoning. Unlike Hippolytus, Phaedra will not allow moral concerns - such as the wrong inherent in falsely accusing someone - to stand in the way of her ambition for a good reputation. In Euripides' *Medea* we saw the way in which a desire for revenge, stemming from a concern with matters of honour, led a mother to commit a monstrous murder. Phaedra's crime may not seem as diabolical on the surface, but in essence it bears many similarities to Medea's crime. In both cases, innocent people die because of the protagonists' concern for their honour which they feel could be diminished. In the *Medea*, two young children were murdered, as well as a young woman.<sup>231</sup> In the *Hippolytus*, a noble young man who is notable for his high principles- which, incidently, are closer to the requirements of truly honourable behaviour according to many western values - dies for these very

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It is probably safe to assume that Glauce was in many ways as innocent as the children were. Considering the system of arranged and politically-decided marriages that was present, Glauce most probably did not choose Jason for herself - he was probably selected for her. In this way, then, Glauce would have been little more than an innocent bystander caught up in a political deal that would cost her life. According to this reasoning, Creon would be the only one of the victims who was not completely innocent, although he too did not deserve to die for acting as almost anyone in his position would have.

principles. In this respect, as in others, Phaedra and Medea are very similar in personality type. Their concern for honour takes precedence over everything else, regardless of the potential sorrow that their actions might cause.

In this matter of personalities, Hippolytus and Phaedra are in direct opposition to each other, and these very opposite character traits allow them to be perfect foils for each other in this play. The actions of the one emphasize those of the other and, thus, show us these two opposite character types side by side.

In conclusion then, this play illustrates clearly the precepts of 'honourable' behaviour and the extents to which 'heroic' personalities will go in order to achieve and maintain it.

### **3.6. Euripides Concluded**

The scope of this study has allowed for the examination of only two of Euripides' plays. However, I believe that these two plays should be sufficient to reveal both the significance of honour as portrayed by the words, thoughts and deeds of the protagonists, and the consequences that this obsession with honourable conduct and public esteem, causes.

There are sufficient examples of the preoccupation with honour and respect, in these two plays by Euripides, and both contain telling acts of vengeance<sup>232</sup>. From these, we can deduce that the concern for due respect was indeed a highly significant issue for those with a 'heroic' personality. As we have already noted, these were frequently people from an aristocratic and noble background<sup>233</sup> to whom public respect and reverence seemed fitting to their position. It seems reasonable to believe that people in very public positions would be more vulnerable to a fluctuating public opinion, while those more 'common' people may be more immune to this. People in leading positions are more 'visible' and to a greater number of people, than the

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Despite the fact that this study has allowed for the inclusion of only two of Euripides' plays, the theme of vengeance can be observed in several of his other plays. For example, in his *Bacchae*, Dionysus exacts a terrible vengeance from those who refuse to acknowledge him and, thus, deny him the respect due to him. In his *Electra*, Electra (and Orestes) are determined to avenge the death of their father - a death which itself can be seen as having been provoked by an act of vengeance for the death of Iphigenia - and Euripides' *Hecuba*, portrays yet another royal woman bent on obtaining vengeance. Thus, as can be observed in the two plays that are examined in this study, both mortals and gods involve themselves in the business of revenge when they deem it necessary.

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With reference to the two plays studied, Medea was a princess and Phaedra was a queen. As far as Artemis and Aphrodite are concerned, their nobility is an obvious effect of being divine.

'average' person is.<sup>234</sup> This is not to say that the 'average' person does not feel the need to 'fit in' with the requirements of society; he / she does - the pressures are merely perhaps less intense and the requirements themselves, less rigid. The important point to note is that in the plays, it is most often the nobles who are seen to be fighting to maintain their reputations, while the 'common' participants are often more practical and more accepting of the ups and downs of life.

In conclusion then, these two plays illustrate well the concept of honour and the drastic actions that the protagonists deem necessary in order to achieve and preserve this honour. Why Euripides chose to do this is another possible point of debate. I would venture to suggest that Euripides, through his choice of characters and his portrayal of their personalities and actions, exposes many of the values and beliefs that the people of that time would have shared. While his purpose may have been to cement these values, it may also have been to place them before the people as an issue for debate and question. Unfortunately, there is not the space in this study to look further at this possibility.

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A modern example of this exists in the way in which the media hounds our own public figures, such as actors and the royal family. Seemingly-everyday events are blown out of proportion simply because they occur in the lives of the famous. Hence, the necessity of living a flawless life which has less chance of being publicly judged and found lacking in some way, becomes more important to these people than to the 'average' citizen.

# PART FOUR - HONOUR IN THE MODERN

## CONTEXT

### 4.1. Introduction

It is very easy to look at the ideals of the Archaic and Classical Greek cultures and to condemn them for their overriding concern for honour and the actions that result, from our position of immunity. We can look at the actions of the leading characters in the plays and criticise them harshly for the terrible acts of revenge that they carry out. However, it is essential to remember that these actions are not representative of the actions of the real people in Classical Greece, but of their beliefs and values. It was stated in the examination of the importance of theatre, that we can ascertain the values of Classical Greeks through an analysis of the types of entertainment that they enjoyed. What was the essential message of the entertainment? The answer to this question will reveal the values that the members of the Classical audience could relate to and, therefore, those that they too considered to be important.

However, the tragedies that were produced portrayed exaggerated events for emphasis. To a large extent, they dealt with mythological or legendary themes, rather than aspects of real life.<sup>235</sup> The audience was not intended to accept the events as real. Likewise, just as the stories themselves were exaggerated and unrealistic, so were the actions of the characters. The plays were not a photographic image of real life, but rather an exaggerated representation of it. We cannot, therefore, criticise the Classical Greeks for their adherence to the ways of their heroes, but rather accept that their values are displayed, rather than their actual behaviour. The Classical Greeks did recognise the importance of honour and recognition, they were a highly individualistic and competitive society, and these values are represented through the medium of their theatre.

We can observe, through the evidence of these plays, that the Classical Greeks were concerned with issues of honour and public image, and that they would have considered these issues when taking action. It now seems fitting to examine our modern society and to see if we share any of these preoccupations. Our modern western society is not on the surface considered to be a shame-culture, but we may find some telltale signs that similar preoccupations survive, although perhaps not to the same extent.

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<sup>235</sup> Aeschylus' *Persae* is an exception.

I shall start my investigation into modern trends with an examination of modern-day Greek rural villagers.

## **4.2. Rural Greek Villages**

### *The Sarakatsani*

The Sarakatsani (Σαρακατσάνοι) are communities of Greek-speaking shepherds living in continental Greece, north of Corinth. In many respects, they are isolated and morally distinguishable from other Greek peoples. Their values hark back to the heroic past cultures which we have already examined, and it is this remarkable similarity that recommends their inclusion in this study.

The most important unit amongst the Sarakatsani is that of the family in both its extended and simple form. The individual owes his allegiance and support to this unit and this causes an attitude of exclusivity with regard to other family units among the tribe. Circumstances dictate that very rarely is one family group able to manage its flocks entirely without external assistance and, for this reason, two, three or families related by kinship or marriage, unite to form a company. However, the

Sarakatsani believe that the concerns of unrelated families are in opposition to each other, and thus, mutually exclusive.

In these beliefs can be observed similarities to ancient Greek culture and ideology. Part of the heroic belief system was the idea that it is the way of a hero to help his friends and allies and to harm his enemies. This simplistic ideology contributed towards a highly competitive society, in which one's individualistic goals could often be achieved at the expense of another's goals. There could, after all, be only one ultimate victor, and it was the goal of each hero to ensure that it was he. Despite this individualistic ideology, alliances were formed and recognized. I have previously discussed briefly the tradition of hospitality and loyalty between heroic comrades, a tradition which was often dictated by necessity. In a hostile and uncertain world, there are times when even a hero comes to need support, and hence, a system developed in which that hero could be confident of acquiring help and willing to offer it.

The Sarakatsani display both of these trends in their behaviour. Their mutually exclusive goals speak of an individualistic and competitive attitude, while their carefully-formed allegiances echo the system of loyalty amongst Greek heroes.

However individualistic this system of familial groups might be, they share and abide by a common value system. This value system has many features in



common with that of the heroic Greeks of epic and tragedy, and I shall, therefore, examine it.

The overriding principle that dictates this value system is one that has already been discussed in detail, namely that of an awareness of public evaluation. Campbell states that the conduct of men and women is evaluated by other Sarakatsani<sup>236</sup> and that the three things of the greatest concern to the Sarakatsani are sheep (their livelihood), children, especially sons<sup>237</sup> (another feature shared by the Classical Greeks) and *honour*. The families compete for reputations of honour and govern their behaviour accordingly.

The obvious similarities between this system and that of the heroic society of the Greeks, need not be discussed in detail. The striking feature is the tendency of directing one's actions with the concern of their appearance in the eyes of others, firmly in mind. Ever-present is the awareness that one's behaviour is being constantly monitored and judged by one's peers, and it is this which determines one's actions, not the quality of the action itself. This concern with appearances is embodied in the concept of honour and the question of honourable conduct.

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<sup>236</sup> Campbell: Honour, Family and Patronage: Pg. 9.

<sup>237</sup>

The sons are responsible for preserving the flocks, and for protecting the honour of their parents and sisters.

The reputation of members of the Sarakatsani depends on various aspects of their life. Men care passionately about their own prestige, as well as that of their families and kinsmen. Paradoxically too, they are reliant on the opinions of their enemies. Despite their intense concern with individuality and exclusivity, they are bound to their enemies by their requirements of reputation. Their actions are governed by their perceptions of the way in which these actions will be viewed by their enemies. As stated above, the behaviour of a Sarakatsani shepherd is constantly evaluated by the other members of his community. They are deeply concerned with the reactions of the community and will act accordingly. Campbell states that whenever some incident occurs, the news of it will be spread to all the tribes within 48 hours<sup>238</sup>. The smaller groupings will then discuss the situation and pass judgement on the actions taken. They will analyse in detail the behaviour of the protagonists and decide whether those involved displayed manliness (ἀνδρισμός) in defending their honour. In this, the criteria used in judging the actions of others can be determined- the questions that are considered are whether the relevant person defended his honour, and if he did so in a manly fashion. These criteria are both components of the heroic system which we have already studied, in

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<sup>238</sup> Honour, Family and Patronage: Pg. 39.

which the qualities of honour and manliness are essential. Then too there is the ever-present feature of public judgement and the concern that this creates.

This aspect of public judgement causes the Sarakatsani to be concerned with the opinions of others, particularly enemies, as stated above. This will include anyone who is not part of the immediate familial group. The prospect of criticism or ridicule from enemies and competition, helps to guide the behaviour of the Sarakatsani. There is an example of a similar situation in our study of Euripides' *Medea*. In Medea's more indecisive moments, when her maternal instinct was urging against the murder of her children, it was the thought of the negative opinion of her enemies that determined the action that Medea would take. This fear of ridicule at the hands of her enemies, proved to be stronger than any other of Medea's emotions, including that of a mother<sup>239</sup>. Hence, it was the possible reaction of her enemies that directed Medea's actions. In a similar manner, the behaviour of the Sarakatsani shepherds depends upon the interpretation of their actions by their enemies.

Therefore, the social reputation of the Sarakatsani is paramount. They share with the heroic Greeks, the understanding of the concept of τιμή. According to the modern Greek usage, τιμή represents the recognition of the excellence or worth of a

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<sup>239</sup> See pages 98 and 104.

person. For the one who possess τιμή, it is whatever raises him up in the eyes of others, and, thus, gives him reason and justification for pride. Τιμή is essential to any assessment of prestige and a man whose family has lost its honour, cannot be understood to have any prestige at all. Consequently, men and women strive to live according to the precepts of ideal conduct and not to suffer any diminishing of their honour, or τιμή. Situations in which τιμή is typically violated or betrayed are homicide, the drawing of blood, verbal insult, seduction, rape and broken betrothal. We can understand many of these in the heroic Greek context as well. Obvious examples are Electra and Orestes who sought to avenge their father's dishonourable murder and Theseus' cursing of his son when he believed him to be his wife's rapist. Furthermore, Medea's dreadful revenge was a direct consequence of Jason's disregard for his marriage vows - and the significance that the Sarakatsani place on vows of betrothal can be easily observed. To return to the Sarakatsani and the offences which they recognise as causing a loss in honour, the status of family is recognized when others take care not to give offence in any of the ways mentioned above. Therefore, if one of the abovementioned acts is perpetrated against a member of a particular family, then the wrongdoer is in effect expressing disrespect for that family and suggesting that they are not worthy or deserving of honour. Because of this underlying meaning of such offences, the wronged family is obliged

to respond with violence to the disrespectful act if it is to preserve its reputation. Since a disrespectful act implies that the family is not worthy of honour, to ignore this act and neglect to retaliate, is to confirm that implication. Every member of the wronged family therefore finds himself under an equal obligation to retaliate.<sup>240</sup>

The Sarakatsani preoccupation with matters of honour, is manifest in varied ways. For example, pride is taken in the care of the flock. The Sarakatsani shepherd will place almost as important an emphasis on the condition of his sheep, as he would on his own appearance and health. The stoning of his sheep by another man represents great dishonour and will detract from the shepherd's own honour. The shepherd's own prestige is reliant on the numbers and quality of his sheep. In an example such as this, a practical matter becomes one of honour. The health and numbers of the shepherd's sheep will obviously affect his livelihood, and for this reason alone, we could appreciate his concern in this regard. However, the implications are broader than this. The condition and number of the shepherd's sheep become a matter of honour, a yardstick by which his social standing can be measured. In this aspect of honour too, features shared by the heroic Greeks are

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Once again, episodes from Greek epic and tragedy are brought to mind. The ongoing cycle of vengeance was a common feature in which family members were obliged to avenge the one wronged and thus to restore the family honour.

exhibited. In some respects, heroic Greeks also measured worth by means of property - certainly their legendary heroes are drawn from a pool of aristocratic youths who are usually further attributed with semi-divine blood. While Greek heroes are not always credited with large stocks of personal property, they are usually acquisitive and will certainly fight to protect the property that they do possess. For example, we have already seen Achilles' bitter and devastating anger at Agamemnon's theft of his 'property', namely Briseis. Quite understandably Achilles viewed this theft as an infringement of his rights. This behaviour represented an infringement upon Achilles' personal honour. Similarly, the Sarakatsani view the stoning of their sheep as more than a malicious or criminal act - it detracts from the owner's personal honour.

Another way in which honourable conduct is judged is by the way in which an individual conducts himself or herself in public. Consequently, there are numerous rigid, accepted 'rules' governing public appearance and behaviour.

Since the dishonour of one family member affects the entire family equally, it is essential for each member to obey the 'rules' set out by society and public opinion. I shall deal with the way in which these rules pertain to women first.

In their attitude towards and beliefs about women, the Sarakatsani again have much in common with the ancient and classical Greeks. It is a Sarakatsani belief

that the very nature of female sexuality makes them a constant threat to the honour of men, and they are seen to be agents of the will of the Devil, whether willingly or unwillingly.<sup>241</sup> For this reason, women must be disciplined and dominated. In a thought-pattern that is similar to that of the classical Greeks that recommends the quality of σωφροσύνη in women in order to curb their supposedly natural wanton tendencies, the critical quality demanded of the women of the Sarakatsani is that of shame. This inner realization of shame is intended to guide the actions of the women and to make them aware of the potential for public dishonour both for themselves and their entire family, that would arise as a direct consequence of any 'shameful' deed committed by them.

The sexual, reproductive and working capacities of women belong exclusively to their families, and there is no more certain way of violating the honour of a family than by seducing one of its female members; hence, the importance of the concept of shame to be present in the women. This shame is considered to be transferred along the female line from mother to daughter; paradoxically, however, its loss always detracts from the honour of the men of the

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The Classical Greeks too, had an innate fear of the sexuality of women and believed that they were promiscuous and inclined to tempt men and so to weaken the self-restraint of men.

family, casting doubts on the manliness of the woman's husband and damaging the social personality of her brothers and particularly her sons. The woman is 'soiled' and dishonours all those who are connected to her through kinship or marriage. Manliness and a woman's sense of shame are linked. It is the manliness of the male family members that protects the sexual honour of its women from insult and conversely, the women must have shame if the manliness of the men is not to suffer dishonour.

The effects of the dishonour caused by disrespectful behaviour towards a woman, are long-term and not easily removed. If a man kills his daughter who has lost her honour, he will gain the respect of the community, but the dishonour of the family as a whole is not forgotten. Even when the rape of a sister has been avenged, a certain measure of dishonour remains and that is the dishonour of the girl's failure to preserve her virginity. It is the reputation that the men of the family have for manliness, that is responsible for preventing such outrageous behaviour; consequently, if such an outrage is committed against a woman, the suggestion that the male members of her family lack sufficient manliness, is implicit. It is not surprising that the worst insult that can be aimed at a man is to use the name of one of his close relatives, such as his mother or sister, in an unpleasant sexual context.



Therefore, we can understand the immense significance that is attached to a woman's honour, and particularly, her sexual honour, since an attack on her honour equates to an attack on the honour of her entire family, and most especially, her menfolk. Hence, the importance of the quality of shame in women to inspire them to honourable behaviour and to limit the potential for dishonourable behaviour.

This cultivation of shame requires that the woman hide her femininity - this is achieved by means of the clothing that she wears. Her hair will be hidden by a black scarf, and any woman who allows her scarf to become undone frequently, will gain a bad reputation. Thick, black, homespun blouses and woolen cardigans are buttoned to the neck and the wrists, the breasts are not supported and the shapeless bodice of the blouse conceals any revealing or provocative shapeliness. The effect is completed by a black, woolen, ankle-length skirt. In this way, the woman is completely covered and shapeless. The woman learns to feel extreme shame at any exposure of her body, even when she is alone - this means that undergarments remain unchanged for long periods and the body between the neck and ankles is never washed. Such is the extent of the shame at the revealing of one's body, that is felt by the Sarakatsani women.

Furthermore, young women must walk slowly and with dignity, keeping silent and lowering their eyes when meeting a man outside. A woman must conduct

herself quietly and with modesty - joking and lacking seriousness in conversation will inspire criticism against her. Such behaviour would be unbecoming to a modest woman as it would be seen to imply a lack of self-discipline. A woman must appear modest (σεμνή) and serious in disposition (σοβαρή), and should never show emotion in public, except where it is expected such as at a death. In childbirth, the woman is given a blanket to bite to prevent her from screaming. In order to prevent her groans from being heard, the other women will laugh and talk and, if necessary, beat tin cans. The reasoning behind such constraints is that if a woman fails to exhibit self-restraint in conventional behaviour, then there is the implication that she may also lack self-control with respect to her sexual virtue.

So, the constraints are imposed upon women in order to ensure that they do not bring dishonour to the family unit. Men, too, have 'rules' which they must follow, although their format is naturally different from those governing the behaviour of women. We shall now examine a few examples of the restrictions applied to the Sarakatsani men.

Honour is an important concept to the Sarakatsani shepherds and it is this aim for prestige that prescribes their behaviour. Most men are automatically assumed to have the quality of being honourable and this quality is, therefore, not something that needs to be competed for; however, it can be lost and this is the eventuality

against which the Sarakatsani shepherd must guard. The belief is that most Sarakatsani possess honour but that individuals may stray from the norm of virtuous behaviour and suffer a loss in prestige. Although a Sarakatsani shepherd will seldom explicitly quantify the prestige attributed to another, his evaluation of the prestige of that other will be evident in their dealings with one another. If this evaluation of prestige is acceptable to the general community, then the man who has been treated as an inferior will receive no public support if he interprets this treatment as an offensive act and reacts to it violently. Hence, the aspect of public judgement of an individual can be observed, along with the importance of conducting oneself according to public norms in order to avoid a harsh judgement. The flagrant breaking of social norms will lead to the withdrawal of recognition - an obvious statement of a loss of prestige. However prestige does not rely on obeying the social norms alone - there are other factors involved.

One of these factors is the size of one's family. A large family earns one prestige, particularly if it is made up of sons. Conversely, sterility and, to a lesser degree, a brood of girls, is a mark of failure. A united group of brothers serves to strengthen and protect the family's reputation. They are able to defend family property and interests by physical force and their numbers may eliminate the need of recruiting the help of others. Furthermore, until the brothers are married and the

family extended, there is at least one unmarried brother who will be prepared to defend and avenge the family's honour. The Sarakatsani will not unthinkingly offend a man with four or five brothers. Conversely, the man without brothers, or the father without sons, is seen to be weak. A man without a brother may be killed with less fear of revenge than would usually be probable, and a girl without a brother runs a greater risk of insult or a broken marriage contract than do other women. This situation reflects badly on the family father and the father without an adult son to protect the virtue of his daughter is held responsible and blamed for this state of affairs.

Another factor which influences a family's prestige is that of wealth, in which the aspect of family property in the form of its sheep, goats, mules and horses, is considered. The family with wealth and numbers attracts visits from passing kinsmen and this too is a factor affecting prestige. Men do not often visit kinsmen of lowly prestige since this serves to draw attention to a relationship which is considered best forgotten. Conversely, they make use of every opportunity to visit a kinsman of high prestige as this is considered a good association to pursue and one which will in turn shed an element of prestige upon the visitor. Hence, the number of visitors that a family has, usually provides a good estimation of its prestige and standing within the community. The community at large is generally aware when

guests arrive at a family's house and the quality, relationship and possible reasons for the visit will be discussed in detail by the other families. We can observe that both the feature of family numbers and that of its wealth, are very visible and easily ascertainable qualities, and this, too, emphasizes the very public nature of the issue of prestige and honour.

A man's lineage is another factor that is taken into account when evaluating his prestige, as is that of the marriage alliances made by his family. A man will rarely marry a woman from a family which he considers to be of lower prestige than is his own, and he will generally attempt to increase his own prestige by making a good marriage alliance. The system of dowry is also a factor as a generous dowry will serve to increase the recipient's wealth and, thus, his prestige.

The final element to be considered in the estimation of a man's prestige is that of his pride and its display. It is expected and permitted behaviour for men and their family to exhibit certain elements of pride in a number of situations. Boasting is a common occurrence and not one which is held in contempt. Furthermore, a man must display pride in such a way as to show himself to believe that he is superior to others. There is a certain arrogance which suggests that the man is the dominant party, but which must not be as hostile as to signify an open challenge or insult to others. This display of subtle arrogance is accepted and even expected by the

community, but only if the man's prestige warrants it. A man of inferior prestige will incur ridicule if he attempts to behave in this fashion, as his lack of prestige will make such behaviour laughable.

This behaviour is similar to that of the Classical Greek heroes. Greek heroes placed great emphasis on the importance of being recognized as the best by their fellows<sup>242</sup>. Modesty was not a virtue that they aspired to and indeed, behaviour was structured so as to display their belief in their own abilities. The hero was supposed to have confidence in himself and a proportionate arrogance was preferable to timidity of a lack of confidence. Hence, the hero often did display a certain element of pride and this is an ingredient in a shame-culture which places value on public appearances.

The above are some of the more important requirements for the acquirement of prestige and honour. Just as is the case with a shame-culture, such as the heroic Greeks, these requirements are all based on outer features, publicly-recognizable elements, rather than inner ones such as one's inner morality.<sup>243</sup> Now that we have established these prerequisites for honour and prestige, we should proceed to examine the consequences of any knock to the honour of a Sarakatsani shepherd.

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<sup>242</sup> For example, refer back to page 31.

<sup>243</sup>

Even the Sarakatsani emphasis on sexual virtue is based on a desire to retain family honour publically.

There are two main categories which together contribute to the prestige of a Sarakatsani shepherd. The first of these deals with the behaviour of the individual and dictates that he must live his life according to the norms of honourable conduct. The second relies on more 'physical' factors which are far more difficult for the individual to change, such as lineage, numbers and wealth. These two categories are interdependent. A position lacking these 'physical' requirements brings into question the honour of the family. Likewise, without the existence of honour and the quality of being honourable, wealth and numbers represent a weak form of prestige. While it is more difficult for a family or individual to change what I have termed the 'physical' factors, they can act honourably and seek to preserve their prestige in this way.

As mentioned earlier, the Sarakatsani individual feels that his behaviour is constantly under observation and evaluated by the community, and is, thus, constantly anxious about the way in which his conduct is being evaluated by others and how this evaluation relates to his ideal image of himself. Hence, he will structure his actions in public accordingly. He will also be required to react if he should feel that his honour has been insulted in any way. To ignore such an insult and fail to respond, would be tantamount to acknowledging that it was deserved.

A man's self-regard and sense of honour is typically insulted when he is insulted or defamed, or believes himself to be so treated. If someone implies, even indirectly, that a man is weak or lacking honour, he insults that man's self-regard. Similarly, if someone acts in a way that would suggest that a man is not worthy of consideration or recognition, then again that man's self-regard is insulted. The reason for this is that a man would only act in such a way towards an inferior whom he believes is of a lesser reputation and hence, less honourable. Therefore, the insulted person, unless he is to admit the correctness of such a belief, is required to retaliate and this is usually achieved by means of physical and violent action.

There are numerous examples of such occurrences in the Sarakatsani community. One of these relates to the abduction of a girl because of the refusal of a marriage proposal. While the reason given was that the girl was too young for marriage and the reality of this was acknowledged by the family of the prospective bridegroom, the rumour that spread was that the bridegroom had been rejected because he was sexually impotent and inadequate. Indeed, the smooth and refined looks of the bridegroom did not meet the standards required of a man; hence, his manhood was brought into doubt. This situation required a reaction to the allegations since the alternative would have incurred ridicule and shame. The bridegroom's kinsmen offered their moral support and there was the unspoken threat



of their abandonment of the bridegroom should he fail to respond to the insult. Consequently, the girl was abducted and eventually agreed to marry the bridegroom for fear of the danger to her own family at the hands of her bridegroom's family, should she fail to consent to the marriage. In this example, the consequences of the concern with honour and public opinion, can be seen. While at first the bridegroom, and presumably his family, was prepared to accept the refusal of the girl's family, once the malicious rumour spread, a response was required and the situation ballooned. Mindful of the reputation of the family, the relatives of the bridegroom insisted that he retaliate, and the girl was forced into a marriage against her will and that of her family. Were it not for the significance of public opinion, manifest in gossip with regard to the bridegroom's manhood, in all probability none of these events would have taken place as initially the bridegroom was prepared to accept the reason for the refusal of marriage.

The awareness or imagination of public ridicule or laughter affects a man's feelings of shame and his self-regard, since if the outer world has marked him as a failure, then he must acknowledge to himself that he has failed to live up to his ideal image of himself as a public figure. This confirms the opinion of the community that he is indeed a failure. Therefore, it is essential for a man to defend his honour when it is brought into question. It is said of a man who fails to defend his honour

that 'the world laughs'.<sup>244</sup> Furthermore, 'the world laughs' if a man fails to behave in a conventional manner or does not fulfil his social role adequately. To be ridiculous and to suffer this laughter, means that a man lacks the recognition that is essential for social reputation.

A man is expected to respond (usually violently) to any situation in which he has 'lost face' in the eyes in the community. It is not surprising to discover that vengeance is expected in return for a murder. The reasoning behind this, however, is the interesting factor. Most noteworthy is the fact that the motive behind such revenge killings is more closely linked to the wish for honour than to that of justice. A murder severely detracts from a victim's family's honour as it lessens their strength which is one of the assets from which prestige is acquired. The Sarakatsani believe that when the victim's blood pours out, his strength, and, indirectly, that of his family, disappears as well. In fact, the belief is that the victim's former strength is absorbed by his killer. The victim's family suffers a lessening in strength while the killer's family increases its strength. Since strength and honour are connected, the Sarakatsani see a similar exchange occurring in the honour and prestige of the families of the victim and his killer. Therefore, the victim's family will of necessity remain inferior until one of its family members 'retrieves' the victim's blood from

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<sup>244</sup> ὁ κόσμος γελάει.

the killer, or until the killer is at least driven into exile.<sup>245</sup> Revenge must be exacted in order for the balance of honour to be restored to the victim's family. This reclaiming of their original honour, is the motivation behind the revenge killing, not the quest for justice.

These revenge killings are part of the dealings of a modern community which has available to it the convenience of a police force and court system. The numbers of revenge killings has decreased, but this is not so much the result of a change in attitude on the part of the Sarakatsani, as the increased vigilance of the Greek police who remove the killer from the scene as soon as his identity is known. The Sarakatsani themselves still adhere to their concepts of honour and honourable killings. This fact is interesting in itself. As stated in the beginning of this section, it is easy to comment on the dealings of the Classical Greeks and to see them as far removed from a modern society. However, the Sarakatsani *are* a contemporary society adhering to old notions of honour and this guides their behaviour in a way that is not entirely dissimilar to that of the Ancient and Classical Greeks.

In conclusion then, I would venture to suggest that in modern-day Greece, at least, among the Sarakatsani, there still exists a very specific code of conduct based

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There is a documented case in which an avenger washed his hands in the blood of the killer and returned to the mother of the first victim, to show her 'the blood of her son'.

on the precepts of honour. This serves to illustrate the fact that heroic values are not dead, but, on the contrary, continue to exist in some form.

### *Other Greek Villages*

I have discussed the Sarakatsani and their values in some detail; for this reason, I do not wish to examine other Greek villages in similar detail since much of the information would be re-duplicated were I to do this. Walcot<sup>246</sup> states that in Kokkinia, the principal concerns are those of family reputation and prestige, and goes on to mention that these features are central to other rural Greek communities. Many rural Greek villages that are to some extent isolated from modern society as we know it, continue to abide by the traditions, customs and values of old. However, it is interesting that Walcot further mentions that even modern Greeks who work in the city and who are, thus, involved in our contemporary lifestyle, also share many of the values which we have discussed.

One other example which I wish to mention briefly is that of Ambéle, a small village in Euboea of 144 inhabitants. This village has no regular transport and,

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<sup>246</sup> The Persistence of Greek Values: 169.

therefore, has no constant communication with the urban and more sophisticated world. The inhabitants of this village live according to values which we have frequently seen both amongst the Classical Greeks and the Sarakatsani. Women are considered to be prone to promiscuity by nature; for this reason, the essence of shame is essential in order for women to conduct themselves suitably. The ideal of honour is highly valued and this term encompasses the whole idea of social worth. Therefore, honour is very closely related to reputation and one's worth in the eyes of the community, as expressed by public opinion. In any act of wrongdoing, the crucial factor is not the actual fact of wrongdoing, but its discovery by the community.<sup>247</sup> This is where the element of shame comes in and it is believed that a person who has no honour and no sense of shame, will not care for the opinion of others, and will act however he or she pleases without any consideration for the social ideals that govern the workings of the society.

Hence, without unnecessary further detail, the similarities between the people of Ambéle and the Sarakatsani are evident. Their similarities, in turn, to the Classical Greeks are also evident.

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*cf. Hippolytus* 321: Phaedra wishes that she might 'never be seen wronging her husband'.

Walcot makes mention of Campbell's assertion that to the Sarakatsani, the only remedy for an insult to a man's honour, is an attack by knife or stick, and argues that the only difference between the modern Sarakatsani and that epitome of Greek heroism, Achilles, is that Achilles prefers a sword as a weapon<sup>248</sup>. Hence, among the Sarakatsani, and presumably other like rural communities, an insult is often addressed, as it was by the Greeks of Achilles' day, with violence.<sup>249</sup> We must remember that it is the dishonour experienced that makes the insult serious enough to warrant such a violent response, and that it is the public element that causes this dishonour and loss of prestige. Herzfeld stresses the importance of viewing each confrontation in the context of its audience, thus stressing the importance of the public nature of these disputes and insults.

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<sup>248</sup> The Persistence of Greek Values: 170 - 1.

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Herzfeld gives an illustrative example of this in his discussion of Cretan villagers, relating an example in which a Psila shepherd went to resolve a dispute over some stolen sheep with a Skoufas. The Skoufas was uninterested and, on encountering his enemy in Iraklio, he shot and wounded him. Later the Psiliot killed the Skoufas. The Skoufas' younger brother, Stamatis, many years later was conducting some business in the district courthouse on the same day as the Psiliot. When the Psiliot was indicated to him, he leapt on him, right there in the courtroom and slit his throat. This account shows us the emphasis which the Greek villages place on vengeance and the enduring nature of such a desire for revenge. (Herzfeld: The Poetics of Manhood as discussed by Walcot).

Therefore, modern Greek communities are seen to display many of the values shared by their ancient predecessors. I shall now proceed to a study of our own culture and society to ascertain whether we too are completely immune from any of these shame-culture values.

### 4.3. Contemporary Western Society

Up to this point, this study has focussed on the values of the Greeks - Classical and contemporary. I shall briefly consider our own culture in order to ascertain whether we ourselves are completely free from the precepts and restrictions of an honour- and shame-driven society. In order to do this, I shall examine some common psychological theories and principles.

Man<sup>250</sup> does not live as an isolated unit but is, to some extent, co-dependant on his fellow human being. As a baby grows through childhood to maturity, he develops according to his environment - the people and places with which he is most familiar. It is these that help to structure his personality and instill his value system. From his parents (or any other figure in authority) he learns what is right and what is wrong,

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I use this term in the generic, and not the specific, sense.

what brings him reward and what brings him punishment. In this way, he gradually establishes a set of values for himself, a set of values which is largely taken from those of the parent figure in his life. He learns to judge the reactions of those in authority to his actions - i.e. will they bring him pleasure, reward or indifference? - and to structure his behaviour accordingly. His own behaviour is, therefore, to some extent, based on the opinions and reactions of others, and from an early age, he learns to estimate public opinion before embarking on any action. In this way, every single person to some extent, has, at some period in his life, judged his actions according to the way in which they are likely to be perceived by others.

However, what about adulthood? It is true that generally a young child is far more reliant on his parents for affirmation and guidance than an adult is; what happens to this consideration for the opinion of others as the child matures into adulthood? In order to attempt to answer this question, we shall have to turn to the field of social psychology.



## *Social Psychology*

*Social psychology is the scientific study of individual behaviour as a function of social stimuli.*<sup>251</sup>

There are three distinctive categories of social stimuli: the presence of other people, interaction among people and the consequences of interaction among people.<sup>252</sup> To put it another way, any social encounter is influenced by the interplay of three 'theories' which each person has about the others who are involved. These 'theories' concern the range of social behaviour expected of everyone, the range of social behaviour expected from specific social categories of people<sup>253</sup> and the range of social behaviour we expect from a person on the basis of our specific knowledge of him as an individual.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>251</sup>

Shaw and Constanzo: Theories of Social Psychology. New York. 1970.

<sup>252</sup> Jordaan : General Psychology. Pg. 910.

<sup>253</sup>

This is influenced by a wide variety of factors, such as nationality, race, social standing, profession, sex or age, or any combination of these.

<sup>254</sup> Tajfel & Fraser: Introducing Social Psychology. Pg. 30.

From this we can ascertain that any action taken in public circumstances - i.e. either physically in front of other people or in a situation which is subject to becoming public knowledge - will be governed to some extent by these social restrictions. With a few extremely rare exceptions, people do not act completely naturally when their behaviour is subject to public consideration. They will structure their behaviour so that it will be viewed in the desired way by those who witness or hear of, it. Thus, even our own society adopts shame-culture values insofar as its members consider the opinions of others and the possible repercussions to their actions, before acting.

In his discussion on self-consciousness and shyness in public situations, Buss explains the reasons behind these very human emotions. It is a natural human feature to judge one's worth on the opinions of others and to seek self-affirmation from others<sup>255</sup>. For example, the fear of public speaking stems from the realization that one is standing before an audience - a potentially hostile and judgmental audience - and being viewed and analysed by them. Any mistake made by the speaker will instantly be judged by the audience in a negative fashion - or, at least,

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See also Cooley (1902) - our image of ourselves is developed on the basis of appraisals of others and we use the reactions of others as we might use a mirror.

this is the belief of the nervous speaker<sup>256</sup>. Since it is a human tendency to base one's feeling of self-worth on the affirmation of others, the potential for public criticism and hostile judgment, is a situation that causes great anxiety, and this is the reason behind the fear of nervous speakers. Any public criticism - real or imagined - detracts from the speaker's sense of self-worth. This is the belief of Buss *et al.*<sup>257</sup>

The nervous speaker, therefore, attempts to conceal his / her anxiety and fear, and to exude an air of confidence. This, too, stems from the worry of public criticism. Since people have the tendency to believe that they should not be afraid of public speaking and that such fear is 'abnormal', then they believe that not only is it undesirable to be afraid, but it is also undesirable to show that fear, as this too, is perceived as a sign of weakness.

The fear of public speaking is commonly believed to be one of the most common phobias; hence, a large number of the members of our society are vulnerable to the opinions of others and base their self-impression on these external opinions.

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The fact that few members of the audience would feel any more comfortable if they were on the stage, is irrelevant to the speaker. The thought that concerns the speaker is that he / she is suddenly very conspicuous and any mistakes that he / she might make, are open to public witness and debate.

<sup>257</sup> Buss: Self-Consciousness and Social Anxiety.

According to Ruth Benedict, shame is a direct consequence of public criticism or the expectation of such criticism<sup>258</sup>. Obviously, this criticism depends upon the existence of an audience. This is the crucial element that separates shame from guilt; guilt requires no audience - only an internal sense of wrongdoing. Shame cannot exist without an audience and one's awareness of and belief in, that audience.

If we conceive of shame as a result of the fear of public judgement and criticism, and accept the psychological rationalization of shyness and the trait of self-consciousness as a manifestation of the fear of public judgement, then we can establish the close link between shyness as it is perceived today, and the Classical conception of shame. The fear of speaking, singing, acting in public, or the fear of any act that might cause embarrassment if people judge it critically, is a manifestation of the same preoccupations that concern the adherents of a shame-culture.

This is not to say that contemporary western culture is identical to that of the Classical Greeks. It is not. My point is, however, that are aspects in which this modern culture is not dissimilar from the culture that I have been analysing through

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Benedict: "Shame is a reaction to other people's criticism. A man is shamed either by being openly ridiculed and rejected or by fantasizing to himself that he has been made ridiculous. ... it requires an audience or at least a man's fantasy of an audience. Guilt does not."  
(The Sword and the Chrysanthemum (London: 1947))

the medium of Euripides' plays. Members of this modern culture are perhaps not as far removed from the Classical culture as it at first seems. While there may be the counter-argument that there are not too many modern Medeas or Phaedras roaming the streets, we must remember that Euripides' plays did not depict the society in which he lived, but rather gave an impression of the values that its members associated themselves with. Medea and Phaedra, as depicted by Euripides, were exaggerated representations of cultural values, not real people. They were characters of fiction, not history. In much the same way, the "average" contemporary, western person expresses shame-culture values, not by emulating the actions of Euripides' protagonists, but by his / her personal beliefs and psychological make-up. For example, as explained above, the fear of public speaking is a consequence of the fear of negative public judgement - a judgement which could result in a loss of face and reputation. While contemporary modern society leans more closely towards that of a guilt-culture, particularly from the Judaeo-Christian viewpoint, many of its members still exhibit some shame-culture values and beliefs. This can be seen in the everyday speech that one can hear people say in different situations. Every time someone says "What will people think if you do X?" or a mother turns to her child and says, "Don't do that in public - it's not polite", they are expressing shame-culture values. These people are not condemning the action in question because of its wrongfulness or

undesirability<sup>259</sup>, but because of the presence of a public audience. These statements, and others similar in intent, are extremely common in the everyday speech of “ordinary” people and it is an interesting exercise to listen for them.<sup>260</sup> They are indicative of shame-cultures values and a concern for one’s reputation. Although I will not dispute the assumption that our culture has developed to a state which is much closer to that of a guilt-based culture than a shame-culture, I would

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They may indeed believe that it is wrong, but when they add the element of public behaviour or witness to their statement, they change the focus of this statement, from “Don’t do that because it is wrong” to “Don’t do that - people might think badly of it / you.”

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A point that is particularly interesting to consider is the frequency with which such statements are used by parents to young children. Firstly, parents will tell their children not to do X in public. This is part of the way in which parents rear their children and familiarize them with ‘correct’ public behaviour. Thus, the growing child learns, and these instructions are inculcated into his / her behaviour and system of values as he grows into an adult. They become part of the adult’s ‘natural’ behaviour and, usually, he / she will turn impart them to any children that he / she might have in the future. Secondly, parents will occasionally admonish their children with a statement like, “Don’t behave like that in public. You will embarrass me.” Here, the justification behind rebuking the child and moulding his / her behaviour, is not only a form of discipline and learning, but also in interest in the parent preserving his / her own reputation. A parent dealing with a screaming child in a busy shop is a common enough scene, and the embarrassment of the parent is frequently obvious. People turn to witness the scene and the parent often feels that their ability as a parent is being judged by the bystanders. Their reputation is at stake. Such behaviour and attitudes are a sign of remnants of shame-culture and reputation-focussed values.

nevertheless argue that there are still many shame-culture values evident in people's behaviour in our own culture.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis was based on the premise that the Greeks of the Classical era followed a heroic ideology, despite the move towards a democracy and away from the individualistic approach. In order to establish the validity of this premise, two plays of Euripides were studied, using the reasoning that theatre, as a popular, democratic institution, to a large extent, reflected the ideals, beliefs and interests of the society that enjoyed it. (It would not focus on values that were totally foreign and bewildering to its audience).

In order to set a historical background for the society depicted in these two plays, episodes from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were first examined. From these, a picture of a heroic society, the attitudes and beliefs of its adherents, was formed. This picture could then be used in conjunction with the study of the two plays by Euripides.

The plays that were selected for detailed study were Euripides' *Medea* and *Hippolytus*. Both these plays deal with vengeful actions and, for this reason, complemented the topic of the study well. The characters as presented by Euripides were analysed, as were the reasons and motives behind their behaviour. Making use of the 'typical' features of heroic characters and the picture of Homeric society, as a guideline, the words and actions of Medea and Phaedra were studied. These two women emerged as heroic personalities, driven by an acute sense of honour and honourable



behaviour. Once their categorization into the realm of heroic personalities was established, the reasons behind their actions were considered. It was discovered that their heroic personalities, in line with the trends of the heroes of the Homeric Age, led them to place honour and the concomitant concern for reputation, before all other issues, and to sacrifice everything else for the preservation of this honour if necessary.

Medea and Phaedra both felt the overriding need to maintain their reputation in the eyes of others. Medea could not tolerate the possible laughter of her enemies and Jason's lack of respect for her; Phaedra recognized the shame that her illicit passion could bring her if it became a matter of public knowledge. Both reacted accordingly to the potential danger of a lessening in reputation; Medea's scheme was the more successful as Phaedra was discovered to be a fraud in the end, but the intent behind the plans of both these women was the same - to preserve their reputation at all costs if necessary. Even death was less serious than a loss of reputation - Phaedra killed herself in her attempt to preserve her reputation. A good name, both during life and after one's death, was the aim, and the preservation of life was secondary to the preservation of a good reputation, according to the code of the heroic personality.

This concern with issues of reputation and public opinion, is epitomized by the precepts of a shame-culture. In contrast to the structure of a guilt-culture, a shame-culture focuses on external appearances and judgements. It is the way in which other

people view one that defines one's behaviour as good or bad, according to the precepts of a shame-culture, while a guilt-culture adopts an internalized system of morality which is independent of the way in which actions are viewed by an external audience. A shame-culture hinges on the judgement of other people; hence, the concern with public opinion and one's reputation.

This study raised some interesting questions. For instance, our contemporary culture is thought to be far more closely linked to the ideals of a guilt-culture than those of a shame-culture. In order to ascertain whether shame-culture values still existed in any form, certain contemporary cultures were analysed. It was found that some rural Greek villages still exhibited a concern with shame-culture values to this day. However, even this might seem far removed from many people who do not live in rural Greek mountain villages. For this reason, some common perceptions of western contemporary society were analysed. It was discovered that many of the behavioural traits that are exhibited, reveal a concern for public image and for one's reputation. The fear of public speaking, according to psychological theories, stems from the fear of the way in which the speaker might be judged by his / her audience. It does not originate from an internalized feeling of guilt - there is no reason for guilt in such a situation - but rather from the fear of external judgement, particularly of the negative kind. This reveals a concern for reputation and appearance in the eyes of others - elements of shame-culture

values. Even a contemporary western culture is not totally free or distanced from the value system of the Greeks of the Heroic and Classical Eras. Technologies have developed, understanding has grown, attitudes have perhaps become more refined, but the instincts for the preservation of one's reputation remain. Perhaps it is a throwback to evolutionary development. In nature, the harsh rule of 'the survival of the fittest' reigns supreme. The weaker ones die' sometimes the weaker ones are killed or chased away, so that the whole breed might benefit and be stronger. Any signs of weakness can, thus, result in death or expulsion. Perhaps, instinctively, humans feel a need to conceal any signs of weakness and replace them with images of strength and confidence. Whatever the reasons for this dissembling might be, the fact is that people are still vulnerable to considerations of their reputation and public appearance. Shame-culture values have not completely disappeared. While they may not dominate the belief systems of many contemporary western societies, they are still in existence.

## APPENDIX

This study has dealt with two of Euripides' plays in detail. However, there are many other works of Classical literature in which similar issues are displayed, and which can, thus, be used to confirm the Classical focus on honour and honourable behaviour. The playwrights dealt frequently with issues of vengeance and the murder that often accompanies it. Aeschylus portrays this excellently with his telling of the cycle of vengeance in his *Oresteian Trilogy*, in which first the mother kills the father, then the children kill the mother and her accomplice as an act of revenge for the murder of the father. Cairns (180) argues that the concern for *τιμῆ* provides the grounds for vengeance and retribution and indeed, there are numerous textual references to the issue of honour, particularly with respect to the treatment and respect that it is right for a person to receive.<sup>261</sup> The murders of, first Iphigenia and then Agamemnon, demand retribution. Agamemnon in particular, died an ignoble death, one that was not fitting to his status. This point is emphasized in the play. Agamemnon was further

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eg. *Eumenides*: 95 -8; *Choephoroi*: 301 - 4 407 - 9, 430 - 43, 444 - 50, 479, 494, 973 - 4.

dishonoured by the adultery committed by Aegisthus in the king's absence (Cairns: 181).<sup>262</sup>

Sophocles also chooses the vengeful murders committed by various member's of Agamemnon's family as a theme for his *Electra*, and, as I mentioned at an earlier stage, Euripides, too, produced a version of the *Electra* as well as several other plays dealing with the issue of vengeance.

In addition, there are other plays in which we can observe feelings of shame caused by a loss of honour, and the actions that this leads to. Sophocles' *Ajax* results in Ajax' suicide after his public humiliation caused by his slaughter of the sheep while his Heracles felt deep shame at being killed by his wife, rather than being vanquished in battle by a worthy opponent.

Issues of honour are dealt with by a variety of Classical authors, not all of them Greek. For example, Cicero, the famous Roman orator, wrote on the subject, including in his work, examples of honourable and dishonourable behaviour (*De Officiis*).

Honourable behaviour was an important issue to the people of that time and it can be viewed in their writings, poetry and prose, fact and fiction.

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Aegisthus is referred to as 'αἰσχυντήρ', i.e. 'one who dishonours another' (Liddell & Scott s.v.) - see *Choephoroi* 990, *Agamemnon* 1363 and 1626.

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