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Tragedy and the Politics of Containment

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If I tell my friends and colleagues that I am writing on pornography in Greek tragedy, the response is often "What pornography?" or "Where is it?" Obviously, by contemporary standards, there is none. But while it would be a mistake to conflate the theater of Dionysus and the 42nd Street movie houses, the *agora* and the bathhouses of New York City, the continuity between the two periods nonetheless bears analysis—there is a clear connection between the ideology and beliefs about sexuality then and now (Sedgwick 1985; duBois 1988). And part of this continuity derives from the status of the tragic myths and the status of tragedy itself. For tragedy is one of the founding texts of Western humanism, and simultaneously the place par excellence where the masculine has been read as universal.

We do well to remind ourselves that tragedy was a popular art form, more like film or TV in its accessibility, and that it developed at a particular time, in a particular place: fifth-century Athens after the Persian Wars. Let us also remember that although issues of gender are central themes, the genre was predominantly male—male actors, male poets, and possibly an all-male audience. Middle- and upper-class women lived a sequestered existence. As Pericles' famous statement puts it: "Your greatest glory is not to be inferior to what god has made you, and the greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticizing you" (2.45.2). In short, the transcendent "human" heroes of tragedy are gendered male and must be understood in that way. Such an emphasis on masculinity may underplay signs of female agency and may consequently reinscribe tragedy's elimination of the female subject. But to focus instead on gaps, contradictions, and female resistance (de Lauretis 1984: 29) is overly

optimistic. For these plays did serve as an apparatus to construct gender, in Teresa de Lauretis's sense of a "technology of gender," in their own day. In fact, in most of the extant texts, female strength is associated with what we might call a male anxiety to control it; on the whole, these dramas achieve closure by foreclosing feminine resistance where it has erupted (Zeitlin 1985a: 81). Moreover, the scholarly tradition and universalizing performances have served to reinforce that gender hierarchy in succeeding centuries.

Feminist theorizing about pornography can help us to analyze tragedy's formation of sex difference and sex inequality. The etymology of the word *pornography*—from *pornê* and *graphê*, depiction of whores—suggests that we should consider it in terms of both content and form. If we focus on the *pornê* component, we find ourselves emphasizing what pornography is *about*. In the current feminist debate, there seem to be two contenders in this division: sex and violence. Theorists like Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon emphasize the coincidence, not the divergence, of these two. MacKinnon holds that the subordination of women through the representation of violence *is* sex for men (1989; 1987: 86–87, 160–61, 172–73). Dworkin takes seriously the sexuality implicit in the etymology and consequently sees a continuity between past and present: "Contemporary pornography strictly and literally conforms to the word's root meaning: the graphic depiction of vile whores, or, in our language, sluts, cows (as in: sexual cattle, sexual chattel), cunts. The word has not changed its meaning and the genre is not misnamed" (1981: 200). The antipornography movement has taken the position that real women are being hurt in the production and reception of current pornographic representations; their argument focuses on the "object" imitated and on the specific ways in which women are objectified in the process. For my purposes, it will be helpful to combine this sense of object with a more literary one, using the terminology of Aristotle's *Poetics*. In this context, the plot of a play—what happens—constitutes the object, for it is in the plot that tragedy imitates an action (and that is what tragedy is, according to Aristotle).

Another branch of the discourse focuses on the *graphê*, drawing attention to pornography's status as representation: pornography resides not in the real world but in texts (or pictures). Susanne Kappeler argues that "pornography, like much other public imaging, is constructed for male viewing." It creates the male as subject and the female as object or victim (1986: 32, 51–53). This form of generalization risks obscuring important distinctions between "hard-core" pornography depicting violence against women, in which real women are used in the making of the "art," and other forms of representation under patriarchal conditions of production. But it performs an important task precisely in connecting pornography to those other forms of representation, most particularly film, and in connecting theory about pornography to semiotic/psychoanalytic work on film, which questions the way in which the spectator is engendered by the experience of watching (de Lauretis 1984; E. Kaplan 1983).[1]

But there is yet a third approach which would emphasize the Aristotelian final cause: effect. Traditionally, pornography has been said to arouse the (male) viewer sexually; more recently, radical feminists have argued that pornography leads to violence against women. Does pornography stimulate men to enact in the real world

what they have seen in pictures? Or does it release those emotions harmlessly and effect a catharsis of them? That is, what is the relationship between representation and some referential reality? MacKinnon calls the catharsis or fantasy thesis a fantasy itself (1987: 190), and Dworkin similarly refuses to separate the representational from the material, rather seeing each as serving the other: "Woman as whore exists within the objective and real system of male sexual domination. The pornography itself is objective and real and central to the male sexual system" (1981: 200).

In one way or another, each aspect of this terrain—object, manner, and effect—is hotly contested, particularly regarding what one should do about pornography. Clearly, politics and aesthetics are related in this discourse, as they were in antiquity where art was held accountable to the social good and was meant to teach (as articulated, for example, by Aristotle and Aristophanes in *Frogs*). The pornography of our day is not separate from all other representational practices and technologies but is, as I hope to show, part of a spectrum of such practices. Advertising, film, and pornography share a structure of representation that can be argued to appear even in tragedy, which depicts neither nudity nor explicit sexuality, and where most violent action takes place offstage. As contemporary feminist theory points up, under male dominance and the hegemony of heterosexuality for women, there is currently ambiguity about and difficulty in distinguishing rape from intercourse (MacKinnon 1983b; 1987: 87–91). Similarly, under male dominance and the hegemony of heterosexuality for women, there is ambiguity about and difficulty in distinguishing representation of women from pornography. While we need to retain the distinctions, we need also to see the commonality. Behind MacKinnon's view of pornography per se stands a feminist theoretical position (1983a: 249), that the epistemological aspect of male power is the power to make its point of view seem like the truth (on tragedy and epistemology, see Zeitlin 1985a). Pornography and tragedy are two of the places where that epistemology is converted into ontology for women, where that knowing turns into being, where women are deprived of subjectivity.

We tend to overlook the more brutal aspects of tragedy, in part because we read the plays rather than seeing them, and because of a tradition that emphasizes the control exercised by the form, for example, in reporting rather than staging scenes of violence. Aristotle, however, gets to the heart of the matter when he asserts that tragedy takes the painful and renders it pleasurable: "Though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms for example of the lowest animals and of dead bodies" (*Poetics* III.4, 1448b, trans. McKeon). Aristotle believes that the enacted imitation is effective because it teaches the audience and because humans instinctively like to learn. However, let us not assume the humanness of the experience but rather put together violence and gender in the tragic genre. Let us ask what tragedy teaches the audience about women's sexuality, whom it empowers, and to whom it is pleasurable. It is my hypothesis that the ideal spectator identifies as if "it" were male, regardless of whether there were women in the actual audience. Moreover, what happens to the spectator is also what happens to the "speculator," for watching is central to theory (the Greek word *theôrein* means "to be a spectator"), and as Mary Ann Doane has said, "ways of looking are inevitably linked to ways of speculating, of theorizing . . . and, ultimately, to ways of representing oneself" (Doane 1987: 37). In this

pornographic structure of male subjectivity, what are the possibilities open to a female spectator?

Since each play is different, and since generalization has a flattening effect, we would be mistaken to seek every element presented in the same way in every play. But using the terms of the debate as I have outlined it, we do see certain recurring features that cohere into a pattern. In tragedy as in pornography, women are either desiring predators or passive victims (on these two models, see Kappeler 1986: 51, 90). Terri Marsh (in the Epilogue of this volume) turns her attention to the figure of the sacrificial maiden, while I will turn mine to those characters seen as having desire and acting on it. Their desire is represented as destructive of others and themselves; having disturbed the sexual hierarchy, they die like women—offstage, within their chambers (Loraux 1987: 20–21). The structure of the plays generally works to contain that destructive passion or will, so that in the end the audience is put into a subject relationship with the masculine protagonist (seen as a victim of women) (see Shaw 1975; Foley 1982). As I look at these plays, I will be taking women's sexuality as the object imitated and considering first how women's sexuality is constructed. Second, I ask whether the structure of representation and rhetoric creates a subject status for men, and object status for women. Finally, I will focus on the effect of the plays, inquiring whether they reproduce the pattern of domination in the audience—is there a space for a female spectator?

Sophocles' *Antigone* (442 B.C.E.) may serve as something of a paradigm for the ancient struggle between the sexes, in which hierarchy is sexualized and the subordinate position is marked as female. After a fatal battle between Oedipus's sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, Kreon has forbidden the burial of Polyneices, the aggressor. Antigone disobeys him and is sentenced to be buried alive in a cave. There she hangs herself, and her betrothed, Haemon, joins her in death by stabbing himself before the prophet Teiresias can persuade Kreon to have them released. After hearing the news, Eurydice (Haemon's mother and Kreon's wife) goes quietly to her own death. Even the virginal heroine is constituted as sexual; then she and the feminized male are exposed to view, so that the male spectator may learn a lesson. As he learns this lesson, he is taking artistic satisfaction in the spectacle, and in this way he consolidates his sense of self and morality from a pornographic experience.

While from Antigone's point of view the issue is one of contending laws—she believes that she enacted the gods' wish by burying her brother, even though she broke Kreon's law forbidding that burial—Kreon sees no such possibility of disagreement (639–80). He reduces her to her reproductive capacities and nullifies her subjectivity by asserting that there are other "furrows for his [Haemon's] plough" (569; see duBois 1988 on this metaphor). Kreon is an archetype of the phallocratic leader. From his point of view, the ruler is male, and the male is ruler. He is defensive about his rule and his masculinity: "I am no man and she the man instead if she can have this conquest without pain"; "No woman rules me while I live" (485, 525). He is anxious that his son honor and obey him (639–44) and calls him womanish or slave to a woman when he is "disloyal" (740, 746, 756). Kreon adheres to a division of responsibilities by age and sex; this hierarchy denies any other role to Antigone than that of mate, while she aspires to a spiritual and devotional role. Kreon sexualizes politics and eroticizes power: brutality is a civic

act designed to firm up his rule, but also explicitly sexual since he means to teach Antigone to be a woman (577–81).

Not only does he sexualize his opponent, but the male tyrant emerges as a maker of language and, I would argue, pornography (he writes the script within the play). A central choral ode (332–83) significantly links Kreon's position to the human subject position in the world. The song begins with the free productivity of earth, but universal man (*ho anthrôpos*) enters to control both earth and sea; the implicit masculinity becomes explicit when man (*anêr*) begins hunting and taking the products of each realm. This male subject then teaches himself the arts of language, city building, and law giving. Such symbolic, coded activities define the human, which through the language is exclusively male. The transformation of nature into culture is central and brought about by Man. In this song, the Chorus celebrates male subjectivity but with ominous misgivings. The colossus who strides across the earth is terrible and strange (*deinos*), and if he is not careful, having founded cities, he may end up without one, as the stranger (*unheimlich*, according to Heidegger [1959: 150–51]). Kreon treats women and his son as Man treats the products of earth and sea—he hunts them and traps them—and in so doing he creates disorder rather than order. His language and law ought to constitute civilization but instead confuse the properly separated realms by treating the live woman as if she were dead, putting her beneath the earth (1068ff.).

At the same time that the text reveals Kreon's error, it gives support to his worldview. First, the play, no less than Kreon, sexualizes Antigone by referring to her as the Bride of Hades (1205). This is no mere conflation of themes, nor does it simply suggest Greek initiation rituals (which would be invoked at marriage and funeral) and a change in status. Rather, it serves to give a strongly erotic character to this heroine, whose salient feature is nonetheless her virginity (Michelini 1987: 76–77). Her strength in action is set against her vulnerability to re-action; she is open to capture. She remains feminine, even though she challenges the masculine, and femininity is vulnerability (Loraux 1987: 65). Because she has been effaced, the messenger speech gives only two small details about Antigone, both of them sexualizing: she hangs herself by the neck, in her veil linen; Haemon's blood is on her white skin.[2] The veil evokes the virgin about to be married, the blood the blood of defloration. In this way, desires that are ambitious are made to seem erotic from the male point of view, and the issue in the end is between father and son (on erotic and ambitious fantasies, see Miller 1981: 40–41).

Second, although Kreon has made a resounding error, for which he will pay dearly, it is nonetheless possible to read this play with sympathy for him, as is clear from Heidegger's concern for the stranger.[3] The structure of the play leaves him standing, the center of our attention, as a result of which there have been long debates about whose tragedy this is, particularly from those who are in search of *the* tragic hero of any given play.[4] He does not pay for his sadism with the loss of our attention. Antigone, however, slowly fades out. Her subjectivity stands out most sharply in the middle of the play when she has committed her act of defiance and defends it to Kreon and the Chorus. From this high point, alluded to by Haemon when he says that she deserves golden honor for her glorious deeds (695, 699), she enters into eclipse. She veers from her original stance, regretting that she is prevented from marrying (916–20) and pointing out that she would not have done what she did under any other circumstances; thus, burial is not an absolute duty but a relative one (904–15). Critics have even gone so far as to eliminate these troubling lines, so little do they seem to fit in with her character (Jebb 1971, ad loc. and 258–63), but they serve as a reminder, if we need one, that Sophocles does not write with a feminist agenda. Indeed, Antigone is gradually displaced as the tragic center; in the end the focus is on Kreon and his tragic experience.

Kreon is the masculine principle writ large, with all of its rigidity and emphasis on unity. He asserts control, condemns his son as a woman, and sexualizes the woman who opposes him. Although he fails and must acknowledge that he too is part of a script, one written for him by the gods, the play subtly supports his position. The structure of representation uses Antigone to make a lesson for men about their relationship to the divine; character/author and audience are put into relation through the objectified woman. In the end, we focus on the male protagonist in his suffering and his life as the stranger, as predicted by the ode, instead of the suffering of those controlled by him in his effort to establish his rule.

Antigone strives to act in conscience; in this she is unique among the active women I will consider. But surprisingly, the play has much in common with others centering in more typical ways on female desire and the more typically sexual figures, such as Clytemnestra, Deianeira, Phaedra, and Medea. Each is a mature woman, a wife and mother, and each is represented as the subject of desire, a desire that has excessive qualities and causes male suffering before leading to the death or suffering of the woman in question.[5] As Loraux (1981b, 1987) and Zeitlin (1985a, 1985b) have pointed out, male suffering is often then coded as female, but far from accepting this as necessary, natural, or freeing for the man, I see it as a sign of male dominance. Throughout these plays, gender boundaries seem to shift, not because the genre takes pleasure in undecidability but rather to restore the hierarchy by destroying the mother. When a woman becomes a subject, all hell breaks loose. As Teresa de Lauretis puts it, "The woman cannot transform the codes, she can only transgress them, make trouble, provoke, pervert, turn the representation into a trap" (1984: 35). In fact, I would challenge the illusion of feminine subjectivity and ask that we remain alert to the sex of the actor, and to the desire of the author/myth put into play in the fabrication of these "women."

One can hardly discuss sexual desire in antiquity without mentioning Clytemnestra—treated by all the tragedians but at greatest length by Aeschylus in the *Oresteia*. This trilogy (458 B.C.E.) tells the story of the house of Atreus beginning with the return of Agamemnon from Troy and his murder by Clytemnestra, followed by Electra and Orestes' matricide at the behest of Apollo, and culminating in the exoneration of Orestes at a trial in Athens, over which Athena presides.

As in *Antigone*, so here the gender hierarchy is at risk (N. Rabinowitz 1976; Zeitlin 1978). Clytemnestra has been ruling in Agamemnon's absence, and the Chorus of the city's elders mistrusts that power in a woman; there is a clear conflict between the queen and these old men. The Watchman she has herself employed speaks of her authority and her "man-counseling heart" (*androboulon kear*, 10–11), raising a fundamental question about whether a woman can and should rule, or whether this woman is not masculine by virtue of ruling. Clytemnestra is repre-

sented as straddling the positions of Kreon and Antigone—she shares Kreon's desire for rule, his arrogance, and pornographic tendencies, but the structure renders her a victim like Antigone, one who is, moreover, sexualized in order to be killed. While Kreon is punished, he is still a man acting like a man; the woman acting like a man seems twisted, and her perversity appears to justify her death.

In *Antigone*, the human (which initially seems to include woman) is the strangest thing, taming the earth and the sea; the *Oresteia* offers this formulation: "the earth and sea nurture strange echoes of fearful things, and send forth monsters" (*LB* 585–89), but male and female are explicitly distinguished. Man (*anêr*) has an "overdaring will" (*hupertolmon phronêma*), while woman is characterized by love that is no love (*aperôtos erôs*), which wins out over wedded union (594–601). In the subsequent lines, Clytemnestra is compared to the Lemnian women, who killed all their husbands. That is the risk that such a woman poses. Patriarchy must bring her under control.

Throughout antiquity Clytemnestra was characterized by infidelity; the *Odyssey* contrasts her with Penelope, and Agamemnon's fate serves as a warning to Odysseus to be wary of women. The *Oresteia* displays and uses her sexual drive, making her explicitly lascivious in several ways. First, she is jealous of Cassandra and kills her as well as Agamemnon. Second, she has a lover of her own, Aegisthus. Third, she takes sexual pleasure in the murder: Agamemnon's blood makes her rejoice like a plant in the dew (1390–92), and Cassandra's death adds an extra "dainty" to the luxury of her bed (1446–47). If in the rhetoric of *Antigone* death is made marriage, in the rhetoric of Clytemnestra murder is made erotic.

The second play of the trilogy shows the successful vengeance of the children. What does it take for the son (and daughter) to plot the murder of their mother? Her loss of status as parent, which logically follows from her sexual activity. Orestes and Electra emphasize the concupiscence of this woman (a pattern in Sophocles and Euripides as well) and find that her motherhood was lacking in contrast to her passion; they believe that she sold them for Aegisthus. Since the two roles, lover and mother, cannot coexist, her original motive—vengeance for Iphigenia—is forgotten in her characterization as adulterous queen. Clytemnestra offers her breast, a metonym for the female body in roles of lover and mother (compare Polyxena's breast as object of desire in *Hekabe*), as evidence that she gave suck, but a long speech by Orestes' Nurse negates that claim. Consequently, the audience is prepared to support Orestes when he rejects her bid for pity and carries out his oath to Apollo and his father (896–908).

The *Odyssey* version of Agamemnon's homecoming included his death and Orestes' vengeance; Aeschylus's rhetoric goes beyond that point, taking female power and rendering it repellent. The maternal here comes into the orbit of the "abject" (Kristeva 1982), culturally marginal and requiring that the subject control it. Not only is she identified with monsters (Skylla and Medusa), but once dead she is reduced to a shadow, a specter, trying to arouse the Furies, goddesses of maternal revenge. These Erinyes, snaky females—phallic, mothers of no man, daughters of Night by herself—heighten the audience's sense of disgust at Clytemnestra. Vile liquids flow from their eyes, and the Pythia (a priestess of Apollo) enacts an appropriate reaction when she runs from them in horror (see now Carson 1990).

Aeschylus's description of the Furies is echoed in Kristeva's definition of the abject ("A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly acrid smell of sweat, of decay . . . refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live," 1982: 3); the hero defines the border and rejects identification with the mother. Similarly, the play wards off danger from the city, by making the female serve the male—as maiden, woman, and crone. First, Iphigenia was sacrificed by Agamemnon to satisfy the crowd and his own war lust. Second, Clytemnestra's sexuality and power, her connection to the earth and the forces of blood, lose force in comparison with language, oaths, and marriage (duBois 1988: 70–71, on reproductive power of Clytemnestra). The sexual Clytemnestra gives way to the asexual Athena in the progress of the trilogy; the mother gives way to the father. Finally, this warrior goddess cleans up the Erinyes. The Pythia, who opens the last play, is an old woman under the control of a young god, speaking his words; even so, the Erinyes come under the control of the figures of light and *only speak their words*. Masculinity triumphs first when Orestes acts on Apollo's orders, and later when Apollo steps in to assert full rights of parenthood for the father, leaving the mother no longer capable (as were Earth and Night) of reproducing by herself but reduced to the nurse for the seed supplied by the father. Orestes' rule and status as speaking subject are firmly established, and Apollo's voice rings out in contrast to the mutterings of the Furies.

The *Oresteia* inscribes the woman as *pornê*, focusing on her sexuality in such a way as to make it seem perverse. The action makes this sexualized woman suffer for her crime; the effect is to eliminate sympathy for her and to justify her murder out of fear of that perversion. The audience is not meant to identify with Clytemnestra or the repulsive Furies but with the masculine position of subjectivity. Clytemnestra's strength could be awe-inspiring—did she not defend her daughter and oppose the senseless killing at Troy?—but not in a culture where femininity is a force to be abjected and contained either in the house or under the city.

Antigone and Clytemnestra challenge the gender hierarchy and are murdered; their texts serve to strengthen male subjectivity. Another group of females are, like Clytemnestra, defined as sexual beings, but they put themselves to death. The suicides share a form of incarceration with Antigone and the Furies, for they typically exit quietly to take their lives within doors, in the bridal chamber. These deaths are pornographic to the extent that they are gratuitous, not required by the plot, or even the myth, and are used to constitute the internal and external male viewer as a subject. Because Clytemnestra is delineated as a sadist, arranging for her own sexual pleasure in the violent death of Cassandra, she pays with her life. But no one pays for the rhetorical gain of these gratuitous deaths. Take, for example, Eurydice and Jocasta, who go in similar ways. The death of Eurydice in *Antigone* results from the Messenger's speech; his callous "why should I make it soft for you?" (1194) and his crude inattention to her silence mark his cruelty. But, in addition, the play makes its own use of her wordless disappearance and her suicide to complete Kreon's suffering.

The death of Jocasta is more sexual, more like what we associate with pornography, since *Oedipus* continually mixes the erotic with the deathly, notably when she (like Antigone, Alcestis, Deianeira) addresses her marriage bed. Like her sister-in-law Eurydice, Jocasta goes silently off stage; we only find her again when the

Messenger's narration re-presents Oedipus violently opening the doors of her room. Oedipus's anger at Jocasta suggests that he thinks her responsible for what has happened; he intends to kill her even after all they have been through. His words reduce her to her body, and her body to the sexual (field of double sowing). The specularization of Jocasta is overt: like the victim in pornography, she is displayed to viewers. Through her suicide she becomes a silent body for their perusal; by the play's verbal depiction of her hanging while they look, she has become an object of their and our gaze. She is the object of violence when Oedipus forcibly enters her room, and then an object for his use when he takes her brooches—a feminine adornment, articles of dress that hold her robes together—and blinds himself with them. Does he not humiliate her by ripping them from her corpse?

The representation of Jocasta's violation is a form of pornography, and it contributes to the creation of masculine subjectivity. She herself is another example of the marginalized and abjected maternal figure: "Jocasta is *miasma* and *agos*—that goes without saying. But Oedipus alone is *pharmakos*. He knows and bounds the mythic universe constituted by the question of (sexual) difference and preoccupied with the separation of the two powers: reproduction/production, feminine/ masculine" (Kristeva 1982: 85–86). Oedipus is the subject created by the discourse, and, of course, attention has remained on him for centuries. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus merely lives on with the knowledge that he has gained with such difficulty, but in the tradition that we have inherited, he becomes a hero of a cult at Colonus and a culture hero standing for the human condition (even in some feminist criticism).

Female desire is essential to the plots of *The Women of Trachis* (421–416?) and *Hippolytos* (428). Each picks up on the monstrosity we can see in Clytemnestra, for instance, and reaffirms masculine subjectivity by controlling that monstrous desire. Deianeira in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* is the daughter of Oeneus and the wife of Heracles. Heracles, having been given up for dead, has just come home with many prisoners, one of them the beautiful Iole for whom he waged an entire war. Deianeira fears to lose her husband if she has to share him with the young woman, and so she anoints a robe with a "love potion" she got from the centaur, Nessus. The robe kills Heracles, who curses her and commands his son Hyllos to marry his intended concubine Iole. Deianeira is explicitly the woman at the boundary, depicted as looking on from the sidelines as Heracles saved her from marriage to the river Achelôos and from attack by the Centaur. Heracles is the hero who goes out in quest.

Deianeira is a prototypical woman in an economy that exchanges women; she, with her potentially active sexuality, imports a danger to the house, and yet that sexual capacity is crucial for the production of heirs. When she waits, she is the perfect wife, but when she departs from that role, going out herself (albeit through intermediaries), she destroys. The text clearly defines the female as destructive, since Deianeira's attempt to protect her marriage (inadvertently) kills Heracles. The language suggests that her sexuality per se destroys, for the inner regions (*mukhois*) where the potion was kept away from the light can also stand for the recesses of the body (duBois 1982: 95–106; 1988: 155). She and her genitals become a mediator for Heracles' destruction (duBois 1988: 155); he is killed because he cannot avoid her kind gift, the caress of the robe she offers him.

The representation of female desire as poisonous coexists with the representation of Heracles' pain as feminine (Loraux 1981b).[6] To suffer is to suffer like a woman (his death pangs are like birth pangs), for to be weak is to be womanish (compare Kreon, and the piteousness of Agamemnon's murder by a woman in the *Oresteia*). This play of sexual opposites is continued by the manliness with which Deianeira kills herself: with the sword, not the noose (Loraux 1987). Then, too, Deianeira is replacing Heracles at the play's opening by being in charge in his absence, as is pointed up by the quarrel between the messengers about what they owe her in the way of information (405–7).

Part of the blurring of cultural boundaries may occur when Deianeira gazes on Iole (306–13), the object of Heracles' desire. Iole is a vulnerable, pathetic, and noble young woman; because she is so clearly an object (of the war and of the gaze), she represents one pole of female experience. Deianeira seems to represent another, that of the mature wife, regent in her husband's absence. The irony of the play lies in that, although Deianeira thinks that she is pitying an other whose fate is different from hers (312–13), they turn out to be the same. She is not above Iole but is rather about to be displaced by her, for she has lost her status as desired object. In her sympathetic identification with Iole, we can see a doubling—two stages of women's lives are represented simultaneously. Just as Deianeira was at one time the prize sought by Nessus and the river Achelôos and rescued by Heracles, passive in her horror of sexuality, she will be turned into an object once again, for the text reestablishes a hierarchy of gender.

The play accomplishes its restoration of the gender hierarchy by constructing Deianeira as a jealous subject, so that she is rendered destructive of others, consequently the object of her son's hatred, and finally self-destructive. Not only the plot but also the discourse objectifies Deianeira. In the representation of her, her borderline status is stressed and controlled by various male subjects. First, Hyllos focuses on her as a hateful object. He wishes he were not her son (734–37). In the course of his speech she is doubly removed; she is mentioned in a description of the sufferings of Heracles, through *his* hatred of her and his marriage bed (791–92). Hyllos believes that Deianeira deserves to be cursed since she has thrown off all law and has killed the best of men (809–12). Silent as Iole, she becomes the vessel receiving this torrent of abuse, with no personhood, merely agency in Heracles' death. When the Chorus asks why she creeps off, they use a word appropriate to nonhumans, infants, and animals (*apherpeis*, 813). Hyllos agrees with the implication, suggesting that she is unimportant with his "let her creep" and his continued attack.

Second, she is objectified through the narrative representation of her death. After Deianeira's exit, she is once again the object of discourse of others, since the Nurse shadows her (914), observes her, and recounts what she does in the privacy of her quarters. She is not supposed to be a witness, and thus is intruding on Deianeira's space.[7] The narrated scene itself focuses on Deianeira's nostalgia for the place of *erôs* and procreation, the wedding bed; it therefore heightens the link between sexuality and death.[8] The pornographic quality inheres in her objectification and victimization, and the fact that her sex kills her.

As the effect of pornographic representation is to solidify relationships between male subjects, so here the ending unites men and eliminates the female almost

entirely as subject. The prolonged description of Heracles' death may have rendered suffering feminine (1075), but he conquers in his combat with death and emerges a victor, able to assert his will over his son. The conclusion to the play establishes a male dyad, replacing the mother-son pair that dominates the play's beginning. Father and son are brought together by the woman, whose function is to provide heirs; she cannot possess the phallus but is necessary to pass it from father to son (Rubin 1975). At the base of patriarchy is the murder of the mother (Irigaray 1981: 16), and Hyllos may be said to kill his mother, since his hateful speech is the immediate cause of her suicide; he moves from his mother to his father, just as the structure of the play moves from mother-son couple to father-son-woman triangle. The woman is split into mother/wife, and both are silent displays, the ground on which the male child can come of age; his incestuous desires are displaced onto this woman, who is marriageable. He replaces his father and becomes a man; but being a man entails living in his father's shadow and marrying the woman he now believes responsible for his mother's death (1233–34). Obedience is the father's law. It is striking that the Chorus of maidens is silent from the entry of Heracles; the focus is now on the father and son and their bond through the exchange of this new (yet old) woman. The circulation begins again.

Drama is in its linguistic roots a doing, and this play does something to women and gender. No matter how much she wanted to be virtuous, Deianeira was dangerous; she resisted the double standard according to which she should have accepted Iole under her blanket. She is replaced by a totally objectified younger woman: Iole never speaks but is looked at and described. In the new attention to men, the man in the audience forgets about Deianeira and what the male traffic in women does to her subjectivity; if there were a woman in the audience, what position of subjectivity would be possible for her? There are only speaking men represented. Thus are pornographic structures of representation, tragedy, and the traffic in women mutually reinforcing.

These issues are even more complex when we turn to Euripides, one who seems the most interested in emotion of the three tragedians and, perhaps for that reason, in women. In fact, his attitude to women has been debated since antiquity. We might even say that he was thought to be a pornographer, for he was attacked by the women in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousai* for telling the sexual secrets of women, forgetting Penelope and making all women like Phaedra, while Aeschylus in *Frogs* accuses him of "making whores" (*epoioun pornas*, 1043). Is *pornopoeia* so different from pornography? Attacks on particular women in *Antigone* and *Women of Trachis* here become generalized; in *Hippolytos* and *Medea* women's sexual activity elicits misogyny from men.

As we saw above, Phaedra is one of the whores Euripides is accused of having portrayed, thereby giving women a bad name. Froma Zeitlin has suggested that the extant version is not the play in which he did so (Zeitlin 1981: 320n), that it is rather a palinode, taking back that earlier vilification. Nonetheless, Phaedra's desire is rendered whorish and despicable to herself and to the audience. Since I have worked out elsewhere the relationship between Phaedra's speech and sexuality (N. Rabinowitz 1987; 1989), I will only mention here that her speech and text threaten Hippolytos and Theseus, and her silence or displacement is required for their harmonious reunion at the play's end.

If we turn to the depiction of Phaedra and female sexuality, we see an interesting confluence: she is objectified at the same time that she is asserted as the subject of desire. Phaedra is first presented as an object for the Chorus's and the audience's desire to know. While she is still offstage, the Chorus and Nurse discuss her physical malady at length, because they are curious about her. Like Deianeira, Phaedra is safe while she is inside, closed up. But the women who speculate on her illness will not leave her be; they open her to our view. This intrusion is a foreshadowing of the force the Nurse will use to pry loose her secret, and thus a foreshadowing of disaster to come. For if this subjected woman should become a subject—speak and act—there is danger for the men gazing at her.

When she is brought onstage, she is still passive, dependent on the Nurse to perform simple actions for her. She then goes fully into a hysterical state, which is erotic in tone and content. Although she is very strongly inscribed as the object of view, the Nurse's uncomprehending interrogation reveals that she is also the subject of desire. Phaedra, ringed about with spectators horrified at her utterances, is like a woman out of nineteenth-century studies of hysteria, like a pornographic image of a woman thrashing about in the throes of hysteria. Madness can be exciting in a woman—look at the role of Cassandra in *Trojan Women*—when she is out of her mind with desire, because she is a victim to be pitied. At the same time, the hysteric may pose a threat, because she might act on her fantasies. But as Catherine Clément points out in *The Newly Born Woman* (Cixous and Clément 1986), it is not much of a threat, for the masculine order will soon close over her head. In the case of Phaedra we can see this: her Nurse finds her discourse alarming because inappropriate, and when she returns to "herself" she is ashamed. Representation of the hysteric so that the masculine audience can take pleasure and see her as acting for him effectively takes her desire away from her and is one mechanism of control. It is interesting in this connection that Euripides only gives Phaedra images for her desire that are imitations of Hippolytos's actions. Let us not forget who creates Phaedra and enacts her. In her hysteria, we have a man in woman's dress pretending to be a woman longing to be the man she loves, longing to be like him, longing to be active. Aphrodite tells us that Phaedra fell in love with Hippolytos while looking at him; that gaze is not hers by rights, and the text takes it away from her.

Hippolytos explicitly makes female desire destructive, through Phaedra's deceitful text. As a result, both sexual and linguistic subjectivity are denied to her. Phaedra at first attempts to exert her will in the negative, by *not* speaking, *not* eating, so that she can peacefully slip from existence. When the Nurse approaches Hippolytos and upsets that plan, she moves into action and attempts to write her own story. But having actively desired Hippolytos, she writes a story of rape; she oscillates between the two pornographic scenarios, that of predator or that of victim, the only ones available to her; the traffic in women leaves no other position, and she can only be victorious by representing herself as a victim of male sexual drives.

The texts I have examined link female erotic desire to female desire for vengeance, which results in the victimization and pornographic representation of the male hero. In these cases (Clytemnestra/Agamemnon, Deianeira/Heracles, Phaedra/Hippolytos), the woman is not only an object set forth for the audience's viewing but the internal cause of another violent event. Like Heracles, in becoming a passive victim, Hippolytos shares the experience of the female (Loraux 1981b).

Phaedra and Hippolytos exchange places, imitate each other (Zeitlin 1985b; Loraux 1981b), and share the role of object in the pornographic plot; she is victimized by Aphrodite and Euripides, he by Phaedra and Theseus as well. As a young man, he too is subjected to the authority of the adult but becomes womanish in the process.[9] I have argued elsewhere that Theseus's violence toward his son may echo homosexual initiation rituals; surely the bull and horses are phallic in their own right (N. Rabinowitz 1989). The graphic description imitates and stands in place of that very violence (1173–1254); it is protracted, in order to wring out the last drop of pity and fear (or is it pleasure?) from the audience.

Such a strategy has the effect of removing audience sympathy from the "woman" who is responsible, at the same time as it justifies male hatred of women and control over them. In a striking mirroring of Heracles' farewell to Hyllos, the play moves to a father-son pietà; the men come together at the expense of the mother. The victimized men (unlike the women) survive their suffering and come onstage; as a result, audience pleasure at closure comes from the male reunion and settling of affairs. Heracles' pain resolves into the scene with Hyllos, and Hyllos's marriage to Iole; Hippolytos's pain resolves into his embrace of his father and a marriage cult that his patron Artemis promises in his honor. If we turn our attention to the intended effect of the plays, we see that just as the woman is eliminated by the father-son dyad in the action, so woman is displaced from the audience by the structure of its experience. Hippolytos suffers and is praised so extensively that it is impossible for the audience to admire Phaedra. She has failed to uphold her own noble standards of action and lowers herself by seeking vengeance. Hippolytos's misogynistic attack in which he calls woman a counterfeit coin (617) seems corroborated by her deceit. Given that fall from grace and the graciousness of the father-son scene, identification would have to be with this male pair. Texts do their cultural work in large part by their manipulation of the audience's desires. *Hippolytos* then combines a representation of female desire as vindictive and destructive, with the control of that desire by displacing the female from subjectivity. Male horror at female sexual activity is thus alleviated by a pornographic strategy that solidifies male subjectivity and the bond between men, shoring up the patriarchal men's club.

It is time now to turn to one last representation of female desire, Euripides' *Medea* (431 B.C.E.). Medea is like the other figures grouped here, in that she is sexual and faces a young rival (compare Clytemnestra, Deianeira), and she too kills (compare Clytemnestra, Deianeira, and Phaedra). Unlike them, she does not pay with her life. She was renowned in Athens for enabling Aegeus to have children; she was also well known for her role in the story of Jason and the Argonauts. Euripides' play takes place after the heroic episodes (her taming of the fire-breathing bulls and taking of the Golden Fleece, her murder of her brother and Jason's uncle), when Jason is about to forsake her and their children and marry the ruler's daughter in Corinth. As soon as Aegeus arrives, promising her safe haven in Athens, Medea arranges for her children to carry a poisoned robe to the princess, killing her and her father. She then murders the children and escapes in the dragon-drawn chariot sent by Helios.

The femaleness of sexual desire and the sexual desire of women are accepted by this text, as by *Hippolytos*. First, Medea's passion for Jason is asserted as a cause of the action. The Nurse, who takes her mistress's part throughout, says, "In Colchis she acted out of a heart (*thumos*) burning with desire for Jason" (8). Jason goes farther: since Aphrodite alone was responsible for all that Medea did for him, he therefore owes her nothing (520–31). Although Medea is in many ways exceptional—she is the granddaughter of Helios and endowed with magical powers—she claims commonality with other women (214–66). Her passion applies to them: Medea's vindictiveness is a measure of her desire, and she generalizes, saying that "once she [a woman] is wronged in the matter of love, no other soul can hold so many thoughts of blood" (265–66, Rex Warner trans.). Jason says, "Women think only about their bed" (569–73). There is a reason for this feminine preoccupation, since women limited, as Medea says, to one man have all their happiness wrapped up in him, while men are free to choose other companions (244–46).

As in *Hippolytos* and *Antigone*, this asserted female sexuality "calls forth" misogyny. The stereotype of women's burning desire seems the perhaps illogical corollary of the exchange of women, which posits and creates an object status for women. Women are obsessed with the bed because it is the source and site of their position in the house. Without that position, what is Medea? Admittedly, since Medea is a foreigner and one who has literally sacrificed her family to her husband, she is not typical, but her action is merely an exaggeration of, not different in kind from, those required of other women. Jason distinguishes himself from Medea, as a rational being from a passionate one; he argues that his purpose in his new marriage is not the gratification of sexual desire but children (563–65, 593–97; compare 876–78, where Medea deceitfully agrees with him) whose noble position would support his children by Medea. He believes that he can reassure her, eliminate her sexual jealousy, but her passion for him has caused a political problem: where can she and her children go if she is no longer his wife (511–13)?

As the plot develops, certainly this sexual woman is made dangerous. Although her suffering is described when she is offstage, she is never passive but from the first inspires fear in the Chorus and Nurse, and specifically fear for her children. Acting on her erotic desire, she sacrifices her role as mother. Although she depicts herself as vulnerable (889–90, 927–28), she is not. Rather, the plot moves Medea from the position of Jason's projected victim to the position of victimizer in her own right; she is the strategist of a successful revenge. We might expect Medea to kill herself after destroying the children, since she is compared to Ino (1282–90), who does so, and since it is usually a woman who is hanging or whose corpse will be revealed when the man yells for the doors to be opened, as Jason does (Loraux 1987: 23). She hurts herself twice as much as Jason, and one can argue that killing one's children is the surest form of suicide (Glass 1988), but the text stresses her intention of harming Jason. Her power extends to prophecy: she is able to foretell Jason's death, while she will have a long life (if not a merry one) in Athens. Her fearsomeness is not played down but placed in high relief by the play's ending.

The rhetoric and structure combine to make the audience experience her vengeance as pornography, with her as the pornographer. Like Kreon, Medea has arranged for a death, has sent a new bride to Hades, but she far surpasses him. She is the dramaturge behind the messenger speech, which constitutes a pornographic moment, excessive in its reporting of sexualized violence. The gruesomeness of the

murder emerges slowly, with trivial details that in their banality reveal the princess as cold and narcissistic. While the servants dandled the children and patted their hair, the new mistress was not kind to them, until she saw the dress. This impression of her is reinforced when she puts on crown and dress: she looks at herself in the mirror, admires her legs before she dies (in an agony like Heracles'), killing her father with his own kindness to her. She becomes the spectacle, object for Medea's delectation and our horror. She is just an ordinary, shallow character, not attractive, without any understanding of what she has done to Medea. The combination of ordinary, commonplace events (the play with the children and her coldness) with a grotesque death heightens the pornographic pleasure in pain. To the extent that the audience supported Medea (or Phaedra, or Deianeira), it must now recoil from her.

Not only does Medea plan the death reported in such lavish and graphic detail, but she is the audience of the narration. And she also, like Clytemnestra, gets a thrill from it: "You will please us twice as much if they died very wretchedly" (1134–35). The woman with sexual desire, who aspires to act in the world, is represented as a perverse sadist, one who will kill her children if she thinks it is necessary. Listening to the account of the princess's death does not lead to her suicide (as is the case for other wives like Eurydice, Jocasta, or Deianeira) but rather confirms Medea in her plan to kill the children before someone else does. We are spared a retelling of that scene (although we do hear the offstage sounds); their pain is displaced onto the very long and drawn-out description of the justified other deaths, working to free Medea and us from the realization of the meaning of her act to *them*.

Euripides' Medea not only kills her children, but she escapes: the final tableau discloses no male couple standing over a figurative or literal female body but rather a woman standing in the position usually left to some divinity at the end of Euripidean drama. Medea, then, has established a subjectivity for herself through her powerful acts. What is the effect on the audience of this structuring of the action? Like Phaedra, this Medea gives up any claim on our sympathy by the vengeance she exacts. Having become masculine, a killer of young, she is like the aggressive woman in contemporary pornography, standing over her puny consort and attacking him with words (if not with a whip). A male might well be terrified of this vision of female dominance and male submission, unless he could console himself with the fact that *his* woman is safe at home, under control. At least comedically, Euripides had a real effect in the world; in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousai*, the women object to Euripides precisely because his plays lead to increased male vigilance.

This text is very self-conscious about the power of representation—in particular, the women of the Chorus recognize that they have a bad reputation because men have had the use of the lyre (190–203); things would be different, they sing, if the female point of view could be represented. I remain suspicious of the feminine position seemingly taken by the playwright, and of the feminism attributed by him to Medea. There is no woman's voice represented in this play, only consciousness of its lack. The Medea who plans the death of the girl and hears it with glee is created in turn by Euripides. Although Medea appears to be a subject in her own right, she is, of course, a subject of Euripides' discourse, and ultimately of the discourse of his culture.

Euripides' Medea, who escapes the fate of ordinary women through magic and

her grandfather Helios, who incarnates a sadistic model of instrumental use of her children for her own selfish ends, clarifies the problems facing the feminist theorist of representation. Jason describes Medea as a monster, Skylla, and critics have noted the extent to which she takes on the attributes of masculine heroism in her action. She must either kill her children or be a laughingstock—there are no other choices available to her. The only victory is achieved by becoming masculine, and it is a self-punishing victory at that. Who gives her those choices? To the extent that we are in the same culture, what are our choices? To beat men at their own game, or to validate the feminine? The terms facing her and us seem to be binary oppositions—passive/active, female/male. Without another term, we are doomed to continue the annihilation of our progeny.

In tragedy after tragedy, we see the female defined as sexual, possessed of a desire that destroys. When women are active and assertive like Clytemnestra and Medea, that sexuality is masculine and makes its object in turn a feminized victim; they usurp the phallocratic subject's privilege of pornography. The women who adopt the values of the culture—Antigone, Deianeira, and Phaedra—yield their place to the dominance of men. The effect is to bolster up the masculine and to justify cultural control of female desire. If in current times pornography (along with film) is shaping male sexuality and its design for what is feminine, tragedy worked in an analogous way in antiquity. Does this mythology and body of material not work in the same way today?

There are two congruent triangles at play in antiquity (and, though in different form, today): one of exchange and one of representation. The triangle formed by men exchanging women in marriage uses women to form and solidify relationships between men; that triangle is often visible in the plots of these plays (Deianeira/Hyllos/Heracles; Phaedra/Hippolytos/Theseus; Clytemnestra/Orestes/Agamemnon-Apollo). In marriage and the representation of gender, women, despite their resistance, are subordinated to relations between men. It is not merely the use of women that is at stake but a construction of their sexuality—necessary for procreation—as dangerous. That sexuality is contained by male control of the circulation of women and at the same time by male control of the circulation of representation. This brings me to another triangle, that among author, text, and audience. Here, I would argue, the audience is made masculine, asked to identify with the male protagonist, and in this way is put in relation to the author and the text. Through this experience masculine subjectivity is established. Tragedy participates in a pornographic structure of representation, accomplishing the solidification of the male subject at the expense of and through the construction of the female as object.

NOTES

1. Laura Mulvey argued in an early piece that sadism demands a story, thereby likening all narrative to pornography; Teresa de Lauretis draws an analogy between that position and Lotman's paradigm in which woman is positioned as obstacle, boundary, and limit for a mobile hero (de Lauretis 1984: 118–19). Does Lotman's typology hold true for tragedy, or

only for myth and film? Desiring females in tragedy refuse to stand and wait; by insisting on moving, characters like Clytemnestra, Phaedra, and Medea, for example, disrupt the phallic order and pay for it.

2. Feminists analyzing advertising have noted the vulnerability represented by the neck and its prominence in contemporary media images of women; perhaps that is why women in tragedy "get it in the neck."

3. I have in mind, for instance, the position Hegel takes on the play in *Phenomenology* (1910: 484–92) and *Ästhetik* (1920: 215), as popularized and simplified by A. C. Bradley in his essay "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy" (1909). For a cogent disagreement with Hegel, see Brian Vickers's chapter on Sophocles in *Towards Greek Tragedy* (1973).

4. Most of these plays have long philological and literary, although not necessarily theoretical, discussions attached to them; I have by and large dispensed with references to those debates, seeking to ground this essay in another problematic.

5. It is possible that the problem is simply desire itself, but tragedy tends to generalize about desire in these plays where women are overcome by lust. Male heroes, to be sure, are involved in plots of sexual desire, but because of the double standard, their desire is not problematized. The loves of Heracles or Menelaus, for example, have enormous consequences, but they are not themselves killers as a result.

6. There is an interesting mixing of genders in the wool. Deianeira first suspects what will happen when some of the unguent drops on a bit of wool and destroys it. The wool is a sign of the feminine (both female genitals and women's work), but it also stands for Heracles, who suffers like the wool and whose decomposition is adumbrated by its decomposition.

7. Messenger speeches about men most frequently report what could be known: Heracles is in a public place. Oedipus is looking for Jocasta in the palace and is followed into her room. Phaedra, Medea, Alcestis: these women are watched by other women in their quarters, who then make that information public.

8. There is a similar scene in *Alcestis;* she is another virtuous woman who dies voluntarily, though not a suicide.

9. Hippolytos and Pentheus suffer as children at the hands of their parents, as do the children of Heracles and Medea; other children are murdered in *Hekabe* and *Trojan Women*. In fact, in tragedy, the sacrifice of children is almost as common as the sacrifice of women; it appears more horrible (more sadistic?) because the children are obviously unwilling. The children remain outside the plot; since they are not the enemy but a way of attacking that enemy, their deaths always seem excessive because gratuitous, serving another end. Children strikingly share the role of women as victims of contemporary pornography; interestingly enough, the antipornography movement has been successful only in attacking pornography that uses children. Perhaps this is because children are presumed never to have consented, to be incapable of consent, while women are always presumed to have consented to pose for the picture. In tragic women's deaths, consent is provided: the virgins (Iphigenia, Polyxena, and Macaria) are all made complicit in their deaths, while the wives and mothers tend to commit suicide. Euripides is more interested in women and presents more child victims than either of the other tragedians, suggesting that there is a connection in his dramaturgy.

3

Eros in Love: Pederasty and Pornography in Greece

H. A. Shapiro

Pornography and Art, Ancient and Modern

Though the origin of our word *pornography* is Greek, its first coinage in English, in the middle of the nineteenth century, was in response to Roman erotic paintings, then lately discovered at Pompeii (Kendrick 1987: 11). But by 1850, pornographic scenes, in the most literal sense ("drawings of prostitutes"), on much earlier Athenian vases were also widely known in Europe. Erotic encounters of hetairai (high-class prostitutes) and their customers are most prevalent on red-figured drinking cups of the period ca. 520 to 470 B.C. (Brendel 1970), the same years in which the export of fine Athenian ceramics to the Etruscans was at its height. When, in the 1820s and '30s, the rich Etruscan tombs began to be unearthed, we may be certain that these erotic vases, which were eventually dispersed to museums and collections all over Europe, were among their contents.

We know too little about the organization of the Athenian pottery industry, or of the Athenian household, to answer many of the immediate questions posed by such vases. Who determined the subject matter: painter, potter, proprietor of the workshop, or customer? Who bought these vases, and who used them, on what occasions? What did the Etruscans, in whose tombs they ended up, think of them? The most reasonable scenario is that erotic vases were used at all-male symposia, or drinking parties, the Athenian version of a stag party. Some were made for immediate export to the Etruscans, who had a well-documented taste for erotica, while others may have reached Etruria by a secondhand market (Webster 1972: 291). The

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