

## Greek Drama

### Part One

Aeschylus' *The Libation-Bearers*, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Euripides' *Electra* all start with the same basic dramatic action: Orestes returns and kills Aegisthus and Clytemnestra to avenge his father's murder and restore his family. Where they depart from each other, and where the playwrights' individual world views and messages are realized, is through the choice, focus, and arrangement of action. This paper will examine how each playwright communicates meaning through this manipulation of the action by comparing some of the structural elements and other choices of their various versions of the Orestes revenge plot, and test their "meaning" (or, content realized through form) against the given background information of each playwright which broadly characterizes Aeschylus as a ritualistic, religious man with a true belief in the gods and their myths; Sophocles as an idealist, military general, and an aristocrat with an interest in affirming the status quo; and Euripides as a realist, sophist, and cultural subversive.

Aeschylus' life straddled two worlds: the traditional ways of the sixth century B.C. and the exciting promise of a new democracy in the fifth century. His trilogy, *The Oresteia*, celebrates and embraces the new democratic process while honoring the traditions of the past. Aeschylus' dramatization of the Orestes revenge plot functions in a larger context than the self-contained *Electra* plays by both Sophocles and Euripides. The structure of the trilogy is: action-reaction-resolution. In *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus murder Agamemnon leaving the chorus of old men to curse their new rulers and call on Orestes to bring justice. The violent act requires a reaction in the form of Orestes' revenge. When the Furies rise up against Orestes' matricide at the end of the second play, Aeschylus has structurally established a pattern or cycle of violence already associated with the curse on the House of Atreus. As Orestes flees to Apollo's temple, the Chorus recognizes this continuous cycle of violence and asks the million dollar question: "Who can bring it to an end?" (145), which is the perfect entrance cue for the gods, Apollo and Athene, in *The Eumenides*. Aeschylus' Orestes plot is the glue in the larger story of a cycle of violence and pollution that cannot be resolved without a new process of judgment and justice instituted by the gods. The individual purpose of *The Libation-Bearers* within the trilogy is to set up a pattern that establishes the great need in the community for this resolution from the gods.

Aeschylus creates a mythical reality where the gods and mortals all exist together in a connected Universe. The first moment of the play opens with Orestes praying to Hermes to help him contact his father's spirit. There are over twenty instances in this play of dramatic actions that involve some form of prayer or other religious ritual. Aeschylus reinforces the idea of ritual with repeating images of blood, wine, and water. Aeschylus establishes through structure and image the great need in this community for purification, which enhances the sense of pollution that permeates this unbalanced world. Aeschylus' intimate integration of the Chorus also helps create a world where everyone is connected, like Electra says, "As if we were links in a great chain" (95). The Chorus has a true stake in the action and experiences the same foul pollution as Electra. Perhaps the most revealing example of their mystical interconnectedness is when Electra first picks up Orestes lock of hair and the Chorus immediately responds, "Why did my heart lurch when you picked that up?" (99) This heightened sense of cause and effect is infused into every moment of the play. Cause and effect is both the structure and part of the message. The full integration of every character, including the gods and ghosts receiving prayers, into the moment by moment reality of the play supports the larger idea that Clytemnestra's actions demand a reaction, setting up a cycle that must be broken in order to set the world back in balance.

The mythical reality and the clear driving action of Aeschylus' play means that more modern (or perhaps, more Euripidean) concepts of character and realism take a backseat. The swiftness of the recognition scene, which denies the reality that Orestes was separated from Electra in his infancy, is actually believable within the same world in which the hearts of the young women jump in response to Electra touching Orestes' tress of hair. Aeschylus' characters are archetypes. Any additional characterization is added solely to resonate with and support the story already being told in the action. Given the lean structure of his play, adding literal realism and complexity of character would only muddy the waters. Much of Aeschylus' characterization comes in the form of animal images, which supports the sense of archetypes within this story. Aegisthus is labeled as a "wolf" or "wolf-bitch" (107, 112). Orestes repeatedly associates his father and his house with an "eagle" and "eagle's nest", and he refers to he and his sister as "the eagle's children" (104). He also likens Clytemnestra to a snake. This same image will later foreshadow the new pollution of matricide when Orestes becomes the snake in Clytemnestra's nightmare: "The meaning is plain. I am that snake" (119). Aeschylus also indirectly highlights Clytemnestra's character through the introduction of a new character. Cilissa, the nurse of the infant Orestes, is Aeschylus' reminder to us of what a mother is, and by contrast, what Clytemnestra is not. Upon hearing the report of Orestes' death, she mourns: "I took him fresh

from his mother's womb, / Fragrant as an armful of flowers. / It was my milk he drank... / It was me he cried for... / He was my life. / And I was his life" (128). Clytemnestra has shed these tender, maternal feelings to survive in this topsy-turvy world where she now assumes the role of a man. She has jumped to a new archetype: a ruler, a king.

Aeschylus also makes important choices of sequence and tempo to support the message of his version of the myth. He places the murdering of Clytemnestra second, at the climax, which draws the focus to the matricide. Just before her murder, Aeschylus gives the voice of Apollo to Pylades, the loyal companion of Orestes: "Remember the words of Apollo. / Obey the command of the god of the oracle. / Embrace the enmity of mankind / Rather than be false to the word of heaven" (135). This command placed in the mouth of one who has hitherto been completely silent strengthens Orestes' purpose in a moment of faltering. The timing of this voice of Apollo is placed just before the murder and the resulting rise of the Furies. The sequence of those events (Apollo's command, matricide, promised revenge of the Furies) spells out the very conflict to come in *The Eumenides*. The most notable anomaly in tempo is the extremely long beat devoted to a single action performed by Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus: the call for the spirit of Agamemnon to possess Orestes in his purpose (108-117). The prolonged focus on an event performed specifically to give courage and support to Orestes begs the question: why do they need this much time and effort to conjure up the will to do something that is perceived by all as just and necessary? Their action of searching for greater justification suggests that they lack sufficient justification at present. Aeschylus' extension of this action once again foreshadows the rise of the Furies.

Sophocles and Euripides were contemporaries with very different views on their world. Where Sophocles sees a superior Athens, blessed by the gods, for which everyone should strive beyond themselves to protect and advance, Euripides sees an endless war with Sparta, oracles bought for a price, and a godless world that is in constant flux. These different points of view are apparent from the very first moments of both their plays.

Sophocles begins with a dialogue between the Tutor and Orestes which thrusts the audience immediately into the action of the play. Such a launch underscores the Tutor's advice to Orestes: "This is not a place for dithering, / but action perforce" (58). What follows is a meticulously structured play with active language that focuses attention on the argument or issue at hand. Unlike Aeschylus, Sophocles' characters go beyond archetypes (especially the strong central character of Electra), and his Chorus is not as intimately involved in the action of the play. The Chorus functions more as a sounding board, once again drawing attention to the issue at hand. Particularly during the debate sequences of the play, the Chorus becomes a kind

of mediator, jury, or voice for balance. During the Chrysothemis-Electra debate over appropriate behaviors, the Chorus chimes in, “There is something in both your declarations. / If only each of you could take something from the other” (68). The Chorus reflects and represents the *polis*. The audience is watching a representation of themselves watching the same action. Sophocles is skillful in crafting the actions and reactions of the Chorus, which functions as an effective cue to how the audience should respond. Wisely, Sophocles begins with a Chorus whose words are so well considered, consistently advocating balance and discretion in such a reasonable manner that any self-respecting Athenian citizen would be proud to recognize the qualities of their own just and wise democratic beliefs. If the audience makes an alliance with the Chorus, then it is against this backdrop that Sophocles focuses on the willful and resolute character of Electra. The Tutor, Orestes, and Pylades set up the action and quickly vanish for thirty-two pages (in the Paul Roche translation) as they and the audience hear Electra for the first time off stage crying, “Ah...Unbearable!” (60) These are not the words of one who suffers silently.

Electra’s main purpose, and the only real option left open to her, is to be a thorn in the side of her oppressors until Orestes returns to restore justice. But Sophocles not only delays Orestes’ return to the action of the play, but also subjects his characters (and the audience) to a series of reversals in the form of false hopes and mistaken or fabricated news of disaster. A prime example is placed at the center of the play. The Tutor enters to deliver his false report of Orestes’ death, which appears to be an immediate answer to Clytemnestra’s prayer. When Clytemnestra begs for more information, the Tutor’s story brings Orestes to life again for Clytemnestra and Electra with such nuanced details of his courage and skill in the chariot races and then kills him off with a description of a gruesome and senseless accident. The dizzying effect is so intense that even Sophocles’ villainous Clytemnestra is thrown off balance: “Great Zeus, what can I / make of this? / Am I to call it a lucky break or terrible? / Saving self by damning self – what irony?” (81) Chrysothemis returns later from the tomb with proof of Orestes’ return, only to be crushed by the news of his death. Like Euripides, Sophocles creates an unpredictable world, but to deliver a very different message. When all hope appears to be lost for Electra, when she is holding and mourning over what she thinks is her brother’s ashes, the reality that the audience sees is that her greatest hope, Orestes, is standing right in front of her. Clytemnestra’s hopes, like the urn, are empty. Aegisthus hurries back to the palace, giddy to see the proof of Orestes’ death, and stumbles into his demise. The message that Sophocles is sending is perfect for a war-torn Athens: during chaotic times, when circumstances appear bleak, then good fortune is just around the corner; and when your enemies are rejoicing, their demise is coming.

No wartime propaganda would be complete without a just cause. Unlike Aeschylus and Euripides, Sophocles does not question the act of revenge. Matricide is not even an issue in Sophocles' version of the story. Even the image of Clytemnestra's nightmare proclaims justice in Orestes' revenge: "...she saw our father... / He took the scepter he used to carry, / held by Aegisthus now, and thrust it in the hearth. / From it sprouted a luxuriant tree / that cast its shade over all Mycenae" (70). This image plays upon the repeating image of Agamemnon as a strong, sheltering tree which Aegisthus savagely cut down with an axe. Sophocles also places Clytemnestra's murder first and Aegisthus' murder, the most easily justifiable, in the climax position. There is no remorse, only celebration. Electra was steadfast in all her hopes and willing to strive beyond herself. In the darkest hour she resolved herself to personally avenge her father. Her world, like war-weary Athens, was chaotic and unpredictable. Electra's lesson to the citizens of Athens is: stay the course, push ahead, and reward will come when one least expects it. If the citizens of Athens are not convinced, their representation on stage already has been. The Chorus condones the murders. As Orestes and Pylades drive Aegisthus into the palace, the Chorus ends the play, "House of Atreus, how many sorrows have you endured, but finally freed this day and finally cured?" (105) With this question Sophocles acknowledges that they are still in an unpredictable world where fortunes can reverse in an instant, but for now, they have won the battle by staying the course.

Euripides begins his play outside of a peasant cottage, which is an informative contrast to both Aeschylus and Sophocles, who both set their stories outside the palace. Euripides' prologue immediately sets him apart. An honest Peasant emerges from the cottage, looks out over the fields and delivers a speech that is almost purely exposition. The strongest action for his language seems to be little more than: to report, or to set up the story. In other words, his prologue functions purely as a prologue; it calls attention to itself as a device. Of the three playwrights, Euripides' language feels the least active. His language is more concerned with communicating the emotional states of being, the "psychological reality" and contradictions in characters, and with weaving a complex plot which unfolds in unexpected ways, to the point of near absurdity. As a result, the characters don't feel like they are affecting one another, but rather, each character is taking their turn to "show" their individual story. There is a tension, a kind of paradox at work in the language: while the characters come off as more psychologically believable in Euripides' world of common people, the moment to moment structure lacks a cause and effect reality. Like the utilitarian prologue, it reminds the audience that they are watching a play because there is not a strong thrust of action for the audience to get sucked into which could cause them to get "lost" in the story. Euripides establishes an unpredictable world

through these unsettling contradictions contained within and surrounding his disconnected characters. His Chorus is so disconnected from the action that their songs function more as transitional pieces between the scenes with major characters. With the scenes isolated, his choral odes cleanse the palette in order to allow the next scene a new attack or a shift in point of view, which paints the picture of a godless world with no true consensus of belief among mortals. Compared to Aeschylus and Sophocles, there is a conspicuous lack of praying in Euripides' version of the story. Mythical archetypes and strong heroic figures have been traded in for honest peasants and cowardly princes. One can view these choices as either a challenge to the societal values of Athens, or as simply playing to a different audience, perhaps depending largely upon the social class to which one belongs. But the effect is the same: conventional thought in the ruling class is being questioned.

Euripides' characterization through language emphasizes these choices. The Peasant is quick to inform us that despite Electra's compelled marriage to him, that "She is a virgin still" (168). The proof of his nobility is extended when he approaches Electra and entreats her, "My poor girl, / why must you toil and moil for me / even when I beg you not to..." (169) Meanwhile, the great mythical characters of Electra and Orestes are yanked down from their heights. Electra is seen as a peasant wife, fetching water from the spring. Unlike Sophocles' Electra, who was tireless in exploiting the few options of action she had available to her, this Electra chooses a more manipulative approach as a self-imposed martyr. She describes her tactic in her first speech, "I am not forced to do this menial work. / I choose to do it / to show the gods Aegisthus' wickedness / and raise a lamentation for my father" (169). This paints the picture that the only thing that makes her day to day suffering greater than her Peasant husband's suffering is that she once lived, and always expected to live, the life of royalty. Her expressed grievances, in this juxtaposition with the generous and noble Peasant, feel less like a cry for justice and more like the tantrum of a spoiled child. Orestes betrays himself as a coward in his very first speech: "I shall not set foot inside the walls/ but stay on the doorstep here.../ If discovered I can slip over the border" (170). Euripides highlights the discrepancy between reality and point of view in the recognition scene where Electra reproaches the Old Tutor, "What nonsense you talk, old man, / if you imagine that my courageous brother would slink into this land in terror of Aegisthus" (134). Euripides drives his point home by referencing and satirizing Aeschylus' recognition scene. The Old Tutor brings the world of Aeschylus with him and all the same proof of Orestes' presence at the tomb, which Electra proceeds to dissect and dismantle and boil down to mundane reality. This is a significant example of Euripides pulling back the proverbial curtain and reminding the audience, "yes, this is a play, and yes, it's about you." Euripides makes

Aegisthus an offstage character that is consistently described as rather hospitable and certainly welcoming to strangers. Orestes eventually exploits this trait to stab Aegisthus in the back. Clytemnestra comes off as reasonable and sympathetic as she extends the olive branch to her daughter: “I can forgive you...and to tell you the truth, / I am not proud of everything I’ve done, my child” (204).

Over and over, these choices send the message: nothing is as it seems. Perhaps the most timely and culturally relevant reference to this theme is Orestes’ doubt in the oracle of Apollo. In his belated efforts to revenge, Orestes summons no support from the gods, nor does he seem to believe he can, and so his doubt never leaves him. Even at the moment of killing Clytemnestra, he reports, “I threw my cloak over my eyes, / and did the thing, forcing the steel / through my mother’s throat” (208). His hesitation and dread is only replaced with horror and regret, but now, in both Orestes and Electra. Then, in a final absurd blow, Euripides confirms uncertainty with the descending of two messenger gods, Castor and Pollux. In modern terms, Castor’s character reads more like a sympathetic messenger working for an inept and rigid mob boss than a son of Zeus speaking on behalf of Apollo. The oracle was indeed unwise, but Orestes and Electra will still be held accountable. The gods bring no comfort or defense, but function as a conscience. Castor is reminding them and the audience that a murder is a murder, oracle or not. Euripides has leveled society’s playing field and has ripped away all the grand, mythical, and rhetorical justifications for violence in this story, and by extension, in Athenian society.

## **Part Two: question #2**

The debate segments in Greek drama function on two levels. First, a debate is a familiar event in the popular consciousness. Weaving a debate into a play gives the playwright a kind of cultural shorthand with which to cue the audience. Everyone in the theatre immediately understands the “rules of the game.” Considering the popularity of public debates and Athenian pride in their democracy, a debate sequence carries a weight with it that could effectively draw the audience’s attention. Second, the debate is inherently dramatic in structure: two points of view colliding over a single issue or event. The debate has a distillation effect; the structure of the action is designed to generate a consensus truth. So, if the debate segment is strategically placed within the structure of a play, then it can have the combined power of connecting with the audience in a common language and focusing their attention on the playwright’s issue of choice. But unlike real debates in the public forum, these are scripted. The playwright not only

decides the outcome, but can also completely frame the debate. Therefore, what is most revealed in the debate sequence is the playwright's point of view.

Both the time period of Aeschylus' play relative to the birth of democracy, and the structural thrust of his trilogy, *The Oresteia*, are important factors when considering how differently he sets up the debate sequence in *The Eumenides*. The democratic legal system had consistently been in the public consciousness by the later plays of Sophocles and Euripides, so a tradition of debates both in public and in plays established these debate segments almost as conventions. But Athens became a full democracy just a few years before Aeschylus wrote his trilogy, so he is referencing something fairly new. But Aeschylus is not only referencing debate as a form, he is celebrating and advocating its existence in Athenian life. The dramatic thrust of the trilogy sets up the great need in the world of the play for a resolution, a means of justice that can end the violent blood feud. The answer comes in the form of a trial, where gods and mortals come together in a common quest for justice. The trial in *The Eumenides* is the focal point of the three play structure. But the play is not finished when Orestes exits with Apollo, acquitted of all charges. The trial gives a context which leads to the final debate between the Chorus of Furies and Athene. The Furies are an irrational, emotional voice of anger and resentment, which Athene diffuses with a calming voice that seeks to honor and reconcile. Athene's judgment, along with the jurors in trial, is the beginning of a new world order. The Furies represent what is left of the traditional ways and, of course, they represent those who lost power because of this new world order: "Our old laws are crushed under the new. / Our justice is buried, like the ashes of Troy" (188). Athene knows that the new system will not work if the old guard remains disgruntled and unsatisfied. Essentially, the action of Athene within the world of the play is an expression of Aeschylus' action with this debate, and by extension, with his trilogy. Athene's voice of reconciliation conquers the irrational emotions of blood feuds. The persuaded Furies admonish the citizens of Athens:

Never let civil war, the most  
Malignant of all misunderstandings,  
Divide Athens.  
There is no hope nor future  
For a land  
Whose mind is split  
Into two, and where each half  
Strives only to destroy the other.  
Give Athens a single mind, a whole mind,  
As a marriage gives to two strangers  
One child. (195)

This marriage image is repeated in the final lines of the play; a marriage that binds the Universe, gods and man, "And the voice of their shout is single and holy" (198).



Sophocles' debate sequences are fully integrated into the action of the play. These sequences isolate a single issue and resolve it in a way that resonates with the message of the larger structure of the play. In Sophocles' *Electra*, the exchange between Electra and the Chorus of young women (just after their entrance) is a prelude to the Chrysothemis-Electra debate. The Chorus raises the issue by counseling Electra to let go of too great a grief. Their counsel is sincere and is enacted with care and an underlining unshakeable support for her. Electra defends the need of her grief and her duty to it. Sophocles establishes the opposing point of view by weaving it into the action. One of the first tactics the Chorus uses on Electra is imploring her to consider the calm and temperate behavior of her sister Chrysothemis, who has also lost a father. With this set up, Chrysothemis enters with ritual offerings for the tomb of her father. The Chorus slips into the mediator/jury role as the two points of view face off. Chrysothemis immediately chastises Electra's extravagant behavior and lays out her argument for living in peace. But Sophocles is already framing the debate against her in this first argument. Chrysothemis is betraying something when she reveals, "...had I the nerve I would show them / what my feelings really were" (67). Electra easily characterizes this as cowardly in her rebuttal. Also, Chrysothemis ends her opening argument with "...I must submit in everything to those in power" (67) This is not a phrase designed to win over an audience that pride themselves on their democratic state, especially when that power continues to be so clearly characterized as unjust and vile. Electra defines her sister's behavior as cowardly and false; false to herself and false to her father. Most damaging of all, she accuses her of an alliance with the enemy. In a time of war, such charges carry a lot of emotional weight. The Chorus steps in for a moment to entreat both parties to find a middle ground. The process of debate begins to peel away the layers as Chrysothemis reveals Aegisthus' plan to bury Electra alive. Electra welcomes such an end to her misery, which reveals the strength of her convictions. At this point the tempo of the debate picks up with a faster exchange of lines, but the cycle of rhetoric repeats. Electra again dubs Chrysothemis' actions to be a cowardly betrayal of their father. Realizing the futility of forcing the issue, Chrysothemis excuses herself to continue her business. Another layer is peeled away as Electra questions Chrysothemis about Clytemnestra's command. Chrysothemis seems oblivious to the significance of Clytemnestra's nightmare, which turns out to be the first sign of hope and a key piece of evidence that persuades the Chorus. The Chorus, in turn, admonish Chrysothemis: "What the young woman says is sensible, / and you, my dear, would be wise to follow it" (71). Chrysothemis concedes, "When an obligation is quite clear / it is absurd to let two voices argue it, / and we must hurry" (72). The two pieces of information that propelled the debate forward to its resolution were both revealed by Chrysothemis, which begs the question: If

she possessed this information, why was she the one that needed to be persuaded of its significance? In the pursuit of her own comfort, has she become so indoctrinated under an unjust power? Or worse yet, do some of Electra's accusations have a touch of truth in them? Chrysothemis self-serving agenda is exposed again with her exit line: "...if I proceed in this, my friends, / I must ask you for the gods' sake to keep quiet. / If my mother get to hear of it, / I think I'll be very sorry for my defiance" (72). The justice of this cause still does not alleviate her fear of personal consequences. Electra is willing to strive beyond herself and risk all consequences for the justice of her cause. Chrysothemis serves tyranny to find daily comfort. This distillation within the debate sequence resonates with the thrust of the whole play. Sophocles, the general, teaches a war-torn Athens of the virtue of remaining firm and loyal to the cause.

In Euripides' *Medea*, the First Choral Ode transitions straight in to the Jason-Medea debate sequence, and it also sets the agenda. In this way, Euripides' debate segments are more conspicuous than Sophocles'; they stand out in the structure. Through the Chorus, Euripides begins by establishing a topsy-turvy world: "...The cosmos and all morality turning to chaos. / The mind of man is nothing but fraud / and his faith in the gods a delusion" (351). The women of Corinth then sing of a new day when "...reverence come[s] to the gender of women," and old songs that marginalize and demonize women will never be sung again. (351) Make no mistake, they clearly sing of equality: "Time in the roll of the ages / Has much to unfold of the fortunes of women / No less that the fortunes of men" (352). They praise Medea's fierce independence and driving devotion that allowed her to achieve equality and that made her the model of all women's hopes. But now they must mourn the broken vow of a man that has cast her down so low. It is fitting that the Chorus' final line before Jason's entrance, "And your bed is usurped / by another queen in your home," references the deeply personal nature of her grievance. (352) What follows is a bitter, painful and very personal debate between two ex-lovers. Euripides has once again elected to tell the messy, emotional, and unflinchingly human story. After Medea's first impassioned counter-argument, the Chorus admits discomfort and despair in the presence of such raw human emotion: "How frightening is resentment, how difficult to cure, / when lovers hurl past love at one another's hate!" (355). But riding on the surface of this personal story are all the issues of equality for women introduced by the Chorus. The consistent action of Jason's language is pseudo-speciation. Like the old songs the Chorus refers to, Jason strips Medea of her equality and marginalizes her needs, rights, and her pain. His opening line condescends to address her stereotypical "problem": "So...this is not the first time / I have seen irrevocable damage done by a recalcitrant tongue" (352). Phrases like "ranted like a barbarian",

“your tirades”, and “obstinate in your folly” diminish her grievances and her person because they ring with the tone of an exasperated adult scolding a small child. (353) His language also diminishes their love and their bond. Jason describes himself as “...patient to the last with someone I am fond of.” He later implies that her love was “infatuation, sheer shooting passion” (356). In Medea’s very long counter-argument, she reasserts herself and her equality in their vows and in their joint endeavors that they braved side by side. Medea echoes the Chorus’ description of a world that allows such betrayals: “Do you suppose the gods of old no longer rule? / Or is it that mankind / now has different principles? / Because your every vow to me, you surely know, / is null and void” (354). After the Chorus’ helplessness interjection, Jason rewrites history. All Medea’s mighty contributions to his life and their union are reduced to the actions of a lustful woman. All her grief and pain is reduced to the actions of a bitter, petty, and jealous woman. But even while Medea is not speaking, Euripides is exposing and attacking the cultural paradigm that allows Jason to not only feel justified, but feel superior in all respects. From Jason’s point of view, his insulting offers are the height of generosity. His thinking is completely out of sync with the reality Euripides presents to the audience. He shushes Medea like a dog twice. Jason has so successfully marginalized women for himself that he argues for their disposal, “What we poor males really need / is a way of having babies on our own – no females, please. / Then the world would be / completely trouble-free” (357). The thrust of this debate leads to a very crucial decision in the action of the play. Jason’s paradigm does not allow him to see that this debate was his last chance. Medea has made the decision: “Curses, ha! You’ll find them coming home to roost” (358). Jason’s broken vow started the action of the play, but underestimating Medea sealed his fate. The Chorus of Corinthian women, completely appalled by Jason, rally behind Medea’s cause. Medea’s plight is a huge lesson for them. In the final lines of the Second Choral Ode which closes the debate, Euripides sums up his warning in the women’s pledge: “Let a man rot in an odious lot / If he never unshutters his heart to the cleansing esteem of another. He’ll not be my friend – no never” (360).

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