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The Rope and the Sword

A Woman's Suicide for a Man's Death

"For a woman it is already a distressing evil to remain at home, abandoned, without a husband. And when suddenly one messenger arrives, and then another, always bringing worse news, and all proclaiming disaster for the house . . . ! If this man had received as many wounds [*traumatōn*] as were reported to his home through various channels, his body would now have more cuts [*tetrōtai*] than a net has meshes . . . Those were the cruel rumors which made me more than once hang my neck in a noose, from which I was wrenched only by force" (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 861–876).

Beyond the lie that the queen handles with consummate skill, there is a truth, or at least an apparent truth, proper to tragedy, which is expressed in these words of Clytemnestra as she welcomes Agamemnon on his return to his palace. The death of a man inevitably calls for the suicide of a woman, his wife. Why should a woman's death counterbalance a man's? Because of the heroic code of honor that tragedy loves to recall, the death of a man could only be that of a warrior on the field of battle. Thus the children of Agamemnon in the *Choephoroe* dream for a moment of what might have been their father's glorious death under the walls of Troy; and, on merely being told of her husband's death, his wife, immured in her home, would kill herself

with a noose round her neck. It was as part of this tragic pattern that Hecuba in the *Troades* (1012–14) was bitterly to rebuke Helen because nobody had ever "surprised her in the act of hanging up a noose or sharpening a dagger as a noble-hearted woman [*gennaia gynē*] would have done in mourning her first husband."

Of course Clytemnestra did not kill herself, any more than her sister Helen did. Not only was the queen no Penelope (even though in her lying speech she speaks of her eyes burning with tears as she lay sleepless, crying for her absent husband), but she was also no ordinary tragic wife. Clytemnestra did not kill herself, and it was Agamemnon who was to die, ensnared in her veil and his body pierced with wounds. She turned death away from herself and brought it upon the king, just as Medea, instead of killing herself, was to kill Jason indirectly through his children and his newly-wed wife.[1] In Clytemnestra, the mother of Iphigenia and the mistress of Aegisthus triumphed over the king's wife. The murdering queen denied the law of femininity, that in the extreme of misery a knotted rope should provide the way out.[2]

A Death Devoid of Male Courage

Finding a way out in suicide was a tragic solution, one that was morally disapproved in the normal run of everyday life. But, most important, it was a woman's solution and not, as has sometimes been claimed, a heroic act.[3] That the hero Ajax, both in Sophocles and in the epic tradition, killed himself was one thing; that he killed himself in a virile manner was another, and I shall come back to this. But to infer from this example that in the Greek imagination all suicide was inspired by *andreia* (the Greek word for courage as a male characteristic) is a step we should not take. Heracles in Euripides without doubt conforms much more to the traditional ethic when, from the depths of his disasters, he agrees to go on living.[4] In the case of mere citizens, things are even clearer. Nothing was further from suicide than the hoplites' imperative of a "fine death," which must be accepted and not sought.[5] We know that after the battle of Plataea the Spartan Aristodamus was deprived by his fellow citizens of the posthumous glory of appearing on the roll of valor because he had sought death too openly in action. Whether he were a Spartan or not, a warrior committed suicide only when struck by dishonor, as Othryadas did in book I of Herodotus and Pantites in book VII. Plato in the *Laws* echoes these practices; he is prescribing laws but is loyal to civic conventions when he lays down that the suicide should be formally punished, "for total lack of manliness," by being buried in a solitary and unmarked grave on the edge of the city, in the darkness of anonymity (IX.873c–d). I would add (and it is relevant) that the Greek language, in the absence of a special word for suicide, describes the act by resorting to the same words as are used for the murder of parents, that ultimate ignominy.[6]

Suicide, then, could be the tragic death chosen under the weight of necessity by those on whom fell "the intolerable pain of a misfortune from which there is no way out."[7] But in tragedy itself it was mainly a woman's death. There was one form of suicide—an already despised form of death—that was more disgraceful and associated more than any other with irremediable dishonor. This was hanging, a hideous death, or more exactly a "formless" death (*aschēmōn*), the extreme of defilement that one inflicted on oneself only in the utmost shame.[8] It also turns out—but is it just chance?—that hanging is a woman's way of death: Jocasta, Phaedra, Leda, Antigone ended in this way, while outside tragedy there were deaths of innumerable young girls who

hanged themselves, to give rise to a special cult or to illustrate the mysteries of female physiology.[9]

Hanging was a woman's death. As practiced by women, it could lead to endless variations, because women and young girls contrived to substitute for the customary rope those adornments with which they decked themselves and which were also the emblems of their sex, as Antigone strangled herself with her knotted veil. Veils, belts, headbands—all these instruments of seduction were death traps for those who wore them, as the suppliant Danaids explained to King Pelasgus.[10] To borrow Aeschylus' powerful expression, there was here a fine trick, *mēchanē kalē,* by which erotic *peithō* (persuasion) became the agent of the most sinister threat.

I am not going to dwell here on women's relation to *mētis,* that very Greek concept of cunning intelligence. Yet this is a good moment to recall that, even when a woman was armed with a sword to kill herself or another, every action of hers was likely to be covered by the vocabulary of cunning. Thus, in the *Agamemnon,* in order to suggest the murderous designs of Clytemnestra as she sharpened her sword for use against her husband, Cassandra quite unexpectedly resorts to the imagery of poison mixed in a cup. But the text of the *Oresteia* will soon substitute a very real snare, the garment that will imprison Agamemnon as in a net—a bold materialization of every metaphor concerning *mētis.* The same logic is at work in the *Trachiniae.* Without meaning to, Deianira has caught Heracles in the poisoned trap of Nessus' shirt. She straightway turns to the sword for a quick death and her release, but even so her suicide can still be construed, if only momentarily, as the product of cunning intelligence.[11]

Against this ensnaring *mētis,* which works in the words and actions of women and weaves the meshes of death or

busily tightens knots, tragedy sets up in contrast the weapons that cut and tear, those that draw blood. This brings us back to the Suppliants of Aeschylus and their drive toward hanging. As a last resort in their headlong flight from the sons of Aegyptus, the deadly rope would protect the Danaids against the violent desire of the male, just as hurling themselves from the top of a steep rock (something they dreamed for a moment of doing) would have kept them safe from marriage, that prison where the husband is only a master. But it is significant that they give this master the name of *daiktor,* which does not mean "ravisher" (as an influential translation has it) but, very precisely, "tearer."[12] From this tearing—which clearly refers to rape or deflowering—there are only two ways of escape: either the death of the Danaids by the rope, resulting in defilement of the city, or their survival at the cost of a war that would spill the blood of men "on behalf of women" (*Supplices* 476–477). The Danaids did not hang themselves. We know the result—marriage arranged in the end, a wedding night ending in bloodshed, fatal for the husbands, and later punishment in Hades. But that is another story.

The Gash in the Man's Body

If we are to believe Euripides, Thanatos (Death) was armed with a sword. This was certainly not pure chance. If death, the same for all, makes no distinction between its victims and cuts the hair of men and women alike, it was for Thanatos, the male incarnation of death, to carry the sword, the emblem of a man's demise.[13]

A man worthy of the name could die only by the sword or the spear of another, on the field of battle. The Menelaus of Euripides was an inglorious character, being the only warrior to come back from Troy without even a trace of a

wound suffered in close combat, the only wound that made a man complete.[14] Even in human sacrifice, an act that was corrupt from every point of view, the executioner had to be a man, especially when the victim was a male. There is proof of this in *Iphigenia in Tauris,* where Orestes questions the sister whom he has not yet recognized: "Would you, a woman, strike men with a sword?" and Iphigenia assures him in reply that there is a male killer (*sphageus*) in the sanctuary to carry out the task.[15]

Even suicide in tragedy obeys this firm rule, that a man must die at a man's hand, by the sword and with blood spilt. In Sophocles, as in Pindar, Ajax kills himself by the sword, faithful till the end to his status as a hero who lives and dies in war, where wounds are given and received in an exchange that, on the whole, is subject to rules. So Ajax kills himself, but in the manner of a warrior.[16] Pierced by the blade with which he identifies himself (*Ajax* 650–651), he tears open his side on the sword that, in staging his own death, he makes into an actor: "the killer [*sphageus*] is there," he says, "standing upright so that he can slice as cleanly as possible."[17] Ajax's sword is a basic signifier in Sophocles' play, recurring at each step in the metaphorical texture of the tragedy and serving to bind it together. If it is the warrior's sword itself that becomes the healing blade that Ajax invokes in his prayers, there are also in a figurative sense many other swords in the *Ajax,* such as the words that have been sharpened like steel and "cut the living flesh." No wonder then that, at the sight of the hero's corpse, the sharp blade of grief pierced Tecmessa "to the liver."[18]

I shall say no more about Ajax's sword. Others before me have discussed it ably, sometimes brilliantly like Jean Starobinski.[19] Nor shall I dwell on the theme of spilt blood, even though it is central to the *Ajax,* for there is another of Sophocles' heroes to make the point that a man's suicide is

inevitably bloody. This is the betrothed of Antigone, whose death is announced punningly in words that cannot adequately be translated: "Haemon is dead; his own hand has drenched him in blood."[20] It is enough to recall that the name Haemon is only too like the word for blood (*haima*). In this way the son of Creon, pierced by his own sword, fulfills the prophecy of his own name and dies like a man.

Hanging or Sphagē

There is a word that must now be mentioned, because it is obsessively present in Greek tragedy and is insistently opposed to the language of hanging. This word is *sphagē,* which means sacrificial throat-cutting, and also the gash and the blood that flows from it. Together with the verb *sphazō* and its derivatives, it is of course used to indicate sacrifices—the sacrifice of Iphigenia in Aeschylus and Euripides, but also in Euripides that of Macaria in the *Heraclidae,* of Polyxena in the *Hecuba* and the *Troades,* of Menoeceus in the *Phoenissae,* and finally of the daughters of Erechtheus offered to their country by way of *sphagia* (*Ion* 278). Up to this point there is nothing abnormal to note, or scarcely so. But, from Aeschylus through Sophocles to Euripides, *sphazō* and *sphagē* are also used to denote murder within the family of the Atreides. Moreover, the same words are used to describe a suicide when it is stained with blood, such as the suicides of Ajax, Deianira, and Eurydice. In order to justify this slight deviation from the usual meaning, can one call on some principle of semantic looseness in the character of tragic speech? Is *sphazō* to be lumped together with words that are more neutral or descriptive like *schizō* and *daizō,* which imply tearing of the body?[21] This would be a misunderstanding of the verbal rigor of Greek tragedy, which twists language only for a very definite pur-

pose, such as to upset the normal categories. It is better to trust in the strong sacrificial sense of these words and to notice that *sphazō, sphagē,* and *sphagion,* terms laden with religious values, do not signify in tragedy just any throat-cutting murder or suicide, but the long series of "murders that result from the application of the blood law" in the family of the Atreides, or the self-inflicted death of Eurydice at the foot of the altar of Zeus Herkeios.[22] More generally, *sphagē* is used to characterize death by the sword as a "pure" death in opposition to hanging.[23]

No sooner have we recalled this difference between two modes of death, one male and the other female, than we are forced to admit that the distinction is in fact violated in the "virile" deaths of Deianira and Eurydice, who plunge swords into their bodies. And in Euripides there is no lack of heroines who, as they contemplate death, prefer the sword to the rope. Thus Electra, as she mounts guard at the door of the house where Clytemnestra is being murdered, brandishes a sword, ready to turn it on herself if the enterprise should fail (*Electra* 688, 695–696). (Conversely, in Euripides there are men who die fatally strangled, in the manner of women. Thus Hippolytus, entangled in the reins of his horses, was smashed against the rocks by the roadside.[24] However, as far as men were concerned, it must be said that this irregular form of death was evidently less frequent.)

The confusion in tragedy that consists in giving a man's death to a woman is not a matter of chance. Let us take the death of Jocasta in the *Phoenissae*. In Sophocles, as we all know, as soon as Jocasta came to see the truth about Oedipus, she hanged herself, as a woman overwhelmed by a crushing misfortune. The Jocasta of Euripides did not hang herself. She survived the revelation of her incest and it was the death of her sons that killed her, as she turned on herself

the sword that had killed them.[25] This was a remarkable departure from a tradition that had been well established since Homer and the hanging of Epicaste (Jocasta). Should one attribute this innovation, as some do, to a change in outlook that had become increasingly hostile to death by hanging?[26] There is really nothing to support this hypothesis: ever since the *Odyssey* (XXII.462–464), the rope dealt the impurest of deaths, and one cannot see how attitudes could have developed on this point. But above all one should read the text of Euripides beside that of Sophocles, and one will see that the *Phoenissae* brings a whole new interpretation of the character of Jocasta. She is no longer, as she is in Sophocles, above all a wife; she is exclusively a mother,[27] and her manly death should be seen as a consequence of this critical reshaping of the tradition.

Starting from this example and several others, I offered in an earlier publication a generalization about women's deaths in tragedy, to the effect that hanging was associated with marriage—or rather, with an excessive valuation of the status of bride (*nymphē*)—while a suicide that shed blood was associated with maternity, through which a wife, in her "heroic" pains of childbirth, found complete fulfillment.[28] I still abide by that reading. However, I shall not return to it, for it is simply the confusion as such that interests me here, and more particularly the many statements in Euripides that seem to assume that the rope and the sword come to the same thing.

The rope or the sword—in brief, death at any price, whatever the method. That is the way manlike women, who would in general prefer the sword, reason in a desperate situation. It is also the way women who are overfeminine boast when, like Hermione, they will not dare even to hang themselves. But, in either case, the way the text runs makes it perfectly clear what would be the real choice for the par-

ticular woman in despair—the sword or the rope. It is this choice that the chorus leaves to Admetus, in face of the imminent death of Alcestis, saying that "a misfortune of this kind justifies cutting one's throat [*sphagē*] or slipping a noose round one's neck"—a simple way of indicating that, having avoided death, a womanish man would not be able to escape the distress that breaks women's spirits.[29]

Paradoxically, as these few examples have already suggested, the confusion even at its very height aims only to reinforce the standard opposition. So it is with Helen in the play that bears her name, summoning death in her prayers: "I shall put my neck in a deadly, dangling noose, or in a mighty effort I shall sink the whole blade of a sword in my flesh, and its murderous thrust will open up a stream of blood from my throat, and I will sacrifice myself to the three goddesses" (353–357). As the final outcome indicates, the only possibility that Helen sees as truly worthy of her is *sphagē;* but, on closer inspection, the choice was already revealed through the very words in which Helen spoke of hanging herself, and especially in the expression *phonion aiōrēma* (353), the untranslatable and contradictory "gory suspension" that translators cover up as best they can, because in their view the distinctive feature of hanging is that no blood flows.[30] But it is precisely in this oxymoron that one can and must guess what the heroine's choice will be. For her no death can be considered that does not shed blood, and her words reject hanging at the very moment that she mentions its possibility. *Phonion aiōrēma:* proclaiming in advance the blood of the *sphagē,* Helen's language runs ahead of her thought.

At the end of this inquiry, therefore, the contrast between the rope and the sword stands more strongly than ever. But certain facts must be clearly understood. A man never hangs himself, even when he has thought of doing so;[31] a man

who kills himself does it in a manly way. For a woman, however, there is an alternative. She can seek a womanly way of ending her life, by the noose, or she can steal a man's death by seizing a sword. Is this a matter of identification, of personal coherence in her character within the play? Perhaps. The imbalance is nonetheless obvious, proving, if proof were needed, that the genre of tragedy can easily create and control a confusion of categories, and also knows the limits it cannot cross. To put it another way, the woman in tragedy is more entitled to play the man in her death than the man is to assume any aspect of woman's conduct, even in his manner of death. For women there is liberty in tragedy—liberty in death.

The Wife in Flight

As there is an alternative open to women, and as some of them choose the ways of femininity to the very end, the question of hanging and of the values associated with it deserves a little more attention.

Beyond the vocabulary of *mētis* and the judgment that it inevitably involves a death where the victim is trapped in her own snare, there is another word that deserves our attention because it describes and suggests rather than judges. The word *aiōra* (or *eōra*) evokes a double image, of a corpse hanging in the air, and of its movement, a gentle swaying.[32] *Aiōra* was in fact the name of a festival at Athens in which representations of hanging were associated with a game on a swing. This religious Aiora is not itself in question here, but rather the visual image induced by the use of the word in tragedy. *Aiōra* of Jocasta and *aiorēma* of Helen: Oedipus has forced open the door that Jocasta had carefully closed on herself, and now everyone can see the woman hanging, "caught in the noose that swings" (*plektais eōrais*

empeplegmenēn). For Helen, equally, who did not hang herself, hanging was summed up in the term *aiōrēma*. It is at this point that the reader of tragedies recalls the word from another context, of the woman who throws herself to her death. In the *Suppliant Women* of Euripides, as Evadne prepares to hurl herself into the fire from the top of an airy rock (*aitheria petra*) that dominates the funeral pyre of her husband, Capaneus, she cries: "Here I am on this rock, like a bird, above the pyre of Capaneus, I rise lightly, upward on a deadly swing [*aiōrēma*]" (1045–47).

Aiōrēma signifies both the swaying of the hanged woman and the soaring flight of Evadne, and we should pause at this: in the language of tragedy there is a thematic relationship between hanging and throwing oneself to one's death. This may seem surprising. The woman who has hanged herself has certainly thrown herself into the void, but her body has left the ground—it is supported, now, by the roof. To throw oneself down, on the other hand, is to fall into the depths (*bathy ptōma*). The same word, *aeirō,* which means elevation and suspension, applies to these two flights in opposite directions, upward and downward, as though height had its own depth: as though the place below—whether it be the ground, or the world under that—could be reached only by first rising up.[33] Strange as it may seem, this is the logic that alone makes sense of the association between these two ways of rising, an association that recurs in the "escape odes," those lyrical pieces in which often the chorus and sometimes that tragic heroine, overwhelmed by events, voice their desire for a merciful flight into death. The *Supplices* of Aeschylus may be mentioned here, and the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, and there are many other texts as well. The vital point is that for both movements the same image returns—that of winged flight and, explicitly, the flight of a bird. If Evadne is a bird, so is Phaedra—recently

a bird of ill omen, and now a pathetic bird escaped from the hands of Theseus. Falling from the heights of a rock or held in the noose, it makes no difference: Evadne and Phaedra have taken flight, forever. There are women, too, who go no further than dreaming of flight, such as Hermione, who in her desire for death wishes she were a bird; or the Danaids, distraught at the approach of men; or again the women of the chorus in *Iphigenia in Tauris* or *Helen,* wingless halcyons burning with regret for their far-off country.[34]

The bird is in tragedy an operator that stands for escape, and because it presents a concrete image of flight, it provides several suggestions on what is said about women in connection with hanging.[35] These wives (who were properly represented in everyday life as sedentary) show in their propensity for flight a kind of natural rapport with the beyond: there they are, throwing themselves into the air and hanging between earth and sky. Again, a misfortune was enough to make them escape from a man, abandoning his life, and their own, as abruptly as they left the stage. Identified as he was with the hoplite model, a man had to hold his ground and face death head on, as Ajax at his end rejoins the earth, fastened to it by his sword, which is at once fixed in the ground and plunged to its hilt in his body.

For women, death is an exit. *Bebēke,* "she is gone," is said of a woman who dies or has killed herself. It is said of Alcestis, and of Evadne, who with a leap (*bebēke pēdēsasa*) left her father's house to reach the rock from which she was to throw herself, with another leap, the last (*pēdēsasa*). Theseus, too, as he mourns the death of Phaedra, who "like a bird escaped from one's hands has disappeared," cries out: "A sudden leap [*pēdēma*] has carried you off to Hades."[36] But one must remember about these heroines that, although for a woman death is always a movement, the only ones to take flight are those who are too feminine. In fact

the announcement of the death of Deianira, who preferred the sword to the rope, starts as one might expect, but ends on an unusual note: "She has gone, Deianira, on her last journey, her very last, on motionless foot [*Bebēke . . . ex akinētou podos*]" (*Trachiniae* 874–875).

The motionless foot of Deianira may be (as Jebb has suggested) something like a proverbial euphemism for death, a way of indicating that the journey and the road are purely metaphorical . . . I myself would prefer to see the phrase, in its opposition to the flight implied in *aiōra,* as a way of suggesting, even before the chorus speculates on how she died, that Heracles' wife has not fled by hanging herself, and that she has died like a soldier. But, conversely, we must come back to the martial suicide of Ajax: Sophocles, in his treatment of this death, still manages to remind us that for a man suicide is a deviation. The hero's death was indeed a manly one, with this difference, that it was the sword that stood (*hestēken*) in the hoplite's place: Ajax transfixed himself on it, hurling himself with a swift leap, and it is no surprise that this leap is called a *pēdēma.*[37]

This is a good place to notice again that, if in tragedy male and female behavior can disregard the division of humanity into men and women, this shift is not an accident, since it serves to show how each character—whether by conformity or by deviation—lives out a destiny as an individual man or woman. There are dimensions of both reality and imagination to these lives, while the city would like to make them fundamentally a matter of social reality.

In any case, whether they are womanly or manlike, women have at their disposal a way of dying in which they remain entirely feminine. It is the way they have of acting out their suicide, offstage. It is meticulously prepared, it is hidden from the spectators' view, and it is in its main details recounted orally. The staging in Sophocles even follows a

standard sequence—a silent exit, a choral chant, and then the announcement by a messenger that, out of sight, the woman has killed herself.

Silence and Secrecy

Silence is the adornment of women. Sophocles said so, and Aristotle repeated it. In Euripides, Macaria, as she prepares to take an active role, makes a point of showing her awareness of this sentiment, remarking that the best thing for a woman is not to leave the closed interior of her house.[38] But women in tragedy have become involved in men's world of action and have suffered for it. So, silently, the heroines of Sophocles return to die in the home that they had left behind. Silence of Deianira under the accusations of Hyllos; heavy silence of Eurydice, in which the chorus correctly divines a hidden threat; half-silence of Jocasta, with ambiguous words and a voice that finally dies away.[39]

These silences, which are heard as expressions of anguish, precede an action that the woman wants to hide from view. Phaedra has made herself invisible (*aphantos*) and Deianira has disappeared (*dieistōsen*): she has organized, one might say, her final disappearance, which takes her far from mortal view to the invisible world of Hades, away from all eyes, even those in the palace where she has taken refuge.[40] In the same way Jocasta and Phaedra hide behind closed doors, which are hermetically sealed on death—an obstacle that puts the body, in hanging, into a double prison. Oedipus has to throw himself against the door, Theseus has to storm and beg that the bolts be drawn back,[41] so that at last they can see their wives—dead. The spectators did not see Jocasta's body, but they do see Phaedra's, and that of Eurydice, revealed to them and Creon at the same time. It was for the

messenger to emphasize the effect: "You can see her; for she is no longer in her retreat [*en mychois*]."[42]

An astonishing interplay of the seen and the hidden, by which we do not see a woman's death, but do see the dead woman. Then, as though the last ban had been lifted on staring at this mournful scene, the dramatic action could continue—even, as it does in the *Hippolytus,* center itself on the corpse of the dead woman and her silent presence. Phaedra had disappeared, but her corpse was there, released from the fatal noose to be laid out on the ground as was seemly—the corpse which she had wanted to make into evidence against Hippolytus and which, though silent forever, yet bore the message of the absent woman.[43] That was, without the shadow of a doubt, a very feminine way of exploiting one's own death. In the case of Ajax, whose dead body was at least as important a dramatic element as that of Phaedra, things are very different, and what is seen and what is hidden do not bear at all the same relation to one another. As Ajax is the model of the manly suicide, it follows that he has the right to kill himself in front of the spectators;[44] but because his death is only a poor imitation of a warrior's noble death, there is a ban on seeing his body. Indeed, before the leaders of the Greek army start to discuss whether the dead body would be appropriately hidden in a tomb, Tecmessa and then Teucer have each taken good care to cover up a sight that was as painful as it was improper.[45]

Finally, there is the very special oscillation between revelation and concealment that occurs in the case of Alcestis, who dies in place of a man. Alcestis dies onstage, and her body, first carried inside the palace and then brought back, is displayed onstage again for a long *prothesis* (exposure) before the funeral cortège (*ekphora*) takes it out of sight—for good, the chorus supposes; and it is true that, without the intervention of Heracles, Alcestis would certainly have

disappeared forever.[46] But she was an exception, the only woman not to reach Hades. We will confine ourselves to the host of women in tragedy who go away and never return.

In the Thalamos: *Death and Marriage*

Let us come back to the door of that closed place where a woman takes refuge to die, far out of sight. With its solid bolts that have to be forced back for the dead woman to be reached—or rather the dead body from which the woman has already fled—this room reveals the narrow space that tragedy grants to women for the exercise of their freedom. They are free enough to kill themselves, but they are not free enough to escape from the space to which they belong, and the remote sanctum where they meet their death is equally the symbol of their life—a life that finds its meaning outside the self and is fulfilled only in the institutions of marriage and maternity, which tie women to the world and lives of men. It is by men that women meet their death, and it is for men, usually, that they kill themselves.[47] By a man, for a man: not all texts make the distinction, but Sophocles is particularly careful to mark it—in the *Antigone,* where Eurydice dies *for* her sons but *because* of Creon, and in the *Trachiniae,* where Deianira dies *because* of Hyllos but *for* love of Heracles. So the death of women confirms or reestablishes their connection with marriage and maternity.

The place where women kill themselves, to give it its name, is the marriage chamber, the *thalamos.* Deianira plunges into it, as does Jocasta. Alcestis sheds her last tears there before facing Thanatos; and when she leaves the palace to die, it is toward this place that she turns her thoughts and her regrets. As for the funeral pyre of Capaneus, onto which Evadne hurls herself to renew her union in the flesh with her husband, it is decribed as

thalamai (funeral chamber), a word that encapsulates the many connections of her death with marriage.[48]

If the *thalamos* is in the depths of the house, there is also within the *thalamos* the bed (*lechos*), scene of the pleasure that the institution of marriage tolerates if it is not excessive and, above all, the place of procreation. No death of a woman takes place without involving the bed. It is there, and there alone, that Deianira and Jocasta are able, before suicide, to affirm their identity to themselves.[49] It is there that Deianira even dies, on that couch that she had too much associated with the pleasures of the *nymphē*. Even when a woman kills herself like a man, she nevertheless dies in her bed, like a woman.

Finally, by fastening the rope to the ceiling of the marriage chamber, Jocasta and Phaedra call attention to the symbolic framework of the house. The rooftree, which the *Odyssey* called *melathron,* Euripides calls *teramna*. By metonymy it can mean the palace considered in its dimension of verticality; but it goes even further. From Sappho's epithalamium ("Come, carpenters, lift up the rooftree [*melathron*], Hymenaeus, for here enters the house a bridegroom the equal of Ares") to Euripides, the roof seems to have been much connected with the husband, whose tall stature it dominates and protects.[50] One might perhaps recall that Clytemnestra, in her irreproachable speech that is also a total lie, called Agamemnon "the column sustaining the high roof" (*Agamemnon* 897–898). Just before a woman leaps into the void, it is the missing presence of the man that she feels for the last time, in every corner of the *thalamos*.

To Die with . . .

It is no wonder, then, if many of these solitary deaths were thought of as ways of dying with one's husband. To

die with: a form in death of *synoikein,* "to live with," which was one of the commonest expressions in Greek to mean marriage.[51]

To die with . . . It was certainly not the fate that Clytemnestra sought, for she much preferred to live with Aegisthus than to die. However, it was the lot that Orestes, with cutting irony, singled out for Clytemnestra when, just before striking her, he told her to go and sleep in death with the man she loved and preferred to her own husband. A just turn of events in the logic of the *Oresteia,* a just retribution for the death of Cassandra at Agamemnon's side, a death that a short while back Clytemnestra had presented as the fate deserved by a mistress.[52] To die with . . . The fate that, in the *Oresteia,* is imposed on women by the logic of murder becomes, in the case of female suicides, the object of a will that seems at once like love and like despair. The moment Deianira knows that disaster is on its way, she announces to her confidantes, the women of Trachis, her intention of joining Heracles in death: "I have decided that, if misfortune befalls him, I too shall die with him, in the same impulse, the same moment" (*Trachiniae* 719–720). This is a firm intention, expressed four times within the same line, and she will carry it out in every respect, except that the word "with" will have meaning only for herself. Because she robs Heracles of a man's death, the hero when he is laid low will deny her, condemning her beyond death to the solitude that was her lot in life. Euripides' Helen, too, should be mentioned, who does not die but talks much of dying. Like the virtuous Helen of Stesichorus in her Egyptian exile[53] she swears that, if Menelaus dies, she will kill herself with the same sword and rest at her husband's side. Finally, as any conduct has its extremes, Evadne deserves a special mention, who, in a bacchantic ecstasy of conjugal love, turned the funeral pyre of Capaneus into a shared tomb.

Not content with aspiring to die with the man who was dear to her, she dreamed of annihilation in an erotic union of their two bodies: "In the burning flame I shall mingle my corpse with my husband's, resting close against him, flesh to flesh."[54]

To die with . . . A tragic way for a woman to go to the extreme limit of marriage, by, it must be said, drastically reordering events, since it is in death that "living with" her husband will be achieved. Yet there is one woman, a mother rather than a wife—or, more precisely, a mother to excess—who displaces "dying with" in the direction of maternity. I mean the Jocasta of Euripides, who, in keeping with her destiny as an incestuous mother, dies with the death of her sons and, "dead, rests on her well-loved ones, embracing them both in her arms."[55] This is how in the *Phoenissae* Euripides reconstructs the story of Jocasta, who, by marrying her son, mingled marriage with motherhood and so could die only as a mother. Moreover the men to whom women offer up their deaths can represent either of two relationships, as we have seen; and when it comes to dying, a Eurydice may prefer death for her sons' sake to life with her husband. Jocasta is original because she "dies with" those whom she brought into the world, killing herself on their bodies, at the very place where they died in battle.

The Glory of Women

The time has come to bring out what tragedy's treatment of the death of women borrows from socially accepted norms in classical Athens, and what separates it from them. What is at stake is the thorny question of the "glory of women" (*kleos gynaikōn*); even the most routine formulation of this is not entirely covered by Pericles' terse declaration.

The funerary epitaphs, which represent a traditional ethic, are not so uncompromising, where women's glory is concerned, as the radicalism of Pericles in his funeral speech. The idea is not completely strange to them, but this glory, which is always subordinated to a career as a "good wife," often merges into feminine "worth" (*aretē*). This means that the glory of women is often mentioned in a tentative, not to say reticent, manner. Female worth is never confused with real worth, which belongs to men and in their case needs no further specification. There is no male worth, there is simply *aretē* itself.

Listen to the words of mourning in their orthodox form:

> Supposing that feminine virtue still exists in the human race, she partook of it

cautiously says an epitaph from Amorgos; and an inscription from the Piraeus goes further:

> Glykera was found to have a double gift, which is rare in women's nature—virtue allied to chastity.

In the praise and admiration of mankind that are sometimes accorded to a wife, her death, that final accident, counts for nothing and the life she led for everything. This is the sentiment in another epitaph from the Piraeus:

> What is in the world the highest praise for a woman Chairippe received in the fullest measure, when she died.

Still more explicit is the epitaph engraved on the tomb of an Athenian woman:

> It was you, Anthippe, who in the world had the most acclaim open to women. Now that you are dead, you have it still.

So much for the daily glory of women. This may have been, for Athens, substantial, but it is also very little. It is true that "good" wives are not material for tragedy.

This does not mean that women in tragedy are not wives. But they are wives in their deaths—and apparently only in their deaths, because only their deaths belong to them, and in them they bring their marriages to fulfillment. It follows that we can take two views of their deaths, contradictory but at the same time complementary. The first, which is attuned to traditional values, holds that in fulfilling themselves as spouses in their deaths the heroines of tragedy are confirming tradition at the very moment that they are innovating. The second view, which is anxious to lay hold of anything in tragedy that tends to support the "women's side,"[56] takes the point that wives in death win a renown that goes far beyond the praise traditionally granted to their sex. It is not necessary to choose one view over the other: each has its truth, and in fact it is impossible not to accept, in each case, both at once. This is what is meant by ambiguity, and there must have been an ambiguous thrill to the *katharsis* when, during a tragic performance, male citizens watched with emotion the suffering of these heroic women, represented onstage by other male citizens dressed in women's clothes. Women's glory in tragedy was an ambiguous glory.

Take the case of Alcestis, an exemplary figure in this interpretation of marriage through death. The chorus readily says of her that "of all women she behaved the best toward her husband." Her last word is to say to her husband "farewell" (*chaire*), just like those fair effigies on the stelae in Athenian cemeteries. And yet this irreproachable figure of Alcestis strikingly shows the way in which the glory of women is always twisted. Alcestis was devoted, loving, and virtuous, but she earned her "glorious death" only through

the male qualities of courage and endurance. Since a fine death is essentially virile and the loyal wife has taken the man's place, this *tolma* has the recoil effect of feminizing the well-loved husband. He is driven to become the mother as well as the father of their children, and condemned to live henceforward cloistered like a virgin or chaste as a bride inside the palace, which his wife has left to join in death the open spaces of manly heroism.[57]

The glory of Evadne is also very ambiguous. She wants to die as both wife and warrior. To honor her marriage the wife of Capaneus seeks death like some equivocal hoplite who has strayed from the scene of battle. She stands on the steep rock, longing for a tomb to share with her husband and anxious that all Argos should know of her fate, yet decked like a woman who wants to seduce—like a *nymphē* perhaps. As a result, the victory that she claims as her due takes her far beyond the limits of her sex, which usually makes its mark at the loom or by a prudent reserve. When Evadne maintains that her victory is one of *aretē,* neither the woman nor the warrior in her seems to get much from it. For the chorus, made up of mothers in mourning, does not really believe either in her virtue as a woman, which is tainted by excess, or in her courage, whose "virility" is unseemly in the good wife she professes to be.[58]

There is also the belated glory of Deianira, who waits until she has committed the irreparable act before proclaiming her wish for a good reputation (*Trachiniae* 721–722). Above all, there is the strange paradox of Phaedra's glory. As infatuated with glory as she was with Hippolytus, Phaedra dies for having lost her reputation as the wife of Theseus. But her death, which she stages in the noble manner, is still an act of *mētis:* the noose she ties round her neck is to prove a trap for Hippolytus, the written note she leaves is to proclaim a false story. Yet her name will achieve re-

nown, because of this love, which she thought would ruin her honor, and because of this disastrous death. This is the height of contradiction. Of course Aphrodite had a hand in all this, but Phaedra herself was to a great extent responsible.[59]

In the matter of femininity, tragedy is two-faced . . . Although they are "out of place," the glories of these women give food for thought; they are to be listened to and seen. Yet, whether excessive or inadequate as wives, Phaedra, Deianira, Alcestis, and Evadne still die within the orbit of marriage. We should accept that tragedy constantly disturbs the norm in the interest of the deviant, but at the same time we must be aware that under the deviant the norm is often silently present. So we have tried out two possible readings at once. One of them draws up a list of all the distortions that, in a system of values, can be applied to those values; the other lends an ear to the occasional dissenting voice in the unison of Greek *logoi* about women.

· *II* ·

The Pure Blood of Virgins

WITH the *jeunes filles en fleurs,* it is sacrifice and spilt blood that predominate. Because, even in the world of tragedy, they have less autonomy than wives, virgins do not kill themselves: they are killed.

Although I make this generalization, I do not forget that there is at least one virgin who is a striking exception—Antigone, of course, who was not content simply to kill herself, but killed herself in the manner of grieving wives, who hang themselves as a last resort. The difficulty is a real one, and it would be pointless to try to play it down. The least we can do is to undertake a detailed analysis of the conditions attending Antigone's death, which was a mixture of a very female suicide and something like a sacrifice outside the norm. Although he thought he had taken care not to engage his own personal responsibility and that of the state, Creon actually condemned Antigone to Hades, a young life offered as a victim to the gods below.[1] Buried alive, the daughter of Oedipus was doomed to die by suffocation, and in making a noose of her virgin's veil she brought on suffocation by other means. She gained twice, by contriving her own death, and by condemning Creon to the defilement that he wanted to avoid. But the significance of this hanging is not exhausted in the gesture by which Antigone, faithful to the logic of Sophoclean heroines, chose to die by her own will and so to change execution

Introduction

1. W. Peek, *Griechische Vers-Inschriften* (Berlin: Berlin Akad. Verlag, 1955), no. 1491: Athens, fourth century B.C.

2. Thucydides II.45.2, a remark that has been commented on and discussed ad infinitum, starting with Plutarch, who, at the beginning of *De mulierum virtutibus,* attacks such an idea. But Plutarch, who sees in feminine virtues "a good deal of historical exposition," belongs to an era in which the literary genres were less centered on the city than in classical times, and so there was room for women's participation in history.

3. Herodotus II.89 (the corpses of beautiful Egyptian women); II.1 (Cassandane), 129 (the daughter of Mycerinus); III.31–32 (the sister/wife of Cambyses); IV.205 (Pheretima).

4. Euripides (*Hippolytus* 813) calls the hanging of Phaedra a *biaios thanatos* (violent death).

5. *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1230: *hekonta kouk akonta.* See also 1237: *autē pros hautēs.* In contrast to Deianira or Eurydice, whose deaths were attributed to an outside responsibility (*aitia*), the *aitia* of Jocasta's death was entirely laid at her door. The quotation that follows is found at 1234–35.

6. See Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 878 and 880, *Antigone* 1174; Euripides, *Hippolytus* 801, *Phoenissae* 1354.

I. The Rope and the Sword

1. Compare Euripides, *Medea* 39–40 and 379.

2. The knot of the rope (*brochos*) makes real the metaphorical knot of misfortune. Compare *Hippolytus* 671 and 781.

3. A. Katsouris ("The Suicide Motive in Ancient Drama," *Dioniso,* 47 [1956], 5–36) asserts this, although he cannot avoid admitting (p. 9) that in tragedy the majority of suicides were committed by women.

4. It is worth remembering that traditionally Ajax is the only male hero to carry a suicide through to the end. The interpretation of Heracles' choice proposed here contradicts that of Jacqueline de Romilly ("Le refus du suicide dans l'Héraclès d'Euripide," *Arkhaiognosia,* 1 [1980], 1–10.

5. This shows all the difference between a wish of reason (*ethelō*) and an inclination (*boulomai*). See Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 102–104, and, on Aristodamus (Herodotus IX.71), "La belle mort spartiate," *Ktema,* 2 (1977), 105–120. It should be noted that, in *Le suicide* (new ed., Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981, p. 374), Emile Durkheim interprets Aristodamus' death as a suicide. Othryadas: Herodotus I.82; Pantites: Herodotus VII.232.

6. For example, *autophonos* and *autocheir.* The overdetermination suicide/death in combat/family murder is particularly clear in the single combat between the sons of Oedipus. See Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes* 850; Sophocles, *Antigone* 172; Euripides, *Phoenissae* 880. Other examples are Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1091; Euripides, *Orestes* 947; and Sophocles, *Antigone* 1175. See also the commentary of L. Gernet on book IX of Plato's *Laws* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1917), p. 162 (873c5–6).

7. This is one of the extenuating circumstances envisaged by Plato in his condemnation of suicide (*Laws* IX.873c5–6).

8. Shame: Plato, *Laws* IX.873e6; ugliness of hanging: Euripides, *Helen* 298–302; defilement: Sophocles, *Antigone* 54 (*lōbē*), also Aeschylus, *Supplices* 473 (*miasma* in a system of suicide as revenge); dishonor: Euripides, *Helen* 134–136, 200–202, 686–687 (death of Leda).

9. As it closes forever the too open bodies of women, hanging is almost latent in feminine physiology. See Nicole Loraux, "Le corps étranglé," in *Le châtiment dans la cité,* ed. Y. Thomas (Rome and Paris: Ecole Française de Rome, 1984), pp. 195–218.

10. Sophocles, *Antigone* 1220–22; Aeschylus, *Supplices* 455–466.

11. Poison: *Agamemnon* 1260–63. The veil as net: ibid., 1382–83, 1492, 1580, 1611; *Choephoroe* 981–982, 998–1004; *Eumenides* 460, 634–635. Deianira: Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 883–884 (*emēsato*), 928 (*technomenēs*). The mixing of the "straight path" of the sword and of *mētis* is at its height in *Medea* 384–409 and 1278 (where the sword is a net).

12. Hanging rather than the male: Aeschylus, *Supplices* 787–790; precipitation rather than the *daiktōr:* 794–799. Compare *daiktōr* with *gōos daiktēr, Seven against Thebes* 917: a tearing sob, a doleful mourning in which one tears one's body in imitation of the torn bodies of the dead, in this case the sons of Oedipus, themselves *autodaiktoi,* 735. Finally, note that at line 680 of the *Supplices,* the verb *daizō* (tear) has made its first appearance, to characterize civil war as the tearer of the city. So there is no reason to turn "tearer" euphemistically into "ravisher."

13. Euripides, *Alcestis* 74–76. Other metaphors of death as cutting or bloody: 118 and 225. On Thanatos as the masculine form of death, see J.-P. Vernant, "Figures féminines de la mort," forthcoming in a collective work *Masculin/Féminin en Grèce ancienne* (ed. Nicole Loraux).

14. Euripides, *Andromache* 616: *oude trōtheis.* It is the scholiast who is right (as opposed to L. Méridier, the translator of the Belles Lettres edition). Menelaus in book IV of the *Iliad* was certainly wounded from

afar by an arrow from Pandarus, but no wound was inflicted on him at close quarters, by a sword or a lance; and this was the sign of his dubious courage.

15. Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 621–622. On the place given to the slaughterer at the heart of feminine sacrifice, see M. Detienne, "Violentes Eugénies," in *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec,* ed. M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. 208.

16. On this exchange, on which I have commented in "Blessures de virilité" (*Le Genre Humain,* 10 [1984], 38–56), see Pindar, *Nemean* VIII.40 (also *Nemean* VII.35 and *Isthmian* IV.35). We must remember that in the tragedy of Sophocles, Hector's sword is a gift from the enemy. As for Ajax, he dies as a warrior "falls" (*piptō: Ajax* 828, 841, 1033).

17. *Ajax* 815, with the translation and commentary of J. Casabona, *Recherches sur le vocabulaire des sacrifices en Grèce* (Aix-en-Provence: Annales Fac. Lettres, 1966), p. 179. One will note that the sword is set upright (*hestēken*) as is usually a hoplite at his post. In 1026 Teucer speaks of his sword as a *phoneus,* a killer.

18. The blade: *Ajax* 581–582, in a context at once medical and sacrificial (cf. *Trachiniae* 1032–33 and *Antigone* 1308–9); the sharpened tongue: 584; the flesh cut by words: 786; the misfortune that pierces the liver: 938.

19. Jean Starobinski, "L'épée d'Ajax," in *Trois fureurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), particularly pp. 27–29 and 61. See also D. Cohen, "The Imagery of Sophocles: A Study of Ajax' Suicide," *Greece and Rome,* 25 (1978), 24–36, and Charles Segal, "Visual Symbolism and Visual Effects in Sophocles," *Classical World,* 74 (1981), 125–142.

20. Haemon: *Antigone* 1175 (see also 1239). On *haima* as a word for effusion of blood, see H. Koller, *"Haima," Glotta,* 15 (1967), 149–155.

21. *Schismos:* Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1149 (Cassandra); *schizō:* Sophocles, *Electra* 99 (murder of Agamemnon). *Daizō:* Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 207–208 (sacrifice of Iphigenia), *Choephoroe* 860, 1071 (murder).

22. The blood law: Casabona, *Vocabulaire,* p. 160. Compare in Euripides' *Electra* the presence of sacrificial equipment (*kanoun, sphagis*) in the description of Clytemnestra's murder (1142; cf. 1222: *katarchomai,* commented on by P. Stengel, *Opferbraüche der Griechen,* Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1910, p. 42). Eurydice is a *sphagion: Antigone* 1291, with the commentary of Casabona, *Vocabulaire,* p. 187. See also the remarks in the text commentary by R. C. Jebb (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 1900) on *bōmia* (suicide at the foot of the altar) and the suicide's sword as sacrificial knife (1301).

23. See, for example, Euripides, *Helen* 353–359.

24. *Hippolytus* 1236–37, 1244–45. In his agony of pain, the dying Hippolytus, caught in a snare like Heracles, will ask for a flesh-cutting sword that will deliver him (1357; cf. Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 1031–33).

25. I deliberately use this phrase, which is logically impossible, for the text of the *Phoenissae* not only does not specify which of the two swords she uses, but even suggests in a general way that the common sword of the sons is involved (see 1456 and 1578).

26. R. Hirzel, "Der Selbstmord," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft,* 11 (1908), especially pp. 256–258.

27. One can compare *Oedipus Tyrannus,* where Jocasta is *pantelēs damar* (accomplished wife), and the *Phoenissae,* where Jocasta dies "with" her sons and will be buried with them (1282, 1483, 1553–54, 1635). In the same way Eurydice is *pammētor,* entirely given to maternity (*Antigone* 1282).

28. "Le lit, la guerre," *L'Homme,* 21 (1981), 37–67. See also "*Ponos.* Sur quelques difficultés de la peine comme nom du travail," *Annali dell' Instituto Orientale di Napoli,* 4 (1982), 171–192.

29. Rope or sword: for Helen, if she had been a *gennaia gynē* (*Troades* 1012–14); for Creusa, if her death plan should fail (*Ion* 1063–65); for the manlike Electra (*Orestes,* 953), who would prefer the sword (1041, 1052); for the boastful Hermione (*Andromache* 811–813, 841–844), whose nurse dreads above all her hanging herself (815–816); for Admetus (*Alcestis* 227–229). See again *Andromache* 412, as well as *Hercules Furens* 319–320 and 1147–51.

30. I differ here from the interpretation of Casabona, *Vocabulaire,* p. 161. One should add that the verb *oregomai* used by the heroine is more suited to the act of wounding (frequent in the *Iliad*) than to that of knotting.

31. Hanging is mentioned by Orestes (Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 746; Euripides, *Orestes* 1062–63) and by Oedipus (Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1374; Euripides, *Phoenissae* 331–334.

32. See P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque,* s.v. *aeirō* (I, 23, on the derivative *aiōra*). Jocasta's *eōra:* Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1264. A controversy rages among historians of religion about the Athenian *aiōra,* the festival of suspension and balancing during which young girls play on swings while dolls hang in the branches of trees. Is it

a rural fertility rite? Or an expiatory rite? I do not intend to examine the difficult question here. See, for example, R. Martin and H. Metzger, *La religion grecque* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), pp. 127–128. I will simply recall that this feast finds its *aition* in the suicide of Erigone and the hanging of a young girl.

33. *Bathy ptōma:* Aeschylus, *Supplices* 796–797. *Aeirō:* for example, *Hippolytus* 735 (escape ode) and 779 (*ērtēmenē,* from *artaō,* derivative of *aeirō*), *Andromache* 848, 861–862. The depth of the ether: *Medea* 1295.

34. Wings, flight: *Medea* 1297, *Hercules Furens* 1158, *Hecuba* 1110, *Ion* 796–797 and 1239, *Helen* 1516. The bird: *Hippolytus* 733 (the chorus), 759, 828 (Phaedra); *Andromache* 861–862 (Hermione); *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1089, 1095–96 (*apteros ornis pothousa*); *Helen* 1478–94. On the bird caught in the snare and the hanged woman, see Loraux, "Le corps étranglé."

35. And, in another mode, womanly men, e.g., Jason; or Heracles, who, after committing feminine crime of murdering children, dreams of flying away (before giving up suicide and recovering his manhood); or Polymestor, mutilated by women and slaves. Flight: Aeschylus, *Supplices* 806; Euripides, *Ion* 1239.

36. Euripides, *Alcestis* 262–263 (image of the journey), 392, 394; *Suppliant Women* 1039, 1043, and 1017; *Hippolytus* 828–829.

37. Sophocles, *Ajax* 815 and 833. Lycophron (*Alexandra* 466) will also talk of *pēdēma.*

38. Aristotle, *Politics* I.13.1260a30, after Sophocles, *Ajax* 293 (it is the "eternal refrain" with which Ajax answers Tecmessa's questions); Euripides, *Heraclidae* 474–477.

39. Sophocles, *Trachiniae, Antigone, Oedipus Tyrannus* 1073–75 (with the remarks of Jebb on *siōpē* and its difference from *sigē*).

40. *Hippolytus* 828, *Trachiniae* 881 (*diēistōsen* is derived from *aistos,* invisible). Much could be made of the play between seeing and looking in the account of Deianira's death.

41. On the bolted interior and the opening of the doors, see *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1261–62 and *Hippolytus* 782, 793, 808, and 825 (note the use of the verb *chalan* in connection with the opening of the bolts, a verb that in *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1266 describes the unknotting of Jocasta's rope).

42. *Antigone* 1293 (and 1295, 1299). On *mychos,* the innermost cavity of the house, and the word's relation to femininity, see J.-P. Vernant, "Hestia-Hermes," in *Mythe et pensée chez les grecs,* I (Paris: François Maspéro, 1971), 152. In this connection one will note with Emily Vermeule (*Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry,* Berkeley and London:

University of California Press, 1979, pp. 167–169) that the death of women, being always implicitly eroticized, is drawn to the hollow and the deep.

43. Note that Phaedra is no longer named. When they talk of her corpse, Theseus and Hippolytus talk of "that woman" (958) or use the word *sōma* (1009).

44. It is not certain that this was in fact the case, and a controversy rages on this death, as on many deaths in tragedy. See, for example, A. M. Dale, "Seen and Unseen on the Greek Stage," in *Collected Papers,* ed. T. B. L. Webster and E. G. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 120–121; and C. P. Gardiner, "The Staging of the Death of Ajax," *Classical Journal,* 75 (1979), 10–14.

45. The body of the hero: *Ajax* 915–919, 992–993, 1001, 1003–4. The body of the warrior fallen in battle is, on the contrary, "noble": cf. J.-P. Vernant, "La belle mort et le cadavre outragé," in *La mort, les morts dans les sociétés anciennes,* ed. G. Gnoli and J.-P. Vernant (Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 45–76.

46. Alcestis dies onstage: 397–398. From 606 the funeral convoy is ready, but the intervention of the old father of Admetus leads to the setting up of a *prothesis* (between 608 and 740; see also 1012).

47. The most obvious case is that of Alcestis, who pursues conjugal devotion to the point of dying in her husband's place. Euripides' text uses many prepositions (*pro, hyper, peri* or *anti*) to express this exaggerated version of marital exchange: *Alcestis* 18, 37, 155, 178, 282–283, 284, 433–434, 460–463, 620, 682, 698, 1002. In this assemblage of women who die for men, Leda, who died for her daughter, is an exception, which one should perhaps link up with the theme of Demeter and Kore in the *Helen.*

48. Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 913; Euripides, *Alcestis* 175, 187, and 248–249; *Suppliant Women* 980 (see 1022: the *thalamos* of Persephone). *Thalamos* and marriage: see, for example, V. Magnien, "Le mariage chez les grecs anciens. L'initiation nuptiale," *L'Antiquité Classique,* 5 (1936), 115–117.

49. See Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 918–922, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1242–43, 1249; also Euripides, *Alcestis* 175, 177, 183, 186–188, 249.

50. *Odyssey* XI.278: Epicaste attaches the rope *aph' hypsēloio melathrou;* Euripides, *Hippolytus* 769–770: *teramnon apo nymphidiōn. Melathron,* rooftree: R. Martin, "Le palais d'Ulysse et les inscriptions de Delos," in *Recueil Plassart* (Paris, 1976), pp. 126–129 (with references); *melathron* as metonymy of the palace: *Iliad* II.414, *Odyssey* XVII.150; *melathron* as metonymy of the nuptial abode: Euripides, *Iphigenia in*

Tauris 375–376. *Melathron* and the husband: Sappho, fr. 111 Campbell (with the translation of D. A. Campbell in *Greek Lyric,* Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

51. Thus Admetus invites Alcestis to wait for him in Hades to "live with him there": Euripides, *Alcestis* 364. Furthermore, he at the same time expresses the normally feminine wish to lie at Alcestis' side (366, 897–902).

52. Aeschylus, *Choephoroe* 905–907, also 894–895 and 979 (Clytemnestra); *Agamemnon* 1441–47 (Cassandra, who indeed accepted this "dying with": *Agamemnon* 1139 and 1313–14).

53. I am alluding to the *Palinodia* by which the poet Stesichorus, after having like Homer "spoken ill" of Helen, substituted a phantom for the adulterous woman, which followed Paris to Troy. Meanwhile the real Helen, a model of virtue, spent the duration of the Trojan War in Egypt. Pledge to die: Euripides, *Helen* 837, a declaration echoed by Menelaus in 985–986.

54. Joint tomb: Euripides, *Suppliant Women* 1002–3; *synthanein:* 1007, 1040, 1063 (1071); union of bodies: 1019–21.

55. *Phoenissae* 1458–59 (*en toisi philtatois*); in 1578 she falls *amphi teknoisi* ("among" or "around" her sons).

56. I borrow this expression from an article by C. Nancy, "Euripide et le parti des femmes," in *La femme dans les sociétés antiques,* ed. E. Lévy (Strasbourg: Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg, 1983).

57. The best (*aristē, esthlē, philtatē*) of women: Euripides, *Alcestis* 83–85, 151–152, 200, 231, 235–236, 241–242, etc.; the last word: 391; death accepted: 17 (*thelein,* verb of the hoplite imperative; cf. 155); glorious death: 150 (see 157 and 453–454); boldness: 462, 623–624 and 741; nobility: 742, 994.

58. Virility, glory, and boldness: Euripides, *Suppliant Women* 987, 1013, 1014–16, 1055 (*kleinon*), 1059, 1067; the nuptial/funeral adornment of Evadne: 1055; beyond femininity: 1062–63; this side of virility: 1075. Other examples of feminine glory in Euripides: *Helen* 302, *Hecuba* 1282–83.

59. I have expanded on this in "La gloire et la mort d'une femme," *Sorcières,* 18 (1979), 51–57.

II. The Pure Blood of Virgins

1. *Antigone* 773, 780. On the similarities and differences between the killing of Antigone and that of the Vestal *incesta,* I refer to a study by Augusto Fraschetti, not yet published.

2. For *sphazō,* see chap. I, note 22. *Thyō* and its derivatives: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 214–215, 224–225, 235–241, 1417; Sophocles, *Electra* 531–532, 572–573. *Phonos* and *phoneuō: Iphigenia in Aulis* 512, 939, and, above all, 1317–18; Clytemnestra in this play always describes the sacrifice of Iphigenia as an execution (*ktanō*). Note that in Aeschylus criticism is heard from every side, despite the use of the verb *thyō*—but the sacrifice will rebound against Agamemnon, "sacrificed" by Clytemnestra (*Agamemnon* 1503).

3. See the work of J.-L. Durand on the Bouphonia (especially "Le corps du délit," *Communications,* 26 [1977], 46–61); also, on the staging of sacrifice, the remarks of J.-P. Vernant, "Sacrifice et mise à mort dans la *thusia* grecque," in *Le sacrifice dans l'antiquité,* Entretiens de la Fondations Hardt, vol. 27 (Vandoeuvres-Geneva, 1981), 1–18 and 22.

4. Sacrifice was not *shown* to the spectators, but from the point of view of the *logos* it was submitted to no censure, and the messengers gave long and detailed accounts. One finds, at the level of discourse, what J.-L. Durand remarked about figurative representations, that "human sacrifice is pleasurable to contemplate if projected in imagination" ("Bêtes grecques," in *La cuisine du sacrifice,* p. 138). On human sacrifice as fiction, see also the remarks of A. Henrichs, "Human Sacrifice in Greek Religion: Three Case Studies," in *Le sacrifice dans l'antiquité,* pp. 195–235.

5. *Parthenos* and war: J.-P. Vernant, "City-State Warfare," in *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 24. Shedding the blood of one girl to save the community of *andres:* the reasoning is explicit in the fragment of Euripides' *Erechtheus,* quoted by Lycurgus (*Against Leocrates* 100.22–39); see Loraux, "Le lit, la guerre," pp. 42–43.

6. Euripides, *Hecuba* 525–527, 544: *lektoi t' Achaiōn ekkritoi neaniai, logades.* All the *parthenoi* sacrificed were not called Polycrites ("the much-chosen": cf. W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual,* Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1979, p. 73), but all were "chosen."

7. Euripides, *Hecuba* 537 (*akraiphnes haim'*), *Iphigenia in Aulis* 1574 (*achranton haima*). Although purity of blood is metonymic with purity of the virgin, Pausanias' account about the daughter of Aristodamus dispenses with this metonymy, and it is the virgin due for sacrifice who is called *achrantos,* pure (IV.9.4). *Chrainō:* touch, hence defile . . .

8. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 232 and 1414–16 (which in the logic of the *Oresteia* one should compare with the *Eumenides* 450: the cycle of

Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman

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