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Honors Thesis

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The Fine Line of Feminine Wiles: Paradigms of the Heroine and the Hero's Foil in Ancient Greek Literature

The women of ancient Greece existed in subservience to the men who ruled the *polis*. Once they became wives, their primary functions were to bear children and tend to the home. As C.A.E. Luschnig writes, "the less talked about she is, the better" (7). Despite this, the literature of ancient Greece is full of prominent female characters, including the *Odyssey*'s Penelope, Circe, and Calypso, as well as others from Greek epic and tragedy, all of whom have captured the imaginations of audiences since the time of their creation. These characters act, on one hand, as ideals to be emulated, and on the other as warnings to be heeded. Yet these differences should not obscure the fact that all females in Greek literature share surprisingly many traits. The heroine and anti-heroine not only exhibit beauty, but also intelligence, authority, and often a sympathetic moral code. What, then, separates the ideal from the negative example, and how do females achieve fame in their time, if not as independent women? Different genres attribute varying levels of power and independence to female characters. Women in epic tend to appear less prominently than those in tragedy. However, women in both genres may be identified by their relationships to men, falling on a spectrum from supportive to treacherous. In this paper, I seek to identify the paradigms of the ancient Greek female hero and anti-hero by situating each in terms of her interactions with males. I will contrast the key relationships of Penelope, from Homer's *Odyssey,* and Medea, of Euripides' play, situating each within her genre, and discussing her fulfillment of the traditional female roles of wife and mother. In doing this, I will identify a mode

for both heroine and anti-hero, and in this way, I will lay the ground for an assessment of Sophocles' *Antigone* who occupies a social and moral space somewhere between Homer's Penelope and Euripides' Medea.

At first glance, both Penelope and Medea seem commendable women. Both are wives, both are mothers, and both have cared for their husbands' households. According to Luschnig, this is the ideal for the ancient Greek woman (7). These qualities are affirmed by Helene P. Foley who argues that the woman is meant "to reproduce the species and care for the daily needs of her household…" ("Penelope", 93). These are functions that both Penelope and Medea serve. Furthermore, both women are highly regarded as intelligent and capable individuals. Both show cleverness in their dealings with others and have won the respect of those around them. Yet Penelope stands out as a righteous woman, while Medea has become famous as a model to be feared. These profiles are the result of each woman's relationship to her husband and function within her marriage. Her identity is defined by her behavior as wife, mother, and woman in society. Specifically, she is defined by the effect she has on the males around her, whether she benefits them, or threatens them.

Penelope exists within the male-dominated world of the epic. As such, she is treated with more caution and subtlety than would be a female character of tragedy. Nonetheless, from the very first time Penelope appears, she does so as a highly sympathetic character. Telemachus, Penelope and Odysseus' son, has already revealed through a conversation with a disguised Athena that the house of his parents is being bled dry by a host of unseemly suitors (1.285-93). Homer reveals the depth of Penelope's struggle, as she breaks down in response to the bard Phemius' account of the Achaians' journey home from Troy. She begs him, "But break off this song… that always rends the heart inside me…. How I long for my husband… that great man

whose fame resounds through Hellas / right to the depths of Argos!" (1.391-6). This dialogue reveals the extent of Penelope's torment. She is a suffering wife, endlessly faithful to her missing husband. Homer further reinforces our sympathies throughout the narrative, depicting heart-wrenching scenes of Penelope crying herself to sleep over the loss of her husband (1.418, 16.500). Perhaps the most powerful image of Penelope's dedication to Odysseus, however, occurs in Book 18, when Eurymachus, one of the suitors, attempts to flatter Penelope with compliments. He claims that Penelope surpasses "all women in build and beauty"(279), but Penelope replies with this resounding expression of feeling for Odysseus:

> "'…whatever form and feature I had, what praise I'd won, / the deathless gods destroyed that day the Achaians / sailed away to Troy, my husband in their ships, / Odysseus—if *he* could return to tend my life / the renown I had would only grow in glory' (18.279-86).

Such are the words of a truly wise and faithful woman in ancient Greece. With this statement, Penelope confirms her good nature.

Emphasizing these emotions even further is the additional pressure on Penelope from the suitors and the question of her duty. The point at which the *Odyssey's* narration begins reveals Penelope in something of a crisis. At his departure, Odysseus had told Penelope that, in the event that he never returned, once Telemachus began to grow a beard, Penelope should remarry. Specifically, he ordered her to "wed the man [she should] like, and leave [her] household behind" (18.303-4). When the *Odyssey* opens, that time has come, and Penelope is in a difficult situation. Nancy Felson-Rubin describes it thus:

> Until now, she has had to protect the household, but it no longer absolutely requires her presence; she may now join a new household and contract a new

> marriage. Yet, despite the propriety of leaving, despite Odysseus' sanction twenty years before, she remains uncertain. Is her husband alive or dead? Is she married or widowed?" (15).

Penelope must act as the cultural expectations of her duty dictate. However, what those expectations are depend upon her position. If she is a widow, then it may indeed be time to remarry; but if she is married, then her utmost concern should be to stay faithful to her husband and tend his household. She has heard stories of Odysseus, but rumors only, none of which she has been able to confirm. Furthermore, none of the suitors seem even remotely *suitable* for the wife of a war hero. From early in Book 1, Telemachus reveals that the suitors are draining Odysseus' house of its resources. Penelope also chastises the men on this account, saying to them, "Your way is a far cry from the time-honored way / of suitors locked in rivalry, striving to win / some noble woman…. *They* bring in their own calves and lambs…. They don't devour the woman's goods scot-free" (18.309-315). Penelope has no interest in marrying any of these suitors, and Homer's construction of these predatory characters makes this not only understandable, but commendable. Yet, Penelope still faces the challenging question of her responsibility.

According to Foley, though women in ancient Greek culture were expected to perform in a very specific role, they were still "endowed with the same moral *capacities* as men." At least this is the case in the *Odyssey*. Foley states that "Homeric women are expected to display moral responsibility in their own sphere of the household and to enforce moral standards, such as those relating to hospitality, in the absence of their menfolk" ("Penelope," 95). This is the position in which Penelope finds herself, a position of moral responsibility. She cannot herself cast the suitors out, being the woman of the household, but as long as she puts off her decision, the foul

men will continue to drain Odysseus' – and now Telemachus' – wealth. Thus, she devises the competition of the bow.

Felson-Rubin calls the bow contest "Penelope's most far-reaching decision" (16.). Penelope has been told by multiple sources that Odysseus either will return or has already (17.171, 19.626-7). It is clear that Penelope is not one to entertain rumors. She is, as Felson-Rubin brings to attention, *periphron*, a Greek word meaning "thinking all around." She is cautious and wise. As such, she knows better than to take reports of her husband's life or death at face value. However, even if the bow-contest is not a hopeful act on Penelope's part, it is the safest action to take. Nancy Felson-Rubin describes it as follows:

> Penelope takes a calculated risk. Associations with both her epithet *periphron* and her name (perhaps from *pene*, "woof" or "loom") suggest that she is the sort of character who actively weaves her life-story, as she does the deceit (*dolos*) of Laertes' shroud, and who improvises her crucial move (setting up the contest) to fit simultaneously into several possible plot scenarios. As she considers what could happen, she chooses the plan (*metis*) most fitting her ambiguous circumstances and most likely to produce at least a modicum of success (17).

Penelope has considered her situation. She knows the choices she has available to her, and so she decides to create an event that will allow her the best possible result while also maintaining her female integrity.

There are three possible outcomes of the bow-contest. The first and most hopeful is that Odysseus may return in time to win the contest himself or else prevent it outright. The second is that one of the suitors proves successful, in which case Penelope will be forced to marry, but at least her new husband will be equal in some fashion to Odysseus. The third is that no one will

win the contest, and Penelope may be granted an excuse to end the ordeal altogether. Cautious Penelope would know better than to be overtly hopeful of the first outcome; she may, however, make an educated guess as to which of the other two outcomes is likely to occur. Penelope knows that the suitors are young and untrained. Much like Telemachus, none of the young men courting her have been raised with a prominent father figure, as all of the battle-ready men had gone to war along with Odysseus, twenty years earlier. They seem to have done very little with themselves other than spend the last four years or more gorging themselves on Odysseus' resources and taking advantage of his wealth in his absence (2.117-20). It is highly unlikely that any of them will be capable of stringing the renowned bow of Odysseus, and Penelope is likely quite aware of this. She is able to judge how things are likely to turn out. Furthermore, she is guided by a moral rightness that is derived from and evident in her marital relationship.

A woman's behavior within her marriage represents a critical aspect of her character. Emily Kearns writes that a heroine must be "of essentially the same type as the hero but of lesser status." She further stipulates that a heroine plays the "role of a woman of the hero's household" – such as the hero's wife (99). What Kearns describes is the Greek *homophrosune* or "like-mindedness." This is a word that arises in the *Odyssey* and other pieces of ancient Greek literature, and it is the subject of much discussion among classical scholars. Nancy Felson-Rubin in *Penelope's Renown* mentions *homophrosune* as the "foundation of a good marriage" (44). This is what Penelope and Odysseus have that Medea and Jason lack. It is manifest in Penelope's fidelity to Odysseus, in the mutual trust that the two share, and in their similar qualities of character, especially *dolos*, or "cleverness."

The world of the *Odyssey* is filled with examples of women who betray men, yet Penelope remains ever faithful to Odysseus through twenty years of war and wandering. Homer

reveals this early in the epic, using language and scenes that depict Penelope "weeping for Odysseus, her beloved husband" (1.418). Agamemnon also sings Penelope's praises even as he warns Odysseus of the dangers of women, calling her "steady" and a "wise woman" (11.504-5). Penelope's fidelity finds representation, as Froma I. Zeitlin discusses, "in the object that has remained in place through all these years . . . ," the immovable bed that Penelope and Odysseus shared (123). The bed, which is first presented in Book 23, acts as a powerful symbol of Penelope's resounding faithfulness. Like Penelope herself, the bed has been unmoved throughout Odysseus' absence, untouched by any other man. This is what distinguishes her in the *Odyssey*.

Foley expresses a relationship between Penelope's moral goodness and her similarities to the males in the *Odyssey*. She writes that "…Penelope repeatedly shows that she shares the value system of her men" ("Penelope," 96). This is another result of *homophrosune*. There are multiple occasions in which Penelope's actions could be misunderstood. However, Homer reveals in these instances that the actions are not ill-intended, but a product of the like-minded cleverness that both Penelope and Odysseus share, and he does this via Odysseus' responses.

In Book 18, when Penelope chastises her guests for their ill behavior as suitors, she convinces them to send for gifts to give her, rather than simply continue to devour Odysseus' household. At first, her motive in this seems questionable. Could the faithful Penelope finally be succumbing to the suitors? However, Odysseus shows no doubt in his wife, but rather rejoices within himself: "Staunch Odysseus glowed with joy to hear all this-- / his wife's trickery luring gifts from her suitors now, / enchanting their hearts with suave seductive words / but all the while with something else in mind" (18.316-319). Another, similar episode occurs in Book 19. While Penelope talks to the disguised Odysseus, she reveals her plot regarding the bow-stringing competition. Odysseus might have responded by questioning or dissuading Penelope - indeed

that may be the expected response for someone in his position. However, he does not. Instead, he encourages Penelope saying,

> 'Oh my queen,' / Odysseus, man of exploits, urged her on, / 'royal wife of Laertes' son, Odysseus, now, / don't put off this test in the halls a moment. / Before that crew can handle the polished bow, /string it taut and shoot through all those axes – Odysseus, man of exploits, will be home with you!' (19.655-60).

These two instances show a keen alignment of thought between Odysseus and Penelope, a similarity that is shown through the general plot of the *Odyssey*. Penelope is making use of *dolos*, or "cleverness." Both Penelope and Odysseus are often described in terms of their wit – Odysseus being clever and Penelope cautious or wise. They are both associated with craftiness; Odysseus uses it to escape from the majority of his predicaments throughout the *Odyssey*, and Penelope is associated with it early on with the story of the shroud in Book 2. Books 18 and 19 only serve to give concrete examples of what has been suggested all along. Penelope and Odysseus exhibit *homophrosune* in almost every aspect of their marriage. They are faithful, trusting, and share pivotal aspects of character. These qualities not only make Penelope an ideal wife, but also an ideal mother.

When the *Odyssey* begins, Telemachus is on the verge of manhood (1.340-1). His upbringing has taken place in Odysseus' absence, and as such has fallen solely to Penelope. Because the suitors, all of whom were too young to fight in the Trojan War, are in a similar situation, one might reasonably expect the same outcome from all of these characters. However, Telemachus stands apart from the suitors from the very beginning. In Book 1, Telemachus appears juxtaposed to the suitors who have invaded his home. Yet, even as the suitors take advantage of his father's house, Telemachus displays *aidōs*.

Aidōs in Greek has the connotation of guilt, shame, or respect. It is a complex emotion in ancient Greek culture that bears an inter-dependent relationship with an ancient Greek's behavior in society. It is the emotion that helps dictate socially correct behavior. Douglas L. Cairns writes regarding the Greek sentiment:

> One feels shame before those who witness one's actions, and focuses on what the members of that audience may say or think of one. Even this kind of response, however, is not a simple fear of disapproval or a straightforward response to purely external stimuli. The internalized component is to be found both in the categorization of one's own situation as one which can be viewed as shameful and in the negative judgment of oneself that is caused by the sense of being under public scrutiny (15).

Thus, *aidōs* contains both an individual component, which is based on one's internal standards, and a social component, which is based on societal standards. The suitors show no concern for societal standards, yet Telemachus feels shame as soon as he sees a stranger untended. The first time he appears, Athena comes to his door disguised as a man named Mentes. Telemachus goes straight to her, "mortified / that a guest might still be standing at the doors" (1.140-1). How is it that this boy without a father has learned the *aidōs* that the others lack? The answer is Penelope.

Penelope has had a difficult task, for even as she has had to maintain the proper role of a woman, she has had to teach Telemachus the proper role of a man, a responsibility that would otherwise have belonged to his father. However, Penelope has taken on the task, and done so successfully, as is clear by her son's actions. This is apparent first in Telemachus' interaction with disguised Athena, and in subsequent episodes, especially those concerning the suitors. Later in Book 1, Telemachus confronts the men, saying to them, "…at first light / we all march forth to

assembly, take our seats / so I can give my orders and say to you straight out: / You must leave my palace!" (427-30). Though the suitors will not be defeated until much later, this moment is an attempt by Telemachus at establishing his manhood. It is the beginning of his transition, and it culminates when he fights with his father in Book 22. Since he has no other fit authority figure for the majority of his life, this is all due to the guidance of his mother.

Penelope has succeeded in teaching Telemachus the virtues of a man, but, more importantly, she has done so while maintaining the proper behavior of a woman. Early in the epic, Penelope confronts the bard Phemius and is chastised by Telemachus. He tells her to "tend to [her] own tasks," saying further, "As for giving orders, / men will see to that, but I most of all: / I hold the reins of power in this house" (1.410-14). Rather than challenge her son, Penelope instead "[takes] to heart / the clear good sense in what her son had said" (1.415-16). Thus, just as Penelope has shown wisdom in raising Telemachus and teaching him the proper behavior, she has equally shown wisdom in knowing when to defer to her son and let him be the man of the house. Penelope's behavior, both wifely and motherly, is guided by her understanding of male values and the bond of *homophrosune* that she shares with Odysseus. She is wise and faithful, and is always mindful of her position as a woman. She maintains these qualities throughout the epic, acting as a paradigm for the Greek heroine, and she is rewarded in the end with the return of her husband. The contrast with Euripides' *Medea* could not be more striking.

The Medea myth ascribes to the woman many treacherous acts, including the betrayal of her father, the possible murder of her brother, and the destruction of Pelias (Mastronarde 46-47), and the Athenian audience of Euripides' time would have been familiar with much of this background (44). In the very first lines, the nurse recounts the events of this myth. It is Euripides' first clue to the evil of which Medea is capable. As the nurse laments the events that have led

Medea to this moment of betrayal by Jason, she mentions that Medea had "convinced the daughters of Pelias to kill / their father" (*Medea,* 9-10). This may be troubling, since it not only names Medea as the root of Pelias' murder, but also as one who must have powerful skills of persuasion and trickery, since she convinced Pelias' own daughters to commit the deed. These skills become a prominent part of Medea's character in the play, and it seems odd that Euripides would be able to create sympathy for such a character. Would the viewers not see some treachery ahead? There are references made to this history within the play at various points, yet they are paired with instances that affirm Medea's character as an abandoned wife who has been badly treated by her husband. The result is an ambivalence that is hard to resolve. The nurse only mentions the deed in passing, and immediately follows it with lines that reaffirm Medea's character as a wife who has "come to live… on Corinthian soil /with her husband and children, winning over / the citizens of the country she has come to as a refugee, / and obliging Jason in every way" (10-13). This description offers the image of a woman who, while technically a foreigner, has come to a Greek *polis*, has married a Greek man, and acts very much as a Greek wife should, forsaking everything to follow her husband and perform her wifely and motherly duties. She has been fully accepted by the people of her new home. Creon is the only character who seems to show reservations about Medea, and his voice is overruled by the others in the play, including Medea herself. Thus, when Medea first appears in Euripides' play, she seems for all the world as a Greek woman who has been pitifully cast aside by her husband.

At this point, the question arises regarding how much Euripides makes use of Medea's other identities, for in addition to being the wife of Jason, Medea is identified in prior myths as a foreigner and a witch. As such, should not this knowledge overpower the voice of the Chorus and other characters, and even establish an expectation of the murders to come? The answer lies in

two structural details. First is Medea's position as a character in tragedy. Medea benefits from being a female character of this genre, as Greek tragedy often features females in prominent and complex roles. Second is the brevity with which Euripides references these aspects of the Medea myth. It is true that Medea's past crimes are referenced during the *agon* by Jason. However, Euripides has already discredited Jason by his actions, and has reinforced this using the other characters in the play. Mastronarde writes, "On the whole… Eur[ipides] has been rather restrained… in the exploitation of the Greek-foreign contrast" (24). He also asserts that the "supernatural elements are downplayed… until the finale" (25). Euripides expertly crafts Medea's character so as to reveal the potentially barbaric qualities of her temperament only at certain moments in the play. By doing so, he minimizes these aspects of her character so that he may call upon them later. At the end of the play, they will be used to underscore Medea's power. Euripides builds a contrast between the Medea with whom the play begins, and the Medea with whom the play ends, but he builds this contrast throughout the play to allow both images – that is, the pitiable image and the treacherous image - an equal chance of surfacing. Furthermore, the points at which the treacherous Medea surfaces are muted by the Greek audience's ability to suspend disbelief. The viewers would be used to seeing Euripides' female characters act inappropriately (Cairns 305-306). This does not negate suspicion. However, Euripides supplements this with the use of other characters to maintain the image of a pitiable Medea juxtaposed with the image of the threatening Medea. This begins with the Nurse's first speech, and continues throughout the play.

At first, the nurse laments how "Jason has cast aside his children and [Medea]…" (17). She describes Medea as suffering "in despair, rejected by her husband," saying that her mistress refuses to eat, and instead "gives in to her grief, / washing away all her hours in tears" (20, 24-

25). These lines conjure a picture of a pitiable woman indeed for a culture in which the women are defined by their relationship to the men in their lives. The nurse's description depicts a sad, helpless wife who has been abandoned by her husband despite her dedication to him, and who can do nothing but weep over her loss; yet, again, this appearance is almost immediately complicated by reference to the heroine as a dangerous woman who is capable of great evil. The nurse says that her mistress "hates her children" and "takes no pleasure in seeing them," and even that she is "afraid of her, in case she has some new plan in mind" (36-37). These lines suggest the opposite of the "helpless wife" image. Instead of a pitiful and helpless woman, the possibility of a devious and dangerous woman arises once more. This woman the nurse describes as "a deep thinker," "frightening," and one who is capable of murder (38-45), a depiction that hearkens back to the pre-Euripidean mythology surrounding Medea and reasserts her potential for deception and violence. Such an account depicts the barbarian woman, the woman who cannot be trusted. And yet, even as Euripides asserts this potential, he simultaneously blinds them to the events to come by using the Chorus of Corinthian women as well as Medea's own voice.

Though Euripides seems to have made a point early in the play to imply the violence that Medea will commit later on, the voice of the Chorus mutes this somewhat. The Corinthian women express sympathy with Medea, and passivity in response to her threats of violence. They assert that Jason's betrayal is "his affair" and a concern for Zeus, not Medea (156-7). Thus, they appear as women who act and think appropriately. They also build support for the pitiful view of Medea, calling Jason "evil" and saying that Medea suffers an "injustice" and that she is "full of despair" (203-206). They even tell Medea that it is "right that [Jason] should pay" for his betrayal (267). This is all reaffirmed in the first stasimon, as well as during Medea and Jason's

first *agon* (410-445, 576-8). In this way, the Chorus, comprising of the women of Corinth, represents society's view on Medea's problem. Namely, they show that, even though she is a foreigner in Greek society, Medea's position in justified, and Jason is in the wrong. Nancy Rabinowitz recognizes this use by Euripides of not only the Chorus, but of several other characters. She states, "The Nurse, the Chorus, Tutor, and Aigeus are all [Medea's] supporters. Each sees that Jason is wrong, and each accepts the premise that she is entitled to justice" (128). Euripides builds Medea's sympathetic appearance through the majority of the play by continually using the Chorus to express Medea's helplessness. As a woman in Corinth, Medea is expected to accept her situation. Such are the Chorus' expectations, for even when Medea threatens evil deeds, the Corinthian women seem not to believe her, or to think her ranting the product of a woman gone mad from betrayal. In this way, the Chorus similarly serves to somewhat undermine woman's abilities and actual intentions, though there are warnings from the Nurse in the beginning of the play. The other factor that creates the element of surprise is that the course of action that Medea ultimately proposes, namely to kill her children, seems impossible, or, at the very least, improbable. Medea was a pitiful woman just at the beginning of the play, and the emotional outbursts that would incriminate her have been muted by her persuasive speeches. Furthermore, prior to Euripides, according to Deborah Boedeker, there were multiple myths surrounding Medea, some with alternate views of her in different roles. The child-murdering mother of Euripides who is famous today was "not yet firmly established" in Euripides time. It is the action of Euripides' play that creates Medea's "canonical identity" (Clauss, 127). Thus, before this action occurs, the character seems all too sympathetic.

Though the murders of her children will come to define her, the beginning of Euripides' play stations Medea as a victim to be pitied. She has fulfilled her societal role and, in Luschnig's

summary, “lived as Jason's wife, borne and reared his children, been in charge of his household and tried to build of his estate and prospects….” (7). She is a faithful wife who has left her home and abandoned her previous life to dedicate herself completely to Jason. But now she has been cast aside by her husband and left with nothing, and as such has suffered an affront to her *aidōs*.

The individual component of *aidōs* is addressed in the *agon* between Jason and Medea, but the societal aspect becomes relevant much earlier. Cairns describes the differences between a woman's *aidōs* and a man's *aidōs*, stating that “society sets different standards for women from those it sets for men,” and that “a woman, then, received *aidōs* for her observance of her social role” (120-121). Thus, *aidōs* keeps a woman faithful to her husband and conscientious in her duties to her husband and to his household. Penelope has done this. Medea has attempted to do this, but once Euripides' play begins, she has failed, not of her own accord, but having been rendered incapable of her duties by her husband's betrayal. But what motivates this betrayal?

Luschnig writes, "For three lines (13-5) their marriage was a perfect union, Medea accommodating herself to Jason in all things” (24-5). This is the *homophrosune* that was evident in Penelope and Odysseus' marriage. Medea had believed that such an alliance had existed between herself and her husband, and perhaps, for a time, it had. Luschnig asserts that “...primarily it was Jason who became dissatisfied with his marriage and brought on the alienation of Medea's love” in favor of a royal marriage with the daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth. She goes on to say, “The simple fact is this: Jason has changed his mind” (15). Jason has dismissed Medea in order to gain status, power, and wealth in Corinth. He had had, as Euripides seems to suggest, the ideal wife. Medea had given up everything to be with him, and had faithfully followed him and reared his children. But Jason betrayed her, severing the marital

bond, severing the *homophrosune* between himself and Medea, and this is the first step in Medea's moral descent within the play. Marianne Hopman describes it thus:

> Plainly put, *Medea* stages the revenge of a woman whose husband has abandoned her for a new bride. The theme of marriage thus stands at the core of the tragedy, and much of the tension between Medea and Jason derives from the incompatibility of their views on their relationship. As the prologue unfolds, the nurse makes it clear that, as far as Medea is concerned, Jason's recent engagement to the Corinthian princess amounts to a nullification of their ties. The *philia*, the reciprocal friendship that used to bind them, has been replaced by enmity (158).

Where once stood a marriage bound by love and trust, there now stands a wounded woman. From this point on, she becomes increasingly set on Jason's destruction, as becomes increasingly evident throughout the play.

The termination of the *homophrosune* and the beginning of Medea's questionable behavior is evidenced in the first *agon* between Medea and Jason, in which the two characters engage in a verbal exchange much like a debate (446-626). Throughout this exchange, both characters accuse and reproach the other, never agreeing on a single point. This is not in itself incriminating of Medea, especially as she comes across as more convincing and more sympathetic than Jason. However, at this point, Medea begins to exhibit qualities that are often associated with the male. The first *agon* is significant in that it is Medea's first rhetorical contest, as opposed to a supplication, and it is against a man. Jason comes to Medea just after Creon has told her of her banishment. Medea begins the *agon* with a bitter accusation against Jason, who has abandoned her even after all she did to help him (465-519). Jason responds with his own speech, in which he dismisses Medea's services to him as actions that should be attributed to

Kypris, the goddess of love, who made Medea fall in love with him. He further insists that he has only done Medea a favor by his actions, including his new marriage (522-75). Immediately following these lines is a rhetorical contest between Jason and Medea, in which each attempts to defend his moral position and condemn the other. The *agon* reveals the extent of Medea's rhetorical powers, for she is able to compete with Jason in the argument, continually turning his attempts at self-justification back to his crime (579-608). Finally, Jason says that he "will not carry on this quarrel any longer" and changes the subject (609). While certainly not a concession, this anticlimactic ending of the *agon* suggests that Jason cannot keep up with Medea. He cannot respond to her, and, thus, she gets the last word. This is reaffirming of Medea's cause, but also subtly incriminating of her character.

Throughout the drama, Medea's speech vacillates between striking outbursts of emotion and strong rhetorical arguments. In this, her speech is both self-incriminating as well as self-exonerating. Medea's first words are in the form of violent outbursts. She expresses suicidal wishes, asking Zeus to "hurl [his] fiery bolt of lightning straight through / [her skull]" (144-5), followed by violent impulses toward Jason, wishing she "could see him and his bride / ground down to nothing, house and all" (163-4). She seems not only emotional, but emotional and impulsive to the point of being uncivilized and barbaric, expressing the desire for physical aggression that is unfit for a woman. Despite this, when Medea first enters on stage, she delivers a speech that may be as effective on the audience outside the play as it is on the audience within the play. She begins the speech by appealing to the values of her Greek audience, specifically to the Chorus, but broadly to the audience of the play itself. She addresses the Chorus, telling them that she has "come out of the house, / so that [they] will not hold anything against [her]" (214-15), for she knows that "an outsider in particular must conform to the city. / A native too…"

(222-3). Expanding on this, she says that she does “not condone self-absorbed people / who through insensitivity irritate their neightbors” (223-4). In this way, Medea, as any good speaker should, builds credit with her audience by telling them that she shares their values, even as a foreigner. After this, she establishes sympathy with her audience. She tells them that she is “cast adrift” and has “lost all pleasure in living” and that she wants to die, because “the man who was everything to [her]… / has turned out to be the vilest man alive…” (226-29). Finally, she seals the sympathetic bond by logically connecting her plight to that which all Greek women share, such as having to “buy a husband” who is then in control of everything, including if he wants to divorce her, a situation which is “unsavory / for a woman” (233-37). Thus, Medea has not only justified her emotions, but she has allied her audience to her cause through the possibility of shared suffering. She has once again revealed a masterful skill of persuasion.

Medea has used her verbal powers, once again, to show her audience the wrongfulness of Jason’s actions. However, she has also revealed something else about herself. The rhetorical and persuasive power that Medea possesses should, traditionally, belong to a man, and not to a woman. A man’s job is in the political arena, but a woman has no reason to speak to crowds of people; her place is in the home. Yet Medea speaks with consistent success not only to the Chorus of Corinthian women, but indirectly to the Greek audience. Again, she is able to do this due to her position within the drama. However, Medea’s deciding scene and the last *agon* between her and Jason reveal the danger of persuasion in the hands of a woman. Mastronarde states that “Medea presents to an interpreter… the alarming image of a woman who engages in male activities,” namely that “she competes for honour, reputation, and revenge, and she lays claim to language and imagery from typically male spheres” (27). This could conceivably make Medea’s character appear suspect to the Greek audience, especially considering the Greeks’

traditional view of women, for, according to Mastronarde, “the dominant ideology of classical Athens was strongly exclusionary of women and distrustful of women’s potentials and behaviors” (26). Were it not for the commonness with which Euripides’ female characters behaved in untraditional ways, this would probably have much more effect on the audience’s view of the character. Yet, Euripides continues to take advantage of the audience’s willing suspension of disbelief. He continues to use characters like the Chorus to lull the audience into a zone of comfort, capitalizing most effectively on Medea’s own abilities of persuasion, until the pivotal moment of Medea’s betrayal.

Medea commits multiple murders in the drama, but none is so frightening as the murder of her children. This is the final moment of her reversal. She has already abandoned her concern for proper female behavior, and now she overturns even her motherly instinct to become a paradigm of the female anti-hero. Christopher Gill identifies the speech in which Medea makes this decision as a poignant section of the play. He states that this speech “works out an ethical dilemma which derives from Medea’s decision to make a stand of principle in her interpersonal dispute with Jason” (217). After Medea meets Aigeus, she reveals her plan to kill Jason’s wife. This is the first concrete example of the pre-Euripidean Medea, as it is at this point that she turns from wish – merely wishing for Jason’s destruction – to will – a plan to bring it about. She plans the death of Jason’s new wife, but immediately afterward she reveals an even darker intention to kill her own children (792). This is an act that should be impossible for a mother, prevented by her instinct. At first, it seems that such an instinct may prevail and that the children may be safe after all when she says, “Goodbye my plans /of before. I shall take my children with me. / Why should I abuse them to wound their father, /and have twice as many woes myself?” (1044-47). But she overpowers her instincts, and she does so with her own powers of persuasion. She

engages in a self-dialogue, in which she vacillates between a motherly desire to save the lives of her children, and the need to exact her full vengeance on Jason. In the end, she convinces herself to murder her children, saying, "…my wrath is stronger even than my thoughts, / which is the cause of the greatest wrongs of humankind" (1079-80). This speech begins Medea's terrible betrayal, the betrayal that is then punctuated by the act itself.

The final scene in the play heightens the effect of Medea's actions, acting as a reversal of the former *agon* between Jason and Medea. In this scene, Jason accuses Medea of her crime, and Medea responds by justifying her actions as a result of Jason's betrayal. Jason now has the benefit of the observers' perspective, as Medea can indeed be nothing but a criminal in light of her actions against her children. They support Jason in his supplications of Medea that he should be able to bury his offspring (1377), or even just to touch them (1403-4). However, Medea appears superior once more. Though she appears morally incorrect, she has a power that Jason cannot touch. She stands literally out of his reach, and with her last refusal to give him any closure with his children, she flies out of his reach forever. Her supernatural lineage surfaces when she stands atop the palace in a chariot drawn by dragons. She has repaid Jason for his injury. As he left her with nothing, she now leaves him with nothing. She has deprived him of his wife and of his children. All that he had left her for she has taken away from him. Euripides, having exploited Medea's witch-like powers in the murders of Glauce and Creon, now exploits her divine lineage to add a final atrocity to her actions. Not only has Medea transgressed her station as a woman, betraying even her own children, but she is to fly away from the scene unharmed and forever safe from retribution of any kind, and she is flying to the beloved home of Euripides' audience – Athens. Euripides emphasizes the threat of Medea's treachery by bringing it physically nearer to the audience.

Medea’s actions have gained her sympathy from the modern audience, even as the child killer. She is a woman who takes matters into her own hands. However, in ancient Greek society, such a prospect was terrifying, and this is, of course, the perspective from which Euripides was writing. Rabinowitz states, “Though some readers may take pleasure in Medea’s revenge, I would argue that this text does not strive for that reaction….” (125). She goes on to say that Euripides “has constructed his character in such a way that the audience will be encouraged to perceive female sexuality and language as embodying a threat to male offspring” (126). In other words, the unrestrained female is a threat, and Medea is certainly unrestrained. Yet, there is a question regarding her treatment of the children’s bodies at the end of the play. Medea announces that she will “bury them with [her] own hand, /taking them to the sanctuary of Hera Akraia /so that none of [her] enemies will defile them / by tearing up their graves. And in this land of Sisyphus / [she] shall authorize a sacred festival and ritual /to last forever for this unholy murder” (1378-73). This is often taken to be a final act of defiance, intended to further punish Jason by denying him the closure of burying his children. However, Lora Holland offers an additional interpretation. Holland suggests that, while it is a capitalization on Medea’s victory over Jason that he should not be allowed to bury his children, it is, more importantly, a recognition on Medea’s part that she has committed an unholy act and must atone for it. She asserts:

> Medea's appropriation of the bodies and announcement of their burial to be followed by cult must instead be understood from the standpoint of Greek religion; she takes responsibility for restoring a proper relationship between the living and the dead…. she publicly acknowledges that murder is unholy (1383) and requires atonement. The atonement will begin with the funeral rites, *thaptein* (1378), and continue with the annual festival the Corinthians will perform (409).

This is an interesting part of the plot for Euripides to include. Medea's mention of the ritual refers to an actual part of Greek culture, specifically, the annual festival that Medea refers to was something that was practiced in Corinth. However, perhaps more importantly, it provides a last insight into Medea's character. The fact that Medea has considered and recognized her actions ultimately emphasizes the logical aspect of her character. It shows that she cannot be dismissed simply as a barbarian or criminal, since she understands and adheres to their customs even after her crimes. For this, she is even more frightening. She displays intelligence, logic, planning, and power that are untrustworthy in a woman, and this comes to define her.

Euripides crafts a character who both warns her audience of her potential for violence, while simultaneously obtaining their sympathy. In the end, she betrays this trust by committing a heinous crime, one of which, as a mother, she should be incapable. However, these traits do not in themselves make Medea most terrifying. Rather, as a woman who has proven herself more capable than her male counterpart, Medea represents a role-reversal. She has bested him in speech, by taking the audience's sympathy away from him, and in power, by taking away his future – the bride he was to marry – and his past – the children that he fathered. She exhibits masculine qualities and goes unchecked by male superiors. Thus, she exemplifies the foil to heroism, the female anti-hero.

Penelope and Medea act as paradigms on opposite ends of the spectrum of female characters. Faithful Penelope, with her good sense and acquiescence to traditional female gender roles, is renowned throughout the Greek world as a woman to be emulated, the heroine to Odysseus' heroism. Conversely, Medea's name is one to be dreaded, the horror of her actions punctuated by her masculine abilities. Where then, does a controversial character such as Sophocles' Antigone fall? From the view of the modern audience, this may be relatively easy.

People are attracted to the iconic figure who refuses to let male political authority overrule her moral conscience. She has been regarded as the image of the feminist speaking out against the tyranny of patriarchal society, her martyrdom shining through as the tragic end to her heroism. Yet what this view overlooks is the perspective of the audience in the time of Sophocles. Philip Holt writes, “We are likely to see Antigone as the champion of moral right, or conscience, or religion against the authority of the state, as represented by Creon… But these terms for describing the conflict and even more the ethical weight and emotional coloring these terms carry are relatively modern” (658). The lens through which the modern audience reads *Antigone* is colored by modern conceptions of the “state” and the individual’s relationship to it. The world of Sophocles’ tragedy in the context of fifth-century Athens would have looked quite different.

Antigone is a woman of strange circumstances. Due to her position as a woman, her actions within the drama cannot be automatically classified as commendable or treacherous. She disobeys the highest authority in favor of the deceased. Creon, the king of Thebes and Antigone’s uncle, has issued an edict that a traitor who died waging war against the former king of Thebes should remain unburied outside the city. That traitor is Antigone’s brother, and in defiance of the edict Antigone resolves to adhere to divine law and bury her brother’s body according to ritual. Since she is a character in drama, the context of the play must determine the moral appeal of her actions. To several characters, Antigone’s action appears as an act of defiance against the king and rebellion against her station as a woman. However, a closer look at the action of the play reveals that neither Creon nor Antigone is completely guiltless, nor at fault. The two stand as antagonists to one another, each adhering to partial custom, but neither acknowledging *nomos* in fullness. Yet Antigone’s actions will lead to the reconciliation of *nomos* in Creon, and by this, she may be considered heroic.

The *Antigone*, simply put, describes the conflict between one's duties to the state law (Creon) and one's duties to filial bonds and divine law (Antigone). Thus, Antigone's position within the drama is largely dependent on the individual's relationship *to* the state, and whether this relationship supersedes her relationship to the family. Holt describes how the individual and the *polis* were much more intertwined than in modern society. He states that "broad construction of the public interest gave the Athenian polis considerable power to regulate what its citizens did" (663). This included the burial of the deceased, the act upon which the conflict of the *Antigone* is based, as long as it was relevant to the state's interests. Holt explains that "Athenian law forbade the burial of traitors and sacrilegious people in Athenian territory," (663). However, as Knox explains, the blood bond of family transcended the laws of the *polis*: " . . . the strong, indissoluble tie of blood relationship had in earlier time . . . been the dominating factor in the citizen's social and political environment. It was much older than the *polis* . . . " In this way, Knox explains that Antigone's loyalty to her brother "is in fact a political loyalty" (76). Thus, Creon is acting within his limits as king to deny Polyneices burial within the city limits, but he is not justified in denying the burial altogether. In light of this, Antigone, while she is not the demure, obedient woman that she should be according to Greek society, still appears to be justified in her actions. Yet Holt asserts that Antigone acts in an extreme and rebellious manner, and this could have been off-putting for the Greek audience:

> To sum up, in fifth-century terms Creon is within his rights as the leader of his polis, and his ban on burying Polyneikes is a reasonable sanction. In fifth-century terms, Antigone's defiance of that ban is seriously, perhaps even shockingly, out of line: an individual defying due authority in the polis, in time of crisis, on behalf of a national enemy, and moreover a woman defying due male authority (667-8).

This attitude is by no means representative of modern critics; however, it is reflected to a certain extent within the *Antigone,* in first encounter of the tragedy, when Antigone petitions for Ismene's help. When Antigone reveals her intentions to Ismene, the latter responds with fearful concern. She reminds Antigone of her position, both politically and socially, voicing her concerns in a despondent speech:

> Think how we'll die far worse than all the rest, / if we defy the law and move against / the king's decree, against his royal power. /We must remember that by birth we're women, / and, as such, we shouldn't fight with men./ Since those who rule are much more powerful, / we must obey in this and in events/which bring us even harsher agonies (74-81).

With these words, Ismene sums up the cultural concerns of Antigone's actions. Her exploits are improper, to say the least. She is rebelling against her position as a female citizen of the *polis*. Kearns states that a heroine should fill a "subordinate position in regard to the hero" (98). Ismene gives voice to this as well, telling her sister, "We must remember that by birth we're women, / and, as such, we shouldn't fight with men" (77-78). This poses a real problem in evaluating the heroism of Antigone's character for a society in which women were defined by their relationship with men. She was expected to marry and to serve her husband's household. Antigone is betrothed at the time of Sophocles' play, but she is not yet married. She has fulfilled none of these expectations, and, moreover, she has rebelled against not only the head of the household, but the head of her country. How could such a rebellious female possibly be seen as heroic? What protects her from the disfavor of the audience? It is *themis*, or "divine law."

Antigone claims the support of the gods. This becomes apparent in the *agon* between her and Creon. The exchange begins with Creon asking Antigone how she dared "to break those very

laws" that he had issued, to which she replies:

> Zeus did not announce those laws to me. / And Justice living with the gods below / sent no such laws for men. I did not think / anything which you proclaimed strong enough / to let a mortal override the gods /and their unwritten and unchanging laws (507-513).

From Antigone's perspective, she is not breaking the law, but upholding it. In her mind, there is no law of man that can override the law of the gods. S.M. Adams writes that Antigone is "not upholding divine law… against the laws of man," she is simply upholding the law that she knows to be correct (49). Burial ritual was an important custom in Greek society, and is referred to in many works of Greek literature. Even Holt recognizes this, as he writes, "Denying burial to traitors and temple-robbers was, after all, a circumscribed exception to a widely accepted norm, the right to a decent funeral. It was an extreme reprisal, and it may well have occasioned doubts, reservations, and ambivalence in the community that resorted to it" (670). So, though Creon's edict is not shocking, nor even really blameworthy in itself, Antigone's distressed response to it is not unbelievable, either. She acts on emotions that are understandable to the Greek audience, and she uses these emotions to her rhetorical advantage early on. Before Ismene has the opportunity to express dismay at her sister's proposal, Antigone prepares the audience to sympathize with her. She uses strong, emotional language, saying to her sister, "There's no suffering,/ no shame, no ruin—not one dishonour— / which I have not seen in all the troubles / you and I go through" (5-8); she further announces that "Dishonours which better fit our enemies / are now being piled up on the ones we love" (12-13). Within the first few lines of the drama, Sophocles has prepared the audience not only to feel sympathy for Antigone, but also to feel disapproval of her enemy – whoever it may be. Her solution may be surprising, but she is not

positioned so as to be hated. Still, she needs to be defined within her relationship to a male counterpart.

As prior studies have revealed, the essential aspect of a heroine-hero relationship is *homophrosune*. If this is in place, the heroine is connected with the hero. The two share similar qualities of character, and she acts in submission to him. This is frequently understood to be the relationship between a hero and his wife, as with Penelope and Odysseus. However, Kearns also states that the relationship between hero and heroine does not necessarily have to be husband-to-wife (99). Antigone, though she is betrothed to Haemon at the time of Sophocles' drama, as yet has no husband. Furthermore, her betrothed does not appear on stage until fairly late in the play, and then he does so only for a short time. Thus, Antigone's heroic counterpart must be a different male and their relationship defined by some aspect other than *homophrosune*. The heroic male in the *Antigone* must be identified, and the relationship between him and the heroine defined.

According to Bernard Knox, the characteristic Sophoclean hero is one who experiences a "tragic dilemma" followed by an ethical "reversal" (1). This hero is manifested within the drama as "a single personality facing the supreme crisis of his life" (3). That is to say, the Sophoclean play portrays an individual who, after making an initial wrong decision, is confronted with events that cause him to realize his mistake and reverse his mistaken action, but only after he has suffered tragic consequences. Within the *Antigone*, these criteria most aptly describe Creon, the king of Thebes. Creon begins the play with an edict that is contrary to divine law. Proceeding from this edict are a number of encounters between Creon and other characters within the play, followed by more mistaken actions arising out of the original fault, after which Creon finally realizes his error and reverses the mistaken actions, though this tragically comes too late to save the lives of several of his loved ones. In other words, Creon faces a tragic dilemma, followed by

an ethical reversal, indicating his identity as the tragic hero. Yet the relationship that Sophocles depicts between Creon and Antigone in many ways opposes the expected relationship between a hero and heroine.

Antigone and Creon are related by blood as niece and uncle, yet Sophocles stations the two in opposing standpoints. From the very beginning of the play, Antigone asserts her grievance against Creon's edict to leave one of her brothers' bodies unburied, while honoring the other's death in ritual, the two having killed one another in battle (*Antigone,* 25-41). Furthermore, at no point during the following events of the playa are the two characters reconciled, for Creon's reversal takes place only after Antigone's death. Thus, many readers and scholars have come to view the two characters as existing strictly in opposition with one another. Knox himself writes regarding the *Antigone,* "In this play two characters assume the heroic attitude, but one of them is in the end exposed as unheroic" (62). Knox asserts, then, that only one character in Sophocles' play will come out as a hero. This indicates that only the views of one character are correct, and the other must yield to that fact. Certainly, Sophocles has intentionally created opposition in his play; however, to view the drama in terms of who is right and who is wrong is perhaps a mistake. Charles Segal states that though "the *Antigone* is certainly a play of antitheses and conflicts," the tendency to approach the play in this way "runs the risk of conceptualizing the protagonists too simply into antithetical principles that somehow are, and dialectically must be, ultimately reconciled" (137). Though the two characters are, in many ways, opposed, and the principles that they represent come to be reconciled in Creon at the end of the drama.

This is the stance that Hegel takes in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He asserts that law – or *nomos* – is unified, that civil law and divine law coexist with one another. It is when *nomos* is filtered through consciousness that a separation or conflict between the two emerges: "…the

ethical essence has split itself into two laws, and consciousness, as an undivided attitude towards law, is assigned only to one" (281). The two do not conflict in essence, but the consciousness of a person only identifies with one or the other position. The limitations of this consciousness, therefore, are what drive the conflict between Antigone and Creon, and not an inherent opposition between the two types of law. Neither of these characters is altogether right or altogether wrong. Each claims a basis in *nomos*. Martha Nussbaum comments on this, stating that, because both Antigone and Creon are morally correct in some way, each "…has a vision of the world of choice that forestalls serious practical conflict; each has a simple deliberative standard and a set of concerns neatly ordered in terms of this. Each, therefore, approaches problems of choice with unusual confidence and stability" (52). However, it is this confidence that causes the intensity of the conflict. Both characters stand self-assured, and therefore neither character will yield. This will bring about their destruction.

What lies at the core of this unyielding is a shared nature, for though Creon and Antigone spend almost the entire play opposed in principle and action, they are nonetheless similar in other ways. Knox describes this nature as the attitude of the tragic hero. He is one who seems "unreasonable almost to the point of madness, suicidally bold, impervious to argument, intransigent, angry," and "his loyalty to his conception of himself, and the necessity to perform the action that conception imposes, prevail over all other considerations" (28). This aspect of character has appeared in Medea, and now it appears in both Antigone and Creon. Both characters are acting according to strong principles, principles for which they are willing to and in fact do take drastic actions, and for which they are confronted by others as being too bold or relentless. This is clear in Sophocles' representation of Antigone from the very beginning. The female protagonist identifies so strongly with her principles that she is willing to act against the

edict of her uncle and her king. In response, her sister, Ismene, accuses her of being “too rash,” asserting that she should obey the orders of her superiors (59-85). Of course, Antigone does not relent, holding so strongly to her ideals that she is imprisoned and takes her own life. While Creon does not meet death in the play, he issues death in defense of his principles. Creon feels so strongly about the justness of his edict that when Antigone disobeys him, he condemns her to be buried alive, telling her to “go down to the dead” (599). He meets opposition from other characters, but is unyielding, even to his own son, Haemon, to whom Antigone is engaged (650). Ultimately, Creon does yield, but only after his stubbornness has cost the lives of not only Antigone, but of Haemon and his wife, Eurydice, as well.

The scene with Haemon is quite illustrative of Creon’s character and bears some resemblances to the conversations between Antigone and Ismene. Haemon comes to Creon after Antigone’s arrest. His first words are an attempt to establish trust and goodwill with his father. He asserts that he would “not consider / any marriage a greater benefit / than [Creon’s] fine leadership” (722-4). This is clearly a reference to Antigone, Haemon’s bride-to-be. Haemon is asserting his loyalty to his father over his loyalty to his bride. Specifically, he is establishing his support of Creon and his concern for Creon’s well-being. At first, this goes well, and Creon praises his son’s good judgment (735ff.). However, as soon as Haemon suggests that Creon should change his action regarding Antigone, the mood shifts dramatically. Creon clearly becomes angry and defensive, so much so by the end of the scene that he threatens to execute Antigone before Haemon’s very eyes (868-70). This, indeed, makes Creon appear unreasonable to the point that he alienates his own son, who would be closest to him. Antigone spurns her sister in a similar way when it becomes apparent that Ismene will not help her, saying, “I’ll hate you if you’re going to talk that way. / And you’ll rightly earn the loathing of the dead” (114-15).

Like Creon, Antigone is incapable of bending to the pleas of those around her. Both characters are so invested in their ideals that they are incapable of seeing an alternative. For Antigone, there is no choice but to bury her brother. For Creon, there is no choice but to sentence Antigone to death. This is another reflection of Hegel's argument. Both Creon and Antigone adhere to a specific manifestation of *nomos*, but they fail to recognize *nomos* in its entirety.

Antigone could easily be painted strictly as an antagonist, especially with regard to her relationship to Creon. Antigone has had no father, since Oedipus' death. The two brothers who may have been responsible for her in his absence are now also dead. Thus, she has come to live in her uncle Creon's household. In this household, Creon is the ultimate authority. As such, Antigone should rightly be subservient to him. Add to this that Creon is the ruler of the city and that Antigone is rebelling against him on two accounts. It seems impossible that such a woman could gain the favor of the audience, yet Sophocles builds a defense for her from the very beginning. He begins with an emotional appeal in the first lines of the play, and he continues to build her credibility through the presentation of her action as it is supported by other characters.

Jean-Pierre Vernant discusses action in terms of the Greek word *prohairesis,* defining it as "action taking the form of a decision," and clarifying, more importantly, that it "rests upon a desire… directed not toward pleasure, but towards a practical objective" that has been "presented to the soul as a good" (34). Antigone is acting according to *prohairesis*. Though burying her brother is against Creon's edict, the act has already appeared to her as good, indeed necessary, and she is willing to act accordingly. Sophocles takes pains to show the moral rightness of Antigone's actions throughout the drama in various ways. He does so first by Antigone's encounter with Creon, after she has buried her brother's body. Though she has acted defiantly, Antigone is submissive when she receives her punishment. She does not deny her actions, but

accepts the repercussions (500-565). Thus, Sophocles offers an image of Antigone as a character who, while she has broken Creon's law, is willing to take the punishment he hands out, and thus he makes her more admirable. This admiration is intensified in a scene just before Antigone goes to her sentence. As she approaches her fate, Antigone laments going to her death with "no wedding and no bridal song, no share / in married life or raising children" (1029-30). Her lamentation reflects on those societal values regarding a woman's role. Antigone shows that she understands and shares those values, that she regrets never having fulfilled the traditional female roles. This evokes pity and respect for Antigone's character.

Just as Sophocles uses Antigone's behaviors to support her character, he uses the behaviors of others to support her initial defiance. The dramatist makes use of key male figures to show that Antigone's actions are morally correct. The first of these is Haemon, the son of Creon, and Antigone's fiancé. Haemon appears in his speech as two voices. First, he claims to speak the attitude of the people of Thebes, saying that the people think Antigone "least deserves / the worst of deaths for her most glorious act" and even that she "deserves some golden honor" (787-8, 790). Furthermore, Haemon himself defends this perspective, asking his father to change his mind (814). The support Haemon shows for Antigone is significant in shaping his identity as her betrothed. Rather than spurning her and condemning her actions, he instead shows support for her behavior. Sophocles affirms Antigone's actions still more with the use of the character Teiresias, a famous prophet in Greek literature. In the *Antigone*, the prophet acts as a voice of the gods and the final word of Antigone's defense. Throughout the drama, Antigone claims the support of the divine law, indicating that Creon's edict had been unlawful with regards to the gods. The first evidence of this – apart from Antigone's word – is the guard's account of the second burial of Polyneices. What he describes is a "scourge sent from the gods" that allowed

Antigone to complete her burial's brother, indicating that the gods do in fact support Antigone's actions. Teiresias confirms this. He tells Creon that the holy places in the city have been tainted "with rotting flesh brought there / by birds and dogs from Oedipus' son," Antgone's brother (1130-31). He goes on to ask, as Haemon did, that Creon reverse his decision and show honor to the dead body. This is the last proof that Sophocles offers for the virtue of Antigone's actions. She has the support of the city, of her fiancé, and now of the gods. This is the last word needed to tip the scale in Antigone's favor and bring about Creon's reversal, and it is the reversal that ultimately defines the hero-heroine relationship between the two characters.

Creon's reversal takes place just after he talks with Teiresias. Initially, he is unrelenting, as he has been throughout his interactions. However, when Teiresias leaves, Creon engages in an episode of indecision, followed by a complete reversal. He resolves to bury the body of Antigone's dead brother and to release Antigone from the living tomb in which he had her imprisoned. Though, in the nature of a tragedy, this reversal comes too late to save Antigone's life and the lives of Haemon and Eurydice, both of whom kill themselves out of grief, it is nonetheless necessary for Creon's redemption, for he may only be complete as a ruler and as a character when he has reconciled his own *nomos* with the *nomos* that Antigone represents. Once Sophocles has shown that the correct action is what Antigone proposed from the beginning, Creon must experience the reversal from his own reasoning in order to fill the role of tragic hero. Antigone, then, as the one who initiates the action of the play and the events that lead to Creon's reversal, is in fact the instrument of his redemption. She represents divine law – an element that is necessary for a Greek society to follow, but that is absent from Creon's rule – the civil law. When these two first clash, the *agon* between the characters appears as a clash between the rights. In this scene of the play, Creon's perspective is clearly oriented toward the city. Polyneices was a

traitor, "fighting for the other side" (583). Antigone counters his assertions by invoking divine ritual, saying that "Hades still desires equal rites" for all dead (592). It seems that the two arguments exist only in opposition. However, they come to be reconciled in Creon, and by the end of the play he is enlightened by the two kinds of knowledge. Thus, Antigone's action leads to conflict, and the conflict ultimately results in Creon's transformation. As such, she brings action Creon full circle, making her the tragic heroine.

Segal writes that Antigone and Creon "have many levels that fuse organically, sometimes indistinguishably, into a complex unity; and here the confrontations of the two protagonists create an ever-ramifying interplay between interlocking and expanding issues"(138). Sophocles constructs the play in such a way that each of the opposing characters has a moral appeal. Antigone has a strong appeal to familial and ritual duties; yet, Creon has an equally strong appeal to political duties. This allows the audience to associate strongly with each character, to feel the insecurity of a hard decision, and ultimately to feel the emotions of pity and fear, for they too are at risk of such suffering. David Konstan writes regarding these emotions, "we must be able to anticipate the possibility of suffering a like misfortune to that which afflicts the person who is pitied" (13). Creon evokes the majority of these emotions because, while Antigone has to suffer death, it is Creon whose actions lead to her death and the other deaths for which he will suffer for the rest of his life, and he suffers so as a result of an understandably misplaced sense of duty. Had Antigone been of Creon's mind, had she been allied with him in the traditional ways that a heroine should be allied with a hero, his reversal may never have come about. Instead, as Foley writes, Sophocles "makes clear from the start that Antigone and Creon speak in different moral voices" (*Female Acts*, 172). Antigone's voice must overpower Creon's, so that he is forced to

change, and both moral voices may be represented in him. Creon must come to understand the full essence of *nomos*.

A female character of ancient Greek literature, though perhaps not so restrained as the women of that time period, was nonetheless expected by her contemporary audience to function within certain boundaries. She may be powerful and intelligent, but in using these attributes she walked a fine line between appearing trustworthy and appearing treacherous. Ultimately, her interactions with men defined her character. The women of ancient Greece served a very specific function. They were married, gave birth, and served their husbands' households. Naturally, then, a female character, if she were a heroine, should fulfill these roles. She should reinforce the standards of her author's society. She should exist and function only in relation to a male counterpart – a hero whose moral code she shares and whom she should never overpower or exceed. Their relationship should be fueled by the bond of *homophrosune*, as should be evident in their individual actions and their interactions. If *homophrosune* is not present, the heroine may become the anti-hero. The anti-hero may begin as an ideal woman, fulfilling the roles of wife, mother, and keeper of the home. Ultimately, however, she opposes the hero, and the standard of her society. She exceeds her boundaries, threatening the masculine sphere of power with her own abilities. In this way, she threatens the hero. She foils him at every opportunity, thwarting his effectiveness and denying his abilities.

Penelope and Medea exemplify these archetypes. Medea, as an anti-hero, opposes Jason at every turn. She threatens the male sphere with her powers of rhetoric and, most horrifically, she denies Jason his own children with her last act of treachery. Penelope fulfills all of the expected roles of a female protagonist. She is a wife and a mother, she keeps her husband's home in his absence, and she supplements his abilities. She is a clear example of a heroine, as Medea is

a clear example of a hero's foil. Antigone's role, however, is much more subtle. She is not married, nor does she have children, yet, she reinforces these societal standards with her speech. She opposes the hero, yet she enables his growth. The two spend almost the entire drama as antagonists, yet they are morally similar to a point of *homophrosune*, the ultimate hero-heroine bond. Thus, Sophocles' drama reveals the subtlety of the heroic female. It is not only her action that defines her, but her intention. Antigone's initial action seems questionable, but her good intentions become clear. Most important, however, is her effect on her hero counterpart. However the hero-heroine relationship appears at first, the heroine must be an aid to the hero. She must benefit him, as Penelope benefits Odysseus, as Antigone benefits Creon.

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