

EURIPIDES AS SOCIAL CRITIC: THE MORALITY OF REVENGE

Larry J. Alderink

Concordia College, USA

*I turn everything inside out
looking for new solutions
to the problems of today,
always critical, giving
suggestions for gracious living,
and they come away from seeing a play
in a questioning mood, with “where are we at?”
and “who’s got my this?” and “who took my that?”*

Euripides (in Aristophanes *Frogs* 971-79, tr. Lattimore)

Why read Greek tragedies? Why interpret them? Why add to the many interpretations that have already been proposed? The play may be the thing where we catch the conscience of the king, of course, but we may be able to catch much more! In addition to providing viewing enjoyment, the tragedies of 5th century Athens offer the pleasure of thinking through an array of puzzles and problems. They afford us the opportunity to devise and test hypotheses that help us think about the problems these tragedies and ancient Athens bequeathed us.

In this paper I will indicate several issues that persist throughout some recent and major studies of ancient tragedy before I offer suggestions that will guide us through Euripides’ *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *The Trojan Women*, *Andromache*, and *Hecuba*.¹ The issues

1. Of particular use for my analysis are Gerald F. Else, *The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), Justina Gregory, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Atheni-*

that are relevant for my purposes are:

1. that tragedy is an activity and an institution of the *polis*, and thus of political as well as aesthetic significance;

2. that *oikos* and *polis*, with the corollary of female restriction to the former and male activity in the later, are distinctions fundamental to ancient Greek culture and are taken into the tragedies for reflection and critique;

3. that power and power relations, in gender, in the city and in the empire, and in the tragic art are drawn into tragedies for display and evaluation;

4. that tensions in Athenian society are asymmetrical with the conflicts in the tragedies, since the tragedians reflect on rather than mirror social conflicts;

5. that the festivals of the city in general and the Great Dionysia in particular comprise the context for tragic performances, and aimed both to glorify and critique Athenian values and interests, and thus are of political significance, as is tragedy;

6. that authorial intention can be detected in the design of particular tragedies and in the general tragic aim to evoke of emotions of pity and fear for purposes of *katharsis*;

7. that the treatment to which all tragedians subject figures from the epics—the heroes—indicates an intertextuality and an evaluation of political as well as aesthetic import, whether the concept of the hero is rejected, as Goldhill and Vernant argue, or refitted for service in the 5th century, as Else argues, as the value of “valor and courtesy and self-respect and devotion to an ideal of conduct;²

8. that historical developments help explain the origin but not the functioning of tragedy; and

9. that tragedy incorporates ethical as well as political (if the two can be distinguished) impulses, and thus invites explanation.

To weave these issues into a single phrase, I suggest that we consider a chapter title from Rush Rehm’s book on tragedy, “The Performance Culture of Athens,” and his summary sentence that captures the point: “The conventions of tragedy return us to our starting point, the performance culture of Athens, where a participatory democracy

ans (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), Simon Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Malcolm Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), Christian Meier, *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*, tr. Andrew Webber (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Charles Segal, *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow: Art, Gender, and Commemoration in Alcestis, Hippolytus, and Hecuba* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993 and *Interpreting Greek Tragedy: Myth, Poetry, Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), and Jean-Pierre and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece*, tr. Janet Lloyd (Sussex: Harvester Press and Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1981) and Froma I. Zeitlin, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

2. Gerald F. Else, *The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy*, Martin Classical Lectures XX (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 67.

played out its political and ethical concerns in an aggressively public and performative fashion. In terms of tragic theatre, the conventions of representation allowed a variety of contemporary elements to be drawn into, and indeed to inform, the dramatizations of the myths and legends of the past.”³

Embedded in contemporary theories of Greek tragedy is a central concern about power and power relations as they are distributed through gender relations and the political activities of Athenian citizens. My aim is to explore power, gender, and political activities with the aid of a fourth, the morality of revenge, and to demonstrate a causal relation that links all four and accounts for the conflicts of power. In the five plays I will investigate, the characters are both subjects and objects of desire in the drive to control and the goal of conquest, for competition requires the females in tragedy as male success in the polis requires female passivity in the *oikos*. Thus I suggest that Euripides’ tragedies can be considered intellectual experiments, for he applied male traits to female characters, with the result that his plays are inversions of social situations. His experiment is, I argue, moral in that the crucial variable is the value given to revenge—admirable in males but horrifying when Medea kills her children to take revenge upon Jason. Here we observe the formal tactics of moral shock and betrayal of *philia* employed by Euripides for political purposes. I contend further, that Euripides’ purpose is to construct alternative characters—or selves—in a somewhat conscious way. That is, Euripides does not merely represent or even present characters and roles according to the categories assigned males and females in a particular power scheme to enable the Athenian audience to see themselves in a theatrical mirror. Euripides is rather constructing his characters by re-distributing male and female roles along a moral scale that invited his Athenians to reexamine their gendered concepts. He is engaged in the effort to recategorize females and males, and thus reconceptualizing social categories according to which Athenian life was lived. On this view, Euripides is an experimentalist working without an ideology of power and gender; indeed, he uses power and gender as the materials for tragic pleasure, for the sheer pleasure of seeing how the experiment turns out!

Five—actually, four, but the fifth is necessary for background—plays of Euripides will illustrate, I hope, the fruitfulness of the hypotheses I have proposed. Two plays will comprise the first set, *Alcestis* and *Medea*, plays about two women whose families are linked by marriage and fate (they are cousins through their husbands). *Alcestis*, the daughter of Pelias, became the wife of Admetos when he yoked a lion and a boar to his chariot. Thanks to the help of Apollo, who had spent a year working for Admetos as punishment by Zeus for killing the Cyclopes who had killed his own son Asklepius for restoring the dead to life. Thanatos has announced that the fated day of death had arrived for Admetos, whom Apollo wants to preserve. Olympian though he may be and

3. Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theater* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 73-74.

therefore powerful, Apollo is unable to save Admetos from death, but he can delay his demise if a suitable substitute can be found for him. The *oikos* is searched, the Admetos' parents refuse although his father Pheres praises Alcestis, apparently oblivious to the fact that his choice not to die and his insistence that Alcestis be the substitute grants himself and denies Alcestis the "natural right to find happiness". When the day of Alcestis' death arrives, she and Admetos bid their farewells; he gratefully grieves his loss of such a wife and promises to mourn her the remainder of his life while she remembers their good marriage, prays for the children, thinks of her husband – and asks that he not take another woman. What a woman, one thinks, and, a bit differently, what a man! Alcestis is quite aware that she is a substitute for her husband, but Admetos is astonished that Thanatos is taking her away. He fears that the *oikos* is ruined. By chance and before the funeral, Herakles, on his way to a deathly dangerous task (reclaiming the human-eating horses for Diomedes' chariot) stops by the house. The quite human but indomitable Herakles will face death, and upon learning that Admetos' *oikos* is in mourning, is determined to wrest Alcestis from the dead. Good *xenos*/host that he is, he will comfort and charm Admetos, who is himself the good *xenos*/guest. Admetos and Herakles are *philo*i/friends – second selves to each other (825). Herakles is as resourceful as he is resolute; he plans to steal Alcestis during the ritual sacrifice of the funerals. Meanwhile Admetos is distressed; in the bargain with Thanatos, he was relieved that she rather than he died in the bargain that is death. No wonder, then, that Herakles will cheer Admetos with the woman he has won in his contest, over Admetos' tentative refusals. Admetos and the woman join hands despite his dead wife's requests regarding their marriage bed – only to realize immediately two facts: (1) the woman Herakles brought him was Alcestis herself, or an image of her, who will speak to Admetos after three more days of mourning and (2) that although substitution was offered and desired and accepted, there is no substitute. Death is unavoidable, and only memories will remain after the dead person has departed. Well, Herakles must be on his way, for he has cheered a friend and must now perform a heroic labor. What a surprise ending, the Chorus sings, for the gods surprise us.

Surprise us they do. Two modes of facing death are given, Apollo proposing substitution and Herakles contest. Apollo the god could not do what Herakles the hero did, although both are as ego-centric as the human Pheres. Only Alcestis displays non-*polis* behavior – *oikos*/family-centric, a selfless-self quite without the competitive drive in struggle with death, in the search for a substitute, in the comfort and hospitality men can give each other. So we ask: what enables Alcestis to do as she does? I suggest that she is motivated less by the presence of a virtue but more by the lack of a vice. Alcestis lacks the desire for revenge, in the knowledge that her dying is not entirely dissimilar to her living in the *oikos*. She has been a substitute all her life, excluded from both competition and hospitality, secreted away in the house. And she does this willingly – one could call her death a sacrifice, a love-sacrifice. One could call her life the same

thing. Euripides shows Alcestis superior in two respects. Alcestis knows all along what Admetos discovered. In addition to her greater self-awareness, however, Alcestis' social role of attending to others frees her from the self-preoccupations that prompt one to see him as less strong than he sees himself.

The second play in our first set is *The Medea*. Medea is the wife of Jason the hero who seeks her for marriage and goes in quest for the Golden Fleece to gain her from her father Aetes, king of Colchis; she has done much for her husband, deceiving her father and killing her own brother (Apsyrtos) as well as King Pelias who occupied Jason's throne in Iolcus in Magnesia/Thessaly. When *The Medea* opens, Jason and Medea with their two children are living in Corinth, a city pervaded by the disease of hatred, a *polis* where old ties of *philos* are giving way to new associations and where selfish love is taking precedence over neighbor love (1-110). The problem is that Medea, a non-Greek wife, has just learned that her husband is drawn to Creusa, daughter of the Corinthian king Creon, and her father's throne. Medea's *oikos* is as disrupted as the *polis* of Corinth. Medea invoked Themis/law, Artemis/virginity, and even the justice of Zeus/father, all to no avail, since she is non-Greek and thus without rights or protection. In the *oikos* she is disadvantaged by a man who can abandon her even though she had killed for him and saved his life; in the *polis* she is defenseless. And although she is beyond consolation and realizes that women are inferior to and disadvantaged by privileged men, and although birth for women is the analogue of battle for men, Medea thirsts for blood as hungrily as any man, for blood in war or in sacrifice. Significant odds are arrayed against her—King Creon, husband Jason, and Aegeus, king of Athens, will give her refuge but neither help in escape nor safe passage. In an *agon* (446-626) between Jason and Medea, she faces her enemy with the bravery of a hoplite, accusing him of being a bad, i.e., counterfeit man, of giving bad for good, of abandoning friends and helping enemies. Soon Medea's plan is devised and executed: under the appearance of exchanging gifts, she magically killed Creusa and Creon and then sacrificed her own two sons. The motivation is clear and strong: she aimed to be avenged on Jason, arguing that it was his disease (1200-30) that killed them. Of course the disease was distributed throughout the city—the disrupted ties of *philia* as well as the morality whose absence Medea lamented in Jason and came to adopt for herself, the Greek maxim about helping friends and harming enemies (810-23). The change in Medea is quite convincing, for as she made herself independent of her birth family through fratricide, so she could make herself independent of her children by paidocide, all for revenge against her husband. Further, Medea is a female who has taken upon herself the male values of competition and friendship in the *polis*, killing enemies, and engaging in action whose consequences were pervasively political in that they deprived the ruling family of king and heirs. Medea transgressed the *oikos-polis* boundary and violated the principle of male domination in both, seeking help from neither gods nor humans; she has taken her own fate into her own hands. Medea inverted the most

prominent categories—hierarchy by triumphing over two men, gender by acting on the assumption or reciprocity in the *oikos*, and morality by designing and executing a plan that would be daring for a man. If the consequences are horrible in a woman who destroys the *oikos*, why should they be admirable in men whose wars destroy the *polis*? If we look for a causal factor to account for all three, the desire for revenge is the most promising candidate.

My hypothesis for explaining the difference between the two wives, Alcestis and Medea, is that the crucial variable is the morality of revenge. Jason appears rather unheroic, whereas Medea seems quite heroic in defying odds in the single-minded pursuit of her objectives. A moral value—helping friends and harming enemies—may govern relations among men in the *polis* and thus considered a desirable quality in a citizen, but when it is built into family relations in the *oikos*, disaster results on any reading of Greek ethics. But why, I think Euripides is asking his Athenians to ask, why should women be immune from manly virtues, and why should a man such as Jason be held to manly virtues when he violates domestic values? Why should Medea voluntarily sacrifice herself when she could sacrifice her father, brother, children, and enemies? Because she seeks revenge on no basis other than her desire for it. Why should Alcestis voluntarily sacrifice herself for her husband and still wish well for her children's future? Because she does not seek revenge, and because both women as Euripides has constructed them are able to think beyond, indeed, to reflect upon, the social roles Athenian society assigned to women. Alcestis and Medea as characters, as fictive persons, are reconceptualized theatrical alternatives to historical Athenian females.

The second set of plays to which I want to put my hypothesis concerns two plays Euripides wrote about the aftermath of the Trojan War, likely thinking as well about the contemporary war between Athens and Sparta. A few comments about *The Trojan Women* will prepare the way for *Andromache* and *Hecuba*. In the prologue of *The Trojan Women*, Poseidon and Apollo bewail their abandon altars, now that the defeated Trojans no longer offer honors and sacrifices; even Athena, who supported the Greeks, is upset with their desecration of her temple. Apparently the gods as well as the Trojans suffered the consequences of the war. In fact, the only Trojans left alive are the women captives gathered near the sea with Astyanax, the only hope for the rebirth of Troy. If the gods seek revenge, so does Hecuba, once queen of Troy but now Greek slave. Quite in keeping with the Aristotelian dictum of the priority of tragic action over tragic character, and with the modern claim about characters as aspectual rather than whole personalities, we see Hecuba in a series of actions. She learns from Talthybius, the Greek messenger, that the women have been assigned to various men—Cassandra to Agamemnon, Polyxena to Achilles' tomb, Andromache to Neoptolemos, and she herself to Odysseus. Cassandra invites her mother to join a wedding dance, which is actually the military dance of a girl become warrior, for Cassandra's marriage will be a continuation of war by other mean and her "husband" Agamemnon she will murder to

avenge her brothers and her father. To daughter-in-law Andromache and grandson Astyanax, who have been brought low, Hecuba advises loyalty to new masters, since the hope of a new Troy rests with the young prince. Hecuba treats Helen differently, calling upon Zeus who governs the world and a cosmic force beyond him to right the wrongs now done and being done. When Helen blames Aphrodite for the adulterous attraction between Paris and herself, Hecuba says that Aphrodite is nothing but another name for human lust, which means that Helen tried neither to be a good wife in the *oikos* nor to make herself a better, i.e., more virtuous person. Hecuba subjects even Zeus to energetic criticism, for he betrayed the Greeks as Helen betrayed her marriage. The boundary between *polis* and *oikos* was crossed—by the application of the same moral principle to the disparate domains. About the only value remaining to Zeus is that he allows Hecuba to conduct the funeral for the little boy, Astyanax, even though the flowers placed upon the body confer upon the living an empty glory and are useless for the dead. Only despair remains for Hecuba. She refuses to call upon the gods as Troy is torched, on the grounds that if they didn't help when she earlier called upon them, why even bother now that the fire rages? She is the one character who maintains the action in a causal sequence, suffering blow after blow and finally abandoning hope in men and gods. She is also the character who has undergone more change than any other, since she both emptied her theology in forsaking Zeus and abandoned her ethic of applying standards of morality that should apply equally to male and female in favor of the typical male value of revenge.

In *Andromache* we see a particular aspect of post-war Greeks that was obscured in *The Trojan Women*. Andromache and her son have taken refuge in the temple of Thetis because their master, Neoptolemos has gone to Delphi for purification and Hermione, Neoptolemos' wife, wants to kill her. For good reason Hermioine seeks to kill Andromache, since the same "mono-principle" holds good in both *polis* and *oikos*: only one can be in command. Although the principle stands without comment or criticism, an obvious imbalance is implied: a man rules the *polis* but one of two women will govern the *oikos*, putting Neoptolemos in the position of a governed woman. Menelaus, Hermione's father, asserts that Andromache must die, since she will leave the *oikos* and a woman without a husband is as good as dead anyway—to which Andromache counters with the assertion that he has confused cause and effect. The cause of the problem is the Greek fear of foreigners, and foreign women at that. Checked in argument, Menelaus can only repeat the belief that one should strike those who strike one (438) and that one should help friends but harm enemies (539-44). Andromache's truth has not been overtaken: she has identified the cause of the war abroad and the distress at home as a Greek fear of non-Greeks. Her savior is the old King Peleus, father of Achilles and grandfather of Neoptolemos. For all practical purposes, Andromache fulfilled her function in the play when she told her truth. But the play is not finished. Orestes exemplifies the opposite of Andromache's truth: he rather than Neoptolemos should be

Hermione's wife, and has contrived to kill him in revenge for taking his woman. Apollo, Poseidon, and Ares represent on the divine plane the same moral value that rules the human world: retribution and the "round of a death for a death (1090-1046). As the chorus sings, the same fate catches both father and son, Achilles in war and Neoptolemos in religion, and for the same reason—the desire for revenge. The Chorus quite agrees, singing that this is just what Zeus brought about. Everything has fallen apart, and the Chorus and Peleus are disconsolate and in grief. But suddenly the *deus ex machina* appears to say that all is well with everyone. Neoptolemos will be buried and honored, Andromache married to a king in Molossia, Astyanax will live, and Peleus and Thetis will see their son Achilles again. This is what Zeus wants. Actually, everything has fallen apart in the play, with only one character, Andromache getting what she wanted, but the conclusion of the play provides the exact opposite, with everyone finding satisfaction. Either the action or its conclusion must be rejected. But which? We can check the characters for the best results. Everyone, males and females alike, seeks revenge—with the exception of Andromache. And everyone gets it but to their own destruction; Andromache has no desire for revenge, which renders her a non-participant in the machinations of the play. She simply disappears from the action after she making her contribution.

Hecuba is set in an atmosphere from that of *Andromache*. Although both tragedies are filled with tension and confusion as the differences between the victorious Greeks and the defeated Trojans emerge as more complimentary to the Trojans, Hecuba is a more complex character than Andromache and is buffeted by a wider array of destructive forces. Yet Andromache's simplicity of character in relation to the diversity of characters opposing her interests brings one central issue to the fore—her lack of desire for, and their obsession with vengeance. Hecuba's complexity has to do with the *peripeteia* she undergoes. In the prologue, Hecuba sees two ghosts that forebode the future. Her son Polydorus, whom Priam and Hecuba sent with much gold to Polymestor in Thrace for safety, comes to her, as does the dead Achilles, who wants Polyxena, daughter of Hecuba, to be sacrificed at his tomb as a sign of honor and a gift by his living friends. Of course Hecuba will hope that Polydorus still lives, but at least the audience knows that her strategic amnesia prevents her from catching the import of her dream, in which a wolf mangled a doe torn from between her knees.

One aspect of Hecuba is seen in her *agon* with Odysseus regarding the Greek decision to sacrifice Polyxena as an offering of honor to the dead Achilles. She argues on equal footing with Odysseus, woman to man as man to man; she is interested in truth and justice but he seeks victory and self-justification. She appeals to justice, mercy, and pity (the tragic emotions of Aristotle!), and to the fair play he should return for her favor of saving him when he spied Troy in disguise. She accuses him of self-deceit: he and the Greeks claim to seek the vengeance that is a corollary of helping friends and harming enemies but they actually gather for the pleasure of watching a young girl

suffer. Hecuba even offers to die in Polyxena's stead, but the Greeks reject the offer of a voluntary substitute. Their wish is not to be fulfilled, for Polyxena refuses to beg for her life and rejects the status of the victim in a sacrifice but volunteers as a warrior; she ripped open her *chiton* to expose her chest rather than her throat to the Greeks. She was a Trojan, they murderers; she died as a free person; the Greeks were victimizers but she was no victim!

Thus in Hecuba and Polyxena we have two brave figures, both female in conflict with males, and both with "right" on their side. After her *agon* with Odysseus, her conversation with Talthybius, the Greek messenger, indicates that she has significant theological problems. She doubts that Zeus cares about humans, and worse (!), she wonders whether humans deceive ourselves in thinking that the gods even exist. Maybe chance and change rule the world. No wonder Talthybius concludes that Hecuba has sunk from queen to slave and has lost her grip on morality as well. Talthybius' report of Polyxena's death drives her deeper into doubt, or maybe clarity. She wants to hold people responsible for their acts and she wants to believe that people can be good and teach others to be good, but her loss inclines her to despair of moral qualities and moral instruction. She has lost everything except the opportunity to perform Polyxena's funeral; she says, as Medea had said, that the simple life of a citizen is preferable to the privileges and dangers of a great family.

Just when Hecuba thinks she can suffer no more, she comes upon a young body washed in by the sea. It is the body of her son Polydorus, who supposedly was under the protection of Polymestor the Thracian. Polymestor had been a guest in her house, a *xenos* as Odysseus had been, and both refused to return the favors extended to them. What conclusion can she reach except that the only goddess is the goddess of suffering? What order can she see in the gods? None, but there is a law of justice beyond the gods, even the justice of Zeus, an absolute moral law whose violation will corrupt human justice. The road to Hecuba's reversal is twisted, a consequence of the failure of reciprocity between male and female: former friends become enemies and former enemies become friends. The reversal is that she abandons the morality of justice as mercy and pity she asserted in her quarrel with Odysseus. The new morality she espouses she articulates in her *agon* with Agamemnon as she appeals to him, the leader of the Greek forces for help in pursuing justice against Polymestor. One problem is that Agamemnon is not the strong and secure leader as he appears to be and thinks he is, for although as king he is committed to justice, as general he knows that his army considers Polymestor its friend and Polydorus its enemy. Euripides does turn things inside out. The difference between male and female is blurred, for two women and two men behave as they shouldn't according to the traditional moral division of *polis* and *oikos* and the gendered roles of male and female; women also assert the right to participate in ethical debate and warfare, and men look like the weak household females they want. Agamemnon is ignorant of his own values and interests, as Hecuba brings him to

see, for he is a slave to money and necessity although he also gives allegiance to the moral values Hecuba has just argued.

Because Agamemnon as king know that justice is necessary to the city and to individuals, and thus grants Hecuba the opportunity to engage Polymestor in debate about justice-revenge. Hecuba shows herself to be as skilled in elenctic methods as Odysseus was, enticing Polymestor to search for more gold in Troy and to enter her tent to acquire jewelry. Although the odds are unfair, Polymestor alone against a company of women, the women do what rarely happens. They defeat a man in battle, killing his sons and blinding but not killing him—as Medea killed those dear to Jason but let him live to see what he had lost. Hecuba has her revenge, and she rejoices in it; Polymestor accepts Agamemnon’s verdict, saying, “Defeated by a woman, by a slave” (1250-91). When Hecuba dies, her tomb will be called “Cynossema” or Dogs/Bitches’ Gravestone, a sign for sailors. Here lies a woman who changed from human into dog, who lost her humanity. Her goodness was vulnerable, as Nussbaum argues.⁴ At least she knew her future. Such knowledge was denied Agamemnon, who soon will sail to Mycenae with Cassandra and receive a welcome from Clytemnestra that will also be a sign of sorts.

Tying together the threads of my analysis lies beyond the time allotted me. Let me only indicate that the comparison of Alcestis with Medea, and Andromache with Hecuba, and the two sets with each other, suggests the possibility of an experimental theater in the tragedies of Euripides. It also suggests the possibility of searching for a causal explanation for two women who do and two women who don’t seek revenge as their roles in a gendered and hierarchical society are turned inside out in the five tragedies we have examined. The single variable that is the experimental variable is the absence or presence of revenge as a moral value.

Let me conclude by making a further suggestion about the way the audience participated in the experience. According to Aristotle, making representations/*mimesis* is natural to human beings, for it distinguishes humans from other animals; it is also pleasurable, for people learn as they observe their own representations.⁵ The *katharsis/catharsis* Aristotle considered constitutive of tragedy also provided a pleasure. In the light of my theoretical suggestions and my application of these suggestions to five plays of Euripides, let me further suggest the following sequence in the emotions of an ancient Greek audience:

1. Terrible, frightening, shocking, actions were presented in a causal sequence—Aristotle’s *muthos*—and performed on stage: killing, infanticide, blinding, and inversion of male and female roles. The actions were not just any action—but violence in

4. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 420-21.

5. Aristotle, *Poetics* 48b5-19, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987), pp. 4-5.

polis and in *oikos*, and among *philoï*, shocking because they were extreme violations of Greek norms.

2. Painful emotions were generated in the audience because in viewing such actions that violated fundamental Greek norms and values, the fear caused by the representations and sympathy for the victims would be thwarted by the course of the plot.

3. Relief of these painful emotions brings a pleasure. The pleasure is not quite the same as the pleasure of making representations, but it is a pleasure, nevertheless. It is a pleasure, I suggest, that situates the audience between the theater and the street—a pleasure in realizing that the social world and the theatrical world are not the same, that the real world will likely not collapse or be disrupted as the imaginary world of the theater was.

4. Euripides comes close to bridging the gap between the social and theatrical worlds as he designed plots that experiment with transgressions, cross-overs, and inversion. The price he pays, and compels Greeks to pay, is the end of tragedy.

5. Euripides deprived his audience of the illusion that society is real but the theater is made-up. He showed that both society and theater are made up, that is, made by human beings. He also showed that the gods, too, are made-up.

Bibliography

- Aristotle, *Poetics*. Translated by Richard Janko. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987.
- Camp, John M. *The Athenian Agora: Excavations in the Heart of Classical Athens*. New Aspects of Antiquity, edited by Colin Renfrew. London: Thames and Hudson, 1986.
- Else, Gerald F. *The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy*. Martin Classical Lectures XX. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Gregory, Justina. *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991.
- Goldhill, Simon. *Reading Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Heath, Malcolm. *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.
- Hurwit, Jeffrey M. *The Athenian Acropolis: History, Mythology, and Archaeology from the Neolithic Era to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Meier, Christian. *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*. Translated by Andrew Webber. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- Neils, Jenifer. *Goddess and Polis: The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens*. Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art and Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Parke, H. W. *Festivals of the Athenians*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1977.
- Pickard-Cambridge, Arthur W. *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy*. Revised by T.B.L. Webster. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

- , *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*. 2nd ed. Revised by John Gould and D. M. Lewis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- , *The Theater of Dionysus in Athens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946.
- Rehm, Rush. *Greek Tragic Theater*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Rhodes, Robin Francis. *Architecture and Meaning on the Athenian Acropolis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Segal, Charles. *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow: Art, Gender, and Commemoration in Alcestis, Hippolytus, and Hecuba*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993.
- , *Interpreting Greek Tragedy: Myth, Poetry, Text*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Simon, Erika. *Festivals of Attica: An Archaeological Commentary*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre and Pierre Vidal-Naquet. *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. Sussex: Harvester Press and Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1981.
- Winkler, John J. and Froma I. Zeitlin, eds. *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Zeitlin, Froma I. *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.