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“THE FEMALE BODY AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF THE RELATION BETWEEN THE TWO SEXES IN ANCIENT GREEK TRAGEDY”

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the physicality of the female characters in the tragedies of Medea, Hecuba, Andromache and Trojan Women by Euripides. Using the theories of performativity by Judith Butler as a key, the research seeks to explore how female physical behavior on stage could resonate elements about their performativity of gender in the Athenian society of the fifth century. Through a recording of references on the female body and after drawing parallels with the according speeches of the characters, a very fierce potential of disavowing the Athenian societal norms arises for the tragic heroines. The female figures manage to accept and utilize the social prescriptions in their favor in order to achieve some control over their lives. In this way, they meticulously employ their consciousness and they transform their passive adherence to males into a powerful abnegating means of manipulating them. Their abnegation patterns fall into eight categories for the purposes of organizing the way females produce their physicality and perform their gender. These patterns are submission, acceptance, supplication, subversion, indulgence, death, imprisonment and reproductive power.

KEY-WORDS: ancient tragedy, female performativity, gender studies.

Women under the Male order.

The Athenian society of the 5th century was a very gendered biased community with robust foundations and clear social divisions. There was a distinct association of men with the public life of the city and women with the private world of oikos. As Sjoberg points out, the term oikos¹ has been a fundamental element in the Athenian society, which not only foreclosed the private sphere but also allowed for a public place to be solid. The robustness of the society depended on the wellbeing of the private houses, for which women were predominantly responsible. Besides the wellbeing of the oikos, women's primary duty was to grant healthy and moral offspring for the continuation of the house. The duties of theirs kept them in the seclusion of their houses in order to ensure that roles and responsibilities were clearly assigned to the two sexes. In Athens, what is inside is considered to be feminine, while the outer space conveys masculine qualities². This special allocation echoed according behavioural patterns for the representatives of the two genders. As a result, tragedies, being the product of the social unit, reflected these social norms from a more critical perspective.

The division in the two sectors echoed an imbalance in the freedom of movement in space, which was as well visible on stage and in the verses of the plays³. Euripides allows for a brave mobility on the female heroines on stage creating role models which deviate from what an Athenian citizen would expect to see on stage. Through the employment of the mythological royal houses the poet challenges the prescribed behavioural patterns of his era. In fact, women were brought up by their families with the view of receiving a husband, who was rather chosen for them by their fathers. This rendered marriage a transaction of a female individual from the domestic protection of the parents to the one of the husband⁴.

In the four tragedies, the female characters find themselves in the absence of their male kyrios, their father or their husband. The heroines also have complete awareness of the fact that their body is a reproductive instrument and thus they possess awareness of their role. Simultaneously they realize their weak position without their protectors and in an attempt to maintain their moral integrity, they transgress the limits of their gender. Thus, the poet creates instances of permeable limits, which denote female abnegating patterns bearing social

¹ Sjoberg 2014, 316.

² Konstantinou 2018, 4.

³ Sjoberg 2014, 316. The author claims that "archeologists study space and architecture not only as a physical phenomenon, but also as a social space".

⁴ Konstantinou 2018, 81. "The young woman acquired a new husband who replaced her father as her kyrios and then she moved to a new household. ...the wedding ceremony rituals came to celebrate this transition and probably render it smother. This is perhaps the only major occasion in a woman's life in which she became mobile." This was rather an exchange between the houses according to Konstantinou.

meaning. In a male dominated society, Euripides with a deep understanding of the female psychology, delivered powerful heroines within equivocal situations in front of an audience whose identity was very strict⁵. Within suffering situations, fierce, bold women, represented by men actors, present and cancel social order⁶. Through the personification of ideas into characters, norms undergo a meaningful transgression and gender performativity is deployed critically. As Syropoulos points out, it is true that tragedies mirrored gender relations, but the plays were not only concerned with sexual issues; they delved into intricate cultural matters as well⁷.

Through Judith Butler's lens

Cross gender issues were investigated in theatre as it provided a fruitful environment for such exploration⁸. More often than not in modern critique, female representation in classical tragedies serves purposes “of imagining a fuller model for the masculine shelf” as Zeitlin points out⁹. Judith Butler, an American academic, philosopher and feminist, who researched on how behavior and acts are generated and bear a signification, coined the term gender performativity. Human bodies, having acquired the heritage of the collective unconscious, are crafted into genders though their presence in time and space and through the interaction with the other. In this artificial grouping of gendered bodies, the Athenian society allowed very specific behaviors to each representative, for the assignment of clear gender statuses ensured the embodiment of social rules. In the four tragedies under the scope of this research, Euripides delivered tableau vivant of female characters who act in the fringes of the social norms because this is where society is more assailable¹⁰. Women in tragedy possess the knowledge of the boundaries of their limits and their association with the other. They are full aware of the fact that gender is a relational activity. They cleverly use the inferiority of their status with complete awareness and they attain some kind of manipulation over men. Their effectiveness lies in the fact that they know their vulnerability and this knowledge is their

⁵ Roisman 201, 3. Roisman underlines the significance of the structure of social background in the composition of plays. She claims that “tragedies were created within an indisputably male dominant society and were written produced and acted by men.”

⁶ Walton 2015, 50-51. “Within the action characters variously embrace, sink to the ground, writhe in pain, hide and commit violence, on themselves or on other people.” These actions demand the deployment of feelings and thus the physicality of performers should have been very elaborate.

⁷ Syropoulos 2003, 2.

⁸ Blundell et al. 1999, 62. “Issues of gender definition, behavior and relations seem especially appropriate at a festival honoring Dionysos, who himself, embodies gender ambiguity and transgression.”

⁹ Zeitlin 1985, 67. “When elaborately represented, they may serve as antimodels as well hidden models for the masculine self.”

¹⁰ Butler 1988.

means of ensuring their prevailing. This knowledge grants the power to invade into the male sphere and in their bodies there is a fusion of male and female characteristics. This could mirror a potential advice from the poet to the citizens of a city, which at times overestimated the capacities and presented defiant behavior.

Female abnegation patterns.

Women in the tragedies of Medea, Hecuba, Andromache and the Trojan know how to utilize their femininity as a means of pursuing their survival or their moral integrity. They attain this thought different ways, which could be set under eight categories. This mosaic of female mobility presents a range of transgressive patterns, which differ in effectiveness and quality, but succeed in offering them a freedom of mobility in relation to the decisions that were taken for them by men.

The first key that women possess is that of submission. Submission applies to the instances of the heroines who realize their inferiority and transgress it as they defy what is cultivated in their consciousness. They are aware of their doomed fates and they do not avoid pain, because through physical endurance they manage to find solutions for themselves. Medea, Polyxena in Hecuba and Andromache know that their existence is restricted in enslavement and they accept this situation.

Firstly, Medea's submission to her fate is mediated through her mourning as she manages to compose a lethal plan, which affects not only the male counterparts, but also herself as a mother. One would say that submissive physicality is obvious in the first lines of the play where Medea is mourning by the sea. The nurturer describes Medea in lines 20-35¹¹ with words that display her deep pain being expressed. The agent of the description is a female trying to visualize another female body suffering of loss. Medea's description includes remarkable similes about her body. It is described at a low level, close to earth and in a way, which reminds of a mythical creature mourning about its disgraceful fate. Medea's submission to her husband's treachery has turned her into a monster, which roars by the sea. This simile by Euripides uncovers the monstrous power women can generate when betrayal triggers the emotional chords of a female psychology¹². Her realization that as a woman is inferior and not self-referential constitutes her submissive behavior.

The next heroine that presents a submissive power is Polyxena in the tragedy of Hecuba.

¹¹ Euripides, *Medea*, lines 20-45. //Johnston 2008, 20-45.

¹² Griffith 2010, 475. As Griffith states, when women in captivity decide to proceed to an action, the results are disastrous.

More specifically, this heroine decides to submit her body for the sacrifice that the Achaeans have decided for her. Polyxena is wise enough to foresee that succumbing to this decision is almost a liberating plan in her fate. She states that had she been given as a slave to new household in Greece, this would have been even more disgraceful than being sent to death¹³. The heroine describes everyday tasks of a slave as a way to demonstrate that a former princess will end up using her body for the mere tasks slaves perform. The verbs denote a female body, giving in to the execution of household duties and this is done through the words “σαίρειν τε δῶμα κερκίσιν/ λυπρὰν ἄγουσαν ἡμέραν μ’ ἀναγκάσει/λέχη”. Additionally, her body is going to be violated by another slave. This potential makes the subject of this body, i.e. Polyxena, admit her submission to the male’s decision for a sacrifice more favorable than remaining alive within disgraceful circumstances. As Segal claims, the heroine demonstrates the character of an “ideal victim: she makes no appeal to her suppliant status, offers no resistance and submissively acquiesces in serving and enhancing with her body the honor of a warrior”¹⁴. Polyxena presents a stoic morality and a bold spirit through the acceptance of death as she denies allowing male to molest her body in the future. Concerning her physicality, she uses her body as a conforming unity to retain her royal status as she denies her physical existence. She locates the element of freedom on her eyes¹⁵ and she declares that she offers her body to Ades.

Moving on to Andromache, there is a deeper element of submission that could account for a double submissive pattern. First, it should be stressed that Euripides generally refers to Andromache in his tragedies as the ideal wife. It is not only in Andromache but also in Trojan women where the audience hears that Andromache was flawless wife. In the tragedy of Andromache, that heroine refers to her past married life by saying how virtuous she was. Even though the past of the princess denotes a joyful married life with Hector, there is a verse where she states that she accepted his adultery when she breastfed illegitimate children of his. In fact, she states that a good wife should be wise enough to remain silent in some cases. Later, she refers to the breast of a woman¹⁶ and the poet uses a part of the female body, which is related to the reproduction, but in this case, there is a link not only to reproduction. There is a hint for submission. Andromache remains silent to the betrayal of her husband. In way her body, validates her husband’s disloyalty. In lines 225-226¹⁷ Andromache recalls the times

¹³ Euripides, *Hecuba*, lines 367-370. Kardan and Gray-Street 2011.

¹⁴ Lawrence 2010, 30. Lawrence states the claims of Segal in an attempt to enhance the idea that Polyxena constitutes the perfect submission.

¹⁵ Lawrence 2010, 23. “She declares her intention to die with ‘free eyes’.

¹⁶ Euripides, *Andromache*, line 224. «Euripides, *Andromache*, line»//Theodoridis 2012. “I would still offer my breast to your bastard sons”.

¹⁷ Euripides, *Andromache*, lines 224-226.//Theodoridis 2012.

when she she continued to make up ways to trigger Hector's last for her in order to maintain her husband's interest in her. She had recognized her duty to entertain and even to keep her mouth closed for the sake of her family's welfare. In other words, she was aware of the fact that she was a subject surrendered to the male gaze and desire and she was faithful to this submissive position. As Rabinowitz states, the structure of viewing is fundamental to male power"¹⁸. In this way, even though she was in a fortunate marriage, she had to execute her duty of being obedient to her husband and even to ignore his relations with other women.

Even though that she executed excessively her duties, her fate has brought her to a more rough submission, that of physical enslavement. This time, she was given to a second husband as a slave and she was forced to succumb to her new male master. In this way, she used her body as a vessel for the raise of a new second child of hers, in an attempt to restore her status¹⁹. The fact that she is underwent the process of childbirth and delivery after the loss of her first child is a traumatic psychological process. Andromache leaves her experience to the past, in the hope of creating a restorative future. This heroine, distances herself from her affection with body, she mutes every seed of personal will, and uses the body as a machine to generate new prospects for her existence. In this way submission, gestates some kind of salvation for her.

Submission can also take the form of acceptance. The prominent example can be traced again in the case of Medea and Polyxena. One the one hand, Medea she twice triggers the feeling of uneasiness to Kreon and Jason and she admits her submission and her willingness to act according to their commands. When she encounters Kreon, even though there is no direct reference to her body, she mentions that she does not possess enough wisdom to be able to harm a king. Roisman explains how ironically Medea uses her physicality to admit that she cannot harm a king²⁰. In these words, female physicality is only implicitly presented as weaker to the male, in an attempt to reassure Kreon that Medea is harmless. The heroine uses her diplomacy when she deploys her affirmation that women are inferior in power and intelligence to men. The acceptance though is a deceptive one, and this creates doubts as to whether she is sincere²¹. A similar deployment is obvious when she confronts Jason for a second time. There she admits her wrong behavior and declares that she regretted her

¹⁸ Rabinowitz 2013, 195. In claiming this, she quotes the principle that women in culture are "to be looked at" and that they "watch themselves being looked at."

¹⁹ Euripides, *Andromache* lines 24-25, 27-28 and 35-37// Theodoridis 2012.

²⁰ Roisman 2021, 217. This section shows that Medea's utterances to Kreon demonstrate "her art of manipulation. She starts with an outright lie by stating that she is not the kind of person who commits crimes against kings. She has already comitted a transgression "

²¹ Roisman 2012, 213. Her intellect and analytic thought allow her to strategize.

opposition to the male decisions to leave the country²². This acceptance of her false behavior does not offer elements of physicality; it is only a verbal declaration of her inferiority. However a bit later on, the lines reveal²³ her lament for what she experiences internally. In order to perform this “acceptance” pattern she has forced herself to distance from her emotion. In these lines an internal battle between how Medea feels and how she must act in order to achieve her aim becomes clear. As Roisman points out Medea “removed from a context of social context and from a moderating inner voice, empowered by her emotions...”she uses her intelligence as a dangerous weapon²⁴. At this point Medea’s acceptance of her inferiority to Jason and the weeping tears in front of him denote this inner battle in her. Medea’s power derives though from her ability to master her pain on account of her goals and in way she is a deviating figure.

On the other hand, Polyxena’s reaction when she learns that she will be executed indicate a powerful command of her transfer and her acceptance of her faith makes her obtain a glorious rout towards death. She uses metaphors to refer to her execution as she refers to the image of a little, wild calf to demonstrate the roughness of her being dragged to Hades and she uses the verb “lie” (κείτομαι). As she states, the fact that she will avoid slavery makes her death a preferable option. She mentions her head,²⁵ which is going to be covered in a peplum and this adds a glorious procession to death. In her final moments onstage, she enjoys the light cast over her eyes. Polyxena manages to turn her death into a ritual, which elevates her spirit through the denial of her physicality. As Segal puts it, these behaviors in tragedies show the “moving and disturbing spectacle of great women and men who, in and through their greatness as well as their weakness, are led to actions that destroy just what is valuable to them and those around them”²⁶.

After acceptance, a very efficient weapon women use to confront men is that of supplication. Supplication was a sacred ritual in ancient Greece and those who fall into a supplicating ritual were protected under the divine power. Harassing a supplicant or violating the protection of him or her would trigger the menace of the gods. Women deploy the safety that supplication casts around the suppliant. Hecuba, in the tragedy of Hecuba adopts this technique twice. The former queen of Troy moves on a supplication to Odysseus and this is combined with rhetoric skills. Hecuba, is a physically frail woman²⁷ who suffers not only for the loss of her country but also for loss of her children. Hecuba in her exchanges with Odysseus recalls a

²² Euripides, *Medea*, lines 873-886.// Johnston 2008.

²³ Euripides, *Medea*, lines 902-905.//Johnston, 2008.

²⁴ Roisman 2021, 231.

²⁵ Euripides, *Hecuba*, line 432. //Kardan and Gray-Street 2011.

²⁶ Segal 2019, 343.

²⁷ Euripides, *Hecuba*, lines 60-67. // Kardan and Gray-Street 2011.

moment when the latter begged her within Troy by touching her knees²⁸. This is a very strong image as the audience pictures through imagination a man pleading a woman to save him. In these lines, the female body attains maximum power as it offers survival to a strong, male warrior, general of the Greek army. A few lines later Hecuba describes for a second time the supplication of Odysseus and this time she refers to her hands and her cheek²⁹. Hecuba mirrors his supplication touching the same parts of his body. This is a transcending scene as the female body is allowed to follow the same supplication process a male has done. This choice of Euripides denotes a balancing attempt between male and female body spheres. The strategic diplomacy aims to manipulate Odysseus towards a positive decision³⁰. Even though ultimately Hecuba does not succeed in changing the situation, her noble thought and her equating with a male pleading indicate at least an attempt by Euripides to assign to a female body an equal right. Hecuba possesses rhetoric power. As Roisman points out³¹, he uses “lawyer’s masterpiece devoid of emotion” showing how successfully Hecuba has tried to persuade him.

Another plea by Hecuba is visible in the third episode when Hecuba encounters Agamemnon in order to take revenge for her murdered son. Hecuba’s second plead is successful because she ensures her plan. Roisman makes a comment on the consecutive pleadings Hecuba demonstrates by stating that she becomes from a woman of rhetoric to a woman of action³². The combination of rhetoric, self-control, and clever pleading makes her an intelligent female agent of her sex. Knowing her lack of physical power, she exploits other means to achieve what she wants. The element of transgression in her case lies in the fact that she proves “her prowess in what are considered to be a male preserves”³³.

In the tragedy of *Andromache*, this fallen queen deploys the means of supplication in order to defend herself and her son. *Andromache*’s supplication is passive as Kitto³⁴ states and this is also visible lines 115-116 with the verb “τάκομαι”(melt). This verb denotes a decay that happens automatically, like a candle that shrinks. From this seated position in the temple, she encounters Hermione and Menelaus in the later episodes. Therefore, it is not the body posture but the location she places herself that infuse her presence with power. The kneeled body is in position of inferiority though in this case the seated position implies power. The supplication

²⁸ Euripides, *Hecuba*, line 245. // Kardan and Gray-Street 2011.

²⁹ Euripides, *Hecuba*, lines 273-275. // Kardan and Gray-Street 2011.

³⁰ Roisman 2021, 172. “Hecuba ends her speech by asking for pity (286). She bases her plea on an example so it might be easier for Odysseus to react more positively.”

³¹ Roisman 2021, 173.

³² Roisman 2021, 176. “As a mother of in turn fighting for, grieving over, and then avenging her children, Hecuba at first fulfills and then goes beyond conventions for Ancient Greek Women.”

³³ Roisman 2021, 177.

³⁴ Kitto 2005, 313.

locus she chooses makes it impossible for other characters to defeat her, and for this reason, Menelaus chooses an implicit way to force her leave the statue by choosing to aim at her child so that she leaves this position of power. Supplication in this case is defeated via deceptive means. Andromache deploys a begging towards Peleus as her last chance to avoid the death of her child. It is true that in order to achieve survival, Andromache needs to be under the protection of another male character. Thus, supplication may mean that a female is still under the male power, which grants her protection. Although this pattern does not denote female independence, it indicates that female intelligence allows women to deploy any means available to achieve their goals.

Another significant scheme of abnegation is that of imprisonment, which is very elaborately built around the presence of Cassandra in Trojan women. Under this term female physicality acts as a vessel, which carries the suffering spirit due to the circumstances the heroine finds herself. Bearing the suffering can become an instrument of revenge in cases where the victim can utter words that could be proven harmful. For Cassandra imprisonment is a means through which she will attain revenge. Cassandra's way of reacting to captivity is a passive aggressive. Cassandra's celebratory tone is very contradictory with the situation of her matching to a new man, to whom she will not be the legal wife. In fact, the young woman orders her mother to celebrate with her in lines 325 -326³⁵. There is a profound awareness of the situation she is about to face. Her head is victorious but she mentions that her body may be standing unwilling³⁶. In a way, her body has succumbed to the impositions of the mind. She does not attack Agamemnon but she awaits joyfully her transfer to Greece. It is her life as a concubine that she does not oppose to in order to see Agamemnon suffer. She can foresee a disgraceful death, a death upon which her body is going to be dismembered and left naked as food to wild birds. However, she does not make any attempt to avoid this monstrous end. On the contrary, until the end of her speech her very last words are related again to the fall of the house of Atreus, as she feels that it is her right to contribute to this project.

Additionally, women seem to possess complete control of the influence their beauty has on men. This scheme of indulgence is the fifth pattern of manipulation females unconsciously follow in the tragedies. The pattern of indulgence lies in the unconscious knowledge inscribed in the female collective memory that the females can become the object of male gaze. The most prominent examples of this pattern are the cases of Helen in the Trojan Women and the one of Hermione in the tragedy of Andromache. Helen makes a very diligent use of her looks in order to affect Menelaus and Hecuba is well aware of the danger this influence of Helen's

³⁵ Euripides, *Trojan Women*, lines 325-326. « //Coleridge 1910.

³⁶ Euripides, *Trojan Women*, line 355. // Coleridge 1910.

might have. From the beginning of the play, there are hints, which refer to Helen's tremendous effect of her beauty. A noteworthy statement about Helen's body is in line 772-773³⁷, uttered by Andromache, which refers to the beauty of Helen's eyes and links her beauty to the destruction of Phrygians. Hecuba, who is a woman and realizes the power Helen's good looks, advises him to avoid looking at Helen³⁸. As Roisman points out Hecuba knows that Helen can make use of her means in order to change Menelaus opinion³⁹. Hecuba refers to Helen's power through the tempting elements of her appearance, which is capable of enslaving whole cities⁴⁰. In these words, a woman confirms the power of a beautiful female physicality and its manipulative force. This proves that women were aware of the fact that when they performed well their duties on being admired and looked at, they could manipulate male judgement. After Helen's first monologue, on which Euripides makes Helen a woman who combines female beauty with intelligence⁴¹, the first character to react is Hecuba. Hecuba being a woman herself, possesses the empirical knowledge of what it means to be a woman and realizes the way Helen manipulatively builds her argumentation. The following confrontation between the two women, in which Menelaus remains silent processing what is being uttered, proves that Helen's understanding of femininity and Hecuba's argumentation indicate how female physicality can prove powerful against men.

Hermione argues on the power of female beauty over men. She affirms her luxurious appearance in the first episode and refers to the accessories that embellish her head and the beautiful peplums that her father had given her⁴². These embellishing accessories given by her father⁴³ to are a means for her to "keep her mouth free"⁴⁴. This is comment on the fact that beauty can grant her security under the husband's protection and this in turn will ensure their freedom of speech. Andromache wants to remind her that good looks is not the means to satisfy a husband's needs⁴⁵ and she continues by highlighting the importance of moral virtues. Two characters of the same sex debate over the priority of virtues in a marriage. The juxtaposition between two women is an interesting choice of Euripides, as he poses both popular beliefs, in the case of Hermione, and more progressive ones, in the case of

³⁷ Euripides, *Trojan Women*, lines 772- 773. // Coleridge 1910.

³⁸ Euripides, *Trojan Women*, lines 890-891. // Coleridge 1910.

³⁹ Roisman 2021, 144. "Hecuba is wary of the effect Helen might have on her husband. She is well aware of Hellen's charms and the magic she can work on men. She fears that Helen will quickly persuade Menelaus to change his mind if they are alone together."τ

⁴⁰ Euripides, *Trojan Women*, line 892. // Coleridge 1910.

⁴¹ Roisman 2021, 183. Roisman explains how Euripides combines in Hellen femininity and beauty with innate intelligence.

⁴² Euripides, *Andromache*, lines 147-148. // Theodoridis 2012.

⁴³ Skouroumouni-Stavrinou 2014, 393. The researcher analyses that in Greek society the structure of marriage ordained a transition from natal to marital, and in the dowry was a profound element in this transition.

⁴⁴ Euripides, *Andromache*, line 153. // Theodoridis 2012.

⁴⁵ Euripides, *Andromache*, lines 207 – 208. // Theodoridis 2012.

Andromache, being uttered by women. The reference also to the wombs⁴⁶ and fertility should be examined in parallel with the idea of beauty. Even though Hermione does everything to please her husband, her womb is not productive, depriving her of her ability to accomplish her major duty towards her husband, that of granting him kids. On the other hand, Andromache who is a concubine, and does not take care of her looks, has granted a son to her master. There is a reversal in the roles of wife and concubine, which is mediated through the element of the womb⁴⁷. This is a statement by Euripides on the fact that the value of women could be measured in more ways than just measuring their beauties. Beauty can be deceptive and allows women to have a false power over men. Thus women are completely aware of the manipulating force a beautiful woman may have over one man.

Moving on, the next powerful abnegating pattern is that of subversion in a sense that women disavow fundamental social norms of behavior in order to challenge male power over them. The two most powerful examples of this scheme are the infanticide of Medea and the nudity of Polyxena before her execution.

With regards to Medea, her whole presence on stage is a case of refuting social order. In her speech, she boldly explains how women are given to men in exchange of money, a reference to dowry, and she highlights the fact that a man becomes the master of female bodies⁴⁸. In this way, she describes the fate of women who are treated like mere commodities in the culture of the 5th century. An additional comment on the female body is Medea's speech on childbirth. She expresses her preference over going to war instead of experiencing the physical procedure of pregnancy and delivery of a child. The claim that a delivery is more atrocious than a war is an unspeakable comment for the audience of Athens. However, Medea possesses the courage to utter the truth about female pain during childbirth and in a way, she opposes against her female nature. As Tessitore points out Medea gives voice to all the injustices suffered by women, Greek and foreigners⁴⁹. Her public argumentation on female fate has a universal character. Having cast light on the elements of motherhood, she ironically chooses to deprive herself of her children. The atrocious plan she has conceived is an additional example of her pervasiveness. Medea turns against herself and she becomes the offender and the victim of her actions⁵⁰. Medea forces herself to gain control over her affection for her children and she

⁴⁶ Euripides, *Andromache*, line 157. // Theodoridis 2012.

⁴⁷ Skouroumouni-Stavrinou 2014, 388. "The conflict and ultimate reversal of roles is one of the most fascinating aspects of this plot."

⁴⁸ Euripides, *Medea*, lines 232-233. //Johnston 2008.

⁴⁹ Tessitore 1991, 590.

⁵⁰ Lawrence 1997, 53. "Medea herself is two people: the agent and the victim of the agent" when killing her children, as she both harms and is harmed through the children's death.

commands herself as if she ordered another third person to kill them. She orders her hand⁵¹ to stay stable when she prepares for the action as if she gave instructions to an external murderer. She realizes the oxymoron of her crime when she says that she kills that to which she has given birth to, disentangling from her body and identity. She rejects her femininity⁵². The transgression of her physicality reaches its peak at the scene before the crime. At this point, she rejects her femininity by killing what her body has grown and deprives Jason's house of his heirs. Medea does not only kill her children but also the new wife of Jason with a view to leave him without hope for future children. Euripides here suggests a reversal of the gender roles.

Turning now to Polyxena, she attempts a very bold uncovering of her body. She boldly rips her peplum and uncovers her upper part of her body⁵³. She exposes a very private part of herself in front of men. The female body is a private space on which every personal story is inscribed. In ancient culture, a noble woman would only allow her husband to enter this personal space. Polyxena's brave command confutes this norm and in this way her body is involved in her subversive action. She protrudes her breasts and as they are let unveiled, she kneels down. In lines 560 -561 her pure beauty is praised and she is compared to a statue⁵⁴. Polyxena confronts the army using her female, physical beauty. As Papastamati points out, "she strips naked to exhibit her beauty and yet diligently controls this exhibition by being careful at the moment of her death"⁵⁵. Standing naked, she claims her readiness to die offering to the young soldier her breast or her neck. Her nudity in front of an army signifies her innocence and the exposure of these parts highlight the contradiction between the atrocity of the war and the purity of a virgin woman⁵⁶. Through this action, Polyxena exposes a very private part of her body and she gains the respect of foreign males to the extent that they are associated with the female tasks of burring, while she is assigned a victoriously masculine character.

The abnegation pattern that follows is that of reproductive power. The female womb carrying the power to produce new successors is utilized as a weapon against the male characters⁵⁷. This awareness grants the females an emotional intelligence, which elevates the female

⁵¹ Στεφανόπουλος 2012, στίχοι 1055-1056. //Johnston 2008.

⁵² Euripides, *Medea*, lines 1062-1063. // Johnston 2008.

⁵³ Euripides, *Hecuba*, lines 559-560. //Kardan and Gray-Street 2011.

⁵⁴ Papastamati 2017, 373. "The peak of narrative ..is the image of her breasts which are not simply καλά, but indeed ως ἀγάλματος /κάλιστα 560-561). For the account of her death freezes here, at the picture and her conspicuous beauty and dignity."

⁵⁵ Papastamati 2017, 371.

⁵⁶ Μπακονικόλα 2008, 194.

⁵⁷ Katz 1992, 74. Katz mentions when he reflects on Greek society, their "intelligence and moral sensibility was sufficiently developed so that they were not an object of their husbands concern".

consciousness. In the tragedies, one can detect polarities between pairs of female characters as in the case between Medea and Glauce or Andromache and Hermione, which are centered around the potentiality of the production of female bodies. In these rivalries there is a deep strength rooted at the reproductive elements of the female body, which allow women to gain power over a male character. In the former case the legitimate wife, Medea, kills the future wife of her husband so the he will be deprived of the potential of new heirs, who in turn will secure Jason's stability in a new country. Accordingly, she kills her own children in order to destroy any potential continuation, reducing the future of Jason to a childless one. A similar juxtaposition between two females is visible in the tragedy of Andromache. The menace between two females revolves around the jealousy over the fertility issues. Hermione accuses Andromache for her infertility, claiming that the concubine has cast spells over her in order to prevent her from conceiving a child. In lines 157-159⁵⁸, Hermione mentions that with the use of magic herbs Andromache controls Neoptolemus desire for his wife and makes Hermione's "womb" infertile. This double spell not only attacks female body but it also affects the male last for the female body. Thus, these two examples showcase the female knowledge of the reproductive power their bodies allowed them to have over men.

The pattern of reproduction unfolds in parallel relationship with that of death. Death in this case is related to the awareness women cultivated subconsciously about their physicality. This awareness has led them to realize the power their absence could involve. In the tragic plots, where the heroines find themselves in dead end situations, they may deploy the refutation of their physicality in order to achieve their goals and by extension threaten the males with the absence of a productive female in the house. As mentioned above, Medea is the fundamental example of this mentality through the death of their children and Glauce. Another vivid demonstration of similar mentality is the example of Hermione who attempts to commit suicide in order to avoid a dismissive rejection by her husband when he finds out her moral faults. In her attempt, she harasses her external appearance as she wants to remove her hair and scratch her chicks⁵⁹. She demonstrates a self-destructive power, which aims at destroying her looks. Her once nice platted braids are now left blown by the wind and she lets her breast nude on stage. These elements show that tragic heroines the above cases are examples of how women attribute to physicality a secondary role since they do not fear to bring death in the sphere of the tragic plots. They decide to die, or murder other characters, who by implication affect their destinies.

⁵⁸ Euripides, *Andromache*, lines 157 -159. // Theodoridis 2012.

⁵⁹ Euripides, *Andromache*, lines 826-827. //Theodoridis 2012.

Conclusions.

Eight deviating patterns have come under the scope of this research. The abnegation patterns of submission, acceptance, supplication, indulgence and imprisonment are less strong tools in the hands of female characters. They grant them some deviation and choice making but within a certain range of possibilities. The patterns of subversion, reproductive power and death could be said to be the more efficient ones in the sense that through them women enhance their power over men. These three constitute manipulative weapons, at times even lethal ones, against men. The heroines affirm that identity awareness challenges the prescribed social norms and allows them to manipulate men. Knowing oneself and realizing one's boundaries in relation to others is a powerful asset of the heroines. They unconsciously possess the knowledge that identity making and gender formation are relational elements. They acknowledge the social impositions and meticulously fuse within their bodies feminine and masculine elements in order to challenge male order.

It is true that there will be instances in which further analysis may be applied in the lines of the heroines in the light of a new researches. Future investigation could explore more the association between deeper psychological states and action. Regarding the level of the present research, taking into account the data analyzed on the relationship between body performativity and speech acts, there is an amount of deviation the women in these tragedies demonstrate. The fact that heroines are at the center of action is itself a transgression since they enter public space. Their manipulative power and their ability to reconstruct or carve their prescribed destinies are elements that allow conclusions to be drawn. In these heroines, identity awareness grants them a powerful dynamics of confronting men and transcending what was culturally taught to them.

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