Gods as Parental Figures in Euripides’ Alcestis, Hippolytus, Iphigenia in Aulis and Tauris

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Gods as Parental Figures in Euripides' *Alcestis, Hippolytus, Iphigenia in Aulis and Tauris*  
by  
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ABSTRACT

The relationship between father and child seems to be a tumultuous one in the Greek tragedies, particularly in Euripidean tragedy. Father and child frequently do not have a loving and unrestrained relationship, but rather a distant, stoic bond void of communication. In *Alcestis* (438 B.C.), *Hippolytus* (428 B.C.), *Iphigenia in Aulis* (406 B.C.), and *Tauris* (414-410 B.C.), the children, Admetus, Hippolytus, and Iphigenia, deal with disregard, mistreatment, and abandonment by their fathers, Pheres, Theseus, and Agamemnon. Doomed to die, these children often hold their fathers accountable, indirectly or directly, as murderers in their passing. Even as the unwritten law of familial obligation from parent to offspring fails, there is another figure that assumes a parental role and succeeds in doing so. The gods of Mount Olympus function as the parents of the tragic hero(ine)s. In acting paternally or maternally toward these mortals, the gods embody noteworthy roles in these Euripidean tragedies. It is these greater roles that need to be analyzed when studying the relationships between the gods and mortals, to help understand their significance and what it is they represent.

In the introduction to his series on Euripides’ tragedies, Lattimore writes that the playwright depicts men not “as they ought to be (or as one ought to show them) but Euripides showed them as they were...Euripides was basically a realist” (v). Lattimore also states that Euripides “believed in a world he disliked. His gods represent this world” (v). If the gods represent the world Euripides lived in, a reality he disliked, then why, in these four specific plays, does Euripides present the gods as morally redeemable? Why are these Gods protective, caring guardians, and not the familiarly selfish, brutal, non-sympathetic fantastical characters? If Euripides is a realist and shows men as they are,
what do the relationships between parent and child, and god and mortal say about the society that influenced his writing?

Gilbert Murray in his book *Euripides and his Age* echoes Lattimore’s sentiments: “What he did (so we young men were told) was to put upon the stage the hallowed legends in all their crudity, as if to say to his fellow-citizens: ‘These are the gods whom you ignorantly worship. Away with them, and find better!’” (Murray vii) Complicating Lattimore and Murray, Hazel E. Barnes states in her collection of essays titled *The Meddling Gods: Four Essays on Classical Themes* the general knowledge of Euripides’ depiction of the Gods, but she also takes it a step further when she acknowledges that this attitude towards the Gods is not universal in all of his tragedies: “The supernatural is not used cynically, as it so often is with Euripides, as though the author were mocking the very deities to whom his characters owe their deliverance” (Barnes 59). Euripides does not use Apollo and Artemis as sardonic figures, nor does he ridicule them. Instead he uses their divine presence to articulate why his characters do indeed owe the Olympians for their freedom and rescue.
GODS AS PARENTAL FIGURES IN EURIPIDES' *ALCESTIS, Hippolytus, Iphigenia in Aulis* AND *Tauris*

A THESIS

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For the degree of Master of Arts

by

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Chapter I: Introduction

The relationship between father and child seems to be a tumultuous one in the Greek tragedies, particularly in Euripidean tragedy. Father and child frequently do not have a loving and unrestrained relationship, but rather a distant, stoic bond void of communication. In Alcestis (438 B.C.), Hippolytus (428 B.C.), Iphigenia in Aulis (406 B.C.), and Tauris (414-410 B.C.), the children, Admetus, Hippolytus, and Iphigenia, deal with disregard, mistreatment, and abandonment by their fathers, Pheres, Theseus, and Agamemnon. Doomed to die, these children often hold their fathers accountable, indirectly or directly, as murderers in their passing. Even as the unwritten law of familial obligation from parent to offspring fails, there is another figure that assumes a parental role and succeeds in doing so. The gods of Mount Olympus function as the parents of the tragic hero(ine)s. In acting paternally or maternally toward these mortals, the gods embody noteworthy roles in these Euripidean tragedies. It is these greater roles that need to be analyzed when studying the relationships between the gods and mortals, to help understand their significance and what it is they represent.

Donald J. Mastronarde’s 2002 edition of The Medea provides an extensive introduction, which has aided in providing historical and textual scholarship on both the playwright Euripides and his tragedies. According to Mastronarde’s research, around the fourth century scholars investigated data detailing information of competitions in the Athenian state archives, and they found that Euripides participation in the Dionysia began in the year 455 B.C. (Mastronarde 3): “His last certain Athenian production during his lifetime was at the Dionysia in 408, and a final tetralogy was entered in the competition
shortly after his death. His name was found in the list of competitions at the Great
Dionysia 22 times (88 dramas), and ancient scholars catalogued 92 plays under his name”
(Mastronarde 3). Of the eighty-eight plays, only eighteen have survived. Out of these
eighteen tragedies, only four depict cruel fathers and humane gods; the rest of Euripides’
tragedies portray fathers and gods in a way that has been universally acknowledged as his
characteristic way of writing: the father’s are nurturing and protective of their families,
and the gods are atrocious and barbarous toward humans (Barnes 59).

In his plays The Medea, The Heracleidae, and Heracles, Euripides includes father
figures that would rather die than see their children suffer. Medea, to revenge her
husband’s decision to marry a princess, decides that she must kill the princess by gifting
the new bride a dress cloaked with poison. Upon hearing the news of her successful
scheme, Medea learns that Creon too has died along with his daughter. Unable to bear
the thought of his daughter’s death, Creon preferred death at the side of his daughter: “O
my poor child, / What heavenly power has so shamefully destroyed you? / And who has
set me here like an ancient sepulcher, /Deprived of you? O let me die with you, my
child!” (li. 1207-10)¹ Creon’s love for his child and willingness to die alongside of her
parallels Iolaus’ devotion and love for Heracles’ children in The Heracleidae. Orphaned
and exiled from neighboring Greek lands, Heracles’ children are left vulnerable and alone
with no one to care for them except for Iolaus. Old and susceptible himself, Iolaus
refuses to leave the children without protection, even if it means risking his own life:

“With displaced children I displace myself/ To share with those who have more than their

¹ Translation text: David Greene and Richard Lattimore, Euripides I: Alcestis, The Medea, The
Heracleidae, Hippolytus (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955). All other quotations from The
Medea employ this translation.
share/ Of sorrows. If I left them, men might say, / 'He failed to do his duty to them, once/ Their father died, in spite of family ties’” (li. 26-30)\(^2\). Back home to save his wife and children from the hands of Lycus, Heracles declares to his wife and children, “Here, I’ll take your hands and lead you in my wake, / like a ship that tows its little boats behind, / for I accept this care and service of my sons. Here all mankind is equal: / rich and poor alike, they love their children. / With wealth distinctions come: some possess it, / some do not. All mankind loves its children” (li. 631-36)\(^3\). Although Heracles’ intentions are pure and righteous, Hera decides Heracles may not be the savior of his family and sends Iris and Madness to torture him. Driving Heracles mad from their power, Hera succeeds in having Heracles murder his own children.

Like Hera, Dionysus and Apollo demonstrate the monstrous and deleterious actions of the gods in Euripides’ *The Bacchae* and *Ion*. *The Bacchae* depicts the tragic end of King Pentheus. Dionysus has decided to punish King Pentheus and his mother Agave because they refuse to worship him. To torture them for all eternity, Dionysus has Agave kill her own son in a possessed daze inflicted by the god. Agave believes she has killed a mountain lion when really she has beheaded her own child. Dionysus does this to avenge his mother Semele. Dionysus destroys the royal house of Cadmus because they did not believe Semele when she said Zeus was the father of her baby. Therefore, Pentheus and Agave did not believe that Dionysus, their offspring, was a god. Dionysus


kills his mother’s nephew and destroys her family to honor her and himself as loved ones by Zeus. Similar to Dionysus, in his selfishness and pride, in Euripides’ *Ion* Apollo is also portrayed as deceitful, a coward, and one who “retains no shred of dignity” (Willetts 182). Apollo could not control his lust for the young virgin maiden Creusa and in a way befitting a god, he impregnates her through trickery. Shamed by his actions and impregnating an unmarried mortal, Apollo makes sure she cannot have any more children and does not reunite her with Ion, their son, until Ion is a young man, causing her years of misery. This Apollo is the same god in Euripides’ *Alcestis*, the protective and nurturing god who cannot bear the thought of husband and wife not living together in old age, and the god who does everything in his power to reunite husband, wife, and children.

These few examples from other Euripidean tragedies establish that Euripides does indeed do something unfamiliar and antithetic with the *Alcestis, Hippolytus, Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Tauris*. Although these are not all the examples from the other fourteen plays, they do make clear that Euripides goes against the grain in the four tragedies that are presented in this thesis.

The next chapter of the thesis will explore Euripides’ *Alcestis*. Death has arrived to decree that Admetus must now transition to the underworld. Apollo, recognized as the god of a multitude of entities including the sun, negotiates for Admetus’ life and develops an arrangement with Death whereby Admetus can forfeit the life of another in exchange for his own. Of all the people in his life, his wife, Alcestis, is the only one willing to die for her husband’s sake. Pheres, Admetus’ father, refuses such a sacrifice for his son. Due to this, both Alcestis and Admetus characterize Pheres as a neglectful, selfish, detached, and unemotional father.
Whereas Pheres fails in his role of the father, Apollo flourishes. It is Apollo who bargains with Death in order to see Admetus live; it is Apollo who momentarily manipulates Death into believing he will still descend into the underworld with a spirit; it is Apollo who brings forth Heracles to undo all the sorrow and pain; it is Apollo who restores Alcestis to Admetus; and it is Apollo who does all he can to reinstate Admetus’ life and contentment, not Pheres.

Following an analysis of *Alcestis*, the third chapter will examine the *Hippolytus*. Akin to Pheres’ selfish desertion and mistreatment of Admetus, Theseus too betrays and abandons Hippolytus. He only finds salvation through the maternal actions of Artemis. At the outset of *Hippolytus*, Aphrodite highlights the characteristics of Hippolytus and his devotion and bond with the goddess Artemis. Immortal parent and mortal child have developed a deep level of commitment and communication. Frustrated over Hippolytus’ praise of Artemis, Aphrodite becomes vengeful toward the chaste virgin. Conjuring up the most severe punishment for Hippolytus’ negligence of her worship, Aphrodite makes Phaedra, his step-mother, fall in love with him. When Hippolytus learns of Phaedra’s desires, he is outraged. However, he is willing to keep her love a secret in order to protect his father’s innocent and ignorant view of his wife. Phaedra, embarrassed by the rejection from Hippolytus, commits suicide and leaves a note stating that Hippolytus raped her. Theseus, Hippolytus’ father, automatically believes the note and declares his son be murdered by the gods. If Theseus knew his son at all, he would discern Hippolytus would never commit such a crime. Moments before Hippolytus takes his last breath, Artemis reveals to Theseus that he has killed his innocent son and Theseus is left remorseful.
The goddess of virginity and chastity acts as a parental figure for Hippolytus. Artemis knows Hippolytus’ character and integrity better than Theseus did. Artemis displays her devotion and appreciation for Hippolytus’ loyalty to her, whereas Theseus was ignorant to his son’s dedication and faithfulness to him. Artemis defends Hippolytus’ honor and reputation, whereas Theseus attempted to pollute and dismember it. Artemis gives Hippolytus immortality through song, whereas Theseus wishes him immediate death.

The final case study will analyze the *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Tauris* tragedies and trace how this model of gods as parental figures extends across two scripts. Similar to Admetus and Hippolytus, Iphigenia too experiences the immediate and horrifying emotions of feeling discarded and betrayed by her father. However, unlike *Alcestis* and *Hippolytus*, the god in this play decrees the death of the child, and yet saves the child’s life. It is Iphigenia’s reactions to the ordained sacrificing of her life and Artemis’ decision to ultimately save her life that demonstrates a parent/child relationship between Iphigenia and Artemis.

Agamemnon has shown himself to be a manipulating and deceiving father in his scheme to bring Iphigenia to Aulis. Afraid to tell Clytemnestra the truth behind their daughter’s sudden departure to Aulis, Agamemnon presents a false purpose for their travels. Lying to both mother and daughter, Agamemnon writes a letter stating that Iphigenia is to marry Achilles, and she must come to Aulis in order for the marriage to take place. Clytemnestra and Iphigenia arrive to Aulis, only to be informed of devastating news: Agamemnon has agreed to kill his daughter for the sake of the Greek army.
Iphigenia is devastated by the news of her father's scheme and purpose for her presence. She convinces herself that Agamemnon's hands are declaring her death. Iphigenia does not view her future sacrifice as a sacrifice, but as a murder. The thought of the perpetrator being Agamemnon gives rise to negativity and antipathy in Iphigenia. Why, then, does Iphigenia's attitude and behavior suddenly change before her sacrifice? Iphigenia realizes it is the request of Artemis, not her father.

By the end of the play, Iphigenia acknowledges the ruling of Artemis as finite and states that, if it is divine will, it cannot be denied. However, when it was solely in the hands of Agamemnon, she pleaded, begged, and argued for her life. Immortality is now given to Iphigenia as she explains to her mother how her name and glory will live on forever. And yet, in the beginning when speaking to her father, Iphigenia reminds him of how he is stripping her of a life yet lived, and depriving her of any generational honor he had wished to see through her life and grandchildren. These drastic differences in emotion and behavior exhibit the dramatic dissimilarity in the relationships Iphigenia has with both Agamemnon and Artemis. Agamemnon does not act as a father should; and Iphigenia's language and behavior toward Artemis reveal how, as in the other two tragedies, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Tauris* together underscore a parent/child relationship between the gods and mortals.

Finally, the conclusion will evaluate the significance of these altered relationships. What does it mean to have the gods portrayed as parental figures? What is Euripides trying to convey to his audience? Why does Euripides use the gods differently in these four plays? I suggest that Euripides does not use the gods the way he typically would, to show how irrational society was to believe in them; instead he utilizes them to
show exactly how foolish people are and how it takes the gods to undo mortal messes.

Through his use of the gods as parental figures, Euripides forces his reader and audience to ask deep universal questions: Should a father die for the sake of their child’s life? Should any human willingly die in the place of a loved one? Is it wrong of a man to want to further his place in society, even if it means destroying his home and family? Is being a king and running an army or society, with all its honors, reputation, and fame more important than the life of a beloved child? Is the polis indeed more important than the oikos, or ultimately, the oikos more important than the polis?
Chapter II: *Alcestis*

Often categorized as a satyr-play, due to its position as the fourth and final play in the series performed that evening, Euripides’ *Alcestis* has often left critics bemused. As Gilbert Murray expounds in his book *Euripides and His Age*, “Euripides at any rate moved gradually away from satyr-plays. In their stead he put a curious sort of pro-satyric tragedy, a play in the tragic convention and free from the satyric coarseness, but containing a least one half-comic figure and preserving some fantastic quality of atmosphere” (Murray 32). Furthering Murray’s analysis, Richard Lattimore describes in the introduction to his translation of the play, a tragicomedy: “...[A]ttempts to explain *Alcestis* as a modified satyr-play are not convincing, and the comic elements are not highly significant...*Alcestis* is no satyr-play, but a tragicomedy...” (Lattimore 5).

*Alcestis* does indeed contain characteristics of both genres; however, even the comedic moments give way to awful truths, especially those involving human relationships. There is the rapport between friends, which is exemplified in Heracles and Admetus; the bond between wife and husband, illustrated in Alcestis and Admetus; and most importantly, the connection between parent and child, which Euripides evaluates in the maternal sacrifices of Alcestis, the paternal love of Apollo, and the paternal negligence of Pheres. Of all these interactions, only one is ultimately tragic--the bond between father and son, Pheres and Admetus. When Pheres fails to take his son’s place in death, Apollo usurps his role as Admetus’ father and becomes his surrogate parent.

The relationship between Pheres and Admetus is a violent one in *Alcestis*. Father and son do not have a strong bond but rather an unrestrained kinship plagued by a detached rapport void of communication, which causes Admetus to deal with indifference
and desertion by his father. Doomed to die, Admetus holds his father accountable for the
death of his wife, and in turn, himself. When the genetic connection disappoints in its
unwritten law of ancestral obligation from parent to offspring, the Olympian god Apollo
goes above and beyond the call of duty as a friend to the house of Admetus, and acts as a
surrogate father to the troubled mortal. Apollo through his own undertaking, and his
connection to the deeds of Alcestis and Heracles, sacrifices the polis (public) for the
oikos (private), demonstrating charis, philia, and acts of xenia toward Admetus. Akin to
Apollo, Alcestis and Heracles too display these characteristics, further underscoring
Apollo’s surrogacy. Distinct from these noble and kind acts, Pheres then becomes
isolated in his lack of charis, philia, and concern for the oikos, leaving him in the same
realm as the character of Death and advancing his anticlimactic paternal temperament.

Preceding the actions of the play and clarified in the prologue, Apollo’s affection
and concern for Admetus stems from Admetus’ guest friendship or act of xenia toward
the Olympian god both in disguise and his godly form. Exasperated over the untimely
death of his own son Asclepius, by the hands of his own father Zeus, Apollo avenges his
son’s death by killing the Cyclopes (1.1-5). As a punishment for having murdered the
“Smiths of Zeus’s fire”, Apollo was sentenced to serve a mortal man, in this case
Admetus. As Apollo details, he tended Admetus’ oxen and was treated with kindness
and respect. Due to this, Apollo, even after he completed his sentence and no longer had
to disguise himself as a mortal working for another mortal, continued to protect and care
for Admetus. The god’s desire to safeguard his friend goes so far as defending him from
death: “I have kept him from danger, cheated the Fates to save his life/ until this day, for
he revered my sacred rights/ sacredly, and the fatal goddesses allowed/ Admetus to
escape the moment of his death/ by giving the lower powers someone else to die/ instead of him. He tried his loved ones all in turn, / father and aged mother who had given him birth, / and found not one, except his wife, who would consent/ to die for him, and not see daylight any more” (l. 9-15)\(^4\). In order to prolong Admetus’ life, Apollo resorts to ruses in order to convince the Fates to take the life of another individual in place of Admetus. Here is where Apollo epitomizes his fatherly nature toward Admetus.

Apollo does not have to care for the life of Admetus. The death of this mortal man does not inflict any danger to the god’s power. Apollo clearly states that Admetus has respected him as a god. This is not extraordinary, but rather a natural and expected attitude between gods and mortals. Additionally, Apollo acknowledges Pheres’ inability to help his son in a time of need, and that out of Admetus’ “loved ones” only Alcestis was willing to die in his place, not his father. This juxtaposition of Apollo professing his concern for Admetus-- “[t]he stain of death in the house must not be on me. / I step therefore from these chambers dearest to my love” (l.22-3) -- and Pheres’ lack of *philia* automatically sets the tone for distinguishing these two father figures. Furthermore, the association between Apollo and Alcestis, in their insatiable need to share in both the good fortune *and* suffering of Admetus, gives emphasis to Apollo as the replacement father figure. It is Alcestis’ undying love for her husband and her self-sacrifice that bring forth Apollo’s homecoming to the house of Admetus, helping to stage the opening exchange of dialogue between Apollo and Death.

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Taken back by the intrusion of Apollo, yet again, in regards to the life and death of Admetus, Death acknowledges Apollo’s previous concern for this man: “Ah! You at this house, Phoebus? Why do you haunt/ the place. It is unfair to take for your own/ and spoil the death-spirits’ privileges. / Was it not enough, then, that you blocked the death/ of Admetus, and overthrew the Fates...And now/ your bow hand is armed to guard her too, / Alcestis...though she/ promised her life for her husband’s/... It is your custom to help this house more than you ought” (l. 29-41). Euripides here portrays Apollo as a god who is going above and beyond any moral obligation. There is no justifiable reason why Apollo should interfere with Death’s contract and protect the lives of Admetus and Alcestis. As Leon Golden states in his article “Euripides’ Alcestis: Structure and Theme,” “Thanatos...is based on the diametrically opposed principle that human and divine behavior is to be governed exclusively by a legal contract which specifies, in binding terms that admit of no exception, the obligations and privileges of the contracting parties” (Golden 117). Repeatedly Apollo has interrupted Death’s liberties, and Death does not comprehend why. Apollo’s response sounds more like a man than a god: “But he is my friend, and his misfortunes trouble me” (l. 42). His meddling is an uncontaminated act of love. Golden notes,

Here we see Apollo act purely out of love as he bestows an altruistic benefaction on a house whose favors to him were already repaid, in a strict, legal sense, when he offered Admetus the chance of evading his fated death. The basis of Apollo’s action is the principle of altruistic love that is manifested in the kindly tone of his remark...and by the character of his ensuing argument with Thanatos. Here Apollo clearly recognizes that the request he is making of Thanatos to allow Alcestis to live until old age has no legal justification. What he is seeking as he expressly states is a favor from Death. This emphasizes the point we have made that Apollo’s actions here are based not on any legally binding obligation but
on an act of grace on his part, an act of altruistic love for the house of Admetus. (Golden 117)

Apollo is revealing a love more powerful than the admiration of friendship, and more concentrated than the mere act of a guest-host relationship. Apollo’s *arête* and *philia* clearly set him apart from the role of a god out to perform their duties upon mortal beings. Apollo’s plea with Death distinguishes him from the traditional behavior of the gods, stressing Apollo’s nature as a father figure.

After Apollo and Death have sparred with one another to no avail, Apollo warns Death of the battle he will soon face with Heracles: “For all your brute ferocity you shall be stopped. / The man to do it is on the way to Pheres’ house/ now, on an errand from Eurystheus, sent to steal/ a team of horses for the wintry lands of Thrace. / He shall be entertained here in Admetus’ house/ and he shall take the woman away from you by force, / nor will you have our gratitude, but you shall still/ be forced to do it, and to have my hate beside” (l. 64-71). Apollo has now taken it upon himself to supply a secondary form of action, since his first attempt has proven to be unsuccessful. Through the godlike powers of Apollo, Heracles will now become part of the plot to rescue Alcestis, and he will win. As Anne Pippin Burnett states in her article “The Virtues of Admetus,” “The prologue thus shows the apparent defeat of what is bright and young and good, while promising that in the end these qualities will be victorious over the power that is black and old and evil” (Burnett 53). Even in his declaration of victory, Apollo still cannot help himself from allowing his emotions to seep through. He proclaims to Death his hatred for him and how this abhorrence will not vanish simply because he knows in the
end he will achieve a life of longevity for both Alcestis and Admetus. Once more, Apollo appears more as a protective father figure than an authoritative and prophetic god.

Burnett also argues that the power that is “black, old, and evil” will walk away defeated and that which is “bright, young, and good” will prosper. If Death represents the first and Apollo the later, then, by action and characteristics, Pheres becomes synonymous with Death and Alcestis and Heracles become tantamount with the charis, arête, and philia of Apollo. As Golden maintains, “This conflict between the altruistic and egoistic world views, we shall see, represents the main theme of the Alcestis. It is a theme which is played out briefly for us on the divine level here in the first scene of the drama, but it achieves much greater intensity when it appears on the human level in the starkly contrasting approaches to Admetus' predicament that are taken by Alcestis, his wife, and Pheres, his father” (Golden 118). Alcestis will validate this dissimilarity and resemblance in her actions, words, and others’ perceptions of her.

Reminiscent of Apollo's commentary in the prologue, the Maid and Chorus also acknowledge Alcestis' courageous self-sacrifice as the profound love of a woman for her husband, family, and home. As Reginald B. Appleton surmises, in Euripides the Idealist, "If we look to the home-woman’s peculiar sphere-we find, in Alcestis, beloved by all in her house, a picture of wifely devotion which could not be surpassed" (Appleton 41). When the Maid provides the Chorus with details of Alcestis' condition, she too offers insight into the thoughts of Alcestis. Calling Alcestis the most noble of all, the Maid describes how this nobility is demonstrated in Alcestis' unwavering love for her husband, even if it means her untimely and tragic death. The Maid also describes how Alcestis asked that she protect and safeguard her children while she is gone. Alcestis requests that
the Maid give her daughter a husband and son a wife: “Let them live a happy life/
through to the end and prosper here in their own land” (1.163-9). After Alcestis’ death
the Chorus sings, “May it only be mine to win/ such a wedded love as hers from a wife;
for this/ is given seldom to mortals” (li. 472-74). It is this concern for the oikos that
Alcestis highlights in her dying wishes to Admetus.

Paralleling Apollo’s charis, philia, and trepidation for the oikos, Alcestis reminds
Admetus that she is dying for him: “I put you first, and at the price of my own life/ made
certain you would live and see the daylight. So/ I die, who did not have to die, because of
you” (l.282-84). Again, we find a character in the play interfering with Death’s plans for
the sake of Admetus. Alcestis, like Apollo, also repeats to the audience that her
untimely death is the result of Pheres’ unwillingness to give up his life, even though he
has reached old age: “Yet / your father, and the mother who bore you, gave you up, /
though they had reached an age when it was good to die/ and good to save their son and
end it honorably. / You were the only one, and they had no more hope/ of having other
children if you died” (l.289-94). As a mother, Alcestis cannot fathom the notion of a
parent not sacrificing herself for their child. Similar to Alcestis’ inability to comprehend
this lack of action, Apollo too has had difficulty refraining from helping his friend.
Furthermore, the most crucial element of Alcestis’ speech is that she also dies in order to
protect her children and home.

The oikos becomes the unbreakable bond that ties Alcestis to Apollo, and
ultimately depicts Apollo as the loving father to Admetus. Leon Golden recognizes this
connection: “Alcestis is ready to die because she recognizes higher values than her
personal well-being and worse fates than death. The happiness of those she loves is more
important to Alcestis than her own life and she acts selflessly to ensure that happiness. Here we see some strong resemblances between the attitude of Alcestis and the attitude of Apollo... It is out of love for Admetus that Apollo acts and it is out of love for Admetus and her children that Alcestis acts” (Golden 119). Alcestis understands that her home and children can survive as long as Admetus acts as both father and mother to their children and protects their home from an outsider by not remarrying: “Keep them as masters in my house, and do not marry again and give our children to a stepmother who will not be so kind as I, who will be jealous and raise her hand to your children and mine” (l. 304-07). Alcestis looks to protect the oikos through her charis and philia toward Admetus, and Apollo too seeks to protect the oikos of Admetus through charis and philia as well. Alcestis acts out of maternal instinct, and, it is because of this that Apollo relates to her as a parental figure. Both do everything in their power to protect the home and their children, and both accentuate Pheres’ failure to do so.

Although many scholars and critics tend to view Admetus as selfish and weak, one cannot overlook the fact that Admetus does stay true to his promises. Wesley D. Smith, in his article “The Ironic Structure in Alcestis,” states, “Admetus is characterized from two points of view: as the worthy friend of god and demigod, whose character inspires others to help him, and as a self-centered, cowardly, and short-sighted man” (Smith 39). In response to Alcestis’ dying wishes, Admetus swears never to remarry, forever to mourn the death of his wife, and to protect their oikos, as he proves with his interaction with Heracles: “Admetus is a noble and decent man who is treated badly by fate, and who loses his generous wife as a result. He is treated by all characters, except his father as a king who deserves respect. He describes himself as a man of honour and
of noble passions, concerned for his reputation” (Smith 39). In the play, Admetus is regarded as someone deserving of respect and honour because of his actions and reputation, as is demonstrated when Heracles comes to Thessaly.

Keeping with his devotion to the acts of *xenia*, Admetus cannot help himself from opening his home to his friend. Even if, as Richard Lattimore states, it is during a time of mourning: “The right treatment of guests is a passion, almost an obsession with him...this is the old Homeric xenia. It is one of those steps by which society progresses from savagery to civilization, when strangers make a willing, immediate, and permanent agreement to be friends...For this hero, otherwise no better than ordinary, has one significant *virtue*, which *saves* him” (Lattimore 3-4). When Heracles enters the play and needs a place to rest, like he did with Apollo, Admetus receives his friend with unlocked arms and doors: “You shall not go to stay with any other man. / You there: open the guest rooms which are across the court/ from the house, and tell the people who are there to provide/ plenty to eat, and make sure that you close the doors/ facing the inside court. It is not right for guests/ to have their pleasures interrupted by sounds of grief” (l. 545-550). By hiding from Heracles that it is Alcestis who has passed away, Admetus is able to demonstrate the *arête* he possesses. Moreover, in welcoming Heracles into his home, Admetus honors Alcestis’ wishes in maintaining the *oikos* and protecting his children’s futures:

His simple impulse to deny Alcestis’ death shows him the way, and he has soon fulfilled Apollo’s requirement by offering the hospitality of his house to Heracles...He could not have turned his friend away, for to do so would have threatened the reputation of his house and the future reception of its members elsewhere. Whereas Alcestis saw the house from within, an enclosed space with the marriage bed at its center, Admetus honors its outward aspect. For him the house includes the city, a city which has
obligations toward other cities. The house where Alcestis’ children are to rule is also the polis, and he values its good name more than his own sharp need to grieve alone for his wife. (Burnett 60)

Admetus not only secures the reputation of his home and children, but he also maintains his devotion to Alcestis. His last words to his wife are that he would forever live in mourning and he “shall make an end of revelry and entertainment in my house, / the flowers and the music that were found here once” (l. 342-44). First, as Admetus is setting up the arrangements for Heracles’ stay, he excludes himself from the pleasures of entertaining his friend and bestows those responsibilities unto his servants. Secondly, he places Heracles in the guest rooms and demands that the doors remain closed, so that Heracles is separated from the rest of the home and technically not in the oikos of mourning. And lastly, he does this all in a way that neither offends Heracles or Alcestis, as Michael Lloyd states in his article, “Euripides’ Alcestis”:

Admetus has sometimes been criticized for giving hospitality to Heracles, but it is clear that his difficulties are due only to his refined moral sensibilities: he could have enjoyed himself with Heracles and treated this as part of the good life which Alcestis died to give him, or he could have turned Heracles away without more ado and given himself over to lamentation. But the first of these courses of action would have betrayed Alcestis, and the second would have compromised his reputation for hospitality and meant that Alcestis would not be rescued. Admetus does exactly the right thing by admitting Heracles but not joining in the festivity himself. (Lloyd 127)

As was illustrated by Apollo in the prologue, Apollo’s paternal instincts toward Admetus has arisen from Admetus’ hospitality toward him when he was disguised as a mortal working on his land. This same act of friendship causes Heracles to come to Admetus’
rescue by resurrecting Alcestis and returning her to the *oikos*, showcasing his *charis* and *philia* toward Admetus.

Heracles acts as the semi-divine agent of Apollo in the revival of Alcestis, and he offers what many scholars consider to be the satyric relief in the play. Acting as a boisterous drunk, Heracles’ epicurean attitude causes indignation from Admetus’ servant: “I have known all sorts of foreigners who have come in/ from all over the world here to Admetus’ house, / and I have served them dinner, but I never yet/ have had a guest as bad as this to entertain” (l. 747-50). The servant describes Heracles’ drunken behavior as he walked around with “wreathed branches of myrtle on his head” and “howled off key” (l. 759-60). Not able to withstand Heracles and his drunken tirade about living life selfishly day to day and only concerning his or her own well-being, the servant reveals to Heracles that it is Alcestis who has passed away. It is Heracles’ reaction to this news that reinstates his connection to Apollo and Alcestis and diminishes his correlation to Pheres.

Upon hearing of Admetus’ mourning, Heracles immediately professes action to restore his friend’s happiness: “Now, where shall I find her...I must save this woman who has died/ so lately, bring Alcestis back to live in this house, / and pay Admetus all the kindness that I owe” (l. 834-42). Whereas in his intoxicated lecture Heracles was attempting to persuade the servant with his philosophies on life, now all Heracles is concerned with is selfless acts. As Thomas G. Rosenmeyer conveys in his article “Heracles and Pheres,” “Hercules’ freedom from involvement also places him beyond the restrictions of a meaningful commitment. He does not need to be sensitive or tactful or morally obligated” (Rosenmeyer 75). And yet, that is precisely what Heracles becomes. He claims that he owes it to Admetus for the hospitality he has shown him. Again, this
signals Apollo and his connection to Admetus. Out of his altruistic love for Admetus, Apollo has brought forth Heracles, knowing Admetus would bestow upon him the guest friendship Admetus respectfully adheres to. Having done as Apollo predicted, Heracles now has a duty to make a sacrifice for his friend. In addition to connecting Heracles to Apollo, this act of sacrifice now too connects Heracles to Alcestis. As Anne Pippin Burnett states, “Heracles is plainly necessary to Euripides’ particular intentions toward his story… [Euripides succeeds in] choosing Heracles, an envoy of Apollo’s, to act as Alcestis’ savor. By means of this semi-divine friend he is able to stage a version of the god-come-to-visit story concurrently with his drama of the love-sacrifice. He can thus consider, in a single play, the characteristic virtues of both Alcestis and Admetus” (Burnett 59-60). Heracles surrenders himself to a battle with Death in order to free Alcestis from his clutches, and he ultimately risks his friendship with Admetus.

When Heracles brings a silent and cloaked Alcestis to an ignorant Admetus, he does not inform Admetus of her identity prior to asking Admetus to take her hand. Heracles, like Apollo did with the Fates and Admetus did to Heracles, tricks Admetus into believing the woman beside him is a prize he has won. He asks Admetus to keep her in his home until he may come back to retrieve her. Admetus, continuing in his promise to his wife, refuses repeatedly to take the woman. Once Admetus gives in and unwillingly takes her by the hand, Heracles reveals her true identity and Admetus and Alcestis are reunited. Heracles’ method of bringing together husband and wife illustrates Apollo’s surrogacy: “Here the direction of Apollo is more than ever evident, for Heracles’ heavy sprightliness serves many more purposes than he can suppose. The disguise of Alcestis allows Admetus a symbolic repetition of the act that first earned him
Apollo's patronage as, for the third time, he receives a god-sent guest. The veil causes Alcestis, whose death had deprived the house of its spirit, to return in the guise of Hestia herself; it also allows her to witness a test of her husband's promised faithfulness" (Burnett 65). In the beginning of his stay, Heracles demonstrates an attitude similar to Pheres' selfishness about life; now at the end, through acts of selflessness and friendship Heracles once again aligns himself with Apollo: "Heracles reenters, the first words in his mouth a description of the reciprocal duties of friendship; as Pheres is a false kinsman so Heracles is the true friend" (Burnett 64). Euripides thus far has correlated both Alcestis and Heracles to Apollo, the only one who remains in the same realm as Death is Pheres.

Opinions toward Pheres all share one commonality-- he chose his life over the life of his son: "The primary fairy-tale identification of Pheres is not as father but as one who refused to do what Alcestis did, and Euripides has done his best to preserve this single character for the old man. When he arrives on the scene one fact and only one is known about him, but it has been stated four times over: Pheres, though ripe for death, refused to exchange his life for his son's..." (Burnett 61) With gifts in hand, Pheres arrives at the house of Admetus to offer his condolences and praises for Alcestis. Pheres maintains that honors must be given to Alcestis for sacrificing herself not only for Admetus, but also for her aged father-in-law: "She would not let/ me be a childless old man, would not let me waste/ away in sorrowful age deprived of you" (l. 620-22). Here is where the selfishness of Pheres may appear self-evident. Admetus is in the midst of burying and mourning his wife, when Pheres decides to express how Alcestis saved him from lamenting. Pheres' perception of Alcestis' death exploits his deficiency of philia.
Pheres, as he himself later points out, is able to share in Admetus’ good fortune when he reminds him of how he has provided Admetus with land, citizens, a home, and royal standing as his father had done for him: “He further asserts that what he was legally obliged to give Admetus, as a father to a son, he has amply given him—many people and wide lands to rule over—for these he, too, received from his father as was customary. Pheres declares that he has done everything that could be demanded of him according to the law; and out of this framework of narrow, egoistical legalism he asks, with intensity, how he has wronged his son and of what legitimate possessions he has deprived him” (Golden 119). Pheres’ retaliation, toward Admetus’ detesting of his presence, typifies Pheres’ inability to share in Admetus’ suffering. As D.M Jones states in his article “Euripides’ Alcestis,” “Admetus is subjected to this miserable quarrel with one who is near and should be dear to him, in the course of which things are said... likely to offend the Greek or, indeed, any humane sensibility” (Jones 62). The old man is there and supportive when the situation seems beneficial to both him and his son, but he abandons his son’s side the minute he is asked to take action in his suffering.

Pheres’ hubris greatly interferes with his duties as a father. Due to his inability to perform philia and charis, Pheres does not see his idleness as an act of selfishness: “An in so denying philia he isolates himself from every other being in the play save Death alone; all the rest, from god to slave, experience what it is to live with two souls instead of one... Thus the problem posed by Apollo was even simpler for Pheres than it had been for Alcestis, since self-sacrifice is inconceivable...Such a man could easily allow his own kin to be protected by one who was not their blood, though he thus betrayed his house as well as his son” (Burnett 62). Pheres believes he should not have to die in place of
Alcestis just because he is old and Admetus’ father. As Jennifer J. Dellner concludes, in her article “Alcestis’ Double Life”, “The aged father and king Pheres easily stands for the idea of succession...He demonstrates the undesirability of giving the gift of life by viewing it in terms of what he underlines as the only equivalent obligation” (Dellner 13). As a father, Pheres has done everything he was supposed to do for Admetus, why should he take the place of Alcestis simply because he shares Admetus’ blood?

Throughout Euripides’ *Alcestis*, Apollo has demonstrated his love for Admetus and his home. From the beginning he has shown *charis*, *philia*, and acts of *xenia* toward his mortal son. First, he convinces the Fates to allow Admetus to escape death by replacing him with the life of another. Then, after witnessing the self-sacrifice of Alcestis for her husband and home, Apollo finds himself once again feeling empathy for the house of Admetus. In order to free Alcestis from the hands of the underworld, he engages in an argument with Death out of pure love for Admetus. Finally, realizing his attempts with Death are fruitless, he sets up a plan of attack using Heracles as his driving force.

The satyric and comedic elements of the tragicomedy foreshadow the “happy ending.” Apollo knows Alcestis will be brought home by the hands of Heracles because Admetus will treat his friend with the respect and hospitality he deserves, and Heracles will repay him for it. This selflessness has been consistent in the acts of Apollo, Alcestis, and Heracles, just as the descriptions of Pheres as a selfish old man who lacks *charis*, *philia*, and concern for his son’s *oikos* have reverberated throughout the play and parallel the pronouncements of Death. Whereas tragically Pheres fails in his role of the father, Apollo flourishes. It is Apollo who bargains with Death in order to see Admetus live; it
is Apollo who momentarily manipulates Death into believing he will still descend into
the underworld with a spirit; it is Apollo who brings forth Heracles to undo all the sorrow
and pain; it is Apollo who restores Alcestis to Admetus; and it is Apollo, not Pheres, who
does all he can to reinstate Admetus’ life and contentment.
Chapter III: Hippolytus

Similar to the Alcestis, Euripides’ Hippolytus too presents a severely damaged father and son relationship. Analogous to Pheres’ selfish desertion and mistreatment of Admetus, Theseus too betrays and abandons Hippolytus when he chooses Phaedra’s lies and his reputation as king, over his trusting and celibate son’s life. Taking the extremity of selfishness and cruelty further than Pheres’ self-centeredness to forsake his own life for Admetus’ wife and his son’s happiness, Theseus wishes death for Hippolytus. Artemis then fills in his void as Hippolytus’ surrogate parent, and the goddess comes to his rescue by restoring all that is left for Hippolytus—his good name.

A tragedy reverberating with the theme of suffering, Hippolytus features two goddesses who set the standard of division amongst the characters in the play. In his article “Human and Divine Action in Euripides’ Hippolytus,” Jerker Blomqvist notes, “By interweaving two chains of events, one of which develops among the gods, the other one in the human world, the poet has contrasted two different modes of reacting to the same stimuli, one primitive, violent, and egocentric, the other reflective, mature, and characteristic of a more developed society” (Blomqvist 398). Aphrodite, as the goddess of love, driven by a need to showcase her eukleia as a powerful deity, surrenders any sense of dike when she condemns Hippolytus to death. Through her manipulation, Aphrodite causes Phaedra to do the same: through a sense of duty to preserve her eukleia Phaedra too sacrifices aidos when she falsely accuses Hippolytus of her rape and death. Theseus also forfeits these characteristics when he orders the exile of Hippolytus and wishes for his immediate death. Even though Aphrodite has plotted for Phaedra and Theseus to act this way, these characters do not know they are working under the hands
of the goddess. In their eyes, the decisions they make are of their own free will. The only characters who do not forgo these characteristics, but rather demonstrate and authenticate them are Hippolytus and Artemis. This division between the characters remains a constant throughout the tragedy. Aphrodite, Phaedra, and Theseus all want to see Hippolytus suffer, but it is Theseus who essentially takes Hippolytus’ life and reputation. It is only when Artemis addresses father and son in the epilogue that Hippolytus’ reputation is restored, emphasizing Hippolytus’ affiliation with the goddess Artemis, and his disconnection with Theseus.

The prologue marks the only time in the play when the audience hears Aphrodite speak. As she explains to the audience the reasons for her visit to the house of Theseus, the goddess admires her own reputation by stating that all men honor her by showing their devotion. Following this narcissistic self-adoration, Aphrodite makes clear her unlimited range of power when she describes that all men, from “Atlas’ Pillars” (1. 4) to the “tide of Pontus” (1. 4) are hers to rule. It is this sense of hubris in having mortals swoon over her statues and immortal stature that causes Aphrodite to draw a stark dividing line between those she favors and loathes. The Goddess makes clear how she distinguishes between the two: “Such as worship my power in all humility, / I exalt in honor. / But those whose pride is stiff-necked against me/ I lay by the heels. / There is joy in the heart of a God also/ when honored by men” (l. 6-8). For Aphrodite, Hippolytus’ lack of devotion and respect for her statue is enough to condemn him to death:

Hippolytus, son of Theseus by the Amazon

has blasphemed me
counting me vilest of the Gods in Heaven.
He will none of the bed of love nor marriage,
but honors Artemis, Zeus's daughter,
counting her greatest of the Gods in Heaven
he is with her continually, this Maiden Goddess, in the greenwood...
mortal with immortal in companionship.
I do not grudge him such privileges: why should I?
But for his sins against me
I shall punish Hippolytus this day. (l. 10-22)

As a devotee of Artemis, Hippolytus remains chaste and a virgin, denouncing Aphrodite
and her powers of love and desire. Frolicking with Artemis in the greenwood, hunting
and bonding over their shared principles, Hippolytus has offended Aphrodite and,
therefore, according to her, must be penalized.

These beginning lines not only reveal how Aphrodite’s hurt pride is enough to
make her condemn a mortal, but they also disclose the lack of a relationship between
Hippolytus and Theseus. Biologically, Hippolytus is the offspring of Theseus and an
Amazon; however, Aphrodite speaks of camaraderie only between Hippolytus and the
goddess Artemis. Yes, Aphrodite’s vengeance and anger stem from Hippolytus’
devotion to Artemis and lack of respect for her, but it cannot be ignored that in the
prologue we sense that the only connection father and son have is their genetic material.
Additionally, it is this notion of father and son only being tied together through birth that
seems to be Aphrodite’s main ingredient in her scheme to destroy Hippolytus.

As the prologue continues, Aphrodite reveals to the audience that she has filled
Phaedra’s heart with yearning and love for her stepson. The goddess notes how Phaedra
has for a long time now suffered at the hands of her own emotions, and kept her feelings
for Hippolytus a secret, but that this secrecy will no longer last: “But her love shall not
remain thus aimless and unknown. / I will reveal the matter to Theseus and all shall come out. / Father shall slay son with curses-/ this son that is hateful to me. / For once the Lord Poseidon, Ruler of the Sea, granted this favor to Theseus/ that three of his prayers to the God should find answer” (l. 42-6). Aphrodite believes that justice for Hippolytus should be a violent and aggressive one and executed at the hands of Theseus. Aphrodite and Theseus now mirror each other in their rage and actions toward Hippolytus. Aphrodite wants to seek revenge because Hippolytus has dishonored her, and now Theseus too looks for retribution against his son because he believes Hippolytus has disgraced him with his own wife. As David Grene states in the introduction to Hippolytus, “But Phaedra’s passion for Hippolytus is still the center of the piece. It is not necessary to debate whether, to the fifth-century Greek, sexual relationships between stepmother and stepson would be technically incestuous or not. It is enough that we can be sure that they involved an extreme violation of the trust and affection between father and son, and something worse than that, even if the evil cannot be exactly shared” (Grene 158). A relationship that is not sound to begin with now will be destroyed through Aphrodite’s manipulation of Phaedra.

Dismissing any quality of *aidos* and *arête*, the goddess of love sees nothing wrong with using Phaedra as her pawn in the grand scheme, even if it means Phaedra’s life: “Her suffering does not weigh in the scale so much/ that I should let my enemies go untouched/ escaping payment of that retribution/ that honor demands that I have” (l. 47-50). Again, Aphrodite’s voracious need to quench her vengeful spirit takes precedence over the lives of others. Phaedra’s life is irrelevant. For Aphrodite, Hippolytus must be
punished for his actions and his misogynistic views, which he himself demonstrates in the following scene with the Servant.

Singing Artemis' praises and signifying his devotion to her, Hippolytus welcomes himself into the play by interacting with Artemis' statue. Placing a garland on the statue's head, Hippolytus declares: "Not those who by instruction have profited/ to learn, but in whose very soul the seed/ of Chastity toward all things alike/ nature has deeply rooted, they alone/ may gather flowers here! the wicked may not" (1. 79-83). Right away, Hippolytus has insulted Aphrodite and her followers. He clearly states that only those who are virgins and pure may gather flowers. Labeling those who are not innocent as "wicked," Hippolytus has indirectly proclaimed the goddess Aphrodite as the symbol of evil. Observing Hippolytus and his extreme religious devotion, the Servant asks Hippolytus if he would accept advice. Hippolytus agrees to listen and the Servant begins to question the young man about whether or not he believes, "Men hate the haughty of heart who will not be/ that friend of every man" (1. 93), and if so, "Do you think that it's the same among the Gods in Heaven?" (1. 97) The Servant then asks why, then, does Hippolytus not salute the goddess. Showcasing his fierce loyalty and devotion to Artemis, Hippolytus automatically becomes defensive and asks, "Which Goddess? / Be careful, or you will find that tongue of yours/ may make a serious mistake" (1. 100). After the servant makes clear he means the goddess Aphrodite, he goes on to suggest that Hippolytus worship her too and that both goddesses must receive honor from all men. Not moved by the Servant's proposal, Hippolytus makes it clear that he only honors Artemis; Aphrodite is not the goddess for his worship. In this exchange with the Servant, not only is Hippolytus' fondness for Artemis illustrated in both his showering of her
statue with song and gift and his defensiveness toward the Servant’s comments, but it is also presented is his reckless devotion to his oaths and beliefs. Even if it means the risking of his own life, Hippolytus will not waver from his word, as he will again express later on in his dialogue with both the Nurse and Theseus.

Once Hippolytus has walked away from the Servant, the old man prays to the goddess Cypris: “O Cypris Mistress, we must not imitate the young men when they have such thoughts as these. / As fits a slave to speak, here at your image/ I bow and worship. / You should not grant forgiveness/ when one that has a young tempestuous heart/ speaks foolish words. / Seem not to hear them. / You should be wiser than mortals, being Gods” (l. 113-20). Hippolytus’ lack of sophrosune is the basis for Aphrodite’s sentencing him to death. And yet, as Aphrodite portrays in her inability to heed the servant’s plea, she too does not have good sense in being able to see Hippolytus’ behavior as youthful ignorance. For Aphrodite, her position as goddess must reveal itself in the “justice” of Hippolytus’ death. Like Aphrodite, whom the Nurse and Phaedra typify in their dialogue, Phaedra’s pride in being a wife who exemplifies aidos and eukleia, takes precedence over truth and arête, even if she gains these false perceptions of self through suicide and the false accusation of Hippolytus.

Refusing to reveal her secret, the queen suffers in silence, and it is this stillness that initially shows the aidos and arête of Phaedra. In her book, Euripides and the Tragic Tradition, Ann Norris Michelini comments on how sympathetic a character Phaedra is at this point in the tragedy: “Unlike the Nurse and the chorus, the audience already knows what is wrong with Phaidra; but what they do not know is Phaidra’s own response to her malady. Phaidra’s reluctance even to speak of her passion makes it more likely that,
when she does come to speak of modesty (aidos), we will believe her and will not
mistake her concern for a mere hypocritical show" (Michelini 292). Her silence leaves
all those around Phaedra bewildered. No one knows what is torturing the queen and she
is unwilling to speak of her woe. When Phaedra does converse with the Nurse she asks
that she be brought to the mountains so that she may hunt beside the goddess Artemis.
The Nurse, shocked by the queen’s ludicrous comments, simply asks the queen, “What
ails you child” (l. 223) and Phaedra crumbles: “O, I am miserable! What is this I’ve
done? / Where have I strayed from the highway of good sense? / I was mad. It was
madness sent from some God/ that caused my fall. / I am unhappy, so unhappy…Cover
me up. The tears/ are flowing, and my face is turned to shame. / Rightness of judgment is
bitterness to the heart. / Madness is terrible. It is better then/ that I should die and know
no more of anything” (l. 239-49). Phaedra understands that as a wife, mother, and queen
it is embarrassing and detrimental to her and her family’s reputation if anyone discovers
she is in love with Hippolytus. She does not embrace her desire for Hippolytus; in fact,
she shuns it. Froma I. Zeitlin, in her article “The Power of Aphrodite: Eros and the
Boundaries of the Self” writes, “Phaedra is now the paragon of female virtue, embodying
the ideals of aidos, sophrosune, and eukleia- the aidos of shame and modesty, the
sophrosune of wifely chastity, and the eukleia of her good reputation” (Zeitlin 52).
Phaedra refuses to eat or drink, for she would rather die than live with her emotions.

Continuing to frustrate the Nurse by refusing to reveal her troubles, Phaedra
leaves the Nurse no choice but to manipulate her by targeting her duties to the family.
Knowing that as a mother Phaedra will respond to the mention of her husband and
children, the Nurse warns Phaedra that, if she allows herself to wither away, she will be a
traitor to her children by leaving them motherless. Here is where the Nurse brings into focus the view of Hippolytus as an “other” in the family: “They will never know their share in a father’s palace. / No, by the Amazon Queen, the mighty rider/ who bore a master for your children, one/ bastard in birth but true-born son in mind, / you know him well-Hippolytus...” (l. 306-09). Just as Aphrodite described Hippolytus as mere genetic material to Theseus, so too does the Nurse. Hippolytus is not family; he is the bastard son. Strictly by birth, and not through familial regard, Hippolytus will rule over Phaedra’s children if she leaves them. Hippolytus is the first born, and as queen Phaedra must stay alive to protect her family. And yet, even with the knowledge of potentially harming her own children through her death, Phaedra still does not speak or agree to live. As Blomqvist notes, “The main motive is her concern for her own and her children’s good reputation...If she intends to preserve her good reputation as a chaste wife and mother and to secure a position in society for her children, it is not only impossible for her to yield to the passion and approach Hippolytus; she must conceal even the fact that she has been subject to the forbidden desire. Therefore, she must die before anybody finds out what troubles her” (Blomqvist 401). Phaedra cannot ruin her eukleia; she must continue to represent the principles of aidos.

After she has indirectly admitted to the Nurse her desire for Hippolytus, Phaedra addresses the Chorus and speaks of her troubles. In her speech, the queen makes clear how ashamed and disgusted she is with her own emotions: “At first when love had struck me, I reflected/ how best to bear it. Silence was my first plan. / Silence and concealment. For the tongue/ is not to be trusted; it can criticize/ another’s faults, but on its own possessor/ it brings a thousand troubles. / Then I believed that I could conquer love, /
conquer it with discretion and good sense. / And when that too failed me, I resolved to
die” (l. 392-400). Again, Phaedra shows her good reputation not only by acknowledging
her emotions as improper, but also by revealing her attempts to hide the shame before it
is exposed. In his article “Shame and Purity in Euripides’ Hippolytus,” Charles Segal
states, “If she could really resolve upon this action, if it were really saphes, clear in her
own mind, she would eliminate the discrepancy between the two kinds of aidos. Her
inner sense of ‘shame’ or ‘ chastity’ (the ‘good’ aidos) would be preserved, for she would
not have given in to her passion; she would remain inwardly ‘pure’. At the same time,
she would not have to violate her social, external aidos or ‘respect’ for what people will
think of her, for her death will seal the secret of her love” (Segal 287). Phaedra’s death
would have sealed her secret and she would have maintained her aidos and eukleia. It is
because the Nurse and Chorus know of her desire for Hippolytus that Phaedra feels the
need to defend herself. Reminding the Chorus of the hardships women face and how
easily they are judged for the slightest of actions, Phaedra makes clear how she must be
viewed as virtuous in her desire to die rather than suffer the humiliation of a soiled
reputation.

Charles Segal touches on the notion of aidos as having both a private and public
characteristic. Inwardly, Phaedra’s aidos circles around her shame for the desire she
bears for Hippolytus and the chastity she maintains as a wife by not acting on these
improper impulses. Outwardly, Phaedra’s aidos is dependent upon her reputation.
Society must continue to regard her as a respectful woman who does not breach her
social code. It is the fear of destroying this public aidos which causes Phaedra to
sacrifice completely the ideals of aidos when she eavesdrops on Hippolytus and the
Nurse’s conversation. Following Hippolytus’ outrage, Phaedra resolves to give up her
arète-- any virtue she may have had in her determination to keep her desires a secret, and
her dike-- the integrity and legitimacy of the truth- through her suicide.

After the Nurse has spoken to Hippolytus about Phaedra’s love, Hippolytus reacts
in a way befitting a follower of Artemis and loyal son to their father. First, Hippolytus
demonstrates his immense abhorrence for women; he considers them to be blasphemous
and an inconvenience to the human race. He fantasizes that the gods, not women create
children: “Why, why, Lord Zeus, did you put them in the world, / in the light of the sun?
If you were so determined/ to breed the race of man, the source of it/ should not have
been women” (l. 616-19). This disgust towards the opposite sex illustrates his asexuality.
Artemis is the virgin goddess. Hippolytus too is chaste. Hippolytus has absolutely no
desire for women, which further underscores his reputation as being a faithful disciple of
Artemis. Furthermore, once Hippolytus has completed his diatribe on women, he goes on
to defend and protect his father’s reputation and home.

The severity and repulsion with which Hippolytus responds to the nurse’s
information is significant for understanding the disconnection between Hippolytus and
Theseus. The audience at this point is aware of the sincere loyalty Hippolytus has for his
father. He is willing to keep this awful proposal secret in order to protect his father’s
innocent and ignorant view of Phaedra. Hippolytus volunteers to leave his father’s lands,
so as not to tempt any further discussion or possible unwanted behavior which could
destroy Theseus’ bliss: “Now I will go and leave this house until/ Theseus returns from
his foreign wanderings, / and I’ll be silent” (l. 660-63). As a threat to these foul women,
Hippolytus promises to stand by his father’s side and continuously watch them, to make
sure they regard his father the way he deserves to be treated: “But I’ll watch you close. / I’ll walk with my father step by step and see/ how you look at him,...you and your mistress both” (l. 663-65). Hippolytus’ good reputation stems from his ability to stay true to his word. Even after he makes clear his disdain, the young man promises not to tell Theseus Phaedra’s secret because of the oath he gave to the Nurse: “Woman, know this. It is my piety saves you. / Had you not caught me off my guard and bound/ my lips with an oath, by heaven I would not refrain/ from telling this to my father” (l. 656-59). Also, the arête of Hippolytus becomes magnified in his selflessness to maintain the ideals of aidos in order to protect his father’s name and home. Privately, Hippolytus showcases modesty and shame in his reaction to the Nurse. Publicly Hippolytus, unlike Phaedra, maintains his aidos when he not only refuses the Nurse’s proposal to be intimate with Phaedra, but also when he promises to keep it a secret from his father. Just as Hippolytus protects his father, so too does Phaedra believe she is safeguarding her family when she decides to preserve her eukleia by sacrificing her aidos and arête.

Afraid that Hippolytus will reveal to everyone her emotions and ruin her and her family’s reputation, Phaedra once again resolves to die. Only this time, Phaedra’s death comes at the price of Hippolytus’ life and reputation: “Bitter will have been the love that conquers me, / but in my death I shall at least bring sorrow, / upon another, too, that his high heart/ may know no arrogant joy at my life’s shipwreck; / he will have his share in this my mortal sickness/ and learn of chastity in moderation” (l. 727-31). Phaedra does not frame Hippolytus, accuse him of rape, and hang herself because she has been rejected by him; she does this to protect her eukleia and oikos. As stated by Jerker Blomqvist, in his article “Human and Divine Action in Euripides’ Hippolytus,”
Another peculiar feature...of Phaedra is her motive for incriminating Hippolytus. When the women of the traditional stories make their accusations against the young man, their motive is either fear of having their elicit passions exposed to their husbands or the rejected woman’s resentment against the man who has disdained her...Far from protecting her own safety, she kills herself, and her resentment against Hippolytus does not decisively affect her way of action. Already when the drama starts, she is resolved to take her own life. Her main concern is not her life but her reputation...she fears that he will reveal her secret to everybody so that her life will end in shame...and that her husband, parents, and children, who share the shame with her, will be damaged by it, too...To prevent this she must silence Hippolytus. (Blomqvist 402-03)

Blomqvist points out not only the public and private *aidos* conflict within Phaedra, but also the facade of her maintaining *aidos, arête,* and *dike* versus the truth of these characteristics and the *adika* against Hippolytus. If Phaedra has lost inward purity, she will at least have its outward appearance. And it is her determination to do so that causes Phaedra to brand Hippolytus by turning Theseus against him, the way she would have experienced it had he revealed her secret.

Upon discovering Phaedra’s suicide note, Theseus is outraged to read his wife’s dying words. Automatically believing Phaedra’s accusations of Hippolytus raping her, Theseus declares his son be murdered by the gods: “I shall no longer hold this secret prisoner/ in the gates of my mouth. It is horrible. / yet I will speak. / Citizens, /

Hippolytus has dared to rape my wife. / He has dishonored God’s holy sunlight. / Father Poseidon, once you gave to me/ three curses...Now with one of these, I pray, / kill my son. Suffer him not to escape, / this very day, if you have promised truly” (l. 882-90).

His anger and hostility toward Hippolytus demonstrate just how poorly he recognizes his own son. If Theseus knew his son at all, he would discern Hippolytus would never commit such a crime. After announcing his wish, the Chorus warns Theseus he has
spoken too soon and he will regret his words. To further prove that he knows exactly what he is doing Theseus says, “I banish him from this land’s boundaries. / So fate shall strike him, one way or the other, / either Poseidon will respect my curse, / and send him dead into the House of Hades, / or exiled from this land, a beggar wandering, / on foreign soil, his life shall suck the dregs/ of sorrow’s cups” (l. 893-98). It is this rash decision either to have his son murdered or doomed for the rest of his days to walk around marked by shame in exile that parallels Theseus to Aphrodite. Prior to his accusatory altercation with Hippolytus, Theseus states: “All men should have two voices, one the just voice, / and one as chance would have it. In this way/ the treacherous scheming voice would be confuted/ by the just, and we would never be deceived” (l. 928-31). It is ironic that Theseus would make such a bold claim considering he does not follow his own ideals. As the audience knows, Theseus is being misled and he willingly forfeits the use of his own just voice. C.A.E. Luschnig notes in her article “The Value of Ignorance in the Hippolytus” how Theseus contradicts himself: “…Theseus acts in haste and ignorance…But his ignorance and unwillingness to track down the facts is underscored by the contrast to his desire for a sure method of knowing the truth, by his odd wish that men had two voices, including one just voice to refute the other if need be” (Luschnig 120). Theseus is now acting on a sense of hubris to preserve his eukleia and he does this by sacrificing aidos, arête, and dike.

Theseus has cruel words for his son, calling him a traitor of his father’s marriage bed: “Look at this man! He was my son and he/ dishonors my wife’s bed! By the dead’s testimony/ he’s clearly proved the vilest, falsest wretch. / Come-- you could stain your conscience with the impurity--/ show me your face; show it to me, your father” (l. 943-7).
Theseus also attacks Hippolytus’ claim to be chaste and his pursuit of the Goddess Artemis as her loyal servant. The king goes on to assault every possible counterargument Hippolytus may make by offering his reasons for not believing him. As Ann Norris Michelini states, in her book Euripides and the Tragic Tradition,

But the conjunction of non-conformist habits and attitudes with these aristocratic tastes is suggestive, as is the relationship between Hippolytus and his father. We do not see the two together before the breach between them, but the kind of abuse that Theseus gives Hippolytus implies that the supposed crime of his son has actualized a potential alienation for some long standing. Hippolytus’ boasts of association with a god are now revealed as the vaunting of a quack. Pretensions to divine favor, as well as to a special moral purity, bring upon the devotee of nonstandard ethics the accusation of being excessive or overnice, hence Theseus’ unfair gibes about Orphic cults and vegetarianism. (Michelini 308)

Finally, Theseus claims he would never pardon Hippolytus because to pardon Hippolytus would mean he never lived up to his reputation and deeds as the king: “If I should take this injury at your hands/ and pardon you, then Sinis of the Isthmus, / whom once I killed, would vow I never killed him, / but only bragged of the deed. And Sciron’s rocks/ washed by the sea would call me liar when/ I swore I was a terror to ill-doers” (l. 976-81). As Richmond Y. Hathorn states, in his article “Rationalism and Irrationalism in Euripides’ Hippolytus,” “Because of his crudity Theseus not surprisingly falls into the sin of rashly jumping to a conclusion without full investigation. He glories in his precipitate action, obviously fearing that any wavering may seem a reflection of some infirmity in his character, or of a lack of integrity in the grief he has expressed at the loss of his wife, or of simple naivety” (Hathorn 213). This attitude is similar to Aphrodite’s. Aphrodite wants to punish Hippolytus for not honoring her, and, even though the Servant in the beginning of the drama prays to the Goddess to pardon the boy for his youthful
ignorance, Aphrodite obviously does not, for if she did she would not be acting as a
goddess. In this similar vein, Theseus has to punish Hippolytus; otherwise, he does not
live up to his reputation as a king and devoted husband.

Hippolytus responds to Theseus' sentence of exile and states again that he is
chaste, and would never commit such a horrible crime against his father. He has no
desire to be a powerful king like Theseus. He wants to be in the background and loyal to
his friends and relatives, even when they are not around. Theseus tells Hippolytus that
his hate for him is now so strong that he would rather Hippolytus die a slow and
humiliating death in exile than kill him quickly without feeling the pain of dishonor:
“"Yes, and had I the power, / your place of banishment would be beyond/ the limits of the
world, the encircling sea/ and the Atlantic Pillars, / That is the measure of my hate, my
son” (l. 1051-54). Theseus speaks with unfounded conviction, and his failure as a father
reveals itself in the error of his words.

Hippolytus reacts emotionally at his father’s cruel words; he cannot understand
how Theseus could just exile him so quickly without a trial or a second thought. Klay
delivers his punishment without respect for the traditional means of measuring guilt or
innocence. He relies instead, as Hippolytus points out, on a ‘rough justice’ that ignores
the very ideals of justice and balance that a king longs for” (Dyer 158). Theseus claims
the evidence and sentence lie in the dead body of Phaedra and her last words on the
tablet: “Rather than listening and assessing the words of his son, Theseus chooses instead
to privilege silence (the body, tablet) over the powers of rhetoric and oral evidence,
which are the traditional values of Greek culture...The voice of justice, in other words, is
tragically inverted in the play, removed from the world of communal, living language of rhetoric and debate, and replaced by the interpretive skills of a single, powerful man whose own limitations are all too clearly underscored with each decision that he makes” (Dyer 158). Hippolytus tells his father that if he wants to exile his son he must do it himself and not leave it to other people, but Theseus does not heed his demand and leaves the scene. As Froma I. Zeitlin states, in her article “The Power of Aphrodite: Eros and the Boundaries of the Self”,

More precisely, she has required him to stand in the place of the other, to be identified with her, to hear from the other, his father, what she, the other, had heard from him, Hippolytus. In short, he will have to live through her experience in every respect, sharing the symptoms of her ‘disease’ in the eyes of the world until the condition of his sick and suffering body as seen at the end of the play symmetrically matches her state at the beginning. Perhaps most important of all, by playing the role Phaedra has assigned to him, Hippolytus will be required to be an other in relation to himself, and as we shall see, to suffer the consequences of his own alterity in the adult social system that requires one to verify the self through the perception of an other. (Zeitlin 65)

Zeitlin’s analysis proves to be true. Hippolytus from the beginning of the drama has been outcast and described as “the other”. He is the bastard son and not legitimately a part of the family. It is his biological connection to Theseus and his non-biological connection to Phaedra that make him the accessible target for accusations. Hippolytus does physically suffer at the end of the drama in the same manner that Phaedra does in the beginning. And, Hippolytus does indeed endure the pain of Theseus’ reaction and having others determine what it is he stands for and represents. However, there is one crucial difference. Yes, Phaedra does succeed in having Theseus speak cruelly to Hippolytus the way Hippolytus had spoken of her, but unlike Phaedra, Hippolytus’ eukleia is restored.
Hippolytus, an honest and just young man, never reveals the truth to Theseus. Although Theseus swears death upon him or exile from the lands, Hippolytus remains silent and takes the truth with him on his odyssey away from home. In keeping his oath to the Nurse, even when his father condemns him to suffering and death, Hippolytus further exhibits his ability to stay persistently faithful to a sacred vow. The aidos, arête, and eukleia of Hippolytus even remain intact for someone other than Artemis. When the Messenger reveals to Theseus that Hippolytus is dying a slow and painful death from the stampede of his own horses upon his body, the Messenger makes clear to Theseus he knows Hippolytus. He tells Theseus that no matter what is being said or shown, he will never believe that Hippolytus committed the crime because he knows that Hippolytus is good. Theseus’ reaction to the news is stoic: “I neither rejoice nor sorrow at this thing” (l. 260). Theseus is to blame for the unjust and wrongful murder of his own child. Hippolytus never committed the rape, and Theseus betrayed his familial obligation to his son. Outraged by Theseus’ ignorance to his own actions, Artemis comes forth and reveals all.

There are many scholars who criticize the notion of Artemis as a protective guardian to Hippolytus. In another one of his articles, “The Tragedy of the Hippolytus: The Waters of Ocean and the Untouched Meadow,” Charles Segal does not see Artemis as the caring goddess: “Artemis may provide the objective material out of which the humanity and forgiveness may grow, but in herself she is indifferent and remote...Scholars of recent years have thus rightly criticized older interpretations which saw in her appearance all sweetness and light, serenity and divine pity” (Segal 154). Likewise, J. A. Spranger, in his article “The Meaning of the Hippolytus of Euripides,”
states his confusion over why Euripides has Artemis act as the only mourner for Hippolytus when she did nothing to save his life: “...I do not know on what authority Euripides places the statement in Artemis’ mouth; but some reason is obviously necessary to explain the seemingly apathetic attitude of the goddess at a time when her faithful young worshipper’s life is in danger and she, his chosen protectress, takes no steps whatever to save him” (Spranger 23). Spranger further showcases contempt for Artemis as a positive figure when he states, “This Artemis, who now excuses herself for not lifting a finger to save her follower, then explains that she may not weep for him, and further explains that she cannot comfort him as he dies, is more bent on avenging the slight done her by Aphrodite and on assigning posthumous honours than on giving herself any trouble on behalf of Hippolytus himself” (Spranger 24). Yes, Artemis does not come onto the stage until the end of the play, but it is Artemis’ explanation for her absence that underscores her connection to Hippolytus. Additionally, what she does for Hippolytus in the aftermath of his tragedy further demonstrates Artemis’ surrogacy as Hippolytus’ parental figure in the wake of Theseus’ parental shortcomings.

Artemis knew of Aphrodite’s vengeful plan and was helpless in the tragedy of Hippolytus. As sanctioned by the gods, Artemis cannot interfere with Aphrodite’s actions against Hippolytus: “This is the settled custom of the Gods: / No one may fly in the face of another’s wish: / we remain aloof and neutral. Else, I assure you, / had I not feared Zeus, / I never would have endured/ such shame as this- my best friend among men/ killed, and I could do nothing” (l. 1329-33). Like Hippolytus, Artemis demonstrates her eukleia and aidos by not breaking the laws authorized by Zeus. Even as a goddess, Artemis does not believe in acts of injustice amongst the gods or mortals.
Unlike Theseus, Artemis does not sacrifice her beliefs for the sake of her reputation. Only after the events unfold is Artemis able to act on Hippolytus’ behalf, laying any doubt of her loyalty to Hippolytus to rest.

Speaking as though she were a mother scorned, Artemis addresses Theseus and discloses the truth to him: “Miserable man, what joy have you in this? / You have murdered a son, you have broken nature’s laws. / Dark indeed was the conclusion/ you drew from your wife’s lying accusations, / but plain for all to see is the destruction/ to which they led you” (l. 1286-89). Theseus has committed the greatest sin of all; and, in doing so, he has deprived himself of any eukleia. Knowing he has unlawfully accused his son and has cost Hippolytus his life, Theseus must now live with the guilt and remorse. In order to salvage what was most sacred to Hippolytus, Artemis uses her authority as a goddess not only to restore Hippolytus’ honor, but also to make him immortal in legacy: “To you, unfortunate Hippolytus...I will give the greatest honors of Troezen. / Unwedded maids before the day of marriage/ will cut their hair in your honor. You will reap/ through the long cycle of time, a rich reward in tears. / And when young girls sing songs, they will not forget you, / your name will not be left unmentioned, / nor Phaedra’s love for you remain unsung” (l. 1422-30). As Michael R. Halleran states in his article “Gamos and Destruction in Euripides’ Hippolytus”,

One of the compensations Artemis gives to the dying Hippolytus is the establishment of a cult in his honor: unmarried maidens will offer up to him lock of hair before their weddings and remember him and Phaedra’s passion in song. Hippolytus, who had stood outside the community’s norms in life, will be integrated into them after his death. ...The predicted death of Aphrodite’s unnamed favorite, the other compensation promised by Artemis, continues, to be sure, the destruction of the play, but it is no longer associated with sexual unions. The vengeance taken by Artemis is
motivated by Aphrodite’s against Hippolytus...Destruction takes place, but in a different and isolated context. (Halleran 120)

Halleran’s analysis of Artemis’ vengeance as different from that of Aphrodite speaks to the idea of Artemis acting as a vengeful parent. Artemis is not going to continue this cycle of death for any other reason than her love for Hippolytus. Aphrodite took Hippolytus away from her and because of this Aphrodite must suffer.

Prior to her departure from the stage, Artemis addresses Theseus and Hippolytus one last time. The goddess tells Theseus to take Hippolytus in his arms and to not blame himself for the actions of the gods. Turning her attention toward Hippolytus, Artemis tells her loyal companion not to hold any ill-feelings toward his father. After the goddess has expressed herself, she departs from the play leaving father and son in what appears to be a reconciliation of their relationship. Whereas some may view this ending as a restored connection between Theseus and Hippolytus, there are critics who view the final scene not as a reaffirmation of the bond concerning Hippolytus and Theseus, but between Hippolytus and Artemis. In his article “The Victims of Aphrodite: Hippolytus,” D. J. Schenker notes that Hippolytus’ reunion with his father only occurs because of Artemis:

That act of human forgiveness is often cited as the single glimmer of optimism in a play that is otherwise darkly pessimistic...But...the gods are not entirely absent, even from the reconciliation. The words of forgiveness, far from spontaneous, come in response to Artemis’ explicit command. Furthermore, we can now conclude that Hippolytus does not even recognize the suffering of Theseus until Artemis points it out to him. If, as I have argued, Hippolytus does not include Theseus...but pities him only when prompted by Artemis, the role of human initiative in this reconciliation is even further diminished...to deny it shows us, finally, an example of purely human initiative or free will. The gods, in other words, are every bit as involved here, at the reconciliation of father with son, as they are in other events of the play. (Schenker 10)
As stated in the introduction, the goddesses of the play set the standard of division amongst the characters. Throughout the tragedy, Hippolytus' words and actions demonstrate his loyalty to Artemis. Likewise, in her appearance at the final scene, Artemis, through her determination to seek justice and salvation for Hippolytus, shows her loyalty and bond to the chaste young man. Even in the final scene, Hippolytus and Artemis showcase their attachment. Hippolytus' forgiving Theseus only displays his allegiance and devotion to Artemis. Artemis wants Hippolytus to rest in peace and her final command that Hippolytus forgive his father gives emphasis to her love.

The goddess of virginity and chastity acts as a parental figure to Hippolytus. Artemis knows Hippolytus' character and integrity better than Theseus did. Artemis displays her devotion and appreciation for Hippolytus' loyalty to her, whereas Theseus was ignorant to his son's dedication and faithfulness to him. Artemis defends Hippolytus' honor and reputation, whereas Theseus attempts to pollute and dismember it. Artemis gives Hippolytus immortality through song, whereas Theseus wishes him immediate death.
Chapter IV: *Iphigenia in Aulis and Tauris*

Euripides wrote two tragedies featuring the character Iphigenia. The first, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, was written between the years 414 B.C. and 410 B.C.; and the second, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, was produced posthumously in 405 B.C. Although *Iphigenia in Tauris* was written and performed first, *Iphigenia in Aulis* is known to be a kind of prequel to *Tauris* since its plot takes place before the actions of the *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Both plays, similar to the *Alcestis* and *Hippolytus*, deal with a parent-child conflict and the humane empathy of a god. In this chapter, the two main points of the argument will be divided as so: first, an analysis of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* will present how Agamemnon fails in his duties as a father; second, a close-reading of the *Iphigenia in Tauris* will confirm that Artemis does indeed act as the surrogate parent to Iphigenia.

In the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Iphigenia, like Admetus and Hippolytus, experiences the immediate and horrifying emotions of feeling discarded and betrayed by her father Agamemnon. As J.H. Kim On Chong-Gossard states in his book, *Gender and Communication in Euripides’ Plays*, "*Iphigenia in Aulis* is one of the few plays to involve an intrigue plotted by a man against a woman-- in this case, father against daughter" (Chong-Gossard 228). Agamemnon has shown himself to be a manipulating and deceiving father in his scheme to bring Iphigenia to Aulis. Unlike the other men in the tragedy, Menelaus and Achilles, Agamemnon decides that *kleos* and the *polis* are more important than the *oikos* and his daughter's life. Afraid to tell Clytemnestra the truth behind their daughter's sudden departure to Aulis, Agamemnon devises a false purpose for their travels. Lying to both mother and daughter, Agamemnon writes a letter stating that Iphigenia is to marry Achilles, and she must come to Aulis in order for the marriage
to take place. Clytemnestra and Iphigenia arrive at Aulis, only to be informed of devastating news: Agamemnon has agreed to kill his daughter for the sake of the Greek army. Here is where this play distinguishes itself from the *Alcestis* and *Hippolytus*. Whereas Admetus and Hippolytus either had a relationship with the god prior to the actions of the tragedy, or the audience heard the gods speak in dialogue, *Iphigenia in Aulis* has neither. The goddess Artemis does not have a single line in the *Iphigenia in Aulis* and never comes in contact with Iphigenia until the *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Even in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, again, Artemis never speaks and does not appear on stage. Furthermore, in the *Aulis* a prophet and Agamemnon declare that it is Artemis who wishes Iphigenia be sacrificed. It is Iphigenia’s reactions to the ordained sacrificing of her life and the actions which unfold in the *Iphigenia in Tauris* that demonstrate a parent/child relationship between Iphigenia and Artemis.

At the beginning of the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, our first impression of Agamemnon is that of an agonizing father. It is just before daybreak and Agamemnon wakes his servant, the Old Man, to engage in random conversation. While everyone else in the army is peacefully sleeping, Agamemnon paces back and forth frantically. The Old Man, in his conversation with the commander-in-chief, explains to his leader that he has seen him act erratically and does not understand why: “But you’ve lit your lamp and/ Been writing a letter, haven’t you? / You still have it in your hand- / With those same words you’ve/ Been putting together. You seal/ The letter up- and then tear/ The seal open. You’ve been doing it/ Over and over again. Then you/ Throw the torch on the ground, / And
bulging tears come down out/ Of your eyes" (1. 34-41)⁶. It is here that Agamemnon begins to explain the situation at hand with his daughter Iphigenia. He tells the Old Man that the Greek army has found itself on Aulis’ shores because of Menelaus’ wife, Helen. Describing to the Old Man how Paris stole Helen, forcing Menelaus to take action and the Greek army to prepare for battle, Agamemnon informs the Old Man that their sudden postponement in Aulis has led to the sacrificing of Iphigenia’s life:

> It was then the prophet Calchas spoke to all of us in despair at the weather and urged that my daughter, Iphigenia be sacrificed to the goddess of this place. He predicted that if she were sacrificed he would sail and take and overthrow utterly the land of Troy. But if she were not sacrificed none of these things would happen. So when I heard this, I ordered our herald, Talthybius, to make a loud proclamation and dismiss the whole army. I would never have the cruel brutality to kill my own daughter! After that my brother bore down upon me with arguments of every kind, urging me to commit this horror. Then I wrote a letter, folded it and sealed it, dispatched it to my wife asking her to send our daughter to be married to Achilles… I contrived this deception about the maid’s marriage to persuade my wife. (1.89-105)

From the outset, the audience is made aware of Agamemnon’s fickle nature. As J.H. Kim On Chong-Gossard states, “In Euripides’ play, Agamemnon is not sure from one moment to the next what is right and what is not…Euripides’ Agamemnon, a kind of reluctant plotter, has too much of a conscience to keep up with his plans” (Chong-Gossard 229). Agamemnon is torn between two worlds, the polis and the oikos. Agamemnon makes clear his initial reaction to the sacrificing of his child was to dismantle the army and go home. He could never consent to the murdering of his own

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child. And yet, he does. Agamemnon’s first instinct to protect his *oikos* becomes overshadowed by the need to defend and protect Greece and the Greek army. As Menelaus reminds his brother, the Greek army and his duty as commander-in-chief are more important than the life of his daughter (li. 97-8). So, to appease Greece, Agamemnon lies to his wife and daughter by writing a letter about a marriage that is never actually to take place. After the Old Man reacts in disgust to Agamemnon’s actions, Agamemnon once again reverts back to his capricious behavior.

Bringing the conversation back to the present moment, Agamemnon says to the Old Man that the letter he keeps ripping and rewriting is a letter to save his daughter’s life. After coming to his decision that he must prevent Iphigenia from coming to Aulis, Agamemnon reads the second letter he has written to Clytemnestra for the Old Man. The new letter states that Clytemnestra should not bring Iphigenia to Aulis, but it does not state the true reasons as to why. Agamemnon does not confess to his agreement in the sacrificing of their daughter’s life. He merely writes that the marriage between Achilles and Iphigenia should be postponed for another season (l. 118-22). Agamemnon orders the Old Man to deliver the letter to his wife and to make sure that Iphigenia and Clytemnestra go back on their ship before any of the Greeks see them. Here Agamemnon is showing his fatherly instincts. He knows it is wrong to sacrifice the *oikos* for the *polis*, and he does not want to follow through with his mistake— that is until Menelaus intercepts the letter. What initially starts off as an argument between two brothers— one a father and the other a “man” of Greece— turns into a reversal of roles that forever changes the plot of the play, reminding the audience of Agamemnon’s failures as a father.
Enraged at the idea of his brother’s recanting of action, Menelaus takes the letter from the Old Man and prevents any chance of saving Iphigenia’s life. Approaching his brother in a fit of rage, Menelaus accuses Agamemnon of treason and states that he will not allow Agamemnon to decide for his home if it means sedition against his country. Menelaus attacks Agamemnon’s weakness for the oikos by reminding the commander-in-chief of his early hunger to build his reputation: “Have you forgotten when you were eager/ And anxious to lead the Greek army to Troy, / Wanting to appear unambitious but in your heart/ Eager for command? Do you remember how humble/ You were to all the people, grasping the hand, / Keeping open the doors to your house, yes, / Open to all, granting to every man, even the lowly, / The right to address and to hail you by name” (1. 338-42). This does not sound like the same man who at the beginning of the tragedy was crying outside his tent, horrified at the idea of sacrificing his daughter’s life for the sake of appearing as the high and mighty commander-in-chief. Menelaus continues to berate his brother when he reminds Agamemnon that it is his own fault that Calchas spoke Iphigenia’s name:

So the Danaans urged
That you send back every ship and at Aulis
Put an end to this toil without meaning.
I remember your face then, bewildered,
Unhappy, fearing you would never captain
Your thousand ships or fill up with spears
The fields of Priam’s Troy. Then you called me
Into council. What shall I do? You asked me.
What scheme, what strategy can I devise
That will prevent the stripping-off
Of my command and the loss of my glorious name?
Calchas spoke: Sacrifice on the altar
Your own daughter to Artemis, and the Greek ships
Will sail. At that instant your heart filled up
With gladness and happily, in sacrifice,
You promised to slay the child. (l. 355-61)

According to Menelaus, Agamemnon was more concerned with the *polis* and *kleos* than he ever was the life of his daughter and the future of his family. Agamemnon was extremely concerned with maintaining his reputation as commander that he was desperate to do whatever possible to not have it slip away from him. So, when the prophet declared that the war could happen so long as Iphigenia was sacrificed, Agamemnon immediately jumped into action and sent the letter to his wife and daughter. Once Menelaus has made his claim, Agamemnon retaliates by striking a personal chord with his brother. All of Greece’s armies are sailing to Troy to battle for the return of Menelaus’ wife. Therefore, the war, which has yet to begin, does not have anything to do with Greece, but Menelaus’ home. Why, then, is Agamemnon wrong to change his mind if it means protecting his daughter and home?

Agamemnon’s counter argument attacks Menelaus for telling him to sacrifice his own family for Greece when Menelaus himself is sacrificing Greek men for his own wife. The war is about retrieving Helen from Paris and returning her to Menelaus. Why should Agamemnon be damned for wanting to protect his family in the same manner Menelaus did? Agamemnon tells Menelaus that he does not care what he says, he is not sacrificing his child and all of Greece can suffer for it: “But in heaven there is intelligence—it can/ Perceive oaths bonded in evil, under compulsion/ Sworn. So I will not *kill my children*...If I did commit this act, against law, right, / And the child I fathered, each day, each night, / While I yet lived would wear me out in grief/ And tears. So these are my few words, clear/ And easily understood. / You may choose madness, / But I will order my affairs in decency and honor” (l. 396-402). Agamemnon will be forgiven for
thinking such sinful acts, so long as he does not follow through with them. Therefore, Iphigenia will not be sacrificed and no one can change Agamemnon’s mind. Up to this point, Agamemnon has portrayed himself to be this loyal and determined father who has made a foolish mistake. For him, the oikos means much more than the polis and kleos ever could. In her book Ritual Irony: poetry and sacrifice in Euripides, Helen Foley notes Agamemnon’s change of heart and how it affects the two men:

Agamemnon, a former victim of gross political ambition, as Menelaus points out, is initially proud of his unheroic change of mind to pity...the war is fought for an unworthy adulteress, and the army’s eagerness for violence is sick and dangerous. Agamemnon’s novel concern for his family even more surprisingly converts the formerly uxorious Menelaus. In contrast to portrayals of pairs of brothers in most other tragedies, their rivalry turns to brotherly concern and a convergence of interest. Menelaus adopts every word of his brother’s next reversal. (Foley 95)

It is only when the Messenger interrupts the brotherly conversation that Agamemnon reverts back to his inconsistent character, proving to the audience where his heart really lies – with the polis and a desire for kleos, and Menelaus’ true priority, family takes priority over all else.

The Messenger delivers important news to Agamemnon: his family has arrived and the Greeks are aware that Iphigenia is in Aulis, but they question why she is on army grounds. Asking if the sacrificial ceremony should be prepared, the messenger leaves Agamemnon to ponder his new conundrum. Overcome with emotion, Agamemnon cries to his brother about his predicament: “Look at me, brother. / I am ashamed of these tears. And yet/ At the extremity of my misfortune/ I am ashamed not to shed them. What words/ Can I utter to my wife or with what countenance/ Receive and welcome her when she appears...Yet coming she only obeys nature, / Following a daughter here to do love’s
services, / And give the bride away. So doing, she/ Shall find me out the author of this evil” (l. 451-59). Agamemnon automatically becomes poignant at the idea of having to face his family, when he knows he is sentencing the death of both mother and daughter. And yet it seems odd that the commander-in-chief would overlook one crucial point, since he is so concerned with the welfare of his family: The Greek army does not know that Iphigenia is there to be sacrificed in favor of their success at war. Herbert Siegel in his article “Agamemnon in Euripides’ Iphigenia in Aulis” notes this crucial element: “These scholars, however, fail to take into account what Euripides makes clear: the army does not know why Iphigenia has come to Aulis...nor anything about Calchas’ oracle...any notion of external [threat] in the form of the army, at the outset of the drama, is meaningless” (Siegel 258). Why does Agamemnon wane in his conviction to save Iphigenia over a concern that has been invalidated? Why does the commander-in-chief and polis suddenly take precedence over the father and his oikos? The answer is simple: kleos is more important than family.

In a reversal of roles, Agamemnon moves Menelaus to withdraw his initial position and simultaneously alters his to be that of Menelaus’. Menelaus moved by his brother’s grief and torment realizes that he has been wrong to persuade his brother to kill his offspring: “When I saw tears bursting from your eyes/ Tears started in mine and a great pity/ Seized me. I am no longer terrible/ To you, or any more your enemy. / All the words spoken I now withdraw, and/ From them I retreat. / I stand in your place/ And beseech you do not slay the child/ To prosper me and destroy yourself” (l. 476-83). Dana L. Burgess in her article “Lies and Convictions in Aulis” analyzes Menelaus’ change of heart as giving credibility to the truth of the matter- Iphigenia should not be sacrificed:
“The fragility of Menelaus’ proposed patriotic conviction becomes evident when he is faced with Agamemnon’s tears for the coming death of his daughter...The private bond between the brothers brings about Menelaus’ retraction...and the audience sees that his earlier advancement of the public good may have been, if not a lie, at least a tenuously held conviction. Agamemnon’s tears have helped Menelaus see the situation as it is, free of the conviction of a patriotic ideal, and his rhesis eloquently articulates the truths which Agamemnon has already advanced” (Burgess 44). Rather than being relieved and working together with his brother to save Iphigenia’s life, Agamemnon does the opposite: he decides to go through with Iphigenia’s sacrifice.

Agamemnon thanks his brother for speaking in his family’s favor and then states: “But we have arrived/ At a fatal place: A compulsion absolute/ Now works the slaughter of the child” (l. 510-12). The commander-in-chief goes on to say that he fears Odysseus will reveal the truth to the army and destroy his reputation. If Odysseus speaks, he will ultimately cause the death of Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Iphigenia. According to Agamemnon, the Greek army will kill them for going against the oracle and still sacrifice Iphigenia for their voyage. The commander-in-chief cannot risk the damnation of his kleos and the lives of him and his brother; therefore, Iphigenia has to die. Dana L. Burgess, as she did with Menelaus, examines Agamemnon’s transformation from father to commander as fundamentally stoic: “But it is Agamemnon’s reversal of position, even more than Menelaus’, which reveals that a conviction of value has been rejected in favor of a pragmatic intention. Accepting the death of his daughter, Agamemnon does not match Menelaus’ adoption of his opponent’s rhetoric. He does not advance the claim that Iphigenia must die for the greater good of Greece. He only admits that her death will
happen, willy-nilly, so he’d better yield to the irresistible necessity” (Burgess 44-5).

Echoing Agamemnon’s former fatherly argument, Burgess too reminds us that Agamemnon’s matter-of-fact approach toward Iphigenia’s death has nothing to do with a war for Greece: “The agon has established that it is a lie to call this Trojan war a patriotic and moral necessity for the good of Greece, though Agamemnon has adopted that the war is a practical necessity” (Burgess 45). Proving his selfish nature, Agamemnon will have Iphigenia killed in order to cement his kleos for a war about an adulterer.

Ignorant of Agamemnon’s deadly concern for the polis and kleos, Iphigenia and Clytemnestra’s reunion with him further underscores the damnation he will ultimately cause their home. When Iphigenia sees her father she is overcome with the emotions of a high-spirited child: “Father! / I long to throw myself before anyone/ Into your arms- it’s been so long a time- / And kiss your cheek! Oh, are you angry, Mother” (l. 635-37). Wanting to hug and kiss him first, Clytemnestra responds to her daughter by stating: “No my child, / this is rightful, and it is/ As it has always been. Of all the children/ I have borne your father, you love him most” (l. 638-640). Euripides does a wonderful job of depicting Agamemnon as a monster with this exchange between mother and daughter. Clytemnestra acknowledges Iphigenia’s eagerness to be the first to embrace her father as only fitting for the child who loves her father above all else.

Once reunited with Agamemnon, Iphigenia automatically concerns herself with his health and well-being. She acknowledges that although her father claims to be happy that she has arrived, she senses something is wrong. Agamemnon responds with a chilling reminder of his character: “I have cares- the many cares of a general/ And a king” (l. 645). What about the cares of a father? What about the cares for his daughter’s
life? Here he is in the presence of his family and yet, his mind still concerns itself with
his position in the *polis*. Ignorant of her father’s heavy words, Iphigenia continues to
shower her father with love. Asking Agamemnon to pay attention to her only, Iphigenia
pleads with him to show excitement about her arrival. Sensing her father is about to cry,
Iphigenia points out that she can see the tears building up in her father’s eyes.
Agamemnon again responds cryptically: “Well, / There is a long parting about to come/
For both of us” (l. 652-53). Agamemnon knows his daughter will not understand what he
means and that it could be interpreted as the parting is her marriage to Achilles, and not
her untimely death. Here he is conversing with his daughter and indirectly he is
mentioning her fate! Too make matters worse, Iphigenia continues to prove her innocent
ignorance when she pleads with her father to spend time at home with his family (l. 666).
In his other article “Self-Delusion and the ‘Volt-Face’ of Iphigenia in Euripides’
*Iphigenia at Aulis,*” Herbert Siegel describes this very tender behavior of Iphigenia and
how ironic it is that it be directed toward a father who has conclusively decided her death:
“Our first view of Iphigenia is that of an eager and exuberant young girl, who is happy
and excited about her forthcoming marriage and about seeing her father. She is openly
affectionate and lovingly sensitive to her father’s mood, and she is childish, innocent, and
naïve enough to ask him to come home and forget the war. Also, she is pathetically
unaware of the true design of Agamemnon” (Siegel 305). Again, Euripides is making it
crystal clear that Agamemnon truly has no affection for his *oikos*. His only concern is the
*polis* and his future glory in war, as he deceivingly makes clear in his exchange with
Clytemnestra.
Showing herself to be a proper wife and loyal mother, Clytemnestra does what any mother would do once she is alone with her husband—she interrogates Agamemnon about her future son-in-law: “I am not unfeeling, nor do I reproach/ Your grief, For I, too, shall sorrow/ As I lead her and as the marriage hymn is sung. / But time and custom will soften sadness. / His name to whom you have betrothed/ Our child I know. Now tell me/ His home and lineage” (l. 691-96). Agamemnon, knowing full well Iphigenia is not marrying Achilles, decides to indulge his wife and continue the lie. He answers all her questions: who his parents are, his family’s inheritance, if his parents’ marriage was a mutual loving decision, where his parents were married, where Achilles lives in Greece, when the marriage between Achilles and Iphigenia shall take place, and where Clytemnestra will hold the women’s feast. All of these Clytemnestra finds acceptable except for Agamemnon’s final detail, that he would be the one to give away Iphigenia.

Startled at the idea of her husband taking her position on the day of the wedding, Clytemnestra retaliates by questioning Agamemnon’s bizarre decision. Why would he do a woman’s job? Agamemnon replies by stating that Clytemnestra should stay in Argos and take care of their other daughters. Putting her foot down, Clytemnestra refuses to obey Agamemnon and states: “No! by the Argive’s goddess queen! / You go outside and do your part, I indoors/ Will do what’s proper for the maid’s marrying” (l. 739-41). J.H. Kim On Chong-Gossard describes in his book *Gender and Communication in Euripides’ Plays* that Clytemnestra has every right to concern herself with the proper formalities of Iphigenia’s marriage: “Clytemnestra’s understanding of what is nomos and kalon—namely, that she should prioritize the marriage of her eldest daughter, rather than worry about her other girls alone in Argos—is perfectly correct for the mother of the bride”
(Chong-Gossard 233). Clytemnestra is a smart and conscientious woman who understands her position as a wife, mother, and woman. She knows better than to pollute her reputation or her husbands, which is why she disobeys his orders regarding Iphigenia’s wedding. This also explains why, when she sees Achilles, she stops to speak to him. There is nothing wrong with speaking to man who is to marry your daughter. Again, it is Agamemnon’s fault that Clytemnestra is unaware of the detrimental mistake she is about to make. Agamemnon has filled her head with lies about a false wedding and through his own egoism brings forth embarrassment and horror for Clytemnestra.

Clytemnestra, upon hearing Achilles’ voice inside a tent, decides to walk in and introduce herself. Approaching Achilles without hesitation, she presents herself as Agamemnon’s wife. Stunned by her brashness, Achilles grows nervous and fearful of their impromptu encounter and tries to leave the tent. Offering her hand in his, Clytemnestra tells Achilles it is quite alright that they speak in private since he will soon marry Iphigenia. Achilles obviously not understanding tells Clytemnestra that he never agreed to marry Iphigenia. Just as Clytemnestra becomes outraged and embarrassed the Old Man appears on stage and warns Clytemnestra of Agamemnon’s plans to sacrifice Iphigenia. In an instant, Agamemnon has caused chaos for his wife. Clytemnestra has not only embarrassed herself in front of another man and potentially ruined her eukleia, but she must now also deal with the disheartening news that her husband is a killer and their daughter the victim.

Desperate to undo the damage her husband has caused, Clytemnestra forfeits all that she has in order to preserve her daughter’s life. Falling on her knees, she begs Achilles to help save Iphigenia: “I am mortal but I am not ashamed/ To clasp your knees
or to do eagerly/ This or anything that will bring succor/ For my daughter’s sake. Protect
us both- / Me from my evil fate, and she, defend her/ Who is your bethrothed, even
though the/ Marriage may never be. In name only/ Is she your bride, and yet, I led her
here/ To be your wife and crowned her head/ With a bride’s wreath” (l. 900-06). Now,
Euripides has depicted two vastly disparate portraits of Iphigenia’s parents. On the one
hand, there is Agamemnon, the father who initially was willing to do all that he could to
save his daughter’s life. It was Agamemnon who told his brother that he did not care
what the Greeks would have to say about it, he was not going to kill his own child. And
yet, he faltered in his devotion to his family in the name of *kleos*. In the end, the *polis*
and his new found glory were more important than his *oikos*. On the other hand, there is
Clytemnestra, a woman, wife, and mother who has done all to obey her husband and the
ways of life. She is a mother who came all the way to Aulis in the excitement and
anticipation of her daughter’s marriage, to then find out she is merely a woman married
to a monster. With no means of attack or protection against her husband, Clytemnestra,
unlike Agamemnon, actually sacrifices herself for the sake of Iphigenia. By begging
Achilles and coercing him through the weakness of men- the preservation of their name
and reputation; Clytemnestra enters the realm of the polis in order to protect her oikos.

Hesitant at first to help Clytemnestra, after hearing Clytemnestra refer to the
damage it would cause his name if Iphigenia were to be sacrificed, Achilles acquiesces.
George B. Walsh, in his article “Public and Private in the Three Plays of Euripides,”
describes Clytemnestra’s courage and Achilles’ ultimate purpose in saving Iphigenia:
“Achilles’ difficulty in acting as Iphigenia’s protector, however, arises principally from
his commitment to the public interest and public opinion. Although Clytemnestra tells
him that she feels no shame in doing anything that may aid so vital a purpose as saving her daughter, and so clearly sets private values over public ones, her appeal for help is based upon Achilles’ honor. She holds before him the prospect of ill-repute if his pretended bride should be slaughtered; and, since it is his name, she says, that has destroyed her, she calls upon him to defend it” (Walsh 303). Once Achilles has agreed to help Clytemnestra he becomes heroic in his speech: “I tell you- / never will your daughter/ Who is my betrothed- die murdered by/ Her father’s hand. Nor to this conspiracy/ Of your husband will I offer my name or/ My person...By him I swear, never will Agamemnon/ Lay hands upon your daughter-nor even/ With his finger tips touch the fringe/ Of her robe” (l. 935-54). However, after a brief deliberation of what he has just said, Achilles decides that perhaps Clytemnestra should talk it out with Agamemnon first, before any violence should occur.

In the end though, Achilles is ready to fight for the life of Iphigenia even if it means his own death. As Helene P. Foley states in her book Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides, “Achilles is about to subvert his talents to a private rather than public cause...Clytemnestra later persuades Achilles to abandon his destiny in Troy to protect Iphigenia, even though she is merely his bride in name. The traditionally action-loving Achilles as first hopes to be able to avoid a violent confrontation with Agamemnon and to repersuade the king, who has succumbed to fear of the Greek army and Odysseus, to save his daughter; he then shifts to active championship of his prospective bride but finally accedes her wishes” (Foley 77,95). Like Menelaus, Achilles too ultimately decides in favor of the oikos, over the polis and kleos. It is only Agamemnon who believes Iphigenia has to die, which is why it is only Agamemnon who
brings out anger in Iphigenia. Nowhere else in the drama is Iphigenia as erratically emotional as she is when she approaches her father about her doomed fate at his hands.

After Clytemnestra forces the truth out of Agamemnon and he confesses his plot, Iphigenia speaks. Iphigenia is devastated by the news of her father’s scheme and purpose for her presence. Reacting as an abandoned and traumatized child, Iphigenia begs for her life:

O Father,  
My body is a suppliant’s, tight clinging  
To your knees. Do not take away this life  
Of mine before its dying time. Nor make me  
Go down under the earth to see the world  
Of darkness, for it is sweet to look on  
The day’s light.  
I was first to call you father,  
You to call me child. And of your children  
First to sit upon your knees…  
You said, ‘surely one day I shall see you  
Happy in your husband’s home. And like  
A flower blooming for me in my honor”…  
I have in memory all these words  
Of yours and mine. But you, forgetting,  
Have willed it in your heart to kill me. (l. 1217-33)

Agamemnon is shown here to have had a positive and loving relationship with his daughter. Iphigenia is reminiscing about days filled with affection and longevity. In these lines a child is literally begging for her life, a life that is in the hands of her father. Iphigenia depicts innocent and pleasant portraits of their past relationship, to remind Agamemnon that he is willing to throw it all away by murdering her. Iphigenia does not view her future sacrifice as a sacrifice, but as a murder. She utters the phrase “kill me,” prior to this she exclaims “do not take away this life of mine before its dying time.” Furthermore, after hearing Agamemnon’s reasoning and defense for his decision,
Iphigenia continues to be enraged and erratic: “He who began my life/ Has betrayed me in misery/ To a lonely dying. / Oh, my wretchedness…Bitter, bitter/ Is the death you bring me! / Murdered by my father- / Accursed butchery, / For I shall be slain/ By his unholy hands” (1. 1314-19). Iphigenia has convinced herself, in these lines, that Agamemnon’s hands are declaring her death. As Christina Elliot Sorum states in her article “Myth, Choice, and Meaning in Euripides’ Iphigenia at Aulis,” “Agamemnon will sacrifice his daughter, for he is a creation of his myth; in the future as in the past, Agamemnon, the descendant of Tantalus and Atreus, destroys families” (Sorum 538).

The thought of it being Agamemnon gives rise to negativity and antipathy in Iphigenia. Why, then, does Iphigenia’s attitude and behavior change before her sudden sacrifice? Why does she, in a matter of moments, unexpectedly become understanding and cooperative? What causes this sudden change in her attitude? Iphigenia realizes it is the request of Artemis, not her father.

Calm, proud, and with the air of a saint, Iphigenia walks toward her surrender of life with elegance and prestige when she recognizes that it is the goddess Artemis who wants her to be sacrificed.

O, Mother, if Artemis
Wishes to take the life of my body,
Shall I, who am mortal, oppose
The divine will? No- that is unthinkable!
To Greece I give this body of mine.
Slay it in sacrifice and conquer Troy.
These things coming to pass, Mother, will be
A remembrance for you. They will be
My children, my marriage; through the years
My good name and my glory…. (li. 1394-99)
Iphigenia’s reaction to Artemis is opposite to that of Agamemnon. Iphigenia does not feel mistreated and forsaken, but cared for. She acknowledges the ruling of Artemis as set and states that, if it is divine will, it cannot be argued against. However, when it was solely in the hands of Agamemnon, she pleaded, begged, and argued for her life. Immortality is now given to Iphigenia as she explains to her mother how her name and glory will live on forever. And yet, prior when speaking to her father, Iphigenia reminded him of how he was stripping her of a life yet lived, and depriving her of any generational honor he had wished to see through her life and grandchildren. These drastic differences in emotion and behavior exhibit the dramatic differences in these two relationships. Agamemnon does not act as a father should; and Iphigenia’s language and behavior toward Artemis reveal how the *Iphigenia in Aulis* too underscores failed fathers and, as the *Iphigenia in Tauris* will now further exemplify, in Artemis’ decision and sympathy, parental gods.

The *Iphigenia in Tauris* with its opening prologue demonstrates the humane empathy of a god toward an abandoned and vulnerable child. The events of the *Iphigenia in Tauris* take place after the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and the audience finds themselves listening to Iphigenia’s prologue:

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People believe
That I was sacrificed by my own father
To Artemis, in the great pursuit of Helen,
Upon an altar near the bay of Aulis…
The flame
Was lit. The blow would have been struck- I saw
The knife. But Artemis deceived their eyes
With a deer to bleed for me and stole me through
The azure sky. And then She set me down
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Here in this town of Tauris… (li. 6-30)\(^7\)

At the last moment of Iphigenia’s sacrifice to Artemis, the goddess intervenes and replaces Iphigenia at the altar with a deer, saving the girl and sweeping her off to Tauris. She has been made a priestess at the temple of Artemis, a position in which she has the gruesome task of ritually cleansing sacrificial victims, foreigners who land on King Thoas’ shores. Artemis replacing Iphigenia with a deer demonstrates the goddess’ sympathy for the girl. Unlike Agamemnon, Artemis could not go through with the sacrifice of Iphigenia’s life. Because Agamemnon could and did go through with the killing of his own child, and Artemis, as the goddess who sanctioned this very sacrificing of the virgin girl, could not- Artemis takes the parental role that Agamemnon failed to live up to.

Euripides in his first tragedy regarding the character of Iphigenia already sets Artemis as the surrogate parent and savior for Iphigenia, so going along with the analysis of the character either sacrificing the polis for the oikos or the oikos for the polis- Artemis sacrifices the polis for her oikos and Iphigenia. Agamemnon surrenders his daughter, a representation of the oikos, for the battle of Troy, his political stance, and the polis. Artemis, as a goddess, is the very symbol of Greece and the polis. Artemis, according to Calchas, is the one who initially requested that Iphigenia be given up in order to help Agamemnon and the Greek ships sail to Troy and defeat the Trojan army. Then, again, going along with the prophecy and Agamemnon’s words, Artemis goes from sacrificing Agamemnon’s oikos for the polis, to then letting go of the polis for the oikos. By saving

\(^7\) Translation text: David Greene and Richard Lattimore, Euripides II: The Cyclops and Heraclès, Iphigenia in Tauris, Helen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956). All other quotations from Iphigenia in Tauris employ this translation.
Iphigenia and giving her life as a priestess in the temple of Artemis, the goddess forgoes Agamemnon and the Greeks political endeavor for the war all together. Also, *oikos* becomes the main priority when Iphigenia is now placed in one of Artemis’ “homes” - the temple is a place of worship and home to honoring Artemis, and Iphigenia now lives there. Therefore, Artemis sacrificed the *polis* for her *oikos*, which now includes Iphigenia.

In his article “Agamemnon in Euripides’ Iphigenia at Aulis,” Herbert Siegel concludes that there are three ways Agamemnon may be viewed. The first is that “Agamemnon is compelled to sacrifice his daughter because of an external force beyond his control. His actions are seen as weak and ambivalent, as pitiable (or as deplorable and inglorious), and he is viewed as only somewhat responsible for allowing his daughter to be sacrificed” (Siegel 257). The second argues that “Agamemnon is compelled to sacrifice his daughter because of an external force beyond his control. He is first seen as ambivalent, weak, and pitiable as the father of Iphigenia but he changes, realizes his obligations as commander-in-chief and gains glory through the sacrifice of his daughter for a great panhellenic cause” (Siegel 258). Finally, the third viewpoint declares “Agamemnon is fearful and weak, but mainly ambitious throughout the play and could have opposed the external force which, he claims, is compelling him to sacrifice his daughter. This compelling force, moreover, is of his own creation and grows partially out of his fears but mainly out of his ambition. Agamemnon is seen as responsible for Iphigenia’s death” (Siegel 258). After carefully reading the *Iphigenia in Aulis* and the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Siegel’s final view on Agamemnon is the only logical conclusion. As Menelaus, Achilles, Clytemnestra, and Iphigenia portray in their actions and dialogue,
the *oikos* should be more important than the *polis* and *kleos*. It is Agamemnon who thinks otherwise. For the commander-in-chief, Iphigenia’s life is not more important than his glory as the leader of the Greek army and the defeater of the Trojans. Had it not been for the sympathy and parental actions of a goddess, Iphigenia would have died on that very altar at the hands of her father.
Chapter V: Conclusion

In the introduction to his series on Euripides’ tragedies, Lattimore writes that the playwright depicts men not “as they ought to be (or as one ought to show them) but Euripides showed them as they were...Euripides was basically a realist” (v). Lattimore also states that Euripides “believed in a world he disliked. His gods represent this world” (v). If the gods represent the world Euripides lived in, a reality he disliked, then why, in these four specific plays, does Euripides present the gods as morally redeemable? Why are these Gods protective, caring guardians, and not the familiarly selfish, brutal, non-sympathetic fantastical characters? If Euripides is a realist and shows men as they are, what do the relationships between parent and child, and god and mortal say about the society that influenced his writing?

Gilbert Murray in his book Euripides and his Age echoes Lattimore’s sentiments: “What he did (so we young men were told) was to put upon the stage the hallowed legends in all their crudity, as if to say to his fellow-citizens: ‘These are the gods whom you ignorantly worship. Away with them, and find better!’” (Murray vii) Complicating Lattimore and Murray, Hazel E. Barnes states in her collection of essays titled The Meddling Gods: Four Essays on Classical Themes the general knowledge of Euripides’ depiction of the Gods, but she also takes it a step further when she acknowledges that this attitude towards the Gods is not universal in all of his tragedies: “The supernatural is not used cynically, as it so often is with Euripides, as though the author were mocking the very deities to whom his characters owe their deliverance” (Barnes 59). Euripides does not use Apollo and Artemis as sardonic figures, nor does he ridicule them. Instead he
uses their divine presence to articulate why his characters do indeed owe the Olympians for their freedom and rescue.

According to Murray, Euripides wrote with a more deep-seated purpose than just to entertain. His tragedies were a serious commentary about humanity. At the beginning of his book, Murray expounds on this very notion: “It was that he had pierced through a deeper stratum of thought, in which most of the pursuits and ideals of the men about him stood condemned” (Murray 14). This analysis rings true with Pheres, Theseus, and Agamemnon. All of these fathers believed that what they did and did not do to and for their children was dignified. It is the aftermath of their decisions that condemns them and makes them tragic figures. Murray goes on to use this tragedy of humankind as the fundamental definition of Greek tragedy: “It is that ritual on which tragedy was based embodied the most fundamental Greek conceptions of life and fate, of law and sin and punishment” (Murray 29). Substantiating Murray’s analysis, Reginald Appleton in his book Euripides the Idealist comments on Euripides’ insatiable need to run through what is not clear: “So Euripides was constitutionally incapable of letting things alone; he could not help asking questions, and he questioned what had never been questioned before. He would probe deep, and would not take things at their surface value. There was a restless spirit about him...Euripides never got life focused thus; it was always blurred at the edges. But to the centre he did send some penetrating glances- glances that pierced right through externals and revealed the inner core of things” (Appleton 73). By using the gods as parental figures, one could argue that Euripides forces his readership and audience to see what society wants to keep hidden.
The relationships between parent and child, and god and mortal are vastly disparate. Apollo and Artemis demonstrate the love and protection a parent has for their child, whereas Pheres, Theseus, and Agamemnon do not. Admetus, Hippolytus, and Iphigienia react to the gods in the same manner a child acts in response to their parent, with respect and commitment. This analysis of inconsistency, concerning the use of the Gods, emphasizes the importance of studying the Gods as parental figures. These relationships not only work against what has traditionally been accepted as Euripides’ attitude towards the gods, but they also shed new light on Admetus, Hippolytus, Iphigienia and their fathers.

At the end of the *Alcestis* tragedy, Admetus and Alcestis are reunited. As a man placed in a peculiar situation, Admetus watched as those around him debated over life and death on his behalf. Apollo decided life for Admetus and Alcestis. Due to his decision and desire to save his friend, Apollo constructed the grand scheme of the play, having Alcestis sacrifice her life, so that Heracles would save her and bring her back to Admetus. Alcestis, unaware of Apollo’s plan, willingly sacrifices her life for her husband’s. Heracles, a friend and passerby, in a drunken stupor was cognizant of his friend’s tragedy and also risked his life to battle with Death. Of all the characters in the play, only Pheres chooses his own life.

As a father, grandfather, and man of old age, Pheres refuses to believe that he must die in place of his son or daughter-in-law. Why should he have to die for his son? Where does it say that a father must die for their child? It is Apollo, the hero and father figure, who exposes the antagonist in Pheres. Living in a democratic Athenian society, Euripides wrote *Alcestis* at a time when *the people* determined the actions of the
government. Athenian citizens did not vote for politicians to stand for them; they voted on all matters themselves. When reading *Alcestis*, one cannot help but recognize this voting system in regards to Admetus’ and Alcestis’ lives. If a person, regardless of their relationship to another, is given a choice, is there such a thing as the wrong answer? If the options are given, is not either choice allowed?

Similar to the democratic influence in the *Alcestis*, Euripides’ *Hippolytus* too finds itself echoing social commentary. As a king, Theseus has an unlimited amount of power. So much so that, when he finds Phaedra’s dead body and the written tablet, there is no need for a trial and the justice system when it comes to sentencing Hippolytus. As king and ruler, Theseus takes matters into his own hands and not only wrongfully accuses his own son of the rape and death of his wife, but he also wishes a slow and painful death for the boy when he exiles him from the lands. Hippolytus, shocked that his father would sentence him without a trial, leaves his lands only to be met by the death wished upon him. If not for the love and loyalty Artemis has for Hippolytus, the young man would have died with a soiled reputation that was not his to own. What does this say about rulers in Athens at the time this play was written? Does democracy produce bad leaders? Are men now so hungry for power and the ability to exercise this power that they would stoop so low as to not follow the laws they themselves represent? Does authority and control take precedence over family and morality?

Nowhere is the debate about political power versus family loyalty more abundant than in Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Agamemnon destroys his family in order to maintain supremacy and influence in the Greek army. Consumed by the need to be famous and honored, Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia’s life for a war that
has not yet even begun. Risking the reputation of his wife and watching his daughter bask in the idea of her father’s love, Agamemnon cannot see past his political gain. Throughout the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Agamemnon finds himself in countless conversations with those around him, and in each they all say the same thing: do not sacrifice the child for the war. Menelaus, Achilles, and Clytemnestra are all willing to fight to save Iphigenia’s life. However, had it not been for Artemis in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Iphigenia’s life would not have been saved and she would have been sacrificed for nothing. She would have been sacrificed for a war that was lost.

Heavily influenced by the thirty year Peloponnesian War, Euripides witnessed firsthand the ugliness of war. Having lost all to the Spartans, Athenians spent countless years in battle for ultimately nothing but defeat. Everything, including family, was sacrificed for the sake of the war. The public sphere took priority over the home, family, and *oikos*. Should the *polis* take precedence over the *oikos*? Does the city-state come before family? Does the Greek war in *Iphigenia in Aulis* come before Iphigenia’s life? It seems that Euripides makes his opinion very clear. According to Euripides, it should not. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter for a war and on his way back from war he not only loses his family, but he loses his life. As the *Iphigenia in Tauris* details, the sacrificing of Iphigenia causes Clytemnestra to kill her husband. Enraged by his mother’s cold-blooded actions, Orestes then decides to kill his own mother to avenge his father. In the end, Agamemnon’s entire family is destroyed.

What does it mean to have the gods portrayed as parental figures? What is Euripides trying to convey to his audience? Through his use of the gods as parental figures, Euripides forces his reader and audience to ask deep universal questions. The
playwright in the _Alcestis_ underscores death and the responsibility a parent has in protecting their child's life, even if it means forgoing their own. In the _Hippolytus_, Euripides calls attention to man's desire to want to further his place in society, even if it means destroying his home and family. The tragedian shows how a king running an army or society, with all its honors, reputation, and fame finds the _polis_ more important than the life of a beloved child and _oikos_ in the _Iphigenia in Aulis_ and _Iphigenia in Tauris_. Euripides does not use the gods the way he typically would, to show how irrational society was to believe in them; instead he utilizes them to show exactly how foolish people are and how it takes the gods to undo mortal messes. As Reginald Appleton concludes, "Man is the cause of his own evil, as he is of his own good. External deities are meaningless; but tradition has handed them down to us, and the best that we can do is to give them what reality we can in relation to ourselves by humanizing them, as it were. This Euripides does...he holds that the gods do care for mortals...One could mention several instances of kindness shown by the gods towards mortals" (Appleton 131). Euripides does show the compassion and humane empathy of the gods, as well as, the self-destruction of man. This thesis has explored the most crucial of these "instances," by tracing in Euripides' _Alcestis_, _Hippolytus_, _Iphigenia in Aulis_, and _Tauris_ the quasi-parental relationships of Apollo and Artemis with their beloved mortals.
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