

Spectacles of Horror  
Approaching the Supernatural in Greek Tragedy

By Nathan Bowman

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## ABSTRACT

Belief in the power of the supernatural world to affect the world of the living permeates Greek tragedy. Contrary to traditional accounts of ancient Greece as a forebearer to modern Western culture, an exploration into Greek supernatural beliefs shows that tragedy is radically non-rational, and non-modern. Its values are incongruous with the values of an empirically and globally based modern world that takes as orthodoxy the inherent realism of all things tangible. It is the radical difference between ancient Greek culture and the modern world that presents such a challenge to modern theatre directors who approach the production of Greek tragedy. This dissertation argues that while the secularized modern West dispatched with supernatural curiosities in the public sphere, tragedy finds its modern kindred in that realm to which those curiosities were banished but given new life: horror fiction. By employing the aesthetic elements of that genre to which the modern world consigned its fascination with the macabre, Greek tragedy, through a spectacle of horror centered on the existence and power of supernatural forces has the potential to challenge the social, ethical, and scientific assumptions of modern audiences. This dissertation will explore the relationship between Greek tragedy and modern horror by considering three objects of horror that guide the violent outcomes of the tragic plot: the Dead, the Divine, and the Other. An analysis of these objects of horror will first consider the role of these forces in ancient Greek culture as evidenced by the extant literary tradition of antiquity. Secondly, this dissertation will analyze exemplary modern productions of tragedy to consider how the aesthetic theories of horror provide a lens by which the modern theatre maker might approach the supernatural characteristics of tragedy. We will see that the parallels between tragedy and horror allow for the aesthetics of horror to provide a model in which the supernatural powers present in Greek tragedy may be affectively presented to a modern audience.

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## EDITIONS

Unless otherwise stated, all citations and references to the extant plays of Greek tragedy and other works of antiquity, both Greek and Latin, are from the Loeb Classical Library (LCL) editions. Citations are according to passage and chapter numbers used in those editions.

## ABBREVIATIONS

Passages are cited using abbreviations for ancient authors and texts following the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. I have provided a key below for the works present in this dissertation.

Aesch. = Aeschlyus

*Ag.* = *Agamemnon*

*Cho.* = *Choephoroi (Libation Bearers)*

*Eleg.* = *Fragments Elegiaca*

*Eum.* = *Eumenides*

*Fr.* = *Fragments*

*Pers.* = *Persians*

*Pr.* = *Prometheus Bound*

*Supp.* = *Suppliants*

*Th.* = *Seven Against Thebes*

Apollon. = Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*

Ar. = Aristophanes

*Ran.* = *The Frogs*

*Thesm.* = *Thesmophoriazusaie (Women at the Thesmophoria Festival)*

Arist. = Aristotle

*Po.* = *Poetics*

Col. = Colluthus, *The Rape of Helen*

Diod. = Diodorus, *Library of History*

Eur. = Euripides

*Alc.* = *Alcestis*

*Andr.* = *Andromache*

*Ba.* = *Bacchae*

*El.* = *Electra*

*Hec.* = *Hecabe*

*Hel.* = *Helen*

*Heracl.* = *Heraclidae (Children of Heracles)*

*Hipp.* = *Hippolytus*

*IA* = *Iphigenia at Aulis*

*Med.* = *Medea*

*Or.* = *Orestes*

*Tro.* = *Trojan Women*

Hom. = Homer

*Il.* = *Iliad*

*Od.* = *Odyssey*

Pl. = Plato

*Lg.* = *Laws*

*Phd.* = *Phaedo*

*R.* = *Republic*

Plut. = Plutarch

*Sol.* = *Solon*

Sen. = Seneca

*Med.* = *Medea*

Soph. = Sophocles

*Aj.* = *Ajax*

*Ant.* = *Antigone*

*El.* = *Electra*

*Eleg.* = *Elegiae*

*Fr.* = *Fragments.*

*OC* = *Oedipus Colonus*

*OT* = *Oedipus Tyrannus*

*Ph.* = *Philoctetes*

*Tr.* = *Trachiniae (Women of Trachis)*

Xen. = Xenophon

*Mem.* = *Memorabilia*

## INTRODUCTION

### Why Horror?

In 1818, English author Mary Shelley anonymously published her landmark novel that would propel works of horror into popular imagination well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, creating one of the most iconic monsters in Western fiction. Since its publication, Shelley's novel about a young scientist who defies the laws of death to create a hideous and violent humanoid creature has been the inspiration behind countless adaptations presented on both stage and film. Just five years after her novel was published, it received its first of many theatrical treatments in a production by Richard Brinsley Peake's.<sup>1</sup> As of this writing, my hometown of Kansas City, Missouri is seeing a one-person adaptation of the novel at the Kansas City Repertory Theatre. The novel made its feature film debut in a fourteen-minute silent film produced by Thomas Edison in 1910, and the work's central creature cemented itself in American popular culture and beyond with its appearance in the 1931 Universal Studios film starring Boris Karloff. This famous novel by Mary Shelley is, of course, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*.

Though the title of the book takes its name from its central character, Victor Frankenstein, the name "Frankenstein" has often come to denote the creature itself. Conversely, modern editions of the novel often drop the secondary title, "*or, The Modern Prometheus*," altogether.<sup>2</sup> The tale of Prometheus seems to have little bearing on our appreciation of Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The violent suffering of Prometheus has been a theme associated with the character in artistic works in both ancient and modern times. We see this ranging from the

<sup>1</sup> Douglas William Hoehn, "The First Season of *Presumption!; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*," *Theatre Studies* 26-27 (1979-81): 79.

<sup>2</sup> For an example, see the Barnes and Nobles edition: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 2003).

tragedy Προμηθεὺς Δεσμώτης (*Prometheus Desmotes – Prometheus Bound*) of Aeschylus<sup>3</sup> to a 2013 (CE) appearance in the eighth season of the beloved television series *Supernatural*, to countless depictions in Renaissance and post-Renaissance paintings.<sup>4</sup> While the Titans is credited in later sources with himself creating humanity from clay, since the earliest accounts of Hesiod, he is depicted as suffering violently for transgressing the Olympian god Zeus by endowing humanity with the gift of civilization in the form of fire. Not to be taken lightly, Zeus orders Prometheus to be bound to a mountainside where his liver will be eaten by an eagle, a symbol of Zeus, only to grow back to have the feeding repeat itself each day. With the liver thought to be the house of human emotions in ancient Greek thought, this physical torture brought with it an added psychological torment.

While the popularity of *Frankenstein* with modern audiences has since diminished the need for subtitles such as “*The Modern Prometheus*,” this subtitle is perhaps the seed from which the topic of this dissertation sprouts. A cursory overview of Shelley’s novel read alongside the mythological accounts of Prometheus reveals striking parallels between these narratives. In both accounts we find a central character, Victor Frankenstein or Prometheus, who betrays the will of their god(s) to bring life to their own creations. Inevitably, each character suffers on account of their infringement of nature. We know that, given her subtitle, Shelley was keenly aware of the relationship between her story and the tragedy of Prometheus. The Greeks bore heavily on the

<sup>3</sup> The attributing of authorship to Aeschylus has been increasingly scrutinized since the 19<sup>th</sup> century with scholarly consensus leaning toward the play having been written later in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE after the lifetime of Aeschylus. For more on the question of authorship see Mark Griffith, *The Authenticity of Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge: UP, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Pre-Olympian gods. In ancient Greek cosmology, there are three generations of gods, each supplanting its predecessor in dominance: Primordial gods, Titans, and Olympians.

<sup>5</sup> See *Prometheus Being Chained by Vulcan* by Dirck van Baburen (1623), *Prometheus bound* by Jacob Jordaens (1640), *Prometheus Bound* by Thomas Cole (1847), *Prometheus* by Gustave Moreau (1868), *Prometheus* by José Clemente Orozco (1927)

minds of Shelley and her peers with whom she entered into a contest to see who could write the best horror story (the impetus for *Frankenstein*). One such peer, Lord Byron, frequently travelled to Greece and was instrumental in providing diplomatic assistance to the Greeks during their War of Independence. Byron himself explored the tragedy *Prometheus Bound* in his poem “Prometheus.”

Recent scholarship has begun exploring the role of supernatural forces in the religious and ritualistic worldview of ancient Greek culture. This dissertation owes a deal of gratitude to an ever-growing body of work which locates the performance of tragedy as an outgrowth of lamentation rituals performed for the purpose of attracting (or deterring) otherworldly powers to the mortal world of humans. Such works which are present in this dissertation include *Greek Theatre Performance* by David Wiles, *Singing the Dead* by Reyes Bertolin Cebrián, and *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual* by Erika Fischer-Lichte. Furthermore, scholars question more and more the idealization of ancient Greece as a foundation of Western rationalism by examining the ways in which the ancient literary tradition is rooted in a world filled with various ghosts, gods, ghouls and other such irrational forces. E.R. Dodds was one of the earliest to question the traditional view of Greek culture as a triumph of rationalism. In his book *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Dodds traces the Greek belief in divine madness, possession by a god, through the Homeric epics to the dialogues of Plato. In her book *Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*, Sarah Iles Johnston highlights the ways in which attention was paid to pleasing the dead through proper burial rites and gift giving lest they torment the living. In *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Daniel Ogden compiles a collection of sources from antiquity which describe belief in, or depictions of, sorcery, curses, necromancy, and other such supernatural activities. While the work of Dodds, Johnston, Ogden,

and others has contributed a great deal to our understanding of the way that the supernatural permeated the ancient Greek worldview, these studies are commonly grounded in literary analysis of extant texts and do not focus exclusively on tragedy, that is, what it means to portray these supernatural stories through bodies on stage.

Given the increased interest in the supernatural elements within ancient literature, it is surprising that the correlation between the violent supernatural stories of tragedy to modern stories of supernatural violence found in the genre of horror has not received much attention. It is the supernatural elements of tragedy, which present a world populated with inhuman creatures, dead people, and demigods, that often makes presenting the play to a modern audience difficult.<sup>6</sup> As Bert States notes, modern audiences and theatre practitioners often find themselves at a “complete loss of what to do” with tragedy.<sup>7</sup> As such, this dissertation will set out to provide one way in which to answer this question by providing a lens through which Greek tragedy may be made accessible to modern audiences. Inspired by Mary Shelley, who transcribed a horrible tale of Greek tragedy into a novel which continues to bring life to the supernatural curiosities of modern audiences, this dissertation will ask how the genre made popular by Shelley might now be used to breathe new life in an ancient form of drama which continues to captivate theatre practitioners. In this dissertation, I will explore the relationship between Greek tragedy and modern horror. In doing so, we will see that the parallels between tragedy and horror allow for the aesthetics of horror to provide a model in which the supernatural powers present in Greek tragedy may be affectively presented to a modern audience.

<sup>6</sup> David Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction* (Cambridge: UP, 2000), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Bert States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 142.

An exploration into new or different methods for performing Greek tragedy, though several have been written, seems well suited for the current decade where the number of theatre companies which produce such works continues to rise. Writing in 2007, Simon Goldhill noted that since the 1970's, every major capital of the world has had "serious and frequent productions" of Greek tragedies and this interest is matched by hundreds of performances on college campuses each year.<sup>8</sup> In the past ten years, it would seem that Greek tragedy is everywhere. London based theatre critic Natalie Haynes noted that in a single year "*Medea* has ravaged the National Theatre, *Electra* has filled the Old Vic; the RSC will be producing *Hecabe* later this year, and a condensed *Oresteia* will be at the Globe in September."<sup>9</sup> In just the span of a few years, the *Antigone* of Sophocles has seen an abundance of productions and re-interpretations across the United States, not to mention the play's popularity internationally.<sup>10</sup> In just one year, between 2018-19, New York saw no less than three productions of the tragedy. As New York theatre blogger Jonathan Mandell noted, "New York audiences can't help seeing the immediate relevance of the story of *Antigone*."<sup>11</sup> In 2018, Theater of War Productions presented *Antigone in Ferguson* at Harlem Stage. The Classical Theatre of Harlem under the leadership of Ty Jones produced their own Afropunk inspired production of *Antigone*.<sup>12</sup> Within the same year, Japanese director Satoshi Miyagi staged a bunraku inspired production of *Antigone* at the Park

<sup>8</sup> Simon Goldhill, *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Natalie Haynes, "Antigone: Freedom Fighter or Terrorist," in *The Guardian*, Feb. 27, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/feb/27/antigone-juliette-binoche-anne-carson-barbican>

<sup>10</sup> Notable international productions of *Antigone* include: a 2014 production by Mohammad Al-Attar in Beirut in which the cast was made up of Syrian refugees; a 2011 adaptation by Homayoun Ghanizadeh at the City Theatre of Tehran; Three UK productions at Barbican (2015), Pilot Theatre (2014), Royal National Theatre (2012).

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Mandell, "Antigone Review: Greek Tragedy as Japanese Theater," New York Theater, Sept. 26, 2019, <https://newyorktheater.me/2019/09/26/antigone-review-greek-tragedy-as-japanese-theater/>

<sup>12</sup> Daniella Ignacio, "History Is Happening in Harlem with 2 Productions of 'Antigone'," *American Theatre*, Sept. 8, 2018, <https://www.americantheatre.org/2018/09/04/history-is-happening-in-harlem-with-two-productions-of-antigone/>

Avenue Armory.<sup>13</sup> Prior to this, New York has seen an LGBTQ oriented adaptation of *Antigone* titled *Vestments of the Gods* (2014), and productions by such companies as the Storm Theatre Company (2014), the London based Barbican Theatre (2015), and LES Shakespeare Company (2016). Philadelphia saw its own production of *Antigone* at the Wilma Theater in 2015. The Twin Cities have seen at least two productions of *Antigone*: Park Square Theatre (2019), and the adaptation *Burial at Thebes* at the Guthrie (2011). In my home state of Missouri, the St. Louis area (where *Antigone in Ferguson* originated) saw another production of *Antigone* in 2019 titled *Antigone: A Requiem par Patriarchus* and Kansas City saw a production of Anouilh's *Antigone* in 2017. This revival has no indications of slowing down. While the ancient texts in which these productions are based do not change, our relationship to them continues to evolve. Our assumptions change. The world around us changes.

One such change has been an increased audience, critical, and scholarly interest in horror. When writing his seminal book *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror*, James B. Twitchell begins by lamenting that “horror is not the stuff of scholarship” due to the genre’s perception as “lowbrow” among academics and film critics.<sup>14</sup> Scott Meslow observes that “despite being the backbone of Hollywood, horror movies have never been revered in the eyes of Hollywood.”<sup>15</sup> It would seem that times have since changed. The past decade has seen an explosion of horror films released not only to enthusiastic fanfare, but critical acclaim. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a rise of auteur directors crafting tales of horror the numbers of which have not been seen since the 1970’s New Hollywood era. Directors such as Karyn Kusama, James Wan, Jennifer Kent, Adam Wingard, Mike Flanagan, Mary Harron, Robert Eggers, Ari Aster, Sophia

<sup>13</sup> Mandell, “Antigone Review.”

<sup>14</sup> James B. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Horror* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Scott Meslow, “How We Ended Up in the Golden Age of Horror Movies,” *GQ*, Oct. 27, 2017, <https://www.gq.com/story/golden-age-of-horror-movies>

Takal, and Jordan Peele have ushered in what has been dubbed a new “golden era” of horror.<sup>16</sup> According to the film critic review aggregation site Rotten Tomatoes, 2017 saw a horror movie for the first time become the most critically lauded film of the year with Jordan Peele’s *Get Out*. Horror movies, which were dismissed for so long by critics and scholars, are now routinely better-reviewed than your average movie. This new critical enthusiasm for the genre has been matched by a seriousness with which academics now approach their own studies of horror. Since Twitchell’s book, and especially beginning in the 1990’s, there have been numerous books written which investigate both the structures of horror, and its allure. Noël Carroll became a leading figure in the aesthetics of horror with the publication of his book *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*. The burgeoning field of horror theory provided a new avenue of gender and sexuality studies as seen in works such as *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* by Carol J. Clover. Clover explores the slasher film as a fantastical allegory for budding teenage sexuality centered on the destruction of innocence in a female character she refers to as the “final girl.”<sup>17</sup> Thanks to Clover, the term “final girl” has since become common parlance among horror film enthusiasts.

It would seem that no amount of criticism, exploitation, or censorship can dislodge society’s fixation with the grotesque, the macabre, and the violent. Yet, as Wheeler Winston Dixon expresses, horror fiction did not begin with the advent of the horror film. The narratives of Greek tragedy “involve a variety of contests between mortals and monsters with a strong otherworldly flavor, in which man is but a tool, or pawn, of the gods.”<sup>18</sup> As we will see in the following chapter, Greek tragedy has been handed down to the modern age in such a way as to

<sup>16</sup> Meslow, “How We Ended Up in the Golden Age of Horror Movies.”

<sup>17</sup> Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: UP, 1992), 260.

<sup>18</sup> Wheeler Winston Dixon, *A History of Horror* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2010), 1.

gloss over its supernatural elements in favor of an emphasis on morality grounded in mistaken human choices. In the following chapters, I will investigate the trajectory of the dramatic criticism of tragedy in order to question the traditional assumptions of tragedy as rooted in human agency and choice making. I will seek to demonstrate the aesthetic tools of tragedy, and their relationship to the aesthetics of horror, which are designed not to provide a clear moral message, but to thrill and horrify audiences by questioning the very possibility of choice making. Taking a cue from Twitchell, who outlines his book by examining three archetypal monsters of modern horror (vampire, Frankenstein's creature, and the transformation monster), I will explore three modes of monstrosity in which the supernatural forces of tragedy make themselves known: the Dead, the Divine, and the Other.

### **Outline of Dissertation**

The first chapter of this dissertation is titled "The Rationalization of Tragedy." In this chapter, I will explore the processes by which ancient Greece, beginning in the Age of Enlightenment, became increasingly portrayed as a forebearer of modern Western scientific, political, and philosophical thought. This process of the "rationalization" of ancient Greece will be demonstrated by exploring its history as it developed in the philological classrooms of Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Within discussions of tragedy, the theory of dramatic structure given by Aristotle became the standard by which modern Western drama was conceived, but also the framework within which modern academics studied tragedy. The chapter will argue that the adherence to the modern interpretation of Aristotelean plot structure is exemplary of the ways in which tragedy has been "rationalized" in the modern era. Such rationalization acts as a means of minimizing the text's assumption of supernatural dominance by emphasizing empirically

observable sequences and psychological circumstances. A body of criticism will be explored which demonstrates that the traditionally understood plot structure of moral errors, recognitions, and reversals of fortune bears little resemblance to the narratives of many tragic works. Rather, an examination of tragedy as horror allows us to explore how the works of tragedy bring into question the very possibility of choice making by placing characters within a conflict of competing supernatural forces which exert themselves violently onto the world.

The second chapter will explore what it means for tragedy to be a “spectacle of horror.” Given that all of the extant tragedies were written with specific physical spaces in mind, namely the Theatre of Dionysus, it follows that the tragedians wrote their plays with a specific eye toward how to use that space to maximum dramatic effect. Much like the filmmaker of horror becomes acquainted with the technology and techniques of their medium in order to shape the suspense of their narrative, the tragedian had a keen awareness of the use of bodies in space as evidenced in their writings. Therefore, the first section of this chapter will expound upon the basic physical elements of Greek tragedy performance as we know it to have occurred during the time of its origin in 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Athens. Doing so will demonstrate how the tools of suspense present within tragedy mirror those of horror, but also how the enactment of violence upon the body is central to both artforms. The second portion of this chapter will elaborate upon definitions of “horror.” We will find that thematically, questions of morality in both tragedy and horror are secondary, if not entirely absent, to questions of existential concern. Namely, positioning characters in situations of inescapable, unexplainable violence and forcing them to act. We will find that the anxiety represented in tragedy and horror fueled by the impossibility of agency in the world around us is allegorized in an object of horror: the monster. Arguing that the monster is the central defining feature of the horror genre, this chapter will examine the

characteristics of the horror monster, its various shapes and forms, demonstrating the presence of such monsters within the works of tragedy.

In the remaining three chapters, I will examine the objects of horror in Greek tragedy. I propose that these objects of horror, the monsters, of Greek tragedy appear primarily in three forms: the Dead, the Divine, and the Other. Put another way, the horror of tragedy is most often generated by anxiety caused in reference to 1) appeasing or summoning dead family or friends; 2) acting for or against the gods; 3) non-male/non-Greek people. Though this investigation will draw examples from a large segment of the canon of Greek tragedy, the following chapters are not a survey of the objects of horror found in every, or even most, of the works. Indeed, the Dead, the Divine, or the Other can be found as objects of horror in all of the extant works of tragedy, directing the tragic outcomes of the plays. I have chosen to narrow the scope of my work to the following examples, each of which I consider an exemplary case study for considering the role of the supernatural in tragedy: *Ορέστεια* (*Oresteia*) of Aeschylus, *Τρωάδες* (*Troians – Trojan Women*), and *Μήδεια* (*Medea*) of Euripides, and the *Ἀντιγόνη* (*Antigone*) of Sophocles (the latter of which I address in the epilogue). My aim is not to reconstruct the methods in which these plays were originally produced two-and-a-half thousand years ago at a theatre in Athens. Rather, my aim is to provide a lens through which one might integrate the inherent supernatural inclinations of the plays into a modern performance. There will be a literary component in each discussion to give context for the supernatural beliefs embodied in the plays, locating the function of the objects of horror within the texts. However, I will also accompany each example with a case study of a modern performance which, in my view, effectively highlighted the elements of horror within their productions. The productions I have chosen to examine, while similar to the degree that the body becomes the focal point of their

spectacle, each provide a culturally and historically distinct lens through which they approached their process.

Firstly, when discussing the role of the Dead in the *Oresteia*, I will consider the 2019 production produced by the National Theatre of Greece. The National Theatre produced the *Oresteia* in its entirety (all three plays) in a single evening at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus as part of the summer Athens/ Epidaurus performing arts festival. By examining this modern Greek production, we will be able to explore approaches to tragedy from the very country in which the plays originated and situate those approaches within a specifically Greek history, one in which the continued performance of tragedy reinforces a national identity and memorialization of the past. Much as the three tragedians give us three different ways of considering the supernatural elements within the story of the House of Atreus,<sup>19</sup> the National Theatre's production included an entirely different cast, director, and creative team for each of the three plays within the trilogy, thus allowing one to compare and contrast, in a single evening, the way each production team distinctly highlighted the supernatural elements of the trilogy. Further, while discussing the violence enacted upon the bodies of the characters of this trilogy, this production allows us to consider the physical demands put upon the actor's body to perform such violence in an ancient Greek amphitheater. While the *Oresteia* itself could be the source to examine all three categories of the objects of horror, I have chosen to limit my discussion of the *Oresteia* to considerations of the Dead as two contrasting approaches to presenting dead people feature prominently in the action of the trilogy. These dead figures are the ghosts of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

Secondly, I will examine the themes of divine dread in the *Trojan Women* of Euripides. This chapter will explore how the *Trojan Women* presents an enactment of divinely ordained

<sup>19</sup> See the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, the *Electra* of Sophocles, and the *Electra* and *Orestes* of Euripides.

violence by staging the gods Poseidon and Athena. Specifically, we will consider the approach taken by Tadashi Suzuki in presenting this violence and the role of the gods in his adaptation of the *Trojan Women*. This approach is grounded in a physically rigorous training method which Suzuki developed by adapting the acting practices of traditional Japanese forms of acting such as *noh* and *kabuki* theatre. As such, this chapter will explore Suzuki's acting method, as well as consider his argument for why the techniques of *noh* theatre are particularly suited for the exploration of the spectacle of tragedy. Suzuki's adaptation will be considered within the context of the popularity of Greek tragedy in post-World War II Japan. Further, we will see that while the use of *noh* and *kabuki* were a prominent means by which directors approached tragedy, so too were these performance styles central to the growing movement of Japanese horror films in the post-war era. Therefore, tragedy is framed as a manifestation of the popularity of horror stories centered on narratives of total annihilation which proliferated in the post-war era. Suzuki writes extensively on the relationship between the actor's body in natural space as well as the portrayal of violence in tragedy. Further, Suzuki explicitly grounds the philosophy of his method, as it applies to tragedy, in the sentiment that tragic performance is inherently directed toward addressing the power of unseen forces in the cosmos.

In a second portion of this chapter, I will contrast the physical staging of the gods Poseidon and Athena with the invisible gods whose presence is assumed throughout the *Trojan Women* as a possible cause of the Trojan War. The invisible gods will be presented as an example of a concept depicted in many modern horror fictions: possession. Through the character of Helen (whom Suzuki omits in his adaptation), I will examine Greek conceptions of possession as a means by which the gods manipulate the world of humans. First, I outline a long history, both ancient and modern, in which Helen is perceived as lustful, dishonest, and the one

who began the Trojan War. Thereafter, I argue that the narrative of Helen, who is shown to be controlled by the god Aphrodite, is comparable to the ways in which possession is depicted in horror media; a divine presence takes control of one's body to sow discord.

Thirdly, I will explore the concept of the "monstrous Other," or, how cultures manifest their fears of different people by portraying such people as inhumanly powerful and immoral. Within the context of ancient Greece, I will survey the development of the "barbarian" in the works of tragedy. We will find that the concept of the "barbarian" coalesced in the works of tragedy by representing non-Greek people as being supernaturally powerful and ideologically the perfect anti-Greek. With the *Medea* of Euripides as its focus, this chapter will explore how the characterization of Medea as a supernatural figure, a witch, is intrinsically tied to an understanding of Medea as the Other, a race different from the other characters in the play, and thereby the audience. I will consider what it means to connote Medea as a "witch" and ask how such a concept would have been understood in the times of antiquity. More broadly, this chapter will see *Medea* as a microcosm for the ways in which Western society exoticizes people of non-European descent by assigning to those cultures traits that are both alluring and repelling. Identifying the fear of "barbarians" as analogous to contemporary anxieties related to immigration and refugee settlement, I analyze productions in which the unbridled fear of immigration took center stage. One such production is the one-woman adaptation of *Medea* by Greek playwright Andreas Flourakis titled *Medea's Burqa*. This production sees Medea as a Syrian refugee whose burqa takes on a monstrous form which exemplifies the irrational fear of Europeans toward her. I examine my own adaptation of *Medea*, produced in 2018 by Kansas City Public Theatre, and frame this production as one of many in the United States which have sought to explore how this play by Euripides speaks to cultural anxieties about immigrants and people

of color more generally. With an understanding of Medea as a figure who both threatens and disgusts the other characters of the play, we will find that Medea closely resembles the horror monster, an allegorical symbol of a society's attraction toward, and fear of, the Other.

Lastly, I have included an epilogue which will discuss a recent production of the *Antigone* of Sophocles by Theater of War Productions titled *Antigone in Ferguson*. *Antigone in Ferguson* was developed by Theater of War in the wake of the murder of teenager Michael Brown at the hands of a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri in 2016. This epilogue will discuss how the character of Polyneices, and the conflict involved in his burial, is a perfect integration of all three categories of supernatural beings I have discussed. The fears of the Dead, Divine and Other coalesce in the figure of Polyneices, whose power is simultaneously attributed to all three forces. With Polyneices figuring as an allegorical substitute for those who have been murdered or otherwise suffered at the hands of an unjust legal system, Theater of War asks how a consideration of the supernatural elements in tragedy may allow individuals within modern society to better address the challenge of bringing justice to those who have been violently and fatally wronged.

While no one piece of modern horror, be it literature or film, will be a subject of this dissertation, various examples will be considered throughout to demonstrate the aesthetic tools of horror as they appear in popular horror fiction. The Dead, the Divine, and the Other act as objects of horror that drive the action, and dictate the outcomes, of Greek tragedy. While the words of these plays are a primary tool for uncovering the supernatural qualities of tragedy, we must avoid the misconception handed down through the process of rationalization. Namely, that tragedy is first and foremost concerned with plot. Rather, each case study will explore how tragedy, like horror, is not chiefly concerned with a sequence of events, that is, by characters

“doing” things, but by suspense grounded in a spectacle of the body. Whereas a typical Greek tragic plot, as a sequence of events, is sparse when compared to the plots of modern tragedies, what we find is that tragedy tends to be structured toward the presentation of a recurring image: the suffering of the physical human form. The Dead, the Divine, and the Other, as objects of horror, make themselves known by enacting violence on human bodies. Therefore, one cannot examine tragedy through the lens of horror without considering the ways in which tragedy is a performance enacted by bodies for the sake of punishing bodies. My hope is that speaking specifically to the elements of horror in a narrow selection of examples will provide a blueprint for the ways in which the modern director can approach presenting Greek tragedy to an audience more broadly.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE RATIONALIZATION OF TRAGEDY**

“Man is many things, but he is not rational.”  
— Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)

Annie Graham recently lost her mother. They had a complicated past. Ellen, her mother, was a very secretive person with friends in strange places, and this put a strain on their relationship. By the end, Annie and Ellen were all but estranged, though Annie allowed her 13-year-old daughter Charlie to visit her grandmother. The period of time following Ellen’s funeral has been filled anxiety and incongruity. Strange sensations have filled the family’s home and a tense air lingers in the atmosphere. Annie has felt a tug in her chest which directs her to a cardboard box in which Ellen left a collection of odd mementos and photographs. Annie takes a brief glimpse into the dusty box, finding photographs and an old book titled “Notes on

Spiritualism.” In it, Annie finds a note written to her by Ellen, apologizing for her secrecy in life and saying to Annie “...do not despair your losses...Our sacrifice will pale next to the rewards.” Filled with a sense of wonderment and dread, Annie becomes aware of a presence in the room. Quickly turning on the lights, Annie sees nothing and leaves in confusion.

As fortune would have it, weeks after the funeral of Ellen, calamity again struck the Graham family. Annie ordered her oldest child, Peter, to take Charlie with him to a party. As one would expect of a high school boy, he was not enthusiastic about the idea of leading his younger sister around with him for the evening. Leaving Charlie unattended, Peter goes upstairs to get high with his friends. Charlie eats a piece of cake unaware that it contains peanuts, which she is deathly allergic to. Peter is informed that the girl he came with is acting strange. He returns to his sister and knows exactly what is happening. Panicked, he lifts Charlie and runs to his car with his sister in his arms. Laying her in the backseat, Peter races home along the poorly lit rural highway. Charlie struggles as her anaphylactic shock intensifies. Grasping for air, Charlie rolls down the passenger side window and sticks her head outside. Peter turns to her, demanding she get her head back into the car. As he returns his eyes to the road, he suddenly is aware of a rotting body, perhaps a cow, in the middle of the highway. He quickly swerves to the shoulder of the road, blinded so deeply by adrenaline and frenzy that he does not notice the thick wooden light post approaching his passenger side. Hearing a violent tear from the backing seat, Peter slams on his breaks. He sits in his car in a cold sweat, crying, too afraid to look at the headless corpse of his sister in the backseat.

Weeks later, Annie has fallen into despair. After joining a support group for parents who have lost children, she relates a story to a new friend who has been affected by a similar trauma. Annie recalls that she once had issues of sleep walking, though she hasn't done it in years. She

would fall asleep and suddenly wake up at various locations within or just outside of the home. For the most part, these excursions were harmless. Yet, one evening, she woke up in the room of her two children. She noticed the distinct smell of paint thinner covering the room. As her children stared at her, frozen in fear, she noticed they too were covered in paint thinner, and so was she. Annie's attention was soon drawn to the book of matches in her left hand, and the empty bottle of paint thinner in her right. The striking of a match against the book was enough to revive her from her slumber. Realizing what she had done, she quickly and shamefully extinguished the match. Peter screamed, accusing his mother of attempting to murder them. Annie and Peter had recently been going through a spout of frivolous arguments and emotions were already heightened. It was impossible to convince him that it was an accident. She had no control over what had happened. She was sleeping.

Annie Graham is the central protagonist of the 2018 horror film *Hereditary* by writer and director Ari Aster. The film follows the Graham family in the aftermath of the death of Annie's mother Ellen. Following her death, the family begins to experience a series of strange and increasingly horrific occurrences, including the death of the young daughter Charlie. Annie unravels cryptic and terrifying secrets about her ancestry and the activities her mother was involved in. Though the force behind these occurrences is never visibly present, Annie soon learns of the power her mother still exerts over their family and home. Early in the film, Peter, in a high school class, is learning about another person whose family was violently and inexplicably taken from him. The man's name was Heracles, the most famous of heroes from the Greek mythological tradition.

If ever there was a horror story, it would certainly be the life of Heracles. A paragon of masculinity and athleticism in the Greek world, his large physical prowess was matched in size

only by his appetites. Though he exceeded the bodily limitations of ordinary human beings, Heracles led a life in constant threat of violence enacted upon him by supernatural forces. Born out of the affair of Zeus, king of the gods, with the mortal woman Alcmene, Heracles was the target of Zeus' resentful wife Hera who through the use of curses and employment of terrible creatures sought to destroy the hero at every turn. The violent sorrow of Heracles' life reached its most terrible zenith upon his marriage to the Theban princess Megara. Heracles was lovingly devoted to Megara and the pair had three children together. But Hera never forgot the wrongs brought upon her by her husband. The queen of the gods set upon Heracles the curse of madness. Possessed with rage, Heracles brutally slaughtered his young children, and Megara too as she desperately tried to protect them. Blood-soaked, Heracles awoke from his rage surrounded by the dead bodies of his wife and sons. He was horrified. As if sleepwalking, he could not recollect what had happened. He remembered talking with his family in what seemed like only moments before.<sup>20</sup> Yet, here he was, the murderer of his family. He had no control over what had happened. He was sleeping.

Heracles eventually finds new love in his wife Deianira and has more children, but not before enduring ten-long years of slavery at the hands of his rival Eurystheus as punishment for his unintentional deeds. Heracles rescued Deianira from capture at the hands of the mischievous centaur Nessus by killing the centaur with a poisoned arrow. However, horror stories rarely end with the character escaping with their life. In *Hereditary*, Peter's teacher has the students read *Τραχίνιαι* (*Trachiniai – Women of Trachis*), the tragedy by Sophocles which recounts the callous end of the life of Heracles. While adventuring through distant lands, Heracles is told through prophecy that he is never to be killed by a living creature but will die at the hands of the dead.

<sup>20</sup> Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1942), 229.

This prophecy is inadvertently fulfilled as a lonely and heartbroken Deianira sends to Heracles a gift in the form of a tunic covered in the poisoned blood of Nessus. Believing the tunic will work to reignite her husband's passion for her, Deianira soon learns she has fallen prey to the trickery of the dead Nessus. Indeed, something of Heracles was ignited: his flesh. As the poison seeped through his skin and attacked his bones, the dying Heracles lashed out at the unknowing herald who delivered the item. As a messenger relates:

He seized him by the foot, where the ankle plays in the socket, and  
hurled him onto the seaswept rock; and the white brains poured out  
from his hair, as his head was shattered.<sup>21</sup>

Having murdered this innocent man, the mutilated Heracles soon appears on stage to perform one last feat of strength: powering through his pain to build himself a funeral pyre upon which to die. Thus ends the tragic life of Heracles.

Peter's teacher poses a question to his class: "If we go by the rule that the hero is undone by his fatal flaw, what is Heracles' flaw?"<sup>22</sup> The rule to which the teacher is referring is the long-upheld structure of the tragic plot laid out by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE) in his treatise on dramatic criticism, *Περὶ ποιητικῆς* (*On Poetics*). Though Aristotle was not a contemporary of the dramatists who produced the extant canon of Greek tragedy (writing approximately one-hundred years after the Golden Age of Classical Athens), he nonetheless provides the earliest systematic approach to interpreting the texts and the emotions they generate in an audience. Aristotle outlines six elements, in order of importance, which he

<sup>21</sup> Soph. *Tr.* 779-81 in Sophocles, *Antigone. The Women of Trachis. Philoctetes. Oedipus at Colonus*, ed. and trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Classical Library 21 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> *Hereditary*, directed by James Whale (New York: A24, 2018).

argues are the basic components of tragedy: Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Song, Spectacle.<sup>23</sup> With μύθος (*mythos* – plot/story), the structure of action through the play, being the most important, Aristotle spends considerable time detailing the components of an effective plot. He states that “the construction of the best tragedy should be complex rather than simple.”<sup>24</sup> The simple plot is one in which the character’s final fate comes about with no discernable reason, as if by coincidence. Randomness. The complex plot is one in which the suffering of the protagonist arises from αναγνώρισις (*anagnorisis* – “recognition”) and subsequent περιπέτεια (*peripeteia* – “reversal”), specifically, the reversal from good fortune to bad fortune due to the recognition of αμαρτία (*hamartia* – “to miss the mark”), a moral error in judgement made by the protagonist. The protagonist is made to recognize their error through violent suffering.

The formula of the complex plot, extrapolated from Aristotle, should be recognizable to anyone who has studied tragedy, taken a theatre history class, or has even seen a movie. Since the early modern age, the complex plot has become the standard by which dramatic theory is both practiced and taught. Theatre textbooks readily portray Aristotle’s formula as the sole method for analyzing performance. While some suggest his ordering of the elements is malleable, textbooks still adhere to the elements themselves as Aristotle describes them.<sup>25</sup> Other textbooks organize their very structure around these elements.<sup>26</sup> The adoption of Aristotle’s elements has defined the modern West’s understanding of not just Greek theatre, but the very notion of tragedy itself in all of its forms: characters have flaws which result in their downfall.

<sup>23</sup> Arist. *Po.* 1450b1-20 in Aristotle, Longinus, Demetrius, *Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, trans. Stephen Halliwell, W. Hamilton Fyfe, Doreen C. Innes, W. Rhys Roberts, Loeb Classical Library 199 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Arist. *Po.* 1452a15-20.

<sup>25</sup> See Thomas S. Hischak, *Theatre as Human Action* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 33.

<sup>26</sup> See Edwin Wilson, and Alvin Goldfarb, *Theatre: the Living Art*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 250.

When applied to the story of Heracles, it is hardly difficult to point to the character dysfunctions of Heracles. He is often boisterously drunk, lashes out at others violently, and in the case of his portrayal in the *Women of Trachis*, has abandoned his wife for a young lover. Responding to her teacher's question concerning the error which led to Heracles' downfall, a classmate of Peter's answers, "arrogance...because he literally refuses to look at all the signs that are being literally handed to him the entire play." Certainly, arrogance has played a role in the hero's adventures. Though he was given a prophecy that he shall be killed by the dead, the arrogance of Heracles led him to believe he was immortal, though all signs pointed otherwise. However, arrogant though Heracles was, the teacher presents his students with an alternative interpretation of the story. "Let's all remember," he says, "Sophocles wrote the oracle so that it was unconditional, meaning Heracles never had any choice, right? So, does that make it more tragic or less tragic than if he has a choice?" Another student responds, "I think it's more tragic, because if it's all just inevitable, then that means the characters have no hope. They never had hope because...they're all like pawns in this horrible hopeless machine."<sup>27</sup>

Why did Ari Aster find the tragic tale of Heracles so relevant to the themes of his film *Hereditary*? The story of Heracles is not unlike that of Aster's protagonist Annie Graham. While these characters do not function as moral exemplars in their given stories, neither their inexplicable assaults on their family, nor their violent deaths were caused by any moral error in judgment. Their merciless fates were ordained by the invisible entities of the supernatural world. While modern dramatic theory, through the influence and re-interpretation of Aristotle, has sought to understand the plot structure of tragedy as a psychologically grounded series of events enacted by observable character actions, the plots of Greek tragedy are rarely so rational. The

<sup>27</sup> *Hereditary*.

dilemma of tragedy is not one of human error but one of horror: the complete helplessness of human beings to the powerful and aberrant forces of the supernatural world.

Since the Age of Enlightenment, modern thinkers have sought to use the processes of empirically grounded reason to understand the world around us. In particular, scholars have sought to interpret the culture of ancient Greece through the lens of a scientifically oriented rationalism. The desire to identify the origins of modern scientific and political reasoning with ancient Greek culture has been a project that artists, scientists, and philosophers alike have been wrestling with through the modern age. These questions have taken forms such as: “Were they Western?” “Were they Rational?” and even “Were they Modern?” These questions, and more like them, center around the need of Modern Western Intellectuals to ascertain, as David Wiles notes, how much the ancient Greeks were “like us.”<sup>28</sup> Early in the modern age, and well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it seemed that the most commonly arrived at answer to these questions was “yes,” the ancient Greeks were Western, Rational, and Modern; forbearers of the Modern Age, ahead of their time relative to their surroundings in both space and time. The ancient Greeks are framed as “the dawn of several Enlightenments with all their philosophical, ethical, and political problems.”<sup>29</sup> Put another way, ancient Greece is the “Cradle of Western Civilization.”

The influence of 19<sup>th</sup> century German scholarship on modern interpretations of Greek tragedy cannot be understated as it is here that the modern European quest to assert its values of democracy and science on an understanding of Greek culture became cemented. In his book *On Germans and Other Greeks*, Dennis J. Schmidt argues that there was a “curiously German effort

<sup>28</sup> Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Freddy Decreus, “Theodoros Terzopoulos Promethiade, or the revolutionary power of contemporary theatre,” in *Classical Papers 11: Proceedings of the International Symposium Drama and Democracy from Ancient Times till the Present Day* (March 2012), 182.

to rejuvenate and reappropriate” Greek tragedy as a modern ethical and political artform.<sup>30</sup> Schmidt argues that a reshaping of tragedy was central to the formulations of ethical philosophies of Kant, Hegel, Heidegger and other torchbearers of German philosophy. Simon Goldhill notes it is in the classrooms of literature departments in the German educational system that the study of ancient texts was transformed from an amateur pursuit to an academic profession in the form of classical philology.<sup>31</sup> The German school of classical philology began a tradition of producing numerous volumes of translations accompanied by extensive commentary, culminating in such influential works as Eduard Fraenkel’s 860 page translation of *Agamemnon* and the equally dense volume of Aristotle’s *Poetics* by Gerald F. Else.

Today’s scholarship of Greek tragedy is indebted to these works which focused on the semantics and technical problems of translation rather than cultural questions. The proliferation of publications on Greek tragedy was apparent as well in the field of archeology as seen in the work of pioneering German archeologist Heinrich Schliemann. A Homer enthusiast, Schliemann was responsible for the earliest excavations of the site of ancient Mycenae.<sup>32</sup> It is at the tombs of Mycenae that Schliemann discovered a golden death mask, famously and erroneously proclaiming it the “Mask of Agamemnon,” based on positivist assumptions through which he interpreted the *Iliad* of Homer as a factual document.<sup>33</sup> Schliemann so valued the association of modern Europe to ancient Greece that he destroyed many important medieval and modern

<sup>30</sup> Dennis J. Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001), 3.

<sup>31</sup> Simon Goldhill, “Modern Critical Approaches to Greek Tragedy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P.E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 326.

<sup>32</sup> The site of Mycenae in Greece is located in the Northeast region of the Peloponnese. The site of Mycenae contains the remains of a Bronze Age civilization whose peak dates between 1350-1200 BCE. The site was identified as “Mycenae” by Francesco Grimani in 1700 due to the presence of a large stone sculpture at the city’s entrance, the Lion Gate, which was described by the Greek geographer Pausanias (110-180 CE). Mycenae is a prominent location within the Greek mythological tradition typically associated with stories involving the Trojan War heroes Agamemnon and Menelaus.

<sup>33</sup> D.F. Easton, “Heinrich Schliemann: Hero or Fraud?” in *The Classical World* 91 no. 5, (May 1998): 341.

structures in Greece, such as the Frankish Tower at the Acropolis of Athens, in order to have better access to the more ancient objects.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps the most famous example of the scientific interpretation of tragedy during this time period is the theory of the Oedipus Complex developed by the father of psychoanalysis himself, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939 CE). Freud, like Schliemann, saw in Οιδίππου Τύραννος (*Oedipus Tyrannos – Oedipus the King*) an acting out of his own modern assumptions of history and science. Namely, Freud indicates that the meaning of the ancient play is not culturally specific, but rather, has a universal power as it acts out the psychic drives of the individual; the male's unconscious drive to compete with his father for the affection of his mother. The Greeks would have found Freud's concept of an unconscious mind incomprehensible. Freud's perception of Oedipus, like most scholars of his time, was conditioned by the realities of theatrical naturalism in his day, with productions that "exchanged Greek tragedy's ritual for domestic realism."<sup>35</sup> Freud was particularly taken with a French production of *Oedipus the King* starring Jean Mounet-Sully which highlighted the individual man of Oedipus while minimizing the role of the chorus. Though the sexual taboos of turn-of-the-century Europe may have been scandalized by the incestuous relationship depicted in the play by Sophocles, vase paintings from fifth-century Athens suggest that the Greeks themselves were far more interested in the triumph of Oedipus over the Sphinx (a female figure, further complicating Freud's assertion of the centrality of killing the father).<sup>36</sup> While psychoanalysis has grown significantly beyond Freud, the interpretation of *Oedipus the King* by modern theatre practitioners is colored with a post-

<sup>34</sup> Thanasis Giochallas, Toniam Kafetzaki, *Athens: Tracing the city through history and literature* (Athens: Estia, 2013), 138.

<sup>35</sup> Fiona Macintosh, "Tragedy in performance: nineteenth- and twentieth-century productions," in *CCGT*, ed. P.E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 289.

<sup>36</sup> Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 22

Freudian conceit. French feminist critique and psychoanalyst, Luce Irigaray, shares Freud's conception that Greek myths are rooted in unconscious psychic processes. Though she critiques Freud for his emphasis on the murder of the father, rather than the more primordial murder of the mother (Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus), she nonetheless states that "our imagery still functions in accordance with the schema established through Greek mythologies and tragedies."<sup>37</sup>

Like Schliemann and Freud, classical philologists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century often uncritically interpreted Greek texts through their own assumptions about the use of language grounded in an empirical positivism common to the modern era.<sup>38</sup> One such scholar who rose from the German philological tradition was Edith Hamilton (1867-1963 CE), notably the first woman to enroll at the University of Munich,<sup>39</sup> whose writings provide an example of the rationalizing of the ancient Greeks in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In her book *The Greek Way*, Hamilton describes a dichotomy between the "East" and the "West" defining each by its adherence to, or lack thereof, rationalist principles, and in doing so, takes a precarious stance toward those cultures she considers to be "Eastern." She argues that the Greeks were unique when compared to non-Greek civilizations which surrounded them both in space, that is, neighboring countries and empires, but also in time, when comparing Greek culture to the culture of the later Roman empire. Hamilton paints a picture of a culture that is uber-rational, based on its contributions to the fields of philosophy and science, and uber-Western, based on this rationality which led to such inventions as democracy. In Hamilton's dichotomy, all things democratic and scientific are Western, and all things authoritarian and religious are Eastern. In

<sup>37</sup> Luce Irigaray, "The bodily encounter with the mother," in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 36.

<sup>38</sup> Goldhill, "Modern Critical Approaches to Greek Tragedy," 327.

<sup>39</sup> Carol Kort, *A to Z of American Women Writers* (New York: Facts on File, 2007), 125.

this regard, she claims that the Romans were more “Eastern” than the Greeks before them based solely on their imperial form of government.<sup>40</sup> Hamilton says of Rome:

[Rome] pointed back to the old world and away to the East, and with emperors who were gods and fed a brutalized people full of horrors as their dearest form of amusement, the ancient and the Oriental state had a true revival.<sup>41</sup>

Hamilton states that the single factor which distinguishes and divides “West” from “East” is the “supremacy of mind in the affairs of men” which “came to birth in Greece and lived in Greece alone in the ancient world. The Greeks were the first intellectuals.”<sup>42</sup> Of Greek supernatural thought, or religion, Hamilton states that the Greeks mark “a great stage on the long road that leads up from savagery, from senseless and horrible rites.”<sup>43</sup> This upward leap, she notes, is due to the stamp which marked Greek religion from others:

Greek religion was developed not by priests nor by prophets nor by saints...it was developed by poets and artists and philosophers” who were guided by a great “rationalizing spirit.<sup>44</sup>

Referring to supernatural thought as a “terror-haunted world,” she states that the Greeks “dismissed it” and that the foremost redactor of the Greek religious tradition, Homer, was “quite rational.”<sup>45</sup>

When reading Hamilton’s work, her references to “Greece” might appear to the reader to be describing the characteristics of the Greek world in its entirety. However, her portrait of

<sup>40</sup> Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way* (Chicago: Time-Life, 1930), 10.

<sup>41</sup> Hamilton, *The Greek Way*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Hamilton, *The Greek Way*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Hamilton, *The Greek Way*, 265.

<sup>44</sup> Hamilton, *The Greek Way*, 267-68.

<sup>45</sup> Hamilton, *The Greek Way*, 271.

Greek society is effectively Athenocentric. She draws from a body of work which derives almost entirely from the city of ancient Athens, and the centrality of democracy to Greece's importance (as she perceives it) further highlights this Athenocentricity. In the study of ancient Greece, there is nothing inherently dubious about Athens taking center stage. Thanks to the patronage of later Roman emperors, there is much more data available from Athens in the form of archeological remains, visual arts, and written texts than from any other Greek city-state.<sup>46</sup> Because of this, most studies in ancient Greece will be more or less reliant on materials which derive from the present-day Greek capital. However, in giving such little consideration to the ancient Greek world at large, we circumvent the fact that Athens was the only powerful Greek city-state with a democratic form of government (one which nonetheless managed to strip rights away from women, working class men, and slaves through the process of democratization). Given the lack of democracy in most other areas of the Greek world, it would seem that according to Hamilton's own criterion, most of the Greek world was very much "Eastern." And yet, even in "rational" Athens, the religious sphere was dominated by a prominent class of priests, the messages of oracles, and the worship of saint-like "heroes." Much survives of these religious institutions in Athens to this day including seats at the Theatre of Dionysus dedicated to priests. The remains of the Athenian treasury at the site of Delphi illustrate Athens' patronage of the religious institution of the Pythia (the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi). Every element of Athenian culture was steeped in ritual practices directed toward the gods. Even basic conveniences such as purchasing meat at a marketplace could not be accomplished unless that meat had been properly sacrificed prior to its arrival at the market.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Paul Cartledge, *Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 64.

<sup>47</sup> James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 14.

It has been said that Hamilton wrote with the intention not of presenting a critical history of the ancient Greek world, but "representing the Greeks in particular as a prestigious source of cultural inspiration for American society."<sup>48</sup> Tara Wanda Merrigan, in her article "Robert Kennedy and the Ancient Greeks of Edith Hamilton," notes:

Rather than giving a detailed and nuanced account of Athens, Hamilton's books present a version of ancient Athens that appealed to mid-century Americans because it provided an image of a classical beacon of fair and democratic society that jibed with many Americans' conception of their own democracy in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>49</sup>

Recently, Hamilton's writings have rightly and fairly been criticized for their unapologetically and uncritical Western biases. However, Hamilton's work on Greek literature and mythology, more than most, displayed a sense of passion toward the people of Greece which is absent in many classical classrooms to this day. Hamilton herself was critical of the densely grammatical orientation of her studies, stating of her experience in the German classical classrooms, the lectures "lost sight of the beauty of literature by focusing on obscure grammatical points...Instead of the grandeur and beauty of Aeschylus and Sophocles, it seemed that the important thing was their use of the second aorist."<sup>50</sup> Hamilton's ability to craft a story from historical material and imbue it with the energy of an epic adventure brought the study of Greece from the academy and made it accessible to the average English-speaking reader. Upon the

<sup>48</sup> Judith P. Hallett, "Edith Hamilton" in *Indiana's 200: The People Who Shaped the Hoosier State*, eds., Linda C. Gugin and James E. St. Clair (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2015), 150.

<sup>49</sup> Tara Wanda Merrigan, "Robert Kennedy and the Ancient Greeks of Edith Hamilton," in *Critical Essays* (Boston: Emerson College, 2018), <http://blog.pshares.org/index.php/robert-f-kennedy-and-the-ancient-greeks-of-edith-hamilton/>

<sup>50</sup> Sandra L. Singer, *Adventures Abroad: North American Women at German-speaking Universities, 1868–1915* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 74–75.

death of President John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert was gifted a copy of *The Greek Way* by the newly widowed Jacqueline Kennedy. It was reported that Senator Robert Kennedy carried his marked and annotated copy of the book with him for much of the remainder of his life, and he would sometimes recite passages from it to audiences.<sup>51</sup> Hamilton's enthusiasm for Greek culture was felt not only in the United States, but in Greece itself. In 1957, at the age of 90, Hamilton was invited to travel to Greece to attend a production of her translation of *Prometheus Bound* at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus at the base of the Acropolis in Athens. In what she stated as the proudest moment of her life, Hamilton was awarded Greece's highest honor, the Golden Cross of the Order of Benefaction, and became an honorary citizen of Athens.

Hamilton's portrayal of ancient Greece as the pinnacle of rationality and Western values in the ancient world was greatly influenced by the German classrooms in which she was trained. And yet, in her enthusiasm for the people of Greece she stood apart from the trends of scholarship in her time. While academics were packaging their scientific and democratic values as "objective," Hamilton's subjectivity was present for the reader to see. Her passion, though lacking in nuance (and sometimes inaccurate), allowed new audiences to encounter the stories of Greek mythology in meaningful and personal ways. To Hamilton's endeavor of introducing the stories of Greece to audiences in an accessible manner reflective of their own experiences, this dissertation is indebted.

However, while having respect toward what Hamilton sought to accomplish with her work, one must still wrestle with the reality that her assessments of ancient Greece have been characterized as "sloppy and inaccurate."<sup>52</sup> The commercial popularity of her work had a

<sup>51</sup> David Brooks, "The Education of Robert Kennedy" in *The New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/26/opinion/26brooks.html>

<sup>52</sup> Merrigan, "Robert Kennedy and the Ancient Greeks of Edith Hamilton."

lasting impact on the way the history and literature of ancient Greece has been taught. As such, the characterization of ancient Greek culture as adhering strictly to rationalist principles was commonplace in history classrooms throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and her books are used in classrooms to this day. Recent books on Greek tragedy continue to argue that the writings from ancient Greece contain within them the origins of modern rationalism and that Oedipus is representative of the ideals of Enlightenment.<sup>53</sup>

However, as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century there has been a concurrent body of scholarship which has sought to counter this uber-rational narrative by highlighting the specific cultural context of ancient Greece. Fundamental to this scholarship is the famous work of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900 CE), *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, a controversial publication amongst German scholars of ancient Greece at the time.<sup>54</sup> Using the performance of tragedy as his entry point, Nietzsche accepts that there are elements of ancient Greek culture that can be characterized by an adherence to rational, or “Apolline,” principles. More importantly, however, and what Nietzsche saw as lost on modern intellectuals, are the elements of Greek culture that are characteristically irrational, that is, based on a belief in the power of things that cannot be experienced empirically. Nietzsche characterized these non-rational qualities variously as intoxication, non-visual, group oriented, populist, ecstatic, and the breaking from social mores, all summed up in the word “Dionysiac.” While Nietzsche’s dichotomy between the Apolline and the Dionysiac is itself problematic, presuming that the Greeks themselves believed in the stark separation of the qualities attributed to each category, it provided a springboard for

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Rocco, *Tragedy and Enlightenment: Athenian Political Thought and the Dilemmas of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 36.

<sup>54</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2005), 19.

future scholars and artists to investigate and bring into question the dictum that principles of structure and rationalism were the foundation of ancient Greek society.

Since the early modern period, the structures of Aristotelianism and its generalizations were “set down and perpetuated as universal and natural truth.”<sup>55</sup> The primary way Greek tragedy has been rationalized in the modern era is through this renewed interest in Aristotle, leading to the popularization of the “tragic error” as being the foundation of a tragic plot. In more recent times, the rationalist perspective along with the Aristotelian tradition which it champions has been brought into question from scholars of a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. Feminist critics have noted that the complex plot detailed in *Poetics*, which has been the West’s template of drama for centuries, is a reflection of the West’s dominant male culture. Some have even suggested that the very structure of Aristotle’s plot, with its rising action, crisis, and denouement, mirrors the male sexual experience of foreplay, arousal, and climax.<sup>56</sup> It is certainly the case that the works of Greek tragedy were written, performed, and viewed by an exclusively male audience within the city of Athens whose laws, even by ancient standards, were undoubtedly geared toward the subjugation of its female populace as women were categorically excluded from the public sphere of Athenian life.<sup>57</sup> Even within this gender-based system of segregation, Aristotle seems to go further by suggesting that in works of tragedy, it is inappropriate to portray a female character as clever or courageous. Given this cultural context, feminist scholars such as Sue-Ellen Case have called for a “new poetics,” one

<sup>55</sup> Maryanne Cline Horowitz, “Aristotle and Women,” in *The Journal of the History of Biology* 9, No. 2 (Autumn, 1976), 183.

<sup>56</sup> Alexis Greene, “Structure in Women’s Plays,” in *The Theatre Experience*, 12th ed., ed. Edwin Wilson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 166.

<sup>57</sup> The issue of whether female spectators were present in the audience at the Theatre of Dionysus is contentious. While there is a single surviving piece of evidence, a throne in the front row is dedicated to a priestess of Athena, it is generally accepted the any female presence at the Festival of Dionysus was at best marginal. The plays were produced for the sole consideration of a male audience.

which moves beyond the perceived gender-based confines of the complex plot structure and is geared toward “fragmentary rather than whole,” and “interrupted rather than complete”<sup>58</sup> narratives. By emphasizing Aristotle’s plot structure, and the role of women in it, Case argues that “a subtextual message was delivered about the nature of the female gender, its behavior, appearance and formal distance from the representation of the male.”<sup>59</sup>

While Case and others have called for new paradigms for constructing a dramatic plot, still others have noted that Aristotle himself, rather than reflecting the view of tragedy in its day, espouses many theories that seldom correlate to the culture and art upon which he is reflecting. For instance, influenced by Aristotle’s assertion that a man’s semen contained all the necessary materials to conceive a child, many have hypothesized that this belief was commonplace in the ancient world, though such a belief was only popularized in the philosophy schools of the medieval period.<sup>60</sup> In the ancient period, Aristotle seems unique in this assessment as the more popular theory in the classical world was that women themselves concocted sperm along with men and that an orgasm was necessary by both men and women to conceive a child.<sup>61</sup> With regard to tragedy, Aristotle’s assertion that the successful complex plot would do best not to feature clever or courageous women is at odds with the plethora of such characters in the works themselves, with many seeing tragedy as containing some of the most substantive female roles in the dramatic canon. Though the *Poetics* holds the complex plot of recognition and reversal as the optimal mode of storytelling, in very few cases does it seem that the violent outcome of events in tragedy are directly related to a moral error in judgment on the part of a protagonist.

<sup>58</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Methuen, 1988), 129.

<sup>59</sup> Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Horowitz, “Aristotle and Women,” 186.

<sup>61</sup> Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 81.

While Case precisely observes the modern West's fascination with and adherence to the Aristotelian plot structure, trends in scholarship continue to question the assumption that this plot structure can be effectively used toward interpreting Greek tragedy. Such scholarship problematizes the supposed continuity between ancient Greek tragedy and the theatre of the modern West by accentuating the radically different worldviews of each. When removing tragedy from the conceptual isolation of "theatre," and studying it within the historical context of the city-state of Athens, one finds that tragedy bears little resemblance to the modern theatre of Europe and the United States. David Wiles notes that to him, Greek tragedy seems more to resemble the theatrical practices of India or Japan in its attitudes toward the unity of body and mind, and its assumption that the universe is inhabited by gods, demigods, and other such supernatural forces.<sup>62</sup> We will see detailed in later chapters works by E.R. Dodds and Sarah Iles Johnston which demonstrate the anxiety present in ancient Greek culture with regard to the status of such supernatural forces in the affairs of mortals. Rush Rehm takes as the premise of his book *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World* that the value of Greek tragedy today is not its similarity to the modern West, but its radical difference.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, this dissertation seeks to explore the ways in which the worldview of tragedy diverges sharply from the social and scientific assumptions of the modern West.

The following chapters will explore, through the lens of Greek tragedy, the role that belief in the power of the supernatural world played in ancient Greek culture, and how tragedy in particular cannot be fully understood without a grasp of how its performance was directed by and for these unseen forces. It is my hope that highlighting the primacy of supernatural elements in the works of tragedy will contribute to the ever-growing body of criticism disavowing the belief

<sup>62</sup> Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Rush Rehm, *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy in the Modern World* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 20.

that ancient Greek society was radically rational. Concerns for the unseen world permeated Greek popular culture, and we find in the works of tragedy a belief in the control that the unseen has over the physical world. To this end, tragedy is radically non-rational, and non-modern. Its values and role in society, its entire *raison d'être*, is alien to the values of an empirically and globally based modern world that takes as orthodoxy the inherent realism of all things physical and measurable. It is the radical difference between ancient Greek culture and the modern world that presents such a challenge to modern theatre directors who approach productions of tragedy. However, while the secularized modern West dispatched with supernatural curiosities in the public sphere, tragedy finds its modern kindred in that realm to which those curiosities were banished but given new life: the realm of horror. By employing the aesthetic elements of that genre to which the modern world has consigned its fascination with the macabre, Greek tragedy, through a spectacle of horror centered on the existence and power of unseen, supernatural forces has the potential to challenge the social, ethical, and scientific assumptions of modern audiences.

## CHAPTER 2

### SPECTACLES OF HORROR

“Fear,” the doctor said, “is the relinquishment of logic, the willing relinquishing of reasonable patterns. We yield to it or we fight it, but we cannot meet it halfway.”

— Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959)

#### Elements of Spectacle

What does it mean to examine Greek tragedy as a spectacle of horror? To arrive at a definition, we must first understand the components of spectacle within which the tragic dramatists were working. After dissecting the tools of spectacle within the works of tragedy, the various visual components, we can then examine how the utilization of those tools culminates in an aesthetic experience which modern audiences experience today in works of horror.

Perhaps due to the influence of Aristotle, the spectacle of Greek tragedy has historically been overlooked in favor of discussions on plot structure, universal themes, and the technical issues of translation. Criticism of Aristotle’s six-elements has increasingly been directed toward the order of their importance. Aristotle ranks *opsis* (opsis – “spectacle”) as the least important element of theatre, noting that spectacle can be “emotionally potent but falls quite outside the art and is not integral to poetry.”<sup>64</sup> He suggests that live performance and actors are not necessary to bring about the effect of tragedy. As such, the *Poetics* shows little interest in the visual, production values, of a theatrical performance. The insignificance of spectacle in *Poetics* seems contrary to the very conception of performing arts in ancient Greek culture. The word “theatre” is derived from the Greek verb *theaomai* (“to watch”). The *theatron* (“theatre”) is a place for watching. The primacy of visual observation as a means of interaction is inextricably bound to the Greek notion of performance. Plato, for instance, accepts visuality as

<sup>64</sup> Arist. *Po.* 1450b15

the definitive quality of theatre. In the Πολιτεία (*Republic*), Plato argues that the performance of tragic poetry is no different in substance from a painting as both, being forms of physical imitation, are inferior to arts such as narrative poetry and music.<sup>65</sup> While theatre lovers might disagree with his conclusion, frequenters of theatre productions would scarcely deny that sight is an essential medium through which the play communicates to the audience. Far from being subservient to a complex plot, the visual elements of performing on a stage would seem to be the single most important dimension of production. That which the audience sees is foundational to the performance of tragedy.

However, the minuscule status of spectacle in the *Poetics* is not solely to blame for the absence of spectacle in the study of tragedy. Perhaps a more significant factor is the lack of material evidence concerning the staging practices of ancient Greece. Of what remains today in the stone amphitheater spaces of Greece, very little can be ascertained beyond general conclusions. Further complicating the matter is that when we discuss the theatre spaces of ancient Greece, we are discussing a timespan of approximately one-thousand years in which time these spaces were in continuous transformation from the Classical period through the much later renovations made during the Roman Imperial period. For instance, the remains of the Theatre of Dionysus (the stage in which all extant tragedies were originally produced at the base of the Acropolis of Athens) are the remains of a stage heavily modified through Roman patronage. The remaining stone seats along with the semi-circular performance floor were later renovations during the Hellenistic and Roman periods respectively. The history of renovations complicates the process of extrapolating the characteristics of the space during the Classical era. There is one

<sup>65</sup> Pl. *R.* 10.605a-b in Plato, *Republic, Volume II: Books 6-10*, ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones, William Preddy, Loeb Classical Library 276 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

fortunate characteristic of Greek theatre spaces which helps build a more complete picture: they were all the same. No matter the location, at the base of the Acropolis or at the top of a mountain in Delphi, the basic components of the Greek theatre space were fixed (though they may differ in scale). Practically, this means that if one theatre is missing a component, we can make an educated guess that it once had said component if the remains of it exist in other spaces.

Basic components of the Greek theatre space include:

- ὀρχήστρα (*orchestra* –“dancing floor”) –the fully-circular playing space.
- εἰσοδοί (*eisodoi* –“entrances”) –symmetrical arched entrances located on either side of the orchestra.
- σκηνή (*skene* –“covered place, tent”) –an upstage masking structure with a single, central entrance.
- θέατρον (*theatron* –“place for watching”) –raked audience seating which circled three-quarters of the orchestra.
- εκκύκλημα (*eccyclema*) –a wheeled platform rolled through the skene entrance
- μηχανή (*mechane* –“machine/crane”) –a wooden pulley device which allowed for the suspension of actors above the orchestra, used presumably in the staging of gods.

This list is not exhaustive, and though many of the extant theatre spaces feature the remains of many of these components, how and when these features were incorporated is the matter of much debate. The most well-preserved theatre space in Greece is the theatre at Epidaurus, located atop a mountain on the Eastern Peloponnese just thirty minutes from the resort town of Nafplion. The location of a popular summer theatre festival, Epidaurus is a rare example of a theatre that was not heavily renovated by the Romans; its orchestra remains

completely circular (whereas the Romans would reduce the orchestra space to a half-circle). The large, stone seating at Epidaurus, with a capacity of up to 14,000 people, remains largely restored to its original form. Like most remaining ancient theatres, the *skene* has all but disappeared except for an outline created by the placement of stones to allow visitors to see where the structure once stood. However, as well preserved as Epidaurus is, using it as a template for assessing the original Theatre of Dionysus is challenging due to the fact that Epidaurus was not completed until the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, some two-hundred years after the Festival of Dionysus started in Athens. Epidaurus is reflective of a later period in Greek history when such characteristics as stone seating and a permanent *skene* structure became commonplace. At the ancient theatre of Oiniades in Western Greece, one can date the construction of the space to the same 4<sup>th</sup> century period as Epidaurus given the presence of permanent stone seating carved directly into the mountain side (as opposed to placing individually carved stone blocks).<sup>66</sup> The Theatre of Dionysus was in use long before the theatre space became standardized. While it may have eventually adopted many of the later innovations such as a permanent *skene* and stone seating, the stage which premiered the tragedies we know today was an ever-evolving, fluid, space. The *skene* may very well have originated as a cloth tent and was likely a temporary wooden structure during the Classical period. Where the *skene* was located (inside or outside of the orchestra) and whether it provided an elevated stage for the actors are all matters of debate.<sup>67</sup>

I have chosen to give a brief overview of the physical space of the ancient Greek theatre for the purposes of context; the works of Greek tragedy were written with a specific space in mind. To conceive of their plays performed in any other type of space would have been nonsensical to the Greek dramatists. However, the purpose of this study is to explore how the

<sup>66</sup> Georgos N. Robola, *Oiniades: An Ancient Akarnanian State* (Mesolongi: Diexodos, 2016), 83.

<sup>67</sup> Margarete Bieber, *History of Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 74.

spectacle of tragedy might be conveyed to a modern audience through its aesthetic qualities of horror. Due to the lack of knowledge on how the ancient theatre space was utilized, coupled with the fact that most theatre today is not produced in such spaces, I have chosen to limit the discussion of archeological evidence in favor of evidence that is more immediately applicable to modern theatre practitioners. More than archeological remains, today's theatre practitioner has an indispensable means by which to access the aesthetic qualities of tragedy: the script.

Oliver Taplin details the significant relationship between script analysis and the dramatic use of space in his pivotal book *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: the dramatic use of exits and entrances in Greek tragedy*. In this book, Taplin explores how the conscious and controlled use of entrances and exits in the works of Aeschylus is the primary way in which the dramatist introduces dramatic tension onto the stage. The use of text analysis to decipher the visual qualities of the work, its spectacle, brings with it several challenges. First, the earliest and most reliable manuscripts contain almost no stage directions (with the possible exception of indicating when lines are delivered from offstage). Second, while we know that the plays were performed musically through song and dance, there is no information on how this music was performed. What did the music sound like? What did the dances look like? Though stage directions and indications of choreography are lacking, Taplin rightly notes that the scenes within a work of tragedy, in this case Aeschylus, are delineated by a character coming into or leaving the space. Taplin's work provides a scene-by-scene breakdown of all of Aeschylus's plays, attempting to recover some sense of the basic staging within the piece, but also to piece together an image of the organization of stage space. Important to Taplin's work is his emphasis on the "practical aspect of staging."<sup>68</sup> While seeking to understand the staging tools at the disposal of Aeschylus,

<sup>68</sup> Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: the dramatic use of exits and entrances in Greek tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 19.

Taplin also provides a blueprint for how the modern director may approach staging such a script. He argues that all significant staging action is either directly or indirectly indicated in the words of the play.<sup>69</sup> For instance, characters often announce the entrance of other characters:

You there, Ajax, I call you a second time! Why have you so little  
regard for your ally?<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, characters state when they exit:

Farewell: this is my last look at you and my last greeting!  
Come, you my young age-mates of this land, bid me farewell and  
speed me from the land!<sup>71</sup>

Wiles notes that such text not only indicates movement to and from the stage but covers it.<sup>72</sup> The entrances located on either side of the orchestra are long, taking the actor a great deal of time to traverse the distance. Therefore, the audience would see the character prior to their arrival in the scene proper and the speaking of lines. The effect of drawing focus to these moments of prolonged entering and exiting is the generation of suspense. The audience sees the character entering long before the other characters do, alerting the spectator that a shift in the action is about to occur. The spectacle of entering and exiting, and the suspense it generates, is a tool utilized by many horror films. One might think of a scene in which the masked killer is walking behind an unsuspecting victim, creeping closer and closer, with the audience knowing full well something violent is to come. In the film *Halloween* (1978), filmmaker John Carpenter makes a thrilling use of the long entrance in a scene in which the protagonist, Laurie Strode, is

<sup>69</sup> Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, 30.

<sup>70</sup> Soph. *Aj.* 90 in Sophocles, *Ajax. Electra. Oedipus Tyrannus*, ed. and trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Classical Library 20 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>71</sup> Eur. *Hipp.* 1097-99 in Euripides, *Children of Heracles. Hippolytus. Andromache. Hecabe*, ed. and trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library 484 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>72</sup> Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 117.

trapped in the house with the masked killer Michael Myers. She leans against the doorway of a darkened closet. Very slowly, the audience can perceive the outline of the mask worn by the killer. Myers becomes increasingly apparent as we watch him fade into the scene from behind Laurie. At the point of Myers becoming mostly visible, he attacks Laurie, at which point she comes to realize what the audience already knew: the character has entered.

For the modern production of tragedy, which is rarely staged in a traditional Greek amphitheater, the dramatic use of entrances and exits provides an aesthetic tool that should not be undervalued. Characters in tragedy do not meander onto stage. When an actor enters the space, it *means* something. Each entrance and exit is a revelation which heightens the stakes of the action. Works of the horror genre engage in the spectacle of entering and exiting through the appearance or disappearance of bodies to dramatic effect. Like the scene from *Halloween*, the suspense of horror can be generated solely through the sudden appearance to the audience of a person, monster, or violent image; the production of emotion through the conscious use of coming and going, appearing and disappearing. However, an understanding of the suspense generated through entering and exiting is far from the only aesthetic tool at the disposal of the modern director of tragedy. Given the limits of our knowledge of the stage space in the development of spectacle, we can look to another crucial element of spectacle in tragedy, an element which more than others is employed toward the aesthetics of horror: the body.

When one glances at the text of tragedy, with speeches as long as they are dense, one can be forgiven for sympathizing with the Aristotelean assertion that the power of tragedy comes through the act of reading of it. To an actor trained in the modern theatre techniques of realism, the heavy text leaves little room for physical action and the language of tragedy seems exceedingly formal as it often engages more with philosophical and mythological themes than

intimate conversation or psychologically grounded given circumstances. Inevitably, modern performances rely less on movement and fall back to boisterous recitation of text. However, tragedy is deeply physical. As we have seen with the work of Taplin, the works of tragedy contain within them an acute awareness of the dramatic use of space. Further, in the large playing space of the Greek amphitheater, there is little to shield the actor's body from complete exposure to the audience. Props and scenery, by modern standards, are all but non-existent. The actor's body, becoming a place of heightened symbolic gesture, is granted an exceeding power of presence unencumbered by the technology of modern theatre. The actor's heightened awareness of their body's exposure is exasperated by another fixed characteristic of ancient Greek theatre spaces: they were outdoors. Plays which dealt with the limits of humans to control the world around them were performed in spaces built into the natural landscape of the environment. Performed in such amphitheatres, with seating capacities in the thousands and surrounded by the ambiance of the wilderness, the act of speaking becomes an exhaustive physical act. Director Tadashi Suzuki (discussed in a later chapter) has been influential in exploring this dimension of Greek theatre, having constructed his own amphitheater, nestled between the mountains and a lake in the rural community of Toga in Japan. In my own theatre work, I have experienced the physical exhaustion firsthand, having performed on several occasions at the Ancient Theatre of Oiniades in Western Greece. I remember the first time I spoke lines in the theatre (successfully or not) and the feeling of having the words so quickly distance themselves from your body in the space as the openness provides little to reflect the sound back to the actor. In the ancient theatre space of Oiniades, with its deteriorating seating carved directly into the mountain, one can viscerally feel the words leaving the body as if someone is gripping your air and forcefully pulling it from your lungs. The necessity of being heard in such large amphitheatres, and the

physical labor required to do so, reveals that the performance of a densely textual piece is an athletic feat. While a human body in exhaustion may only seem slightly spectacular to the modern audience (given the stage technologies at our disposal), Amy Hughes argues that the “body in extremity is a defining feature of spectacle.”<sup>73</sup> In ancient times, this extremity would have been heightened by the weight of long flowing costumes of multiple layers as well as πρόσωπα (prosopa –faces/masks), which may have acted as an obstacle in the performer’s ability to project.<sup>74</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte comes to a similar conclusion as she discusses Greek tragedy’s concern with the corporeal. The characters of tragedy often find themselves in extreme states of bodily dysfunction, which the actor must represent to an audience in what Fisher-Lichte refers to as the “semiotic body.” Simultaneously, the “phenomenological body” of the actor is under duress due to the difficulty of sustaining and controlling the body.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, in tragedy, the symbolic body of the character and physical body of the actor, while not identical, are parallel. Below, we will find that this parallel experience of corporeal duress in both actor and character is a key feature of horror which, like tragedy, forces its audience to engage in the enactment of violence on the human body.

### **Defining “Horror”**

With a consideration of corporality at its foundation, this dissertation considers what it means for tragedy to be a spectacle of “horror.” What is “horror,” and how does the horror genre, considering the vast amount of literature already available on Greek tragedy, provide a

<sup>73</sup> Amy Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform: Theater and Activism in Nineteenth Century American* (Ann Arbor: UP, 2012), 32.

<sup>74</sup> David Wiles, *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy: From Ancient Festival to Modern Experimentation* (Cambridge: UP, 2007), 153.

<sup>75</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, 19.

perspective that has not already been thoroughly expounded upon in classical scholarship? The spectacle of tragedy assuredly entails an approach which considers the physical labor of the human body. However, we also find within the tragic narratives themselves interrogations into the fragility of the human body. An immediately discernible shared characteristic between tragedy and horror is the overt representation of violence found in both art forms. One might picture Oedipus in the final moments of *Oedipus the King*, walking onto the stage bloodied and blinded, having just punctured both of his eyes. Greek tragedy was intimately concerned with meditating on the incomprehensible suffering of all living beings through the enactment of terrible violence on the human form. But along with the shared characteristic of violence, a consideration of Greek tragedy as horror must explore the purpose of such violence within the context of the plays.

When speaking of horror as a genre, we are speaking broadly to a perceived collection of work under which umbrella is a large body of art from various mediums. For James B. Twitchell, “horror” is not, strictly speaking, a genre at all, but rather, “a collection of motifs in a usually predictable sequence.”<sup>76</sup> These motifs, which we call “horror,” may take the form of film, theatre, literature, or visual art. Therefore, if we were to define “horror,” whether as genre or motif, we cannot do so by a particular artistic medium. An association of tragedy to horror is a cross-disciplinary endeavor. While I have noted that a clearly discernible similarity between tragedy and horror is the presentation of violence, we know that works of other genres also present violence. Action movies, science-fiction, film noir, war films, westerns, and thrillers are among those other forms of fiction which display violence to graphic effect. And while violence is a common thread of tragedy and horror, violence is by no means a necessary component. Even

<sup>76</sup> Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures*, 8.

within a single medium, the means by which one defines a genre is to some extent arbitrary. Pieces of art rarely fall cleanly into these conceptual categories of genre, often straddling multiple genres at once. The Ridley Scott film *Alien* (1978), for instance, may be horror considering the frightening and violent confrontation with the eponymous creature, but it may also fall within the realm of science-fiction as the story takes place in a future when corporations have begun sending commercial vessels to space. Genres weave between and within one another. The horror genre has been categorized across a range of subgenres including: Gothic, stalkers, slashers, body horror, torture porn, etc.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, my aim here is not to argue for a definitive definition of the genre of horror. Rather, by examining characteristics which may be proscribed to the genre, its motifs which are generally present in works of horror, we may unlock methods by which modern theatre practitioners might approach producing the ancient plays of tragedy. While one shared characteristic of the two artforms is violence, to distinguish this violence from other forms of art (action, thriller, etc.), we must ask: what are the mechanisms within the story which generate the violent outcome? It is in this question that we might discover a peculiarity of horror and tragedy.

Previously, I sought to define tragedy by what it is not: rational. The notion that the tragic plot can be understood as a logical sequence of events propelled by a mistaken moral choice made by a protagonist is to this day a commonplace rationalization of tragedy. Whether it be Greek tragedy, Shakespeare, or *Death of a Salesman*, the events of tragedy are understood as the outcome of a character's own psychology made manifest in choices the audience sees them act out. The supernatural elements of these works are at best treated as supplementary, but usually as outdated but colorful imagery. However, the tragic outcomes of Greek tragedy are less guided

<sup>77</sup> Brigid Cherry, *Horror* (London: Routledge, 2009), 52.

by a logical sequence of events grounded in a moral error, but like horror, by the powers of supernatural forces against which humans are powerless. To say that tragedy is not rational is to say that the stories of tragedy are driven by these unseen powers, usually with little to no explanation for the rationale of those forces. The lack of rationale given to the supernatural force is a common feature of horror. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) as well as in subsequent film and stage adaptations, very little is said about why the character is choosing to torment humans. The reader accepts Dracula as a force of violence which makes plans against humans without needing a motive. Further, the cruelty he enacts on them is not the result of any moral blunder on behalf of the human characters. Dracula is an unexplainable otherworldly force that, whether understood or not, the human characters must deal with. This is not to say horror fiction has *never* attributed motivations to its villainous characters. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), it is clear that the Creature is motivated in part by revenge against his maker, Dr. Frankenstein, for failing to create a wife for him. To say that questions of rationality are inconsequential in horror is not to say that such questions are entirely absent, but rather are secondary to the spectacle and drama of human reaction in the face of inconceivable suffering. Similarly, questions regarding the moral choices of characters are also not entirely absent in tragedy. However, such questions typically involve a negotiation of multiple choices at the character's disposal in the face of suffering rather than the investigation of a single moral choice. The act of choice making is hardly so reductive in tragedy. As such, when held up to most of the Greek tragedies still in existence, we find that Aristotle's theory of the "tragic error" is incompatible. Take as an example the story of Orestes.

The powerlessness of humans to act in a world of active supernatural forces is epitomized in the Greek tragedy by Aeschylus, *Χοηφόροι* (*Choephoroi* – *Libation Bearers*). Prior to the

events of the play, the mother of Orestes, Clytemnestra, murdered his father Agamemnon out of revenge for Agamemnon's own murder of their child Iphigenia. Throughout the play, his resolve is unshakeable. Orestes understands that he must be an avenger of his dead father. And yet, at the moment of action, knife in hand, with his mother standing heartbeats away from him, Orestes is confronted with doubt. He is struck with a sudden indecisiveness as to whether or not he should murder his mother. Orestes asks, "τι δράσω" or "what should I do?"<sup>78</sup> His silent companion Pylades, as if speaking the voice of god, forcefully reminds Orestes of his obligation to the god Apollo to commit the deed. His resolve restored, Orestes succeeds in his task, but not without consequence. As punishment for his matricidal deed, Orestes is tormented by the earthly deities of revenge –the Erinyes, or, Furies. Those who adhere to the model of the complex plot which is rooted in a tragic error would no doubt claim that the torment of Orestes at the hands of the Furies is the outcome of his moral choice, a mistaken choice, to murder his mother. And yet the concept of a single error in judgment is nowhere to be found in this narrative as Orestes does not willingly choose to murder his mother. Orestes recounts the order given to him by the Oracle of Apollo:

The mighty oracle of Loxias<sup>79</sup> will assuredly not betray me. It bade me brave this peril, it cried forth many things, and it spoke openly of catastrophes that will bring dire chill into my hot heart, if I do not pursue those guilty of my father's death 'in the same manner'—meaning, kill them in revenge. He said that I myself would pay for it with my own dear life, enduring many

<sup>78</sup> Aesch. *Cho.* 899 in Aeschylus, *Oresteia: Agamemnon. Libation-Bearers. Eumenides*, ed. and trans. Alan H. Sommerstein, Loeb Classical Library 146 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>79</sup> An epithet of Apollo derived from from λέγειν –"to say" indicating Apollo is the god who speaks prophecy.

disagreeable sufferings, enfeebled by penalties that went beyond  
loss of property.<sup>80</sup>

Here we find that Orestes is ordered, by threat of death, to perform the murder of his mother by the god Apollo. In so doing, he understands that he will nonetheless be tormented by the supernatural power of the Furies. Orestes is saddled between two violent and angry forces. Therefore, his choice is not one of acting correctly or incorrectly. Rather, as Rehm notes, the choice of Orestes sits at a confluence of competing forces: traditional expectations of revenge, one's duty to family, the expectations of patriarchy, the responsibility to one's household, and the pressures of divine sanction.<sup>81</sup>

The question "what should I do" is existential in nature. The earliest of existential writers, Søren Kierkegaard, himself noted that the dilemma of action in the midst of such opposing forces is a key distinction between ancient and modern tragedy. Critical of the Aristotelean tradition of dramatic analysis prevalent in the modern age, Kierkegaard argued that "it is surely a misunderstanding of the tragic that our age strives to have the whole tragic destiny become transubstantiated in individuality and subjectivity."<sup>82</sup> While modern interpretations of tragedy see a hero who "stands and falls entirely on his own deeds," the "true peculiarity" of Greek tragedy is that "the hero's downfall is therefore not the outcome simply of his own action, it is also a suffering."<sup>83</sup> In Kierkegaard's view, "a suffering" is characterized by the experience of pain coupled with "tragic guilt," an intermediate expression between activity and passivity. The protagonist of Greek tragedy is neither entirely without guilt nor entirely culpable but remains in a state of ambiguity. Orestes did murder his mother. He performed the actions. But

<sup>80</sup> Aesch. *Cho.* 269-275.

<sup>81</sup> Rehm, *Radical Theatre*, 65.

<sup>82</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/ Or: A Fragment of Life*, trans. Alastair Hanney (London: Penguin, 1992), 143.

<sup>83</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/ Or*, 143.

Orestes was confronted with two impossible choices. He knows that murdering his mother will lead to his suffering at the hands of the Furies, and yet he also knows that turning away will surely bring the punishment of Apollo. This dilemma is at the heart of Greek tragedy; being trapped by supernatural forces and knowing that no matter what choice is made, suffering will follow. This is the tragic question: how does one act in a world that will inevitably act against them? This tragic question, a question which better characterizes Greek tragedy than the model of a tragic error, is also at the heart of horror, a genre the stories of which pit humans against forces that are unexplainable, out of their control, and compels them to survive. The realization of one's powerlessness to maintain agency within a cosmos dominated by supernatural entities is at the heart of stories from both tragedy and horror in what Stuart Hanscomb refers to as "narratives of awakening."<sup>84</sup> Hanscomb argues that the existentialism which characterizes such statements as "what should I do?" is mirrored in horror fictions. What is awakened is not the realization of a moral error made on the part of the protagonist. Both tragedy and horror see a protagonist who "overcomes their initial rejection of threatening and repelling circumstances" and eventually replaces that rejection with an acceptance of those circumstances which requires a "shift in their sense of identity in the direction of the monstrous."<sup>85</sup>

Scholarship of Greek tragedy is sometimes criticized for the attempt at establishing "grand theories," universal models of myth and ritual by which to examine the works.<sup>86</sup> The "tragic question" provides not a categorical model for interpretation, but a general theme by which one can examine individual plays that, I argue, is more broadly applicable to the extant works of tragedy than the complex plot structure of the Aristotelian tradition. This theme, the

<sup>84</sup> Stuart Hanscomb, "Existentialism and Art-Horror," in *Sartre Studies International* 16, no. 1 (2010): 1.

<sup>85</sup> Hanscomb, "Existentialism and Art-Horror," 2.

<sup>86</sup> Goldhill, "Modern Critical Approaches to Greek Tragedy," 333.

powerlessness of human agents in the face of supernatural forces, is the guiding argument for why the horror genre provides a lens through which to invigorate modern performances of tragedy with an eye toward its inherent supernatural tendencies. While supernatural elements were being stripped from the West's understanding of itself and the world (as was seen with Greek tragedy), those elements did not disappear altogether. Horror became the realm through which artists rechanneled their explorations into supernatural reality. While Greek tragedy was deprived of its supernatural qualities through a process of rationalization, the writers of horror explored the ways in which humans are powerless against the supernatural forces surrounding us. Horror is irrational.

Horror brings into question “our ability to know the world by means of a socially given system of interpretation.”<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the stories of tragedy, rather than being morally instructive, portray a protagonist who awakens to find that the very system which dictates those morals was fruitless in preventing their suffering. The tragic protagonist is akin to the Final Girl who was told that her suburban home was safe, but who is forcefully compelled to acknowledge the permeability of that structured existence when the masked killer decimates her life.<sup>88</sup> Like the Final Girl, suffering is thrust upon the tragic protagonist by forces outside of their control and they are obliged to act. The anxiety of asserting agency in such a reality is crippling. It is for this reason that Maria H. Loh notes that it is no coincidence that horror has historically seen revivals of popularity during periods of war.<sup>89</sup> Greek tragedy is too an art form that became popular in ancient Athens over the course of a century dominated by war, first against the

<sup>87</sup> Susan Stewart, “The Epistemology of the Horror Story,” in *Journal of American Folklore* 95, no. 375 (1982): 48.

<sup>88</sup> The “Final Girl,” a term coined by Carol J. Clover, is the archetypal female character present in slasher films who is depicted as morally upstanding and survives the assault of the killer.

<sup>89</sup> Maria, H. Loh, “Introduction: Early Modern Horror,” in *Oxford Art Journal* 34, No. 3, Early Modern Horror (2011): 328.

Persians to the East, and then against the Spartan led coalition in the Peloponnese of Greece.

Tragedy at its crux, like horror, centers on a confrontation with helplessness.<sup>90</sup> This confrontation is allegorized through the encounter with a monster.

Noël Carroll in his seminal book *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*, argues that the “monster” is perhaps the most defining feature of the genre of horror. Carroll charts the history of horror and its development of the “monster” in its earliest forms during the period of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, Carroll notes, was a period in which rationality was “elevated as a major faculty.” Religion and other such references to supernatural realities were “a special object of distrust because it valued faith and revelation over reason.”<sup>91</sup> With the empirically grounded sciences given new esteem since the work of Isaac Newton, the Enlightenment thinkers were inclined to view all aspects of culture and society as susceptible to scientific analysis. The supernatural was regarded as a “figment of the imagination.”<sup>92</sup> While I have discussed how Greek tragedy fell vulnerable to this process of rationalization, Carroll is interested in how horror developed as a contrast to this cultural rationalization as if an outlet to continue society’s exploration of the supernatural. The horror novel might be seen as a sphere in which supernatural beliefs, for the purposes of fiction, were given a form of expression.<sup>93</sup> A direct correlation between the origins of horror to the Enlightenment is difficult to confirm, as one cannot assess whether individual horror writers were consciously responding to Enlightenment writers or not. However, it is certainly the case that the advent of the horror novel coincided with this period. On a conceptual level, Carroll suggests that horror stories are

<sup>90</sup> David Cronenberg quoted in Cynthia A. Freeland, *The Naked and the Undead. Evil and the Appeal of Horror* (Westview: Boulder, 2000), 1.

<sup>91</sup> Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge 1990), 55.

<sup>92</sup> Carroll quoting Crane Brinton, “Enlightenment,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 520.

<sup>93</sup> Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 56.

grounded in a violation of nature. However, to violate nature entails a conception of nature in which to violate, which the thinkers of the Enlightenment provided. The monster is the symbol through which the horror fiction depicts this violation.

In *The Philosophy of Horror*, Carroll provides a succinct definition of the genre of horror and addresses the aesthetic devices used in horror fiction which generate an emotion he denotes as “art-horror,” or, “some nonordinary physical state of agitation” caused by the thought of a monster.<sup>94</sup> Twitchell similarly uses the term “artificial horror” to connote this same emotional state, a state consciously (“artificially”) evoked by the artist.<sup>95</sup> The definition of “art-horror” as a physical reaction is consistent with the origins of the word “horror” which derives from the Latin *horrere* – “to stand on end.” Literally, this word describes the way the hair of the nape stands on end during moments of shivering. It is from this word that zoologists coined the term “horripilation” to describe the condition many people associate with being cold or frightened: goosebumps. Twitchell describes how in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “horror” was a term used by physicians to designate the sensation of sudden tremors one gets following a high fever; i.e. the chills. <sup>96</sup> In Greek, both modern and ancient, the closest equivalent to the word “horror” is φρίκη (*friky* – “shuddering”). In the modern sense, it may also suggest “being struck.”

We see then that “art-horror” connotes not strictly an emotional state, but a physiological state in which the body physically reacts to emotional stimuli in response to the given qualities of the fictional horror monster. While Twitchell accepts that such monsters existed in ancient literature as they do today, he suggests that the difference between the “old” horror of antiquity and modern horror is that the stories of old were a means to demonstrate a hero’s victory over the

<sup>94</sup> Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 35.

<sup>95</sup> Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures*, 5.

<sup>96</sup> Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures*, 10-11.

monsters. Monsters were defeated through acts of heroism in which cultural champions were shown to be triumphant. If the monsters of ancient narratives did scare people, it was only so that they may appreciate their hero even more.<sup>97</sup> However, the works of Greek tragedy seldom present such triumphant endings. Contrary to Twitchell's characterization of "old" horror, tragedy presents heroes who are utterly destroyed by violent monsters beyond their control. As such, the monsters of tragedy seem more in line with Twitchell's characterization of "modern" horror than the victorious narratives he ascribes to the "old." My aim here is to explore the qualities which Carroll attributes to the horror monster, those that generate the effect of "art-horror," and then demonstrate how these qualities are manifest in the supernatural entities which permeate the works of Greek tragedy.

Firstly, a persistent quality of the horror monster is its status as something supernatural, or beyond ordinary experience. Here, "supernatural" may be applied more broadly to reference any such entities that are perceived to have traits which are not ordinary in the lives of the characters. It is anything which violates a society's understanding of the norms of nature. "Supernatural" then may refer to a ghost, or a deity, but may also refer to a giant fly, a talking cat, a person with inhuman capability, or any other form of physically mutated creature. For instance, the character of Heracles is considered human for most purposes, yet he is described as being unnaturally large as well as strong. He repeatedly transcends the limits of the ordinary human body. Similarly, Helen of Troy is described as having a beauty so powerful that no man can resist their desire for her. The supernatural quality of her beauty is further highlighted by the fact that of all the Greek texts which refer to Helen (of which there are many), not one describes her physical appearance. French critic Ronald Barthes said that you cannot describe her beauty,

<sup>97</sup> Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures*, 25.

but only through similes and tautologies.<sup>98</sup> Helen's beauty is often described as burning and flame-like.<sup>99</sup> Her hair may be described as perfect, but we are never told what color it is. Helen is indescribable. In both cases, Heracles and Helen, we have seemingly human characters associated with extraordinary traits, thereby placing them within the category of supernatural.

It is the supernatural qualities of the horror monster which define it against such similar stories as fantasy. Carroll argues that what appears to demarcate the monster of a horror story from similar creatures in the realm of fantasy is the perception of the monster as "abnormal" on the part of the humans.<sup>100</sup> The human characters of the story exemplify for the audience the way we are expected to react toward the monster. For instance, in the film *Star Wars* (1977) we understand Chewbacca and other non-human creatures as ordinary within that world given the way they interact with other characters. Yet, in the world of *The Wolfman* (1941), a similar creature is treated as abhorrent by human characters who live in a world otherwise similar to our own. It is a distinguishing feature of the horror genre that the audience's experience parallels that of the human characters. Both Aristotle and Plato attributed to tragedy the same parallel emotional experience of audience and character. It is for this reason that Aristotle suggests the tragic protagonist must be "like" the audience.<sup>101</sup> Plato notes that because the audience's experience parallels the character's experience, tragedy is psychologically harmful.<sup>102</sup> One can imagine other genres in which the opposite is true. In comedy, the character may find their predicament saddening while the audience laughs. In the action film, the audience may be having fun while the character is fighting for their life. Yet, tragedy and horror are demarcated by a

<sup>98</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Hill and Wang, 1975), 33.

<sup>99</sup> Bettany Hughes, *Helen of Troy* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 151.

<sup>100</sup> Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 16.

<sup>101</sup> Arist. *Po.* 1454a23

<sup>102</sup> Pl. *R.* 10.605d-606d.

paralleled emotional response between audience and character toward an abnormal reality.

Simply put, in the stories of horror, the monster is an extraordinary creature in an ordinary world, whereas in fantasy fiction, the monster is an ordinary creature in an extraordinary world.<sup>103</sup>

Secondly, this supernatural creature must not only be abnormal relative to the established norms of the fictional world, it must also be perceived as “threatening.”<sup>104</sup> This quality is perhaps the most obvious with regard to horror. The human character must perceive the monster, the supernatural creature, as an immediate threat to their life. While commonly portrayed as a physical threat, the monster may also be socially, morally, or psychologically dangerous.<sup>105</sup> The various supernatural forces of Greek tragedy are plainly dangerous. In the aforementioned example, the tragic dilemma of Orestes in his decision to murder his mother Clytemnestra is indicated by the threat made against his life by the god Apollo on the one hand, and the perceived danger awaiting him by the Furies on the other. The assumption of someone’s life being in danger is a prominent feature of tragedy. However, an entity’s status as supernatural does not necessarily entail it is dangerous. The gods of Greek tragedy may just as well help the human characters if they so choose. Though Apollo initially threatened the life of Orestes, we find in the *Εὐμενίδες* (*Eumenides*) of Aeschylus that Apollo, grateful to Orestes for obeying his command of matricide, intercedes on behalf of Orestes to protect him from the rage of the Furies. Similarly, we find modern stories of supernatural creatures such as *Casper*, *The Friendly Ghost*, in which the eponymous ghost does not present a threat to the lives of the human characters.

<sup>103</sup> Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 16.

<sup>104</sup> Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 27.

<sup>105</sup> Examples may include *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) or Richard Matheson’s novel *I am Legend* (1954), both of which evoke danger through the establishment of a new social order rather than by directly harming the physical body. Indeed, the premise of the *Body Snatchers* is that the physical body remains completely intact and unharmed.

Therefore, the horror narrative calls for the monstrous entity to be *both* supernatural *and* dangerous.

Thirdly, while the monster of horror is both supernatural and dangerous, it must also be “impure,” that which “involves a conflict between two or more standing cultural categories.”<sup>106</sup> The monsters of horror transgress the categories of natural science, often existing in a “liminal space,”<sup>107</sup> simultaneously inhabiting seemingly contradictory forms: living/dead (ghosts, zombies, Frankenstein’s creature), human/animal (Wolfman, centaurs, Gill-man, Audrey II<sup>108</sup>), flesh/machine (The Terminator, *Ex Machina*), male/female (*Psycho*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), me/ not me (Jekyll and Hyde, possession). The list is not exhaustive. Importantly for Carroll, the human character’s response to the impure nature of the monster is most commonly depicted as “disgust.”<sup>109</sup> Horror fiction is filled with depictions and descriptions of its monsters in viscerally repulsive terms. In Wes Craven’s 1984 film *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, it is not enough that the killer Freddy Krueger is supernatural (appearing in dreams) and dangerous. But Krueger also has a horribly burned, decaying face. In *The Exorcist* (1973), the girl Regan’s possession at the hands of the demon Pazuzu is shown not only through a personality change and violent threats made by the demon, but through bodily corrosion in the form of urinating profusely, excessively vomiting green bile, lacerated discolored skin, and extreme contortions of her body. Physical repulsion is a key feature of Bram Stoker’s depiction of Dracula, as the character Jonathan Harker narrates:

<sup>106</sup> Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 43.

<sup>107</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (New York: Routledge, 1969), 94.

<sup>108</sup> The plant-like antagonist of the 1960 B-movie horror/comedy *The Little Shop of Horrors*, later popularized in the eponymous musical by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman.

<sup>109</sup> Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 19.

As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which do what I could, I could not conceal.<sup>110</sup>

Whether it be the rotting corpses of *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the amorphous antagonist of *The Thing* (1982), or the sinewy black creatures of *Stranger Things* (2016-present), horror evokes the bleeding, pus excreting, rancorous, slimy, oozy, gelatinous, corroding, contorting, melting, and all nausea inducing possible deformations of a natural body. We find this viscerally disgusting imagery as a recurring aesthetic device in Greek tragedy as well. After discovering the hanging corpse of his wife Jocasta, now revealed as his mother, Oedipus strikes his eyes with the golden brooches which pinned her clothes and we are told:

He lifted up his eyes and not once but many times struck them; the bleeding eyeballs soaked his cheeks, and did not cease to drip sending forth sluggish drops of gore, but all at once a dark shower of blood came down like hail.<sup>111</sup>

For the modern audience, the revelation of an incestuous relationship between mother and son, Jocasta and Oedipus, only exacerbates the disgusting nature of the characters as this relationship straddles the contradictory categories of mother-son/wife-husband. An equally repulsive end befalls Pentheus in the Βάκχαι (*Bacchae*) of Euripides, when he is ripped apart by his own mother and her female followers, all possessed by the god Dionysus. A messenger relates the dreadful event, narrating the screams of Pentheus:

<sup>110</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2003), 25.

<sup>111</sup> Soph. *OT*, 1270-1280.

It's me, mother, Pentheus, the son you bore in Echion's house!  
Have pity on me, mother! I have sinned, but do not kill your son!"  
But her mouth dripped foam and her eyes rolled: she was not in her  
right mind but possessed by the Bacchic god.  
...Taking his right hand in her grip and planting her foot against  
the poor man's flank, she tore out his arm at the shoulder,  
...Ino was destroying his other side, tearing his flesh,  
...One woman was carrying an arm, another a foot still in its boot,  
his flanks were stripped bare, the flesh torn from them, and every  
woman, hands red with blood, hurled Pentheus' flesh about like a  
ball.<sup>112</sup>

Images of disgust, mutilated, dismembered, and reeking bodies are all but customary in Greek tragedy. In the extant works of tragedy, we are variably given descriptions of "unholy stench," "spewing gall sac," "dripping thigh-bones," "bloodied breasts," "milky brains," "skin dripping like tree sap," "shredded heads," and more.<sup>113</sup>

These graphic descriptions of violence along with the depiction of brutalized bodies (which in ancient times would have been revealed through the central door of the *skene*) are the outcomes of the dangerous and impure/disgusting nature of the supernatural forces at play in tragedy. The revelation of this danger and impurity is made known to the characters, and audience, in what Hughes characterizes as the "spectacular instant."<sup>114</sup> In this moment, the play reaches the height of its spectacle allowing for a "unique efficacy because of its stimulation of

<sup>112</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 1118-1135 in Euripides, *Bacchae. Iphigenia at Aulis. Rhesus*, ed. and trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library 495 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>113</sup> See Soph. *Ant.* 1000-1090, *El.* 90, *Tr.* 780-785; Eur. *Med.* 1130-1230, *Hipp.* 1230-1240.

<sup>114</sup> Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform*, 40.

the senses.” As the intense culmination of the forces confronting the protagonist since the story’s onset, the spectacular instant is the “epicenter of meaning.”<sup>115</sup> In the horror film, this instant takes the form of the characters final confrontation with the monster; everything has been leading to this point. Similarly, in Greek tragedy we find the tragic protagonist confronting the forces which have sought to dominate them and have finally succeeded in doing so. Hughes, who is chronicling the performances of melodrama in 19<sup>th</sup> century America, rightly notes that spectacle is inherently visual. Modern stage technology as well as the special effects capabilities of cinema allow for a deeper and more visceral exploration of visuality. Though the visual components of spectacle in Greek tragedy have been discussed, the horror of tragedy is particular due to its utilization of *invisibility* to generate suspense.

To understand the “spectacular instant” within tragedy, one must give what Andrew Sofer describes as a “spectral reading” of the performance, or, the ways in which meaning and suspense are generated through the absence of an important element within the play.<sup>116</sup> While the outcome of violent events is often revealed to the audience through the presentation of a brutalized body, the actions of brutalization along with the supernatural forces who ordained the actions are not shown on stage. They are invisible. Though a prominent interpretation of this lack of violence on stage is that the Greeks disliked such imagery, it is quite possible that scenes of death and incomprehensible action, such as the graphic violence which modern technology allows to be portrayed in film, may not have been staged given the concern of verisimilitude, that is, these scenes could not be believably staged for a Greek audience, so were communicated through extremely detail oriented messengers.<sup>117</sup> As Sofer notes with regard to Oedipus:

<sup>115</sup> Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform*, 44,

<sup>116</sup> Andrew Sofer, *Dark Matter: Invisibility in Drama Theater, and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>117</sup> R. Sri Pathmanathan, “Death in Greek Tragedy,” *Greece & Rome* 12, no. 1 (April 1965): 7.

“Sophocles artfully blinds us to the blinding because, paradoxically, only through narrative can the event happen to us on a visceral level that transcends cheap spectacle.”<sup>118</sup> Famed director Alfred Hitchcock, when commenting on his depiction of violence in his film *Psycho* (1960), elaborated on the aesthetic power of invisibility in horror, stating:

I have always felt that you should do the minimum on screen to get the maximum audience effect. I believe the audience should work. Sometimes it is necessary to go into some element of violence, but I only do it if I have a strong reason. For example, in *Psycho* there was this very violent impressionistic murder in a bathroom, you see, and it was montaged by little pieces of film giving the impression of a knife stabbing a victim, and so on and so forth.... Once I had given the audience that one—shall we say, sample?—I allowed them to imagine the violence, you see. I did not have to show it.<sup>119</sup>

Hitchcock, for creative purposes, preferred to show in his films the least amount of violence required, as he believed the power of the audience’s imagination is far more horrific than anything he could depict on screen. Conversely, to show images of death and violence requires a compelling reason. Similarly, we find that in the extant works of Greek tragedy, there are several cases in which death is portrayed on stage, in the Ἄλκηστις (*Alcestis*) of Euripides and possibly in the Αἴας (*Ajax*) of Sophocles. The existence of onstage death in these tragic works diminishes the position that there was a categorical prohibition against presenting death on stage

<sup>118</sup> Sofer, *Dark Matter*, 120.

<sup>119</sup> Alfred Hitchcock, *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 146.

in the ancient world. Even in the small fraction of tragedies which have survived, it appears that the dramatists experimented with such a staging. *Oedipus the King*, in which the character appears self-blinded, among other plays, illustrates that there likely was no prohibition against the representation of violent images. Therefore, we must consider the non-visual staged violence, as well as non-staged supernatural figures, as an aesthetic choice rather than a moral one.

To summarize, a story is characterized as “horror” when the emotion generated by the narrative is “art-horror,” a state of physical agitation generated by the parallel emotional experience of the audience to the character with regard to a monster. The monster of horror is supernatural, an entity beyond the confines of ordinary human experience. This supernatural entity must be perceived as both dangerous and impure by the human characters of the narrative, and thereby the audience. “Art-horror” is then a “compound” emotional state as it arises through the multifaceted and simultaneous experience of something as supernatural, dangerous, and impure.<sup>120</sup> Because of the centrality of the monster in the formation of emotion, the monster is the “formal object of emotion”<sup>121</sup> in the horror narrative. The definition of horror as something pertaining to an entity that is extraordinary and both dangerous and impure parallels the role that supernatural forces play in Greek tragedy. Therefore, the remaining chapters of this dissertation will be devoted to examining the forms in which the horror monster appears in the various narratives of tragedy: the Dead, the Divine, and the Other.

<sup>120</sup> Noël Carroll, “Enjoying Horror Fictions: A Reply to Gaut,” in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, No. 1, (1995): 67.

<sup>121</sup> Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 28.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE DEAD

#### Tragedy and Death

The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, in observing those Athenian citizens participating in the Festival of Dionysus, stated: “But Hades is the same as Dionysus, in whose honor they rave and keep the feast of the vat.”<sup>122</sup> In the *Βάτραχοι* (*Batrachoi – Frogs*) of Aristophanes, the comedian shows us an ignorant Dionysus claiming himself an expert guide to the Underworld. Though the comedian presents Dionysus as shitting himself in fear at Hades’ door, Aristophanes nonetheless is commenting on a conceptual connection between the realms of tragedy and the death. On the surface, the association between the words “tragedy” and “death” is an association obvious to most English speaking people. Even by modern colloquial definitions, the word “tragedy” is often used to denote an unfortunate event in which there is a loss of life. People might hear a newscaster refer to a traffic accident as a “tragedy.” Unexpected violent events such as mass-shootings and terror attacks are typically framed as “tragic.” In most circumstances, the word “tragedy” is evoked when there is a loss of life that was not foreseen. The death of a grandparent, who lived a long life and died peacefully is not a “tragedy.” Conversely, the loss of a child is. And so, there need be little convincing that there is an association between tragedy and death. But, is there a relationship between this modern notion of tragedy, as unexpected death, to the formalized and culturally specific artform of

<sup>122</sup> Heraclitus CXXVII in Hippocrates, Heraclitus, *Nature of Man. Regimen in Health. Humours. Aphorisms. Regimen 1-3. Dreams. Heraclitus: On the Universe*, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 150 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931).

tragedy in ancient Greece? It may be that there is a similarity if tragedy is thought of as *preventable* death. Given that Greek tragedy has come down to us within the frame of Aristotle's plot structure which grounds the event of the play in an avoidable "tragic error," one might say that the events of such plots were preventable, had the tragic hero not made the error. Similarly, when a loss of life in today's world is given the quality of "tragic," it is given this quality because of the belief that the death was preventable had certain choices been made. For instance, in the above examples, all of these events referred to as "tragic" are framed as avoidable or grounded in the morally incorrect choices made by others. It seems then that both Greek tragedy and the word "tragedy" have been handed down to the modern age as ways of discussing *preventable* death.

However, to better examine the relationship between tragedy and death, it may be worth examining the ways in which the word "tragedy" functions in the Greek language from which it derives. A commonly discussed origin of the word "tragedy" has very little to do with death. Τραγωδία (*tragoudia* – "tragedy") literally translated means "goat-song." The formal name of this artform as "goat-song" may be rooted in the earlier years of the competitions between tragic choruses (διθύραμβος – *dithyramb*) in which the prize for the winner was said to have been a sacrificial goat.<sup>123</sup> Given that these competitions were held in honor of the god Dionysus, there may also be a correlation of the name "goat-song" with the goat-like servants of Dionysus, the Satyrs. Satyrs, half-goat half-human, were regularly associated with the god through depictions on pottery as well as in the Satyr play, a play (from which we derive the genre of *satire*) which mocked mythological subject matter and was performed at the end of the dramatist's presentation of three tragedies at the Festival of Dionysus in Athens. Whether there is a direct

<sup>123</sup> Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 34.

lineage between the mythological figure of the Satyr and the use of the term “goat-song” is impossible to say, but it is clear that there was an association between the god, the artform, and goats.

While the use of the word “tragedy” in the modern West has since distanced itself from goats, so too has “goat” dropped from the word’s meaning in Modern Greek, though in a radically divergent way. While “tragedy” in the modern West almost exclusively means “death,” the Modern Greek word τραγούδι (*tragóúdi*) means “song.” Further, the verb “to sing” is τραγουδώ (*tragoudó*). Therefore, in modern Greek usage, there is not only an association between “tragedy” and “song,” but the literal definition of “tragedy” is “song.” And so, there is a divergence. On the one hand, the West has come to define “tragedy” in relationship to the themes and content of the ancient artform, whereas in modern Greece the word is defined as the specific medium in which the artform was performed, song. Perhaps these two seemingly contrary uses of the word can help guide our understanding of the role of death in the ancient Greek plays.

In his book *Singing the Dead: A Model of Epic Evolution*, Reyes Bertolín Cebrián traces the artform of tragedy, indeed the entire Greek epic tradition, to the performance of song. Though he presents stark differences in ideology between the epic and the tragedy,<sup>124</sup> he argues that both are the outgrowth of a particular style of singing: the funeral lament.<sup>125</sup> Bertolín Cebrián links the origin of tragedy to the “hero-cult,” rites of lamentation and praise performed in honor of an ancestor (ἥρωες –hero), legendary or otherwise.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, Adrian Poole notes

<sup>124</sup> The differences between epic and tragedy were a central theme in the *Poetics* of Aristotle. While Aristotle pays close attention to the technical aspects of poetry such as language, melody, and rhythm, Cebrián’s distinction rests in the societal shifts which occurred in ancient Greece between the time the popular epics were composed and when the tragedies were composed in a decidedly democratic Athens.

<sup>125</sup> Reyes Bertolín Cebrián, *Singing the Dead: A Model for Epic Evolution* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 78.

<sup>126</sup> Bertolín Cebrián, *Singing the Dead*, 80.

that the origins of tragedy are bound up in the mourning rites of heroes or dead kings. Tragedy then is a “kind of inquest,”<sup>127</sup> an inquiry of song not only into the significance of the dead person, but as a means of “anticipating death”<sup>128</sup> in the present through the dead person’s story. Prior to the democratic foundations set forth in the reforms of Athenian statesman Solon (approximately 594 BCE), who sought to curb the prominence of aristocratic families in favor of the city-state, the lament was the most outward display of grief throughout the funerary process. In the pre-democratic period of Athens, the aristocratic families of the city conducted their funerals as a public affair. The funeral provided an outward and boisterous means of honoring the dead ancestors of a family, ensuring they find peace in their new reality. The funeral was performed publicly as a means of drawing attention and respect to the specific aristocratic family who experienced the loss. As such, the funeral functioned both as a way of honoring the dead and re-establishing the importance of the aristocratic family to the society at large. This *πρόθεσις* (*prothesis* –“a placing in public”) gave “the bereaved an opportunity to indulge in shameless self-pity by bemoaning the effects upon their own lives occasioned by the loss of the beloved.”<sup>129</sup> This practice was not so much an expression of authentic feeling as an orchestrated ritual, with hired professional lamenters, which gave families the opportunity to flaunt their wealth and esteem throughout the city as well as publicly call for vengeance in cases where the loved one was killed in battle. Families would loudly and with pomp parade through the city streets. Primarily performed by the women of the family, these laments would involve the

<sup>127</sup> Adrian Poole, *Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 41.

<sup>128</sup> Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 219.

<sup>129</sup> Bonnie Honig, “Antigone's Laments, Creon's Grief: Mourning, Membership, and the Politics of Exception,” in *Political Theory* 37, no. 1 (Feb. 2009): 10.

beating of breasts, tearing at clothes, shaving the head, even cutting into one's own skin, what Plutarch later dismissed as the "disorderly and unbridled quality" of women's grief."<sup>130</sup>

Memorialization is at the forefront of tragedy, which presents to its audience instances of the rite of memorialization going awry. The *Ηλέκτρα* (*Electra*) of Sophocles provides a clear dramatic example of the practice of funerary memorialization and demonstrates the rite when taken to its most violent extreme. When Electra first appears to the audience, she is chanting a lament directed at her dead father Agamemnon. The audience is given to believe that she has been performing these lamentations for some time as the question of her physical condition is raised on numerous occasions. Electra references beating herself in lament to such a degree that her breasts are bloodied.<sup>131</sup> When he first encounters Electra, her brother Orestes is taken aback by her appearance when he enters the scene to meet his sister after his years-long absence. He describes the body of his sister as "hateful to behold," and "miserable."<sup>132</sup> Given what Electra herself has told the audience of her self-mutilation, there is no reason to suspect that the share of her physical condition is due to anything other than her excessive and public lamentations. These lamentations were a key "funerary gesture" in the death rites of ancient Greece, and as such, these rites dominate the plays of tragedy.<sup>133</sup>

By the classical age, democratic Athens had put an end to the outward funerary displays of families, divesting women of their role in public life. However, the plays of Greek tragedy provide numerous dramatizations of practices associated with these funerals. Tragedy provided an institutionalized format, sanctioned by the new democratic state, which could explore the

<sup>130</sup> Plut. *Sol.* 21.5 in Plutarch, *Lives, Volume I: Theseus and Romulus. Lycurgus and Numa. Solon and Publicola*, trans., Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 46 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).

<sup>131</sup> Soph. *El.* 86-94.

<sup>132</sup> Soph. *El.* 1180-1190.

<sup>133</sup> Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, 219.

tensions between the new forms of state authorized private funerary practices and the necessity of ancestor worship still active in the public consciousness. Though the evolution of tragedy into the form we are familiar with paralleled the rise of democratic Athens, the content of tragedy invokes the permeability of the boundary between living and dead showing us that even by the Classical Age the dead were viewed as a force which could affect the world. Much attention was paid to pleasing the newly dead through proper funerary rites in the form of burial etiquette and gift giving lest the dead become angry and torment the living. The funerary lamentations performed in tragedy are reflective of a broader cultural belief in the ancient world of the power of the dead to exact punishment on the living if they are not pleased. In this way, the plays of Greek tragedy present a tension between public democratic values of state and the inherited belief in the absolute need to attend to the ancestors in private. The stories of Greek tragedy present horrific tales of the consequences of not attending to the needs of the dead. Simply put, Greek “tragedy” is not so much concerned with death as it is with the Dead.

### **Defining “the Dead”**

Dead people crowd the surviving works of tragedy. In the earliest surviving tragedy of record, Πέρσαι (the *Persians*) of Aeschylus, Queen Atossa asks the chorus for their aid in summoning her dead husband Darius. Appearing before his living wife, Darius gives a unique insight from beyond the grave into the future demise of his son Xerxes. In the Εκάβη (*Hecabe*) of Euripides, we find the ghost of Polydorus appearing before the audience and delivering the prologue of the play, referencing his deceased nature:

I have come from the hiding place of the dead and the gates of  
darkness, where Hades dwells apart from the other gods.<sup>134</sup>

Polydorus has recently been killed by the man who was entrusted with his safe-keeping, Polymestor, the king of Thrace. Polydorus, though visible for the audience, is characteristic of the majority of dead characters in Greek tragedy as he is not visible to the other characters. We learn that Polydorus has haunted the dreams of his mother Hecabe, longing for his death to be avenged, but he never interacts with Hecabe onstage. However, Polydorus, in his prologue, brings word of yet another ghost whose presence portends a threat even greater than himself:

All the Achaeans, anchoring their ships, sit idle upon the shore of  
this land of Thrace. For Peleus' son Achilles appeared above his  
tomb and stopped the entire Greek fleet as they were steering their  
ships toward home, asking to receive my sister Polyxena as a  
special sacrifice for his tomb and a prize of honor. And get it he  
will: he will not be left without a gift by his friends. For fate is  
leading my sister to her death on this day.<sup>135</sup>

He speaks of the great hero of the Trojan War, Achilles, who exerts his ghostly power over the Greek fleet to prevent them from sailing home. Polydorus, a material ghost (that is, one staged by an actor) introduces an invisible ghost (that is, one we cannot see, but who is spoken of and spoken to by others). Of the two, it seems to be the unseen Achilles in his need to be appeased in death that is the more powerful given his ability to affect the sailing conditions of the fleet. While the dead often bear down on their loved ones, friends and family, Achilles provides an example of the ways in which the power of the displeased dead was thought to affect

<sup>134</sup> Eur. *Hec.* 1-5.

<sup>135</sup> Eu. *Hec.* 35-45.

also an entire community. Given the urgency of needing to sail, much of the play's action is focused on meeting Achilles' demands. Although his body may be physically underground, buried somewhere on the battlefields of Troy, his soul remains, tied to the earth by demands made by his body. The ψυχή (*psyche* –“soul”) and σῶμα (*soma* –“body”) were not thought of as antagonistic entities, and the distinction between ghost and corpse was blurred.<sup>136</sup> Both words, *psyche* and *soma*, could be used to refer to oneself as “I.”<sup>137</sup> It is for this reason that the soul was spoken of in corporal terms. Achilles, a ghost, is still tormented by the need of his body. These demands are that he be reunited sexually with his concubine and prize of war, Hecabe's daughter Polyxena. Achilles' power over the living will linger until he is able to consummate his love for Polyxena, a consummation only made possible by properly sacrificing her in Achilles' name.

While the dead were thought to affect the world of the living, such as the case of Achilles, the stories we have suggest it was unclear exactly how the dead went about these interactions. In the canon of tragedies that have survived, the dead are rarely represented on stage, Polydorus being one of the exceptions. In such cases when they are staged, the dead seem to lack the power to cause any harm to the living themselves. In the *Persians*, when Atossa asks the chorus to summon the ghost of Darius, her purpose is to seek his advice rather than call him to action.<sup>138</sup> Polydorus, the staged body, seems to have much less power than the invisible Achilles. This might be because the power of the dead to act, given the mystery which surrounds them, could not very well be displayed on stage in an embodied form because by definition the dead are disembodied; invisible. The audience sees Polydorus, but he doesn't actually do anything. Conversely, we are reminded throughout the play of just how much the invisible

<sup>136</sup> E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 138.

<sup>137</sup> See Sophocles' *OT* 64, 643.

<sup>138</sup> Aesch. *Pers.* 598-842 in Aeschylus, *Persians. Seven against Thebes. Suppliants. Prometheus Bound*, ed. and trans. Alan H. Sommerstein, Loeb Classical Library 145 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Achilles is doing. As previously stated, scenes of death and incomprehensible action, such as the kind of action performed by dead people, may not have been staged given the concern of verisimilitude,”<sup>139</sup> that is, these scenes could not be believably staged for a Greek audience and were, therefore, communicated through messengers. Given this, one can see why the dramatist, when actually staging a dead person, utilizes them more as tools for exposition rather affecting the actions of other characters. The actions of the dead are mysterious and invisible, and therefore, unstageable. The power of the dead, and their ability to affect the world, seems inextricably bound to their invisibility, at once enigmatic and dangerous. This invisibility allows the audience to visualize horror far beyond what a stage picture can deliver, evidenced by the recurring narrative trope of the messenger.

While tragedy is brimming with appeals to or dispersing of the invisible dead, little is said about how a modern theatre producer is to approach a scene that is directed toward the dead. For instance, plays such as the *Ajax* of Sophocles are rarely performed today as the urgency of the need to bury a body in a specific location is not easily rendered to a modern audience.<sup>140</sup> If it is true that tragedy, with its concern for the proximity of the dead, is a reflection of broader ancient Greek cultural values, then the performance of tragic work presents a challenge for a modern Western audience who is not embedded in a cultural atmosphere which views the dead as an active force in the world. The heightened stakes which arise from the centrality of invisible dead figures in the plays of tragedy is a difficult proposition for modern audiences. This is due in part to the fact that, as Ronald Grimes suggests, the public worldview in Western Europe and North America “does not include disgruntled ghosts” and therefore “mainstream funeral rites assume little need to protect the bereaved from the recently deceased.” There are mixed feelings

<sup>139</sup> Pathmanathan, “Death in Greek Tragedy,” 7.

<sup>140</sup> Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 40.

in the modern West about the finality of death and its role in society. On the one hand people are urged to “get on with life,” while on the other, considerable time and money is spent on embalming, as if to deny death’s finality. While the rhetoric of funerary oratory may refer to the dead as living in an afterlife, the funerary gesture of sending souls elsewhere is de-emphasized, and on the occasion that the dead are commemorated, “we seldom regard them as ancestors whose advice and presence should be actively courted.”<sup>141</sup> To this day, communities in rural Greece assume a belief in the persistence of the dead in the affairs of the living, either as “venerated ancestors or as vaguely troubling shades.”<sup>142</sup> This can be seen in elderly women who from the day they are widowed wear black for the remainder of their lives in order to honor their spouse and keep their presence alive. In the modern West, the conception of the dead as a powerful force which can act upon the living has been expunged from the domain of funerary rites and now inhabits the realms of superstition and ghost stories. For this reason, the idea of the ghost story becomes an ideal model for discussing the ways in which dead figures affect the action of these tragic plays. When framed as a type of haunting, the power of dead people in the canon of tragedy is perhaps the least challenging aspect of the supernatural nature of these plays as modern audiences are accustomed to stories of horror centered on ghosts.

While a correlation between the dead figures of tragedy and ghost stories of horror may be recognizable on a conceptual basis, the challenge of representing these dead figures on stage does not have an easy solution, especially when their presence is assumed but they are never seen. The ghost stories of film have at their disposal various technologies to communicate the presence of the invisible figure. In the Oren Peli film *Paranormal Activity* (2007), the main characters use a recording device to film themselves sleeping as a means of investigating the

<sup>141</sup> Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, 220-221.

<sup>142</sup> Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, 280.

strange occurrences in their home. In one scene, the camera is pointing directly at the sleeping couple with their bedroom door in frame next to the bed. For a prolonged period of time, the camera remains at this still angle with no movement taking place. Suddenly and subtly, the door moves ever so slightly. There is no doubt in the audience's mind that this meager and unimportant shift in the door is the action of the ghost. The stakes are immediately heightened.

The lack of set pieces coupled with a minimal use of silence makes such a feat difficult to accomplish in the performance of tragedy. Suspense generated by the ghosts of tragedy is grounded in the actor's performance. Whereas a film such as *Paranormal Activity* can make us afraid of the ghost while the characters are motionless in bed, the works of tragedy achieve this effect through the character acknowledging the ghost's presence and even interacting with it. Graham Ley in his book *Acting Greek Tragedy* attempts to address the challenge of presenting Greek tragedy to a modern audience by formulating any one play as a series of "transactions" between characters.<sup>143</sup> Noting that private conversations never occur in Greek tragedy due to the presence of the chorus, Ley suggests that in performing tragedy, one must understand the ways characters seek to elicit help from or quell the desires of other characters. Though Ley does not reference the presence of dead characters, the word "transaction" might best describe the role of the dead and the reaction of characters to them. On several occasions, Plato, tragedy's great critic, observed the fear that most people commonly held with regard to the dead.<sup>144</sup> For instance, observing the transactional relationship between the living and the dead, Plato observes:

...the souls of the dead have a certain power of caring for human affairs after death....the guardians shall fear...the souls of the dead, whose natural instinct it is to care especially for their own

<sup>143</sup> Graham Ley, *Acting Greek Tragedy* (Exeter: Exeter UP, 2014), 52.

<sup>144</sup> For another example, see Pl. *Phd.* 81b-d.

offspring, and to be kindly disposed to those who respect them and hostile to those who disrespect them.<sup>145</sup>

The dead always appear within a context of giving-and-taking with living characters. As such, the invisible dead entities are never represented as passive. When the dead are mentioned, it is typically within the framework of needing the dead person's assistance or attempting to calm the dead person. The dead are "invariably associated with judgment and retributive justice."<sup>146</sup> As such, the dead are a driving force of the onstage action and a dominant motivating factor for the characters. Approaching these plays necessarily requires attending to this invisible dimension of the action, what Andrew Sofer refers to as the "dark matter" of performance. This "dark matter comprises whatever is materially unrepresented onstage but is un-ignorable."<sup>147</sup> The presence of the dead, though unseen, is a "constitutive element" in any performance of Greek tragedy. The Greeks certainly believed this in a literal way, and it is reflected in the tragic canon as the actions of characters often center on appeasing these immaterial entities. Though modern audiences may hold different beliefs concerning the afterlife, by exploring the presence of the dead in scenes of Greek tragedy and framing these scenes within the context of ancient Greek assumptions about the dead, the modern producer of tragedy can come to understand how the invisible specters of the play act as a source of horror for both the characters and audience.

In order to explore the role of the dead in ancient Greek tragedy, it is good to attempt a working definition of "the dead." Dead people, their motivations, wants, and needs, can have very different qualities depending on the manner of their death. In her book *Restless Dead: Encounter Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*, Sarah Iles Johnston outlines

<sup>145</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 927a-b in Plato, *Laws*, Volume II: Books 7-12, trans. R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library 192 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

<sup>146</sup> Poole, *Tragedy*, 34.

<sup>147</sup> Sofer, *Dark Matter*, 4.

three categories of particularly dangerous dead people that help to elucidate the transactional nature of living-dead relationships in tragedy.<sup>148</sup>

First, there are the *ἀταφοί* (*ataphoi*)<sup>149</sup>, dead people who are angry because they have been deprived of proper funeral rites and are trapped between the worlds of living and the truly dead. As Johnston notes, the restless nature of these dangerous dead personages seems obvious: they no longer inhabit the living world but were not properly placed in the world of the dead, so they simply do not have a place to rest. Given this, the remedy seems obvious as well: give the dead a proper burial.<sup>150</sup> Of course, the drama of tragedy shows us that such obvious remedies are not always simple, and rarely achieved without a cost. In ancient Greece, the dead who have not been given a proper burial seem compelled to bring harm upon the living. In the *Ιλιάς* (*Iliad*) of Homer, a dying Hector uses the threat of his power once dead to persuade Achilles to return his body to the Trojans.<sup>151</sup> As noted of the play *Hecabe*, Achilles himself provides a strong example of the category of *ataphoi*. Though he was given a burial that placed him underground (the proper location for a dead body), the lack of a proper sacrifice meant that his body was not given the attention it needed to be permanently laid to rest. This oversight is the direct cause of Achilles' decision to haunt the Greek fleet.

An example of the *ataphoi* that modern audiences may be more familiar with is the character of Polyneices in the *Antigone* of Sophocles. In this work, Antigone's motivation throughout the play is to give Polyneices, her brother, a proper burial. Of course, this becomes difficult as her uncle, the newly empowered king Creon, has declared that due to the treachery of

<sup>148</sup> Sara Iles Johnston, *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 127.

<sup>149</sup> The word *ἀταφος*, the singular form of *ἀταφοί*, means "unburied." *Τάφος* means "a burial" or "a tomb." The prefix *α-* infers a "lack" or "absence."

<sup>150</sup> Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 128.

<sup>151</sup> Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 10.

Polyneices against the state, is it illegal to give Polyneices a proper burial. While *Antigone* is one of the most frequently performed tragedies of today, the importance of the question of burial has the potential to be lost on modern audiences. The decision to bury or not to bury Polyneices is not merely one of respect or lack thereof. Within the context of a belief in the necessity of burying the dead, Creon's actions indicate that he is not symbolically exerting power by not burying a dead person, but he quite literally intends his law as a means to punish the dead Polyneices. Creon knows well that the lack of burial will prevent the dead Polyneices from finding rest, a proposition Antigone finds abhorrent. Given the similar nature of Polyneices to Achilles, both restless due to the lack of a proper burial, one must presume that the soul of Polyneices is an active participant in the action of the play *Antigone*.

The second category of the dead are the *ἀωροί* (*aoroi*),<sup>152</sup> ghosts who died prematurely, before their time. These ghosts have been robbed of lives that could have been. Typically, these dead figures are associated with children as well as women of reproductive age. As he was murdered while supposedly under the safe keeping of another, Polydorus may have not been given a proper burial. However, given his age, being the youngest son of Hecabe and her husband Priam, Polydorus could potentially fall into the category of *aoroi*. In the *Trojan Women* of Euripides, we witness the violent reasoning for the need to send Polydorus away.

Andromache, daughter-in-law of Hecabe and wife of Hector, appears with her young son Astyanax, the last remaining male of Troy. Knowing the Greek proclamation to eliminate the male population of Troy, the appearance of the young child immediately portends doom. This doom is realized when, upon discovering the existence of the child, the Greek soldiers violently abduct the boy and throw his small body from the highest point of Troy, a terror filled sequence

<sup>152</sup> From the root *ᾠρος*, "time," which when coupled with the prefix *α-* translates as "untimely."

which takes place offstage and is described to the audience. Astyanax, as a young child, would be an example of an *άωρος* (*aoros* singular of *aoroi*) given the untimely nature of his death. However, these dead are not victims alone. Characteristic of these dead souls is their need to exact revenge on the living by targeting their own kind: women and young children. Johnston states, “it is scarcely an exaggeration....to say that any woman of reproductive age who died was expected to become a sort of ghost who attacked children and other women during pregnancy and labor.”<sup>153</sup>

The third category of restless dead identified by Johnston are the *βίαιοι θάνατοι* (*biaiothanatoi*);<sup>154</sup> those who have died violently and dishonorably. The remaining portion of this chapter will be allotted to discussing this particularly dangerous category of dead people who form the foundation of the horror that is central to the story of Orestes in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, and in other versions of the tale by Sophocles and Euripides.

### **Haunted Houses in the *Oresteia***

Given the popularity of the tale of Orestes among the works of ancient literature, the details of the story can shift depending on the source. However, the basic outline of the story is relatively consistent between the sources of Homeric epic and the three tragedians. With such an abundance of dramatizations, the tale of Orestes gives to the modern reader the rare opportunity to observe this story from multiple viewpoints. Each ancient author by whom we are given a form of this story interprets the meaning of the story in radically different ways, sometimes re-imagining basic details of the story, sometimes inventing new details altogether. For this reason,

<sup>153</sup> Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 165.

<sup>154</sup> Literal translation “violently dead” from *βίαιος* “violent” and *θάνατος* “death.”

when discussing accounts of the events surrounding the life of Orestes, it would serve well to remember that rather than referring to one specific work, we are examining a *tradition*. By tradition, I mean to say that the story in its various forms contains a “program of actions” which were generally accepted and retold by most of the ancient sources.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, in giving a synopsis of this story, I am rather giving a synopsis of the generally accepted function of each character within the broader tradition.

Aeschylus, two years before his death, produced at the Festival of Dionysus in 458 BCE what today is the only tragic trilogy still in existence. Those three plays were later given the collective title, the *Oresteia*. The three plays within this trilogy form a single connected plot that unfolds in chronological order with continuity in images, subject-matter, and characters recurring throughout. While the three plays of this trilogy will be the focal point by which we will explore the prominent role of ghosts within tragedy, I will also use the term *Oresteia* in a broader sense to mean the *story of Orestes*; not as a proper title to the work of Aeschylus, but to the broader tradition as a whole which includes works of Sophocles and Euripides with the same subject matter. I will state when I am referring to a specific play within that tradition, and further, if I am speaking exclusively about the work of Aeschylus.

As with many mythological tales of the Greek canon, the violent episodes surrounding the House of Atreus<sup>156</sup> are set to the backdrop of the Trojan War. Prior to the start of the war, Agamemnon, leader of the combined Greek fleet, faces a possible mutiny amongst his soldiers. The Greek soldiers are frustrated over poor sailing conditions at the port of Aulis which prevent

<sup>155</sup> Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 10.

<sup>156</sup> The title given to the totality of a family lineage beginning with Tantalus, continuing through his son Pelops, father of Atreus, through Atreus' son Agamemnon, and Agamemnon's son Orestes. A key theme of the stories involving the House of Atreus is the transference of a family curse from one generation to the next, which until Orestes, always ends in the brutal demise of that generation's patriarch and often those around them. Therefore, “House of Atreus” refers not only to the family tree proper, but also the manifestation of family curse.

them from the launch. When word spreads as to the culprit of the frenzied waters, the soldiers' incensement grows. That culprit is revealed to be the goddess Artemis. Agamemnon learns that the only way to appease this supernatural force is to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. Knowing the dishonor that it will bring to the Greeks if they back down from the impending war and knowing the anger that such dishonor will cause his soldiers, Agamemnon appeases the god. Though the details of this story, such as the reason for the goddess' anger, differ between sources, the outcome always remains the same. Agamemnon murders his daughter.<sup>157</sup>

Having accomplished this task of appeasement, Agamemnon sets forth with the Greek fleet to wage a war in Troy for the next ten years. However, the sacrifice of Iphigenia sets in motion a series of events from which Agamemnon will not recover. His wife, Clytemnestra, mother of Iphigenia, is not appeased. The ghost of her daughter, crying and gagged as she watches her own father lift the sacrificial knife ordained by the god, haunts the mind of Clytemnestra. She is angry. She colludes with her lover, Aegisthus, the vengeful cousin of Agamemnon, to return blood for blood upon her husband's homecoming. When a war-weary Agamemnon does arrive, the surprise presence of his new concubine and prize of war, Cassandra, only fuels Clytemnestra's anger. The sources differ on who performed the killing. In the *Οδύσσεια* (*Odyssey*) of Homer, the dead Agamemnon relates his sorrowful end to the journeying Odysseus:

<sup>157</sup> According to Aeschylus, Artemis is angry over the lives that will be lost in Troy. However, in the *Electra* of Sophocles, the dramatist expounds upon a story in which Agamemnon slew a stag that was precious to Artemis, and subsequently boasted about his accomplishment. Thus, Sophocles directly related an immoral action to the predicament at Aulis. Later stories, reflected in the works of Euripides, relate that Iphigenia is saved from slaughter by Artemis, being replaced at the last minute by a sacrificial stag and flown to Tauris to become a priestess of the goddess. See *Iphigenia at Tauris* by Euripides.

Aegisthus brought upon me death and fate, and slew me with the aid of my accursed wife, when he had bidden me to his house and made me a feast, just as one slays an ox at the crib!<sup>158</sup>

Aegisthus appears to be the primary perpetrator of the killing. Conversely, the three tragedians seem to agree that Clytemnestra herself committed the murderous deed. For instance, in the *Αγαμέμνων* (*Agamemnon*) of Aeschylus, the Chorus seems to mock Aegisthus for his lack of involvement:

As though I'll let you be tyrant of the Argives—you who, when you'd planned the death of this man, didn't have the courage to do the deed with your own hands...

Why were you so cowardly as not to slay this man yourself? Why did a woman have to join in the murder, polluting this land and the gods who dwell in it?<sup>159</sup>

While the literary tradition is inconsistent in regard to who operated the knife, the conclusion is the same. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus conspired to ruthlessly murder Agamemnon along with the seemingly innocent Cassandra. With our primary interest being tragedy and given that there are a number of more examples of this iteration of the story, the remainder of this discussion will give more credence to the narrative that Clytemnestra herself murdered the couple. The assumption of Clytemnestra's direct culpability in the murder of Agamemnon is a primary motivating factor for the characters in plays by all three tragedians which depict the fate of Clytemnestra as the victim of her son Orestes.

<sup>158</sup> Hm. *Od.* 11.460-470 in Homer, *Odyssey, Volume I: Books 1-12*, trans. A. T. Murray, ed. George E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library 104 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919).

<sup>159</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 1633-1645.

Any discussion of the supernatural presence of the dead in the *Oresteia* must begin with the more conspicuous example of violent apparitions within the canon of tragedies— the Ghost of Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus. The only character to appear in all three parts of Aeschylus' trilogy, we find in Clytemnestra all stages of the life cycle of revenge which forms the core of the trilogy. In part one, *Agamemnon*, we find Clytemnestra planning and implementing revenge against her husband for his sacrifice of their daughter prior to the start of the Trojan War. In part two, the *Libation Bearers*, we see the tables turned as Clytemnestra becomes the victim of a revenge plot orchestrated by her son Orestes and ordained by the god Apollo. And finally, in the *Eumenides*, the closing play of the trilogy, we witness a dead Clytemnestra, lurking through the Underworld calling its earthly deities, the Furies, to punish Orestes for his matricidal action. Thus, in Clytemnestra we find Avenger:

This is Agamemnon, my husband,  
a corpse now, the work of this right hand of mine,  
an artificer of justice.<sup>160</sup>

Victim:

You seem, my child, to be on the point of killing your mother!<sup>161</sup>

and Unavenged soul:

...none of the divinities is wrathful on my behalf,  
slaughtered as I have been by matricidal hands.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 1404-1406.

<sup>161</sup> Aesch. *Cho.* 922.

<sup>162</sup> Aesch. *Eum.* 100-103.

The three stages of revenge traversed by Clytemnestra which lead to the point of ghostly wrath were front and center in the 2019 production of the *Oresteia* by the National Theatre of Greece presented at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus.

If it is true that acts of memorialization feature prominently in tragedy, paying honor to or warding off the dead, there is perhaps no better analogy for the process of memorialization in modern theatre than the continued prominence of tragic performances in Modern Greece. What may surprise many people who study the classical texts but have otherwise no experience of the country of Greece is that a great deal of the ancient theatre spaces of antiquity are in continued use as spaces for the production of tragedy. The well-intact Theatre of Apollo at the site of Delphi was chosen as the location of the first annual Theatre Olympics in 1993, created on the initiative of Greek director Theodoros Terzopoulos. Since its excavations were completed in the 1980's, the theatre at the ancient site of Oiniades, just minutes outside of the small town of Katochi in Western Greece, has been the site of summer theatre productions as well as popular musical acts. Performances at the theatre of Epidaurus, the largest and most well preserved of the ancient theatre spaces, began in 1954 with the establishment of Athens/Epidaurus Festival which runs annually from May-October. The festival was established just five short years after the conclusion of one of the most violent periods of modern Greek history, the Greek Civil War, a period of time when national identity was inexorably shaken. According to Marilena Zaroulia, since the early twentieth century, ancient tragedy has “assumed a position of tradition in Greek theatre,” acting as a reference point in the recollection of the country's past and an enduring symbol of the persistence of Greek identity.<sup>163</sup> Anthon Smith argues that the conception of “Greekness” in the modern Greek state is an ethnic identity constructed by means of origin

<sup>163</sup> Marilena Zaroulia, “Members of a Chorus of a Certain Tragedy: Euripides' *Oresteia* at the National Theatre of Greece,” in *Theatre and National Identity*, ed. Nadine Holdsworth (New York: Routledge, 2014) 206.

myths that emphasize the affiliation between modern subjects and their ancient ancestors.<sup>164</sup> Greek studies scholar Vangelis Calotychos has argued that due both to the four-hundred year occupation by the Ottoman Empire and the immediate and overwhelming management of Western European powers that followed, modern Greeks were “deprived of a present identity.”<sup>165</sup> Because of this, since the establishment of the modern state in 1830, with its capital located at the hitherto unimportant city of Athens, Greek identity has been profoundly shaped by emphasizing the continuity between the present and the ancient past. The establishment of Athens as the modern capital of Greece was itself a means of glorifying the nation’s ancient past. Only since the late-Enlightenment period, when more and more Western nations began proclaiming the virtues of democracy, was Athens thought of as a singularly important city, a supposed forerunner to modern democracy. Influenced by this new esteem, the modern Greek state chose Athens as its capital, prior to which it had a remarkably small population of approximately 6,000.<sup>166</sup> The continued performance of ancient tragedy in the revitalized theatre spaces of modern Greece is then a reflection of the country’s desire to reinforce its own historical narrative and strengthen a uniquely Greek identity.

As a means of establishing continuity and honoring the past for the purpose of advancing a sense of self-affirmation and self-reflection, tragedy as a memorialization functions in Greece today in a similar way as it did in ancient times. If the *Oresteia* is an attempt by Aeschylus to elevate to mythic dimensions the evolution of the city of Athens,<sup>167</sup> so too does this mythical history persist in its performance for modern Greek audiences who, if in Athens, can walk down

<sup>164</sup> Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 79.

<sup>165</sup> Zaroulia quoting Vangelis Calotychos, *Modern Greece: A Cultural Poetics* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 47.

<sup>166</sup> Carthage, *Ancient Greece*, 62.

<sup>167</sup> Mary Lefkowitz, “Introduction to Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*,” in *The Greek Plays*, eds. Mary Lefkowitz and James Romm (New York: Modern Library, 2016), 141.

the street and observe the very Areopagus, “The Hill of Ares,” in which Aeschylus sets the *Eumenides*. There is a material reality to the performance of tragedy in modern Greece which both glorifies and demonstrates a tension between the modern and the dead, but very present, past. Ancestors, the writers of antiquity, and other material traces of the past, including Aeschylus, are not viewed as abstracted forebearers of Western Civilization but as “fellow members of the national family.”<sup>168</sup> In this way, the process of memorialization inherent in the continued performance of works of tragedy is analogous to the ways in which the plays themselves address the relationship between the living and the deceased ancestors of the past. Perhaps this is why beginning with the first performance of the National Theatre of Greece in 1932 –the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus–the ability to perform tragedy well has become an unofficial measure of the merits of a theatre practitioner. In both ancient and modern times, Greek tragedy acts as a “monumental metonymy for the ideal, classical past,”<sup>169</sup>

In the first twenty years of performance at Epidaurus since 1954, the National Theatre of Greece alone shouldered the burden of producing works of ancient tragedy in the space as it was the only theatre company allowed to perform in the space.<sup>170</sup> On the weekend of June 28-29, 2019, the company shouldered the burden of presenting the *Oresteia*, in its entirety, in a single five-hour long performance; each play of the trilogy presented in succession with no intermission. Following this weekend, the National Theatre presented the separate parts of the trilogy in repertory at tour dates which spanned the country of Greece. The ability to watch all three plays in a single evening provided a unique opportunity to observe the evolution of the

<sup>168</sup> Yiannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins: Antiquity, Archeology and National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), x.

<sup>169</sup> Zaroulia, “Members of a Chorus of a Certain Tragedy,” 206.

<sup>170</sup> E. Sakellaridou and S. Patsalidis, *(Dis)Placing Classical Greek Theatre* (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2003), 15.

character Clytemnestra as she transitions from righteous murderer, to corrupted governor, and ultimately, to ghost. Perhaps the reason why Clytemnestra's progressive transformation was so evident in this production is that each of the three plays had an entirely different creative team and cast. The stages of Clytemnestra's revenge story were so distinct because over the course of the trilogy Clytemnestra was played by different actors each with a different lens through which to observe the way revenge takes its toll and eventually ends with an unavenged soul.

In *Agamemnon*, directed by Io Voulgaraki, we see a vengeful and bitter Clytemnestra, played by Evi Saoulidou, presented in bold fashion wearing what looks similar to a white, sleeveless pantsuit, and completely bald headed (perhaps as a symbol of mourning over her dead daughter). This Clytemnestra is not only resentful of her husband, but of the Chorus of men who regularly question her authority over them, a ruling class who lacks the ability to take action among themselves. The Chorus are silent in their knowledge that an innocent child was murdered by their leader for the sake of a military campaign. On Clytemnestra's first entrance, a powerful stride downstage from the plays central set piece (a wooden scaffolding of several stories faced with a large porcelain mask of a man), the men of the Chorus scattered as if afraid to be near her. Upon the murder of her husband, the porcelain mask collapses, and Clytemnestra reappears atop the scaffolding to proclaim her victory, her hands covered in blood the color of which contrasts sharply with her otherwise perfectly white canvas; she is now tainted.

We see a very different Clytemnestra, played by Filareti Komninou, in the *Libation Bearers*, directed by Lilly Meleme. The Clytemnestra of this second portion is no longer someone who has been wronged, but someone who has wronged others. Bejeweled and wearing a regal gown, this Clytemnestra has insulated herself within a house of slaves, fearful of a revenge she is certain will come. When her lover Aegisthus first appears on stage, he violently

drags a Chorus member across the floor by her neck. Clytemnestra herself is equally abusive to her servants, the Chorus, even using them as furniture. As if to highlight Clytemnestra's knowledge of the eventual outcome of revenge, this production newly adapted the climactic encounter between mother and son. Clytemnestra, rather than making attempts to threaten and dissuade Orestes, acknowledges his need to murder her on account of Apollo and allows him to do so. The next time we see Clytemnestra, she is dead and vindictive.

Like Polydorus, the Ghost of Clytemnestra is staged; performed by an actor. And like Polydorus, in such cases when the ghost is staged, the dead seem to lack the power themselves to cause any harm to the living. In the *Eumenides*, Clytemnestra seems unable to affect the living herself and must rely on the power of the Furies to exact her revenge and bring honor to her in the afterlife.<sup>171</sup> Indeed, the appearance of Clytemnestra's ghost in the *Eumenides* is undoubtedly dependent on the sleeping deities whom she is trying to rouse. The National Theatre production of the *Eumenides* chose a unique approach to its casting, a benefit of which was that it demonstrated this inherent connection between Clytemnestra and the Furies. Though in the original text the Ghost of Clytemnestra appears in a series of short interchanges between herself and the sleeping Furies, director Georgia Mavragani chose to have a single chorus of actors clad in grey robes to portray, at various times, every character in the play. This meant that while every actor plays the Furies, every actor also took turns playing the role of Clytemnestra, a directorial choice which gave the illusion of a single supernatural force guided toward enacting punishment. As Clytemnestra spoke, the chorus formed a single-file line behind a microphone. On each turn to speak the words of Clytemnestra, a chorus member would step forward, placing

<sup>171</sup> Aesch. *Eum.* 97-129.

a white veil over their face. Once their lines were complete, the chorus member would hand the veil off to the next person in line who would step forward to assume the role.

Though the National Theatre production took a more somber, perhaps elegant, approach to the *Eumenides*, there is little doubt that the threat of the Furies conjures a feeling of dread throughout the *Oresteia* as well as other tragedies.<sup>172</sup> An anonymous ancient source tells that when the *Eumenides* was performed, the sight of the Furies before the audience was so horrific it caused women to have miscarriages:

some say that at the performance of the *Eumenides*,  
when he led on the chorus one by one,  
he frightened the people so much that some  
children lost consciousness and unborn babies  
were aborted.<sup>173</sup>

By virtue of the presumption of women in the audience, this source is likely from a much later in time than 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE Athens. And though assuredly hyperbolic, the passage does communicate the sense of horrific spectacle that had become associated with the performance of the Furies. Such accounts recollect the opening of the 1931 James Whale film *Frankenstein* in which the actor Edward van Sloan warns the audience:

I think it will thrill you. It may shock you. It might even *horrify*  
you. So, if any of you feel that you do not care to subject your  
nerves to such a strain, now's your chance to uh, well,—we *warned*  
you!<sup>174</sup>

<sup>172</sup> See Eur. *Tro.* 450-460., *Or.* 38., Soph. *OC.* 30-110., *Ant.* 1070-1080.

<sup>173</sup> S. Burges Watson, trans., *Living Poets*, (Durham, 2014),  
[https://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk/w/Life\\_of\\_Aeschylus?oldid=2529](https://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk/w/Life_of_Aeschylus?oldid=2529)

<sup>174</sup> *Frankenstein*, directed by James Whale (Hollywood, CA: Universal Studios, 1931).

The *Eumenides* seems to dwell in this sense of spectacular horror conjured by the thought of the Furies. The play opens with a Priestess of Apollo praying at the holy shrine at Delphi. The priestess exits the shrine terrified from what she encountered. The Priestess describes a “horror on the tongue and in [her] eyes” stating of these entities:

I won't call them women, but Gorgons.<sup>175</sup>

They're black and utterly nauseating. They're pumping out snores  
that one doesn't dare come near, and dripping a loathsome drip  
from their eyes. And their attire is one that it's not proper to bring  
either before the images of the gods or under the roofs of men.<sup>176</sup>

This description of the Furies is an example of the ways in which writers construct “horrific biologies” to create an image which instills horror in the audience.<sup>177</sup> By exaggerating the physical features of an entity and fusing some of those features with non-human features, such as having snakes in place of hair, the dramatist creates for the audience an image of something that is not only threatening but is disgusting. As Noël Carroll notes, the fusing together of human features with various animal characteristics is a regularly occurring method for fomenting a sense of disgust with regard to the horror monster.<sup>178</sup> Orestes, aware of his torment to come at the hands of these repulsive creatures, is sent by Apollo to the city of Athens to elicit the aid of the city's patron goddess Athena. It is upon his initial exit that the Ghost of Clytemnestra first appears along with the crowd of sleeping Furies. The dead Clytemnestra calls upon them as if performing a conjuring. Though initially stubborn in their laziness, the Furies soon awake with a

<sup>175</sup> Female monsters with snakes for hair.

<sup>176</sup> Aesch. *Eum.* 45-55.

<sup>177</sup> Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 43.

<sup>178</sup> Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 43.

rage upon learning of the crime for which they have been called to punish.<sup>179</sup> They subsequently chase Orestes to Athens, and we do not hear from Clytemnestra again.

The scene between Clytemnestra and the Furies is a turning point in the *Oresteia*. In a world enveloped with the threat of the Furies, this scene is the first time in the trilogy that the Furies are actually seen. The potential threat of these deities forms a central tension of the *Libation Bearers*. Orestes, when elaborating on the mission he has been sent on by the god Apollo (murdering his mother), acknowledges his expectation that such actions will bring about his torture at the hands of the Furies. At the play's end, Orestes, having completed his matricidal deed, sees his previous expectations come to fruition. Yet, in all his anguish and detailed account of their horrible appearance, Orestes seems to recognize that only he, and not the Chorus, can see them. This leaves the audience with an ambiguity; are the Furies a psychological phenomenon; that is, are they just in his head? Their appearance and dominant role in the *Eumenides* removes this ambiguity: the Furies are dangerous, disgusting, and they are real. In similar fashion, the *Eumenides* marks the first appearance of a ghost in the trilogy. This ghost, vengeful and dishonored by murder at the hands of her own son, is exemplary of Johnston's illustration of the *biaiothanatoi*. Yet, unlike those earthly deities who seem to pose a real threat of danger, the dead Clytemnestra, though physically present, seems relatively powerless to enact violence herself. The inability of Clytemnestra to enact her own revenge contrasts starkly with the apparent power and danger invoked by another dead, but invisible, figure in the *Oresteia*: Agamemnon.

The dead as an active invisible force in tragedy is made no clearer than in the character of Agamemnon. Agamemnon presents an array of material for scholars of ancient Greek beliefs on

<sup>179</sup> In Greek religious thought, the Furies were the punishers of those who murder their own family members.

the dead as the character's ghost not only appears as early on as the *Odyssey* of Homer, but his distraught afterlife is a subject tackled in detail by all three of our tragedians. In the earliest literary account of the dead Agamemnon, Odysseus encounters the dead man when sailing at the end of the earth. Informing Odysseus of his murder at the hands of Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus, Agamemnon indignantly warns the traveler never to trust women.<sup>180</sup> The ramifications of this unjust murder are the driving conflict which underlies the *Libation Bearers* of Aeschylus, *Electra* by Sophocles, and both *Electra* and *Orestes* by Euripides. Given the circumstances of his murder, Agamemnon is exemplary of that third category of restless dead; the *biaiothanatoi*. The *biaiothanatoi* is not so much defined by the violence of the death, but by the reasoning or mode behind the death. Dishonorable deaths are especially linked to the *biaiothanatoi*.<sup>181</sup> Unlike Achilles, who died as a warrior in battle, Agamemnon was murdered in a particularly dishonorable fashion, not in battle, but by his wife and her lover. This dishonor makes Agamemnon exceptionally restless.

The need to rouse the dead Agamemnon to action is the central driving force behind much of the action in the Orestes-centered plays of all three tragedians. Given their beliefs in the close proximity of the dead, it follows that in ancient Greece, necromancy, or the act of summoning the dead for the purposes of knowledge, was a popular interest. This interest continued well into the Roman period as is evidenced by such stories as the raising of Lazarus from the dead depicted in the Gospel According to John. The Gospel does not enumerate the details of the reviving act performed by Jesus, but accounts of necromancy in earlier Greek texts provide significant details, and even instructions. First, and perhaps most obvious, tombs and

<sup>180</sup> Hom. *Od.* 11.440.

<sup>181</sup> Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 149.

battlefields are the locations best suited for raising the dead. In the Φαίδων (*Phaedo*) of Plato, Socrates reflects not only on the centrality of the tomb for locating ghosts, but on the belief that mistreatment of the dead body prevents the soul from finding rest:

the soul in this state...will have been bound up with the corporeal...this corporeal element is weighty and heavy, earthy and visible. Indeed such a soul that has this is weighed down and dragged back to the visible world by fear of both the invisible and Hades, so it's said, circling aimlessly among the tombstones and graves, among which indeed some shadowy apparitions of souls have actually been seen, the kind of images that such souls produce that have not been released in a pure state, but having a share in the visible can thus be seen.<sup>182</sup>

While the earliest fully extant account of necromancy in tragedy occurs in the *Persians* of Aeschylus where Atossa raises the ghost of her husband Darius, the relative abundance of extant stories concerning the raising of Agamemnon provides an avenue to compare various interpretations of the same necromantic act. The tragedians present this act as being performed by Orestes and Electra, rousing the attention of their dead father through the acts of wailing and gift giving.

The *Libation Bearers* takes its name from the funerary act of gift giving which is central to the play. It is a play dominated by phantoms residing in the ground. Set at the tomb of

<sup>182</sup> Pl. Phd. 81c-d in Plato, *Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo*, trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones, William Preddy, Loeb Classical Library 36 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

Agamemnon, the first of these libation bearers we encounter is Orestes who opens the play by narrating for the audience his command by the god Apollo to seek retribution for the murder of his father. He soon sees a procession of women in striking black garments led by his sister Electra. Electra brings gifts to the tomb at the behest of her mother Clytemnestra to quell the dead soul of Agamemnon who has apparently been haunting their home. In their opening song, the Chorus of slave women describe the dreadful presence of this ghost:

A clear prophetic dream, breathing out wrath in sleep,  
which made the house's hair stand on end,  
raised a loud cry of terror at dead of night in the  
innermost part of the house,  
making a heavy attack  
on the women's quarters;  
and the interpreters of this dream  
proclaimed, under a divine guarantee,  
that those beneath the earth were furiously aggrieved  
and wrathful against the killers.<sup>183</sup>

This passage indicates Agamemnon's ongoing anger toward those who, in his view, unjustly murdered him. Further, the dead man seems to be haunting his wife's dreams. Clytemnestra has received visions of a snake, a creature of the Underworld, which she herself brought into the world and it feeds on her breast. These nightly torments are even more frightening to Clytemnestra as she previously attempted to mitigate these hauntings when she initially

<sup>183</sup> Aesch. *Cho.* 34-41.

murdered the man. As a precautionary measure, Clytemnestra dismembered the corpse of Agamemnon by removing its hands and feet. This preventative technique known as *μασχαλίσμος* (*maschalismos* – “arm-pitting”) disempowered the ghost and protected against its arousal particularly in the cases of murdered kin. Though Aeschylus indicates the removal of hands, other sources suggest that any number of body parts could be removed such as nose, ears, or genitals.<sup>184</sup> No matter the severed parts, the final step of the process required stringing the detached parts under the arm-pits of the mutilated body, hence the labeling of the procedure as “arm-pitting.” By tying the removed body parts to the corpse, the living person ensured that the soul has been robbed of any capability while simultaneously keeping the body together for purposes of a proper burial. Such a process was believed to be effective as the soul remains closely tied to the needs of the body, even in the afterlife. However, given the nightly hauntings indicated by the above passage, the arm-pitting of Agamemnon has not utterly demobilized him. It is for this reason that Clytemnestra sends the women. It is her hope that with the proper gifts, the soul of Agamemnon will calm and leave her house.

The dead of tragedy are not only restless, they are thirsty. As the title of this second portion of the *Oresteia* indicates, the primary gifts associated with ghosts are libations. While proper burial rites were crucial if the dead were to find peace, the dead are perpetually in need of appeasement. In ancient Greek funerary traditions, even after burial, attendance was paid to the dead lest they become anxious and involve themselves with the living. In the *Antigone* of Sophocles, Antigone is caught not when providing proper burial to her brother Polyneices, but on a second trip when she returned to deliver the offering of libations to her brother. In cases when the dead are needed for council, or as in the case of Agamemnon are needed to exact revenge, the

<sup>184</sup> Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 109.

offering of libations becomes all the more urgent and necessary to appease these underground dwellers. In the *Odyssey*, we are given a detailed account of the practice. First, the rites must be performed in the location of the dead person's body (tomb, battlefield, etc). Second, the rites must be performed at night. Third, prayers are made to the ghosts in question but also to those who have power over them such as Hermes, the one who delivers souls to Hades as well as delivers messages between the living and the dead. Lastly, the libations themselves are made up of a variety of liquids including wine, honey, milk, water, and the blood of slaughtered animals such as sheep or cattle. Odysseus digs a pit and pours into it these offerings, allowing them to soak into the ground and reach the dead person.

The details provided in the story of Odysseus remain consistent in the works of tragedy. While Odysseus performed these acts of necromancy to seek council, the call to Agamemnon is more dire. Though Electra has been sent by Clytemnestra to provide these gifts on her behalf, Electra reflects on a choice: she could deliver these gifts in shame and walk away, or, she could deliver them as her own offering, one that could arouse her father to aid. Choosing the latter, she pours the offering, praying in the proper order first to Hermes, deliverer of messages. Second, she calls to the Earth itself, home of dead souls. After addressing the messenger and location, Electra pours the offerings into the ground and finally addresses the ghost of her father directly. She prays that the ghost will deliver Orestes to her. Along with this, she prays that the ghost of her father will send an avenger to free her from her mother and bring justice to their house. With the sudden appearance of Orestes, who has also been tasked with the murder of Clytemnestra, one must assume that the libations in combination with her prayer worked. Electra's request has

been granted.<sup>185</sup> Orestes appears and eventually confronts his mother. Clytemnestra, bearing her breast, reminds Orestes of the nourishment she provided him as his mother. But Clytemnestra forgot that in her dream, the snake sucked not only milk from her breast, but clots of blood. Though momentarily stunned, Orestes plunges the knife into his mother's chest.

A similar appeal through the pouring of libations can be found in the *Electra* of Sophocles. In Sophocles' retelling of the story, Electra's pernicious wailing toward her father is interrupted by her sister Chrysothemis. In this incarnation, set not at the tomb but outside of the family's palace, it is Chrysothemis who has been given the task by her mother to deliver the offering of libations to Agamemnon. Unlike the *Libation Bearers* in which the descriptions of the ghost's haunting presence as described by the Chorus is ambiguous, Chrysothemis gives a detailed account of Agamemnon invading the dreams of Clytemnestra. Chrysothemis recounts:

They say that [Clytemnestra] was once more in company with your father and mine, who had come to the world of light; and then he took the staff which he used to carry, and which Aegisthus carries now, and planted it beside the hearth; and from it grew up a fruitful bough, which overshadowed all the land of the Mycenaeans...It is because of this fear that she is sending me.<sup>186</sup>

Electra agrees that this dream was caused by Agamemnon, a symbol of him returning to the earthy world and taking back what is rightfully his. She then argues with her sister about the need to submit to their mother. As in the *Libation Bearers*, Electra makes the decision to ignore

<sup>185</sup> Aesch. *Cho.* 87, 92, 97, 129, 149, 156, 164 (libations), 150 (wailing), 124-30 (prayer to Hermes, Earth, and Agamemnon), 138-48 (appeal for vengeance), 212-13 (Orestes appears).

<sup>186</sup> Soph. *El.* 417-430.

their mother's wishes and calls Agamemnon to their aid rather than calm him. However, the tragedy of Sophocles suggests this process also involves discarding the gift of libations altogether rather than repurposing the gift as happens in the *Libation Bearers*. Convincing Chrysothemis to turn on their mother, Electra states that they must replace the offering of Clytemnestra with their own offering, strands of their hair. Chrysothemis agrees and leaves toward the tomb with the new purpose of begging the dead man to come to them. Again, considering the return of Orestes and subsequent murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, it would seem their offering proved successful and that the power of the ghost was instrumental in the events to come.

As previously noted, the act of gift giving through the pouring of libations must be accompanied by prayer. In the *Libation Bearers*, Electra follows the prayer to her father by ordering the Chorus to perform the customary funerary wailing to call the dead man to attention. Given the aforementioned relationship between the funerary lament and the performance of tragedy, it should follow that such a lament would be the center piece of a play so fixated on a dead person. A particular scene shared between the works of Aeschylus and Euripides is between Orestes, Electra, and a varying third party, in which the three perform a mourning lament for the purpose of seeking help from the dead Agamemnon. Central to this lament is the act of γοός (*goös* –“wailing”). *Goös* can be variably translated as “groaning” or “howling,” both of which strike at the heart of the performance act. In contrast to other more controlled and structured expressions of grief, the performance of *goös* as a lamentation was “spontaneous and emotionally powerful...[with] the purpose of rousing the listening to revenge.”<sup>187</sup> Performers of the lament roused the dead through excessively brooding in their own pain, screaming loudly,

<sup>187</sup> Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 101.

and reminding the dead of the injustices wrought upon them. This wailing is accompanied by the act of κομμός (*kommós* – “striking”), inflicting harm on oneself by beating one’s breast and tearing into one’s own flesh as we saw Electra doing in the aforementioned opening to the tragedy of Sophocles. One might also think of the practice of speaking in tongues found in American Pentecostal churches. Practitioners, said to be inhabited by the Spirit of God, emphatically chant in undecipherable vocalizations while convulsing in an ecstatic state. Similarly, the performance of wailing in the laments to Agamemnon is physically violent. Often, these wailings are vocalized in the form of untranslatable syllables. This does not stop English translators from attempting to make sense of these howls as seen in such editions of the text which translate the noises variably as “Oh my!” “I am so miserable!” or “Oh my suffering!” These fiercely convulsive acts of lament exemplify the conviction that in order to reach the supernatural entities, whether it be a god of a dead ancestor, one must remove themselves from an ordinary state of being, and they must be loud enough to be heard.

The lament to Agamemnon is perhaps the most famous theatrical example of the Greek funerary practice of public, boisterous, and efficacious displays of grief.<sup>188</sup> The lamentation scene takes its earliest form in the *Libation Bearers* of Aeschylus. The extended *goös* is the climatic highpoint, the bloody heartbeat, of the *Libation Bearers* and the scene encompasses approximately a third of the whole play. As such, Aeschylus seems particularly interested in presenting the piety exhibited by Orestes and Electra toward their dead ancestor and household. The lament is a cyclical exchange between Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus as they plead with Agamemnon to aid them in their vengeance. With the repeated pattern of Orestes -> Chorus -> Electra ->, the three plead with Agamemnon to join them. The siblings mourn the fate of their

<sup>188</sup> Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 41.

father, while the women of the Chorus continue the call that blood must be paid for blood. This conjuring completes the transformation of the offerings initially sent by Clytemnestra. The three conjurers incite the ghost to rise from the dead and give them the strength to succeed in their task.<sup>189</sup>

The National Theatre of Greece production certainly sought to arouse a sensation of the dead Agamemnon in their performance of this scene. The program for the company's *Libation Bearers* states that their intent in the production was to show that while the father is dead, invisible, "his presence in the play is just as powerful as it is in *Agamemnon*, although in a different way."<sup>190</sup> Though performed in a large outdoor amphitheater, the visceral nature of the lament could be felt throughout the theatre. The Chorus of women, dressed in long black gowns, were flailing violently about the stage, the whipping of dresses adding to the visually contorted nature of their movement. The Chorus moving thus, Electra with Orestes fiercely gripped each other and fiercely, repeatedly, threw themselves against the ground, home of their father. These vicious contortions combined with the sheer length of the prolonged sequence, increasingly heavy musical score, and slow transition to blood-red lighting which cast shadows of the actors onto the trees that formed the backdrop of the stage, cruelly bombarded the audience. This bombardment is analogous to the force necessary to call the dead to action. Though the lament is directed toward the soul of the dead Agamemnon, the event focuses the audience, converting the theatre space itself into the dwelling place of the ghost.

Perhaps due to the influence of Aeschylus, Euripides wrote a version of this same lament in both his *Electra* and *Orestes*, though he dedicates much less time to it. Euripides gives

<sup>189</sup> Rush Rehm, *Understanding Greek Tragic Theatre*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 108.

<sup>190</sup> Lilly Meleme in program for *Libation Bearers* (Athens: National Theatre of Greece, 2016), 32.

significant time to the characters devising the details of their murder plot rather than to libations or lament. However, the shortened lament found in the *Electra* of Euripides imparts added qualities to the ghost of the father. Euripides modifies the lament by replacing the Chorus' role in the rite with an elderly family friend who helps them not only call to Agamemnon as a source of strength, but implores the dead man to action:

Orestes: Come out, and bring the dead to help us, Father!

Electra: Yes, bring the men with whom you ruined Troy!

Old Man: And all who hate polluted, wicked people!<sup>191</sup>

In this rendition, Agamemnon apparently has the ability to call other ghosts into action. Euripides avoids the elaborately sung sequence of the *Libation Bearers* lament by replacing the longer stanzas of each character with single line exchanges, each seeming to build from or complete the previous line. Euripides orchestrates a similar scene in the *Orestes*, this time replacing the Old Man with the friend of Orestes, Pylades, who in every other variation of the story is a completely non-speaking character. As in his *Electra*, Euripides places the call to Agamemnon just after the team of conspirators advances their murder plot. In this third variation, Orestes, Electra, and Pylades reach out once more to Agamemnon for his aid, this time in murdering the character Helen as punishment of their uncle Menelaus for refusing to help them avoid their own punishment for the murder of Clytemnestra. Agamemnon's purpose in this murder remains ambiguous, though Orestes suggests that he and his sister, now facing death, are owed a debt by their dead father due to their previous murder of Clytemnestra on his behalf,

<sup>191</sup> Eur. *El.* 680 translated by Emily Wilson in *The Greek Plays*, eds. Mary Lefkowitz and James Romm (New York: Modern Library, 2017), 612. The ordering of these lines is debated. In the Loeb Classical edition translated by David Kovacs, the passage is attributed solely to Orestes, rather than to three speakers.

advancing the notion of this lament as a form of transaction. Thus, the *Orestes* of Euripides reverses the previous model of lament as the siblings now expect from their dead father their own compensation. In a line-by-line exchange like the one found in the *Electra*, the pair now remind their father that it was out of faithfulness to him that they are currently being punished. Rather than appeasement, the lament is now a means of making demands upon the dead man. Electra screams:

Father, come, if you hear deep in earth the voices of your children  
calling you, children who are being killed because of you!... I did  
not abandon you.<sup>192</sup>

However, in no version of the lament presented by Aeschylus or Euripides does it explicitly state what Agamemnon's actions are to be. The dead Agamemnon is asked in general terms to assist his children in their murder plot against his wife, but how he should do this remains unclear. As the incantations of the siblings rise in fervor, one might well expect an appearance of Agamemnon rising from the earth. Yet, as Johnston notes, "we do not actually see the dead do anything; indeed, we do not see Agamemnon's ghost at all."<sup>193</sup> It's a scene of necromancy with no ghost, which on the surface indicates a failure of the rites. While Johnston is correct in noting the absence of any action attributed to the dead father, it is the very absence of a visible presence which gives the dead figure its power. Given that so much action within these plays is directed toward the offerings, one would be hard-pressed to assert that Agamemnon is absent. As in the example of *Paranormal Activity*, the supernatural force which haunts the family never appears, but its power is made known to the audience. A comparable

<sup>192</sup> Eur. *Or.* 1230-1240 in Euripides, *Helen. Phoenician Women. Orestes*, trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library 11 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>193</sup> Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 101.

scenario is played out in the film *Poltergeist* (1982), directed by Tobe Hooper. This film sees a suburban family combat an invisible malevolent entity that torments their home and captures their young daughter. Though the ghost of this film is never seen, its presence is conveyed through complex lighting sequences as well as subtle manipulations of the scenic environment such as breaking glass and moving furniture. When we learn that the family's house has been built atop the graves of dead people, we become aware that it is these disrespected souls who haunt the home.

Similarly, the disrespected dead Agamemnon looms over the action of these tragedies. Though invisible, we sense that the supernatural powers summoned ally themselves with Orestes and Electra as they succeed in their tasks of vengeance. The modern audience may presume that the attempts to summon the dead father are circumstantial to the fact that Orestes does indeed return and he, with the assistance of Electra, does accomplish the matricide. But why should one presume this coincidence? With reports of hauntings and nightmares that torment the house of Clytemnestra, it is clear that the ghost of Agamemnon is actively attempting to avenge his death. Because of this, we can presume Agamemnon has answered the requests of his children, granting them the power needed to accomplish their task. The presumption that the dead Agamemnon is shaping the fortune of his children is consistent with the ways in which the ancient Greeks saw the dead as an active force in their lives. The powerful nature of these invisible specters is felt throughout the works of tragedy handed down to us. The modern director producing such a scene cannot avoid considering the ways in which the character's actions are directed by the horror of these unseen forces.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE DIVINE**

#### **Faceless Killers**

The looming presence of the gods is a constant in all of Greek tragedy. Though they seldom appear physically in the surviving plays, the language of Greek tragedy is dense with references to Athenian religion. The role that the gods play in the lives of characters and events surrounding them is discussed and debated in every existing Greek play. The Chorus often takes moments within the action of the play to address, question, or give praise to a god. While the supernatural power of the gods over the affairs of mankind is taken for granted in Greek tragedy, it presents a challenge for modern productions performed in front of an audience who is largely unfamiliar with ancient Greek ritual and mythological traditions. This might be a reason why of the surviving plays, those most popular among modern theatre producers tend to be those plays with less overt references to the power of the gods.<sup>194</sup> The *Antigone* of Sophocles, for instance, has been adapted on several occasions in such a way that it downplays the role of the gods and highlights the original text's relationship with a modern political dilemma, typically framed as an assertion of free will against a tyrannical power. The character of Antigone is interpreted in modern times as a model of civil disobedience with the action of burying her brother a symbol of social justice against a fascist state.<sup>195</sup> For this reason, the years of World War II saw multiple adaptations of *Antigone* which highlighted this very theme, including such adaptations by Bertolt Brecht and Jean Anouilh. Given the need to re-contextualize any such text so dense with the

<sup>194</sup> Goldhill, *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*, 205.

<sup>195</sup> David Daube, *Civil Disobedience in Antiquity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972), 5.

sentiments of a culture far removed from the modern world, one can understand the tendency of utilizing contemporary political discourse when producing these plays

Though not lessening the significance of how tragedy may be reexamined through the lens of social justice and modern politics, the themes of civil disobedience in *Antigone* speak more to the expectations of modern audiences than to how the play functioned within the context of Athenian society. While the presence of the gods may be less overt to a modern audience, and thus, easier to negotiate in a production, a deeper read of the text reveals that the gods are far from absent in the action of the play. It is difficult to ignore the number of times a character reflects on whether or not the gods are intervening in their situation. When challenging Creon's latest law preventing the burial of her brother, Antigone states:

...it was not Zeus who made this proclamation, nor was it Justice who lives with the gods below that established such laws among men, nor did I think your proclamations strong enough to have power to overrule, mortal as they were, the unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods. For these have life, not simply today and yesterday, but forever, and no one knows how long ago they were revealed. For this I did not intend to pay the penalty among the gods for fear of any man's pride.<sup>196</sup>

To a modern audience, Antigone's appeal to the power of the gods may seem no more than a rhetorical move, couching her actions in the language of a religious ethos to declare herself correct over the authority of Creon. This style of rhetorical challenge, reminiscent of a

<sup>196</sup> Soph. *Ant.* 450-460.

political debate, is a common motif in tragedy. However, one would be remiss to ignore the real possibility of divine punishment foreshadowed by Antigone. As Frank Nisetich notes in the introduction to his own translation of the play, not only does Antigone make the claim that she acts in accordance with the will of the gods, but the gods seem to be on her side: a guard describes a sudden whirlwind of dust that covers the entire ground where the body of Polyneices lays soon after the guards uncovered the corpse. It is later that the blind prophet Tiresias confirms that the invisible gods are exerting themselves on behalf of Antigone and her brother. Tiresias, having been rebuked by the stubborn Creon says to him:

You have kept here something belonging to the gods...

you have inflicted it upon them...

On account of this there lie in wait for you the doers of outrage

who in the end destroy, the Erinyes<sup>197</sup> of Hades and the gods, so

that you will be caught up in these same evils!<sup>198</sup>

Staging these arguments, densely couched in the language of invisible gods, as purely rhetorical might be a simple solution for many modern productions. Yet by reducing the presence of the gods to rhetoric, one also reduces the cause of Creon's suffering to mere chance. It asks the audience to believe that *three* members of Creon's family take their own lives within a short time frame by simple coincidence. What the modern production tends to neglect is the way in which Creon's suffering is attributed directly to the gods as punishment for manipulating the laws of the dead. Though the gods are not present on stage, they are no less dangerous. The plays of tragedy are steeped in an anxiety generated by the knowledge of the gods' ability to

<sup>197</sup> The Furies.

<sup>198</sup> Soph. *Ant.* 1070-1076.

enact violence upon the world. This anxiety, or divine dread, is an awareness that at any moment, and without a known reason, one's life can be utterly devastated by powers beyond their control.

Divine dread, as it is experienced in the *Antigone* of Sophocles, is characteristic of how most tragedies portray the gods: invisible but dangerous. For various reasons, the deeply theological conversations of the divine danger at hand is a challenge for modern producers. For one, when reflecting on the danger presented by the gods, an actor must convince the modern audience of the urgency and close proximity of this danger. On the other hand, ancient Greek audience members, steeped in the stories of Homeric mythology, would have been familiar with, if not formally educated in, the concept of ἐπιφάνεια (*epiphany* –“appearing,” “coming to light”) the direct appearance to a human of a god in disguised form, often for violent purposes. Creon's insight when recognizing the full ramifications of his actions is an “epiphany” not in the modern secular sense of learning new information, but that he recognized the presence of the gods through the violence enacted upon him. The poetry of Homer presents us with scenes of gods who take sides in war, enjoy sex, drinking, eating, and enacting cruel and punishing events upon humans often with little motivation for doing so. Taking our cue from Homer, this chapter will explore the role played by the gods in the events of the Trojan War as depicted in the *Iliad* and reinterpreted by Euripides in his tragedy the *Trojan Women*. We will see how the *Trojan Women* interrogates the methods by which the invisible gods enact violence, but also contrasts that invisibility by staging the gods Poseidon and Athena in the play's prologue. This contrast generates a tragic suspense as characters debate the existence of gods while the audience is aware of their presence. First, we will examine a production of the *Trojan Women* by Tadashi Suzuki, exploring how the director's unique approach to staging the gods brings about a sense of

dread in the minds of the audience with regard to the god's perceived power. Secondly, this chapter will consider the threat of the gods as invisible manipulators in the world of humans through the possession of the character Helen of Troy.

### **The Gods of the Trojan War**

The *Trojan Women* is a horrific wartime tragedy by Euripides which was originally produced in the year 415 BCE at the city-wide Festival of Dionysus in Athens. Euripides wrote this play during the brutal latter years of the Peloponnesian War fought between an Athens who controlled territory throughout the Aegean Sea and the Spartan led Peloponnesian League. During the war fought against the Persian Empire earlier in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the city-state of Athens had begun exerting its power and wealth throughout the Greek world, assuming political control over a large segment of Greek speaking territories across the Aegean Sea and into the wider Mediterranean. Though Athens referred to these conquered territories as "allied states," other Greek cities, with Sparta at the forefront, became suspicious of the increasingly transparent imperial aspirations of Athens. Athens collected tribute in the form of money and resources from its "allied states" and was quick to assert military force when necessary to ensure that these territories paid. Athenian aggression toward its imperial holdings only increased once Sparta and its military allies began war with the intention of dismantling the powerful city-state. The *Trojan Women* is commonly interpreted as a commentary on the increasingly violent actions of the Athenian military. The play was first produced less than one year after the Athenians had massacred the entire male population of the island Melos, enslaving its women and children, in order to put down a revolt. The island state's only crime was refusing to side with Athens.

To parallel the Athenian victory at Melos, Euripides sets the *Trojan Women* in the aftermath of the Greek victory in Troy. The play is distinct among other works of tragedy in that it turns an unapologetically critical eye toward the popular Greek heroes of the Trojan War. While other tragedies present the heroes of myth as flawed, and sometimes nefarious, human beings, no other work of tragedy shifts so entirely the perspective of the famous war. The Trojan War, as depicted in the *Iliad*, amounted to an origin story of Greek society. No other story so colored the Greek worldview of war and loss. The Trojan War was the paradigm by which Greeks understood their relationship to the gods and the cosmos. Yet, Euripides presents a darker rendition of Greek victory, proposing a perspective which sees the Greeks as the villains of the story, imperial conquerors invading and decimating an indigenous population. In the *Trojan Women*, we find what remains of the city of Troy. With their husbands and sons having all been murdered by the hands of Greek soldiers, the women of Troy sit in the ashes of their burnt city. They lament their losses and future enslavement, defenseless in a war started by men and of which they wanted no part.

The story is told from the perspective of Hecabe, Queen of Troy, who laments the death of her husband Priam. She laments also the brutal murder of her sons, the hero Hector, and the prince Paris. Even by the standards of Greek tragedy, the play has very little plot. A sequence of distinct actions which culminate in the recognition of a tragic error has little resemblance to the structure of this play. One by one, Hecabe encounters the remaining women in her family: Cassandra, her daughter driven mad by torture at the hands of a god; Andromache, daughter-in-law through Hector who hides the existence of her son from Greek soldiers; Helen, daughter-in-law through Paris who is almost universally blamed as the cause of the war. Though each character reflects differently on the outcomes of the war, their fates are the same: each is allotted

into servitude under a Greek general. Her prayers going unanswered and her struggle fruitless, the play ends with Hecabe marching toward the ship of her new master, the scheming Odysseus. Unfortunately for Hecabe, there is no reversal of fortune. She makes no discoveries which affect her dire circumstance. She suffers in the beginning, and she is left suffering at the end.

This work of Euripides not only brought into question the character of the mythic Greek heroes who defeated the Trojans, but also pits the gods against the Greeks for the atrocities they have committed. The gods of Greek religion are far from absent during the events of the Trojan War, and even further from impartial. In Homer's rendering of the war, the gods regularly intercede on the behalf of one side or the other, and their presence is presumed even when they are not visible to the human characters. While the characters of Homeric poetry frequently expound upon the ways in which the gods are manipulating their world, the director of tragedy must communicate that manipulation, and the anxiety it entails, to an audience. The script of tragedy gives little more than urgent conversation to convey this anxiety. As with the presence of ghosts discussed in the previous chapter, the stage lacks the technology to generate the dread of divine power through any other means but speech. The actor must relate this dread to the audience. However, the *Trojan Women* is a notable example within tragedy of the gods appearing on stage before the audience, that is, played by an actor. Though the Greek stage developed several pieces of technology meant to distinguish the gods from other characters in the play (such as the *mechane* described in the second chapter), the staging of a god brings with it a different kind of challenge in modern productions.

Persuading an audience of the gravity of a conversation between characters does not near the absurdity of an actor appearing before an audience and proclaiming, "I am God!" For instance, the *Trojan Women* opens with the declaration "I am Poseidon!" Further complicating

the matter is that the gods, especially in the works of Euripides, most often appear in the prologue of the play for the purpose of setting both the scene and tone of what is to follow. For the modern director of tragedy, this means ensuring that the gods of a prologue establish the seriousness of the situation. The prologue of the *Trojan Women*, while establishing the seriousness of the event, also lays the groundwork for a dramatic irony through the course of the play. The characters regularly debate the divine world's involvement in their suffering. They pray to the gods, curse the gods, ask for assistance, question them, but receive no response. It would seem like the gods are absent to the plight of these women. And yet, the gods themselves appear in the prologue of the play establishing their involvement from the outset and in the same space that the women are present.

Poseidon, patron god of the city of Troy, opens the play by lamenting the destruction of his city at the hands of the Greeks. The Greek armies had implemented an idea of the general Odysseus to create a weapon in the shape of a horse, symbol of Poseidon, to lure the citizens of Troy into trusting them. In the midst of his reflection, Poseidon is interrupted by his niece, the goddess Athena. Athena, who sided with the Greek army during the conflict, is now seeking the aid of Poseidon to punish the army on its journey home. She is angry; the Greek soldier Ajax assaulted Cassandra in the goddess' temple, and not one Greek sought to correct these disdainful acts.<sup>199</sup> It is worth noting that Athena is not seeking punishment of the Greeks due to a moral obligation against the assault of Cassandra. After all, Athena was in full support of the Greeks throughout the war and its aftermath, with little concern for their treatment of the Trojans. The fact that the assault of Cassandra took place in the goddess' temple, thereby diminishing its

<sup>199</sup> Known also as Lesser Ajax and to be distinguished from the more famous Ajax the Great whose suicide was dramatized in the work of Sophocles.

sanctity, is the root of Athena's objection. Initially questioning her motives, Poseidon eventually agrees to assist his fellow Olympian. The thought of tormenting the destroyers of his city delights him. Poseidon conjures the sea against the Greek fleet, complicating their journey home. This prologue establishes for the audience that the gods are an active force in the events surrounding the Trojan War. They take sides in war, they are vengeful, sorrowful, temperamental, and rarely compassionate. The gods are capricious, and their actions often seem arbitrary in the minds of humans. However, while this conversation between gods seems to forecast doom for the Greeks, the two gods promptly exit, never to return and their scheme of revenge never to affect the action of the play. The gods simply disappear, and the audience is left with a merciless tale of assault against the bodies of downtrodden victims of war.

As Simon Goldhill notes, the appearance of the gods in the prologue and their absence throughout the remainder of the play sets up an irony that runs through the course of events.<sup>200</sup> The gods appear, sharing the same space as the human characters. They mark this space with their presence, but do not make themselves visible throughout. While they are not physically present with the other characters, their mark is felt violently through the course of the play. For instance, in a debate between the protagonist Hecabe and her daughter-in-law Helen, Hecabe argues fiercely that the gods do not care enough to take part in the lives of humans and that any such claim of their involvement is an excuse made by humans to justify their wrong deeds. Hecabe provides a rational argument for the causes of the Trojan War; Helen is simply a very flawed, lustful, and selfish human being. Though Hecabe's argument is reasonable, and probably sympathetic to a modern audience, her case from the outset is undermined by the fact

<sup>200</sup> Goldhill, *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*, 216.

that the audience just a short while ago witnessed the gods discussing their involvement in human activities, adding a dimension of tragic irony to Hecabe's argument.

The play takes for granted that the gods are the source of the violence regularly acted out against humans, a violence which reaches its climax in the sexual assault of Andromache and the slaughter of her son Astyanax, son of the hero Hector and last remaining male child in Troy. Many contemporary productions of the *Trojan Women* have addressed this challenge of divine presence by ignoring it or reducing the gods to an expository gimmick such as newscasters whilst the remaining portion of the play becomes an allegory for modern war.<sup>201</sup> There is no doubt that the play's parallels to modern war continue to make the *Trojan Women* an unfortunately relevant piece of theatre. Bombs continue to go off in cities around the world in wars propagated by men of wealth and power, displacing and leaving downtrodden the most vulnerable members of society: women, children, poor, and disabled. While the *Trojan Women* reflects these seemingly universal conditions of war, what the play also demonstrates is that while the events of war may be rationalized through the outsider's gaze (i.e. "these are the socio-political events which led to the war..."), the reduction of suffering to such logic is hardly the experience of the traumatized. In the *Trojan Women* we find characters who attempt to make such reductionist explanations of the war but find that inevitably such justifications mean nothing. Their suffering has no reason, and it has no meaning. The presence of the gods reflects the position of a society's helplessness in the face of total destruction. The purpose of this violence is unknowable – divine. The *Trojan Women* avoids narrowly attributing violence to empirical causes by accentuating the subjectivity of suffering. By bringing into focus the role that the gods play as arbiters of violence in the *Trojan Women*, the modern director can explore

<sup>201</sup> Goldhill, *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*, 216.

the ways in which the subjective experience of violence is seldom reducible to rational explanations. The gods are the faceless killers of horror which bring destruction and leave little motivation or reasoning to comfort the awestruck person. While Poseidon and Athena disappear from the stage after the prologue, avant-garde director and acting teacher Tadashi Suzuki (b.1939) contends that they are very much present and responsible for the onstage violence in his adaption of the *Trojan Women*.

### **Divine Dread in Tadashi Suzuki's the *Trojan Women***

The philosophy undergirding Suzuki's physically rigorous actor training method, and thereby his adaptation of the *Trojan Women*, in many ways is a critique of the modern West's rationalistic approach to ancient Greek theatre. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw Japanese theatre makers become increasingly interested in Western realistic drama. During this time, the older traditions of Japanese theatre such as *noh* and *kabuki* were waning in popularity as a new style of theatre performance known as *shingeki*, or "New Drama," began to take hold. Under the guiding philosophies of Osanai Kaoru (1882-1928), who himself traveled to Moscow to observe Konstantin Stanislavski, the artists of *shingeki* made popular naturalistic productions of Western classics such as Shakespeare, Chekov and Ibsen.<sup>202</sup> It was toward *shingeki* that Suzuki (and other directors of the *angura*<sup>203</sup> theatre movement) aimed his criticisms of what he saw as the hypocrisies of Western rationalistic, technological, and democratic culture.<sup>204</sup> For Suzuki, *shingeki* was only one piece of a larger picture where "beginning [with] the Meiji period in 1868,

<sup>202</sup> Marianne McDonald, *Ancient Sun, Modern Light* (New York: Columbia UP, 1992), 22.

<sup>203</sup> "Underground."

<sup>204</sup> Ian Carruthers and Takahashi Yasunari, *The Theatre of Suzuki Tadashi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

there have been tremendous efforts within Japanese culture to catch up with, then surpass, the West.”<sup>205</sup> For those who contend that Greek tragedy is a “Western” art, it may seem an ironic twist that some of Suzuki’s most successful productions of criticism were his adaptations of Greek tragedy that he directed with his theatre company, the Suzuki Company of Toga.

By the time of Suzuki’s production, adapting Greek tragedy was nothing new to Japanese theatre practitioners and audiences. As with the European works of Shakespeare, Chekov, and Ibsen, the works of Greek tragedy had been introduced to Japanese theatre artists as the nation opened its borders in its quest to modernize in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, unlike the more modern works of Chekov, Ibsen, as well as Shakespeare, which dominated major theatre companies in Japan, Greek tragedy became the object of interest for *angura* artists; smaller, more experimental, and decidedly non-*shingeki* oriented theatre troupes. These theatre troupes often performed in unstylish small theatres, repurposed warehouses, street corners, rural villages, or public bathes –almost anywhere but the traditional Western proscenium stages of *shingeki*.<sup>206</sup> In their attempts to revive, re-invent, re-define traditional Japanese performance techniques such as *noh* and *kabuki*, the most “inventive and resourceful” of the *angura* artists often sought inspiration from classical Greek tragedy.<sup>207</sup> Such productions include Terayama Shûji’s *The Hunchback of Aomori* (1967; an adaptation of *Oedipus the King*), Satoh Makoto’s *Ismene* (1966; based on *Antigone*), and Yukio Ninagawa’s *Medea* (1978). Suzuki collaborator and famed *noh* actor Kanze Hisao, a member of the experimental troupe Mei no Kai, helped develop several productions of Greek tragedy in the first half of the 1970’s including *Oedipus*

<sup>205</sup> Tadashi Suzuki, *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki*, trans. J. Thomas Rimer (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1986), 4.

<sup>206</sup> Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, “Remembering and Forgetting: Greek Tragedy as National History in Postwar Japan,” in *Staging Nationalism*, ed. Kiki Gounaridou (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2005), 133.

<sup>207</sup> Sorgenfrei, “Remembering and Forgetting,” 131.

(1971), *Agamemnon* (1972), and *Medea* (1975). The emerging interest in exploring relationships between the ancient Greek drama and traditional Japanese theatre, stimulated by the aforementioned productions, led to the National Theatre of Greece being invited to Tokyo in April 1974.

The reasons for the popularization of Greek tragedy among experimental theatre artists of Japan are various and impossible to fully pinpoint. What is certain is that the proliferation of Greek tragedy productions in Japan increased significantly in the post-World War II era, an era which saw Japanese society struggle to recover from the decimation of two nuclear attacks and wrestle with the ramifications of Occupation which saw the reversal of two-thousand years of Japanese thought by the imposition of American-style democracy.<sup>208</sup> Japan until this time had never been occupied by a foreign power. While American propaganda promoted the ideal of democracy, the contradictions were clear. The democratic occupiers severely limited speech, and while preaching equality, they themselves constituted a privileged class.<sup>209</sup> What had been a society governed by a warrior class for centuries was forced into constitutional pacifism. And yet, the United States asked for Japan to form a National Police Reserve to aid the war in Korea and in 1960 the US signed with Japan the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty (AMPO) which established a military partnership between the countries and a permanent US military presence in Japan. In the backdrop of such societal upheaval, the lasting impact of the nuclear attacks of 1945 remained a significant menace in the culture milieu. The United States continued developing and testing nuclear weapons off the coasts of Japan. In 1954, such a test at Bikini Atoll led to the nuclear contamination of a Japanese tuna fishing vessel, *Little Boat 5*. While all

<sup>208</sup> Sorgenfrei, "Remembering and Forgetting," 126.

<sup>209</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton, 1999), 551.

crew members were stricken with radiation poisoning, the extent of the fallout worsened as the tuna aboard the ship was distributed through markets, sparking widespread panic among the public of being stricken with radiation poisoning through their food supply.<sup>210</sup> In short, post-World War II saw a cultural cleansing which sought to impose a Western-centric history and democratic state on Japanese society, while at the same time found that society living under constant fear of being wiped out at any moment.

It is against this backdrop of “collective traumatic memory” that *angura* theatre artists began to reject the “blind reproduction of Western theatre” and embrace a “nostalgia for the pre-modern Japanese world.”<sup>211</sup> Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei suggests that it was the shared theme of grappling with the realities of a newly democratic state that made Greek tragedy appealing to young Japanese artists. Sorgenfrei finds it reasonable to assume that the appeal of Greek tragedy is that it presents a struggle to reconcile an “imagined, idealized, and mythological tradition of Greek democracy” with an ever-present and decidedly non-democratic past. This struggle parallels the Japanese experience of coming to terms with the imposition of “American-style democracy and its contradictions.”<sup>212</sup> While agreeing that overt political leanings were a key feature of *angura* theatre productions, David Goodman notes that the post-war conditions of Japan saw Japanese artists increasingly portraying a deep sense of societal anguish in their work. Especially after 1960 with the heavily protested renewal of the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty, the inevitability of suffering and the decimation of the world around them became an oft-

<sup>210</sup> Penelope Chatzidimitriou, “Tadashi Suzuki and Yukio Ninagawa: Reinventing the Greek classics; reinventing Japanese identity after Hiroshima,” in *Contemporary Adaptations of Greek Tragedy*, ed. George Rodosthenous (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 94.

<sup>211</sup> Chatzidimitriou, “Tadashi Suzuki and Yukio Ninagawa,” 104.

<sup>212</sup> Sorgenfrei, “Remembering and Forgetting,” 133.

explored theme in Japanese art. Quoting theatre practitioners Tadashi Saito and Nakamura Masaki, Goodman states:

We have been atomic bombed and nothing changed. We have been occupied by a foreign army and nothing changed. We have organized demonstrations of our citizens and nothing changed.<sup>213</sup>

This statement suggests while the themes of democracy within Greek tragedy may have appealed to Japanese theatre practitioners, Greek tragedy is characteristic of a more profound reality which concerned many *angura* artists, that is, no matter human endeavors, the inevitability of suffering will not change. Like the society which produced the plays of ancient tragedy, an anxiety set in among the people of Japan reflective of a people who more and more contemplated that their communal suffering was utterly beyond their control. Forces seemingly continued to exert themselves violently onto the nation and as the above quote echoes, nothing ever changes. The presence of such a worldview that so characterizes tragedy invites us to question the coincidence that alongside the increased popularity of Greek tragedy in post-World War II Japan, another artform grew in popularity which brought to the forefront the fears of eminent nuclear annihilation which afflicted the island nation: the Japanese horror film.

After the war, the horror genre rose to prominence in the popular culture of Japan beginning in the 1950's.<sup>214</sup> Supernatural tales of vengeful ghosts and powerful monsters which destroyed the world around them proliferated.<sup>215</sup> A popular example of such a story, and the one often cited as the catalyst for future films of the *kaiju* ("strange beast") genre, is the 1954 film by

<sup>213</sup> David Goodman, "New Japanese Theatre. Theatre in Asia" in *The Drama Review* 12, no.2 (Spring 1971), 165.

<sup>214</sup> Cherry, *Horror*, 7.

<sup>215</sup> Colette Balmain, *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 12.

Ishirô Honda, *Gojira* (released in the United States as *Godzilla: King of Monsters!* in 1956). While the giant lizard-like creature Godzilla has been a fixture in popular world media since its inception, the film's international release was a heavily headed version of the original film, one which substantially downplayed if not removed the original film's political commentary. The original cut of the 1954 film *Gojira* was not made available to Western audiences, scholars and critics alike, until 2004.<sup>216</sup> Brian Merchant states that this “unflinchingly bleak” film is the “best window into post-war attitudes towards nuclear power we've got—as seen from the perspective of its greatest victims.” He goes on to describe *Gojira* as the most successful and “severe...monster-as-metaphor in cinema history.”<sup>217</sup> The metaphor, the political commentary that needed to be trimmed for Western audiences, is the fear of immanent destruction by nuclear holocaust. Steve Ryfles argues that the film is not about the threat of nuclear weapons *per se*, but that it espouses a more cosmic perspective which sees Godzilla as an unstoppable force of nature taking revenge on the world of man. Godzilla is not so different from the gods of Greek tragedy then. Like Athena who has been wronged by the Greeks and seeks the help of Poseidon to conjure the world against them, Godzilla rises from the depths of the ocean to punish mankind for its contemptuous actions. *Gojira* became the first in a long line of movies whose narratives culminate in the total annihilation of the world of the human characters at the hands of an unstoppable monster. Other popular monsters developed by Honda include Rodan, Mothra, King Ghidora, and Gamera, all of which “repeatedly devastate Tokyo and its environs in sequences of spectacular destruction.”<sup>218</sup> While these monster movies and subsequent Godzilla sequels may seem little more than campy monster movies, with the 2004 release of the original

<sup>216</sup> Steve Ryfles, “Godzilla's Footprint,” in *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 81, No. 1 (WINTER 2005), 45.

<sup>217</sup> Brian Merchant, “A Brief History of Godzilla, Our Never-Ending Nuclear Nightmare,” *Vice*, April 25, 2013, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/8gd4e3/a-brief-history-of-godzilla-our-never-ending-nuclear-nightmare](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8gd4e3/a-brief-history-of-godzilla-our-never-ending-nuclear-nightmare)

<sup>218</sup> Dixon, *A History of Horror*, 77.

cut of *Gojira*, Ryfles notes that “now, fifty years after the fact...the country responsible for dropping those bombs” can observe the film as it was intended to be: “an epic postwar tragedy.”<sup>219</sup>

The popularity of Greek tragedy among younger, politically oriented Japanese theatre artists is reflective of the country’s trend in horror media in which narratives of total annihilation proliferated. Suzuki’s adaptation of the *Trojan Women* is a narrative of total annihilation which, like the monster movies of horror, presented Troy as a metaphor for the Japanese fear of nuclear destruction. As such, Suzuki’s Trojan cemetery is set not in the ancient battlefields of the burning city of Troy, but in the destitute streets of 1945 Japan. The *Trojan Women* was first staged by Suzuki in 1974 shortly after he was appointed artistic director of Iwanami Hall in Tokyo and it is perhaps his most celebrated work. The *Trojan Women* garnered international acclaim through its 1977 reincarnation when it began a world tour that lasted until 1990. The performance length was just over an hour.<sup>220</sup> While the original 1974 production design consisted of a dimly colored backdrop of parachutes and fishnets, the touring production consisted of a mostly black and bare stage with a suggestion of forced perspective created by framing columns on either side of the stage. The majority of the words were direct translations of Euripides’ words into Japanese, though Suzuki supplemented some of the material he felt was too Greek specific with the contemporary poetry of Ooka Makoto (1931-2017). We see the events of the *Trojan Women* acted out in the mind of an Old Woman, played by Shiraishi Kayoko (b.1941), who in her attempt to reconcile her new life as a beggar in the wake of the atomic bomb acts out the play in her mind. Suzuki, in discussing his reasons for producing the

<sup>219</sup> Ryfles, “Godzilla’s Footprint,” 47.

<sup>220</sup> Paul Allain, *The Art of Stillness* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2002), 152.

*Trojan Women*, wanted to stay true to what he saw as the tragedy's critique not only of war, but of the powerlessness of women to determine their own fate, as well as the indifference of the gods, saying in the program:

I do not think any other work has so successfully expressed one aspect of universal man. Nor is this just because war itself remains a present reality for us. The fundamental drama of our time is anxiety in the face of impending disaster...I intended to express the disastrous fate of women caused by war, which was initiated by men, and the complete powerlessness of religion to aid the women or the war itself.<sup>221</sup>

As the earliest of his forays into Greek tragedy, Suzuki's adaption of the *Trojan Woman* was pivotal in the development of his famous acting method. A harsh critic of the West's rationalistic approach to Greek tragedy (and theatre performance in general), Suzuki developed a concept for the play which highlights the agency of divine forces in the violence presented. In Suzuki's adaptation, Poseidon and Athena are supplemented by a single divine figure named "The God" in the English program. This god most closely resembles Jizo, the merciful bodhisattva of Japanese Buddhist traditions who is closely linked to the protection of women and children. He is typically depicted as a monk with a shaved head, and he carries with him a staff in his right hand. Jizo is said to be a guide to those whose lives are cut short, making him a conspicuous choice given a plot which meditates on the loss of children to war.

<sup>221</sup> Allain, *The Art of Stillness*, 154.

Like Poseidon, the God of Suzuki's *Trojan Women* is the first character seen by the audience. Unlike both Poseidon and Athena, the God does not speak but remains on stage for the entirety of the performance, frighteningly motionless throughout the piece. The God was originally played by famed *noh* actor and frequent Suzuki collaborator Kanze Hisao until the actor's untimely death in 1978. Similar to the opening sequence of a *noh* production, The God enters the space from stage right with a slow sliding walk, at the center of a storm caused by a great war. The God stands upright in the center of the stage as we then learn the fates of the surviving women: Helen of Troy (in whose name the war was waged) will be given back to Menelaus, Hecabe to Odysseus, Cassandra to Agamemnon, and Andromache to Achilles' son. Another daughter of Hecabe, Polyxena, will be killed as an offering and we see eventually the child Astyanax killed by soldiers.

As a looming onstage figure both silent and motionless, the God's physical presence does nothing to aid our understanding of the violence portrayed. By staging the god but presenting him as an utterly passive physical object, Suzuki creates a sense of invisible power that is ascribed to the god, though never materialized. Paradoxically, Suzuki highlights the invisible power of the gods by presenting a visible but passive body. This passive body, as both silent and motionless, is an irrational presence as no motivation is ascribed to it. The characters, being unaware of its vicinity, make no attempt to understand the god, though they constantly cry out for answers. Much like the giant monsters of the *kaiju* films, the god will give no answers as it is there simply to oversee the destruction of its victims. In the final moments of the play, the broken girl, Andromache, now a modern looking woman in a t-shirt and torn skirt, (originally played by Ishihara Etsuko) throws flowers at the stomach of the God in anger of his culpability, the first time a character has interacted with the divine figure. The impact of the flowers causes

the God to flinch, folding over in agony while gripping his wound to the tune of a modern Motown sounding chorus ringing loudly the words, “Why won’t you love me tonight?” It is the only time the god has moved since entering the stage.

The tragedy was the ideal vehicle for Suzuki to demonstrate his artistic and social concerns and an even greater vehicle for the talents of kabuki actress Shiraishi who played Hecabe, and later Cassandra, and even later assumed the additional role of the Old Woman.<sup>222</sup> Suzuki’s now famous training method was codified simultaneously with this production as the production saw for the first time a *noh* actor (Kanze Hisao as Jizo/ Old Man/ Menelaus) share the stage with a *shingeki* actor (Ishihara Etsuko as Cassandra/ Andromache) and featured kabuki actress Shiraishi as the protagonist Hecabe. Shiraishi, upon Kanze’s death in 1978 (just weeks after opening Suzuki’s *Bacchae*), assumed the role of Old Man, and later would play Cassandra; hence she was playing three roles simultaneously by the 1980s, each with its own unique physical manifestation. Popular myth has it that Shiraishi is the reincarnation of Okuni, the female originator of *kabuki* in the seventeenth century. *New York Times* reviewer Mel Gussow said of Shiraishi in the 1982 performance in New York “when Miss Shiraishi is on stage it is difficult to notice anyone else. She is like a Fury that has assumed human form.”<sup>223</sup> Though no masks are used, *Chicago Tribune*’s entertainment editor at the time, Richard Christiansen, in 1986 described Shiraishi’s face as “the design of a flawlessly sculpted stage mask.”<sup>224</sup> Marianne McDonald, a scholar of adaptations of ancient literature, says of Shiraishi’s transformation from Hecabe to Cassandra: “her transformation before our eyes from aged actress to young maiden

<sup>222</sup> Yasunari Takahashi, “Tradition and Experiment in Contemporary Japanese Theatre,” in *Contemporary Theatre Review* 1, no. 2 (1994), 107.

<sup>223</sup> Mel Gussow, “Greek Tragedy: A Japanese *Bacchae*,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1982.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/06/03/theater/greek-tragedy-a-japanese-bacchae.html>

<sup>224</sup> Richard Christiansen, “Power of Grief Energizes *Trojan Women*,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 14, 1986.  
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1986-05-14-8602030747-story.html>

was spectacular and thoroughly convincing.”<sup>225</sup> In her book *Ancient Sun Modern Light*, McDonald continues her praise of Shiraishi saying “she brings a dynamic, almost supernatural intensity to the stage, and this involves the audience in a close physical sharing of the action. One can compare the religious basis of the Greek drama.”<sup>226</sup> As in the Greek drama, Suzuki aimed to blur the division between the audience in their seating space and the actors on the stage to create a theatre space as an organic whole.

Suzuki’s formulation of a bodily centered acting method which drew on Japanese theatrical traditions grew largely out of his experience with these actors of various backgrounds. Suzuki’s techniques were also practical as he was considering what methods he deemed effective in approaching Greek tragedy. The production of the *Trojan Women* and the development of Suzuki’s theories of actor training did not occur in separate vacuums, but rather, one influenced the other. Suzuki stated that approaching Greek tragedy meant stepping back from modern Euro-American styles of textual interpretation, and rather, finding an appropriate acting style. He says with regard to performing tragedy in a secular setting: “The problem doesn’t lie in whether or not there is a god, but in the fact that unless Greek texts are performed with the same kind of energy as in the age when they were originally produced, it becomes difficult to revive them successfully.”<sup>227</sup> Put another way, while the modern theatre producer may not believe in the presence of gods as the Greeks did, one cannot deny that an acceptance of their power over the world is a source of energy inherent in these ancient plays.

<sup>225</sup> Marianne McDonald, “Suzuki Tadashi’s Theatre: A Japanese Export That Enriches,” *Didaskalia*.  
<https://www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol1no4/mcdonald.html>

<sup>226</sup> McDonald, *Ancient Sun, Modern Light*, 24.

<sup>227</sup> Paul Allain quoting Suzuki in Allain, *The Art of Stillness*, 152.

According to Japanese theatre historian Ian Carruthers, in trying to solidify a proper performance technique for the production, Suzuki notes several parallels between the Japanese *noh* theatre and what we know of the performance of Greek tragedy: both grew out of religious rituals performed for the gods and overtime shifted into secular entertainment; both utilize masks which the actors wear at all times; both make use of lyric poetry, music, and dance in combination presented in a highly technical and stylized fashion.<sup>228</sup> One aspect of this stylized fashion which Suzuki aimed to replicate is a presentational style in which actors, rather than speaking directly to each other, face outward to deliver their speech not only to the audience but to the gods. The gods, and other supernatural figures, are perhaps the most vital justification for the implementation of *noh* techniques in the production of Greek tragedy. The stories of *noh*, like tragedy, almost always feature some form of deity, ghost, or other vengeful spirit. *Noh* plays are divided into five categories, each characterized by its subject matter made manifest in the type of character the protagonist, the *shite*, portrays:

- 1) *Waki-noh*, plays that portray the gods.
- 2) *Shura-mono*, plays that deal with the disgruntled or tormented state of a dead warrior, a ghost.
- 3) *Kazura-mono*, plays about woman.
- 4) *Yonbamme-mono* plays in which the *shite* is in a state of madness.
- 5) *Kiri-noh* plays about demons, monsters, non-human phantoms.

The supernatural entities described in these categories are arguably the very entities which form the basis of this study into Greek tragedy. In the extant body of Greek plays, there is no tragedy in which gods, ghosts, demons, states of madness, and disenfranchised women are not featured

<sup>228</sup> Carruthers, *The Theatre of Tadashi Suzuki*, 125.

prominently. It may well be that the acute similarity of subject matter between these categories of *noh* and the characters of Greek tragedy provide yet another explanation for the marrying of *noh* performance techniques to Greek tragedy. Compared to modern forms of theatre, *noh* seems exceptionally attentive to narratives of supernatural import. It may also be for this reason that while the producers of tragedy were turning to *noh*, so too were the filmmakers of Japanese horror.

As previously noted, the proliferation of Greek tragedy among *angura* artists paralleled the popularization of Japanese horror as both genres of performance explored narratives of total annihilation at the hand of uncontrollable forces. Films influential in the development of Japanese horror in the 1960's include *Onibaba* (1964) and the anthology film of ghost stories *Kwaidan* (1965). *Onibaba* in particular utilizes various elements of *noh* performance. A han'nya mask, a *noh* mask representing a jealous female demon, is central to the film's plot in which an older woman wears the mask to trick her younger companion into believing she is a demon. Keiko McDonald, noting the film's treatment of *noh*-inspired folklore, suggests the camera angles used when capturing the mask harkens to the ability of the *noh* performer to position their head in different ways, angling their mask to indicate different emotions.<sup>229</sup> Though a period piece set during a 14<sup>th</sup> century civil war, *Onibaba*, like tragedy and the monster films of *kaiju*, resembles a narrative of total annihilation. The older woman discovers that the mask is not removable, and her face becomes horribly disfigured underneath it by the end of the film, completing her transformation into the "demon." With the post-war condition being at the forefront of the creative process for the artists of tragedy and horror, the director of *Onibaba*, Kaneto Shindo, stated that the make-up used in the old-women's unmasking scene to reveal her

<sup>229</sup> Keiko McDonald, *Reading a Japanese film: Cinema in context* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 116.

disfigurement was inspired by photographs of victims of the atomic bombs.<sup>230</sup> It would seem that *noh*, with respect to its performance techniques which derive from stories of the supernatural, provided a model foundation for horror films like *Onibaba* and productions of Greek tragedy such as Suzuki's the *Trojan Women*.

However, there are notable differences between Suzuki's production of the *Trojan Women* and what we know of Greek performance traditions. For one, Suzuki's actors do not wear masks. Another notable difference is found in the implementation of violence. As we have previously seen, while there may not have been a moral justification for it, the Greek tragedies of record do not present overt violence or sexual encounters on stage. When Andromache is assaulted by Greek soldiers, as well as when her infant son Astyanax is thrown from the ledges of Troy as punishment for her resistance, both happen offstage and are then described to the audience in horrific detail. On the other hand, Suzuki's production has Andromache being dragged by soldiers and assaulted onstage in front of the audience, albeit in a choreographed and highly stylized manner involving the use of scarves. We see her struggle and we hear her screams and the soldiers tear at her clothing. Astyanax, portrayed by a white muslin doll, is held in the protection of another woman while Andromache suffers. A Greek soldier slices the arm of the woman and takes the child. A fight ensues between the women and the soldiers for control of the child at which point a soldier cuts the child's arm. Three Greek soldiers, stepping in their arrogant swagger, tear the doll to pieces and throw it to the feet of his grandmother, Hecabe.

The presentation of violence in this manner on stage is not something found in the texts of Greek tragedy, and the process of staging it can be seen as a method of adapting the horror

<sup>230</sup> McDonald, *Reading a Japanese Film: Cinema in Context*, 118.

aesthetics of the ancient Greek world into a manner more suited for representing horror to a modern audience. Greek tragedy has been described as a “drama of words.”<sup>231</sup> In the ancient Greek world, horror was communicated through the spoken word, a style of representation which left the listener to imagine a threat far more dreadful than could be effectively staged. The use of a messenger to describe the violent act, often thought to reflect a moral aversion to displaying the grotesque, is more likely due to the realization that within the confines of fifth-century theatre making, such imagery is made far more vivid through narration than presentation. The modern audience, inundated with images of violence, is accustomed to seeing scenes of graphic bloodshed played out in front of them. As Goldhill notes, “horror and science fiction films have changed a modern audience’s perception of the physically grotesque and the frightening.”<sup>232</sup> This change in audience expectations, from word to image, coupled with the added naturalism of violent acts in film makes staging scenes of violence in a natural way challenging. Suzuki’s approach to violence is then a middle ground between the narrative approach of the ancient world and the overt naturalism made possible by film; he stages violence, but does so in a highly stylized though still visceral format which provides the image of violence, but continues to leave space for the audience’s imagination to create their own horror.

Of course, Suzuki never claims to have been aiming at authenticity with regard to Greek practices. How could he? Rather, he was concerned with replicating a style of energy, one grounded in enacting violent physical force upon the body. Through the tools of Japanese *noh*, he sought to recapture a pre-modern animal energy grounded in the human body that he feels has been lost to an inert energy couched in modern technology. Suzuki sees the result of the

<sup>231</sup> Peter Burian, “Myth into *mythos*: the shaping of tragic plot” in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P.E. Easterling, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 199.

<sup>232</sup> Goldhill, *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*, 198.

increasing use of inert energy in the theatre, both in the West and Japan, as the “faculties of the human body and physical sensibility [becoming] overspecialized to the point of separation.”<sup>233</sup> Modern society creates special tools to aid in specific functions of the body such as a microscope to see better and microphones to speak louder. By compartmentalizing different functions of the body, we become “dismembered,” and our awareness of bodily functions becomes impaired through disuse.<sup>234</sup> Actors lose a sense of their body as an organic whole and begin to view it as an amalgam of individual functions. It is by the gradual replacement of animal energies with inert energies that ancient Greek performance traditions were lost to the West. Like Greek tragedy, *noh* developed as style of performance which took for granted ever-present supernatural forces. While the modern West’s approach to acting is rooted in scientific understandings of body and mind, the artists of *noh*, ground their techniques not in the empirical sciences, but in the bodily experience of the supernatural. In his essay, “Culture is the Body,” Suzuki states that the broad goal behind developing his method for the *Trojan Women* was to “uncover and bring to the surface the physically perceptive sensibility which actors had originally, before the theatre acquired its various codified performing styles.”<sup>235</sup> He explains that his interest is to “make the whole body speak, even when one keeps silent.”<sup>236</sup>

Suzuki discusses several characteristics of *noh* which make its existence exceptional among forms of theatre in the modern world. These characteristics, by virtue of their origins in practices oriented toward the gods, make the techniques of *noh* particularly suited for the performance of Greek tragedy. In *noh*, from the beginning of the rehearsal period to the last

<sup>233</sup> Suzuki, *Culture is the Body*, 65.

<sup>234</sup> McDonald, *Ancient Light, Modern Sun*, 23.

<sup>235</sup> Tadashi Suzuki, *Culture is the Body* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2015), 66.

<sup>236</sup> Suzuki, *Culture is the Body*, 66.

performance, virtually no energy is used in the artistic process that is not naturally human. Here, Suzuki compares and contrasts animal and inert energy, the former as that which is created naturally through the body of living organisms, and the latter as that which is created not by human or animals, but by electricity, oil, or even atomic power.<sup>237</sup> One is natural, the other not. The environment, the stage on which *noh* is performed is akin to the original environment of Greek tragedy in that it is both fixed and outdoors. Like the theatres of ancient Greece, *noh* is always performed in a specific space created especially for it and rarely do the style or physical attributes of space change. Indeed, the *noh* actor develops such an intimate physical connection with the space that it has been said one could perform their piece flawlessly even if all lights were extinguished. Suzuki refers to the relationship between the actor's body and the performance space as "sacred space."

In both *noh* and the ancient Greek world, the relationship between the mortal body and the natural world might indeed be called "sacred" as this relationship is given a supernatural dimension. The bodily experience of nature is a key element in the experience of the divine in both *noh* and Greek tragedy. As David Wiles notes, whereas religions rooted in Western monotheism consider God to be *everywhere*, Greek religion considered any particular god to be *somewhere*.<sup>238</sup> The belief in epiphany connotes the manifestation of a god by its appearance to mortals in the natural world through natural phenomena. As such, the act of praying to a god is a highly physical, rather than cognitive, act meant to meet the god at the place of its appearance in nature. For instance, Dionysus is said to appear to mortals through the grape vine. Therefore, an act of prayer to Dionysus would involve the consumption of wine. As we have seen, the *Trojan*

<sup>237</sup> Suzuki, *The Way of Acting*, 91.

<sup>238</sup> Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 43.

*Women* opens with the god Poseidon proclaiming himself the god of a natural domain: the sea. The association of gods to their appearance in nature, of Poseidon to the sea, should not be viewed solely as a way for Greek culture to explain things they lacked the modern science to explain. Rather, the association of gods to their appearance in nature speaks volumes to the conception of the body's relationship to nature in ancient Greek society. Nature is not a controllable object, but contrarily, the body is at the disposal of the cosmos as the body is birthed from, lives within and ultimately returns to the cosmos. The actions of nature are unknowable, and in this way, one's experience of natural phenomena is a manifestation of irrational forces which act upon bodies.

The conception of nature as a force beyond human control is seen throughout Greek tragedy where references to nature are rife. Rush Rehm notes that the sun in particular was a popular symbol in much of Greek tragedy, examining how these references are all the more significant given that the performances took place during the day, under sunlight.<sup>239</sup> As such, references to the sun are not simply metaphorical but speak to a shared cosmic experience of both the audience and characters. The Greek stage was outdoors, surrounded and effected by the elements. Not only was the experience of tragedy an experience of these elements, but the very process of attending such a theatre is a physically rigorous activity. About four hours west of Athens, located in the municipality of Messolonghi (Μεσολόγγι), is an ancient theatre characteristic of many ancient Greek theatres which I have previously discussed: the ancient theatre of Oiniades (Οινιάδες). The theatre of Oiniades is a fairly well-preserved ancient theatre which sits at the top of a tall mountain. Audiences to this day attend theatre productions at the outdoor space presented by various touring companies around Greece (including my own

<sup>239</sup> Rehm, *Radical Theatre*, 23.

production of the *Trojan Women* in 2019). While there is a paved road that allows buses to take audience members a significant distance up the hill, all audience members must walk up a long unpaved hill to get to the top where the theatre is located. If one struggles with or does not have the ability to walk, it would be very difficult for them to attend a production at this theatre. Once at the top, one can see a never-ending landscape of mountains, farmland, and the sea. In such circumstances, with the sea in view, the act of appearing before an audience, who traversed the natural terrain to attend, and declaring one's self "Poseidon, god of the sea" is not simply theatrics or an abstraction, but a reminder of the forces within which the performance takes place.

While *noh* performances have since moved indoors, the belief in the power of the divine through its appearance in nature has persisted, as seen primarily through the presence of the pine tree. The stage is mostly bare and has no decoration except for a large bright green pine tree that is painted on the panels of the back wall, referred to as the "pine panels" though their more proper title is *kagami-ita*, or "mirror boards."<sup>240</sup> However, Royal Tyler in his article "Buddhism in Noh," suggests that the more accurate name for the large painted pine tree is *yogo no matsu*, "the pine of the appearance of the god."<sup>241</sup> Three living pine trees are placed on each side of the bridge that connects to the primary stage. On the one hand, these pine trees serve a practical function as they give the *shite*, the lead actor, a point of reference when moving as they can see very little through the mask they wear. However, the pine trees were not introduced to the *noh* stage for practical purposes. Mikiko Ishii outlines two theories concerning the history and significance of the trees. The first is that the trees are simply a remnant, a symbolic reminder, of

<sup>240</sup> Mikiko Ishii, "The Noh Theater: Mirror, Mask, and Madness," in *Comparative Drama* 28 (1994): 53.

<sup>241</sup> Royal Tyler, "Buddhism in Noh," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14 (1987): 27.

when performances were held outdoors in front of a pine tree. The second theory is that the pine trees represent the famous Yogo Pine at the Kasuga Shrine in Nara Prefecture where it is said that an old man came once a day to dance. This old man, dancing in front of the pine was discovered to be the god of the shrine, and the dances of *noh* are performed so that the god may descend once more. The pine tree then is an important marker of the stage as a sacred place, a place where the god is invited to dance as he did in Nara. Ishii suggests that the pine tree must also be viewed within the context of Japanese Buddhism, where the pine tree is a symbol of the “eternal and unchangeable over against the Buddhist philosophy of the transience of human life.”<sup>242</sup> Zeami, the originator of *noh*, himself describes the pine tree as a symbol of the divine when he says “We celebrate our Royal Highness’ everlasting era with an evergreen pine tree, and hope that we might live one thousand years under his protection.”<sup>243</sup>

The belief in the gods as supernatural forces which appear to humans through nature entailed that activities directed toward those gods, such as prayers, were activities rooted in corporality. So too, a hyper-awareness of physicality would be at the forefront of a mode of theatre which traces its lineage to actions directed toward these forces. Pragmatically, the most important difference between Greek tragedy and traditional Japanese forms of theatre, for Suzuki, is that Greek performance traditions have been lost, while Japanese performance traditions have been preserved. The physicality of *noh* is rooted in the “act of restraint”<sup>244</sup> whereby emotional movement takes the form of minimal but precise bodily gestures. The God

<sup>242</sup> Ishii, “The Noh Theater,” 54.

<sup>243</sup> Zeami, “Go-on kyoku-jo-jo,” in *Zeami and Zenchiku*, eds. Akira Omote and Shuichi Kato (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 200.

<sup>244</sup> Lee A. Jacobus, ed., *The Bedford Introduction to Drama*, 5<sup>th</sup>ed. (Boston: Bedford/St Martins, 2005), 227.

of Suzuki's the *Trojan Women* exemplifies this restraint given his performance required an hour of utter stillness. Gussow, in his *New York Times* review, states the *Trojan Women* of Suzuki is:

first of all, physical. By his own design, the director leads his actors in exercising body language – strange, spasmodic movements that often seem to defy traditional use of muscles. Actors wheel rather than walk on stage, as if propelled by interior motors. They drop to the floor with the suddenness of a rifle shot.<sup>245</sup>

Paul Allain, a scholar of bodily centered acting techniques, says the physical nature of the *Trojan Women* is, as in *noh*, derived from “the feet and the relationship of the body to the ground” which “invoke[s] the mood of the production.”<sup>246</sup> Indeed, one needs only glance at photos and videos of the production to be drawn to the actors' use of specific foot movements.

Suzuki himself describes *noh* as the art of walking. For this reason, the actors in the *Trojan Women* do not wear shoes, as this would diminish the connection between one's feet and the ground beneath. Rather, they tend to wear *tabi* (white split socks). A performance begins when the actor's foot touches the ground (in the case of *noh*, a wooden floor) and has the sensation of putting down roots. To this end, a prominent bodily gesture in the production (and one of Suzuki's more popular exercises) is a technique called “stomping.” Of the act of stomping Suzuki says: “...we come to understand that the body establishes its relation to the ground through the feet, that the ground and the body are not two separate entities. We are a part

<sup>245</sup> Gussow, “Greek Tragedy: A Japanese *Bacchae*.”

<sup>246</sup> Allain, *The Art of Stillness*, 137.

of the ground. Our very beings will return to the earth when we die”.<sup>247</sup> As Allain explains, basic stomping consists of bringing one’s torso to an upright position with arms straight and toward the ground, hands in light fists, knees are slightly bent, and feet and legs are pressed together giving the body a low center of gravity. Pull the right knee up, lifting the leg up as high as possible, then stomp directly and forcefully down with the whole foot, and repeat with the left leg. This basic walking technique is known as *ashi-bumi* and is one of ten walking techniques which ground the Suzuki training method.<sup>248</sup> Stomping in various capacities, highly stylized and physically rigorous, adds both a rhythm and a carnality to the *Trojan Women*. As soldiers march toward Andromache to tear her child from her, their violent intensions are manifest in hyena like laughs and walking sequence.

The use of stomping techniques is not unique to Suzuki, but has a long history in Japan, perhaps originating in Shinto shrines. As in the performance of Greek tragedy, stomping as a performance technique seems derived from activities directed toward supernatural forces. From ancient times, pounding against the ground was a ritual used by farmers meant to suppress evil spirits that might do harm to the crops. Later the ritual was directed toward deterring actual animal predators. At the temple of Tokuzoji in Nara Prefecture, for example, farmers on the third of each January perform a dance called the *shishi-oi*, or “wild boar chasing ceremony.” The villagers in bare feet rigorously stomp on the floor of the Jizo Hall while crying out in such a way as to ward off unwanted visitors. They believe this dance is a way of driving wild boars from the village, though in its infancy the ritual had much more supernatural significance.

<sup>247</sup> Suzuki, *The Way of Acting*, 9.

<sup>248</sup> Allain, *The Art of Stillness*, 117.

Suzuki notes that literary critic and folklore scholar Origuchi Shinobu (1872-1953), in his *Six Lectures of the Traditional Japanese Arts*, traces the act of stomping to a Shinto creation myth that describes the goddess Ame Uzumi no Kami dancing on an overturned bucket in front of the Heavenly Rock Cave, in which the Sun goddess, Amaterasu, has hidden herself, casting the world in darkness. The myth is said to represent the beginnings of the *kagura*, a sacred Shinto dance. In his analysis, Origuchi suggests the bucket represents the earth. Therefore, to step on the bucket is to step on the ground. The goddess, by stomping, is indicating that the soul, trapped in the earth, can come forth; hence, stomping is an act of communicating with spirits within the earth.<sup>249</sup> Suzuki believes that in *noh* and *kabuki*, the practice of stomping originated not only as a way of pushing away bad spirits, but as a way of making room for good spirits to come forth and inhabit the performance through the actor. This is for this reason that classical Japanese productions were often set in places where these spirits were believed to dwell, such as burial sites. To this day, when a *noh* stage is constructed the bottom of the stage is often hollowed out and empty jars are placed underneath. Though the hollow stage serves to create an artistic effect when the floor is struck by the foot of the performer, the echo and reverberation of the actor's feet can be understood as a summoning forth of spirits to dwell within the body of the performer.

By studying both *noh* and the Japanese influenced European avant-garde, Suzuki came to believe that the most defining feature of the theatre is that the human being is not primarily a rational being. Rather, the fundamental starting point of the *Trojan Women*, as well as his training method, is that the human being is first and foremost a body that is imbedded in the forces of nature. The body experiences suffering, and that suffering is not reducible to rational

<sup>249</sup> Suzuki, *The Way of Acting*, 12.

explanations. The philosophy behind Suzuki's production of the *Trojan Women* challenged its audience to consider the ways in which forces beyond human control act upon bodies. When asked to describe the characteristics of Greek tragedy which make it "unique," Suzuki has said that it is "the theatrical form which so painstakingly examines the nature of violent crime with human communities."<sup>250</sup> As Suzuki notes that Euripides, in examining this violence, does not transpose well to the standards of modern realism grounded in the unities of character, speech, and action. Holding the broken and dismembered corpse of her grandchild, Hecabe laments:

That man is a fool who imagines he is firmly prosperous and is glad. For in its very nature fortune, like a crazed man, leaps now in one direction, now in another, and the same man is never fortunate forever...

...The gods, as we now see, had nothing in view but my misery and their hatred of Troy beyond all other cities. Our sacrificing was for nothing.<sup>251</sup>

As Hecabe laments her fate, bemoaning her trust and reliance on the gods, the audience of Tadashi Suzuki's the *Trojan Women* is conscious of the proximity of those gods. With his motionless, imposing presence prominently positioned centerstage for the entire performance, the God of Suzuki's tragedy makes known to the audience that Hecabe's suffering has been ordained. Unbeknownst to her, Hecabe's prayers and sacrifices are futile not because of disinterested gods, but because they have actively campaigned against her. It is better for her to

<sup>250</sup> Suzuki, *Culture is the Body*, 110.

<sup>251</sup> Eur. *Tro.* 1200-1250 in Euripides, *Trojan Women. Iphigenia among the Taurians. Ion*, trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library 10 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

think they are absent, or perhaps non-existent, than to think they are responsible for taking her family from her. As such, the above passage is reflective of Hecabe's increasing disillusionment in the gods. She denies their involvement in her suffering or the suffering of others, leading her to reject fiercely the plight of other victims in the play. One such victim is notably absent in the production of Suzuki, though her role in the Trojan War has been immortalized more than others. While Suzuki's production of the *Trojan Women* recognizes the culpability of the gods in the suffering of Hecabe after the war, the production does not address the dread of divine manipulation through the character often identified with causing the war itself: Helen of Troy.

### **Helen's Possession**

In a scene referenced, but not depicted, in the *Iliad* and expounded upon in the *Trojan Women* of Euripides, we are told that the Trojan War begins with a contest among the gods Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena. The gods in their envy insist on proving once and for all who of the three divinities is the most beautiful. To answer this question, Zeus, king of the gods, appoints Paris, prince of Troy, to decide. In order to win his favor, Aphrodite promises Paris that she will deliver to him the most beautiful woman in the world should he choose her. While tempting Paris with great rewards for his compliance, Aphrodite is seen tempting Paris in other ways, flirting, imploring him to obey her. In one description by Colluthus in *The Rape of Helen*, it is said the goddess:

...lifted up her deep-bosomed robe and bared her breast to the air  
and had no shame. And lifting with her hands the honeyed girdle  
of the Loves she bared all her bosom and heeded not her breasts.<sup>252</sup>

While Aphrodite is not depicted going so far as to make love to Paris, it is clear he stood no chance in rejecting her. Naturally, Paris accepts her offer. As promised, Aphrodite rewards him by traveling to the city of Sparta and imbuing the city's queen, Helen, with the curse of love. Helen, controlled by the influence of Aphrodite, runs away with Paris, leaving her husband Menelaus behind. Unlike modern conceptions of divinity which are abstracted and given a moral dimension, the gods of these plays are not moral arbiters. They are portrayed as biased, unfair, happily and arbitrarily performing violent deeds upon humans. The question of Helen's culpability in the Trojan War is steeped in a worldview which accepts that divine figures regularly interact with and intervene in the affairs of mortals. Therefore, the question that the modern theatre producer might address is how to present the gods in such a way as to evoke the horror that follows such interventions. Perhaps more than the onstage gods of Poseidon and Athena, and their adaptation into the God of Suzuki's production, the invisible presence of divine forces through their manipulation of mortals is a catalyst for the violence set upon the characters of the *Trojan Women*. Though rejected by Hecabe, the dread of Aphrodite is central to the events which play out before, during, and after the Trojan War.

<sup>252</sup> Col. 155-8 in Oppian, Colluthus, Tryphiodorus, *Oppian, Colluthus, and Tryphiodorus*, trans. A. W. Mair, Loeb Classical Library 219 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

Like all tales of mythology, Helen's culpability in the Trojan War depends significantly on the source. The *Iliad* spends little time discussing the judgment of Paris concerning the beauty of the gods. The poet states that the cause of the war was:

the folly of Alexander,<sup>253</sup> who had insulted those goddesses when  
they came to his farmstead and praised her who furthered his  
grievous lustfulness.<sup>254</sup>

The famous translation by Robert Fagles is perhaps more helpful in elucidating the meaning behind this passage as he gives names to those goddesses being referenced:

Paris in all his madness launched the war.  
He offended Athena and Hera –both goddesses.  
When they came to his shepherd's fold, he favored Love<sup>255</sup>  
who dangled before his eyes the lust that loosed disaster.<sup>256</sup>

The vagueness of this allusion coupled with the lack of details as to what was “dangled before his eyes” suggests that an audience member listening to the tale was familiar enough with the story to fill in the details. While the popular tale seems to suggest that Aphrodite is at least partially to blame for the outbreak of war, Helen has none-the-less taken the brunt of the blame in the majority of available literature. Yet, rather than accuse Helen, the above passage questions the role of Paris in the event, suggesting that it was his “madness” that began the war. The complexity of causes attributed to the Trojan War highlights the question at hand: how might one

<sup>253</sup> Another name of Paris.

<sup>254</sup> Hom. *Il.* 24.28-30 in Homer, *Iliad, Volume II: Books 13-24*, trans. A. T. Murray, ed. William F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library 171 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

<sup>255</sup> Aphrodite.

<sup>256</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1990), 589.

avoid reducing the causes of violence in tragedy to human agency, and rather, address the web of supernatural forces which bear down on that agency, or strip it away altogether?

For his part, Euripides is the only tragedian whose extant plays examine the question of the relationship between Helen and the gods in the violent war. Aside from the *Trojan Women*, Helen appears as a central character in two other works by Euripides: *Helen* (412 BCE), and *Orestes* (408 BCE). Indeed, of the works which remain, Euripides was the only Greek tragedian to put the story of Helen to the stage.<sup>257</sup> In the *Trojan Women*, Helen must fight for her life as she is called onstage by her husband Menelaus who, supported by Hecabe, has decided to have his wife murdered as punishment for causing the war. The scene is one of three debates which provide the structure of the play. One by one, Hecabe encounters a daughter (or daughter-in-law) with whom she debates the meaning of their suffering, the purpose of the war, and the role of the gods in all of it. In the third of these ἀγώνες (*agōnes* – “struggle, contest”), Menelaus declares his intent to have Helen murdered for the dishonor and embarrassment she brought to him by fleeing Sparta for the home of Paris in Troy. Hecabe blames Helen personally for the death of her husband Priam, and sons Hector and Paris. Helen is trapped between two people who want her dead.

She begs for her life, asserting her innocence by relating the tale of Paris’ judgment in the divine beauty contest.

[Paris] judged the trio of goddesses.

...Cypris,<sup>258</sup> admiring my beauty, promised she would give me to him if she defeated the other goddesses in the beauty contest.

<sup>257</sup> Lefkowitz, *The Greek Plays*, 683.

<sup>258</sup> An epithet of Aphrodite derived from her association with the island of Cyprus.

...What was I thinking of that I left the house in  
company with a stranger, abandoning my country and my home?  
Discipline the goddess and be stronger than Zeus! Zeus holds sway  
over all the other divinities but is a slave to her. So it is pardonable  
in me.  
...How then should I be justly put to death, dear husband... seeing  
that Paris married me by constraint, while my own situation caused  
me painful slavery.<sup>259</sup>

In this speech, Helen pleads her case. Firstly, she is not responsible for what the gods forced her to do. Indeed, she speaks of herself quite literally as a slave. Secondly, she asks rhetorically, “what was I thinking?” to imply that no human person on their own volition would have abandoned their home to live with a stranger from a far-off land. Thirdly, given that she is not responsible for her actions, she suggests to Menelaus and Hecabe that if they must cast blame, they should direct it toward the gods.

Of course, Hecabe wants nothing to do with the excuses of Helen. Hecabe can see that through her impassioned speech, Helen has begun to win back the affections of her husband. The Queen of Troy takes it upon herself to prove to Menelaus that Helen is both a liar and a dishonorable wife by contending that the gods would have no want or reason to involve themselves in the affairs of mortals. The gods, she argues, are perfectly beautiful as they are and would not need such affirmation from a human. Discounting Helen’s story of this beauty

<sup>259</sup> Eur. *Tro.* 914-950.

contest, Hecabe maintains that there is only one reason why Helen would have left her home, stating:

My son was very handsome, and when you saw him your mind  
was turned into Cypris.

... You saw him resplendent in the golden raiment of the East, and  
your mind became utterly wanton.<sup>260</sup>

Hecabe's argument is quite simple: Helen, full of desire, left her husband Menelaus because she was lustful of Paris and his wealth. Put another way, Helen made an incorrect moral decision which resulted in the violent outbreak of war. The modern audience would presumably be sympathetic toward Hecabe in this situation. The queen has had her entire life ripped away from her. Hecabe's appeal to rationality is persuasive; the flawed human rather than a supernatural power is at fault. Through the modern lens, it is difficult to find justification in Helen's actions when her claim to innocence is grounded in an argument which amounts to proclaiming, "God made me do it." Modern times give little credence to such claims. Even into the period of medieval Christianity, Helen was the paradigmatic symbol of unbridled lust and the adulterous woman.<sup>261</sup> In the *Ylias* by theologian Joseph of Exeter, the poet describes Helen as a temptress of Paris who "lying on him with her whole body, opens her legs, presses him with her mouth and robs him of his semen."<sup>262</sup> It should be noted that Joseph *did not* have explicit fantasies he clearly needed to exercise. Christian tradition espoused a moralistic view toward sexual activity, especially when that activity was centered on a woman. The benevolent God would not command anyone to commit such a grave sin as adultery. As such, the Western

<sup>260</sup> Eur. *Tro.* 987-992.

<sup>261</sup> Hughes, *Helen of Troy*, 144.

<sup>262</sup> B. Geoffroy-Schneiter, *Greek Beauty* (New York: Assouline, 2003), 5.

tradition has tended to dismiss Helen as one who is making excuses. However, while Helen's affair with Paris in medieval society was seen as an act against God, for the Greeks and Romans it was believed to be an act of a god –Aphrodite.<sup>263</sup> Helen's claim of innocence takes on an entirely new dimension when examined through the lens of a concept popular in the imaginations of both the ancient Greeks and modern audiences: possession.

Stories of possession, or the loss of one's ability to act on their own rational volition due to the outside influence of a god, were widespread in antiquity. E.R. Dodds in his book *The Greeks and the Irrational*, examines the Greek belief in possession at the hands of a god. To begin, Dodds calls attention to a form of divine temptation, *ἀτη* (*atē*) which in Greek religious traditions, and especially in the works of Homer, was described as the source of temporary madness in a human being.<sup>264</sup> In the *Iliad*, for instance, when Agamemnon is made to answer for his wrongdoing of robbing Achilles of his mistress, he states:

It is not I who am at fault, but Zeus and Fate and Erinys, that walks  
in darkness, since in the place of assembly they cast on my mind  
fierce blindness on that day when on my own authority I took from  
Achilles his prize. But what could I do? It is a god that brings all  
things to their end. Eldest daughter of Zeus is Ate who blinds all—  
accursed one.<sup>265</sup>

As with the justification given by Helen for her actions, the modern audience is likely to interpret Agamemnon's contention as hardly more than a rhetorical excuse meant to minimize

<sup>263</sup> Hughes, *Helen of Troy*, 146.

<sup>264</sup> Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 2.

<sup>265</sup> Hom. *Il.* 86-91.

his culpability. However, as Dodds notes, Agamemnon's explanation is immediately followed by an offer of compensation on the grounds that he accepts performing the deed, whether in a state of madness or not:

But since I was blinded, and Zeus robbed me of my senses, I am  
minded to make amends and to give compensation past  
counting.<sup>266</sup>

Dodds states that "had [Agamemnon] acted on his own volition, he could not so easily admit himself in the wrong; as it is, he will pay for his acts."<sup>267</sup> Agamemnon's actions, though not of his own accord, have tainted him morally and, accepting this, he acknowledges that he must make amends. Through Achilles, the story provides further evidence that Agamemnon's apology is not simply an alibi. Achilles seems to hold the same view as Agamemnon with regard to his actions. Achilles states:

Father Zeus, great indeed is the blindness you send to men. Never  
would the son of Atreus have thoroughly roused my heart within  
my breast, nor led off the girl shamelessly against my will.<sup>268</sup>

Therefore, it is the belief of both characters, and presumably the poet, that the only possible cause for Agamemnon's actions is possession at the hands of Zeus. In antiquity, the dividing line between human insanity and prophetic madness was difficult to draw.<sup>269</sup> Taken in isolation, one might presume that Achilles could be accepting the fiction given to him by Agamemnon in order to quickly make amends and move on. However, this would ignore the

<sup>266</sup> Hom. *Il.* 132-33.

<sup>267</sup> Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 3.

<sup>268</sup> Hom. *Il.* 270-75.

<sup>269</sup> Dodds, *The Greek and the Irrational*, 68.

countless other moments in the *Iliad* when the gods in some form are described as temporarily taking away, destroying, or enchanting a human being's reasoning.<sup>270</sup> Further, to take as a shallow excuse a character's justification for their misdeeds would be to discount various other passages of Greek literature, particularly in tragedy, where we are given further examples of possession at the hands of a god.

Modern depictions of possession almost invariably take their cue from *The Exorcist* (1973), the film which set the standard for all depictions of possession in popular media since. In *The Exorcist*, the novel and film written by William Peter Blatty, a twelve year-old girl, Regan, finds herself victim to an ancient power of evil, the demon Pazuzu, who enters the girl's body as she plays on a Ouija board with her friends. In Blatty's story, and subsequent movies which it inspired, the notion of possession is rooted in the symbology and language of Judeo-Christian religions, particularly Roman Catholicism. Priests, nuns, and other features of the Catholic religious institution feature prominently in modern stories of possession. The central characters of *The Exorcist*, the elderly exorcist Lankester Merrin and his assistant Damien Karras, are both priests. *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005) is about the courtroom trial of a priest who performed a supposedly botched exorcism resulting in the possessed person's death. In *The Conjuring* (2013), demonologists Ed and Lorraine Warren must obtain permission from the Catholic Church to perform an exorcism on a haunted house. *The Conjuring* franchise further explored this use of Catholic imagery when in later films creator James Wan introduced the character of The Nun, a demon possessed sister of the church. The centrality of Catholicism to modern portrayals of possession has contributed to the painting of possession as a moral dilemma. That is, the demonic force which possesses victims is categorically evil, an entity

<sup>270</sup> Dodds, *The Greek and the Irrational*, 4.

opposite of the singular benevolent god. Depictions of possession seldom depart from this formula, and there is little nuance between the forms that possession can take. Importantly, the evil displayed by the possessed victim does not necessarily manifest as a physical threat. In a previous chapter, I outlined some of the repulsive physical mutations of Regan's body during her possession: urinating profusely, excessively vomiting green bile, lacerated discolored skin, and extreme contortion of her body such as rotating her neck in a complete circle. However, this bodily degeneration is accompanied by a personality shift. The demon began speaking through the girl's body, tormenting the character psychologically, toying with Father Karras' grief over his recently deceased mother to the point where Karras is asked by Merrin to leave the room. The demon, through the manipulation of Karras' emotions has gained exactly what it wants: to be alone with the elderly priest, a situation which eventually leads to the priest's death.

The mechanism by which the possessed affects the world often takes the form of manipulation. The Greeks did not conceive of possession in such starkly binary terms as good and evil, as they did not conceive of their gods in such morally binary ways. Still, possession within the literature of ancient Greece often leads to unscrupulous ends through acts of manipulation. Dodds, elaborating on Plato's assessment of possession in the *Phaedo*, outlines several forms of possession, or "divine madness," which are present in the Greek literature of antiquity. Rather than be perceived as a categorically evil event, the characteristics of a possession differed depending on the god or other deity that was possessing the human being. Gods may possess humans to productive ends. For instance, Plato viewed the art of poetry composition, both tragedy and epic, as a result of possession by the Muses.<sup>271</sup> However, the stories of tragedy rarely present possession as so constructive. Possession by the gods, whether

<sup>271</sup> See Pl. *Ion*.

they possess humans as a form of punishment or simply to gratify their own appetites, ultimately leads to the suffering of the possessed person and those around them. There are three distinct forms of possession which linger within the works of tragedy: 1) ecstatic possession by Dionysus; 2) prophetic possession by Apollo; 3) erotic possession by Aphrodite.<sup>272</sup>

The god Dionysus, in whose name all of the extant tragedies were performed, was particularly associated with possessing individuals. Though evidence of the cult worship of Dionysus dates formal practices to relatively late in the ancient Greek world, originating in the Near East,<sup>273</sup> Hugh Bowden notes that stories of the god's ability to take possession of people can be traced to as early as the Bronze Age.<sup>274</sup> By the classical age, depictions of the possessed female followers of the god, Maenads, were commonplace in pottery, poetry, and performance. While the Maenads may be more legendary than historical, it is clear that possession was a trait associated with smaller scale and private worship ceremonies dedicated to Dionysus. The *Bacchae* of Euripides is the one piece of theatrical representation we have of Dionysus enacting his possession upon a group of these women. In particular, Dionysus takes possession of the character Agave, his aunt. Dionysus tells us in his opening monologue that when his mother Semele died through the trickery of Hera, Agave rejected her story that Zeus was the true father of Dionysus. Agave accused Semele of being a liar, thus tarnishing her name and Dionysus' reputation in Thebes. As punishment for her mistreatment of Semele, Dionysus takes possession of Agave, driving her mad and eventually guiding her to murder her son Pentheus.

Helen's plea for sympathy, that her actions were that of a god and not her own, are consistent with another character in the *Trojan Women* who is similarly tormented by a god. The

<sup>272</sup> Dodds, *The Greek and the Irrational*, 64.

<sup>273</sup> Oscar G Brockett, Franklin J Hildy, *History of the Theatre* (Boston: Pearson Education Inc, 2007), 15.

<sup>274</sup> Hugh Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 105.

previous chapter discussed the *Oresteia*, a narrative in which the judgment of Apollo casts a foreboding shadow over the action. While Orestes is forced to act on threat of death by the god of light and knowledge, the dominance of Apollo is felt prior to our introduction to Orestes. In the opening play of the trilogy, the leader Agamemnon returns from the fields of Troy bringing with him a prize in the form of a disoriented and tortured princess of Troy who is a victim of Apollo: Cassandra. In the *Trojan Women*, we see a Cassandra who has been driven mad. As we learned in the play's prologue, Athena's decision to turn on the Greek army following the war was instigated by the assault of Cassandra, which took place in the temple of the goddess. Coupled with the trauma of this assault, Cassandra's mind has recently been enchanted by Apollo. Just as the mind of Dionysus' victims is taken over with crazed ecstasy, characteristic of the gods attributes, so too is the mind of Cassandra consumed by the specific capabilities reflected in Apollo, namely, the power of prophecy. As punishment for rejecting his advances, Apollo implants himself into Cassandra's mind, cursing her with the gift of foresight, a gift not bearable for mortals. Cassandra is subsequently tormented by visions of the wrecked city of Troy, the brutal deaths of her family, and her own enslavement and death at the hands of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra respectfully. To worsen her psychological state, Apollo has manipulated his power so that no person will believe a word that Cassandra says, thus exacerbating her torture.

When she first appears, Cassandra frightens the Chorus as she is erratically wielding a torch. She begs her mother to dance with her as a celebration of her upcoming "marriage" to Agamemnon. Cassandra maddeningly longs for her journey to Greece as she eagerly awaits her moment of death. Though others do not believe her forecasts of a doomed journey home for the

Greek fleet, there seems to be an acknowledgment of their awareness that Apollo is responsible for her given state. The herald Talthybius, frustrated by Cassandra's disorderly conduct states:

If Apollo had not struck your wits awry, you would pay dearly for  
sending my generals from the land with such word.<sup>275</sup>

A possessed person has no filter. Cassandra aggressively forecasts the doom of various Greek generals to the dismay of those around her. Cassandra responds to the Greek herald Talthybius in a way that no lucid person would, with an insult:

What a clever fellow this servant is! Why are they called "heralds,"  
these creatures all mortals hate, when they are merely lackeys  
bustling about tyrants and cities?<sup>276</sup>

In his production, Suzuki lays bare the madness of Cassandra. Talthybius does not exist as a character for her to interact with. Shiraishi Kayoko, who plays Hecabe, also plays Cassandra. By stripping the character of others to interact with, Suzuki brings closer attention to a single person in unspeakable pain. As Shiraishi begins speaking Cassandra's words, she slowly sheds her black robes, emerging as if from a cocoon, to reveal a white robe underneath. As Cassandra, her voice becomes rough, and manic. She lets out a deafening, scream, sustaining its pitch on a single breath for an uncomfortable amount of time. Though her movements are subtle, there is a tension in her stillness reflected in a crazed look upon her face. Spitting vicious prophecies at the Greek soldiers, she stirs the Chorus into a panic as they begin stomping around her. She eagerly awaits the arrival of her captors to take her away, so that in her own death, she may be present for the death of her enemy and be freed from her curse. Of the aforementioned categories of *noh*, Ishii suggests that the plays of madness, *yonbamme-mono*, are unique to *noh*.

<sup>275</sup> Eur. *Tro.* 408-410.

<sup>276</sup> Eur. *Tro.* 424-26.

However, given the prominence of characters who are victim to divine possession in the *Trojan Women* and other tragedies, we find perhaps another factor in the popularization of Greek tragedy through the use of *noh* techniques.

As the Greeks defined the qualities of possession relative to the god who caused it, *yonbamme-mono* plays are divided into five subcategories that correlate to the cause of the character's madness, the most common of which is that the character is driven to madness by obsession with love. Zeami believed that madness, and its portrayal, allows people to understand important human truths by examining the line between normal and abnormal, placing an otherwise normal person into a situation that results in their own madness. This belief arises perhaps out of the ancient belief that madness is brought on through the possession of the person by gods, or other spirits with access to transcendent realities.<sup>277</sup> An example of this madness can be seen in Zeami's work *Lady Han*. In this play, the *shite*, Hanago, is a courtesan who becomes distracted by thoughts of her lover, the *tsure* Yoshindo, after he leaves her for Kyoto and has yet to return. This distraction becomes an obsession and Hanago becomes incapable of attending to the guests and her other duties, resulting in the matriarch of the establishment throwing her out. Upon her banishment, she embarks on a journey to Kyoto to find her lover, possessing nothing but a fan, a memento left to her by Yoshindo. In the case of Hanago, her madness dissipates when she is finally reunited with her lover. The Cassandra of the *Trojan Women* is a woman whose mind has been poisoned by a vindictive god, who was assaulted by a Greek soldier as her family is killed, who sees vividly her imprisonment as Agamemnon's concubine, and who actively experiences her own violent death, and no one believes her. She has been driven mad by knowledge.

<sup>277</sup> Ishii, "The Noh Theater," 64.

In the character of Helen, we find the most violent and unforgiving consequences of the madness brought on by yet another supernatural force: Love. While there is little doubt shown that the state of Cassandra's mind is a result of manipulation by Apollo, such affinity is not given to Helen. Yet, if Helen is to be believed, the Trojan War and its outcomes which we see in the *Trojan Women* are the result of Helen's own possession at the hands of the goddess of love, Aphrodite. The Greek mythological tradition contains several stories of Aphrodite which tell of the god using her weapon of love to take control of unsuspecting mortals, often to grotesque outcomes. A prominent example of such possession can be found in the stories surrounding the conception and birth of Adonis, a Greek deity of Near East origin who was associated with beauty. A popular version of the tale as handed down to us in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid (whose details date back much further) tells us that Adonis was conceived as a result of his mother, Myrrha, seducing her own father, King Cinyras of Cyprus. Myrrha's mother insulted Aphrodite, patron god of their island nation, by proclaiming her daughter more beautiful than the goddess. As punishment for this insult, Aphrodite took control of Myrrha's affections, driving her to lust for her father, leading to her subsequent seduction of and impregnation by her father Cinyras. Such episodes of possession are challenging to demonstrate as they are couched in the religious language of a religiosity not easily recognizable to a modern audience as "religion."

In the *Trojan Women*, Helen blames Aphrodite for the lapse in her judgment which caused her to flee for Troy. There seem to be various indications within the literature that Helen's actions which led to the war are not of her own volition. Homer describes how during the height of the Trojan War, Aphrodite stands outside of the bedchamber of Paris, ordering

Helen in, “commanding her...to worship her in the act of sex.”<sup>278</sup> Helen defiantly rebukes the goddess:

Strange goddess, why is your heart set on deceiving me in this way? Will you lead me still further on to one of the well-peopled cities of Phrygia or lovely Maeonia, if there too there is some one of mortal men who is dear to you, because now Menelaus has defeated noble Alexander and is minded to lead hateful me to his home?

...There I will not go—it would be shameful—to share that man’s bed.<sup>279</sup>

Aphrodite angrily replies, threatening Helen with a fate far worse if she does not comply. The episode indicates that Helen’s actions before and during the Trojan War are not of her own accord. She is compelled by the vehemently forceful and powerful goddess of love. While being taken by the powers of love rings with a romantic tone to the modern ear, love’s power had a much more pernicious dimension in ancient sources. As Bettany Hughes discusses in her book *Helen of Troy*, and as the above examples demonstrate, Aphrodite’s power of love was a thing to be feared. The ancient Greeks talked of love as “Aphrodite’s disease,” a sickness beyond human control and which had the capability to wreck the mind and body. Hughes notes that there were reports of people who would bathe in the river Selemnos because they believed it would cure them of “the dreadful affliction of love itself.”<sup>280</sup> In the tragedy *Iphigenia at Aulis* by Euripides, the Chorus directs a prayer toward Aphrodite who they blame for being the one who

<sup>278</sup> Hughes, *Helen of Troy*, 149.

<sup>279</sup> Ho. *Il.* 3.399-412.

<sup>280</sup> Hughes, *Helen of Troy*, 150.

brought “Greece with spears and ships to the citadel of Troy.” They pray that they may know of Aphrodite only in moderation and that they may never be driven mad by her rage.<sup>281</sup> Socrates describes the effects of love as resembling the bite of a poisonous spider, inflicting “excruciating pain and [driving people] out of their minds.” He notes that the bite of love is much worse than the spider because the gods need not make physical contact with a mortal to infest them.<sup>282</sup> The son of Aphrodite, Eros, was an equally calamitous being. Far from Cupid, his adorably chubby Roman counterpart, Eros is a malevolent creature who takes delight in disseminating chaos into the world through the curse of love.

These episodes of characters being overtaken with “love” are remarkably analogous to the modern interpretations of possession at the hands of demons and aliens popularized in horror films and literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Returning to *The Exorcist*, we watch someone as innocent as a child taken possession of by the supernatural force of Pazuzu. While the girl undoubtedly performs horrific acts of violence upon herself (at one point mutilating her groin with a crucifix), she does not physically assault other people. The divine invader of the girl’s body is present to sow discord in the minds of the mortal characters. The demon manipulatively compels the people around it into anger by stabbing deeply into their psyche. And we know that the 12-year old Regan is not speaking and acting on her own accord. If we are to take Helen at her word, the episode of Regan is not dissimilar to the ways in which Helen is said to have fallen in love with Paris. *The Exorcist* opens with a prologue in which Lankester Merrin encounters Pazuzu, thus establishing the demon’s invisible presence throughout the film as Regan begins to act strangely. Similarly, the *Trojan Women* frames Helen’s claim of divine intervention as all

<sup>281</sup> Eu. *IA*. 540-590.

<sup>282</sup> Xen. *Mem.* 1.3.12 in Xenophon, *Memorabilia. Oeconomicus. Symposium. Apology*, trans. E. C. Marchant, O. J. Todd, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library 168 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

the more convincing given the opening of the play in which we see two gods having that very conversation which acknowledges their intervention in human affairs. Euripides presents Helen's story as consistent with so many other stories of possession in the Greek canon which routinely end in violence. Aphrodite does not herself assault men, but through the body of Helen, manipulates their pride and desire. As Hughes notes, Aphrodite is only ever moments away as she is both Helen's muse and alter ego. "Helen is Aphrodite's mortal surrogate."<sup>283</sup> Helen is not guilty of her actions, though she is not entirely innocent as she did commit the deed of adultery. She is racked with a tragic guilt, being aware of her actions which led to the violent deaths of countless people, while simultaneously understanding that she could not help but behave in the manner that she did. Helen recognizes her own helplessness in the face of the destructive and controlling power of the gods.

However, Helen receives little remorse for her victimhood from Hecabe. Hecabe, unable to fathom the reality that she has been the target of the gods, calls for Helen's death. Hecabe is naïve, believing that if only Helen would have made a different decision, Hecabe would still be with her family and home. Hecabe, before marching to her new life of servitude, embracing the limp corpse of her grandchild, has learned a morbid lesson: one can live a flawless life, free of moral error, and still suffer. In modern times, we are taught that we can find the motivational causes of violence if we observe hard enough. The presence of the divine in Greek tragedy asks us to question the wisdom that all violence can be explained. The horror of the *Trojan Women* is found in those divine characters whose very presence portends doom. The tragic question asks

<sup>283</sup> Hughes, *Helen of Troy*, 149.

what could Hecabe have done to avoid her suffering? What could Helen have done to avoid her capture? The answer –nothing.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE OTHER**

“The keynote of minority prejudice is this: They are loathed because they are feared.”  
— Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (1954)

#### **The Monstrous Other, Now and Then**

The objects of horror in Greek tragedy, its monsters, generally take one of the following three forms: the Other, the Dead, and the Divine. Put another way, the horror of tragedy is most often generated by the anxiety caused in reference to 1) non-male/non-Greek people; 2) appeasing or summoning dead family or friends; 3) appeasing or honoring the gods. While I suggest these categories as a convenient shorthand for discussing the ways in which horror is generated in Greek tragedy, it might be clear that these objects of horror weave within one another, being able to inhabit more than one of these categories at once. For instance, the Dead and the Divine both arguably fall into the category of “the Other,” as both are a reference to entities set apart from ordinary mortal experience. Yet, I have chosen to speak of “the Other” as its own category since not every object of horror is necessarily dead or divine. As we will see, the horror of tragedy is often generated through provoking fear of people beyond the periphery of Greek culture and assigning to these people supernatural traits.

Of course, the fear provoked through confrontation with the Other is not unique to the ancient Greeks. Within modern Western culture, there is a paradox that mirrors the paradox of

horror itself. That is, people are attracted to, and even excited by, what they fear. The paradox of Western centrism is that asserting the dominance of Western values often manifests in what seems to be a captivation with non-European/American people. Western media frequently presents the practices of people of non-European descent as something to be admired, such as in the popularization of yoga and meditation practices in Europe and the United States. The Other is romanticized, placed on a pedestal as a source of inspiration, keepers of esoteric, “spiritual,” knowledge which is more in tune with the cosmos.<sup>284</sup> Concurrent to the glorification of non-European spiritual practices is the amplification of fear relative to those dimensions of non-European culture not so easily assimilated. Elements of non-Western society which are romanticized may simultaneously be rejected as “uncivilized” or even hazardous. As a modern example, the emotions of captivation and fear in the presentation of non-European people is seen in no clearer a venue than American stories that tell of interactions with indigenous people.

American media is rife with examples of the allure toward indigenous cultures, so selecting one instance is a slightly arbitrary process. For an example that received critical praise in its time, one need look no further than the 1990 Western epic film *Dances with Wolves*, starring, directed and produced by Kevin Costner. The Civil War-era drama finds a recently injured officer in the United States Army sent to a remote prairie outpost. He soon encounters, befriends, and eventually joins the Lakota Sioux tribe. Through Costner’s character, the audience comes to sympathize with and root for the characters of the tribe. In its time, the film was lauded for its portrayal of indigenous people, the use of the Lakota language, and casting of actors of indigenous descent. For his work, Kevin Costner was even celebrated at a Sioux festival. Yet, as if to mirror the cycle of history, Costner, within a few years of this honor,

<sup>284</sup> John Mihelich, "Smoke or Signals? American Popular Culture and the Challenge to Hegemonic Images of American Indians in Native American Film," *Wicazo Sa Review* 16, no. 2 (2001), 130.

commenced to purchase National Forest land which was important to the tribe in order to expand a casino he owned.<sup>285</sup>

The processes of captivation and fear in the face of the Other is rooted in the ability or lack thereof to control a narrative. The West's enchantment with non-Western cultures is a mechanism of the ability to analyze those cultures as objects of study. Indeed, the history of colonialism parallels the development of modern science and anthropology. To categorize and study is to control, though this control tends to be masked as curiosity or respect for said people. This "object" of study will be "passive, non-participating, endowed with a 'historical' subjectivity," and is, above all "non-sovereign with regard to itself."<sup>286</sup> As a narrative device, the image of the well-meaning Westerner engaging their curiosity is used throughout *Dances with Wolves* as the protagonist keeps a journal of his observations about the tribe. This protagonist, a white all-American soldier named John J. Dunbar, provides the lens through which the audience comes to know the indigenous tribe. The audience comes to respect the tribe because one of their own has joined. Prior to this, the tribe of indigenous people is presented as a mystery, and perhaps dangerous. It is not until this soldier accepts them and joins their ranks that the audience accepts them as well. The need to view the indigenous characters through the lens of the soldier is cemented when we learn that Stands with Fist, an indigenous woman Dunbar has fallen in love with and the most prominent indigenous character in the film up to this point, is in fact a white American. When the narrative of the indigenous people is controlled through a character representative of the audience at large, they are presented as intriguing. In *Dances with Wolves*, the audience experience parallels that of Dunbar's in his captivation with the Lakota people. In

<sup>285</sup> Dirk Johnston, "To Some Sioux, Costner now Dances with the Devil," *New York Times*, February 24, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/02/24/us/to-some-sioux-costner-now-dances-with-devil.html>.

<sup>286</sup> Anwar Abdel Malek, "Orientalism in Crisis," in *Diogenes* 44 (Winter 1963): 107-108

other narratives, we find that the point of separation between captivation and fear begins when the audience, through the lens of the protagonist, is at a loss of control over the people they encounter. As James Twitchell notes, one's experience of another becomes dreadful when one's ability to classify, categorize, and control them through a system of signs is blocked.<sup>287</sup> It is at the point of this lack of control that the horror narrative begins.

The fascination with people and practices outside of what is familiar to the dominant culture at large has been a rich source of horror narratives for much of the Western horror canon. In contrast with *Dances with Wolves*, which presents a sympathetic portrayal of the Lakota people made possible through the soldier's lens, American media has readily portrayed the indigenous Other as a people to be feared. People of indigenous descent become coded as the "monstrous Other."<sup>288</sup> The fear of indigenous people has been a highlight of American entertainment since 19<sup>th</sup> century vaudevillian Wild West shows popularized the villainous and amoral "Indian" character. In the genre of Western film, Native American tribes are featured prominently as a recurring antagonist. In D.W. Griffith's silent film *The Battle of Elderbush Gulch* (1913), a forerunner to the Western, we see the representation of outlandishly evil indigenous people from an unspecified tribe (played by white actors in make-up) violently assault white settlers in order to steal an innocent child's two puppies for food.<sup>289</sup> It would not be until much later in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that theatre and film works began to problematize these narratives. Works such as Arthur Kopit's *Indians* (1968) and the formation of organizations such as the Native American Theatre Ensemble (1973) and Spiderwoman Theater (1978) helped recontextualize the monstrous and stereotypical portrayals of indigenous people in Wild West

<sup>287</sup> Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures*, 24.

<sup>288</sup> Cherry, *Horror*, 107.

<sup>289</sup> Brian Young, "Why I Won't Wear War Paint and Feathers in a Movie Again," *Time* (June 11, 2015) <https://time.com/3916680/native-american-hollywood-film/>

shows and Western films. Yet, while media such as the Western film declined in popularity over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the fear of indigenous people in American narratives took a new form; a supernatural form.

As the character Ken Hotate (played by actor Jonathan Joss) states in the NBC sitcom *Parks and Recreation*: “There are two things I know about white people: they love Rachael Ray, and they are terrified of curses.”<sup>290</sup> Curses enacted by indigenous people are a cornerstone of American horror, seen plainly in the frequently used trope of the “Indian Burial Ground.” As Darryl V. Catherine notes, the rhetoric of cursed lands, a relic of retribution left by indigenous people, took shape in the early twentieth century and has become a “distinctive myth of American cultural origins.”<sup>291</sup> In Robin Wood’s account of American horror, the “Indian Burial Ground” represents the “return of the repressed” in monstrous form. Wood argues that the figure of the monster in the horror narrative is an embodiment of the repressed, psychologically or socially (or both).<sup>292</sup> The myth of the Indian curse appeared in works of horror as early on as the tales of H.P. Lovecraft, and continued in such notable works as the *The Amityville Horror* (1977) by Jay Anson along with *The Shining* (1977) and *Pet Sematary* (1983) by the “king” of American horror Stephen King. Catherine argues that the feeling of being terrorized by the ground beneath one’s feet became a unique feature of American horror, stating, “Indian curses and accursed lands stand apart from other paranormal beliefs in the explicit voice they give to Euro-American anxieties over cultural authority.”<sup>293</sup>

<sup>290</sup> *Parks and Recreation*, s. 3, e.7, “Harvest Festival,” directed by Dean Holland, aired March 17, 2011, on NBC.

<sup>291</sup> Darryl V. Catherine, “Heirs through Fear: Indian Curses, Accursed Indian Lands, and White Christian Sovereignty in America,” in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 18, No. 1 (Aug., 2014), 38.

<sup>292</sup> Robin Wood, “The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s’,” in *Horror Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002), 29.

<sup>293</sup> Catherine, “Heirs through Fear,” 39.

However, rather than view the trope of the Indian curse as a unique feature of American horror, it may well be that this narrative device is a microcosm for the ways in which anxieties of cultural authority have played out by assigning supernatural qualities to otherness throughout history. Similar to the projection of supernatural power onto indigenous people in American horror, the ancient Greeks projected their beliefs in the ability to harness supernatural forces onto their image of non-Greek people.<sup>294</sup> As such, the works of Greek tragedy present several narratives in which people of non-Greek heritage are framed as objects of horror to the audience.

For Wood, the conflict between normality and the Other “constitutes the essential subject of the horror film.”<sup>295</sup> He lists several categories which may define the Other:

- Other people
- Women
- The proletariat
- Other cultures
- Ethnic groups within the same culture
- Alternative ideologies of political systems
- Deviations from ideological sexual norms
- Children<sup>296</sup>

In tragedy, like horror, we find the status quo come into conflict with one of these subordinate groups in the form of a monster. When examining the conflicts of tragedy, it is not difficult to identify examples of when these forms of the Other manifest themselves.<sup>297</sup>

<sup>294</sup> Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghost in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 6.

<sup>295</sup> Wood, “The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s’,” 32.

<sup>296</sup> Wood, “The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s’,” 27-28.

<sup>297</sup> Cherry, *Horror*, 108.

To a degree, all Greek tragedies are an exercise in representing the Other to an audience. Though united through its use of the Greek language and a shared mythological history, the ancient Greek world was far from homogenous. Varying city-states developed distinct identities rooted in different local customs, spoken dialects, systems of government, and hierarchy of the gods. As is well documented, the Greek city-states were regularly at war with one another, often for the purpose of exerting influence over weaker city-states. It is within this context that the significance of the fact that most extant tragedies do not take place in the city of Athens becomes apparent. While the Greek tragedies were performed in Athens to a majority Athenian audience, they are all set in other Greek city-states or non-Greek regions (with exceptions being the *Eumenides* and *Oedipus at Colonus*).<sup>298</sup> The function of grounding the stories of tragedy in non-Athenian characters is a point of debate among scholars. Some have noted that by setting the stories of tragedy in other locations and in the mythological past, the dramatist is able to create an aesthetic distance between the audience and the events on stage. This aesthetic distance, rather than instill a sense of superiority, allowed the Athenian audience to reflect on the events of their world in a more detached way, placing themselves in the role of the protagonist, thereby allowing them to relate to the plight of the non-Athenian person. Rush Rehm notes that while the characters on the surface are not Athenian, the tragic heroes are representative of Athenian values. These heroes are then placed in a moment of κρίσις (*crisis* – “decision, judgment”)<sup>299</sup>

<sup>298</sup> In the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, the later portion of the play is set in Athens at the Areopagus, the location of the Athenian court. The *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles takes place at Colonus, a small village near Athens but within the realm of the Athenian king Theseus. It should be noted that while these plays are set within Athens, or its vicinity, they are also set in a mythical past which still succeeds in creating distance between the narrative and the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Athenian audience.

<sup>299</sup> “Crisis” indicates a significant moment of choice making, rather than a state of chaos as in modern usage.

which challenges the (Athenian) values they hold dear, forcing the hero to act even in the face of futility.<sup>300</sup>

However, Harvey Young notes that due to the importance of the Festival of Dionysus as a civic festival in Athens, it played an important role in reinforcing Athenian identity. As a Pan-Hellenic event, the festival was open to non-Athenians to participate, giving the city of Athens an opportunity to display publicly its wealth and power to the entire Greek world. The performance of tragedy was not the only event which took place at the festival. Ceremonies in the days leading up to performances included a procession which led the statue of Dionysus into the city, the paying of tribute by allied city-states, a parade of hoplites, the freeing of slaves, and dancing competitions among the ten tribes of Athens. These extravagant activities played an important community building role, and while non-Athenians could participate, given tasks such as carrying wine bowls during the procession, they were demarcated through the use of red clothing. As such, the Festival functioned as a means of cementing Athenian identity in the face of the Other. Contrary to Rehm, who sees tragedy as playing a different function in the festival than the pre-performance events, Young's assessment of the identity forming function of the festival asserts that in the works of tragedy themselves, through the presentation of non-Athenian figures being punished, the narratives instill a sense of superiority in Athenian audiences. Young states that Greek tragedies "affirm a sense of communal wholeness by spotlighting foreigners whose unchecked passions and (occasionally) mixed blood made them 'other' to Athenians."<sup>301</sup>

Young's assessment raises several questions. Firstly, if the viewing of "other" people and their wrongdoings is meant as a mode of asserting Athenian superiority, why is it that the

<sup>300</sup> Rehm, *Radical Theatre*, 92.

<sup>301</sup> Harvey Young, *Theatre and Race* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 20.

thoughts and language utilized by “other” people in the plays often seem to reflect significant socio-political issues of Classical Athens? Certainly, the Festival of Dionysus allowed Athens to display its wealth to non-Athenians attendants. However, to reduce the themes of the plays themselves to that of instilling a sense of superiority undervalues the several ways in which the dramatists used their work to *challenge* Athenian superiority. In so many tragic works, the audience is presented with characters who are victims of attitudes prevalent in Athenian society, especially the subjugation of women and foreign people. Rehm gives a detailed list of such characters, stating that in tragedy:

we meet abused wives (Deianeira, Medea, Phaedra, Clytemnestra, Eurydice) and daughters (Electra, Iphigenia, Antigone); captive or enslaved women (the Danaids, Tecmessa, Iole...the Dioynsus-possessed women of Thebes); the targets of power and political expediency (Prometheus, Philoctetes, Neoptolemus, the exiled Orestes); casualties of war...(the women of Troy).<sup>302</sup>

The prominence of such characters in tragedy builds within it a challenge to Athenian power and societal expectations, making the performance of such plays an “unsettling act.”<sup>303</sup> Especially unsettling is the fact that the audience is guided through the plots of tragedy through the actions of these non-Athenian characters, encouraging identification with said characters. It may be an oversimplification to suggest that a performance set in a different time and location from its audience is meant to assert an audience’s superiority. However, whether or not tragedy challenged or affirmed Athenian social norms is a matter of interpretation. The answer lies

<sup>302</sup> Rehm, *Radical Theatre*, 92.

<sup>303</sup> Rehm, *Radical Theatre*, 92.

somewhere in between and requires examining each play in isolation. The tragedians, like any artists, had different intentions behind each work, and those intentions do not always fall cleanly within the dichotomy of challenge or affirmation. Many of the tragic works do both at the same time, accepting certain dimensions of Athenian culture while complicating others. The question with regard to Greek tragedy's relationship to the Other rests not in whether any one work intended to instill a sense of Athenian superiority. Rather, one should consider the culturally specific classifications of race which functioned in ancient Athens. Put another way, how did ancient Athenian society define a concept of ethnic division and how were the tragedians influenced by such a concept in the development of their work? Though Young acknowledges that "race" as a term meant to connote cultural identity is a modern construct, he characterizes notions of identity in ancient Athens as either Athenian or non-Athenian. However, while patriotism toward one's city-state was an important value, there was also value in Greekness. The Greeks saw themselves as a single ethnic people. A concept of Greekness undergirded such Athenian laws as the prohibition against owning *Greek* slaves.<sup>304</sup> While the distinction between Athenian and non-Athenian was valued, the entirety of the ancient Greek world valued a much more significant distinction: Greek and Barbarian.

### **The Barbarian in Greek Tragedy**

There is no clearer a representation of the "monstrous Other" in Greek tragedy than in the figure of the barbarian. The word "barbarian" (βάρβαρος) as it is used within the works of

<sup>304</sup> Vincent J. Rosivach, "Enslaving "Barbaroi" and the Athenian Ideology of Slavery," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 48, no. 2 (1999): 129.

Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, most commonly has any, or all, of the following connotations: 1) someone whose speech cannot be understood; 2) foreign, that is, non-Greek by nationality; 3) derogatorily to convey a sense of inferiority.<sup>305</sup> In its earliest usage dating to the Mycenaean age, the word “barbarian” was used as an explicit reference to language, that is, to denote those who did not speak Greek. In this sense, “barbarian” derives from an onomatopoeia, “*bar bar*,” describing the sound of gibberish that is heard when listening to someone speak a foreign language. Noting that the criteria for ethnic self-consciousness varies widely from one group to another, Edith Hall proposes that the use of adherence to language as the sole criteria for ethnic identification was not common in the ancient world. For instance, in China during the same time period, ethnic self-determination was largely connected with lifestyle and habit (“nomads,” “shepherds, “jungle people”). Hall suggests that a close parallel to the Greek conception of self-image is that of the Hebrews as both groups travelled and settled in many different places while maintaining a “remarkably resilient” language which bonded their cultures. However, Hall notes that while language was certainly an element in Hebrew self-consciousness, it differs from Greek self-consciousness to the degree that Hebrew identity was also connected with shared religious traditions. Religious continuity was not a characteristic of Greek culture as Greek religion was flexible and syncretic. Therefore, language became the single binding element which formed the basis of Panhellenic self-consciousness.<sup>306</sup>

Hall states that the term “barbarian” became especially prominent in the works of tragedy which were developed in a period of increased tension, and war, with the Persian Empire.

Though, the representation of the barbarian as the perfect anti-Greek against which the Greeks

<sup>305</sup> Helen H. Bacon, *Barbarians in Greek Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1961), 10.

<sup>306</sup> Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 4-5.

could define their ideal self did not occur in a historical vacuum, Hall suggests that a shared Panhellenic identity did not become a central feature of Greek culture until the Persian Wars which “engendered the polarization of Greek and barbarian.”<sup>307</sup> The rise of Persia heightened a sense of Panhellenic “Greekness” the result of which was the increasingly prevalent use of the word “barbarian” to encapsulate all non-Greek people. With the increased association between language and ethnicity, the fifth century saw the word evolve to take on an additional meaning of nationality describing all people who were not Greek by heritage rather than language. The use of “barbarian” to signify ethnic identification is not found in any of the archaic literature.<sup>308</sup> However, while “barbarian” was a word applied to designate all non-Greek people, the word simultaneously continued to evoke the Persians, as this powerful empire continued to be an influence on the Greek world throughout the history of ancient Greece.<sup>309</sup> Especially after the defeat of the Persians in the early fifth-century, there are incrementally more examples of “barbarian” used in a derogatory sense, as a means of shaming another person by associating them with non-Greek customs. As we will see below, the works of Euripides are especially notable for their use of “barbarian” to describe not simply language or nationality, but something that is seen as cruel, inhumane, or evil.

As noted by Helen H. Bacon in her book *Barbarians in Greek Tragedy*, the relationship between Greeks and non-Greeks is such a prevalent theme of Greek mythology that it cannot be avoided by the writers of tragedy who use this body of mythology as the principal source of their stories.<sup>310</sup> Of at least a thousand tragedies which were produced in the fifth-century, something

<sup>307</sup> Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 6.

<sup>308</sup> Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 11.

<sup>309</sup> Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 146.

<sup>310</sup> Bacon, *Barbarians in Greek Tragedy*, 9.

is known of approximately three hundred of them, whether in complete form, titles, fragments, or references by other ancient writers.<sup>311</sup> As much as half of these presented barbarian characters, non-Greek locations, and almost all of the extant plays refer to barbarian practices or inferiority.<sup>312</sup> The non-Greek people to whom the word “barbarian” may refer might be, but are not limited to, the Trojans, Persians, Egyptians, Lydians, Taurians, or Syrians. Even in plots that are not directly related to non-Greek people, it is hard to avoid references to non-Greek culture such as Tyrrhenian trumpets, Scythian iron, Thracian winds, or Laconian hounds.<sup>313</sup> The gravity of establishing a distinction between Greek and non-Greek was substantial, and yet similar to modern constructions of racial definitions, the writers of antiquity often disagree as to what constitutes a “barbarian.” One challenge to the distinction between Greek and non-Greek in the ancient world was the fact that the ancient Greeks readily accepted the idea that much of their own culture was adopted from non-Greek entities. The Greek alphabet took its current form when the Greek people adopted the alphabet of the Phoenician people. While the Greeks adopted this alphabet as their own, they also celebrate its Phoenician origins in the myth of Cadmus, the legendary founder of the city of Thebes and a Phoenician. The Greek historian Herodotus regularly draws connections, and even equates, Egyptian and Greek gods. While the details of Herodotus’ history of Egypt is often as questionable as assigning factuality to the mythical tales of Cadmus, both examples present within the Greek tradition an acceptance of and openness toward the syncretism between Greek and non-Greek.

Moments of discord concerning what constitutes ‘Greekness’ is apparent in the depictions of Trojans which we saw in the preceding chapter. Bacon notes that the Greek

<sup>311</sup> Bernard Knox, *Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1979), 8.

<sup>312</sup> Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 1.

<sup>313</sup> Bacon, *Barbarians in Greek Tragedy*, 4.

tradition leaves little doubt that the Trojans are non-Greek. Aeschylus represents this sentiment in the *Agamemnon* when Clytemnestra scolds the silent, supernaturally gifted/cursed Cassandra, princess of Troy, deriding the princess for her “unintelligible barbarian language”<sup>314</sup> (an example of a strictly language-based use of the word). Scholars have contended contrary to Bacon that writers of antiquity also sought to establish the commonality of Trojan and Greek culture, breaking down barriers of distinction. As Emily Wilson notes in the introduction of her translation of the *Trojan Women*, the Trojans in the *Iliad* are not presented as “others” as they are not recognizably non-Greek.<sup>315</sup> The ending portion of the *Iliad* is dedicated to lamenting the Trojan hero Hector, a hero who throughout the poem is given an equal status to his Greek counterparts. When Hector, in his last moments of life, intimidates Achilles with the threat of haunting if he is not given a proper burial, it establishes the commonality of funerary beliefs and practice between the two. Perhaps most notable in the relationship between Trojan and Greek is that Poseidon, a god of the Greek pantheon, is not presented as a Greek god but a Trojan god. By the time Euripides writes the *Trojan Women*, the poet similarly associates the Trojans with Poseidon and the same funerary practices as set forth in the *Iliad*. All of this suggests that while many in the ancient Greek world presented the Trojans as non-Greek, there was a concurrent tradition which highlighted just how Greek the Trojans were.

On the surface, the horror of Greek tragedy as it relates to depictions of the barbarian is built on generating anxiety through highlighting the danger, and supernatural quality, of non-Greek traits. Edward W. Said suggests that the fearsome presence of the non-Greek is key to understanding the threatening nature of the ecstatic cults of Dionysus. Dionysus is frequently

<sup>314</sup> Aesch. Ag. 1051.

<sup>315</sup> Emily Wilson, “Introduction to Euripides’ *Trojan Women*,” in *The Greek Plays*, eds. Mary Lefkowitz and James Romm, (New York: Modern Library, 2016), 633.

portrayed as an “outsider” god to the Greek pantheon, one of Near East origin. In the *Bacchae* of Euripides, the Eastern-ness of Dionysus, characterized by excessiveness and violent punishment, is a source of dread for the proudly Greek character of Pentheus. However, the anxiety toward non-Greeks, barbarians, is also generated by bringing into question the very idea of defining ‘Greekness.’ As Said notes, Pentheus eventually joins the ranks of the cult of Dionysus, relinquishing his rigid legislative demeanor and becoming a Bacchant himself.<sup>316</sup> Further, the question of Dionysus’ Greekness, whether or not he is one of them, is the source of the apprehension felt toward him by the citizens of Thebes. The horror of the Other as a supernaturally dangerous force is coupled with the psychological horror of challenging the audience’s perceptions of itself. To better explore the confrontation with Otherness, non-Greekness, as a source of horror within tragedy, one might examine a barbarian character who, though not a god as Dionysus, is no less presented as enacting otherworldly violence upon the Greek world around her: Medea.

### **Medea the Monster**

With a conception of the horror monster as a supernatural entity who is perceived as both dangerous and impure by the characters with whom the audience identifies, it can be argued that Medea is framed as a “monster” in many works of antiquity in which the character appears. Having been described as the “great witch of Greek mythology,” stories of Medea flourished in Greek popular culture as early as the development of the early epics.<sup>317</sup> Perhaps the earliest surviving example in literature of Medea’s supernatural power exists in fragments of a lost play

<sup>316</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 57.

<sup>317</sup> Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghost in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, 78.

by Sophocles, Ριζοτόμοι (*Rhizotomoi – The Root-Cutters*) presumably named after the chorus of attendants who aid Medea in performing her craftwork. Evidently, this craftwork was concocting potions out of plant-like materials. The subject of the play is not certain, though it is thought to involve Medea’s murder of Pelias, the man who sent Jason on his quest for the Golden Fleece. Several fragments exist in which Sophocles seems to describe Medea brewing a powerful potion:

And she, looking back as she did so, caught the white, foamy juice from the cut in bronze vessels...And the hidden boxes conceal the cuttings of the roots, which she, uttering loud ritual cries, naked, was severing with bronze sickles.”<sup>318</sup>

“O Sun our lord and sacred fire, the spear of Hecate of the roads, which she carries as she attends her mistress in the sky and as she inhabits the sacred crossroads of the earth, crowned with oak-leaves and the woven coils of savage dragons!”<sup>319</sup>

While these passages do not give much detail, they portray a characteristic of Medea’s power which is consistent with other accounts of her power. Namely, her ability to manipulate natural matter into violently capable elixirs. A lengthier account of Medea’s journey from her home in Colchis to the Greek city Corinth comes some two-hundred years after the Classical period from Apollonius of Rhodes, head of the Library of Alexandria, in his great work of Hellenistic epic poetry Ἀργοναυτικά (the *Argonautica*) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. In the *Argonautica*, prior to the first encounter between Jason and Medea, Argus speaks to Jason of “a certain girl who concocts

<sup>318</sup> Soph. *Fr.* 534 (Macrob. *Sat.* 5.19.8) in Sophocles, *Fragments*, ed. and trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Classical Library 483 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.)

<sup>319</sup> Soph. *Fr.* 535 (Scholium on Apollon. *Argonautica* 3.1214).

drugs with the guidance of Hecate.”<sup>320</sup> Apollonius further expounds on these supernatural abilities, later describing Medea as the one whom:

the goddess Hecate taught to employ with exceeding skill  
All the drugs that the land and full-flowing waters produce.  
With these even the blast of unwearying fire is softened,  
and she can suddenly halt the flow of roaring rivers and  
arrest the stars and the paths of the sacred moon.<sup>321</sup>

Hecate, the goddess of Greek myth, variably associated with crossroads, magic, necromancy, and knowledge of herbs, is a figure often linked to Medea. Medea is portrayed variably as a devotee, a priestess, or even a familial descendant of Hecate. The description of Medea’s use of plant-like matter in her magic, coupled with Hecate’s association with both herbs and magical abilities, suggests that the foundation of Medea’s supernatural power rests in her ability to create drug-like substances. These substances are so powerful that they apparently have the ability to control the natural world around them.

The *Argonautica* of Apollonius is only one example of how stories of Medea’s witchcraft were popular sources of entertainment well into the Roman period and through late antiquity. However, the multitude of tales provide an equal amount of interpretations concerning Medea’s character, events of her life, and her abilities as a witch. In the *Argonautica*, Medea is a relatively unimportant character, appearing as an assistant to Jason in his journey for the Golden Fleece. While she possesses knowledge of the art of sorcery, the Medea of Apollonius is decidedly mortal. Whereas Apollonius focuses on the young Medea at Colchis, Ovid, in the

<sup>320</sup> Apollon. 3.477-78 in Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, ed. and trans. William H. Race, Loeb Classical Library 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>321</sup> Apollon. 3.528-533.

*Metamorphoses* (8 CE), narrates in linear fashion the full length of Medea's journey from Colchis, to Corinth (where she murders her children), and her escape to Athens. Ovid's portrayal of Medea ranges from a younger sympathetic figure with love for her husband, to an older deranged witch with nothing but maleficence in her heart. It is in this second portion of Ovid's narrative that Medea's magical abilities are central, though her character becomes a fairly one-dimensional evil figure. Like many of the other transformed characters in the *Metamorphoses*, Medea's evolution into a witch is one which negates her human characteristics. For Ovid, this meant transforming Medea from good to inhumanely evil.<sup>322</sup> In the *fabula crepidata* (Roman tragedy with Greek subject)<sup>323</sup> by Seneca (50 CE), the playwright continues in the trajectory sparked by Ovid and takes Medea's derangement to an even further extreme. Seneca, inspired by the tragedy of Euripides (discussed below), sets his play in Corinth and relates the tale of Medea's betrayal by Jason and eventual infanticide. Seneca presents Jason as a much more forgivable figure while presenting Medea as a figure of immoderate and violent passion. Contrary to the Chorus of Euripides, Seneca's Chorus finds no sympathy in her plight, taking a position of moral superiority over the immoral Medea.<sup>324</sup> Seneca further explores the malicious nature of the titular character by dwelling significantly more upon the gruesome nature of her sorcery.<sup>325</sup> The dramatist goes into considerable detail of Medea's magic and the gods which she channels to aid in her schemes.<sup>326</sup> While other playwrights explore the psychological

<sup>322</sup> Carole E. Newlands, "The Metamorphosis of Ovid's Medea," in *Medea*, eds. James Clauss and Sarah Iles Johnston (Princeton: UP, 1997), 189.

<sup>323</sup> A *fabula crepidata* refers to a Roman tragedy with Greek subject matter. The genre originated when Roman playwrights began adapting Greek tragedies into Latin. Of the nine fully intact plays of this genre, all are written by Seneca.

<sup>324</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton: UP, 1994), 464.

<sup>325</sup> Laura K. McClure, *A Companion to Euripides* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 559.

<sup>326</sup> Katherine James, "Medea," in *The Classical Outlook* 50, No. 1 (Sept., 1972): 6-8.

development of Medea coming to terms with her eventual plans of violence, Seneca opens his play with a tormented Medea who almost immediately declares:

Be present now, you goddesses who avenge crime, your hair  
bristling with loosened snakes, your bloody hands grasping a black  
torch; be present, as once you stood unkempt and fearful around  
my marriage chamber. Bring death on this new wife, death on the  
father-in-law and the whole royal stock.<sup>327</sup>

Whereas similar versions of the tragedy present the processes by which Medea comes to her murderous decisions, Seneca wanted his audience to fear, rather than sympathize with Medea from the play's outset. With allusions to avenging goddesses depicted as having "loosened snakes" for hair, one may recall the Furies described in the preceding chapters. We saw how these female deities of revenge were invoked by Clytemnestra who similarly was betrayed by male family members, first her husband, then her son. Further cementing the unambiguously malevolent nature of his protagonist, the Medea of Seneca declares:

Savage, unheard-of, horrible things, evils fearful to heaven and  
earth alike, my mind stirs up within me: wounds and slaughter and  
death creeping from limb to limb. But these things I talk of are too  
slight; I did all this as a girl.<sup>328</sup>

Medea openly acknowledges the bloodshed she is capable of bringing upon not only Jason's new family, but the heavens and earth in their totality. She does not seek to ground her impending carnage in moral righteousness, but plainly refers to her supernatural abilities as evil.

<sup>327</sup> Sen. *Med.* 13-18 in Seneca, *Tragedies, Volume I: Hercules. Trojan Women. Phoenician Women. Medea. Phaedra*, ed. and trans. John G. Fitch, Loeb Classical Library 62 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018.)

<sup>328</sup> Sen. *Med.* 45-50.

And as if to quell any sentiment that the ferocity of her power may have resulted due to her betrayal at the hands of Jason, Medea almost flippantly notes that she has been conjuring her unworldly abilities, which stir “wound and slaughter and death” from within her, since she was a child. This Medea, far from struggling in the conviction to murder her children, disavows them entirely, murdering one in front of Jason and tossing the child’s body from her chariot in the sky rather than give it a proper burial. Though rooting Medea’s powers as much in her ability to call upon otherworldly entities as her ability to make concoctions, Seneca no less ascribes an element of Medea’s evil powers to the drug mixing process. The Nurse describes Medea as she:

...plucks the deadly herbs and bleeds the snakes of their venom;  
she mixes in also unwholesome birds, the heart of a boding horned  
owl and entrails cut from a living screech owl.<sup>329</sup>

Medea as a figure who plucks deadly herbs and mixes them with the disposed parts of chilling animals such as snakes and owls may spark an image in one’s mind not far removed from the modern conception of a “witch.” Modern audiences are likely familiar with the image of a witch who conjures potions or natural material in her caldron in order to cast spells on the world. In the Roman Polanski film *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968), we find a young woman, Rosemary (Mia Farrow), whose husband Guy Woodhouse (John Cassavetes) is secretly a member of a coven of witches and warlocks located in a Manhattan apartment building. A necklace made of “tannis root” plays a key role in the coven’s plot to bring Satan into the world by magically impregnating the unsuspecting Rosemary. Lucy Fischer notes that the history of depictions of witchcraft is often linked to the manipulation of natural processes, especially with regard to motherhood. Fischer suggests that the depiction of Minnie Castevet (Ruth Gordon), the

<sup>329</sup> Sen. *Med.* 730-735.

character who gives Rosemary the tannis root, is consistent with historical depictions of the “midwife-witch.” The midwife, “often portrayed as a poor, older, peasant woman with little standing in the community,” was “thought to bear evil spirits, capable of inducing female fertility or male impotence” due to their perceived ability to manipulate the natural processes of child birth.<sup>330</sup> Though not specifically a midwife, depictions of Medea’s witchcraft are also shown in relation to her role as a mother and her ability to disrupt birthing processes. Below, we will see how Medea implements her magic to provide aid in one’s ability to give birth, while also disrupting motherhood by taking away the lives of her children.

However, depictions of witches and their powers have grown since antiquity to include a wide variety of abilities including, but not limited to, plant-based potions. As Michael Ostling notes, while the long-standing juridical and ecclesiastical tradition conflating herbal mixing with witchcraft never dissipated entirely, “a very small proportion of accused witches across Europe seem to have been herbal healers in any sense, and an even smaller proportion came to trial as a direct result of their practicing the herbal arts.”<sup>331</sup> Additional descriptors came to define the witch as a means of differentiating it from other similar character types. For instance, men and women of the church utilized their knowledge of herbs in the creation of sacramentally “blessed herbs” for use in Catholic liturgical practices. Barbara Creed, discussing Joseph Campbell’s influential work *The Masks of God*, describes how the modern witch is physically deformed, monstrous, when compared to their more “holy” counterparts. The witch is representative of the so-called “phallic mother,” feminine creatures of horror whose domineering power is projected in the imagery of the phallus grafted into their bodies. This motif is exemplified in modern

<sup>330</sup> Lucy Fischer, “Birth Traumas: Parturition and Horror in Rosemary’s Baby,” in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, 2nd edition, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 445.

<sup>331</sup> Michael Ostling, “Witches’ Herbs on Trial” in *Folklore* 125, No. 2 (August 2014), 179.

representations of the witch by long fingers, a pointed nose, a tall hat, and the use of a broom stick for flight.<sup>332</sup> Representations of witches in modern media have moved beyond herb mixing to exhibit such supernatural powers as telekinesis, clairvoyance, teleportation, and often they can cast spells through spoken word rather than by mixing plant matter.

“Witchcraft” is a broad term that varies across time and different cultures. Thus, it is difficult to define with precision.<sup>333</sup> Contrary to such modern depictions of witchcraft, the image of Medea as a “witch” has a much more direct relationship to drug manufacturing than the image of a modern witch. To describe Medea as a “witch” is to make a narrower statement regarding mixing processes. Bernard Knox denies that Medea is any more a witch than Deianira, the wife of Heracles who unwittingly anointed a piece of clothing with poison which melted her husband’s flesh. Deianira, like Medea, is similar in kind to an apothecary who has recourse to drugs with supernaturally associated ingredients.<sup>334</sup> One element that seems to define the abilities of Medea against other characters who make comparable use of drug-like ingredients is her professionalism. S. P. Mills cites several passages within the work of Euripides which he suggests present Medea as particularly adept in her knowledge of ingredients and ability to weave them.<sup>335</sup>

When the above passage from the *Argonautica* refers to Medea’s power to “concoct drugs,” this is a translation from the ancient Greek verb φαρμάσσειν (*pharmássein* –“to make drugs/medicine”) and the substance which she creates φάρμακα (*phármaka* –“drugs/medicine”). It is from these words that modern English (among other languages) derives “pharmacy,” the

<sup>332</sup> Barbara Creed, “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection,” in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 37.

<sup>333</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1972), 4–10.

<sup>334</sup> Bernard Knox, “The ‘Medea’ of Euripides,” *Yale Classical Studies* 25 (1977) 211-16.

<sup>335</sup> S. P. Mills, “The Sorrows of Medea,” *Classical Philology* 75 (1980): 291-93 citing Eur. *Med.* 9-10, 476-87, 504-5, 734.

place which mixes drugs. Indeed, *phármaka* has retained the same meaning in modern Greek, “drugs/medicine,” where the place to purchase these items is the *φαρμακείο* (*pharmakeío* – “pharmacy”). It is also the action of Medea concocting drugs, *pharmássein*, that is variably translated as “witchcraft” or “sorcery.”<sup>336</sup> Therefore, while Medea’s abilities are often translated as “witchcraft,” Medea’s witch-ness is not identical to modern conceptions of the witch to the degree that “witch” is perceived as someone having abilities beyond drug making. Rather, Medea is a specific class of person with a vocation in creating and mixing powerful drugs. Medea’s explicit identity as a manufacturer of drugs not only demonstrates the supernatural qualities the ancient Greeks associated with drug use, but their belief that non-Greek people are especially capable of fabricating in such connections.

The most influential telling of Medea’s story, both today and in its influence on the later writers of antiquity, is the famous tragedy of Euripides. First produced in 431 BCE at the Festival of Dionysus in Athens, the play (as part of the tetralogy within which it was presented) took last place out of three at the festival. Given the popularity of the character, many have wondered why the work was presumably disliked by its initial audience at the festival. It has been suggested that the traditional mythological account of the death of Medea’s children had it that the Corinthians were responsible for killing her children as a means of chasing her into exile. If this is the case, it would seem that placing the filicidal act in the hands of Medea herself was an invention of Euripides, and given its third place position, an unpopular invention at the time.<sup>337</sup> However, with artistic renderings of the story immortalized in pottery, allusions to the play’s popularity by Aristophanes,<sup>338</sup> and the near identical sequence of events as told by the

<sup>336</sup> For an example, see Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghost in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, 83.

<sup>337</sup> Emily McDermott, *Euripides' Medea: the Incarnation of Disorder* (State College: Penn State Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>338</sup> See Ar. *Thesm.* 1130-1, a comedic adaptation of Eur. *Med.* 298-9, occurring when the character Euripides is confronted by a barbarian archer.

Latin writers Seneca and Ovid, it is undoubtable that Euripides' rendition of Medea quickly became the standard by which all others were judged. Whereas later tales dwell heavily on the malicious and immoral character of Medea, Euripides begins his tragedy not with the character Medea, but with a Nurse and Tutor who express sympathy toward the scorn she has experienced. Likewise, the Chorus of lower-class Corinthian women are initially advocating for Medea, themselves having experienced the wrongs brought on by men. However, as the play progresses and Medea contemplates her options, we witness Medea's more threatening nature come to fruition. Euripides presents Medea as a dangerous figure whose power derives from her supernatural ability to forge reality-altering substances. Like the monsters of modern horror, the objective of the Greek characters in this play is to banish Medea from their world. The reasoning for her banishment is clear. Firstly, the king of Corinth, Creon,<sup>339</sup> believes that she presents a threat to his family and country. Creon says to Medea:

I will not return home again until I expel you from the country.

...I am afraid, no need to dissemble, that you will do some deadly harm to my daughter. Many indications of this combine: you are a clever woman and skilled in many evil arts.<sup>340</sup>

Creon explains that his fear of Medea derives from her vaguely stated "dangerous skills." The audience would have presumably been familiar with the stories of Medea, thus allowing Euripides to build suspense through the indirect reference to her supernatural powers without being explicit. Her abilities are made more explicit later when she encounters Aegeus, King of Athens. Aegeus reveals that he is traveling for the purposes of finding a cure to his sterility. As

<sup>339</sup> A different character from the more well-known Creon of the Theban plays of Sophocles.

<sup>340</sup> Eur. *Med.* 274-285 in Euripides, *Cyclops. Alcestis. Medea*, ed. and trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library 12 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

Medea is on the verge of exile, she offers her assistance in the form of φάρμακα (*phármaka* – “drugs/medicine”) that will cure the king in exchange for sanctuary in Athens. Euripides has now made more evident the traditional association between Medea and drug making. However, Medea does not state that she herself is the one who will be responsible for making the drugs. She states ambiguously that she has heard of such drugs. Again, Euripides withholds an overt explanation of Medea’s power for the purposes of generating suspense. This suspense is resolved in the play’s climax when the full spectacle of Medea’s supernatural capability is made manifest in her violent murder of the king, Creon, and his daughter. Medea, with her children as the deliverers, sends to the princess a soft dress with a golden coronet. The description of these gifts is in keeping with popular imagery of barbarian cultures, especially Persians, who were portrayed as having extravagant wealth and access to rich, golden resources.<sup>341</sup> Thus, Euripides is taking this common trope and turning it into a weapon. Unbeknownst to the princess, Creon, or the palace guards, Medea has laced these items with a powerful drug capable of melting the flesh of anyone who adorns themselves with the gifts. A messenger from the palace recounts in cruel detail the brutal effects of the drugs:

For her color changed, and with legs trembling she staggered back  
sidelong, and by falling on the chair barely escaped collapsing on  
the floor.

<sup>341</sup> The material culture of barbarians, their dress and various objects associated with them, is typically spoken of as luxurious, extravagant, and often made of gold, with specific details being absent. For other examples in the extant work of Euripides of see the following passages: *Heracl.* 130-131, 830; *Hec.* 734-735, 925-926, 1153-1154; *Tro.* 544, 991-992, 1218-1220; *El.* 317-318; *IA* 73-74, 576, 1036; *Phoen.* 1377; *Alc.* 346; *HF* 684; *Hel.* 170; *Bacch.* 58, 127.

One old woman...saw the white foam coming between her lips and her eyes starting out of their sockets and her skin all pale and bloodless.

The golden circlet about her head shot forth a terrible stream of consuming fire, and the fine-spun gown, gift of your sons, was eating into the wretched woman's white flesh.

From the top of her head blood dripped, mingled with fire, and her flesh dropped from her bones like resin from a pine torch.<sup>342</sup>

In this violent spectacle, Euripides vividly displays the danger which Medea embodies to the other characters. Not only is she a murderer, but a profoundly more capable murderer due to her unique abilities. Her concoctions are so powerful they have the ability to utterly mutilate the human body upon contact. While the perception of this danger is a key defining factor of the traditional "monster" of horror, the danger of the supernaturally gifted Medea is given an added dimension. Relative to the later works of Ovid and Seneca which he inspired, Euripides spends little time on Medea's sorcery as such.<sup>343</sup> Later writers such as Seneca describe Medea's process of anointing the abominable items with her magic, setting up an altar, preparing certain rites and reaching out to Hecate.<sup>344</sup> While Euripides describes the results of her work in gruesome detail, the items that Medea uses to aid Aegeus and destroy the royal family have already been crafted when they are first mentioned. The audience never sees Medea preparing her craftwork, and references to her status as "witch" or "sorceress" (i.e. drug maker) are few and vague. Euripides, rather than giving specifics into the nature of Medea's drug making capabilities, chooses to

<sup>342</sup> Eur. *Med.* 1135-1230.

<sup>343</sup> James, "Medea," 6-8.

<sup>344</sup> Sen. *Med.* 575-580.

display a more nuanced character of a woman who has been wronged, and whose perceived threatening nature derives from her designation as “barbarian.”

Hall asserts that while Medea’s “pharmaceutical skills were [always] an old element in the story” it is possible that Euripides also invented the notion of Medea being a barbarian. In a footnote, Hall explains that prior to the production by Euripides, no rendering of Medea on vase artwork portrayed her in oriental costume.<sup>345</sup> However, it is quite clear that since Euripides, Medea’s identification as a barbarian has been central to her story. The supernatural qualities assigned to Medea are intrinsically linked to her status as a barbarian. Medea’s designation as both “witch” and “barbarian” is not happenstance as the perception of her supernatural abilities is a consequence first and foremost of identifying her as non-Greek. The literary tradition of antiquity strongly characterizes people of the Near East and Egypt as being the source of supernatural wisdom. David Ogden in his book *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds* suggests that the frequent portrayal of supernaturally gifted people (sorcerers, witches, etc.) as Asian and Egyptian in ancient Greek literature is an example of the Greek tendency to project traits that are deemed unnatural, grotesque, or outlandish onto non-Greek people.<sup>346</sup> With barbarian culture shrouded in mystery and mythological narratives, depictions of barbarians featured “more than what was empirically known” about them.<sup>347</sup> Since the period of archaic Greek thought, the non-Greek is often embodied in the form of the monstrous, the non-human. Heroes such as Heracles and Perseus regularly grappled with and cleared the earth of horrific creatures of decidedly non-Greek origin. It is in the work of fifth-century tragedy that Greeks more and more identified the Persians as a fundamental source of magical wisdom.

<sup>345</sup> Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 35.

<sup>346</sup> Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghost in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, 33.

<sup>347</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 55.

Indeed, the words “Persian,” “barbarian,” and “witch/sorcerer” function almost interchangeably in the works of tragedy.<sup>348</sup>

The tendency to associate supernatural abilities with Persian people can be seen in the work of first century BCE historian Diodorus. Though the traditional mythological account of Medea places her homeland as Colchis, which lies along the East coast of the Black Sea (located in present day Georgia), Diodorus took on the genealogical project of linking Medea to Persian ancestry. He sought to illustrate both Medea’s murderous tendencies and her supernatural abilities as an outgrowth of this Persian heritage. Medea is shown to be the actual familial descendant of Hecate in the work of Diodorus. With Hecate being portrayed as a cruel murderer and the inventor of drugs, the kinship further demonstrates the association of Medea to drugs. Hecate is the daughter of the equally murderous Perses, a character the Greeks identified with the Persians, thus establishing Medea’s Persian ancestry and placing her within the tradition of witchcraft and sorcery through which the Greeks perceived Persian people. While Diodorus depicts Medea’s dangerous tendencies as an effect of her non-Greek lineage, he puts a more hopeful, Greek-centric, spin to her character noting that Medea had the opposite inclination of her violent parents due to her desire of utilizing her powers in the service of Jason (i.e. the Greeks). The account of Medea’s murder of the royal family of Corinth through the power of her drugs is relatively consistent with the account of Euripides, and, though Diodorus blames the “desire of the tragic poets for the marvelous”<sup>349</sup> for varied and contradictory stories about Medea, his depiction of Medea as the murderer of her children shows that he was influenced by Euripides to a significant degree.

<sup>348</sup> Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 52-3.

<sup>349</sup> Diod. 4.56 in Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History, Volume II: Books 2.35-4.58*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library 303 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935.)

The importance of the account of Diodorus is to show the attention given in the literature of ancient Greece to tracing activities which were seen as supernatural or otherwise bizarre to non-Greek culture. Put simply, Medea is not a supernatural threat *and* a barbarian; Medea is a supernatural threat *because* she is a barbarian. In the *Medea* of Euripides, the central character's status as non-Greek, a barbarian, is a fundamental source of fear for the Greek characters in the play. Bacon suggests that Euripides, among his extant plays, seems to have a greater interest in exploring the concept of the "barbarian" given the number of times he uses the word compared to the other two tragedians. Bacon notes that while there are two and a half times as many extant plays of Euripides as there are of Sophocles and Aeschylus, Euripides uses the word "barbarian" ten times more than Sophocles and six times more than Aeschylus.<sup>350</sup> This might indicate that Euripides had a particular interest in exploring the role of the barbarian in Greek culture. Further, Bacon notes that while the works of Euripides have a keen interest in the barbarian, the dramatist utilized the word in a more derogatory way, rather than the more formal language-based definition in which Aeschylus or Sophocles used the word. For instance, in the aforementioned example in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, the supernaturally gifted Cassandra, a barbarian, is presented as morally superior to the Greek Clytemnestra. All references to Cassandra's barbarism are to her ability to speak. The use of the word "barbarian" in the works of Euripides is often divorced from its literal meaning as a speaker of a foreign language, and rather, given a more ethical connotation to describe not only inferiority, but cruelty, savagery, and evil.<sup>351</sup> This is not to say Euripides himself espoused the belief in barbarians being morally

<sup>350</sup> Bacon, *Barbarians in Greek Tragedy*, 10.

<sup>351</sup> See Eur. *Andr.* 243, 261; *Tro.* 764; *Hec.* 326, 1129, 1247, *Heracl.* 131; *IT* 31, 389, 417, 739, 886; *Or.* 1110, 1351, 1369, *Hel.* 501, 1210.

inferior. The tragedian's use of the word to connote a moral status may be construed as a criticism of Greek perceptions toward non-Greek people rather than an endorsement.

By understanding the supernatural qualities of the character Medea as a consequence derived from her status as a barbarian, the play by Euripides has the potential to be particularly poignant to modern audiences. Given the rise of nationalist populism in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere, one of the most compelling traits of the character Medea is her status as an outsider. Put another way: Medea is an immigrant. As such, she is framed as both dangerous and impure by the Greek characters of the play. If it is true that the story of Medea is a microcosm of the ways in which the ancient Greeks projected undesirable qualities onto their understanding of non-Greek people, then the play provides a sharp analogy to the rhetoric revolving around the perceived threat of immigrant communities in the modern West. In this way, tales of horror act as a mechanism for reinforcing a culture's identity by exacerbating a society's fear of other types of people. Stephen King acknowledges as much when he articulated:

Monstrosity fascinates us because it appeals to the conservative Republican in a three-piece suit who resides within all of us. We love and need the concept of monstrosity because it is a reaffirmation of the order we all crave as human beings.<sup>352</sup>

What King has in mind here is that horror relies on a society's perception of the norm. By taking this norm for granted, the sensation of horror arises when this norm is challenged. Put another way, people are afraid of things perceived as unnatural or simply different. For that reason, it becomes clear why, when reading the *Medea* of Euripides, one cannot avoid the number of times Medea's non-Greek heritage is brought to attention as if it were an indictment.

<sup>352</sup> Tim Underwood and Chuck Miller, eds. *Bare Bones: Conversations on Terror with Stephen King* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), 9.

When justifying his marriage to a Greek woman, Medea's ex-husband Jason often mentions his disdain for her non-Greek heritage, as if in disgust of it. Jason states:

First, you now live among Greeks and not *barbarians*, and you understand justice and the rule of law, with no concession to force. All the Greeks have learned that you are clever, and you have won renown.<sup>353</sup> (emphasis added)

When Medea eventually commits her murderous deed of infanticide, Jason exclaims:

I was insane before when I brought you from your home among the barbarians to a Greek house.  
...No Greek woman would have dared to do this<sup>354</sup>

As expressed, both of these passages find Jason attributing Medea's crimes to her non-Greek nature. In the first passage, he equates barbarian culture with a lack of justice and law, making no reference to Medea's language. In fact, Medea's language is not once brought up throughout the course of the play, further highlighting the way Euripides defines the term barbarian as an ethical rather than a language-based category. In the second passage, though the word "barbarian" is not used, Medea's non-Greek status is linked directly to her threatening nature. And yet in Jason's speech, Medea's status as non-Greek indicates not only danger, but ethical perversity (i.e. *Barbarians* kill people in unseemly ways, Greeks do not). Jason not only espouses moral superiority over Medea due to his Greek heritage, but he even makes what today might be interpreted as an explicit declaration of genetic superiority as he relates Medea's perceived inferiority to her biological heritage:

I wanted to raise the children in a manner befitting my house

<sup>353</sup> Eur. *Med.* 535-540

<sup>354</sup> Eur. *Med.* 1330-1340.

...to beget brothers to the children born from you, and put them on  
the same footing with them, so that by drawing the family into one  
I might prosper.<sup>355</sup>

The word “beget” in this passage is translated from σπείρας (*speiras* –“to sow seed”), indicating the biological function of spreading seed. Therefore, Jason’s central motive for leaving Medea for a Greek woman is his belief in the inferiority of non-Greek people based not in language, or even culture, but in blood. He correlates Medea’s past actions and current worth to lack of a Greek bloodline. Jason establishes that from his perspective, Medea is not only morally impure due to her status as a barbarian, but biologically so. Therefore, Medea, within the structural confines of the play by Euripides and in later stories that followed, is depicted as a dangerous supernatural force due to her ability to concoct drugs, and impure due to her non-Greek heritage. These two traits, her dangerousness and impurity, act as a source of fear to all other characters in the play, establishing Medea as the central object of horror to the story. Medea is a monster.

Framing Medea as an object of horror, a monster, may seem to collide with how the character has been portrayed in productions of recent years. In the modern age, the tragedy of Euripides has been readily interpreted as a nuanced and sympathetic portrayal of a woman asserting her agency against an abusively patriarchal society. The theme of subjugation and domination of women by men is perhaps the most frequently explored theme in modern productions. As early as the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, versions of Medea were being performed which challenged the lack of legal protections to women.<sup>356</sup> The late 20<sup>th</sup> Century in particular saw

<sup>355</sup> Eur. *Med.* 560-565.

<sup>356</sup> Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh, *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre, 1660-1914* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 391.

renewed interest in Medea through various adaptations which focused on the politics of gender.<sup>357</sup> It is for this reason that some have characterized Medea as a symbol for women and an icon of feminism.<sup>358</sup> Questions of gender politics continue to dominate modern productions as exemplified in English director Tony Harrison's 1991 operatic adaptation (and aptly titled) *Medea: SexWar*.

An understanding of the character Medea as an object of horror does not preclude her from being the object of sympathy to a modern audience. As Stuart Lawrence suggests, Euripides intentionally framed the moral status of Medea as one of "ambivalence and ambiguity." While Medea's betrayal by her husband is not dissimilar to the Athenian wife who suffered under a legal system which granted men full authority to mistreat their wives, "Medea is also a monstrous beast, for (one might wish to believe) only a beast could kill her own children."<sup>359</sup> One might be reminded of the 1976 Brian De Palma film *Carrie* (based on the novel by Stephen King) in which the central character is driven to acts of unspeakable violence due to her mistreatment at the hands of fellow high schoolers. Like Medea, Carrie (played by Sissy Spacek) is an outcast, mistreated by those around her, who is gifted with terrible and powerful supernatural abilities. Sue Short argues that horror films are often located on the sites of failed rites of passage for young women. In both *Medea* and *Carrie*, we find marginalized female figures gifted with supernatural abilities, who are deemed monstrous when their failed attempts at normalcy challenge cultural expectations.<sup>360</sup> Medea's very identity as a barbarian challenges the Greek world around her, and ultimately, she rejects the traditional rite of

<sup>357</sup> Helene P. Foley, *Reimagining Greek Tragedy on the American Stage* (University of California Press, 2012), 190.

<sup>358</sup> Betine van Zyl Smit, "Medea the Feminist," in *Acta Classica* 45 (2002): 102.

<sup>359</sup> Stuart Lawrence, "Audience Uncertainty and Euripides' Medea," in *Hermes* 125 (1997): 49-55.

<sup>360</sup> Sue Short, *Misfit Sisters: Screen Horror as Female Rites of Passage* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 73.

motherhood by taking, rather than nurturing, the life of her children. Carrie's framing as the Other is marked by her innocence to the high school world around her and non-inclusion in her peers' social circles. Teenager Carrie is a "pitiable victim of her culture who evokes sympathy. She is a nerd whose outrage, however horrific and excessive its expression, is a response to a comprehensible betrayal."<sup>361</sup> As in *Medea*, *Carrie* operates within the domestic sphere, portraying "supernatural forces that invade the family home or render its inhabitants monstrous."<sup>362</sup> While critics and audiences alike have tended to interpret Carrie's monstrosity with sympathy, a revolt against oppressors, Shelley Stamp argues that by "mapping the supernatural onto female adolescence and engaging the language of the fantastic, *Carrie* presents a masculine fantasy in which the feminine is constituted as horrific."<sup>363</sup> Stamp's characterization of the "monster" is similar in kind to Carroll's definition as she views the monster, in this case *Carrie*, necessarily framed as dangerous and impure from the perspective of the audience. Though *Carrie* is an otherwise suburban American girl in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she nonetheless represents suburban American fears of outcasts and feminine sexuality.

While modern audiences may find sympathy in *Medea* due to her husband's betrayal, the Athenian audience would have found little sympathy in *Medea*, a character who is a woman, barbarian, and child murderer. While *Medea* is a barbarian, she is simultaneously a manifestation of the "monstrous-feminine," a concept developed by Barbara Creed in her psychoanalytical examination of horror. The "monstrous-feminine" describes the characteristics

<sup>361</sup> Vivian Sobchack, "Brining it all Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange" in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 179.

<sup>362</sup> Shelley Stamp, "Horror, Femininity, and *Carrie*'s Monstrous Puberty," in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 329.

<sup>363</sup> Stamp, "Horror, Femininity, and *Carrie*'s Monstrous Puberty," 331.

of a monster which takes the form of “transgressive femininity” and represents the failure of sexual repression to contain the feminine.<sup>364</sup> In both her status as a barbarian (lesser than a Greek woman) and child murderer (rejection of motherhood) Medea transgresses traditional Greek ideals of femininity. In this context, Jason would have been a more identifiable tragic protagonist to the Athenian audience. Rachel Cusk, adaptor of the 2015 production of *Medea* at the Almeida Theatre, states with regard to the play’s original context:

Those audiences were entirely male, and Medea did not please them, for not only does she get away with murder, she is glorified for it.<sup>365</sup>

The resonance of the play’s gender politics in the modern world cannot be understated, and the power of the play to speak to such concerns is unquestionable. Yet, with such gravity given to the fact that Medea is not only a woman, but a barbarian, one cannot help but wonder how the play might also speak to the fears which arise in contemporary conversations of race and immigration. As Betine van Zyl Smit notes, the tragedy of Euripides not only portrays “betrayed women, but also oppressed racial groups, exploited colonials and women.”<sup>366</sup> Medea’s opening speech highlights the additional burden placed on her as an outsider, first acknowledging her commonality with Greek women:

Of all creatures that have breath and sensation, we women are the most unfortunate.

<sup>364</sup> Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 155.

<sup>365</sup> Rachel Cusk, “Medea is not Psychotic—She’s a Realist,” in *The Telegraph*, Sept. 30, 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/actors/medea-rachel-cusk/>.

<sup>366</sup> Betine van Zyl Smit, “Medea the Feminist,” 102.

But goes on to say:

Now a foreigner must be quite compliant with the city...  
...your story and mine are not the same: you have a city and a  
father's house, the enjoyment of life and the company of friends,  
while I, without relatives or city, am suffering outrage from my  
husband. I was carried off as booty from a foreign land and have  
no mother, no brother, no kinsman to shelter me from this  
calamity.<sup>367</sup>

With this opening speech, Medea passionately laments a woman's lot in life, and as such, the speech is central to many productions as a means of highlighting the play's theme of gender politics. While the struggle of women in an abusively patriarchal culture is certainly an element of the speech, the speech is equally an acknowledgement of Medea's even more precarious situation: she is not only a woman, but she is not Greek. She is therefore a stronger source of fear to those around her, a fear rivaled only by her own fear of being abandoned in a strange land. Greek playwright Andreas Flourakis explored the conception of Medea as an immigrant in his one-woman adaptation of the Euripidean tragedy, *Medea's Burqa*.

First performed at the Colonus Theatre of Athens in 2014, Flourakis envisioned his Medea as a Syrian refugee fleeing her war-torn country for a better life in Greece (a country at the forefront of the Syrian refugee crisis given its proximity to Syria and its geographical function as a bridge between Asia and Europe). With the Syrian refugee crisis as its backdrop, the play straddles the ancient and the contemporary, interweaving mythological details of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece with modern emblems such as airplane travel, white wedding gowns,

<sup>367</sup> Eur. *Med.* 214-264.

and courthouse marriages. With an eye toward Medea as a character who puts fear into those who seek to banish her, Flourakis instills Medea with a monstrous presence. Reflecting the modern fear of Syrian refugees, and Muslims more broadly, the central character of Flourakis' adaptation wears a burqa which is described as a long piece of skin attached to and hanging from her face. In the production, thin transparent fabric about a meter in length hung in front of the actor's face. This fabric was coupled with dim but pointed lighting which succeeded in creating the illusion of long skin hanging from Medea's face. Much of the recent work of Flourakis has centered on modern conceptions of Greekness in the face of an ever-growing population of displaced refugees. In his play *The Things You Take With You*, (a two-act play the acts of which are titled "Us" and "Them"), Flourakis uses the model of a Chorus to devise a piece centered on the items which refugees manage to take with them when fleeing their country. In 2014, Flourakis developed *Medea's Feet*, a retelling of Jason's entry into Colchis and the decision of Medea to marry him and leave for Greece though "everyone will think [she is] a witch." In *Medea's Burqa*, Flourakis sought to tell the story of an Eastern woman who falls in love and gets married to a Western prince. Two different religions, two cultures, two disparate worlds clash in a story of betrayal, a story about being a foreigner in an unfriendly country. Medea laments:

I became unwanted in a world  
where foreigners should stay in their foreign country.

Flourakis explores the relationship of Medea's designation as a foreigner and the perception of her as a witch:

Now they all scream "burn the witch, the harpy, the alien"  
...They will come holding torches.  
To burn me, like I'm some kind of medieval witch.

The pairing of the words “witch,” with derogatory terms for women and immigrants such as “harpy” and “alien” further illustrates that the fear relative to Medea as a witch lives at an intersection of the fear of femininity and fear of foreignness.

The role of the dominant culture in creating the monster that is Medea was brought to the fore in my own adaptation of the tragedy by Euripides which was produced by Kansas City Public Theatre in 2018. The interrelated themes of foreignness and parenthood seemed an apt subject matter for the time as news reports were dominated by scenes of refugee camps along the United States–Mexico border in which immigrant children were being forcibly removed from their parents. Simultaneously, there was the increasingly tense debate over the extension or abolishment of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The deadlock surrounding the phasing out of DACA (currently being placed on hold by several courts), which granted asylum in the United States for immigrants who were brought to the country as youths (“Dreamers”), suddenly brought the concept of exiling children to the forefront of the American political climate. Images of imprisoned and separated families presented by the news media sparked an outcry as it allowed many American citizens to see firsthand the destruction of family as a result of a society’s treatment of those deemed as outsiders. And yet, a concurrent sentiment in the United States sought to arouse fear within the general public toward those families by stoking the flames of paranoia about the violence which immigrants might bring. By virtue of being immigrants, large swaths of people were accused of enacting a variety of “evil” acts within the United States border. They were labeled as law breakers, drugs dealers, gang members, rapists, and more.

Titled *Medea: An America Tragedy*, Kansas City Public Theatre presented this adaptation of *Medea* in partnership with the Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Heritage Museum, a black cultural

center operated by Kansas City Parks and Rec. The performance took place on a Greek style amphitheater in an adjacent park operated by the Watkins Center, and was one of several events scheduled to celebrate the opening of the Spirit of Freedom Fountain in the park. The script of *Medea: An American Tragedy* remained relatively close in kind to the words of Euripides. For both aesthetic and practical reasons, I chose to eliminate the character Aegeus, who in the original text offers Medea a safe haven. Aside from the removal of this scene, the adaptation parallels the traditional structure of the play by Euripides while substituting the Greek specific nature of the original with language specific to the United States, thereby framing Medea as an immigrant to the United States who is being deported while having her children used against her as a bargaining tool. Creon and Jason were played by the same actor and, in a modern political gesture, the character of Creon, who seeks to deport Medea, wore a dark suit with a red tie and liked to make circular gestures with his hands. The most apparent deviation from a direct translation of Euripides could be seen in the Chorus, outfitted in simple black leotards and equipped with scarves to highlight movement and act as symbolic props. The choral odes were supplanted with ritual hymns directed toward the “gods” of the United States, The Founding Fathers, as well as America folk tunes that embody themes of immigration and prosperity. The most obvious example of this is when the Chorus, rather than doing anything to prevent the murder of Medea’s children, sang the song “Mercedes Benz” by Janis Joplin, a song which comments on how a comfortable society is easily distracted by the allure of new material possessions while ignoring the world around them. After the song’s ending, Jason rushes the stage to confront Medea over her murder of his bride-to-be. As he laments the news of the death of his sons, described to him by the Chorus, Medea rises behind him wholly soaked in the blood of her children.

Like watching the victim run from a terrifying killer in a horror film, the audience takes its emotional cue from the characters they perceive to be most like them. Given this, the director of a modern production with an eye toward horror could consider the ways in which Medea is framed as a source of dread for the characters of the play, and thereby the audience. A question that may be asked by the director is: to what end does one present Medea as a figure to be feared? For what purpose might one stage *Medea* as a story which elicits horror, as well as sympathy, through its central character? As Simon Goldhill proposes, while tragedy may begin with dread “at the scene of the other...it turns out to be about us”.<sup>368</sup> Greek tragedy uses the horror of otherness, in whatever form it takes, to pose questions of the self. P.E. Easterling notes that while framing Medea as “a barbarian from Colchis must have helped a Greek audience to accept both her past crimes and her expertise as a powerful sorceress,” it does little to justify her actions of infanticide. Easterling continues, asking, “if Medea is to be seen as a distinctively oriental type (because she was a foreigner, she could kill her own children) why does Euripides make her talk like a Greek, argue like a Greek, and to all appearances feel like a Greek?”<sup>369</sup> Rehm argues that the central fear which motivates Medea is being laughed at by her enemies, a fear she acknowledges on six occasions throughout the course of the play. This fear, the reason behind Medea’s actions, reflects a central moral tenet of Athenian society, one deeply embedded in male-dominated ideology linked to “face saving, competition, warfare, and a highly polarized notion of friend and enemy.”<sup>370</sup> Far from the barbarian that Jason calls her, Medea has assimilated all too well to her new culture. She adheres so devotedly to these new values that she slays her own children to avoid the enduring laughter of her enemies. The fear of an

<sup>368</sup> Goldhill, *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*, 165.

<sup>369</sup> P. E. Easterling, “The Infanticide in Euripides' *Medea*,” *Yale Classical Studies* 25 (1977): 181.

<sup>370</sup> Rehm, *Radical Theatre*, 62.

enemy's laughter, and the need to punish them, was ingrained in the public consciousness of the Athenian audience. By presenting *Medea* in front of a Greek, probably all male, audience, Euripides forced spectators to question their belief that the source of Medea's monstrosity is her non-Greek heritage. The play by Euripides suggests an alternate viewpoint: that it is the very Greek qualities the audience held as truth which have tainted Medea, and thereby, are the source of her monstrosity. Perhaps the source of her impurity is not her status as immigrant, but the misguided values that Greek culture has forced upon her and which inevitably led to Jason's doom. While the Athenian audience would have found little to relate to in the character Medea, their fear is elevated when they begin to see the values that they cherish displayed in a person they perceived as so different. As it turns out, Medea is a monster of our own making.

## EPILOGUE

"How do we kill our dead?" For a modern audience, this question may be perplexing. You can't kill the dead, they're already dead, right? This question presumes that the living concede a sense of agency to those entities who are not present in this world; those who are invisible. Such a question is one which might be asked at a religious service where the possibility of supernatural existence is foregrounded. And yet, I hope that this dissertation has demonstrated that such a question is at the heart of Greek tragedy. The works of tragedy are rooted in a worldview which accepts the power and control that unseen, supernatural entities have over the physical world. It is because of its occupation with the violent possibilities of the

supernatural that I have argued that theatre practitioners presenting tragedy to modern audiences may learn from the modern artform that is almost exclusively engaged in the world of the supernatural: horror. As such, the violent aesthetics of horror may gleam for an audience the possibility of addressing how the living might harm the dead. I thought it would be appropriate to use this epilogue to briefly explore the work of one production which sought to address issues of unspeakable violence within the setting of a public forum. Through the process of public forum, New York based Theater of War Productions presented *Antigone in Ferguson*, an adaptation of *Antigone* which attempted to engage the audience by questioning those unseen realities which modern society rebuffs, but which nonetheless contribute to violence on both an individual and communal level. Theater of War asked its audience to address their unspoken anxieties in the face of the Dead, the Divine, and the Other by beginning its post-show talkback session by asking the question: “How do we kill our dead?”

I was in the audience that evening, at a performance held at Harlem Stage in October 2018. The air was thick in the densely packed room as the audience took a moment to discern the nature of the performance they just witnessed. The heat felt by the audience was perhaps more psychological than actual; sweat by osmosis having just observed a powerful Chorus made up of citizens of Ferguson, Missouri and New York City bring the performance to a close with a lengthy rendition of the gospel inspired choral ode, “I’m Covered,” written by the production’s composer and musical director Phil Woodmore. As the Chorus vigorously repeated the refrain “I’m covered in the precious blood of the lamb,” Chorus Leader De-Rance Blaylock gave ecstatic praise to the God who covers all with its power. The audience could see Blaylock’s body in duress. As she sung, each note became more compelling than the last. This was not a musical theatre performance. Blaylock sang with the intensity of one who did not care to

preserve her voice for the next performance, but in that moment, was compelled to lament the dead with the entirety of her corporeal being. This was not a choreographed performance, yet Blaylock dynamically channeled each muscle of her body to display a vocal presence that penetrated the room and was accompanied by minimal but authoritative gestures toward the sky. As the song ended and Blaylock made her way center stage to take her well-deserved bow, her breath was heavy, and she was covered in sweat. Looking as if she had just completed a marathon, she walked with a stagger in which one may be forgiven for worrying that she could fall over at any moment. After the bow, she left the stage. She could not participate in the talkback as she had weakened herself to the point of sickness. It was at this time, after having witnessed a performer quite literally sing themselves sick in their lament of the dead and praise to God, that the audience was asked “how do we kill our dead?”

The tragedy of *Antigone* continues to inspire theatre artists across the globe as a means of addressing societal questions of justice and one’s obedience to the law. As I noted in a previous chapter, the character of Antigone represents to the modern audience an ideal model of non-violent protest against the laws of a tyrannical state. In these forms of interpretation, Creon, King of Thebes, is transformed into a symbol of the tyrannical power which the production of the play is protesting: racism, sexism, capitalist, fascism, etc. Antigone places herself in direct conflict with this power when she acts against a decree which prohibits the burial of her brother Polyneices who died in battle as a traitor to the state. While Antigone is an idealized character to modern audiences, she occupies little stage time when compared to Creon who is arguably the play’s true protagonist. In the context of ancient Athens, the audience would see themselves in Creon from the outset. He is a man who is trying to stabilize the state and states need laws. The audience would have been immediately sympathetic toward Creon’s dilemma as the Athenians

were proud of their democratic state and were especially skeptical of criticisms toward it when those criticisms came from the mouth of a woman. In this context, Antigone is not initially a hero, but an enemy to the worldview of the Athenian audience. Similarly, what makes the play relevant in modern society is not that the audience sees themselves in Antigone, but that the play has the ability to present audiences with the bitter truth that we are more like Creon than we care to admit. Like Creon, individuals who make up modern audiences turn their cheek to instances of unfathomable violence which effect the world around them. Antigone's attempts to enlighten Creon of the powers which will inevitably come to dominate him are fruitless. Society's inclination to deny the powers of violence and its effects, as manifest in the character of Creon, takes centerstage in the Theater of War production of *Antigone in Ferguson*.

*Antigone in Ferguson* was developed in the wake of the murder of teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri at the hands of a white police officer in 2014. Theater of War Productions, a New York based company, was founded with the mission of presenting adaptations of classic work, for free, in public venues for the sake of addressing issues of public health and social justice. Like the original audience of these plays (an Athenian citizenry of civilian-soldiers and people otherwise affected by a century of war and disease), Theater of War presents Greek tragedy to communities struggling to wrestle with the trauma of violence. Because of this, Theater of War artistic director Bryan Doerries is of the opinion that his audiences are more knowledgeable of these pieces than he is, expressing his belief that:

people who have come into contact with death, who have faced the darkest aspects of our humanity, who have loved and lost, and who

know the meaning of sacrifice, seem to have little trouble relating to these ancient plays.<sup>371</sup>

Theater of War traveled to Ferguson to develop *Antigone in Ferguson* with the community most impacted by Brown's murder and subsequent fallout. The production was originally staged at Normandy High School, Michael Brown's alma mater, in September of 2016, before moving on to runs at Harlem Stage in New York in 2018 and at St. Ann and the Holy Trinity Church in Brooklyn in 2019. As with previous Theater of War projects, such as their ongoing program which presents the tragedies *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* to veterans and military families, the format of *Antigone in Ferguson* was that of a staged reading performance by a revolving group of professional (sometimes quite famous) actors who played the character roles. The cast of four changed weekly, and rehearsals with these actors are limited to a short number of hours just days before they perform. As a reading, there was no scenery except for the event space itself. The actors wore no distinct costumes, but ordinary, everyday clothes. The actors were accompanied by a Chorus, a diverse body of choir singers and band members including police officers, activists, youth, teachers, and concerned citizens from the St. Louis area and New York City.

Following the hour-long performance, a two-part community talkback was held which Doerries described as equally a part of the performance as the words of the actors. Doerries does not view the talkback session as supplementary, but rather, as the objective. The discussion acts as a mode of reinvigorating Greek tragedy with a sense of participatory public forum which the audiences of ancient times were accustomed to (given the nature of the Festival of Dionysus as a public event in which attendance was obligatory). To this end, the first portion of the community

<sup>371</sup> Bryan Doerries, *The Theater of War: What Ancient Greek Tragedies Can Teach us Today* (New York: Vintage, 2015), 6.

discussion is not directed toward the performers of the piece, but to community panelists: a small selection of audience members (four in this case) chosen prior to the performance and brought to the stage after the curtain call to discuss their experience in conversation with the rest of the audience. Doerries meets with the panelists prior to the evening's performance and asks them to listen closely to the scenes and identify which moments linger in their minds and are perhaps reflective of their own experiences. In the second portion of the talkback, following the panel discussion, Doerries mediates a town hall-style conversation with the audience. He poses thought provoking questions, the answers to which are anything but simple, if answers exist at all. For instance, during a performance of *Ajax*, Doerries began the conversation by asking: "How do we honor Ajax's great accomplishments without honoring the violence that took place at the end of his life?"<sup>372</sup> As with the nature of Greek tragedy itself, these questions reflect an understanding that one's encounter with suffering is a complex intersection of experiences the reasons of which are not easily discerned.

"How do we kill our dead?" During the panel and audience discussion, members of the room touched on a variety of issues raised by Brown's murder and the subsequent civic unrest: police brutality and racism, black disenfranchisement, community strengthening, grief, and pain. Though there was a conscious choice not to use his name during the performance, the talkback session revealed what had been obvious to anyone in the room: Michael Brown was at the forefront of the audience's mind throughout the evening, affecting our experience of the performance. Many of the performers in the Chorus and band knew him personally. Chorus leader Blaylock was Brown's high school music teacher. In a quote about her performance on the production's website (which she reiterated during the evening I attended) Blaylock stated:

<sup>372</sup> Sophie Klein, "Theater of War: Ancient Greek drama as a forum for modern military dialogue," in *Contemporary Adaptations of Greek Tragedy*, ed. George Rodosthenous (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 151.

“every night that we sing “I’m Covered” at the end of the play, it’s my way of covering my student Michael Brown.” Reviewer Tim Teeman commented that the very name *Antigone in Ferguson* suggests an intent to distill the Greek tragedy into a “commentary on the urgent questions—including around police brutality and racism—resulting from the death of Michael Brown.”<sup>373</sup> Those who conceived of the piece, Doerries as translator and director with Woodmore as composer, knew that no such direct reference to the victim of the heinous violence they sought to address was necessary for his presence to be felt through the power of the performers. For Doerries’ part, the script which was read aloud by the actors was a straightforward, though accessible, modern translation of the words of Sophocles with no contemporary signifiers. Woodmore’s choral arrangements were entirely original songs. With the lyrics directed at questioning or giving praise to the power of God, the gospel style compositions were not altogether different in mode than the function of the Chorus in ancient Athens; the Chorus was updated to reflect modern religiously oriented music. With both the script and music keeping close to the intent of the work of Sophocles, the inaction toward justice which characterized the fallout of Brown’s murder was cited directly but framed as analogous to the inaction toward justice given to Polyneices.

*Antigone in Ferguson* was not accusatory. At their core, the projects of Theater of War do not seek to find an empirical cause to violence, but rather, address society’s response to it. Like the works we have addressed in previous chapters, the company takes as its assumption the inevitability of suffering due to the power of forces beyond our control. *Antigone in Ferguson* did not examine the death of Polyneices by designating an enemy that the well-informed can rail against. The very inclusion of Ferguson, Missouri police officers in the Chorus suggests that the

<sup>373</sup> Tim Teeman, “Michael Brown and the Raw Power of Antigone in Ferguson,” *The Daily Beast*, Sept. 17, 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/michael-brown-and-the-raw-power-of-antigone-in-ferguson>

production was not interested in espousing a moral binary of good and bad, heroes and villains. Establishing such a binary would have cheapened the production's questioning of how *we*, the culture at large, are implicated in the perpetuation of violent crime. As Doerries notes "tragedies are designed not to teach us morals but rather to validate our moral distress at living in a universe in which many of our actions and choices are influenced by external powers far beyond our comprehension."<sup>374</sup> Therefore, the production did not seek to rationalize the events surrounding Brown's murder by casting blame at a single individual or institution. Rather, the production sought to investigate the ways in which society at large, presented through the character of Creon, is consumed with irrational forces which make themselves manifest in horrifically violent acts; there is nothing rational about a child being murdered in cold blood. Society's culpability in such violence lies in the broad refusal to acknowledge those forces, resulting in lack of justice given toward those who have been most victimized.

*Antigone in Ferguson* investigates this culpability largely through an exploration of the ways in which the drama surrounding the character of Polyneices pertains to a culmination of external irrational powers which lay beyond the empirical cosmology of modern individuals. *Antigone in Ferguson*, rather than present a straight-forward hero versus villain narrative which teaches a moral lesson, presents a story in which its central conflict is in regard to the confluence of the Dead, and the Divine, and the Other in a single victim of violence.

Even as the secular, industrialized world has lost an enthusiasm for many of the ritual practices which were dominant in earlier times, Doerries believes that suffering individuals in the modern world are no less receptive to tales of supernatural forces which affect them and drive their anxieties. He states of supernaturally oriented myths that "humans today are no less

<sup>374</sup> Doerries, *The Theater of War*, 13.

receptive to them than were our ancient forebears.”<sup>375</sup> As we have seen, the objects of horror within tragedy, those entities which instill fear and disgust in the audience, need not be physically present on the stage to make their power felt. The presence of Polyneices, an invisible dead figure, hovers over the action of the play as his improper burial weighs heavily on the mind of his sister Antigone. Antigone continues to remind her family members, and audience, of society’s obligation to put the dead to rest properly. In this manner, the conflict between Antigone and Creon is analogous to the media circus surrounding the aftermath of Brown’s murder, but also reflects the disturbing reality that Brown’s body was allowed to be left lying in the streets of Ferguson for four hours after his murder.<sup>376</sup> Not present at this scene was any concern for the wellbeing of this deceased person. *Antigone in Ferguson* presented this scenario as a grievous lapse in obligatory action toward the deceased, a lapse which ultimately led to more violent suffering for the living.

The power of the dead to inspire violent conflict is seen clearly as Creon loses all of his loved ones as a direct result of his unattendance to the dead Polyneices. However, the threat of the dead Polyneices toward the social order upheld by Creon is made more dire given his status amongst the Theban citizens. Polyneices is a traitor; an outsider, one beyond the confines of the walls which define the city of Thebes. Polyneices is not one of them, he is Other. The fear of tainting the citizens of Thebes with the presence of such a body adds a further dimension of disgust in Creon’s attitude toward the dead person. Maybe if Polyneices had lived up to Creon’s standards of respectability he would still be alive, or at least honored. As we saw in the

<sup>375</sup> Doerries, *The Theater of War*, 27.

<sup>376</sup> Kim Bell, David Hunn, “Why was Michael Brown's body left there for hours?” in *St. Louis Dispatch*, Sept. 14 2014, [https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/why-was-michael-brown-s-body-left-there-for-hours/article\\_0b73ec58-c6a1-516e-882f-74d18a4246e0.html](https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/why-was-michael-brown-s-body-left-there-for-hours/article_0b73ec58-c6a1-516e-882f-74d18a4246e0.html)

preceding chapter, a perception of a person or entity as Other emboldens one's fear toward that person. The Otherness of Polyneices is made more apparent as it is contrasted with the honor given to his dead brother Eteocles, a respected member of the Theban community. Antigone's plight is not only to bury her dead brother, but to make the case for his very personhood; that no matter the acts he performed, he is still a member of the community. Yet, the members of this community refuse to accept him as one of their own, painting him in the worst possible light to justify the mistreatment of his body. The fear and disgust directed at the dead Polyneices is precisely a manifestation of the perception of him as outside of the city; the Other.

Theater of War Productions, through the story of *Antigone*, presented a radically different view of the meaning of death, and by doing so invited the audience to reconsider their views on what it means to pay heed to our dead. "How do we kill our dead" is a question that forces a modern audience to assess their own obligation to those dead persons who are dismissed from public consciousness upon their exit from the world of the living. The audience of *Antigone in Ferguson* was made to consider if our corpses are simply passive victims, or if they are actively suffering due to society's inability to acknowledge their presence through action. The refrain of the performance's final song repeats again and again the words "I'm cover in the precious blood of the lamb." These words remind the audience that all people are covered in the blood of those whose lives are taken by the irrational forces that so many refuse to acknowledge.

I began this dissertation by describing the ways in which both tragedy and horror can be characterized as narratives driven by supernatural entities who are perceived as both threatening and impure. Polyneices, the victim, is framed by Creon as such an entity; a monster. Being dead, he is supernatural. As someone who brought war to the city of Thebes, he is considered dangerous. His impurity derives from his status as traitor, which Creon often notes with open

disgust. And yet, the production of *Antigone in Ferguson* complicates this perception of Polyneices by undermining the qualities Creon associates with monstrosity. The distance between “Us” and “Other” is minimized as those most affected by the violence in Ferguson were placed front and center. As an audience member, this traumatic news story was no longer an abstracted event. The Chorus, Ferguson citizens, lament the devastation caused by the inaction of properly putting our dead to rest. Ultimately, the window that horror provides the performance of tragedy in the modern world is a visceral investigation into the subjective encounter with suffering that is rooted in an experience which is not reducible to scientific or rational explanation. In horror, people come face-to-face with their monsters. The works of horror, through fictitious lenses, expose a reality that the domineering and unstoppable force of suffering can occur without motivation or reason. A disregard for the immutable omnipresence of the irrational forces of the cosmos, rather than mitigate, emboldens violent conflict. A denial of monstrous forces only perpetuates them. The horror of tragedy is found in the final confrontation of the protagonist with those monstrous forces that they have denied. Greek tragedy, through an aesthetic of horror centered on the existence and power of the supernatural, utilizes a fear of monsters to force audiences to question the very qualities they associate with monstrosity. In doing so, tragedy provides the dark hope that each and every person will inevitably confront those monstrous qualities which are at the heart of violent conflict. Tragedy presents to its audience characters who are compelled to act in the confrontation with impossibility. In such stories, we are reminded of our own helplessness in the face of suffering. We are reminded that, whether today, tomorrow, or in years to come, the cosmos will surely act against us and we will all be compelled to answer that question at the heart of tragedy: what should I do?

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