"EVIL WEALTH OF RAIMENT": DEADLY Πέπλοι IN GREEK TRAGEDY[1]

"Textiles are a feminine weapon and they may be used for good or evil."[2]

Perhaps more than any other Greek textile the πέπλος was imbued with a distinct ambiguity. It was celebrated as the sacred cloth dedicated to Athena at the Panathenaia, yet it figures prominently as an instrument of feminine destruction in tragedy: the deadly garments wielded by Clytemnestra, Deianeira, and Medea are all called πέπλοι. While many have noted the destructive capacities of textiles in Greek tragedy, the particular significance of the πέπλος has not been addressed. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, the πέπλος was not a garment in common use during the Classical period.[3] But if the πέπλος was not worn as regular dress by Greek women, what was the infamous πέπλος of Greek tragedy?

This study traces the development of the concept of the πέπλος, from its earliest appearance in Homer as the noun-stem of feminine epithets to its adoption by the tragedians as a central motif symbolizing the inversion of the proper social order. It will be argued that the tragedians manipulated earlier connotations of the πέπλος, especially femininity, luxury, protection and marriage, to

[1] I wish to thank the editor and the two anonymous referees for their insightful comments. The present study is derived from Chapter 3 of my dissertation, 'The Myth of the Classical *Peplos*' (Bryn Mawr, 1999). Special thanks are due to A.A. Donohue, who advised me, S.L. James, who commented on the chapter, and R. Hamilton, who assisted me at early stages of the study. I am grateful to N.S. Rabinowitz and K.S. Morrell for their comments on earlier drafts, and to A.E. Hanson for her advice on Hippocratic herbals. I also thank J.L. Rife for his careful reading and advice on issues of clarity and style. L. Battezzato kindly shared a copy of his study of Dorian dress in advance of its publication.

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[2] Jenkins, "The Ambiguity of Greek Textiles," 118.

[3] Lee, "The Ancient Greek *Peplos* and the 'Dorian Question'."

create an ideologically charged literary symbol of feminine *metis*. Hence, the seemingly innocuous garment becomes an ideal medium for the negotiation of gender in tragedy.

Πέπλος in Early Greek Literature

In early epic and lyric, the garment known as πέπλος has two primary connotations: femininity and luxury.[4] The term πέπλος appears most frequently as the noun-stem of compound epithets for female characters in reference to their luxurious garments.[5] In all cases the πέπλος-epithet denotes the high status of the wearer by emphasizing the abundance or beauty of her clothing: ταvύπεπλος ("with flowing *peplos*"), ἑλκεσιπέπλος ("with trailing *peplos*"), εὔπεπλος ("with beautiful *peplos*"), κροκόπεπλος ("with saffron *peplos*," indicating an expensive dye).[6] Πέπλος appears in noun

[4] The origin of the word πέπλος is obscure. Most etymologists define the term according to the appearance of the pinned garment commonly (mis-)identified as πέπλος in Greek sculpture (Lee, "The Ancient Greek *Peplos* and the 'Dorian Question'," and "The Myth of the Classical *Peplos*," 335-339). It is unclear whether a garment called πέπλος was worn in the time of Homer (Lee, "The Myth of the Classical *Peplos*," 256-257).

[5] This point was noted already by Eustathios (*ad Il.* 2. 42). The adjectival usage of πέπλος does not indicate the form or arrangement of the garment, save for its copious length. This generalized semanticity argues against the historic existence of a garment called πέπλος when the poems were composed.

[6] In some cases, the πέπλος-compound is the only adjective the poet uses to describe the characters; in other cases, the poet has selected the πέπλος-compound from a range of possible epithets to identify individuals, perhaps for metrical reasons. In Homer, ταvύπεπλος: Helen (*Il.* 3.228; *Od.* 4.305, 15.171), Thetis (*Il.* 18.385, 18.424), Lampetia (*Od.* 12.375), Ktimene (*Od.* 15.363); ἑλκεσιπέπλοι: Trojan women (*Il.* 6.442, 7.297, 22.105); εὔπεπλοι: Achaean women, female attendants and sisters-in-law (*Il.* 5.424, 6.372, 6.378, 6.383, 24.769; *Od.* 21.160); εὔπεπλος: Nausikaa (*Od.* 6.49); κροκόπεπλος: Eos (*Il.* 8.1, 19.1, 23.227, 24.695). In Hesiod, εὔπεπλος: Pemphredo (*Th.* 273); κροκόπεπλος: Enyo and Telesto (*Th.* 273, 358); ταvύπεπλος: Enioche (*Sc.* 83), Aristaichmes (fr. 251a.4), Eudora (fr. 291.3); ἑλκεσίπεπλος: Cadmeians (fr. 193.2). Variations of the Homeric epithets appear in Pindar, for example καλλίπεπλος ('with beautiful *peplos*'): Koronis (*P.* 3.25) and χρυσόπεπλος ('with golden *peplos*'): Mnemosyne (*I.* 6.75; also restored in a fragmentary partheneion [fr. 94b.1]); but he also describes Mnemosyne as εὔπεπλος, a familiar epic adjective, in a paean (fr. 52h.15). Alcman: κροκόπεπλοι, the Muses (fr. 46.1); Alcaeus: ἑλκεσίπεπλοι, women of Lesbos (fr. 130b.18); Stesichorus: ταvύπεπλος, Eurytion's mother (fr. 45 col. 1, 7); Hipponax: λευκόπεπλος ("with white *peplos*," a variation of the standard Homeric κροκόπεπλος, "with yellow *peplos*"), Eos (fr. 47). The epithet κυανόπεπλος ("with dark *peplos*") in reference to both Demeter (*h. Cer.* 319, 360, 374, 442) and Leto (Hes. *Th.* 406) emphasizes the negation of luxury in their bereavement. The fragrant πέπλος worn by Callirrhoë in Stesichorus' *Geryoneis* (fr. S13.2-10) recalls the divine πέπλοι in Homer (*infra*). Πέπλοι and other garments seem to have figured prominently in a fragmentary poem by Sappho (fr. 92.5-14).

form less frequently in epic poetry, but it likewise carries connotations of luxury and wealth. Πέπλοι cover chariots (*Il.* 5.193-96) and thrones (*Od.* 7.95-97), while purple πέπλοι surround the golden casket containing Hektor's ashes (*Il.* 24.793-98).[7] Πέπλοι are also exchanged as gifts of *xenia,* and are intended especially for use as bridal garments. Helen gives Telemachos a πέπλος she wove for his future bride to wear on their wedding day (*Od.* 15.123-127),[8] and Antinoös vies for the hand of Penelope by giving her a large ποικίλος ("many-colored") πέπλος and twelve golden περόναι ("dress pins") (*Od.* 18.292-294).[9] While such gifts might be interpreted simply as high status items worthy of aristocratic gift-exchange, the bridal connotation is adopted by later authors.

In contrast to the garments worn by women, πέπλοι worn by goddesses are featured as divine instruments with supernatural power.[10] In the *Iliad,* Aphrodite uses her ἀμβροσίου ... πέπλου, ὅν οἱ Χάριτες κάμον αὐταί ("immortal πέπλος, that the very Graces had woven for her carefully," 5.338) to shield her son Aineias from the Danaan spears (5.311-317).[11] The protective value of πέπλοι is likewise emphasized in several passages in the *Iliad* (6.86-92, 6.269-273, 6.288-295, 6.301-304) describing the Trojan women's dedication of a πέπλος to Athena to secure her protection in the

[7] The high economic value of πέπλοι is also indicated by the fact that they are kept in storage chambers (*Il.* 6.90, 6.288-295, 24.229) along with other palatial treasures, such as vessels of precious metals (*Od.* 15.101-108), and they are offered as ransom for Hektor's body (*Il.* 24.228-231). On cloth as treasure in Homer, see Van Wees, *Status Warriors,* 52, 103-104, 227, 229-31, 235-236.

[8] Whether we are to read the adulteress Helen's gift as ironic (Goldhill, "The Failure of Exemplarity," 62-63) or that of a "virtuous housewife, upholding the values of marriage" (de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary on the* Odyssey, 368) is irrelevant to the present study. I wish only to demonstrate the bridal connotations of the πέπλος.

[9] Πέπλοι are also included among the garments in Nausikaa's laundry (*Od.* 6.38), perhaps an allusion to her status as a *parthenos* ready for marriage.

[10] The divine aspects of πέπλοι are indicated by their appearance and fragrance. In the *Hymn to Demeter,* the mourning goddess casts off her mourning attire, a πέπλος κυάνεος ("dark *peplos,*" 181, a nominal transposition of her usual epithet κυανόπεπλος), to reveal her divine identity: and ὀδμὴ δ' ἱμερόεσσα θυηέντων ἀπὸ πέπλων σκίδνατο ("a delicious smell spread from her fragrant *peploi,*" 277; translation adapted from Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*). Likewise, the πέπλος worn by Aphrodite in the Homeric hymn is φαεινότερος πυρὸς αὐγῆς ("more brilliant than gleaming fire," 86; translation adapted from Athanassakis, *The Homeric Hymns*). The sheen and fragrance of these garments may reflect actual techniques of textile production in the Bronze Age. See Shelmedine, "Shining and Fragrant Cloth in Homeric Epic."

[11] Translation adapted from Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer.*

war against the Greeks.[12] Whether human or divine, the epic πέπλος is intimately associated with the feminine realm.[13] Two verbatim passages in the *Iliad* describe Athena's preparation for battle (5.733-737, 8.384-388), in which she slips off her ποικίλος πέπλος and exchanges it for Zeus' χιτῶν (*chiton*). The passages underscore the feminine aspect of the πέπλος: Athena made and wore it, but she must replace it with the *chiton*, which is otherwise worn only by men in Homer, in order to enter the masculine realm of war.[14]

The bridal connotations of πέπλοι recur in poetry and prose of the sixth century. Pindar's Ninth Pythian concludes with the story of a Libyan who offered his daughter as a prize, announcing ἀπάαγεσθαι ὃς ἂν πρῶτος θορών / ἀμφί οἱ ψαύσειε πέπλοις ("whoever first leapt forward and touched her *peploi* would take her away with him," 119-120).[15] Likewise, the maiden singing one partheneion ties up her πέπλος before commencing (fr. 94b.6), perhaps alluding to her readiness for marriage.[16] Bridal πέπλοι are featured in several Orphic and Pythagorean texts. In the ἱερὸς γάμος ("sacred marriage") described in the cosmology of Pherecydes of Syros, Zas (Zeus) presents to his bride Chthonie (Ge) a garment decorated with Chthonie and Ogenos (Okeanos). This garment is identified in a third-century A.D. papyrus fragment as a φᾶρος (*pharos*, "robe"),[17] but the summary of this work by the Roman writer Maximus of Tyre mentions only a πέπλος (*Phil.* 4.4.5-8).[18] The theme of marriage may have been central to a work

[12] These passages diverge from one another in several details, and it has been argued that their distinctly Panathenaic character indicates a sixth-century Athenian interpolation (Kirk, *The* Iliad, *ad* 6.86-98).

[13] Curiously, Hesiod does not mention πέπλοι in his descriptions of the creation of Pandora (*Op.* 69-82; *Th.* 570-610).

[14] Kirk, *The* Iliad, *ad* 5.734-737. Naturally, when Aphrodite attempts to use her πέπλος as a shield on the battlefield, she finds the feminine garment ill-suited for war and sustains a wound to her hand, which elicits Athena's mockery (*Il.* 5.422-25).

[15] Translation adapted from the Loeb by Race.

[16] Two non-nuptial uses of πέπλος occur in one epinician and one paean, both of which include excurses on the infant Herakles strangling snakes in which his mother, Alkmene, leaps from her bed in fear without donning her πέπλος (*N.* 1.43-50; fr. 52u.7-19).

[17] Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros*, F 68. This episode provides the *aition* for the *anakalypsis*, or unveiling of the bride, in the ancient Greek wedding.

[18] ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ Συρίου τὴν ποίησιν σκόπει καὶ τὸν Ζῆνα καὶ τὴν Χθονίην καὶ τὸν ἐν τούτοις Ἔρωτα, καὶ τὴν Ὀφιονέως γένεσιν καὶ τὴν θεῶν μάχην καὶ τὸ δένδρον καὶ τὸν πέπλον.

But consider also the work of the man from Syros: Zen and Chthonie and Eros between them, and the birth of Ophioneus

entitled Πέπλος by the Pythagorean Brontinus, which according to M.L. West contained an early version of an Orphic rhapsody in which Persephone wove a flowery robe when Pluto carried her off to the Underworld.[19] Although it cannot be proven that early Orphic and Pythagorean literature was composed at Athens,[20] it is tempting to associate the centrality of the πέπλος in these works with the πέπλος dedicated at the Greater Panathenaia, which was instituted when Peisistratos reorganized the festival in 566.[21]

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and the battle of the gods and the tree and the *peplos*.

(Schibli F 73)

Translation adapted from Schibli.

The gift given by Zas to Chthonie is called γέρας by Diogenes Laertius (1.119 = Schibli F14). Although most assume the equivalence of the πέπλος and the φᾶρος, Origen in his *contra Celsum* suggests that the πέπλος cited by Maximus might not be a bridal gift, but rather the Panathenaic πέπλος dedicated to Athena in the Panathenaia at Athens:

> ταῦτα δὲ τὰ Ὁμήρου ἔπη οὕτω νοηθέντα τὸν Φερεκύδην φησὶν εἰρηκέναι τὸ 'κείνης δὲ τῆς μοίρας ἔνερθέν ἐστιν ἡ ταρταρίη μοῖρα· φυλὰσσουσι δ'αὐτὴν θυγατέρες Βορέου Ἅρπυιαί τε καὶ Θύελλα· ἔνθα Ζεὺς ἐκβάλλει θεῶν ὅταν τις ἐξυβρίσῃι'. τῶν τοιούτων δέ φησιν ἔχεσθαι νοημάτων καὶ τὸν [περὶ] τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς πέπλον ἐν τῇι πομπῇι τῶν Παναθηναίων ὑπὸ πάντων θεωρούμενον.
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> He [*sc.* Celsus] says that Pherecydes, thus understanding these words of Homer, has said: "Below that portion is the portion of Tartaros; the daughters of Boreas, the Harpies and Thuella, guard it; there Zeus banishes any of the gods whenever one behaves with insolence." Related to such conceptions, he says, is also the *peplos* of Athena that is seen by all in the Panathenaic procession. (6.42 = Schibli F 78)

Translation adapted from Schibli.

[19] *The Orphic Poems*, 11. The Πέπλος of Brontinus is known only through the testimony of Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis*:

> Ἐπιγένης δὲ ἐν τοῖς Περὶ τῆς εἰς Ὀρφέα ⟨ἀναφερομένης⟩ ποιήσεως Κέρκωπος εἶναι λέγει τοῦ Πυθαγορείου τὴν Εἰς Ἅιδου κατάβασιν καὶ τὸν Ἱερὸν λόγον, τὸν δὲ Πέπλον καὶ τὰ Φυσικὰ Βροντίνου.
>
> Epigenes in his work *On Poetry Attributed to Orpheus* says that the *Descent to Hades* and the *Sacred Doctrine* are works of the Pythagorean Cercops, and the *Peplos* and the *Physics* works of Brontinus. (1.131.5)

Translation adapted from Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria*.

[20] For example, D.L. Toye ("Pherekydes of Syros") has argued that Pherecydes of Syros and Pherecydes of Athens are the same individual, but R.L. Fowler ("The Authors Named Pherecydes") contests this interpretation.

[21] The testimony of Origen (*supra*, n. 18) supports such a connection.

As will be seen below, both the bridal and the civic connotations of πέπλος were significant for the tragedians.

Πέπλος in Classical Greek Literature

The meanings of πέπλος established in early Greek literature persist in the Classical period, but only in particular contexts and for specific purposes. Most have assumed that the significance of πέπλος in Classical literature was informed by the use of a garment by that name following the Persian Wars, as a symbol of renewed Hellenic pride. In fact, there is little evidence that a garment called πέπλος was worn as everyday dress at that time.[22] The term πέπλος is not used by Herodotus in his description of the change from Dorian to Ionian dress styles (5.87-89), nor does it appear in contemporary epigraphic sources on dress.[23] In contrast to other terms for dress, such as χιτών (*chiton*) and ἱμάτιον (*himation*), which appear frequently in other genres of fifth-century literature, πέπλος appears only in drama.[24]

The function of the word πέπλος in comedy underscores its central role in both tragedy and Athenian civic religion.[25] The term appears in comedy only in direct references to the Panathenaic πέπλος and in parodies of the use of the term by the tragedians.[26]

[22] *Supra*, n. 3.

[23] Lee, "The Ancient Greek *Peplos* and the 'Dorian Question'." The only reference to πέπλοι in Herodotus is in a direct quotation from Homer (*Il.* 6.289-292) describing the storeroom of the palace of Hector at Troy. On the term πέπλος in epigraphic sources, see Lee, "The Myth of the Classical *Peplos*," 241-244, 248-253, 262-263.

[24] The term πέπλος also appears in the Hippocratic corpus in reference to a type of medicinal plant. It is not certain whether the names of the garment and the plant are linked semantically, and, if so, which determined the name of the other. Πέπλος was administered in antiquity primarily as an emetic (*Epid.* 2.3.11); it was also used for gynecological treatment (*Superf.* 32.12). Several different plants have been identified with the ancient πέπλος, all of which modern herbalists consider poisonous and potentially fatal in large doses.

[25] This section concerns the literary function of πέπλοι in Athenian drama and not the appearance of dramatic costumes *per se*, for which contemporary archaeological and iconographic evidence is scanty at best. For representations of theatrical performances in contemporary vase-paintings, see Taplin, "The pictorial record," Green, *Theatre in Ancient Greek Society*, and *idem*, "On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre in Classical Athens." It is interesting to note that the lexicographer Pollux does not mention πέπλοι in his discussion of stage costumes and props (*Onom.* 4.115-120; Csapo and Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, 395-396).

[26] That πέπλοι are not mentioned at all in the *Lysistrata*, a comedy in which real women's garments play an important role in the narrative, is further evidence that the πέπλος was not everyday dress in the Classical period.

Aristophanes mentions the Panathenaic πέπλος three times in two plays. In the *Knights*, the chorus of Athenian cavalrymen invoke the famous textile to celebrate their fathers' good citizenship;[27] later in the play, Paphlagon and the Sausage-Seller compete for the support of Demos by bringing him various foodstuffs, gifts of their patron goddess Athena, to which Demos responds, καλῶς γ' ἐποίησε τοῦ πέπλου μεμνημένη ("Nice of her to remember the *peplos* we gave her!" 1180). The comic poet also refers to the Panathenaic πέπλος in the *Birds* during the planning of the utopia, Νεφελοκοκκυγία (Cloudcuckooland), when the chorus-leader asks, τίς δαὶ θεὸς / πολιοῦχος ἔσται; τῷ ξανοῦμεν τὸν πέπλον; ("Now what god shall be Citadel Guardian? For whom shall we weave the *peplos*?" 826-827).[28] Two fragmentary comedies offer tantalizing references to the Panathenaic πέπλος. Strattis' *Macedonians* is frequently cited as evidence that the Panathenaic πέπλος was hoisted as a sail on a ship-cart in the procession.[29] Finally, Hermippus' *Birth of Athena* contains several references to weaving as well as a description of flowered πέπλοι which, given the subject of the poem, might well be related to the Panathenaic πέπλος.[30]

In addition to references to the Panathenaia, the term πέπλος appears in comedy in satirical references to πέπλοι in tragedy. A fragment of Cratinus has characters ἐκβάλλοντες τοὺς αἰθεῖς πέπλους ("casting off the burning *peploi*," fr. 4.1), perhaps an allusion to the fiery πέπλος sent by Deianeira to Heracles in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*.[31] The close association between πέπλοι and tragedy is indicated by the extended parody of Euripides in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*. Dicaiopolis, hoping to convince the

[27] εὐλογῆσαι βουλόμεσθα τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν, ὅτι ἄνδρες ἦσαν τῆσδε τῆς γῆς ἄξιοι καὶ τοῦ πέπλος ("We want to praise our forebears for being gentlemen worthy of this land and the *peplos*," 565-566). Translations adapted from the Loeb by Henderson.

[28] Translation adapted from the Loeb by Henderson.

[29] τὸν πέπλον δὲ τοῦτον / ἕλκουσ' ὀνεύοντες τοπείοις ἄνδρες ἀναρίθμητοι / εἰς ἄκρον ἱστίον τὸν ἱστον ("men uncountable haul this *peplos*, winching it with ropes, to the top of the mast, like a sail," fr. 30.1). Translation by Mansfield, "The Robe of Athena and the Panathenaic *Peplos*," 47. On the Panathenaic ship, see Mansfield, pp. 68-78.

[30] καιροσπάθητον ἀνθέων ὕφασμα καινὸν Ὡρῶν . . . λεπτοὺς διαψαίρουσα πέπλους ἀνθέων γέμοντας ("A closely-woven web of flowers newly made by the Seasons . . . <the breeze> blows delicate *peploi* full of blossoms," fr. 5-6). Translation adapted from Edmonds, *The Fragments of Attic Comedy*.

[31] Translation adapted from Edmonds, *The Fragments of Attic Comedy*.

Acharnian army of the necessity of ending the war with Sparta, goes to Euripides' house to borrow a costume of rags:

ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΕΣ
ποίας ποθ' ἀνὴρ λακίδας αἰτεῖται πέπλων;
ἀλλ' ἢ Φιλοκτήτου τὰ τοῦ πρωχοῦ λέγεις;

ΔΙΚΑΙΟΠΟΛΙΣ
οὔκ, ἀλλὰ τούτου πολὺ πολὺ πτωχιστέρου.

ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΕΣ
ἀλλ' ἢ τὰ δυσπινῆ θέλεις πεπλώματα
ἃ Βελλεροφόντης εἶχ' ὁ χωλὸς οὑτοσί;

ΔΙΚΑΙΟΠΟΛΙΣ
οὐ Βελλεροφόντης· ἀλλὰ κἀκεῖνος μὲν ἦν
χωλός, προσαιτῶν στωμύλος δεινὸς λέγειν.

ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΕΣ
οἶδ' ἄνδρα, Μυσὸν Τήλεφον.

ΔΙΚΑΙΟΠΟΛΙΣ
ναὶ, Τήλεφον·
τούτου δὸς, ἀντιβολῶ σέ, μοι τὰ σπάργανα.

EURIPIDES
What tatters of *peploi* does the man seek? Do you mean those of the beggar Philoctetes?

DIKAIOPOLIS
No, someone far, far more beggarly than he.

EURIPIDES
Then do you want the foul *peplomata*[32] that this Bellerophon, the cripple, wore?

DIKAIOPOLIS
Not Bellerophon, though the man I want was also a cripple, a beggar, a smooth-talker, an impressive speaker.

EURIPIDES
I know the man: Mysian Telephus.

DIKAIOPOLIS
Yes, Telephus! Give me, I entreat you, his swaddlings![33]

[32] *Peplomata* is commonly understood as a poetic form of the word πέπλος adopted by the tragedians. See *infra*, n. 38.

[33] Translation adapted from Henderson, *Aristophanes*.

C.W. Macleod ("Euripides' Rags") proposed that the "rags" in the *Acharnians* are meant to represent actual copies of Euripides' plays, and that in the staging of the

As Dikaiopolis requests various *accoutrements* to complete the ensemble, his language becomes more and more tragic. It is clear that πέπλοι were so closely associated with tragedy, and in particular Euripides, that they could be parodied as "tragic rags" by the comic poets.[34]

The integral association of πέπλος with tragedy is confirmed by the high frequency of the term in the extant tragedies as compared with other genres of classical literature. Πέπλοι appear in all the plays of Euripides, in all but the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus, and in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. In contrast, garments other than πέπλοι are rare in tragedy but common in comedies, histories and the Hippocratic corpus.[35] The preference for πέπλος over other terms for garments shows that the concept of the πέπλος was a focus of interest for the tragedians. They manipulated the semantic range of the term in earlier literature in order to create an ideologically charged literary motif of a murderous robe wielded by a woman.

An important source for the tragedic πέπλος is epic poetry. The influence of epic literature on the tragedians in general is well known,[36] and it is clear that Aeschylus initially borrowed the term πέπλος along with its connotations of femininity and luxury from the epic tradition.[37] Its adaptation to tragedy, however, results in a shift in usage and significance. Whereas in epic and lyric πέπλος occurs primarily in epithets for female characters, in tragedy it

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play the costumes were wound up to look like scrolls. If so, the imagery of the woven fabric of the heroes' costumes would be linked with the concept of weaving a narrative.

[34] Aristophanes' dependence upon Euripides as a source of comic inspiration was such that Cratinus mocked his tendency εὐριπιδαριστοφανίζειν ("to euripidaristophanize," fr. 307 K) or to borrow Euripides' style for comedic purposes (see Foley, "Tragedy and Politics in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*," 47).

[35] In tragedy the frequency of terms for dress other than πέπλος decreases over time. Χιτών appears relatively frequently in Aeschylus (four times in the complete plays, usually in compound forms, and twelve times in the fragments), but just five times in Sophocles (twice in the fragments) and only once in Euripides. Ἱμάτιον appears in one fragment of Aeschylus and one of Sophocles but nowhere in Euripides.

[36] See recently Goldhill, "The Language of Tragedy."

[37] That the tragic poets were consciously borrowing the term πέπλος from earlier sources and not from contemporary terminology for dress explains its absence from other literature of the same period. J. Herington has noted that the language of tragedy "embodied and evoked an entire national poetic tradition, a dialect which was never spoken outside the theater but was mostly as remote from the *language* of the streets as the tragic masks and costumes were from the *dress* of the streets" (*Poetry Into Drama*, 127). Aristophanes parodies this incongruity between tragic language and costume and contemporary custom in the *Frogs* (1060-1064).

appears most often as a noun. In addition, while πέπλος usually appears in the singular in Archaic poetry, in tragedy it appears frequently in the plural or as the poetic variant πέπλωμα.[38] Beyond these grammatical innovations, the tragedians transform πέπλοι from personal effects into major narrative motifs by manipulating their earlier meanings. The invert connotations of femininity, luxury, protection and marriage convey essential themes of tragedy on both a verbal and a visual level. Finally, an important referent for the tragedians is the Panathenaic πέπλος. Although no tragic poet mentions it by name, the use of the term πέπλος, as opposed to other words for garments or textiles, would have had special resonance for the Athenian audience.[39]

The remainder of this study traces the development of the πέπλος as an instrument of feminine destruction in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, and Euripides' *Medea*.[40] In each of these plays, the exchange of πέπλοι represents an inversion of traditional marriage and the proper social order to the detriment of both husband and wife and the community at large. It will be seen that each author drew upon the developments of earlier plays, exploiting the significance of the πέπλος as a luxurious feminine garment, to create a malleable and polysemous literary device laden with meaning for the negotiation of gender.

Aeschylus, *Oresteia*

Aeschylus seems to have invented the motif of deadly πέπλοι in the *Oresteia*.[41] Many have noted that throughout the trilogy garments and woven textiles are central images that underscore the

[38] Studniczka, *Beiträge*, 133-135. H.L. Jones noted that Homer uses only "genuine plurals" for garments, whereas the tragedians use both singular and plural forms in reference to the same garment (*The Poetic Plural of Greek Tragedy*, 17-18). In addition, "there is a marked shift to the plural in Aeschylus and Euripides, independent of mere metrical considerations" (121). A.A. Long suggests that the tragedians use the nominal suffix -μα for *variatio* or metrical convenience or to lend a particular dignity to a passage (*Language and Thought in Sophocles*, 19-20, 36).

[39] Eur. *Hec.* 466-74 alludes to the Panathenaic πέπλος.

[40] For a comprehensive study of the function of πέπλοι in extant tragedy, see Lee, "The Myth of the Classical *Peplos*," 77-217.

[41] Πέπλοι figure prominently also in the *Persians*, in which they symbolize not only Xerxes' wealth, but also his effeminate weakness and cowardly behavior (199, 468, 1030, 1060). The defeat of the barbarian king is made visible onstage as his garments become more and more tattered. The motif of πέπλοι as barbarian dress appears also in the *Suppliant Maidens* (235, 720).

themes of entrapment and feminine corruption.[42] Among the various textiles that appear in the *Oresteia*, πέπλοι have particular significance, especially in reference to the snare in which Clytemnestra traps Agamemnon.

Aeschylus introduces the potential danger of πέπλοι early in the *Agamemnon* with the description of the king's sacrifice of his daughter, Iphigeneia (231-241):

> φράσεν δ' ἀόζοις πατὴρ μετ' εὐχὰν
> δίκαν χιμαίρας ὕπερθε βωμοῦ
> πέπλοισι περιπετῆ παντὶ θυμῷ
> προνωπῆ λαβεῖν ἀέρ-
> δην στόματός τε καλλιπτώ-
> ρου φυλακᾷ κατασχεῖν
> φθόγγον ἀραῖον οἴκοις,
> βίᾳ χαλινῶν τ' ἀναύδῳ μένει·
> κρόκου βαφὰς δ' ἐς πέδον χέουσα
> ἔβαλλ' ἕκαστον θυτή-
> ρων ἀπ' ὄμματος βέλει φιλοίκτῳ
>
> and her father told his servants after a prayer
> to lift her, face downwards, like a goat above the altar,
> and she fell about his *peploi* to implore him with all her heart,
> and by gagging her lovely mouth
> to stifle a cry
> that would have brought a curse upon his house;
> using violence, and the bridle's stifling power.
> And with her robe of saffron dye streaming downwards
> she shot each of her sacrificers
> with a piteous dart from her eye[43]

Although the question of who wears the πέπλοι (233) has been debated, H. Lloyd-Jones' identification of the robes as belonging to Agamemnon and not Iphigeneia is supported by the bridal connotations of πέπλοι in earlier literature.[44] Iphigeneia has been brought to Aulis on the pretense that she will be married, but in fact she has been brought for her death. Such ambiguity may be underscored by the fact that she is not wearing πέπλοι appropriate for marriage, rather, her father wears them as sacrificial garments. This reading is also consistent with Aeschylus' usage of the term in the *Persians*, where πέπλοι have feminine and

[42] See most recently Morrell, "The Fabric of Persuasion," with earlier bibliography.

[43] All translations of the *Oresteia* are adapted from Lloyd-Jones, *The Oresteia*.

[44] "The Robes of Iphigeneia." See also, e.g., Lebeck, "The Robe of Iphigeneia in *Agamemnon*"; Armstrong and Ratchford, "Iphigenia's Veil."

barbarian connotations.[45] In the *Agamemnon* the Argive king wears πέπλοι to show that a proper marriage has gone profoundly wrong.[46] He wears clothing appropriate for a woman, not a man, in order to sacrifice his own daughter, a reckless act befitting a barbarian, not a Greek.[47]

In the scene that follows, the dangerous and lethal capacities of textiles are demonstrated by the metaphorical use of nets, snares, and coverings. When Clytemnestra recounts her sorrow over the absence of her husband, she says that she had heard rumors that he had been wounded so extensively as to resemble a δικτύον ("net," 868) and that he was dead, buried under a χλαῖναν ("cloak," 871) of earth. She herself had on more than one occasion threatened suicide by hanging herself with ἀρτάνας ("nooses," 875), only to be rescued against her will. T.G. Rosenmeyer rejects any necessary connection between the net-imagery and the "fatal net" that kills Agamemnon, arguing that the Orphic poets compared the structure of a living being to a net, and that "tissue," "structure" and "net" were closely allied concepts in Greek thought.[48] Although he posits that "once this is acknowledged, the net image seems much less startling," one could argue that the conception of living "tissue" as a "net" informed Aeschylus' poetics and the meaning of his imagery.

The motif of the dangerous textile is most prominent in the infamous scene in which Clytemnestra invites Agamemnon to enter the palace by walking on πετάσματα ("spread-outs," 909).[49] The king demurs, protesting that such luxurious εἵματα ("garments," 921) are fit only for the gods and that his treading on them would waste the wealth of the household, a hubristic act.[50] After some

[45] N. Loraux observes that the πέπλος "is a woman's garment — and sometimes a barbarian's garment—no contradiction, as far as a Greek is concerned" ("Herakles," 34). E. Hall likewise observes in reference to the *Agamemnon*: "Femaleness, barbarism, luxury, and hubris are . . . ineluctably drawn into the same semantic complex" (*Inventing the Barbarian*, 206).

[46] Compare the sacrificial πέπλοι worn by Heracles in Sophocles, *Trachiniae* (*infra*).

[47] The πέπλοι in this sacrificial scene prefigure those in Agamemnon's own sacrifice following Clytemnestra's ruse of the εἵματα ("garments") On the relationship between the two scenes of sacrifice, see Dover, "The Red Fabric in the Agamemnon," 154.

[48] Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus*, 120.

[49] On the misnomer "carpet scene" see, in particular, Morrell, "The Fabric of Persuasion", and Lebeck, *The Oresteia*, 74-79.

[50] On the connotations of wealth in this scene, see especially Morrell, "The Fabric of Persuasion," 149-150, 158-161; Crane, "Politics of Consumption and Generosity"; and Flintoff, "The Treading of the Cloth."

coaxing by Clytemnestra,[51] Agamemnon relents and enters the house. Cassandra prophesies the murder about to take place (1125-1128):

> ἃ ἃ, ἰδοὺ ἰδού, ἄπεχε τῆς βοὸς
> τὸν ταῦρον· ἐν πέπλοισιν
> μελαγκέρῳ λαβοῦσα μηχανήματι
> τύπτει; πίτνει δ' ⟨ἐν⟩ ἐνύδρῳ τεύχει·
>
> Ah, ah! Look, look! Keep away the bull
> from the cow! In the *peploi*
> she has caught him with the contrivance of her black horn,
> and she strikes; and he falls in the vessel of water.[52]

Much controversy surrounds the identification of the weapon used to kill Agamemnon, whether sword or axe.[53] Given the established symbolic import of the term πέπλος, it may be argued that Aeschylus deliberately did not specify the type of weapon used in order to focus attention on the garment itself.[54] Indeed, the πέπλος as weapon underscores Clytemnestra's role as the killer because it is an "objet féminin."[55] Whereas a proper masculine death is caused by cutting weapons, Agamemnon dies a shameful death at the hands of a woman by means of an enveloping feminine garment.[56]

Subsequent references to the deadly πέπλος expand the metaphor: Clytemnestra describes it as ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον, ὥσπερ ἰχθύων, / ... πλοῦτον εἵματος κακόν ("A covering inextricable, like a net for fish, ... an evil wealth of raiment," 1382-

[51] L. McClure has noted that Clytemnestra's speech in this scene represents "a form of magical incantation, a speech genre closely associated with feminine seductive persuasion, as well as with barbarians" (*Spoken Like a Woman*, 81).

[52] The garment used in Agamemnon's death is envisioned by the mythographer Apollodorus as "a garment with no holes for the neck or arms" (*Epit.* 6. 23). Such a garment is portrayed on a red-figure calyx krater by the Dokimasia Painter dating to around the time of the first production of the *Oresteia* (458 B.C.); the reverse of the vase depicts the death of Aegisthus (Vermeule, "The Boston Oresteia Krater"). For an examination of the gendered connotations of the myth and its depiction on the vase, see Viret Bernal, "When Painters Execute a Murderess."

[53] E. Fraenkel proposed that the murder was committed with a sword (*Aeschylus, Agamemnon* III,, Appendix B, 806-809), a view also held by A. Sommerstein ("Again Klytaimestra's Weapon") and A.J.N.W. Prag ("Clytemnestra's Weapon Yet Once More"), while M. Davies contends that the weapon was an axe ("Aeschylus' Clytemnestra: Sword or Axe?").

[54] Fraenkel, in fact, allows for this solution (*Aeschylus. Agamemnon* III, 809). Prag suggests that Aeschylus was free to manipulate the imagery of the murder-scene because earlier tradition was vague on the issue of the weapon ("Clytemnestra's Weapon Yet Once More," 244).

[55] Moreau, "Les sources d'Eschyle dans l'*Agamemnon*.".

[56] Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, 11.

1383),[57] and the chorus refers to it as ἀράχνης ... ὑφάσματι ("spider's web," 1492). Finally, at the close of the play, Aegisthus calls the wrappings ὑφαντοῖς ... πέπλοις Ἐρινύων ("woven *peploi* of the Erinyes," 1580), the ancient chthonic female monsters that will haunt Orestes for the remainder of the trilogy. The imagery accumulates to generate a complex figure from a seemingly innocuous object, the πέπλος. The motif is all the more effective because the normal function of the garment as a means of protection is inverted and the garment is transmogrified into an implement of destruction.[58] As B. Hughes Fowler has written, "The robe, the murder device, is the symbol provided in action; it is the net, the snare, the spider's web, the Erinyes' robes. . . . It is a primary symbol of compulsion and stands, first for the murder itself, both before and after its accomplishment; then, for the compulsive forces that made for the murder."[59] While the imagery of the πέπλος is conflated with that of the net, the snare, and the web, it is significant that, in a play full of references to various garments and textiles, no other word, including φάρος (see *infra*, n. 66), is used to describe the murderous robe.[60]

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* exploits the range of meanings associated with textiles and other woven objects that were produced by women and inextricably related to them ideologically. K.S. Morrell has argued that the prevalence of fabrics in the *Agamemnon* is related to "the dynamic of competition and control within the *oikos*."[61] In the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra uses textiles to challenge the authority of her husband and subvert the proper order within the *oikos*.[62] The danger of feminine control is symbolized by the πέπλος, which, more than any other type of garment, carries with it strong feminine associations. The

[57] The πέπλος becomes net-like when pierced by Clytemnestra's stabbings. The image recalls Clytemnestra's vision of Agamemnon's death at Troy (Conacher, *Aeschylus' Oresteia*, 42).

[58] Lynn-George, "A Reflection on Homeric Dawn in the Parodos of Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*."

[59] "Aeschylus' Imagery," 26. The relationship between garments and murder is also demonstrated by the fact that all the characters in the *Agamemnon* remove some article of clothing before their deaths (Griffith, "Disrobing in the *Oresteia*").

[60] The term πέπλος is exclusively used, despite the fact that "in ancient Greece, as in some parts of India and Persia today, the distinction among tapestries, carpets, and robes was not altogether sharp" (Lloyd-Jones, *Aeschylus: Oresteia*, 77).

[61] "The Fabric of Persuasion," 141.

[62] In contrast to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, the inversion of proper order is underscored by the fact that Agamemnon treads on the πέπλοι as opposed to wearing them.

traditional bridal connotations of the garment are likewise implicated in the *Agamemnon*, but rather than binding together husband and wife, the πέπλος destroys their union.[63]

The leitmotiv of the πέπλος is transformed in the subsequent plays in the trilogy to indicate the change in power from the feminine *oikos* to the masculine *polis*. The language of entrapment and entanglement persists in the *Choephoroi*.[64] But still the most important garment is that used to kill the king in the *Agamemnon*. Orestes, in defense of his matricide, takes from the house the deadly garment, which he calls δίκτυον μὲν οὖν, ἄρκυν τ' ἂν εἴποις καὶ ποδιστῆρας πέπλους ("a net, a hunting net you might call it, or *peploi* to entangle a man's feet," 999-1000). A.F. Garvie questions the variety of terms used to describe the lethal garment: "As Orestes searches for the right description he begins with the idea of a net, then turns to the different, and more elaborate, idea contained in νεκροῦ . . . κατασκήνωμα. Why does he next reject (μὲν οὖν) or correct that description, only to revert to the net, ending not with the expected climax but with the tame statement that the πέπλος is after all best described as a πέπλος?"[65] As in the *Agamemnon*, the richness of the πέπλος-imagery is demonstrated by the various descriptions of the garment; in the end, none of these adequately defines its vile character. That "the *peplos* is after all best described as a *peplos*" is not a "tame statement," but a recognition of its essential malignance.

As Orestes continues his defense, he identifies the deadly raiment as both ὕφασμα ("web," 1015) and φάρος (*pharos*, 1010). The exclusivity of the term πέπλος in the *Agamemnon* no longer holds.[66] The potency of the πέπλος is slowly undermined as the balance of power within the household shifts from feminine

[63] This destructive robe may be seen as antithetical to the robe given by Zas to Chthonie in Pherecydes' creation myth, which symbolizes their marriage (Rabinowitz, "From Force to Persuasion," 174).

[64] For example, the House of Agamemnon is described as καλύπτουσι ("shrouded," 52) in darkness, and the cautious Electra is wary of the δόλον ("snare," 220) woven by her brother. The rending of linen πέπλοι by the Chorus in the *parodos* (*Ch.* 28-30) recalls the excessive lamentations of Easterners in the *Persians* (125). Linen "seems to have been regarded as a material characteristic of Persians and Ionians, and of luxury" (Johansen and Whittle, *Aeschylus: the Suppliants* II, *ad* 121 = 132).

[65] Garvie, *Aeschylus: Choephori*, *ad* 998-1000.

[66] W. Whallon notes that Agamemnon is the exclusive wearer of the φάρος in the *Iliad* (*Problem and Spectacle:* 66).

(Clytemnestra) to masculine (Orestes).[67] This transition is reinforced in the dramatic staging by the removal of the garment from the interior of the house, the domain of the female.[68]

The transfer of power from the feminine to the masculine realm culminates in the *Eumenides*. The climax of the play, the trial of Orestes, takes place at the law court, the domain of men. In defense of Orestes' matricide, Apollo, god of masculine reason, recounts the death of Agamemnon (633-35):

> δροίτῃ περῶντι λουτρὰ κἀπὶ τέρματι
> φᾶρος περεσκήνωσεν, ἐν δ' ἀτέρμονι
> κόπτει πεδήσασ' ἄνδρα δαιδάλῳ πέπλῳ.
>
> as he was stepping from the bath, at its edge
> she curtained him with a *pharos*, and in the maze
> of an embroidered *peplos* entangled him and struck him.

Again the deadly garment is identified as both φᾶρος and πέπλος. By the end of the play, however, the garment is divested of its destructive power. Athena appeases the Eumenides by establishing a cult in their honor, in which they will receive dedications of φοινικοβάπτοις ... ἐσθήμασι ("robes of crimson dye," 1029).[69] Many have noted that these sacred garments replace the murderous garment that caused the death of Agamemnon, which was called "woven *peploi* of the Erinyes" (1580).[70] Thus, the poet exchanges the feminine πέπλος, product of the *oikos*, for new garments in the service of the *polis*. These textiles no longer function to bind together husband and wife in marriage. Now they represent the unity of the larger community. But, as Macleod observes, the red robes do not replace the dark raiments of the Eumenides. They are merely worn over the old garments, suggesting that the frightful

[67] For a recent analysis of the transition from feminine to masculine power in the *Oresteia*, with particular reference to language, see McClure, *Spoken Like a Woman*, 70-111.

[68] McClure, *Spoken Like a Woman*, 105.

[69] The interpretation of this passage as an allusion to the red robes worn by resident aliens in the Panathenaic procession (Headlam, "The last scene of the *Eumenides*") is generally accepted.

[70] T. Tarkow suggests that the red robes of the Eumenides refer also to Clytemnestra's ruse of the εἵματα in the *Agememnon*. In the resolution of the trilogy, the blood-red garments have been lifted from the ground and are restored to their proper place ("Thematic Implications of Costuming in the *Oresteia*," 154, 162). On the connection between the Eumenides' red robes and other garments in the trilogy, see also Sider, "Stagecraft in the *Oresteia*."

aspects of the Erinyes persist.[71] And so, although social order is seemingly restored with the dangerous textile brought under the control of the masculine *polis*, fear of the powerful πέπλος remains.

Sophocles, *Trachiniae*[72]

In the *Trachiniae*, Sophocles builds upon the dangerous connotations of πέπλοι established by Aeschylus to symbolize feminine treachery more specifically through the application of magic.[73] Like Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia*, Deianeira, whose name means "Husband-killer," uses πέπλοι "to overturn the 'natural' order of the world and the traditional dominance of the male."[74] Compared to Aeschylus' trilogy, however, the *Trachiniae* focuses most vividly on the bridal connotations of the πέπλος. This emphasis corroborates the observation by K. Ormand that, "of Sophocles' extant tragedies, the *Trachiniae* focuses most clearly on the dynamics and implications of marriage."[75]

Numerous parallels between the *Trachiniae* and the *Oresteia* suggest that Sophocles was consciously imitating his predecessor. In Sophocles' play, Deianeira sends a πέπλος to her husband, Heracles, to wear during his sacrifice; in the play of Aeschylus Agamemnon wears πέπλοι in his sacrifice of Iphigeneia (*A.* 233) and accepts the gift of deadly πέπλοι from his wife, Clytemnestra.[76] In both plays, the sacrifices go profoundly wrong and reveal the uncivilized behavior of the sacrificers. Agamemnon, in his overwrought desire to defeat Troy, is willing to murder his own child; Heracles, instead of returning home to his faithful and loving wife, Deianeira, has taken Iole as his mistress. Both ultimately suffer for their excessive behavior, and their

[71] Macleod, "Clothing in the *Oresteia*." See also Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, 413.

[72] Whereas the word πέπλος appears in all of Aeschylus' and Euripides' extant plays (save Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*), it appears in Sophocles only in the *Trachiniae*. Sophocles' imagery focuses more on weaponry (the sword of Ajax's suicide, *Aj.* 624; the axe that murdered Agamemnon, *El.* 190) than on clothing and other textiles, as in Aeschylus and Euripides. It is interesting to note that Oedipus puts out his eyes with the περόναι (*peronai*, "dress pins") of Jocasta's garments, which are not πέπλοι but εἵματα (*OT* 1268).

[73] Although the motif of magical spells is present already in the *Agamemnon* in the incantations of Clytemnestra during the so-called carpet scene, the imagery is more highly developed in the *Trachiniae* (and the *Medea*; see *infra*).

[74] Faraone, "Deianira's Mistake and the Demise of Heracles," 123.

[75] *Exchange and the Maiden*, 36.

[76] In both plays men wear πέπλοι as sacrificial garments. Since the πέπλος is an essentially feminine garment, such cross-dressing represents a reversal of gender roles in ritual contexts. See Loraux, "Herakles," 33-40.

wearing of πέπλοι, proper attire for women and not men, prefigures their shameful deaths. In both plays, the deadly πέπλοι are called Ἐρινύων ὑφαντὸν ἀμφίβληστρον ("the woven covering of the Erinyes," *A.* 1580; *Tr.* 1051-1052).[77]

Despite the many resonances between the plays, the authors depict the malignancy of the πέπλος in different ways. While Aeschylus employs vivid imagery to describe the πέπλοι that kill Agamemnon ("a net for fish," "a hunting net," "a crafty snare," "a spider's web"), such metaphorical description is generally absent in Sophocles' play, in which the garment is identified by various terms depending on the speaker and the status of the garment.[78] For example, Deianeira explains to the Chorus that she has dyed a χιτῶν with the blood of Nessos (580). But after she has treated the garment with the supposed love-potion, and given it to Lichas to deliver to Heracles, she calls it a πέπλος (602). The transformation Heracles will suffer is prefigured by her choice of words: οὕτω γὰρ ηὔγμην, εἴ ποτ' αὐτὸν ἐς δόμους ἴδοιμι σωθέντ' ἢ κλύοιμι, πανδίκως στελεῖν χιτῶνι τῷδε, καὶ φανεῖν θεοῖς θυτῆρα καινῷ καινὸν ἐν πεπλώματι ("For this was my vow, that if ever I saw or heard of his safe return home, I would duly clothe him in this *chiton*, and reveal to the gods a new sacrificer wearing new *peplomata*," 610-613).[79] Then, when she discovers that her intended aphrodisiac is poison, she again refers to it as a πέπλος (674). Hyllus' diction when describing the effect of the garment also expresses Heracles' dire experience:

> μέλλοντι δ' αὐτῷ πολυθύτους τεύχειν σφαγὰς
> κῆρυξ ἀπ' οἴκων ἵκετ' οἰκεῖος Λίχας,
> τὸ σὸν φέρων δώρημα, θανάσιμον πέπλον·
> ὃν κεῖνος ἐνδύς, ὡς σὺ προὐξεφίεσο,
> ταυροκτονεῖ μὲν δώδεκ' ἐντελεῖς ἔχων
> λείας ἀπαρχὴν βοῦς· ἀτὰρ τὰ πάνθ' ὁμοῦ
> ἑκατὸν προσῆγε συμμιγῆ βοσκήματα.
> καὶ πρῶτα μὲν δείλαιος ἵλεῳ φρενὶ
> κόσμῳ τε χαίρων καὶ στολῇ κατηύχετο·
> ὅπως δὲ σεμνῶν ὀργίων ἐδαίετο
> φλὸξ αἱματηρὰ κἀπὸ πιείρας δρυός,
> ἱδρὼς ἀνῄει χρωτί, καὶ προσπτύσσεται
> πλευραῖσιν ἀρτίκολλος, ὥστε τέκτονος
> χιτών, ἅπαν κατ' ἄρθρον· ἦλθε δ' ὀστέων
> ὀδαγμὸς ἀντίσπαστος· εἶτα φοίνιος
> ἐχθρᾶς ἐχίδνης ἰὸς ὡς ἐδαίνυτο.

[77] V. Wohl notes that "Deianira's gift evokes the most negative stereotype of feminine activity, Clytemnestra" (*Intimate Commerce*, 25).

[78] Morrell has observed a similar pattern of speech in the *Oresteia* ("The Fabric of Persuasion," 155-157).

[79] All translations of the *Trachiniae* adapted from the Loeb by Lloyd-Jones.

ἐνταῦθα δὴ βόησε τὸν δυσδαίμονα
Λίχαν, τὸν οὐδὲν αἴτιον τοῦ σοῦ κακοῦ,
ποίαις ἐνέγκοι τόνδε μηχαναῖς πέπλον·
ὁ δ' οὐδὲν εἰδὼς δύσμορος τὸ σὸν μόνης
δώρημ' ἔλεξεν, ὥσπερ ἦν ἐσταλμένον.

And as he was about to slaughter the many beasts for sacrifice, there came from home his own herald, Lichas, bringing your gift, the *peplos* of death. He put it on, as you had instructed, and slew twelve bulls without a blemish, as the first fruits of the spoils; but in all he was bringing up a hundred cattle of all kinds. At first, poor man, he spoke the prayer cheerfully, rejoicing in the *kosmos stole*. But when the bloodshot flame from the sacred offerings and from the resinous pine blazed up, the sweat came up upon his body, and the thing clung closely to his sides, as a carpenter's *chiton* might, at every joint; and a biting pain came, tearing at his bones; then a bloody poison like that of a hateful serpent fed upon him.
Next he shouted at the unhappy Lichas, who was in no way guilty of your crime, asking him through what scheme he had brought the *peplos*. And Lichas, who knew nothing, poor fellow, told him that was your gift alone, as he had been instructed. (756-776)

The deadly garment is first and last πέπλος. What Heracles took to be *kosmos stole* turned out to be Ἐρινύων ὑφαντὸν ἀμφίβληστρον ("the woven covering of the Erinyes," 1051-1052), as he calls it at his death.[80]

Compared to the Aeschylean πέπλος, the poisoned πέπλος of Sophocles' play is more concrete. While the πέπλος in the *Oresteia* is the metaphorical cause of death for Agamemnon, the garment in the *Trachiniae* literally slays Heracles.[81] Faraone has asserted that the poisoned garment embodies a popular belief that "powerful poisons, when properly administered in small doses, do arouse desire in the male," but that such aphrodisiacs could have negative effects, including sleepiness, paralysis, impotence, or

[80] This discrepancy was noted by a scholiast: οὐκ εὖ δὲ τὸν ἀνδρεῖον χιτῶνα πέπλον φησί ("Sophocles sloppily calls a man's *chiton* a *peplos*," *ad* 602; Wohl, 195).

[81] Indeed, the garment seems to be alive (Segal, "Heroic Values in the *Trachinian Women*," 36).

death.[82] Sophocles' use of the term πέπλος to denote the poisoned garment represents an inversion of its meaning in earlier literature, where it has a protective function.

The bridal connotations of the πέπλος are central to the *Trachiniae*. V. Wohl notes that Heracles dies an "emasculating death," in which "all the elements of [his] identity — his physical strength, his social status, and his masculinity — are eroded."[83] By wearing the πέπλος, the super-masculine Heracles becomes a woman, and specifically a bride.[84] Heracles' death therefore becomes an anti-wedding centered around the πέπλος, a traditional bridal present, given by Deianeira to her husband.[85] Deianeria's gift represents a reversal of traditional gender roles in that marriage-gifts and dowry are traditionally bestowed by men, not women. Moreover, by applying the love-charm, Deianeira attempts to control her husband's sexuality, with devastating results.[86] Although she had hoped that the philter would bring her husband back to her, he instead becomes literally wedded to the πέπλος, which he describes as ξυνοικοῦν ("cohabiting," 1055) with his body.[87] He "melts" with the πέπλος as a husband and wife "melt" together in erotic love,[88] a horrible perversion of the traditional bridal connotations of the πέπλος.

Deianeira's death is likewise a terrible parody of traditional marriage rites, and, whereas Heracles dies like a woman, Deianeira dies like a man. The nurse's account of her death describes her deliberate actions: she bursts into the marriage chamber, makes up the bed, leaps into it, tears off her πέπλος, and stabs herself with a sword (912-31). While the bloody piercing of her flesh evokes the act of sexual consummation, she has usurped

[82] "Deianira's Mistake and the Demise of Heracles," 115, 125-126. This observation is all the more significant given the potentially fatal effects of the πέπλος-plant (*supra*, n. 24).

Folklorist A. Mayor ("Fiery Finery") has proposed that the deadly πέπλος given by Deianeira to Heracles was smeared with a combination of petroleum, sulphur and lime, all substances commonly used in textile production, which, when combined, can spontaneously combust. Whether or not this interpretation reflects the intentions of the poet, the metaphorical value of the love potion gone awry is more significant than any functional explanation for the poisoned πέπλος.

[83] Wohl, *Intimate Commerce*, 9. D. Wender identifies the emasculating πέπλος as a *vagina dentata* ("The Will of the Beast," 12).

[84] Loraux, "Herakles," 39; Ormand, "More Wedding Imagery."

[85] Segal, "Time, Oracles, and Marriage in the *Trachinian Women*," 79-83.

[86] Bowman, "Prophesy and Authority in the *Trachiniae*," 345-346.

[87] Ormand, "More Wedding Imagery," 225. Compare Aesch. *A.* 1115-1117, where Clytemnestra is equated with the fatal garment that kills Agamemnon.

[88] Segal, "Time, Oracles, and Marriage in the *Trachinian Women*," 80.

the masculine role by inflicting the wound upon herself.[89] Deianeira need not loosen her garment in order to stab herself: the rending of her πέπλος is a perversion of the *anakalypsis* and therefore a rejection of her feminine role in marriage.

Euripides, *Medea*

The inversion of categories of masculine and feminine in the *Trachiniae* are central also in Euripides' *Medea*, which likewise emphasizes the bridal connotations of the πέπλος. The similarity between the two plays is exceptional. Both the leading characters are foreign women who, distraught over their husbands' infidelities, send poisoned πέπλοι as gifts. In Sophocles' play, the πέπλος is intended to win back the affections of the husband; in Euripides' play, the πέπλος is a bridal gift for Glauke, intended to kill Jason's new bride.[90] Deianeira sends the πέπλος to her husband believing she has smeared it with a love potion, only to discover her fatal mistake; Medea knows the damage her gift will cause, and she schemes to cause pain to her husband by destroying all those close to him. The two plays are similar in certain details as well. In both plays the πέπλοι are sent by intermediaries (Lichas and Medea's children), who are given strict instructions to deliver the gifts directly into the hands of the intended recipients. The descriptions of the deaths caused by the πέπλοι are also comparable, though the death of Glauke is much more vivid and horrific. In both cases the deadly garments also claim other victims, Lichas and King Creon. The πέπλος of Medea seems to have been more potent, causing death almost immediately, as opposed to the slow, agonizing death of Heracles. Given the numerous parallels between the two plays, it is understandable that scholars have had difficulty identifying which influenced the other.

Whereas Deianeira focalizes the conflict between masculine and feminine, Medea subverts traditional social categories on

[89] Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, 54-56.

[90] The high economic value of the πέπλοι is reflected in Jason's speech to Medea: τί δ', ὦ ματαία, τῶνδε σὰς κενοῖς χέρας; δοκεῖς σπανίζειν δῶμα βασίλειον πέπλων, δοκεῖς δὲ χρυσοῦ; ("Silly woman, why do you deprive yourself of these things? Do you think the royal house has need of πέπλοι or gold?" 959-61; translation adapted from the Loeb by Kovacs.) Likewise, πέπλοι in the *Medea* are frequently identified as λεπτός ("finely woven," 786, 949, 1188, 1214) and ποικίλος ("many-colored," 1159), but such qualifiers are absent from other extant tragedy.

multiple levels.[91] As N.S. Rabinowitz has pointed out, Euripides characterizes her according to the "triple-binaries" of divine/mortal, masculine/feminine, and Greek/barbarian.[92] The feminine and barbarian connotations of the πέπλος are well-established in earlier tragedy, but Euripides stresses the divine aspect of Medea's character in his use of πέπλος. Medea claims descent from the sun god Helios, from whom she received the πέπλος, and she is a relation of the sorceress Circe.[93] Her divine lineage is also the source of her knowledge of magical charms and φάρμακα ("drugs") with which she poisons the garment.[94] A fragment from Sophocles' *Rhizotomoi* ("Rootcutters") preserved in Macrobius states, ἡ δ' ἐξοπίσω χερὸς ὄμμα τρέπους' / ὀπὸν ἀργινεφῆ στάζοντα τομῆς / καλκέοισι κάδοις δέχεται . . . ("And she [Medea], looking back as she did so, caught the white, foamy juice from the cut in bronze vessels . . .," fr. 534).[95] Could this passage refer to the same φάρμακα with which she poisoned the πέπλος in the *Medea*?

Euripides' use of the term πέπλος may be significant in this regard. Sophocles employs several words to indicate the poisoned πέπλος, depending on the identity of the speaker and the state of the garment, but Euripides identifies it only as a πέπλος (786, 949 [restored], 982, 1066, 1159, 1188, 1214).[96] Furthermore, he mentions no other garments anywhere in the play. While Aeschylus in the *Agamemnon* used numerous references to different garments and textiles to identify the "woven *peploi* of the Erinyes," and Sophocles refers to Deianeira's tainted gift with variable terminology, Euripides consolidates his use of language to accentuate the poisoned πέπλος of Medea. Euripides' focus on the πέπλος is especially interesting, given the fact that it was the golden crown that seems to have been more important in earlier

[91] See McDermott, *Euripides' Medea: The Incarnation of Disorder*.

[92] Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, 131-141. E. Hall has suggested that Euripides' portrayal of Medea as *barbara* might have been his own invention (*Inventing the Barbarian*, 35).

[93] Graf, "Medea, the Enchantress from Afar."

[94] Medea is frequently depicted in Athenian and South Italian vases holding various containers for her poisons (Sourvinou-Inwood, "Medea at a Shifting Distance").

[95] Translation from the Loeb by Lloyd-Jones. On this passage, and the use of plants as drugs generally, see Scarborough, "The Pharmacology of Sacred Plants, Herbs, and Roots." The description of this plant recalls the πέπλος-plant, which also produces a milky juice and is fatal in large doses (*supra*, n. 24).

[96] πέπλος appears in the singular early in the play but changes to the plural in the death-scenes. At 1156 κόσμος refers collectively to the πέπλος and the crown.

versions of the myth. It has even been suggested that Euripides invented the poisoned garment.[97] In the *Medea* the deadly πέπλος is a product of divine/feminine/barbarian cunning, and as such signifies the central theme of the play.

Conclusion

While most have assumed the historicity of a garment called πέπλος, analysis of the use of the term by the tragedians demonstrates that the πέπλος was a literary device related to the negotiation of gender categories, a prominent theme of tragedy. The early epic poets established the feminine and luxurious connotations of the πέπλος and its functions as a means of protection and as a bridal gift. The tragedians, however, inverted these meanings. The adoption of a feminine garment by a male represents a disruption of the social order, which leads to his gruesome, unheroic death as a victim of πέπλοι. In the *Medea* the garment takes on the properties of φάρμακα, underscoring the male fear of divine/feminine/barbaric knowledge. Because the πέπλος was not a garment in everyday use in the fifth century, the author was free to depict it however he chose. A particularly luxurious costume, for example, would have reinforced the connotation of feminine/barbaric excess, forging a link between poetic language and its realization on stage.[98]

The tragic poets ascribed the πέπλος a dangerous quality that did not exist in earlier literature. The malevolent character of this πέπλος is likewise associated with the feminine gender category. As a woven textile, the πέπλος is inextricably linked to women's production and therefore feminine *metis*.[99] The tragedians evoke the Greek concept of weaving as symbolic of feminine *metis* to represent the ultimate expression of female craftiness and

[97] D.L. Page asserts that the duplication of the poisoned gifts, both πέπλος and crown, must be significant, because only one should have been enough to carry out Medea's plan. Apollodoros' synopsis of the play (1.9.28) mentions only the πέπλος, which points to the relative insignificance of the crown in the Euripidean version of the story (*Euripides: Medea*, xxvi).

[98] On the relationship between literary and visual imagery in Greek tragedy, see especially Ferrari, "Figures in the Text."

[99] On weaving as feminine *metis* generally, see Bergren, "Language and the Female in Early Greek Thought"; Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, 299-300; Joplin, "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours." On feminine *metis* specifically in tragedy, see especially Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, 10, 17.

treachery in the πέπλος. The horror of the πέπλος which Clytemnestra employs to murder Agamemnon is underscored by the extensive weaving and textile imagery throughout the *Oresteia*. Likewise, the poisoned πέπλοι of Medea and Deianeira are transformed from benign domestic objects into instruments of destruction as the result of their conniving. As C. Segal has noted, "the *peplos*, the sign of women's domesticity, modesty, and obedience to male authority, reveals this hidden other side of the female in tragedy — the sudden, terrible release of murderous, vengeful power."[100]

This particular role of πέπλοι in tragedy echoes an intellectual interest in constructions of gender that were being re-negotiated amid broader social and cultural changes in Athens during the fifth century. The choice of the term πέπλος in this context would have been especially effective for an Athenian audience, for whom it carried a sacred and civic significance. In the *Oresteia*, the dangerous πέπλος symbolizes the masculine fear of feminine power within the *oikos*. The theme of the πέπλος as an instrument of feminine and barbarian destruction is most poignant in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and Euripides' *Medea*, both of which were produced after the Periclean citizenship law of 451/0 that profoundly effected relations between men and women, citizens and foreigners.[101] The πέπλος was a symbolic channel through which the tragedians could explore the implications of changing social and gender relations without addressing them directly, which might otherwise have been impossible.

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[100] Segal, *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow*, 167.

[101] de Wet, "An Evaluation of the *Trachiniae* of Sophocles in the Light of Moral Values in Athens of the Fifth Century B.C."; Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 176. On the conflict between endogamy and exogamy in the *Trachiniae*, see especially Segal, "Marriage in the Trachinian Women," 88-91.

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