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Restraining the Song of her Mistress and Saving the *Oikos*? Nurses in Euripides' *Medea*, *Hippolytus* and *Andromache*¹

Abstract

Contemporary scholars usually associate actors' song with extremely heightened emotion. Solo songs in tragedy, and especially in Euripides, are frequently attributed to female characters. In this article I examine three instances where a female character (*Medea*, *Phaedra* and *Hermione*) who sings is juxtaposed with another female character, a Nurse, who speaks or chants. Nurses attempt to restrain the songs of their mistresses and, usually, encourage them to articulate their thoughts in a more rational way. The excessive emotions, unrealistic fears and uncontrolled desires expressed by song are perceived by the Nurses as a threat to the lives of their mistresses. These emotions also pose a serious threat to the survival of the *oikos*. Nurses encourage these singing females to be more rational and attempt to save their lives, that is, they serve a consolatory function within the play; nevertheless, in this tragic environment both self-absorbed singing and dialogue lead to disaster.

KEYWORDS: Euripides; song; *oikos*; nurses

Introduction

Greek tragedy did not develop in a cultural and literary vacuum. On the contrary, Greek tragedy developed within a 'song culture' (see Herington 1985: 3-10). This has as an implication that the audience of fifth-century Attic drama was, to some extent, an integral part of this 'song culture'.² Not only was the audience of Greek tragedy acquainted with many different lyric genres, but the tragedians had to respect certain generic conventions in order to allude to them. Tragedians did not only recall the most

¹ This research was funded by the State Scholarships Foundation (IKY) through the operational programme: Human Resources Development, Education and Life-long Learning 2014-2020.

² See Kurke 2000: 60; Hall 2002: 5-6; Ford 2003; Swift 2010: 31; Bierl 2016: 3n4.

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eminent characteristics of various lyric genres, but they also used lyric metres to appropriate them.³ Singing in tragedy seems to have been considered a gendered activity. Especially in Euripides, most of the choruses are female and singing female characters outnumber the singing male characters.⁴ As Hall suggests, tragedy's innovation was to integrate genres into a complicated artistic pattern: spoken verse alternated with various types of sung poetry (see Hall 2002: 6). The tragic song has traditionally been considered as emotional, solo arias often replete with pathetic expressions and seen as moments of gushing, venting and even uncontrollable frenzy.⁵ The very switch between recitative and lyrics was considered as particularly emotive.⁶ Contemporary scholars consider that in Euripides the antithesis between the lyric and the spoken or chanted metres reflects the emotional state of each interlocutor. The emotionally unsettled female character sings a metrically complex song, which is in turn commented upon by a more rational speaker in iambic trimetres.⁷ Medea in the eponymous tragedy, Phaedra in *Hippolytus* and Hermione in *Andromache* appear to sing and to engage in a lyrical exchange with their Nurses who speak or chant. Furthermore, their Nurses seem to try to restrain their songs and to convince them to behave properly.⁸ Nonetheless, they seem to be greatly involved in the sufferings of the singing heroines. In these scenes, there seems to be a struggle between emotion and logic, sometimes expressed by the alternation of lyric and iambic metres. I suggest that in these domestic plays, the

³ On this issue see Rodighiero 2012; Bagordo 2015: 37-8.

⁴ See Cyrino 1998: 81-2; McClure 1995: 40; Hall 1999: 112-13, 116; Csapo 2000; Hall 2002: 5-8; Chong-Gossard 2003: 210; Chong-Gossard 2008: 26-8.

⁵ See Chong-Gossard 2008: 26. Cyrino has even suggested that in the *epirrhematica amoibaia* encountered in the extant plays of Euripides there is a type of 'lyric space' in which the singing character is represented as being in a position of greater vulnerability than that of the responding speaker, and whose status is thereby emphasized as being subordinate. See Cyrino 1998: 82. It is not surprising that in Greek tragedy females were connected with an activity that was considered almost irrational. Madness, the irrational, and the emotional aspects of life were associated in Greek culture more with women than with men. See on this e.g. Zeitlin 1985: 65.

⁶ See Dale 1984: 50-1; Hall 2002: 7.

⁷ See Cerbo 1989: 40; Cyrino 1998: 88; Hall 2002: 9; Chong-Gossard 2008: 34-6. Hall argues that this is not only evident in Euripides' work, but also in Aeschylus' and Sophocles' plays (1999: 108, see also 117-20). Damen calls Euripides' singers "notoriously self-absorbed" (1990: 134) in the sense that in their songs they mention themselves and their direful situations repeatedly. For the self-absorption of Euripides' female singers see also Hall 2002: 9.

⁸ Hall has noticed that in Greek tragedy the lyrics uttered by a character never become continuous but are restrained by the repeated insertion of iambic (and, that is, probably spoken) language: See Hall 1999: 117-20.

speaking actors in these scenes, the Nurses,⁹ try to save the lives of their mistresses. Nurses in these plays share the sufferings of the singing heroines and try to prevent them from performing acts of violence. These acts of violence have the potential to lead the *oikos*, to which the heroines and the Nurses belong, to destruction.¹⁰ These *oikoi* are threatened by the acts of violence that the singing heroines want to commit. These singers express in song their excessive emotions, unrealistic fears and uncontrolled desires that threaten the existence of the *oikoi* created by their union with a man. Nurses encourage these singing females to be more rational and this leads the heroines to articulate their thoughts in speech. Nevertheless, in this tragic environment, both self-absorbed singing and dialogue lead to disaster.

Family-Destroying Singers

Medea, Phaedra and Hermione use singing in order to express their excessive distress. All three do not sing a specific type of song. Instead, they engage in many different lyric modes. Their songs have affinities with the more private expressions of ritual lament.¹¹ Ritual lament was a traditional form of expression of grief that was considered challenging to the cohesion of the democratic *polis*;¹² nevertheless, lament, a typical form of expression

⁹ It should be noted that the Nurse in the *Medea* also uses anapaests, that is, she does not only speak, but also chants.

¹⁰ All three Nurses have faithfully followed their respective mistress, that is Medea, Phaedra and Hermione, from their native home. Medea, Phaedra and Hermione, as well as their Nurses, are integrated into their new *oikoi*.

¹¹ There were different types of ritual lament, such as *thrênos* and *gôos*. The term *thrênos* is used for the set dirge composed and performed by the professional mourners, and the term *gôos* for the spontaneous weeping of the kinswomen (see Alexiou 1974: 102-4). The songs of Medea, Phaedra and Hermione employ elements of the less public form of ritual lament. The heroines sing their songs in private (Medea inside the house, Phaedra and Hermione in front of their Nurse and a female chorus), they express very strong feelings and perform gestures associated with the more private forms of mourning, such as female ritual lament displayed at the *prothesis* (e.g., tearing off clothes, self-laceration). The term *gôos* appears in *Medea* (59, οὐπω γὰρ ἡ τάλαινα παύεται γόων: "What? Does the poor woman not yet cease from moaning?") and it is used by the Tutor to describe Medea's lamentation. Nonetheless, in tragedy the terms *thrênos* and *gôos* are used interchangeably. See on this Alexiou 1974: 113n6; Swift 2010: 299-304, with more bibliography. For *Medea*, I follow the translation of Kovacs (1994).

¹² It has long been argued that uncontrolled female lament in Greek tragedy poses a threat to the male civic order of the community, see Foley 1993; Loraux 1998; Toher 2001: 332-3; Dué 2006: 30-2, 38, 41, 46-9. For the dangers that ritual lament possibly posed to the community, see Alexiou 1974: 20-3; Holst-Warhaft 2002: 2-3. For lament

in tragedy, in all three cases analyzed does not interfere with the external world of the *polis*. The singing heroines also seem to register their songs into different verbal genres¹³ which were usually sung.¹⁴ What these songs have in common is that they express intense emotions that threaten the existence of their *oikoi*.

In the opening lines of *Medea*, the eponymous heroine is in a terrible situation. Her husband, Jason, has abandoned their house and has the intention of marrying another woman. Medea's *oikos* is in danger of extinction or, as the Nurse dramatically states to the chorus of women, the house has already perished (139: οὐκ εἰσὶ δόμοι· φροῦδα τάδ' ἦδη).¹⁵ Her reaction is very intense. Medea remains in her chamber (141) and spends her time lamenting. Medea sings her song while she is inside the house. The Nurse and the women of the chorus describe her feelings and label their expression as a lamentation. Medea is said to be stirring up her feelings and her anger (99), to have been beaten by her sufferings (109-10), to be miserable (132: τὰς δυστάνου Κολχίδος; 149-50: δύστανος / μέλπει νύμφα),¹⁶ to feel wrath (172: χόλον; 176-7: βαρύθυμον ὀργάν / καὶ λῆμα φρενῶν) and grief (184: πένθος).¹⁷ Her reaction is opposed to speech. Medea does not listen to the soothing words of her friends and she refuses to be pacified¹⁸ (142-

expressing the concerns of the *genos* (natal family) as opposed to the interests of the *oikos* and the *polis*, see Alexiou 1974: 21-2. However, male efforts to control female lament only apply to public manifestations of grief – as examples from funerary legislation show – but certainly not to the family environment, that is, to the domestic ritual frame of the *prothesis*. For the relationship between funerary legislation and lamentation, see Alexiou 1974: 14-23.

¹³ Verbal genres are culturally recognized, routinized, and sometimes though not necessarily overtly marked and formalized categories of discourse in use in particular communities and societies. See Sherzer 1987 for a definition of verbal genres. See also McClure 1999: 32-69 for a discussion of verbal genres in Greek tragedy (e.g., lamentation, *aischrologia*, ritual song, gossip and seductive persuasion) and Chong-Gossard 2003; 2006 for the use of different verbal genres in Euripides' tragedy. For "women's speech" (the use of different speech from men by women) in Greek tragedy, see Mossman 2001.

¹⁴ In other words, their language bears 'lyrical markers', that is, features that are found in monodic and choral poetry from the archaic and classical period (see Nooter 2012: 1).

¹⁵ I follow the text of Murray. See Murray 1966: 139: "The house is no more: it has perished".

¹⁶ 132: "of the unhappy woman of Colchis"; 149-50: "the miserable woman".

¹⁷ 172: "wrath"; 176-7: "angry temper"; 184: "grief".

¹⁸ Chong-Gossard observes that it is characteristic of Euripidean singing women to refuse to accept the sympathy or take the advice of others in order to gain what he calls the "ownership" of their sufferings (2003: 209-11). For μῦθος as speech, see LSJ s.v. μῦθος.

3: φίλων οὐδενὸς οὐδὲν / παραθαλπομένα φρένα μύθοις; 173-5: πῶς ἂν ἐς ὄψιν τὰν ἀμετέραν / ἔλθοι μύθων τ' αὐδαθέντων / δέξαιτ' ὄμφαν; 187-9: καίτοι τοκάδος δέργμα λεαίνης / ἀποταυροῦται δμωσίν, ὅταν τις / μῦθον προφέρων πέλας ὀρμηθῆ).¹⁹ She does nothing but lament (107-8: νέφος οἰμωγῆς ὡς τάχ' ἀνάψει / μείζονι θυμῷ; 131: ἔκλυον φωνάν, ἔκλυον δὲ βοᾶν; 135-6: βοᾶν / ἔκλυον; 150: μέλλει; 158-9: μὴ λίαν / τάκου δυρομένα σὸν εὐνάταν; 168: κλύεθ' οἶα λέγει κάπιβοᾶται; 204-6: ἰαχὰν ἄιον πολύστονον γόων, / λιγυρὰ δ' ἄχεα μογερὰ βοᾶ / τὸν ἐν λέχει προδόταν κακόθυμον).²⁰

Part of the description of Medea's lyrical lament is conveyed lyrically by the chorus (132, 149-50, 158-9, 173-5, 176-7, 204-6). 'Sympathetic' tragic choruses, that is, choruses who emotionally participate in the sufferings of a character, typically appear after the prologue and, usually, have a consolatory function (see Cerbo 2012: 280-1).²¹ This also seems to be the case here. Mastronarde has used the term "three-way exchange" in order to describe the "triangulation" of song in the *parodos* (2002: 189), since Medea is absorbed in her own emotions and has no awareness of her listeners (the Nurse and the chorus members) and their comments. Medea has strong motives for singing since she is a female who suffers excessively in a Greek tragedy.²² Her activity is also designated as singing, mainly lamenting, by the Nurse and the chorus, as I already mentioned. The chorus perceives Medea's activity as singing as it is obvious by the use of a Greek tragic term designating song (*μέλλει*)²³ to describe Medea's utterance: according to the chorus, Medea is a miserable woman who sings (149-50).²⁴

¹⁹ 142-3: "her heart in no way soothed by the words of any of her friends"; 173-5: "Oh, how I wish she could come face to face with us and receive the sound of our words to her"; 187-9: "though she glowers at the servants with the look of a lioness with cubs when any of them approaches her with something to say".

²⁰ 107-8: "she will soon kindle with even greater passion the cloud of lament"; 131: "I have heard the voice, I have heard the cry"; 135-6: "I heard her shooting"; 150 "utters"; 158-9: "Do not grieve excessively or weep over your husband"; 168: "Do you hear what she says"; 204-6: "I have heard her cry full of groans, how she utters shrill charges against the husband who betrayed her bed".

²¹ On sympathetic choruses who intervene in Euripides' plays, see also Pattoni 1989, especially 42-45 and 76-79 for *Medea*.

²² "What a wail the miserable woman utters".

²³ Barner (1971: 292) has collected some Greek tragic terms designating song. See also Hall (2002: 7) for tragedy's internal clues to the ways in which the voice of the actor was used.

²⁴ Νύμφα was used to describe either a young wife or a bride (see LSJ s.v. νύμφη). Although it is not used here with the latter meaning, the word certainly has marital connotations. For the conflation of the motifs of marriage and death in Greek tragedy, see Rehm 1994.

It is clear that Medea does sing.²⁵ She uses lyric anapaests (96-7, 111-4, 144-7, 160-7), that is, a metre linked to lamentation in Euripides' tragedies (see Lourenço 2011: 31, 42). The content of Medea's song is also close to lamentation. As Alexiou suggests, Medea's song is a 'dirge' for herself; Medea, like other tragic heroes or heroines, laments her own fate or impending death (see Alexiou 1974: 113). Medea begins with a preliminary address to herself (96-7: *ιώ, / δύστανος ἐγώ*),²⁶ laments her ill fate (97: *μελέα τε πόνων*; 111-12: *ἔπαθον τλάμων ἔπαθον μεγάλων / ἄξι' ὀδυρμῶν*),²⁷ states that she wishes to die at 98 (*ιώ μοί μοι, πῶς ἄν ὀλοίμαν*),²⁸ and 143-7:

αἰᾶ;
 διά μου κεφαλᾶς φλόξ οὐρανία
 βαίη· τί δέ μοι ζῆν ἔτι κέρδος;
 φεῦ φεῦ· θανάτῳ καταλυσάιμαν
 βιοτᾶν στυγερὰν προλιπούσα.

[Oh! May a flash of lightning pierce my head! What profit any longer for me in life? Ah, ah! may I find my rest in death and leave behind my hateful life!]

She remembers her past, her union with Jason and the sacrifices she made for him²⁹ (161-3: *μεγάλοις ὄρκοις / ἐνδησαμένα τὸν κατάρατον / πόσιν*; 166-7: *ὦ πάτερ, ὦ πόλις, ὦν ἀπενάσθην / αἰσχυρῶς τὸν ἐμὸν κτείνασα κάσιν*),³⁰ combining some of the central aspects of ritual laments (see Alexiou 1974: 133-4). Medea's song is not set in a tone of restraint and moderation, but rather in one of intense and personal grief. She contaminates her lament with the language of oaths³¹ (160-3: *ὦ μεγάλα Θεμί καὶ πότνι' Ἄρτεμι / λεύσσεθ' ἅ πάσχω, μεγάλοις ὄρκοις / ἐνδησαμένα τὸν κατάρατον / πόσιν*)³² and with the language of curses. She uses the language of curses against her whole house and its members (112-14: *ὦ κατάρατοι /*

²⁵ This is clear by the Doric forms encountered in Medea's anapaests (e.g., *δύστανος*, 97; *τλάμων*, 112).

²⁶ "Oh, what a wretch am I".

²⁷ 97: "how miserable in my sorrows"; 111-12: "Oh, what sufferings are mine, sufferings that call for loud lamentation".

²⁸ "Ah ah, how I wish I could die".

²⁹ Medea's and Jason's marriage does not seem to be a traditional one. Here Medea states that she has pledged him with oaths. See on this Boedeker 1991: 96.

³⁰ "I who have bound my accursed husband with mighty oaths"; 166-7: "O father, O my native city, from you I departed in shame, having killed my brother".

³¹ For oaths as linguistic markers of women's speech, see Sommerstein 1995. On how oaths are manipulated in tragedy, see Fletcher 2003.

³² "O mighty Themis and my lady Artemis, do you see what I suffer, I who have bound my accursed husband with mighty oaths?".

παῖδες ὄλοισθε στυγεράς ματρὸς / σὺν πατρί, καὶ πᾶς δόμος ἔρροι)³³ and against her husband, his new bride and their new house (162-4: τὸν κατάρατον / πόσιν· ὄν ποτ' ἐγὼ νύμφαν τ' ἐσίδοιμ' / αὐτοῖς μελάθροις διακναιομένου).³⁴ Medea expresses in her song her wish to end her *oikos* including her children, her husband and herself. Medea does not stop here. She also sings of her wish to destroy the new *oikos* of Jason: she wishes harm to Jason, his new bride and their new household. Medea's song is not simply imbued with threats of violence against her and Jason's *oikoi*.³⁵ In addition to this, Medea seems nostalgic of her natal family, her *genos* that she harmed by killing her brother and of her *polis* that she abandoned (166-7).

Phaedra is also in a dreadful state. Her husband is absent from their *oikos*.³⁶ According to the chorus of women, she stays inside the house, refuses to eat, covers her head and wishes to die (131-40). They believe that Phaedra suffers from a disease which forces her to remain inside the house (131-2: τειρομένην νοσερᾶ κοίτᾳ δέμας ἐντὸς ἔχειν / οἴκων).³⁷ Phaedra is carried outside the house by the Nurse and the chorus notices that she is extremely unhappy. Her body is ravaged, and its colour has changed (170-5). The Nurse states that it was Phaedra's wish to come outside the house (176-85). She speaks of an illness, too (179-80: νοσερᾶς / δέμνια κοίτης; 186: νοσεῖν).³⁸ According to the Nurse, Phaedra is moody and finds contentment in nothing. Phaedra orders the servants to raise up her body, to hold her head erect and to take off her head-dress because she wants her tresses to be spread upon her shoulders (198-202). These orders are not simply

³³ "O accursed children of a hateful mother, may you perish with your father and the whole house collapse in ruin!"

³⁴ "My accursed husband / may I one day see him and his new bride ground to destruction, and their whole house with them". Not all curses were sung, but singing was often used in non-literary curses and in literary curses. Faraone is of the opinion that during the classical times, or even earlier, there was a tradition of hexametrical incantations which combined epic vocabulary, performative syntax and traditional Greek magical *praxis* (1995: 11; see also Faraone 2004). For literary curses, see the seminal work of Watson 1991. For women being associated with especially privileged language such as prophecy and prayer (including curses) in early Greek thought, see Chong-Gossard 2003: 210n1; Goldhill 2004a: 35. For the use of curses in *Medea*, see Boedeker 1991: 100.

³⁵ Medea wishes to wipe out Jason's present and future children, as Segal rightly observes (1996: 18, 25). Medea in killing her children attacks the males of the household at their weakest point.

³⁶ Disaster striking during the husband's absence from the *oikos* is a familiar motif of Greek tragedy: see Mossman 1996; Skouromouni 2014: 390.

³⁷ "She lies afflicted, they say, in a bed of sickness and keeps indoors". For *Hippolytus* I follow Kovacs' translation (1995).

³⁸ 179-80: "sick-bed"; 186: "sick".

indicative of her emotional state. Unveiling in drama often occurs as a response to death and as an expression of grief or operates as a sign of the loss of status and vulnerability.³⁹ According to her, her limbs are unstrung (199: λέλυμαι μελέων σύνδεσμα φίλων). Goff has persuasively argued that Phaedra's loosening of her body and veils acts as a prelude to the loosening of her tongue during her 'delirium'. She considers this as a manifestation of *lysimeles* Eros.⁴⁰ *Lysimeles* Eros or *pothos* (desire) was a common motif encountered in archaic lyric poetry.⁴¹ Phaedra then expresses her profound emotional distress in lyric anapaests (208-31), a metre that has threnodic connotations or expresses deep emotional distress.

What Phaedra really desires is not just to get out into the fresh air, as the Nurse suggests. She has a series of unusual cravings. She sings of her desire to drink pure water from a dewy spring and to rest lying under the poplar trees in the uncut meadow (208-11). This meadow evokes a site of erotic encounter familiar from lyric poetry.⁴² She also wishes to go to the mountains in order to hunt wild beasts (215-22). Her other wish is to go to the ground of Artemis in order to tame Eneitic horses (228-31). The taming of horses clearly has erotic overtones and may be a possible allusion to a poetic motif known from archaic lyric poetry (see Segal 1965: 125, 163n23). Modern scholars have long associated Phaedra's irrational cravings with her hidden love for Hippolytus.⁴³ All she wants is to find herself as far as possible from the house, in places where her desires can be fulfilled.⁴⁴ Although Phaedra's song does not directly threaten the existence of the *oikos*, it becomes a means to signal her forbidden desire for Hippolytus. Phaedra threatens the house as a potential adulteress (see Goff 1990: 5). She also expresses her desire to get away from the house, and from the norms of organized society. She seems to wish for the life of an adolescent (see Goff 1990: 7) or for the life of a Bacchant,⁴⁵ but not for that of a house-

³⁹ See Finglass 2009: 275-6, 278; Skouroumouni 2016: 10.

⁴⁰ See Pigeaud 1976: 8; Goff 1990: 5-7; McClure 1999: 126.

⁴¹ See Alcman fr. 3.61-2 *PMGF*; Archilochus fr. 196 W.; Sappho fr. 130 V.

⁴² See Berns 1973: 62-3; Bremer 1975; Segal 1965: 124-5; McClure 1999: 126. For meadows as persistent erotic images in Greek literature, see Motte 1973: 45-8, 85; Calame 1999: 151-74.

⁴³ See Dodds 1925: 102; Knox 1952: 6; Segal 1965: 124-5, 130, 144-7; Glenn 1976; Segal 1978: 137-8; Zeitlin 1985: 74; Goff 1990: 31-4; Swift 2006: 137; McClure 1999: 125-7.

⁴⁴ Contemporary scholars have noticed that Phaedra's desires can only be fulfilled far from domestic territory: see Zeitlin 1985: 74; Goff 1990: 7. Phaedra can fulfill her love in the world of fantasy far from reality (see Glenn 1976: 436), in an idealized location (see Swift 2006: 137; 2009: 370), outside society or in the wilderness (see Segal 1965: 125).

⁴⁵ See Schlesier 1993: 109-10 for the maenadic imagery in *Hippolytus*. According to her, maenadic imagery in tragedy has associations with female violence against the

wife. It is worth noticing that both adolescents and Bacchantes were, in real life and in Greek tragedy, associated with singing.⁴⁶

Hermione finds herself trapped in a dreadful situation. Neoptolemus is absent from the house. Her plan to murder Andromache and her son has been revealed, and her father and accomplice, Menelaus, has abandoned her. Hermione had tried to eliminate serious threats to her household, the concubine of her husband and her son with Neoptolemus, but her plan to save her *oikos* has gone awry. Before their lyric exchange, the Nurse describes Hermione's situation: Hermione wants to die because she is afraid that her husband may send her away in disgrace from their *oikos* (807-10). She had already attempted suicide inside her house, but she had been restrained by her servants (811-15). According to the Nurse, Hermione is in great pain (814). Her duty is to restrain her mistress from the noose (816: δέσποιναν εἴργουσ' ἀγχόνης κάμνω).⁴⁷ The chorus of women hears the servants shouting from inside the house (820-1). According to the chorus, Hermione laments her deeds (822-3: στένει / πράξασα δεινά).⁴⁸ They announce that Hermione is coming outside the house in order to communicate her sufferings (822: δείξειν δ' ἔοικεν ἢ τάλαιν' ὄσον στένει).⁴⁹

Hermione then starts her song which is composed of a combination of various Aeolic metres with dactylic metres, dochmiacs and lyric iambics (825-65). Her song is constantly interrupted by the speech of her Nurse (she uses iambic trimetre). The first thing Hermione sings about is her attempt to disfigure herself: she threatens to tear her hair and scratch her cheeks with her nails (825-6). She also sings about what she does on stage, casting her veil away (829-31), like Phaedra in her 'scene of delirium' and other tragic heroines in moments of despair.⁵⁰ Furthermore, this particular attire was part of her dowry, as Hermione has stressed earlier in the play (147-53). Hermione's attire is a symbol of her attachment to her father and of her

members of the household. On the latter, see also Seaford 1993. Marinis persuasively argues that there is a connection between the lamenting women and the conceptual realm of maenadism, especially in Greek tragedy, see 2012: 34-5.

⁴⁶ As Hall notes, certain characters (especially virgins) seem almost pre-programmed to sing in tragedy (1999: 121). One of the activities of the Bacchantes in Greek tragedy was singing, as we can observe in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Antigone describes herself as a mourning Bacchant in her monody in Euripides' *Phoenician Women* (1485-92).

⁴⁷ "I for my part am weary with restraining her from the noose".

⁴⁸ "She laments over the terrible deeds she has done".

⁴⁹ "But it is likely that the poor woman will make plain how she laments".

⁵⁰ Skouroumouni regards that this act reminds the audience of Clytemnestra's act in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1266 (2016: 10n36). Clytemnestra was considered a wicked female. Contemporary scholars have underlined Clytemnestra's manipulation of language in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, see on the latter Thalmann 1985: 226; McClure 1997: 123-5; Goldhill 2004a: 35; Goldhill 2004b: 41-2, 75-8.

problematic marriage to Neoptolemus.⁵¹ Hermione also loses her gown and exposes her breasts. Her gesture is completely inappropriate within her culture, but she lacks any social decorum.⁵² Hermione's gesture also brings to mind her mother, Helen, the unsuitable wife *par excellence* who had made the same gesture when she was in an analogous position.⁵³ Her problem is not that she exposed her body, but that her sins against her husband have been exposed (833-5).⁵⁴ Hermione displays exaggerated grief by tearing her clothes and by lacerating herself. Similar displays of grief were familiar from ritual lament.⁵⁵

Hermione states that she laments her daring and uses the language of curses against herself. Because of her deeds, she is cursed in the eyes of mortals (837-9):

κατὰ μὲν οὖν στένω
δαΐας τόλμας, ἄν ἔρεξ'.
ὦ κατάρατος ἐγὼ κατάρ-
ατος ἀνθρώποις.

[I groan for my bloodthirsty daring, the daring I wrought, I accursed, accursed in the eyes of mortals!]

She imagines her dim future, a motif well-known from ritual laments (see Alexiou 1974: 133-4). She is certain that her husband will kill her and she sings of her fantasies of escaping her husband by death. Hermione wishes to commit suicide by striking her heart, by hanging (841-4), by entering a pyre, by leaping from a cliff into the sea or in the mountain woods so that she will be taken care of by the ones who will collect her body (846-50).⁵⁶

⁵¹ See on this Battezzato 1999-2000: 358-9; Papadimitropoulos 2006: 151; Skouroumouni 2016: 8-9. For Hermione's problematic attachment to her natal family (*genos*), see also Kyriakou 1997: 11.

⁵² For the impropriety of her gesture, see Wiles 1997: 201; Battezzato 1999-2000: 359; Lloyd 2005: 155; Skouroumouni 2016: 11-12.

⁵³ See on this Kovacs 1980: 71; Papadimitropoulos 2006: 152; Skouroumouni 2016: 12. Peleus speaks of Helen's gesture towards Menelaus earlier in the play (627-31).

⁵⁴ Skouroumouni remarks that visible nude breasts are actually a rare sight in Greek tragedy; hence, the exposure of Hermione's breast is a very powerful visual image that generates associations with the scenic presentation of another important wicked female of the Spartan family: Aeschylus' Clytemnestra. Her exposed *mastos* in Aeschylus' *Choephorae* (896-8) is the single other extant instance of such an act on the tragic stage. See Skouroumouni 2016: 111.

⁵⁵ See Alexiou 1974: 20-3; Swift 2010: 304-5.

⁵⁶ Chong-Gossard rightly remarks that the means of death that Hermione invokes are notably traditional in extant tragedy. Hermione seems to seek for grandeur in her death-wishes (2003: 225). She also recalls previous tragic moments of despair (e.g., Medea's wish to be struck by lightning, *Medea* 144). Hermione prefers to kill herself, em-

She laments the betrayal of her father and her future death at the hands of her husband (854-6: ἔλιπες ἔλιπες, ὦ πάτερ, ἐπακτίαν / [ῶσει] μονάδ' ἔρημον οὔσαν ἐνάλου κώπας. / ὀλεῖ ὀλεῖ με).⁵⁷ Her main concern is the possible change of her status⁵⁸ as she believes that she will be expelled from her *oikos* (856-7: τᾶδ' οὐκέτ' ἐνοικήσω / νυμφιδίῳ στέγῃ).⁵⁹ Instead of the mistress of the *oikos*, she will end up being a suppliant or a slave (859-60: τίνος ἀγαλμάτων ἰκέτις ὀρμαθῶ; / ἢ δούλα δούλας γόνασι προσπέσω;).⁶⁰ She also wishes to escape from this difficult situation by flight. Hermione wishes to fly to the Dark Rocks (Cyaneae), often identified with the Wandering Rocks (Planctae) and Clashing Rocks (Symplegades) in lines 861-5. Hermione's escapism expressed in a lyric form reminds us of other lyric moments of 'escapism' in Greek tragedy.⁶¹ Hermione's song does not only bring to mind other lyric moments of Greek tragedy, but also employs the language and the themes of lament.⁶²

Consolation-Offering Nurses

While Medea sings in anapaests inside her house, her Nurse is outside with the chorus and chants in order to comfort and soothe her.⁶³ Her use of metre reveals her emotional status. Although she tries to be more rational, she seems to be very involved in Medea's sufferings. She tries to offer her comfort by using speech and chanting. Her aim is to persuade her mistress to come out of the house in order to meet the women of the chorus (185: ἀτὰρ

bracing the tragic genre by dying as women in tragedy do, and not to become a scheming wife murdered by her husband (see Chong-Gossard 2003: 227).

⁵⁷ "You have abandoned me, father, abandoned me, all alone on the shore with no sea-going oar! He will kill me, kill me!".

⁵⁸ Chong-Gossard 2003: 214 observed that for some of the female singers of Euripides' tragedies (Hermione included) their intense fear for the loss of their status triggered their singing.

⁵⁹ "No more shall I dwell in this bridal house of mine!".

⁶⁰ "To which of the gods' statues shall I run as suppliant? Or shall I fall as a slave before the knees of my slave?"

⁶¹ The desire to be transformed into a bird and escape by flight through the air is a common wish of choruses and actors in tragedy, and it is always articulated in lyrics (see Chong-Gossard 2003: 225). For escape odes in Greek tragedy, see Knight 1933; for escape odes in Euripides, see Padel 1974; Swift 2009.

⁶² See Hausdoerffer 2006.

⁶³ I should note that the Nurse does not use iambic trimetres since Medea's first intervention from within the house (96-7); all lines uttered by the Nurse from line 99 until the end of the *parodos* – that is, until the very last line she utters in the play – are anapaestic. The mode of expression of the Nurse is not iambic. She does not speak, she chants.

φόβος εἰ πείσω δέσποιναν ἐμήν).⁶⁴ The Nurse intervenes amidst Medea's shouting and lamenting (99-111, 115-31, 140-3, 169-73) in order to comment on it. In the anapaestic scene that leads up to the *parodos* (96-130) and during the *parodos* itself (131-213), Medea's lines are heard and commented upon by the Nurse, first by the Nurse alone and then by the Nurse and the chorus. Medea seems unable or unwilling to hear them.⁶⁵

The Nurse comments on Medea's sufferings trying to adopt a philosophical tone. According to the Nurse, every proud soul stung by an injury will react passionately (105-10); royalty even more since they often command and seldom obey, and so are subject to violent changes of mood (119-24); the gods get angry at non-moderate living and they often destroy royal *oikoi* (119-30). She advises moderation and living a modest life of equality.⁶⁶ Regarding Medea's tirade against her children (112-14), she offers a rational argument in that her children do not share their father's sin and thus she has no reason to hate them (116-17: τί δέ σοι παῖδες πατρὸς ἀμπλακίας / μετέχουσι; τί τούσδ' ἔχθεις;).⁶⁷ The chorus asks her to bring Medea outside the house in order to listen to their words (173-6: πῶς ἂν ἐς ὄψιν τὰν ἀμετέραν / ἔλθοι μύθων τ' ἀύδαθέντων / δέξαιτ' ὀμόφάν).⁶⁸ According to the chorus, Medea's malicious intentions conveyed by her song have the potential to harm the members of her *oikos* (181-4). Both the chorus and the Nurse believe that the antidote to Medea's song is the language of persuasion. The Nurse will try to bring Medea outside and to persuade her, although she doubts that Medea is perceptive of her words. Medea uses song, but the Nurse seems to doubt the effectiveness of song to soothe Medea. She speaks of the inability of song to put an end to mortals' bitter grief (190-204). As Mastronarde has suggested, the Nurse seems too directly involved in the event to derive solace or pleasure from music (2002: *ad* 190-204), and she supposes that the same is true for Medea. According to the Nurse, grief that cannot be cured with song can overthrow houses (197-8: ἔξ

⁶⁴ "But there is doubt whether I shall persuade my mistress".

⁶⁵ See Mastronarde's comment *ad* 131-213 (2002: 189): "Medea's lines sung from inside turn the *parodos* into a three-way exchange. Medea is absorbed in her own emotions and has no awareness of her listeners and their comments as she continues to sing in anapaests".

⁶⁶ The philosophical tone of the speech of the Nurse can be compared to the tone adopted by the lyric genre of *thrênos*. Lyric *thrênos* avoided expressions of personal grief and adopted a philosophical tone (e.g., Simonides often refers to the inevitability of death and suffering in human life and to the quick changes of fate: 520, 521, 523, 524 *PMG*). On the differences between ritual lament and *thrênos*, see Swift 2010: 310-4.

⁶⁷ "Why do you make the children sharers in their father's sin? Why do you hate them?"

⁶⁸ "Oh, how I wish she could come face to face with us and receive the sound of our words to her, on the chance that somehow she might give up her angry temper!"

ὄν θάνατοι / δειναί τε τύχαι σφάλλουσι δόμους).⁶⁹

Phaedra's song is interrupted by her Nurse's speech (203-7, 212-14, 223-7, 232-8). The Nurse, in response to Phaedra's 'delirium', offers her arguments using a variety of metres (mostly dimeters and a monometer at 212 and a few paroemiac lines: 227, 238). She believes that her mistress is afflicted by an illness (205) and that Phaedra is on the brink of madness (214, 232, 237-8).⁷⁰ She adopts a philosophical tone and remarks that every mortal has to suffer (206-8). All Phaedra has to do is to stop uttering her cravings. According to the Nurse, Phaedra should stand still and not move violently (203-5: καὶ μὴ χαλεπῶς / μετάβαλλε δέμας),⁷¹ she should stop performing her wild words that are created by madness in front of an audience (212-4: ὦ παῖ, τί θροεῖς; / οὐ μὴ παρ' ὄχλῳ τάδε γηρύση / μανίας ἔποχον ῥίπτουσα λόγον);⁷² and she should stop expressing her wild cravings for things that are outside the house (224-7).⁷³ According to the Nurse, Phaedra should stay calm, express herself in a moderate way (205-7) and settle for things that are close to her household: for example, she should drink at the well near the city (225-7). Phaedra has nothing to do with hunting and with drinking from flowing springs. She should stay within the sheltered world of the *polis*. Phaedra should be pleased with the things that belong to her

⁶⁹ "It is because of these griefs that deaths and terrible disasters overthrow houses". Contemporary scholars have noticed that the Nurse does not accidentally comment on the inadequacy of song to bring a solution to Medea's problems. The Nurse is a connoisseur of the poetry of previous mortal men. The target of her statement seems to involve both epic and lyric poetry, both sung in festivals and banquets according to Pournara-Karydas (1998: 110n148) and she understands the therapeutic notion of poetry according to Pucci 1980: 25-6. Nevertheless, her personal involvement expressed by the metres she uses makes her unable to find a solution to Medea's problems.

⁷⁰ It is worth mentioning that Phaedra's speech in these lines has been considered the speech of a mad woman by many contemporary scholars. It has been characterized a 'delirium'. See for example Knox 1952; Barrett's 1964 commentary on these lines; Segal 1965: 436; Goff 1990: 7; Halleran 1995 on the passage; McClure 1999: 125-6. Nevertheless, Roisman sees Phaedra's statements as a ruse for madness: she believes that Phaedra's rhetoric indicates that she is in full control of herself (1998: 50-1).

⁷¹ "Do not shift your body so roughly".

⁷² "My child, what are these words of yours? Won't you stop saying such things before the crowd, hurling wild words that are mounted on madness?" Γηρύω usually means 'sing' (see *LSJ* s.v. γηρύω). McClure 1999: 126 suggests that since Phaedra's speech is eroticized, once it breaches the discursive sphere of men, becomes transgressive both in its content and in the fact of its public disclosure, it must be confined to the house.

⁷³ The Nurse has also remarked that her mistress desires things that are far away (183-5: ταχὺ γὰρ σφάλλη κούδενι χαίρεις, / οὐδέ σ' ἀρέσκει τὸ παρόν, τὸ δ' ἀπὸν / φίλτερον ἡγή, "for you slip all too soon from contentment, and you find joy in nothing, taking no pleasure in what is at hand but loving rather what is far off").

oikos and not to the wilderness (see Swift 2006: 137n55). The Nurse is very critical of Phaedra's song. She finds Phaedra's words inappropriate and puzzling (214: *μανίας ἔποχον ῥίπτουσα λόγον*; 232: *παράφρων ἔρριψας ἔπος*; 236-8, *τάδε μαντείας ἄξια πολλῆς, / ὅστις σε θεῶν ἀνασειράζει / καὶ παρακόπτει φρένας, ὧ πᾶϊ*)⁷⁴ and wants her to stop (213). Phaedra's Nurse is anxious that Phaedra and Theseus' children will not receive their rightful inheritance in case their mother dies. As there will be no one to defend their rights, such rights could be usurped by their stepbrother, Hippolytus, the Amazon's son (305-9).

Hermione's Nurse in *Andromache* advises her mistress and disapproves of her exaggerations using iambic trimetre. She interrupts Hermione's song to prevent her from grieving, though Hermione seems unresponsive to her words.⁷⁵ She wants Hermione to stop displaying signs of excessive grief, such as self-lacerating and tearing off her veil (829, 832). The Nurse adopts a philosophical tone towards misfortunes: misfortunes sent by the gods come to all mortals late or soon, so Hermione should stop grieving in this way (851-2: *τί ταῦτα μοχθεῖς; συμφοραὶ θεήλατοι / πᾶσιν βροτοῖσιν ἢ τότ' ἤλθον ἢ τότε*).⁷⁶ The Nurse offers her rational advice to her mistress in that she will be forgiven by Neoptolemus (840) and she will not lose her status as the mistress of the *oikos* (867-78). According to the Nurse, although Hermione has a rival in love whom she shares her marriage with (836: *συγγάμω*), Neoptolemus is her husband (840, 869: *πόσις*). Hermione is the mistress of the house and not the other woman, a barbarian prisoner taken from Troy (870-1). Hermione's marital union is stronger because Neoptolemus has received her with a large dowry for her: she is the daughter of a man of importance, and comes from a wealthy city (872-3: *ἀλλ' ἀνδρὸς ἐσθλοῦ παῖδα σὺν πολλοῖς λαβῶν / ἔδνοισι, πόλεώς τ' οὐ μέσῳς εὐδαίμονος*).⁷⁷ According to the Nurse, Menelaus has not abandoned Hermione and he will not allow her to be banished from her *oikos* (874-5: *πατήρ δέ σ' οὐχ ὧδ' ὡς σὺ δευμαίνεις, τέκνον, / προδοῦς ἐάσει δωμάτων τῶνδ' ἐκπεσεῖν*).⁷⁸ All Hermione has to do is to go inside and stop perform-

⁷⁴ 214: "hurling wild words that are mounted on madness"; 232: "What whirling words are these you utter yet again in your madness?"; 236-8: "All this calls for a skillful diviner to say which of the gods is wrenching your head aside, my child, and striking your wits awry". The Nurse in *Hippolytus* has also stated that Phaedra's words need a seer to interpret them (346).

⁷⁵ For Hermione's self-absorption in this scene, see Chong-Gossard 2003: 224.

⁷⁶ "Why do you grieve this way? Misfortunes sent by the gods come to all mortals late or soon".

⁷⁷ "But he has received you with a large dowry and you are the daughter of a man of importance and come from a city of no ordinary prosperity".

⁷⁸ "Your father will not, as you fear, abandon you and allow you to be banished from

ing her song in front of her house (876-7: ἀλλ' εἴσιθ' εἴσω μηδὲ φαντάζου δόμων / πάροιθε τῶνδε, μή τιν' αἰσχύνην λάβῃς).⁷⁹ According to the Nurse, Hermione's excessive feelings as expressed by her song endanger her status (877).⁸⁰

Heroines in Dialogue and the Destruction of the *Oikos*

All three Nurses urge their mistresses to abandon the emotional state from which their singing arises: vindictive rage in the case of *Medea*; a refusal to keep living and an illicit desire in the case of *Phaedra*, and excessive fear of being punished in the case of *Hermione*. Nurses encourage rational thinking. *Medea*, *Phaedra*, and *Hermione* comply⁸¹ and they, eventually, stop singing. The cessation of their songs, however, cannot save their *oikoi*. The heroines switch verbal genre and they slip into speech. This is marked by a change in metre: they start to use iambic trimetre. Their new mode of expression, nevertheless, becomes the vehicle of the destruction in their households.

Medea is persuaded to stop lamenting. She exits her house and speaks of her troubles to the women of the chorus (214-66). *Medea* uses a different form of discourse which allows her to reveal her power of persuasion.⁸² She uses rational arguments in order to convince the chorus to keep silent if she finds a way to get justice from Jason (259-63). *Medea* insists on the binding nature of the 'contract' she made on her own with Jason (228-30, 252-66) and defends her right to honour and self-esteem in terms resembling those of the male heroic code.⁸³ Her song and her emotions are restrained. Her speech is the vehicle for the destruction of her *oikos*. Rational speech, not lament, aids her in setting her revenge in action.⁸⁴ In her

this house".

⁷⁹ "But go inside and do not show yourself in front of this house lest you disgrace yourself". *Hermione*, as Neoptolemus' legal wife, has to dominate inside the house. For the "dynamics of domestic space" in Euripides' *Andromache*, see Skouroumouni 2014.

⁸⁰ The main concern of the Nurse is that *Hermione* will retain the dignity appropriate to her status as a member of royalty and of the female gender. See on this Cyrino 1998: 86-8; Chong-Gossard 2003: 224; Skouroumouni 2016: 11-2.

⁸¹ Pournara-Karydas persuasively argues that Nurses in Greek tragedy had authority over their mistresses (1998: 83-92).

⁸² For the fascination of Euripides' *Medea* with language, its dangers and powers, see Boedeker 1991: 97. For *Medea*'s power of persuasion, see Buxton 1982: 153-170; Boedeker 1991: 99-100; Rabinowitz 1993: 142-4, 153; Fletcher 2003: 33; Levett 2010.

⁸³ See Knox 1977: 198-225; Zeitlin 1985: 68; Segal 1996: 27-8. For the affinities of the use of *Medea*'s language with the language of men, see also Williamson 1990.

⁸⁴ As Levett correctly remarks (2010: 55), *Medea* learns to restrain and control her

speech, she identifies the root of her unhappiness with the loss of her natal *oikos* and her having to remain in her new *oikos* and *polis* (252-8). She calmly states that she will find a solution to her problems (260-6). It is known from the myth that Medea is going to extinguish the new *oikos* of her husband by murdering his new wife and destroy her own *oikos* by killing her children. At the end of the play, she will depart from the *polis* on the dragon chariot of her immortal ancestor, the Sun.

Phaedra, once she stops singing, enters into a dialogue with her Nurse (310-61). The dialogue is of a stichomythic nature for almost its entire extent: from 315 to 352 (with distichomythic start at 311/312+313/314 and *antilabē* at 352).⁸⁵ The self-absorbed and unresponsive singer communicates with another person. Phaedra articulates her problems, eventually, revealing the root of her anxiety; she is in love with Hippolytus (350-3). Despite the concerns of her Nurse, Phaedra's enigmatic song allowed her to conceal the reason for her grief. Her dialogue with the Nurse is the means of the destruction of the *oikos*.⁸⁶ Rabinowitz has rightly remarked that although Phaedra had vowed silence, the play depicts her shift into language, first with unwilling speech (in her lyric 'delirium scene'), then with mediated speech (in this dialogue with her Nurse), then with writing (see Rabinowitz 1987: 131). Phaedra will try to become an adulteress in order to satiate her passion for Hippolytus, as other women who come from her natal family did in similar cases of forbidden love (337-41) and she will endanger her *oikos* with Theseus. The revelation of her desire will stimulate the Nurse into seeking a cure for her mistress' illness. Phaedra will also use different modes of expression and, eventually, she will destroy her *oikos* by committing suicide and implicating Hippolytus.

Hermione stops singing and she engages in a dialogue with her cousin Orestes, a member of her natal *oikos*, who suddenly comes to her house (881-1008). Hermione uses supplication (891-5) and then explains her misfortunes to Orestes. According to her, she is to blame, in part, with her husband, and in part with one of the gods (902-3). The causes of her grief are

own words, hiding her true intentions as she effects her revenge, in particular by suppressing her 'feminine' instinct to lament.

⁸⁵ Although not one of Euripides' most complex stichomythiae, this is an interesting one, both for its structure and the proxemic change at 353: Phaedra to her Nurse: 2/2x1 + 1/1x15 + *extra metrum* + 1/1x4 + *antilabē*. Regarding this dialogue, a clear distinction between speech and song is impossible to be made. The Nurse seems to mix rhetoric discourse (lines 358-9 until the caesura) with elements encountered in lyric song (e.g., the re-echoing in clausula at 353/361, caesurae followed by repetitions in 354 and 355 with enjambement).

⁸⁶ As other scholars have noted, Phaedra's speech is what sets the tragedy in motion. See Rabinowitz 1987: 131-4; Goff 1990: 13; Fletcher 2003: 36-7; Mueller 2011: 150.

her marital problems (906-10) and the approach she used to solve them (910-19). She then implores Orestes, a member of her *genos* (921: ὁμόγνιον),⁸⁷ to escort her to any place far away from this land or to take her back to her father's house.⁸⁸ Hermione is certain that she has already destroyed her *oikos* with Neoptolemus. She feels that even the house seems to take voice and drive her away (924: δόμοι τ' ἐλάυνειν φθέγμ' ἔχοντες οἶδε με).⁸⁹ All she wants is to be driven away by her *oikos* in order to escape the wrath of Neoptolemus and Peleus (989-92). Orestes, who wishes to take revenge over Neoptolemus for marrying Hermione, will destroy this *oikos* by killing Neoptolemus and he will use Hermione to build a new household. It is Hermione's speech and not her song that reveals her latent condescension to Orestes' desire to marry her and urges Orestes to reveal his plot to murder Neoptolemus.⁹⁰

Conclusions

Medea, Phaedra and Hermione express their anxieties and grief in song. Their songs have affinities with some of the private expressions of ritual lament, especially Medea's and Hermione's songs, and they resonate with many different verbal genres (e.g., ritual lament, oaths, and curses) that are considered feminine. They also resonate with several kinds of lyric and dramatic poetry. All three heroines are self-absorbed in their songs and seem unresponsive to their Nurses. They also mention their natal family in their songs. Medea had to sacrifice members of her natal family and abandon her *polis*. Phaedra is afraid that she will follow the familiar pattern of fulfilling her desire for a lover who is, for some reason, forbidden. Hermione is extremely attached to her natal *oikos*. All three heroines are not in their native land and are far away from their natal *oikos*. They do not seem to fit in well in their new *oikoi*. Medea's marriage is borderline legitimate and Jason wants to create a new union; Phaedra has fallen in love with her stepson, while Hermione is barren and shares her husband with another woman.⁹¹ Their attachment to their *genos* seems problematic, especially in Her-

⁸⁷ "Who is of our family".

⁸⁸ Hermione's wish is to get away from her problematic union with Neoptolemus and to join her natal family once again. See Kyriakou 1997: 11.

⁸⁹ "For this house seems to take voice and drive me forth".

⁹⁰ For Hermione's latent consent to marry Orestes and her attitude that have as a result Orestes' revealing of his plan, see Papadimitropoulos 2006: 152-3.

⁹¹ Some of the common problems of the *oikos* in Greek tragedy were the failure of monogamy (by the relationship of a man with another woman or vice versa), acts of violence and disappearance through the lack of male heirs. See on this Seaford 1990: 151-2.

mione's case. The *oikos* was created by the union of the members of two different households who would become husband and wife. Marriage created an implicit threat to the *oikos*, since it joins together (typically) members from two different households, with potentially conflicting claims, and the threat was greater in cases where the woman remained attached to the interests of her natal *oikos* (see Seaford 1990: 151-2). These singing heroines threaten the existence of their new *oikos* by committing acts of violence: suicide (Medea, Phaedra, Hermione) or murder (Medea with her curses). They seem opposed to the survival of the *oikos*.

Nurses in all three instances attempt to restrain the songs of their mistresses and encourage them to behave in a rational way. In these domestic plays, the Nurses are concerned with the interests of their mistresses. The Nurses try to soothe the unresponsive singing heroines. They are deeply involved in their mistresses' discomfort and would like to help them, being of solace to their suffering. Their role is similar to the role of choruses who emotionally participate in the sufferings of a character, usually appearing after the prologue in many tragic plays, as I mentioned above. They are tightly bound to the people whom they assisted while they were growing up and maturing, not to the original familial group or to the one that subsequently received them as adults. The excessive emotions, unrealistic fears and uncontrolled desires of their mistresses that are expressed through song are life-threatening. Furthermore, Medea's plans, Phaedra's irrational thoughts and Hermione's suicidal thoughts expressed by song also pose a threat to the well-being of their *oikos*. The Nurses are successful at offering consolation. Medea, Phaedra and Hermione comply and they, eventually, stop singing. The restraining of their songs, however, cannot save them or others from destruction. The heroines stop expressing their overwhelming feelings by song. They switch verbal genre and slip into dialogue; nevertheless, their problems cannot be fixed. The problems of their *oikoi* were inherited from the mythical material, versions of which may predate the *polis* (see Seaford 1990: 151-2). Medea will exact her revenge by eliminating Jason's two *oikoi* by murder and filicide, Phaedra will be exposed and will pay the price and Hermione will be driven away from her headless *oikos* and will return to her natal *oikos*. Within this context, either irrational emotions expressed by song or rational thinking expressed by speech backfire and the Nurses cannot do anything to prevent destruction.

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