

Deals and women's subjectivity in Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Medea*

by

Lauren Mayes
B.A., University of Victoria, 2008

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Abstract

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Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Medea* are plays about a woman of exemplary virtue and a woman of horrible vice, respectively. This thesis examines how both heroines have a subjectivity that is destructive because they are female, and which is expressed by making deals with men. Women's deal-making is dangerous because it conflicts with a system of exchange exclusive to men, in which women function as objects of exchange which solidify men's homosocial bonds. *Alcestis*' and *Medea*'s deals with men disrupt these bonds. *Alcestis*' dangerous subjectivity is contained when she is made the passive object of exchange between men, while in *Medea*'s case, the absence of deals between men allows the uncontained effect of her deal-making to destroy her family and community. Comparison of the plays shows that the suppression of women's deal-making, and not the benign or malicious intent of the deal-maker, is crucial to the happy resolution of the play.

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Preface

Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Medea* are about families in crisis; most Greek tragedies are. The families and the crises in the two plays seem very different, and so too their title characters. The first play is about an extraordinarily virtuous woman, and ends happily; the other is about an evil woman, and does not.

Alcestis and Admetus are a devoted married couple, king and queen of their city. Admetus is even favoured by a close relationship with Apollo. Tragedy strikes this happy family when the Fates decree that Admetus has to die. Luckily, Apollo intervenes, and arranges that a substitute may die in Admetus' place. *Alcestis*, in an exemplary act of uxorial devotion, volunteers to die when Admetus' aged parents selfishly decline to sacrifice themselves. *Alcestis* dies. Admetus, who had promised her to mourn forever, thinks better of his promise when his friend Heracles comes to visit. Heracles discovers that his friend has been hiding *Alcestis*' death and so, as a surprise, brings her back to life. *Alcestis*, the most virtuous of all wives, is reunited with Admetus -- a happy ending.

Jason and *Medea* are a couple living together with their two sons in their adopted city of Corinth, in exile from their respective home cities. Everything is going reasonably well, and they are reasonably happy, until Jason decides to leave *Medea* to marry the King's daughter. *Medea* is extremely angry that Jason has broken his promises to her, and is unmoved by Jason's protestations that his marriage is a good opportunity for social advancement for them all. To get her

revenge, Medea hatches a plot to murder Jason's new bride, the King, and finally her own children. The unspeakably evil Medea then makes good her escape to Athens -- a sad ending.

The crisis in *Alcestis* is Alcestis' death. It is precipitated by Admetus' selfishness in refusing to die. The crisis is resolved, and the happy ending made possible, through Heracles' heroism.

The crisis in *Medea* is Jason's betrayal, which leads to Medea's murderous rampage. The sad ending -- the death of the children and Medea's escape -- is brought about through Medea's intelligence and desire for revenge against Jason, which motivates the unnatural murder of her children.

In fact, the differences in the plots of the plays only serve to obscure the fact that each play grapples with the same danger: the destructive effect of uncontrolled female subjectivity. That is, both plays explore the destructive consequences when women assert their individuality and personhood, and that individuality and personhood is recognized.

Female subjectivity has a destructive effect both when it is expressed by the virtuous Alcestis and the vicious Medea; the dramatically different character of each woman is an entertaining and emotive but irrelevant distraction. The ending of the play is not determined by the vice or virtue of the heroine, but by how successfully her subjectivity is contained. Alcestis' subjectivity is contained and the play ends happily; Medea's subjectivity is left uncontained, and the play ends in disaster.

Both men and women assert their subjectivity in these plays by making deals with men. On the one hand, deals between men are socially desirable and constructive; they benefit the participants and strengthen their relationship. On the other hand, deals between men and women are destructive and undesirable. When women make deals with men, the deals have a destructive effect on the men, and limit the men's ability to form deals and maintain relationships with other men.

The threat of women's dealmaking, and its destructive effect on men's homosocial bonds, is contained when women are made into the objects of deals between men. When men exchange women, the women's role as objects rather than participants in the deal serves to contain the women's subjectivity, and reinforces the deal between the men and the benefits that the men derive from the exchange.

In my Introduction, I will discuss some theories of exchange, especially as they have been applied to literary criticism and the study of Greek tragedy, with particular emphasis on the exchange of women. I will develop the framework and define the terms that I will use for my discussion of *Medea* and *Alcestis*.

In *Alcestis*, I will discuss a case in which women's agency is successfully contained. Alcestis makes a deal with Admetus that, although on the surface beneficial, is actually destructive to Admetus and his relationships with other men. The destructive effects of Alcestis' agency are reversed when she is made into the object of a deal between Heracles and Admetus, and the play ends happily.

In *Medea*, I will discuss a case in which women's agency is not contained, and results in disaster. Medea is never made into the object of a deal, or exchanged by

men. Instead, she makes deals with Jason, Creon and Aegeus, to the detriment of each. Medea destroys Jason's and Creon's homosocial bonds as a result of their deals with her, and she disrupts their deal with each other. No men make deals with each other during the action of the play. Instead, they try to contain Medea's capacity for destruction by making deals with her -- a tactic that has an opposite effect to the one they intended, and reinforces her subjectivity.

I will show how the deals in which each woman engages are destructive to those around her, regardless of the nature of the deal or her motivation for entering into it. Alcestis shows that even a woman sacrificing herself for her family is destructive and dangerous. Medea shows that even a mother's murder of her children is a consequence of subjectivity which is dangerous and inappropriate in a woman, not qualitatively different from Alcestis' subjectivity.

Introduction

My thesis will examine how subjectivity is expressed through exchange (what I will later call “deals”) in Euripides’ *Alcestis* and *Medea*, and how this expression of subjectivity through exchange is gendered. I will use a model of exchange in which exchange between men, particularly men’s exchange of women, is normative. These exchanges reinforce the men’s subjectivity while suppressing women’s. Under such a system, for women to engage in exchange as participants rather than objects is transgressive – it is a dangerous expression of their subjectivity. In this Introduction, I will discuss the theories of exchange which lead to and inform my analysis of *Alcestis* and *Medea*.

The theory of exchange was first elaborated in anthropological and ethnographic works, and has since been applied to literary criticism, and to Greek literature and tragedy specifically. I plan to discuss very briefly the theory of exchange, the exchange of women, a feminist elaboration and critique of exchange, and finally the application of the resulting theory to Greek tragedy and to Euripides specifically.

My aim in this discussion is not to offer a comprehensive summary or analysis of any theorist’s work in its entirety. Rather, I plan to discuss those aspects of their theories which are most relevant to my work, as well as those objections to their theories which will allow me to more clearly define my own frame of reference for this project.

In my discussion of Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, I will show how their work, while providing a crucial foundation for the analysis of exchange in tragedy, will nevertheless not allow a complete analysis of Euripides. Lévi-Strauss in particular provides a description of a system of exchange of women, but without an acknowledgement that such a system, in which women are treated only as objects, is in fact a highly problematic in view of the fact of women's subjectivity. Feminist critiques like those offered by de Lauretis and Rabinowitz incorporate an awareness of the reality of women's subjectivity in their theories of the exchange of women, and therefore are also able to acknowledge the existence and examine the functioning of mechanisms for the suppression of women's subjectivity within the system of exchange. This acknowledgement is crucial for a study of Euripides, where much of the tension and drama is derived from the incompatibility of the reality of women's subjectivity with a system that demands their passivity in exchange.

Having focused on larger issues of women and exchange in the first part of my discussion, in the second part I will look at various definitions of exchange with a view to developing my own working definition. One of the problems with work on exchange is the lack of consensus on terminology. A variety of terms is used for very similar and overlapping phenomena: exchange, reciprocity, gift-exchange, gift-economy, negotiation are only some. The confusion caused by the excess of possible terms is only increased by the multiplicity of definitions for any given term. Theorists and critics tend to insist on their own idiosyncratic definitions of the same term, often as a reaction against what they see as a misapplication of the term by others. For these reasons, and to avoid possible confusion, after my discussion of the

body of work on what might loosely be called “exchange”, I will apply those aspects that I find useful and relevant to my definition of what I will call a “deal”. This will be the term that I will employ in my discussion of *Alcestis* and *Medea*.

Mauss

In his 1923 essay *The Gift*, Mauss gives a seminal account of the anthropological theory of gift-giving and reciprocity in what he terms “primitive” or archaic societies. He examines the social function of gift exchange, and how a system of ritualized gift-exchange, which incorporates an expectation of equivalency and reciprocity, accomplishes social goals, such as mediating interaction between groups, and allowing for the establishment of common interest. The agents of exchange that Mauss considers are men, and the common interest that he considers is also exclusively male.

He stresses the idea of an obligation of reciprocation inherent in a gift economy. This idea is explicit in his definition of the scope of his work:

We intend in this book to isolate one important set of phenomena: namely, prestations which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested. The form usually taken is that of a gift generously offered; but the accompanying behaviour is formal pretence and social deception, while

the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest.¹

Mauss argues that gift exchange is something present in all societies, and draws upon evidence from a wide range of what he terms primitive or archaic cultures. One of the mechanisms by which he identifies a society as primitive is the extent to which it engages in a gift-economy, but he believes that every society has an economic market of some sort. The market economy is merely less developed in primitive societies, in which a gift-economy is correspondingly more prominent.²

Mauss mentions marriage and the exchange of women, but is not focused on it, and is certainly not remotely interested in an analysis which acknowledges the problematic nature of treating women as objects. Mauss gives women as one item on the list among the many goods and services that can be exchanged in a gift economy: “what they exchange is not exclusively goods and wealth, real and personal property, and things of economic value. They exchange rather courtesies, entertainments, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances, and feasts”.³ Women and children do not get any sort of prominence in this list, and there is no discussion of the possibility that the exchange of a woman is a qualitatively different thing than the exchange of feasts.

His concluding chapter is begun with a section entitled “Moral Implications.” In this section he discusses the effect of the vestiges of a gift economy on the modern

¹ Mauss, 1

² Mauss, 2

³ Mauss, 3

world. He discusses the morality of the expectation of ostentatious generosity in modern society, which may cause men to expend more than they can afford. He discusses man's obligation to man, but does not touch on the moral implication of viewing women as exchanged objects, either in what he terms as primitive or modern societies. He does, however, briefly touch on the moral implication of using animals, in a short paragraph which describes various customs intended to accept their transfer from one master and household to another.⁴ This does acknowledge some need to acknowledge animals as beings whose preferences have an effect on the ritual process of their exchange. Women, and the effect that the fact of their agency and volition has on a process of exchange which treats them only as objects and denies that agency and volition, do not enter into his discussion.

Lévi-Strauss

When Lévi-Strauss begins his discussion of reciprocity in his 1949 work, he cites Mauss' work on gifts as the basis of his theory.⁵ Lévi-Strauss accepts the basic framework of Mauss' theory, but he expands significantly on Mauss' work, and it is his theory which is most often adopted and criticized.

Lévi-Strauss insists on the pervasive nature of obligatorily reciprocal gift exchange in cultures which practice it; that is, he insists that the expectation of reciprocity extends beyond the immediately obvious context of gift exchange. He uses his assertion about the pervasive nature of gift exchange to develop a general

⁴ Mauss, 64

⁵ Lévi-Strauss, 61

theory of society, based on “primitive” societies, but positing effects which he claims linger in modern, Western society.

Like Mauss, the symbolic social value of gifts and gift-giving is crucial to his analysis of reciprocity, and he excludes from his analysis those exchanges which are purely economic in nature, that is, those exchanges which are made with a view to economic benefit.⁶

Unlike Mauss, Lévi-Strauss is very interested in the exchange of women. Where Mauss included women as just another item on the list of goods that might be exchanged as part of a gift economy, Lévi-Strauss’ list makes clear that women are the best and most important good that can be exchanged in his comprehensive theory of gift exchange: “l’échange, phénomène total, comprenant de la nourriture, des objets fabriqués, et cette catégorie des biens les plus précieux, les femmes”⁷. A woman might be *la plus précieuse* example of a good, but she is still a good. That a woman is the most valuable object to be traded does not make her any less an object to be traded. Lévi-Strauss specifically denies that the exchange of women functions *like* the exchange of goods; in his view, the two systems are identical, because women are goods: “Il serait donc faux de dire qu’on échange ou qu’on donne des cadeaux, en même temps qu’on donne des femmes. Car la femme elle-même n’est autre qu’un des cadeaux, le suprême cadeau, parmi ceux qui peuvent s’obtenir seulement sous la

⁶ For a view which draws on more modern anthropological theory and evidence, and disputes the notion that self-interested market exchanges may be cleanly separated from altruistic gift-exchanges, see Van Wees 1998, and my discussion below p. 25

⁷ Lévi-Strauss, 71

forme de dons réciproques”.⁸ Like Mauss, Lévi-Strauss fails to consider the problematic fact of women’s agency and subjectivity in his analysis. Women are the paradigmatic exchanged object, from which the rest of his theory of exchange may be elaborated and understood, and so there is no suggestion that they do not fit perfectly within a system of exchange.

Lévi-Strauss links his theory of the reciprocal exchange to the incest taboo: “Comme l’exogamie, la prohibition de l’inceste est une règle de réciprocité: car je ne renonce à ma fille ou à ma soeur qu’à la condition que mon voisin y renonce aussi; la violente réaction de la communauté devant l’inceste est la réaction d’une communauté lésée -- à la différence de l’exogamie -- ni explicite ni immédiat: mais le fait que je puis obtenir une femme est, en dernière analyse, la conséquence du fait qu’un frère ou un père y a renoncé.”⁹ In this theory, women are not assimilated to the system of reciprocal exchange of objects; objects are assimilated to the system of the reciprocal exchange of women. From such a perspective, there can be no awareness that the treatment of women as objects creates problems within the system that objectifies them, since the rules for the treatment of objects are said to be based around them.

I am not condemning Mauss or Lévi-Strauss for describing a system of exchange in which women were treated as objects. To that extent, their description is accurate. But an analysis of such a system is incomplete if it fails to take into account the reality of women’s subjectivity and agency (the fact of women’s

⁸ Lévi-Strauss, 76

⁹ Lévi-Strauss, 72-73

personhood and independent and self-determined interest, and their ability to act on that fact), because any system devoted to treating women as objects must incorporate some mechanism for suppressing their subjectivity. The reality of women's agency must be acknowledged before the mechanism by which it is suppressed can be analyzed or even recognized.

The feminist criticism, revision and extension of Lévi-Strauss' theory of gift exchange bring it to a point where it can be usefully applied to Euripides, where it can be used to show the constant concern in Euripides' work not only with the exchange of women, but also with the problematic suppression of their agency.

De Lauretis

In her 1984 book on feminist theory and cinema, de Lauretis offers an extended criticism of Lévi-Strauss' theory, which points out his blindness to women's subjectivity, and proposes a feminist reading of exchange theory.

She points out the fact that Lévi-Strauss' discussion of his theory assumes an exclusively male subject: "subjectivity, or subjective processes, are inevitably defined in relation to a male subject, that is to say, with man as the sole term of reference."¹⁰

Consider the quote above (Lévi-Strauss 72-3) as an illustration of this principle.

Marriage is not only framed as an exchange between a father or brother and a husband,¹¹ but the reader is assumed, here and throughout Lévi-Strauss' discussion,

¹⁰ de Lauretis 1982, 8

¹¹ Which is an accurate description of the reality of marriage in Ancient Greek society. The basis for criticism is not necessarily in a failure to describe the ideal situation from the perspective of a system of exchange which treats women as

to be male. Lévi-Strauss makes a statement of general principles in the first person singular: “je ne renonce à ma fille...” in a way which forces the reader into the male perspective. The reader, and the universal experience, is of giving and receiving women. There is never any similar encouragement that the reader adopt a female perspective.

De Lauretis shows how Lévi-Strauss’ quest for a neat and all-encompassing theory of exchange and culture blinds him to the messy reality of women as subjects: “But the point is this: the universalizing project of Lévi-Strauss -- to collapse the economic and the semiotic orders into a unified theory of culture -- depends on his positing woman as the functional opposite of subject (man), which logically excludes the possibility -- the theoretical possibility -- of women ever being subjects and producers of culture.”¹²

De Lauretis shows how Lévi-Strauss’ neglect of women’s subjectivity is not just an oversight or a minor flaw in his logic, but actually central to his theory. She argues that the key to Lévi-Strauss’ error is not in the ethnographic data that he offers, but that “it is in his theory, in his conceptualization of the social, in the very terms of his discourse that women are doubly negated as subjects: first, because they are defined as vehicles of men’s communication -- signs of their language, carriers of their children”.¹³ Her second point stems from her first; it is that Lévi-Strauss’ theory

objects, but failure to recognize that the fact of women’s subjectivity would in fact result in the failure of the system to work ideally, unless it incorporates some mechanism for suppressing women’s subjectivity and resolving the resulting cognitive dissonance for men who know women who have the capacity for agency.

¹² de Lauretis, 20

¹³ de Lauretis, 20

positions women as the natural passive receptacles of desire, which is an active property of men.¹⁴ Lévi-Strauss offers a crucial insight into the exchange of women, but he offers that insight from a perspective of the dominant male role within the system. The possibility of a female perspective, and hence female agency, is not only ignored, but unthinkable. De Lauretis exposes the hole at the centre of Lévi-Strauss' theory, not precisely by saying that women exercise agency that Lévi-Strauss ignores, but by saying that their lack of agency must be acknowledged and its consequences considered.

Rabinowitz

De Lauretis criticizes Lévi-Strauss' exchange theory by showing how it precludes an analysis which acknowledges the reality of women's subjectivity. In her 1993 book, Rabinowitz shows how a feminist version of exchange theory which has at its centre an understanding of women's subjectivity and the problematic nature of its suppression can be usefully applied to an analysis of Greek literature and to Euripides in particular. I am basing my own analysis on Rabinowitz' model of the exchange of women.

Rabinowitz argues that Lévi-Strauss' theory of exchange and kinship is relevant to antiquity. It is relevant in general because gift exchange and hospitality were central to Greek society, and his work on the exchange of women is relevant in particular because of the fact that Greek marriage was an explicitly negotiated contract between a male guardian from a woman's natal family, and the potential

¹⁴ de Lauretis, 20

husband, with the woman functioning as the object of exchange.¹⁵ But Rabinowitz, like de Lauretis, argues that Lévi-Strauss' "overt androcentrism" means that his theory can not unquestioningly be applied in that form to Greek society.¹⁶ Lévi-Strauss argues that the distribution of women by men underlies and is necessary to support kinship systems, but never asks why it could not be, for example, women who organize the distribution of men, if some sort of distribution is indeed necessary.¹⁷

Rabinowitz notices Lévi-Strauss' primary focus on the triangle formed among a man, a woman, and a community, when a woman is exchanged; and his allusion to the triangle formed among a woman and two men who are competing for her. But Rabinowitz focuses on another triad of relationships which Lévi-Strauss neglects: the relationship formed between the man who gives a woman, the man who receives her, and the woman herself. This triangle gives the illusion that the woman and her relationship to the men is of primary importance, when in reality she is only a means of creating and reinforcing a relationship between men, who owe loyalty to each other, but not to her.¹⁸ A woman is prevented, by virtue of being an object exchanged between men, from acting as a subject. She notes that such a system is clearly problematic for women, and less obviously to men as well, because both women and men are constrained as to what sort of relationships they may cultivate.¹⁹

¹⁵ Rabinowitz 1993, 15

¹⁶ Rabinowitz 1993, 15-17

¹⁷ Rabinowitz 1993, 17

¹⁸ Rabinowitz 1993, 17-18

¹⁹ Rabinowitz 1993, 20

Rabinowitz then applies her description of the tension inherent in the system of the exchange of women to Greek tragedy, and to Euripides:

The role of tragedy as a public art form was in part to keep the system going. Even Euripides' radical plays do this cultural work, both revealing and disguising the system whereby men exchange women to institute culture, which excludes them. The plays are informed by the pattern of the exchange of women, with the suppression of female subjectivity that that necessitates. They mimic the social structure, inscribing a heterosexuality that is seemingly absolute for women but consistent with, even predicated upon, homosocial behaviour for men. Women are represented as torn from associations with other women which might be supportive; men are encouraged in their relationships with other men. Female identification with men supports male power by dividing women and making them seem to be agents of their own suffering; men's same-sex relations similarly support male power.²⁰

I am adopting this framework for my own analysis. It is a clear and compelling reworking of the theory of the exchange of women that includes the reality of

²⁰ Rabinowitz 1993, 21

women's agency and the problem of its suppression. Crucially, Rabinowitz' theory asserts that the reality of women's lives is not identical to the portrayal of women in tragedy, although the two are closely interconnected.²¹ This separation between historical women and their fictional reconstruction allows me to consider patterns of exchange, gifts and negotiation in tragedy without having to make my discussion conform exactly to anthropological theory, while still allowing that theory, and concepts of exchange and reciprocity centred in literary criticism, to inform my analysis.

Definitions of systems of reciprocity and exchange

The discussion above focused on the exchange of women, and is of central importance to my thesis. But I also wish to consider other types of exchanges, gifts and negotiations which complement or operate in parallel to a system of the exchange of women. In order to explain what I mean by "deal", the term I adopt in my discussion of *Alcestis* and *Medea*, I will first discuss some definitions proposed by others related to exchange and reciprocity.

²¹ De Lauretis explicitly adopts a similar distinction between historical women and women as social and literary constructs: "By "woman" I mean a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures [...]By *women*, on the other hand, I will mean the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain." (5) While I appreciate the distinction between these two categories and think that it is crucial to be aware of it, I will not myself adopt the same singular/plural convention to distinguish the two.

Herman

Herman takes a broad view of the extent of reciprocity in Greek society, and his definition of the system of reciprocity in Greek society is similarly broad. He argues that the system of reciprocity includes *xenia*, but is not limited to it. Herman declines to use the term ‘*xenia*’ in his study, arguing that it has been too narrowly defined in modern scholarship.²² He argues that *xenia* was present in those spheres where it has traditionally been recognized -- in warfare, diplomacy, and trade-- but that it was not limited to these spheres and could be found in virtually all co-operative ventures that involve mutual assistance -- including family problems and the personal arena.²³

Because he wants to make the broader implications of *xenia* clear, Herman prefers the term ‘ritualized friendship’, which he defines as “a bond of solidarity manifesting itself in an exchange of goods and services between individuals originating from separate social units.”²⁴

Herman argues for a division and distinction between two types of exchange. He argues that goods and services can either be exchanged in the context of friendship, or outside the context of friendship, and the two types of exchange are mutually opposed: “Crudely, the distinction is this. Outside the context of friendship -- in trading relationships, for example -- the exchange is a short-term, self-

²² When defining the terms and purpose of his study, Herman argues that “what has traditionally been labelled in modern scholarship as ‘guest-friendship’ is beset with misapprehensions. I argue that *xenia* can be located within the wider category of social relations known to anthropologists as ‘ritualized personal relations’ [...] What emerges at the end of this inquiry is a social institution with clear boundaries, well-defined rules, and a remarkable degree of internal cohesion” (Herman, 7).

²³ Herman, 128

²⁴ Herman, 10

liquidating transaction. Once the benefits are obtained, the social relationship is terminated. The transaction does not create moral involvement. By contrast, with the framework of amicable relations, (kinship, friendship, ritualised friendship), exchanges have a long-term expectancy. Gifts beg counter-gifts, and fulfill at one and the same time a number of purposes: they repay past services, incur new obligations, and act as continuous reminders of the validity of the bond.”²⁵ While I do not agree with the analysis of friendship and market exchanges as distinct and non-overlapping categories, for reasons I give in my discussion below, I nevertheless find Herman’s description of the function of gifts in the context of amicable relations very apt and appropriate to the study of Euripides, particularly his emphasis on the capacity of gifts both to create and to fulfill obligations between the parties to the exchange.

Van Wees

Van Wees rejects a strict and inflexible distinction between market/non-market and reciprocal/non-reciprocal exchanges, which he argues are based on a biased analysis of “native” societies. Van Wees comments on how the biases of Western capitalist society contribute to simplistic mis-readings of anthropological evidence from so-called primitive societies: “The distortions of native ideology, it is said, are compounded by those of the modern Western ideology, which draws a black and white distinction between ‘purely altruistic’ gift-giving and ‘purely interested’ market transactions -- a distinction peculiar to capitalist society, and one

²⁵ Herman, 80

which obscures the mixed motives governing most forms of exchange most of the time.”²⁶

The argument that most if not all exchanges have mixed motives behind them, and that they can serve more than one purpose, while seemingly obvious, is nevertheless sometimes overlooked. It is dangerous to impute uncomplicated, single-minded motives for exchange to people in what we term archaic or primitive cultures, when a moment’s reflection on our own lives and society will let us know this is actually very rarely the case for us.²⁷

Belfiore

Belfiore takes an inclusive view of reciprocal relationships, based on the Greek idea of *philia*, which she argues “includes the relationships of marriage, *xenia*, and suppliance, and recognition includes the acknowledgement and acceptance of outsiders as *philo*. Marriage, *xenia*, and suppliance are all formal relationships

²⁶ Van Wees, 14

²⁷ Van Wees argues throughout his article that in our own society, the overt rules of exchange do not necessarily correspond very closely at all to the implicit ones. For example, exhortations to “forget about” or “not mention” a favour or a gift, while not precisely insincere, do not accurately reflect the real expectation of reciprocity that is incurred. I find this view particularly relevant to exchange in Euripides. It is reasonable to assume that patterns of exchange in Greek culture were different from our own, but we cannot also assume this difference means that their systems of exchange did not have the same degree of complexity and contradiction as ours. Such assumption risks the possibility that the ambiguous interplay of ritual, social and personal motives at work in their portrayals of exchange (in my case, in Euripides) will be overlooked because of what we think we know about ancient exchange. We should not assume that exchange relationships can be neatly separated from concerns of family and friendship. Rejecting a clinical separation between disinterested commodity exchange and personal and complex ritual exchange will allow a messier, more ambiguous and more affective analysis, which is useful in the study of literature and perhaps particularly Euripides.

involving reciprocal rights and obligations, and are in many ways similar to blood kinship. In all of these relationships, outsiders are brought into a *philia* relationship by means of formal acts of reciprocity. To include reciprocal relationships as well as biological kinships is not only useful for a study of Greek tragedy, it is also consistent with Greek ideas about *philia*.”²⁸

Though Belfiore is approaching her argument with a view to incorporating formal reciprocal relationships into the idea of *philia*, I find the idea that *philia* should be included in a study of reciprocity in Greek tragedy useful. It is particularly relevant to the two plays I have chosen to analyze, in which deals between family members are as important if not more important than deals between friends or *xenoi*. Belfiore argues that relationships between blood relatives are functionally very similar to the formal/personal relationships created through marriage, and that these are similar to the relationships created through *xenia*. Belfiore’s position is relevant to my study of *Alcestis* and *Medea*, because they all involve complicated intersections of personal, family and political relationships.

Lyons

One element of exchange, reciprocity and gender that I have not yet focused on, but which will be crucial to my discussion of Euripides, is the danger and destruction that is associated with women and exchange.

In a recent work, Lyons articulates particularly clearly and forcefully the causal relationship between gifts and women, and disaster. She points to Deianeira

²⁸ Belfiore 1998, 144

and the robe, Eriphyle and the necklace, Aerope and the golden lamb, and Klytaimnestra and the cloth, and concludes: “No matter whether they are givers or receivers, disaster follows. The message seems clear: while any exchange has the potential for danger, women and gifts are a particularly deadly combination.”²⁹

She goes further in identifying women’s exercise of agency in exchanges, not the mere combination of women and exchange, as the locus of the cultural anxiety that is reflected in the portrayal of women and exchange as dangerous: “In a society in some sense founded on the circulation of women, the possibility that a woman’s circulation will not end with her marriage remains an ever-present threat. At the heart of this anxiety is a fundamental conceptualization of women as *objects*, not *agents*, of exchange. The perverted exchanges [...]point to the possibility that once she is established in her marital household, a woman may lay claim to a new economic (and affective) power as a wife and mother, no longer allowing herself to be a passively exchanged object.”³⁰

Women who claim agency in exchange, who give or receive, are doing something dangerous and threatening. Lyons does not examine at any length the corollary, that women who are the passive objects of exchange are not only safe but that their role as exchanged object promotes a (constantly threatened) social stability based on relationships between men. I will not be arguing that “women and gifts are a particularly deadly combination” which is exacerbated by the addition of female agency. Instead, I will show that women and agency are a deadly

²⁹ Lyons, 93

³⁰ Lyons, 95

combination, which may be expressed in the context of gifts and exchange. Women and gifts, where the women *are* the gifts and where they make no attempt at negotiation or exchange of their own, are constructive rather than dangerous.

Xenia

Xenia is a form of exchange that has particular relevance to a discussion of *Alcestis* and *Medea*, since the plots of both plays involve relationships supported by mutual hospitality and gifts or favours given in exchange for or in the context of hospitality.

As is suggested by my discussion above on competing definitions and theories of reciprocity, there is no consensus on a precise definition of *xenia*. A basic definition of *xenia* is: an aristocratic system of exchange of hospitality, and gifts connected with hospitality, as a means of establishing and maintaining a friendly connection between members of different family and political units. Particular elements of this definition may be disputed, and acts in which they are absent may still be defined as *xenia*, but it is not necessary for the purpose of my analysis to arrive at an exhaustive or nuanced definition of *xenia*.

What is most important for the purpose of my argument is that *xenia* is a form of reciprocity, a subset of reciprocal exchange. This is an uncontroversial aspect of *xenia*; discussions of *xenia* often take place in the context of larger discussions of reciprocity, and so assume its reciprocal nature.³¹

³¹ See for example Belfiore 1998, particularly p. 144-6; Herman 1987; Van Wees 1998, particularly for how obligations to repay may exist despite the nominally “free”

It is not crucial to my argument to believe that every example of *xenia*, in literary or historical evidence, is immediately reciprocated or creates a feeling of obligation to repay, although I would argue that they do. It is only necessary to accept that acts of *xenia* can create this expectation of reciprocation, and that in *Alcestis* and *Medea*, it does.

In *Alcestis*, the sense of obligation incurred by acts of hospitality is made explicit in the text. No character demands repayment for his hospitality, since hospitality is given as a gift. But Apollo, Admetus and Heracles all state that they are performing a service for a host out of gratitude or obligation for the hospitality their host provided.³² In *Medea*, which deals with the perversion of normal relationships and proper hospitality, the obligation created through *xenia* may be observed in the disastrous consequences of ignoring that obligation.³³

nature of a gift; Konstan 1998 for the importance of reciprocity in relationships conceived of as “equal” in the Athenian democracy, and how it operated in conjunction with the affective aspect of friendship. Depew 1997, 233 lists hospitality among the things regularly offered to establish the existence of a interpersonal relationship that may be drawn on for a favour.

³² See Apollo 10-12, Admetus 553-560, and Heracles 840-2. See Nielson 1976, 194 for Apollo’s obligation to repay Admetus. See Hartigan 1991, 28 on Admetus’ obligation to repay Heracles’ hospitality with hospitality, and p. 31 on Heracles’ obligation to repay Admetos. See Padilla 2000, 185 for how the individual interest in giving a gift need not be identical with the systemic purpose of the gift-giving. See Rabinowitz 1993, 90-2 for a discussion of gender and the *xenia* exchanges in *Alcestis*. See also Wohl 1998, 128-30; Dellner 2000; Golfarb 1992.

³³ See for example Schein 1990, who discusses *Medea* in terms of reciprocal friendships.

What is a 'deal' ?

Rather than referring constantly to “exchange, reciprocity, negotiation, gift-economy, ritualized friendship or *xenia*” in an attempt to encompass elements of all the definitions I’ve mentioned , I will instead use the term ‘deal’. It is desirable to use only one term for the sake of clarity and economy, particularly as previous terms come encumbered with connotations that I wish to avoid.

For the purposes of the present study, a deal must involve two parties, though third parties may be implicated in the terms of the deal. The participants will normally be individuals, though they may, like the Fates, be groups acting as one. They may be *any* two individuals, and they need not be members of a different social unit, or of the same social unit. They may be male or female, and they may be gods or humans.³⁴

A deal must involve an exchange, though I am not restricting what I call a deal by what is exchanged. What is exchanged may include, but is not limited to, material gifts, services, and promises, which may be promises to undertake certain behaviour, or to refrain from certain behaviour (as in a deal for mutual non-aggression).

I am less concerned with the actual goods or specific conditions of the deal than I am with the expressed intent of the participants, the behaviour of the

³⁴ The inclusion of gods as parties to a deal is appropriate for the work under discussion. In *Alcestis*, the deal between Admetus and Apollo is treated by Euripides as equivalent to other deals between males. Euripides emphasizes that the deal between Admetus and Apollo is based on Admetus’ hospitality, as the deal between Heracles and Admetus is based on hospitality. There are no deals, or interactions of any kind, between gods and humans in *Medea*.

participants in making their deals, and the effects of the deal on the behaviour of the participants and on those implicated in the deal. A deal as I define it includes 1) the negotiation of the terms of the deal by the participants, 2) agreement on the terms and 3) how each party interprets and fulfills or fails to fulfill his or her obligations under the terms of the deal. These stages are not only expressions of the deal, or representative of the deal, but parts of the deal itself.

While my analysis of deals in Euripides will be informed by the structure and theory of exchange, I am most interested in exchange theory as it is manifested in “deals”. These manifestations are plentiful and intricately varied in Euripides, and they are absolutely central to his work.³⁵ In *Alcestis* and *Medea* in particular, deals form the bulk of the plot.

Conclusion

According to most theories of exchange in anthropology and literary criticism, when men make deals with each other, they form and maintain relationships with each other as a result of those deals. The outcome of these deals and relationships is positive, as it is the product of men’s agency, itself desirable. Women are objects

³⁵ Buxton explains “Again and again in Euripides we find issues made *explicit*: matters are debated and argued openly. The reason why it is especially risky with Euripides to choose one speech or one argument from a play and say, ‘This is what Euripides believed’, is that his works are composed of a series of interlocking arguments. Various characters put cases, trying to persuade each trying to persuade each other, and the audience, of the validity of their position. The effect of the play consists of nothing less than the impact of all the interlocking persuasions, arguments and cases.” (Buxton 1982, 150). What Buxton calls “interlocking persuasions, arguments and cases” are subsumed in my definition of “deal” and would often form a part of what I would call a deal, though they need not be present in every instance of a deal.

that men frequently exchange with each other, particularly in deals called “marriage”. Here, the women serve as objects that reinforce men’s homosocial bonds, which are constructive and desirable. This is what emerges from a prescriptive model of the world Euripides describes in the plays discussed. In a descriptive model, however, there is the confounding reality of women’s subjectivity. In the plays I discuss, I will show how women’s subjectivity, expressed through deal-making, is destructive of men’s deals and their homosocial bonds. The containment of their subjectivity as objects of deals between men is desirable, but not always achieved. *Alcestis* provides an example of the successful containment of women’s subjectivity through men’s deals, *Medea* shows the disastrous consequences of women’s subjectivity left uncontained

Alcestis

Deals in Alcestis

Alcestis is a play about a complex and interwoven series of negotiations, exchanges and deceptions in which the characters are entangled. These negotiations, exchanges and deceptions are themselves closely related: negotiations lead to exchanges, and deception is sometimes employed to facilitate negotiation and exchanges. I will refer to the process of negotiation and exchange as a ‘deal’, as discussed in the Introduction (p. 25).

The play comes to a happy and successful conclusion once the terms of all the legitimate deals have been fulfilled, and the terms of the illegitimate deals have been broken. The process of resolving the play becomes the process of determining which deals are legitimate, and which deals are illegitimate.³⁶

Illegitimate deals are those in which women are active negotiators (most importantly, Alcestis’ deal with Admetus). Legitimate deals are those negotiated only between men, and in which women function only as the objects of exchange in the deal. In *Alcestis*, Alcestis also functions as an object of deception. By “object of deception,” I do not mean that she is deceived. I mean that she is used by others

³⁶ For a reading of *Alcestis* which argues that the tension between the values of *philia* and *xenia* is a major issue in the play, see Goldfarb.

(men) as a tool of their deception of each other, but does not participate in the deception either as its perpetrator or its victim.³⁷

The element of deception in deals serves as a distraction from the actual cause of undesirable deals: women's participation.³⁸ In *Alcestis*, the fact that a deal between men is founded on deception does not invalidate it. *Alcestis* demonstrates that relationships between men may be strengthened through mutually deceptive negotiations: the relationship which brings about the play's happy resolution, the one between Heracles and Admetus, is founded on mutual deception. The relationship is successful because Alcestis functions as an exchanged object which facilitates both Heracles' and Admetus' deception, with no capacity to assume the role of active negotiator that she had taken for herself at the beginning of the play.

Alcestis demonstrates that deception is neither an exclusively female nor an exclusively negative phenomenon. As my discussion of *Alcestis* will show, deception is destructive and dangerous only when it is used by women,³⁹ and when it is used

³⁷ Lefkowitz points out that Penelope and Alcestis serve as the (very rare) archetypes of good women in Greek myth, and that Penelope has a deceptive intelligence. (Lefkowitz 1986, 63) It is interesting to note that the possibility of active deception and agency is available to (at least one) "good" Homeric woman in a way that it is not available to this "good" Euripidean woman. See Holmberg 1995, 113-20 for Penelope's cunning and deceptiveness, and the tension between the extent to which these qualities support the Odysseus' goals, but also support Penelope's subjectivity.

³⁸ Hesk sees deceit in Euripides as a vehicle for the representation of threats to Athenian men and to their democracy: "Alongside persistent representations of deceit as 'unAthenian', typically Spartan, feminine and cowardly in a range of texts, we will see the opposition between *apate* and the Athenian male self being articulated and problematised in Euripidean drama. This problematisation will evoke the threat of deceit in democratic politics." (Hesk 2000, 6)

³⁹ That deception is a feature of women's speech is a common feature of the analysis of women in Greek literature. For example, for a discussion of deceptive women's speech in Greek literature, particularly Hesiod and Homer, see Bergen 1983. See

by women it is always destructive and dangerous, not because it is deceptive, *per se*, but because any female agency is dangerous.

Apollo's Deals

Apollo's Double Deal with Admetus and with the Fates

In the Prologue of *Alcestis*, Apollo describes the current state of Admetus' household, and explains how it came about. Apollo was compelled by Zeus to serve in Admetus' household. Admetus treated him well. In return for acting as a good host, Apollo has granted Admetus a reprieve from an early death. So far Apollo is describing an exchange of *xenia* gifts between men, which is orthodox in form if extravagant in scale: Admetus acted as a good host to a god in a vulnerable position, Apollo grants him an extended life in return.⁴⁰

It is the mechanism by which Apollo is able to offer Admetus the gift of a longer life that complicates an otherwise straightforward exchange of gifts.⁴¹ Apollo

Holmberg 1995 for a discussion of the association between deception and the feminine in Greek literature, especially in Homer. See Walcot 1996 for the use of literary evidence to show the fear of women's deception and mistrust of women in Greek society. Buxton explains the connection between deceit and subversive activity, particularly women's subversive activity: "It is clear that *dolos* is a subversive form of activity. It is often used in situations where one person wishes to get the better of another who is superior in power: if your antagonist will not be persuaded, and his superior strength rules out force, then your only resort is cunning. Thus women were frequently imagined in Greek myth as overcoming their inferiority to men by means of cunning." (Buxton 64)

⁴⁰ For a description of the exchanges which led to the deal between Admetus and Apollo, for alternate versions of the myths in the backstory, see Rabinowitz 1993, 68-70.

⁴¹ For Hartigan, it is Apollo's offer to Admetus that disrupts the normal patterns of Admetus life and household (Hartigan 19). I argue that it is important to emphasize that it is Alcestis' involvement, not Admetus' and Apollo's exchange, that is

goes on to explain that he tricked the Fates into agreeing to let another unspecified person die in Admetus' place. Apollo's deal with the Fates leads to Alcestis' involvement; she is the only one who will agree to die in Admetus' place. However, her agreement to die doesn't come for free. As a result of the deal with the Fates, Alcestis gains the capacity to negotiate the terms of her death with her husband.

Apollo explains his deal with Admetus and his deal with the Fates in very quick succession:

ἐλθὼν δὲ γαῖαν τήνδ' ἐβουφόρβουν ξένω,	I came to this land and served as
καὶ τόνδ' ἔσωζον οἶκον ἐς τόδ' ἡμέρας.	herdsman to my host, and I have kept
ὀσίου γὰρ ἀνδρὸς ὀσιος ὦν ἐτύγχανον	this house safe from harm to this hour. I
παιδὸς Φέρητος, ὃν θανεῖν ἐρρυσάμην,	am myself godly, and in Admetus, son of
Μοίρας δολώσας: ἦνεσαν δέ μοι θεαὶ	Pheres, I found a godly man. And so I
Ἄδμητον Ἄιδην τὸν παραυτίκ' ἐκφυγεῖν,	rescued him from death by tricking the
ἄλλον διαλλάξαντα τοῖς κάτω νεκρόν.	Fates. These goddesses promised me that
(9-14) ⁴²	Admetus could escape an immediate
	death by giving in exchange another
	corpse to the powers below.

problematic and destructive. Luschnig similarly ignores Alcestis' gender when tracing the cause of the disruption back to Admetus, though she does acknowledge Alcestis' role: "It is in fact usually neither possible to take someone's death nor desirable: the former we know instinctively; the other is a strong (though perhaps not a deadly serious) message in the play. The opportunity is an irrational gift to Admetus, the desirability a thoughtless reaction on Admetus' part and an aesthetic choice on Alcestis', which like any significant choice requires a narrowing of vision." (Luschnig 1995, 8)

⁴² All Greek text, and English translation, is Kovacs'.

He explains the essence of each deal in five words: ‘ὅν θανεῖν ἐρρυσάμην/Μοίρας δολώσας’ ([Admetus], whom I rescued from death by tricking the Fates). The two deals are so closely linked in Apollo’s explanation that they are easy to confuse. But they are, in fact, distinct: there is one deal between Apollo and Admetus, in which Apollo extends Admetus’ life in exchange for his hospitality.⁴³ This deal is fulfilled if Admetus lives, but does not specifically require that Alcestis, or anyone, die. The death of a substitute is merely one of the many possible ways in which the deal could be fulfilled. The Admetus and Apollo deal is fulfilled through a separate though related deal between Apollo and the Fates, whereby Apollo acquires the means of offering Admetus his life. This is the deal that requires that a substitute, Alcestis, die.

That the two deals are distinct is most easily demonstrated by the fact that at the resolution of the play, only the deal between Apollo and Admetus remains intact: Admetus is still alive. The deal between Apollo and the Fates is broken: Alcestis is no longer dead.

In the Prologue, Apollo presents both deals as one. Admetus presumably accepted both deals, either at the same time, or by later agreeing to allow someone else to die after he had already accepted Apollo’s offer of life. That is, while agreeing to accept the gift of a longer life from Apollo, Admetus consented to allow someone else to die in his place as a condition of that gift. I am not arguing that the two deals

⁴³ Rabinowitz makes a similar, though not an identical distinction when she argues for an awareness of two separate story lines, which Euripides obscures: “As is the case with many of the tragedies, there is more to the traditional story than Euripides makes use of. In fact, there are two story lines: that of Apollo and Admetos, and that of Admetos and Alcestis.” (Rabinowitz 1993, 68)

are distinct in order to reduce Admetus' moral culpability.⁴⁴ Rather, I am arguing that it is crucial to appreciate the distinction between Apollo's two deals in the Prologue, because these two deals serve as a model for other deals throughout the play, most importantly Alcestis' deal with Admetus and Heracles' deal with Admetus.

Apollo's deal with Admetus is a positive example of an appropriate deal. It is negotiated exclusively between males, its terms are beneficial to both parties, and neither party is inappropriately subordinated to the other. It prioritizes relationships between males (Apollo and Admetus), over relationships between males and females (Apollo and the Fates)⁴⁵. The deal between Heracles and Admetus shares these characteristics. By accepting a deal with Heracles which emulates the mutuality, equality, and exclusively masculine agency modelled in the deal with Apollo, Admetus is restored to his proper social position, his household is returned to a state of good order, and the play concludes happily.

By contrast, Apollo's deal with the Fates is an example of the wrong sort of deal. The Fates, as females, are active negotiators. Unlike Apollo, or Heracles, the Fates impose terms on Admetus rather than offer gifts as part of a system of mutual exchange. Where the deal between Apollo and Admetus is meant to benefit both parties, the consequences of the deal with the Fates are destructive. Apollo's deal

⁴⁴ For a reading of the play which examines both Admetus' and Alcestis' moral positions see Nielson 1976.

⁴⁵ I am using the terms "male" and "female" here to emphasize that gender is the relevant distinction between the parties, not humanity or godhood. The central deal which involves a god in *Alcestis* involves Apollo, whom Euripides domesticates through the emphasis on the time he spent in Admetus' household and the hospitality bond they share as a result. Apollo's domestication combined with the centrality of his deal with Admetus domesticates the other gods involved in deals with humans.

with the Fates leads to further female agency, in that it put Alcestis in a position to negotiate with Admetus. The deal between Apollo and the Fates begets the deal between Alcestis and Admetus, which shares in the destructive characteristics of the parent deal. The deals are closely connected, and both must be overturned, and their consequences reversed (most notably with Alcestis' return from the dead) before the play can reach its happy conclusion.

It is true that Apollo's deal with the Fates is founded on deception, something that Thanatos is particularly eager to point out:

ἀδικεῖς αὖ τιμὰς ἐνέρων	Are you engaged in more injustice,
ἀφοριζόμενος καὶ καταπαύων;	curtailing and annulling the
οὐκ ἤρκεσέ σοι μόρον Ἀδμήτου	prerogatives of the gods below? Was it
διακωλύσαι, Μοίρας δολίῳ	not enough that you prevented the
σφήλαντι τέχνῃ; (29-34)	death of Admetus, tripping up the Fates
	by cunning trickery?

But it is not the fact of being founded on deception which invalidates this deal. If that were the case, Heracles' and Admetus' mutual deception would also invalidate their deals. It is the fact that it is a deal on the one hand negotiated with female Fates, and on the other hand closely tied to Alcestis' negotiation with Admetus, that invalidates Apollo's deal with the Fates. Despite Thanatos' disapprobation, Apollo's deception of the Fates is a positive aspect of the deal, one that counteracts the contamination of female agency. To the extent that Apollo's deception of the Fates

facilitates his deal with Admetus, it is a deception that strengthens and supports a relationship between men.

Apollo's deal with Thanatos

While Apollo tells the story of his exchanges with Admetus and the Fates to Thanatos, he is in fact in the process of making a third exchange, with Thanatos himself. Where Apollo's deals in the Prologue serve to establish a pattern of legitimate and illegitimate deals with a man as the negotiator, Apollo's deal with Thanatos serves to demonstrate Alcestis' lack of agency in the deals which concern her. In this exchange, Alcestis is very clearly an object being exchanged between Apollo and Thanatos:

Θάνατος: πῶς οὖν ὑπὲρ γῆς ἐστι κοῦ
κάτω χθονός;

Death: Then how is he still on earth and not beneath the ground?

Ἀπόλλων: δάμαρτ' ἀμείψας, ἦν σὺ νῦν
ἦκεις μέτα.

Apollo: By giving in exchange the wife you have now come to fetch.

Θάνατος: κάπάξομαί γε νερτέραν ὑπὸ
χθόνα.

Death: Yes, and I will take her down below.

Ἀπόλλων: λαβὼν ἴθ': οὐ γὰρ οἶδ' ἄν εἰ
πέισαιμί σε. (43-48)

Apollo: Take her and go. For I doubt if I can persuade you.

In this short space of this dialogue, Alcestis is used as the grammatical and the actual object of two exchanges: between Apollo and Thanatos and between Apollo and Admetus. In line 44, Apollo smoothly joins Admetus' agreement to Thanatos' mission, making Alcestis the grammatical object of both the clauses in

which the men are the subjects, as well as the object of the exchanges between men. In Apollo's view, Alcestis' death fulfills the terms of two of his deals, neither of which was negotiated with her. In line 48, he assumes closer control over Alcestis, granting Thanatos permission to take her, while omitting any explicit mention of her; the pronoun for Alcestis which is the object of 'λαβών' is only implied. By doubling up his role in the exchange that is Alcestis' death, Apollo repeats the objectification of Alcestis which he began in his deals with Admetus and the Fates. By making her an object twice over, Apollo is erasing any hint of Alcestis' own agency in any exchange in which her death forms part of the terms. This negotiation with Thanatos over Alcestis' life anticipates her negotiation with Admetos. In that negotiation Alcestis lays claim to her own life and the right to negotiate the terms of its surrender; Apollo's and Thanatos' negotiation preempts this claim, by fixing in the audience's mind in advance that Alcestis does not in fact have the right or the ability to negotiate with or for her own life. Apollo's erasure of Alcestis from his account of the interconnected series of deals makes Alcestis' later attempts at negotiation seem out of place, and foreshadows the play's resolution, in which Alcestis is reduced to a voiceless and generic object.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Garner also recognizes the effect of Thanatos' presence in the Prologue on the audience's later perception of Alcestis' sacrifice. He emphasizes the antagonism and separation between Apollo and Thanatos rather than the unifying effect of their joint negotiation, and so does not comment on the effect of Thanatos and Apollo's deal on Alcestis' agency. He puts the figure of Thanatos at the forefront of the conflict, arguing that "dying holds such importance for the play that although its essence is final silence and inevitable material disintegration, it has acquired a voice and body: Death himself, a crude and coarse ogre, interrupts the beautiful Apollo's dignified prologue, asserts himself rudely, and drives the brighter, purer god from the stage. In this fashion, then, the death of Alcestis, foretold and foreseen, infects

Apollo's deals in the prologue thus set up the model for gendered deals and the gendered use of deception in the rest of the play. Deceptive deals are to be used to further relationships between men, when men are in control of the negotiation and the deception and women are used as the objects of that deception, that is, as tools which are used in a deception, not as active participants in it. Women's agency, expressed through their capacity to negotiate, is ultimately untenable. The characters in the play are moving towards the successful application of these principles in their own negotiations, and their eventual success allows the play to end happily.

Alcestis' Deals

Alcestis makes only one deal in the play: her deal with Admetus, which finally proves unsuccessful. The terms of this deal are thoroughly reversed as a condition of the play's happy ending.

It has often been remarked that Alcestis seems to be acting like a hero,⁴⁷ and Alcestis, in both ancient and modern criticism, has been used as a model of exemplary behaviour. But I follow O'Higgins, among others, in seeing Alcestis' attempts at gaining *kleos* and acting like a hero as challenging, rather than supporting, the male heroic tradition. O'Higgins comments on the contrast: "Of all the women in Greek tragedy Alcestis is perhaps the most unambivalently "good,"

great stretches of the play in a way which is more reminiscent of the *Iliad* than it is of any tragedy." (Garner, 59) Against Garner, I argue that it is Alcestis' choice, not the fact of death, that is out of place and that infects the rest of the play.

⁴⁷ For example, see Segal 1993, 70; and Plato's *Symposium* 179 b-d.

yet, as we shall see, implicit in her famous action is a challenge to male authority, as represented by her husband Admetus, the very man for whom she sacrifices herself.”⁴⁸ I argue that a great deal of Alcestis’ challenge to male authority lies in her appropriation of the capacity to negotiate. Alcestis and Admetus, whose marital relationship is necessarily hierarchical, are engaged in a zero-sum struggle for agency and the capacity to negotiate. The fact that Admetus negotiates with Alcestis, even if he appears to fare better than she in the deal, as she cedes and he gains life, is in and of itself dangerous. By being willing to engage in a deal with Alcestis at all, Admetus loses some of his own capacity to negotiate. Alcestis and Admetus’ destructive relationship is juxtaposed with Heracles’ and Admetus’ relationship. Alcestis and Admetus engage in honest and direct negotiation, Heracles and Admetus engage in mutual deception, but it is the latter and not the former relationship whose effects are beneficial rather than destructive, and whose terms remain in effect at the play’s conclusion.

Alcestis’ Deal with Admetus

Before her death, Alcestis approaches her negotiation with Admetus from a position of strength: what she is willing to give, and what she is willing to sacrifice, life, is of the greatest possible value both to herself and to Admetus.⁴⁹ In a 1995

⁴⁸ O’Higgins 1993, 80

⁴⁹ For an excellent discussion of Alcestis using her death as a commodity, see Dellner. She summarizes: “Viewed by readers such as Wittig and Loraux, the women of Greek tragedy, though understood to be tokens circulated within masculine sign systems, have death to call their very own. Nowhere does this idea seem more obvious than in Euripides’ *Alcestis* where death is Alcestis’ commodity and she its broker. Until,

article, Luschnig follows Alcestis' journey from the general (in the Prologue) to the particular (reaching its apex at her death) and back to the general by the play's conclusion (with an upward bump in the descending curve during Alcestis' funeral).

⁵⁰ I agree that such a curve exists, and will show that it corresponds also to the rise and fall of Alcestis' individuality (rather than simply particularity, as Luschnig has it) and her capacity to negotiate. ⁵¹

The rise and fall of Alcestis' individuality and ability to negotiate has an inverse correlation with Admetus' success in engaging in the correct form of deal-making,⁵² as modelled by Apollo in the Prologue. Alcestis' moment of greatest subjectivity, the moment of her death and the culmination of her deal with Admetus, corresponds to his lowest point. Admetus' increasingly successful

that is, one realizes that "her" death is someone else's and that there is in fact more than one "power on earth" (first Admetus, then Herakles) that can take it from her." (Dellner 2000, 1)

⁵⁰ Luschnig 1995, 16-17

⁵¹ The distinction between individuality and particularity for my purposes is this: individuality consists of having characteristics which are used to meaningfully distinguish a person or objects from others. Particularity consists simply of being picked from among a field of functionally interchangeable objects or people, where the person or object is not distinguished based on meaningful differences, but by the simple fact of having been arbitrarily chosen.

⁵² Chong-Gossard argues that Alcestis has control of the discourse in the time immediately leading up to her death, while Admetus has none. He notes that in lines 244-70, Alcestis pointedly addresses her children and not her husband, and she makes no response to Admetus. (Chong-Gossard 2008, 80-1) He further argues that Alcestis resists Admetus' interruptions and pursues her own themes as a means of resistance to Admetus' superior power (he argues that Admetus is more powerful in that moment, since he will survive and Admetus will not). (Chong-Gossard 2008, 82). I agree that Alcestis is pursuing her own themes as a means of asserting her voice and her control, but I would argue that Admetus' inability to counter with an agenda of his own demonstrates Admetus' inferior power. As I argue above, the fact of Alcestis' death in the face of Admetus' survival makes her more powerful, not less.

attempts at engaging in the sort of deal which reinforces male homosocial bonds corresponds to Alcestis' journey from subject to object.⁵³

Alcestis is defined through her choice to die, and it is the only thing that offers her any claim to individuality. It is how Apollo defines her in the opening lines of the Prologue: “οὐχ ἤϊρε πλὴν γυναικὸς ὅστις ἤθελεν/θανῶν πρὸ κείνου μηκέτ' εἰσορᾶν φάος” (17-18).⁵⁴ This is an allusive way of referring to Alcestis; it avoids her name, and defines her only by her relationship to her husband. The indirect reference is remarkable because it follows an opening speech in which a slew of characters are mentioned by name: Admetus' name is the third word in the play, others mentioned in first fifteen lines are Zeus, Asclepius, and Pheres. Admetus is mentioned twice more.

In his conversation with Thanatos, Apollo connects Alcestis' final role as an object to the legitimate deal between Heracles and Admetus. Apollo promises that Heracles will bring Alcestis back from the dead, in the same breath that he mentions Heracles' *xenia* relationship with Admetus: “ὃς δὴ ξενωθεὶς τοῖσδ' ἐν Ἀδμήτου δόμοις/ βίᾳ γυναῖκα τήνδε σ' ἐξαιρήσεται” (68-9).⁵⁵

⁵³ On the tensions between Alcestis and Admetus, Segal remarks “The play is called *Alcestis*, but its real center is probably Admetus, and the real concern is male rather than female experience. Alcestis is there as the object of loss but also as a problem: she displays and embodies a heroism that Admetus himself cannot reach. By shifting the focus gradually, but forcefully, from her experience in the house to Admetus and then to Heracles, Euripides moves from female to male emotions in the face of death.” (Segal 1993, 70)

⁵⁴ “...he found no one but his wife who was willing to die for him and look no more on the sun's light.”

⁵⁵ “He, entertained as a guest in this house of Admetus, shall take the woman from you by force.”

After Apollo's Prologue, Alcestis' choice to die continues to serve as marker of her identity, as does the superlative nature of her uxorial and maternal devotion and sacrifice. Alcestis' exceptional action is also something that differentiates her from the masses of interchangeable Greek wives and women after Apollo's speech and in the mouths of other characters,⁵⁶ until she is forced back into voiceless and passive anonymity at the end of the play.

It has often been noted that superlatives abound in references to Alcestis. Alcestis is frequently called "*ariste*" in connection with her decision to die for Admetus, as in this exchange between the Nurse and the Chorus:

Χορός

ἴστω νυν εὐκλείης γε καθανουμένη
γυνή τ' ἀρίστη τῶν ὑφ' ἡλίῳ μακρῶ.

Chorus-Leader

Let her know then that she will die
glorious and the noblest woman by far
under the sun.

Θεράπεινα

πῶς δ' οὐκ ἀρίστη; τίς δ' ἐναντιώσεται;
τί χρή λεγέσθαι τὴν ὑπερβεβλημένην
γυναῖκα; πῶς δ' ἂν μᾶλλον ἐνδείξαιτό τις
πόσιν προτιμῶσ' ἢ θέλουσ' ὑπερθανεῖν;
καὶ ταῦτα μὲν δὴ πᾶσ' ἐπίσταται πόλις:
ἂ δ' ἐν δόμοις ἔδρασε θαυμάση κλύων

Serving-woman

Noblest indeed! Who will say she is not?
What should we call the woman who
surpasses her? How could any woman
give greater proof that she gives her
husband the place of honor than by
being willing to die for him? This, of

⁵⁶ For example l. 36-7, l. 86, l. 150-7(below), l. 230

(150-7) course, the whole city knows, but what she did within the house you will be amazed to hear.

The Chorus' comments emphasize Alcestis' exceptional nature. Alcestis, having died (καθανουμένη) will become the single *best woman* (γυνή τ' ἀρίστη) distinguishable from all the others (τῶν ὑφ' ἡλίω μακρῶ). For Alcestis, her newly acquired uniqueness and identifiability is inextricably linked to her decision to die; it is something that only happens while she is καθανουμένη.

Wohl argues that Alcestis' superlative nature threatens her husband, in that it demonstrates not only her superiority to other women, but her superiority to him. Alcestis' superiority to Admetus, she argues, threatens the exchange made between Admetus and Alcestis, because it reaches a point where Admetus' shameful life cannot be considered equivalent to, and thus cannot be exchanged for, Alcestis' glorious death. "So superlative is Alcestis that equivalencies become impossible."⁵⁷ Death becomes a contest, one that if Alcestis wins, Admetus must lose. "To the extent that this contest proves Alcestis *ariste*, best, it proves Admetus *kakistos*, worst."⁵⁸

I agree that Alcestis' superlative nature puts her in competition with Admetus, but I disagree that it is her death which gives rise to her superlative nature. Rather,

⁵⁷ Wohl, 139

⁵⁸ Wohl, 139. Wohl usefully lists the instances of superlative adjectives being applied to Alcestis in the play. For example, *ariste* (83, 151, 152, 241, 442, 559, 742, 899.) Bassi notes that the word "ariste" is seldom applied to women in tragedy. She observes that Aeschylus never uses it to refer to a woman, and Sophocles only uses it three times in that context. By contrast, Euripides uses it nine times to describe a woman's heroic nature. (Bassi, 61-62)

it is her decision to die, and the capacity for agency and negotiation that that decision implies, that gives rise both to her superlative nature and to her death. A death, even of an excellent wife, that was entirely under Admetus' control, would not have put husband and wife into competition, and would not have been so problematic. This is the case for Euripidean sacrificial virgins, who have no capacity to negotiate their own deaths (though they will usually agree with their sacrificer's logic in the face of their inevitable slaughter) and whose deaths reinforce, rather than threaten, male homosocial relationships and patriarchal order. Their excellence enhances,⁵⁹ rather than destroys, the male relationships of which the sacrifice is representative.⁶⁰ So it cannot be Alcestis' death, or her excellence, which is threatening to Admetus. It is her capacity for agency and negotiation that are threatening. It is her ability to negotiate her death that, when combined with her excellence, expressed by the insistent use of superlatives, gives her a uniquely identifying and therefore threatening quality, which carries over into the public sphere.⁶¹

Alcestis' decision to die makes her superlative in a way which can be recognized in public, by the whole city (καὶ ταῦτα μὲν δὴ πᾶσ' ἐπίσταται πόλις)(156)⁶², and which brings her and her actions within the household, normally

⁵⁹ For an overview of the sort of excellence in Greek literature, see Finkelberg 2002. For the sort of excellence appropriate to women, see p. 37.

⁶⁰ See Wilkins 182 on the need for perfect victims in Euripides' pattern of sacrifice.

⁶¹ Bassi argues that it is the act of making demands which makes Alcestis unfeminine, and compares Alcestis' demands to Medea's speech, or Clytemnestra's speech in the *Agamemnon*, both of which are acknowledged to have masculine characteristics. (Bassi, 60)

⁶² "This, of course, the whole city knows"

private, into the public sphere. Unlike other tragic wives who die in seclusion, Alcestis dies in the open.

Unlike tragic sacrificial virgins, who are usually killed in public, tragic wives usually commit suicide in private, off stage and inside the house. Loraux lists this hidden quality among the essential characteristics of women's suicide in tragedy. According to her, tragic female suicides 1) retain their femininity, 2) prepare their deaths carefully, 3) die offstage and have their deaths reported in a messenger speech.⁶³ It has often been remarked, however, that Alcestis violates not only the norms of tragic female suicide (or self-sacrifice) but of all tragic death, by dying in the open, on stage. Like the superlatives which attach to Alcestis, Alcestis' public death serves to identify her uniquely, beyond what is accrued by most tragic women in death. Alcestis' public death gives her a public identity as an individual, separate and distinguishable from Admetus and the household of which he alone should properly be the public face.⁶⁴ If Alcestis is allowed to publicly claim an identity apart from Admetus, then there is necessarily an implication that Alcestis, as an individual

⁶³ Loraux 1987, 20

⁶⁴ See Segal 1993 (Chapter 5) for a discussion of gendered interior and exterior spaces in Greek tragedy. Segal observes on the typically masculine nature of public death: "In archaic Greece, male heroic death had a carefully coded spatial representation. The warrior, fallen in battle, outside the city and the house, was carried home by his male companions. Once he had been returned to the civic and domestic space, the women, inside, lamented his death and prepared the corpse for burial by the ritual ablutions and by dressing it for the pyre of the tomb [...] Men, of course, died at home too, but the exemplary male death had a public context." (Segal 1993, 75). Further, on interior space being gendered female and the dangers associated with women venturing beyond the domestic sphere: "As far as literary representation is concerned, both Homer and tragedy *tend* to associate women with domestic and private space, and men with martial and political space; and tragedy *tends* to suggest that the crossing of these lines, while not prohibited or even unusual, may be dangerous or prefigure disaster" (Segal 1993, 75).

separate from the household, might have interests which are also distinct from the household. This very implication is threatening to Admetus and to systems of exchange which rely on the passivity and interchangeability of women.

Alcestis takes full advantage of the platform afforded her by her public death. She makes very clear that she is choosing to die, and that she expects a return on her sacrifice from Admetus:

<p>Ἄδμηθ', ὄραξ γὰρ τὰ μὰ πράγμαθ' ὡς ἔχει, λέξαι θέλω σοι πρὶν θανεῖν ἃ βούλομαι. ἐγὼ σε πρεσβεύουσα κἀντὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς καταστήσασα φῶς τόδ' εἰσορᾶν θνήσκω, παρόν μοι μὴ θανεῖν ὑπὲρ σέθεν, ἀλλ' ἄνδρα τε σχεῖν Θεσσαλῶν ὃν ἤθελον καὶ δῶμα ναίειν ὄλβιον τυραννίδι. κούκ ἠθέλησα ζῆν ἀποσπασθεῖσα σοῦ σὺν παισὶν ὀρφανοῖσιν, οὐδ' ἐφεισάμην ἡβῆς, ἔχουσ' ἐν οἷς ἕτερπόμεν ἐγώ. (280- 90)</p>	<p>Admetus, since you see how things stand with me, I want to tell you before I die what I wish. Because I give you the place of honor and have caused you to look on the light instead of me, I am dying. I need not have died in your place but could have married the Thessalian of my choice and lived in wealth in a royal house. But I refused to live torn from your side with orphaned children and did not spare my young life, though I had much in which I took delight.</p>
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Unlike sacrificial virgins, or wives who commit suicide after their husband's deaths, Alcestis makes clear that she has other options; she doesn't see her death as absolutely necessary: "παρόν μοι μὴ θανεῖν ὑπὲρ σέθεν" (284).⁶⁵ Unlike most suicidal tragic wives, she is not so overcome with grief at her husband's death that she sees

⁶⁵ "I need not have died in your place".

no future but death.⁶⁶ She enjoys living, “ἔχουσ’ ἐν οἷς ἕτερπόμεν ἐγώ” (290)⁶⁷ and giving up life is a sacrifice.⁶⁸ As an independent agent with something of value to offer, she is making a rational choice, and will negotiate the terms of her deal with Admetus until they are sufficiently favourable: “λέξαι θέλω σοι πρὶν θανεῖν ἃ βούλομαι.”(281)⁶⁹ Alcestis makes very clear that she sees her death as an exchange. If her choice to die were only the ultimate enactment of dutiful and wifely womanhood⁷⁰, then she would not require or negotiate anything in exchange for her death, not least because the ideal woman would not even have the power or desire to negotiate.

To enhance her negotiating position, Alcestis makes clear that what she has to offer is of more value than anything Admetus can hope to offer in return: “αἰτήσομαι γάρ σ’ ἀξίαν μὲν οὔποτε/ (ψυχῆς γὰρ οὐδέν ἐστι τιμιώτερον)/ δίκαια δ’, ὡς φήσεις σού:” (300-2).⁷¹ She is offering something of immeasurable value, on which she is

⁶⁶ The division of tragic heroines who die into sacrificial virgins and suicidal wives is Loraux’s (Loraux 1987, *passim*)

⁶⁷ “I had much in which I took delight.”

⁶⁸ For an overview of the hierarchy of nobility of motives for self-caused death in Greek thought, and the moral distinction between self-sacrifice for other and suicide, see Belfiore (Belfiore 2000, 105-6)

⁶⁹ “I want to tell you before I die what I wish.”

⁷⁰ Loraux argues that tragic women only truly become wives when they die, and that in dying “they bring their marriages to fulfillment.” She cites Alcestis as the perfect example of a tragic heroine who fulfills her marriage in death. (Loraux 1987, 28)

⁷¹ “I shall not ask you for the return my act deserves (for nothing is more precious than life), but for what is right, as you will agree.”

nevertheless willing to put a price.⁷² The price will naturally be a high one, and one which Admetus will be in no position to dispute, no matter what her demands.

Alcestis demands that her place in Admetus' household be preserved: to protect her children's (especially her daughter's) status in the household and community,⁷³ and prospects for marriage, she requires that Admetus not remarry (299-323).⁷⁴ She is trying to preserve the control over Admetus that she purchased with her death even after she has died.

Alcestis' unique identity, acquired through her decision to die, is brought out by the laudatory superlatives and by the exceptional openness of her death. This dangerously unique identity and agency, however, compete against an ambiguity and liminality which threaten to overtake Alcestis throughout the play. Wohl notes the emphasis on Alcestis' liminal and ambiguous state at the play's beginning: "Throughout much of the play, Alcestis is simultaneously alive and dead. The

⁷² Dellner observes that Alcestis' gift to Admetus is by definition unrepayable: if he were to die for her in return, he would in fact be rejecting her gift. Alcestis' gift will thus always leave her in a superior position in any gift exchange between them. (Dellner 2000, 8) Padilla has a similar view: "Since Alcestis is providing [Admetus] with a *charis* that he can never properly compensate (no matter how hyperbolic his rhetoric becomes) -- and since his social status in relation to hers in the context of the play's peculiar organization of social relationships has accordingly been adjusted downward -- his grieving for her must be done in a state of open humiliation for the disparity of their gifts to one another." (Padilla, 192)

⁷³ Dellner observes that Alcestis is "negotiating to retain her structural position in the house, and the position of her children. Her body is expendable, her position isn't." (Dellner 2000, 17-8)

⁷⁴ The choice that Alcestis rejects for herself; death of a spouse and then remarriage, is what Alcestis specifically forbids from Admetus. Kaimio notes the explicitness of Alcestis' choice. (Kaimio, 103). She also notices that double standard likely inherent in the perception of this choice: that a wife has no standing to demand monogamy from her husband, even while alive, and that a husband has an absolute right to expect it. (Kaimio, 107)

chorus' first lines call attention to this liminality: no one can say whether Alcestis is alive or dead (80-83); she is a corpse already, it speculates, but not yet buried (93-94), and therefore privately dead but publicly alive, actually dead but officially alive. She is, according to the slave woman, both alive and dead (141). Her preparations for death (narrated by the nurse) culminate in her appearance alive onstage: there she will die once only to come back to life so she can die again.”⁷⁵

In the first instance of ambiguity that Wohl cites, Alcestis' liminal state is juxtaposed with the superlative excellence which confers a unique identity:

ἀλλ' οὐδὲ φίλων πέλας <ἔστ'> οὐδεῖς,	What is more, there are not even any of
ὅστις ἂν εἴποι πότερον φθιμένην	his kin about who might say whether the
χρὴ βασίλειαν πενθεῖν ἢ ζῶσ'	queen has died and one should mourn
ἔτι φῶς λεύσσει Πελίου τόδε παῖς	her or whether Pelias' daughter still
Ἄλκηστις, ἐμοὶ πᾶσί τ' ἀρίστη	lives and looks on the light, Alcestis, the
δόξασα γυνή	best of wives to her husband, as I and
πόσιν εἰς αὐτῆς γεγενῆσθαι. (79-85)	everyone regard her.

In lines 80 and 81, the person who may be alive or dead is identified first as 'βασίλειαν,' which identifies Alcestis obliquely through her relationship with Admetus (she is Queen because she is married to him), and next as 'παῖς Πελίου', which identifies her explicitly through her relationship with her father. The first word of the next line, following immediately after 'παῖς' is 'Ἄλκηστις', and 'ἀρίστη' is in the emphatic final position in that line.

⁷⁵ Wohl, 126

The uncertainty and ambiguity about whether Alcestis is alive or dead at the beginning of the play before her death is, as the above quotation from Wohl suggests, echoed in the uncertainty as to her identity, and hence whether she is in fact alive, at the end of the play. I argue that by the play's conclusion, Alcestis' identity is no longer in a state of tension with her ambiguity. The ambiguity has won out, because the role she is to fulfill is generic: any woman who is a reasonable approximation of Alcestis would suffice.⁷⁶

Though her death was her most powerful bargaining chip, it has an inherent and important flaw: once dead, Alcestis is no longer in a position to enforce the terms of her deal or to object if they are broken. After her death, Alcestis undergoes a process of de-individualization which corresponds to the dismantling of the terms of her deal with Admetus and culminates in her return as a silent, passive and anonymous figure.

Following Alcestis' death, the Chorus offers comfort to Admetus by turning his loss into a commonplace rather than an exceptional one, and assimilating Alcestis to every other dead wife: 'τί νέον τόδε; πολλοὺς ἤδη/ παρέλυσεν θάνατος δάμαρτος'

⁷⁶ Dellner asks, of the tension between Alcestis' individual vs. her generic identity, that the "duplicious rendering of Alcestis' situation unfolds as the agonistic structure of the drama, which reels between two assessments not merely of Alcestis' agency, but her value as well. Is she unique, and therefore incommensurate, or is she, as her dying suggests, the ultimate substitute, and easily replaceable at that?" (Dellner 2000, 2). Dellner equates Alcestis' death with the loss of power and identity. I make the opposite association-- I argue that it is Alcestis' death, or more specifically her capacity to die in exchange for concessions from Admetus, that gives her a unique identity, and that it is the renewed life which negates that capacity to negotiate, which makes her into a generic woman.

(931-2).⁷⁷ Alcestis and her sacrifice are no longer being spoken of in exceptional terms. Alcestis' choice to die is removed from the Chorus' description of her death, and her death is reframed in terms of Admetus' loss.

Admetus picks up on this theme in his response to the Chorus. First, he downplays Alcestis' sacrifice: he argues that her position is better than his, since her suffering has ended, and she died a glorious death, while he is doomed to pain and grief for the rest of his life (935-940). Alcestis' ability to negotiate a deal with Admetus was based on the enormity of her sacrifice, and the incalculable value of her gift: calling her death happy and his life miserable is a preliminary step in the dismantling of the deal, and the retroactive revocation of her power to negotiate.

Second, Admetus de-individualizes Alcestis by making it clear that he is not grieving for her in particular, and the exceptional qualities which have so far served to identify her, but for the inconvenient absence of a woman from his household:

πῶς γὰρ δόμων τῶνδ' εἰσόδους ἀνέξομαι;	Now I understand. For how shall I
τίν' ἂν προσειπῶν, τοῦ δὲ προσρηθῆις ὕπο	endure entering this house? Whom
τερπνῆς τύχοιμ' ἂν εἰσόδου; ποῖ τρέψομαι;	will I greet, by whom be greeted, to
ἢ μὲν γὰρ ἔνδον ἐξελαῖ μ' ἐρημία,	win pleasure in my coming in? Which
γυναικὸς εὐνὰς εὗτ' ἂν εἰσίδω κενὰς	way shall I go? For the desolation
θρόνους τ' ἐν οἴσιν ἴξε καὶ κατὰ στέγας	within will drive me out of doors when
αὐχμηρὸν οὐδας, τέκνα δ' ἀμφὶ γούνασι	I see my wife's bed empty and the
πίπτοντα κλαίῃ μητέρ', οἱ δὲ δεσπότιν	chairs in which she sat and in the

⁷⁷ "This is not something new. Many men ere now have been parted from wives by death."

στένωσιν οἶαν ἐκ δόμων ἀπώλεσαν.
 τὰ μὲν κατ' οἴκους τοιάδ': ἔξωθεν δέ με
 γάμοι τ' ἐλῶσι Θεσσαλῶν καὶ ξύλλογοι
 γυναικοπληθεῖς: οὐ γὰρ ἐξανέξομαι
 λεύσσω δάμαρτος τῆς ἐμῆς ὁμήλικας.
 (941-953)

house the floor unswept and the
 children falling about my knees
 weeping for their mother, while the
 slaves bewail what a mistress they
 have lost from the house. So stand
 affairs within the palace. But outside it
 weddings of Thessalians and
 gatherings full of women will drive me
 back indoors. For I shall not be able to
 endure the sight of women my wife's
 age.

Admetus' lament focuses on the spaces left empty in Alcestis' absence, but he does not use her name. He starts by using indefinite pronouns in his rhetorical questions to allude to her absence. He then expresses his grief in terms of the various positions that now stand empty in his household after Alcestis' death: wife, mother, mistress (γυναικός, μητέρ, δεσπότην). He is suffering a staffing crisis as much as the loss of Alcestis as an individual.

Admetus' Deals

After Apollo's deal with Admetus in the Prologue, which serves as a model of a valid deal reinforcing male homosocial bonds, Admetus enters into negotiation with three people: Alcestis, Pheres, and Heracles. Each of these three deals draws closer to a successful imitation of Apollo's deal with Admetus, and further from the

negative example of Apollo's negotiation with the Fates. Admetus' progress in the play is toward a successful relationship with Heracles, mediated through their mutual deception, and away from his honestly negotiated relationship with Alcestis. Admetus' attempt at a deal with his father Pheres serves as an unsuccessful intermediary step.

Admetus' Deal with Alcestis

Admetus' deal with Alcestis is the wrong sort of deal. Admetus is made weak and passive in its negotiation, in that he is subordinated to Alcestis. Relationships between men and women cannot, by definition, be founded in equality. By entering into a negotiation with her at all, Admetus is ceding his dominant position in the relationship. Any attempt on his part to manoeuvre within the framework of his deal with Alcestis is doomed to failure (as with his proposed creation of a statue-replacement for Alcestis, or his negotiation with Pheres) since by acknowledging the deal he is acknowledging her right and her capacity to negotiate, that is, her agency.⁷⁸ In order for the play's happy ending to come about, and for Admetus to

⁷⁸ Fletcher notes that oaths sworn by women in Euripides have destructive consequences, I believe that the capacity to negotiate is similarly destructive, and for similar reasons. On the representations of women and oaths in Euripides she comments: "To a predominately male audience of the fifth century this degree of female agency would represent a potential threat to the male hegemony that was demonstrably nervous about women's use of language. Classical Greek literature consistently manifests this anxiety in representation of women's speech as duplicitous or dangerous, a stereotype that includes oath-tendering females in tragedy." (Fletcher, 30) While I take Fletcher's point, it is important to reiterate that my own argument for Alcestis is that women's speech does not have to be duplicitous to be dangerous, like Alcestis', and that men's speech can be duplicitous without being dangerous, like Admetus and Heracles'.

regain his proper status, his deal with Alcestis has to be completely unraveled, and its terms reversed.

Admetus is passive in his negotiations with Alcestis in that he simply accepts her terms, rather than proposing any of his own. He readily accepts that his way of life will forever after be shaped and constricted by Alcestis' decision to die and the terms that she proposes:

σοῦ γὰρ φθιμένης οὐκέτ' ἄν εἶην:	For if you are gone I live no more.
ἐν σοὶ δ' ἔσμεν καὶ ζῆν καὶ μὴ:	Whether we live or not is in your power,
σὴν γὰρ φιλίαν σεβόμεσθα. (277-9)	for it is your love we hold in reverence.

He is permanently granting to Alcestis ultimate authority over his life. By agreeing to abide by her terms, indeed by enthusiastically embracing them, even while she is dead, he is permanently giving up any possibility of renegotiation. Even while absent, Alcestis will maintain a life-like authority, and Admetus will be reduced to death-like and feminine obedience. Though dead, Alcestis will continue to exist as authoritative words while Admetus will be made voiceless by his inability to speak to or engage in further negotiation with her.⁷⁹

The most important of Alcestis' terms is her prohibition on Admetus' remarriage. Admetus eagerly agrees to this condition. While repeating her demands back to her, Admetus puts the prohibition against remarriage first:

⁷⁹ Luschnig notes that the "fact that [Alcestis] imposes terms allows her to remain in control of the plot. It also gives substance to the life she is leaving and to which she will return, not only as a statue, but as a woman. It is Admetus whose existence needs substantiation before it can be improved." (Luschnig 1995, 8) I agree that in the first instance, Alcestis' imposition of terms is an attempt to retain control after her death. However, I will argue that this is an unsuccessful attempt, which does not give any substance to the life to which she returns.

ἔσται τάδ', ἔσται, μὴ τρέσης: ἐπεὶ σ' ἐγὼ
 καὶ ζῶσαν εἶχον, καὶ θανοῦσ' ἐμὴ γυνὴ
 μόνη κεκλήση, κοῦτις ἀντὶ σοῦ ποτε
 τόνδ' ἄνδρα νύμφη Θεσσαλὶς
 προσφθέγγεται.
 οὐκ ἔστιν οὕτως οὔτε πατρὸς εὐγενοῦς
 οὔτ' εἶδος ἄλλως ἐκπρεπεστάτη γυνή.
 ἄλλῃ δὲ παίδων: τῶνδ' ὄνησιν εὐχομαι
 θεοῖς γενέσθαι: σοῦ γὰρ οὐκ ὠνήμεθα.
 οἴσω δὲ πένθος οὐκ ἐτήσιον τὸ σὸν
 ἀλλ' ἔστ' ἂν αἰὼν οὐμὸς ἀντέχη, γύναι,
 στυγῶν μὲν ἢ μ' ἔτικτεν, ἐχθαίρων δ'
 ἐμὸν
 πατέρα: λόγῳ γὰρ ἦσαν οὐκ ἔργῳ φίλοι.
 σὺ δ' ἀντιδοῦσα τῆς ἐμῆς τὰ φίλτατα
 ψυχῆς ἔσωσας. ἄρά μοι στένειν πάρα
 τοιᾶσδ' ἀμαρτάνοντι συζύγου σέθεν; (328-
 42)

It shall be so, fear not, it shall be so.
 While you lived you were my wife, and
 in death you alone will bear that title.
 No Thessalian bride will ever speak to
 me in place of you: none is of so noble
 parentage or so beautiful as that. And of
 children I have enough. I pray to the
 gods that I may reap the benefit of them,
 as I have not of you. I shall mourn you
 not a year only but as long as my life
 shall last, hating her who bore me and
 loathing my father. For their love was in
 word, not deed. But you sacrificed what
 is most precious so that I might live. Do I
 not have cause to mourn when I have
 lost such a wife as you?

In her demands, Alcestis was particularly concerned with having her place in the household usurped, and with the consequences for her children (particularly for her daughter) of being under the authority of a step-mother. Admetus promises not only that he will not have another wife, and have more children, but also that Alcestis will remain his wife, even in death: “καὶ θανοῦσ' ἐμὴ γυνή/μόνη

κεκλήση,”(329-30)⁸⁰ With a living wife (see the chapter on *Medea*), or a wife whose death he demanded rather than negotiated, he would have been free to remarry. Admetus is promising greater loyalty to Alcestis in death than she was strictly owed in life.

Admetus’ promise not to remarry cuts him off from the very type of deal that Apollo’s model suggests he should be making: a deal exclusively between men, where a woman is the object of exchange who cements the relationship, but has no part in negotiating it. The exchange of a woman between a son-in-law and a father-in-law is the standard form of this exchange. Keeping to his deal with Alcestis, Admetus can never again enter into a relationship with a new father-in-law.

Admetus is also constrained in his future role as father-in-law. He is implicitly obligated to conform to Alcestis’ hopes for the marriages that will be arranged for their children. Alcestis explains her expectations for the marriages of her son and her daughter:

<p>ἐχθρὰ γὰρ ἢ 'πιοῦσα μητρὶὰ τέκνοις τοῖς πρόσθ', ἐχίδνης οὐδὲν ἠπιωτέρα. καὶ παῖς μὲν ἄρσιν πατέρ' ἔχει πύργον μέγαν</p> <p>[ὄν καὶ προσεῖπε καὶ προσερρήθη πάλιν]: σὺ δ', ὦ τέκνον μοι, πῶς κορευθήσῃ καλῶς;</p>	<p>For a step-mother comes in as a foe to the former children, no kinder than a viper. And though a son has in his father a bulwark of defense, how will you, my daughter, grow to an honored womanhood? What sort of step-mother will you get? I fear she will cast some</p>
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⁸⁰ “and in death you alone will be my wife.”

ποίας τυχοῦσα συζύγου τῷ σῷ πατρί;	disgraceful slur on your reputation and
μή σοί τιν' αἰσχρὰν προσβαλοῦσα	in the prime of your youth destroy your
κληδόνα	chances of marriage. For your mother
ἤβης ἐν ἀκμῇ σους διαφθείρη γάμους.	will never see you married, never stand
οὐ γάρ σε μήτηρ οὔτε νυμφεύσει ποτέ	by to encourage you in childbirth, my
οὔτ' ἐν τόκοισι σοῖσι θαρσυνεῖ, τέκνον,	daughter, where nothing is better than a
παροῦσ', ἴν' οὐδὲν μητρὸς εὐμενέστερον.	mother's goodwill.

(309-319)

Alcestis allows Admetus his relationship with his son (she says that fathers serve as protection for their sons), but keeps for herself the most critical role in their relationship with their daughter, who is the future object of exchange in the imagined marriage. By suggesting that a step-mother would ruin her daughter's chances for a good marriage (even while their son would be protected by Admetus) she is denying that Admetus would have the capacity to negotiate a good marriage for their daughter. By preventing Admetus from remarrying, she is keeping control of her daughter's marriage. Alcestis gets credit and control of her daughter's marriage because of her decision to die, which kept Admetus alive, and because of her capacity to negotiate the terms of her death, which protects her daughter so that she will one day be in a position to marry well.

As long as Admetus engages in negotiation with Alcestis at all, he cannot escape the passivity which is the necessary consequence of Alcestis' agency.⁸¹ Even

⁸¹ Bassi notes that, in mourning for Alcestis "Admetus takes on the role of his female literary antecedents. And it is important to stress that this role is not that of an

Admetus' capacity to merely agree to the terms of the deal is reduced: the Chorus eagerly accepts on Admetus' behalf before he gets the chance to respond to her demands. When he does respond, as I noted above, he does not argue his own position or attempt to get Alcestis to compromise hers, but rather willingly offers Alcestis even more than she asked.

Admetus' (Lack of a) Deal with Pheres

Pheres, Admetus' father, shows up at Alcestis' funeral with gifts for Alcestis' corpse. Admetus rejects the gifts, and turns his father away from the funeral, angry that Pheres rejected the deal that Alcestis accepted: to die in Admetus' place. Admetus and Pheres argue, and Admetus disowns his father, declaring that he will accept the dead Alcestis as father in Pheres' place (630-650). The deal that Admetus and Pheres did not make is at the forefront throughout their conversation. The imagined happier consequences of this unrealized deal are contrasted with the unhappy reality of Admetus' actual deal with Alcestis.⁸²

Antigone, ie, the unmarried female of heroic stature, but that of the dependent wife and mother.” (Bassi , 69) Wohl notes “Even in the supreme act of uxorial devotion, a woman would seem to be a dangerous gift-giver, as Admetus loses not only his reputation, but also his masculinity and legitimacy.” (Wohl, xvi). Murnaghan notes that Admetus is also cast in the feminine role when he casts Alcestis choice to die as a betrayal and begs her not to leave him. In so doing Admetus is using the conventions of lamentation, a speech act which is very strongly gendered female. (Murnaghan, 113)

⁸² Burnett comments on the reintroduction at this point in the narrative of Pheres' past refusal to make a deal with Admetus: “The refusals of Pheres and his wife, in Alcestis, are placed well back in the past, that they should not interfere with the necessity of the day's death, but as soon as Alcestis is gone, they are disinterred with peculiar violence and allowed to interrupt the funeral in a shocking way. Pheres re-

<p>ἔδειξας εἰς ἔλεγχον ἐξελθὼν ὃς εἶ, καί μ' οὐ νομίζω παῖδα σὸν πεφυκέναι. ἧ τᾶρα πάντων διαπρέπεις ἀψυχία, ὃς τηλικόσδ' ὦν κάπὶ τέρμ' ἤκων βίου οὐκ ἠθέλησας οὐδ' ἐτόλμησας θανεῖν τοῦ σοῦ πρὸ παιδός, ἀλλὰ τήνδ' εἰάσατε γυναῖκ' ὀθνεῖαν, ἣν ἐγὼ καὶ μητέρα καὶ πατέρ' ἂν ἐνδίκως ἂν ἠγοίμην μόνην. καίτοι καλόν γ' ἂν τόνδ' ἀγῶν' ἠγωνίσω, τοῦ σοῦ πρὸ παιδός κατθανῶν, βραχὺς δέ σοι πάντως ὁ λοιπὸς ἦν βιώσιμος χρόνος. (640-650)</p>	<p>When you were put to the test you showed your true nature, and I do not count myself as your son. You are, you know, truly superlative in cowardice; for though you are so old and have come to the end of your life, yet you refused and had not the courage to die for your own son, but you and your wife let this woman, who was no blood relative, do so. I shall consider her with perfect justice to be both mother and father to me. And yet it would have been a noble contest to enter, dying for your son, and in any case the time you had left to live was short.</p>
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Admetus argues that the deal that Alcestis accepted would have more properly been concluded with Pheres, a man with whom, like Apollo, he has a long-standing relationship and an expectation of mutual obligation. Because, as Admetus sees it, Pheres has not lived (or died) up to his side of the deal, Admetus is no longer willing to fulfil his obligations to his father upon his death; care of his body and burial (665).

enacts his earlier refusal to die for his son in a scene whose only strained parallel is Creon's in the *Phoenissae*." (Burnett 1971, 26)

The bond between father and son is broken because Alcestis, not Pheres, made a deal with Admetus.⁸³

Admetus' failed deal with Pheres was closer to Apollo's model of a desirable deal, in the sense that it was a negotiation with another man, whose relationship to him is distinct from and existed prior to Admetus' relationship with Alcestis. But even if Admetus and Pheres had made a deal, it might still have been problematic in so far as it accepted the premise of Apollo's deal with the Fates: that someone must die in Admetus' place.

As the situation stands, the fact of Alcestis' agency in her deal with Admetus stands in the way of any reconciliation between father and son. Pheres speaks to his son in a way that emphasizes Alcestis' agency. She overtakes Admetus in his father's attention; Pheres moves very quickly (in the space of a few lines) from addressing Admetus directly and consoling his son for his loss, to the praise of Alcestis, to giving Admetus instructions regarding Alcestis' body, to addressing the dead Alcestis herself:

ἤκω κακοῖσι σοῖσι συγκάμνων, τέκνον:	I come to share in your trouble, my son.
ἔσθλης γάρ, οὐδείς ἀντερεῖ, καὶ	For you have lost, as no one will deny, a
σώφρονος	noble and virtuous wife. Yet you must
γυναικὸς ἡμάρτηκας. ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν	bear these things though they are hard
φέρειν ἀνάγκη καίπερ ὄντα δύσφορα.	to bear. Now take this finery, and let it

⁸³ In an article on marriage in Euripides, Seaford notes that it is an unusual feature of Alcestis that a man, rather than a woman, is alienated from his natal family "with the irony that the continuity of the *oikos* for which Alkestis dies is combined with total estrangement with the male line of descent." (Seaford 1990, 166)

<p>δέχου δὲ κόσμον τόνδε, καὶ κατὰ χθονὸς ἴτω. τὸ ταύτης σῶμα τιμᾶσθαι χρεῶν, ἥτις γε τῆς σῆς προύθανε ψυχῆς, τέκνον, καὶ μ' οὐκ ἄπαιδ' ἔθηκεν οὐδ' εἶασε σοῦ στερέντα γήρα πενθίμω καταφθίνειν, πάσαις δ' ἔθηκεν εὐκλεέστερον βίον γυναιξίν, ἔργον τλαῖσα γενναῖον τόδε. ὦ τόνδε μὲν σώσασ', ἀναστήσασα δὲ ἡμᾶς πίτνοντας, χαῖρε, κἄν Ἄιδου δόμοις εὖ σοι γένοιτο. φημί τοιούτους γάμους λύειν βροτοῖσιν, ἢ γαμεῖν οὐκ ἄξιον. (614-628)</p>	<p>be buried with her. We must show honor to her corpse seeing that she died to save your life, my son, and did not leave me childless or let me waste away in a stricken old age bereft of you. She has given the lives of all women a fairer repute by daring to do this noble deed. <i>To Alcestis</i> You that both saved this man's life and raised me up when I was falling: farewell! In the house of Hades may it go well with you! A marriage like this, I maintain, is a boon for mortals, and if not, it is never worthwhile to marry.</p>
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Pheres goes beyond acknowledging Alcestis' decision to die and praising her for it. He frames her decision to die as a deal between the two of them, in which Admetus' life is the good which is exchanged: “ὦ τόνδε μὲν σώσασ', ἀναστήσασα δὲ/ ἡμᾶς πίτνοντας, χαῖρε...”⁸⁴ (625-6). Pheres' attempt to build a relationship with his son which is premised on the assumption that Admetus is an object he has received in an exchange with Alcestis is doomed to failure, because, as Apollo's model in the Prologue, it is a deal negotiated with a woman that assumes female agency.

⁸⁴ “You that both saved this man's life and raised me up when I was falling, farewell”

Admetus' rejection of his father is also premised upon Alcestis' agency and power to negotiate, and his (Admetus') relationship with her. Admetus rejects his bond with his father in favour of his relationship with Alcestis. He claims that his parents cannot have had any biological relationship with him, since they refused to die for him (636-40). Since Alcestis did agree to die for him, he accepts her as both mother and father in their place: 'ἦν ἐγὼ καὶ μητέρα/ καὶ πατέρ' ἄν ἐνδίκως ἄν ἡγοίμην μόνην.'⁸⁵(646-7) In replacing his father with Alcestis, he is replacing someone who properly has authority over him (Pheres) with someone over whom he should have authority (Alcestis). Admetus' relationship with his father is shaped, and destroyed, by his deal with Alcestis. Rather than mitigating the passivity that Admetus suffers as a result of his deal with Alcestis, his failed exchange with Pheres exacerbates it.⁸⁶

Admetus' Deal with Heracles

In his deal with Heracles, Admetus succeeds in making the right sort of deal according to Apollo's model. He prioritizes the obligation of *xenia* (bonds between

⁸⁵ "I shall consider her with perfect justice to be both mother and father to me"

⁸⁶ Wohl argues that "Alcestis' death preserves not only the link between father and son, the vertical axis of the *oikos*, but also its horizontal axis, matrimony. For Alcestis dies not only to save her children, but also to save her husband." (Wohl, 136) I think rather that Alcestis' negotiation of the terms of her death, while perhaps preserving the link between Admetus and his son, destroys the father-son link between Pheres and Admetus. Wohl does not devote adequate attention to the role of Alcestis' capacity to negotiate in the destruction of the relationship between Pheres and Admetus. Wohl does acknowledge, however, that Admetus' disowning of Pheres in favour of Alcestis argues that Alcestis is appropriating Admetus' patriline in favour and replacing it with a matriline, and that while this has the immediate effect of preserving succession, it does constitute a further problem which needs to be resolved through Admetus' reclamation of his patriline (Wohl, 138-9).

men, specifically his relationship with Heracles) over the terms of his deal with Alcestis. Discarding the terms of his inherently unequal deal with Alcestis, he engages in a deceptive (but equal and mutual) exchange with Heracles. He uses Alcestis as the object which facilitates his deception of Heracles, and in so doing returns her to her proper role as an object whose use facilitates a relationship between men.

Admetus uses evasion and wordplay to deny the fact of Alcestis' death to Heracles. He famously identifies Alcestis only as a generic 'γυνή' (531) when Heracles asks the identity of the dead woman, and describes her relationship with the family as "ὄθνεϊος, ἄλλως δ' ἦν ἀναγκαῖα δόμοις" (533).⁸⁷ He denies her individuality and identity, and her specific importance to the household, even as he denies the fact of her death, through which she achieved that identity and importance. Admetus redefines Alcestis in terms of her transfer from her father's household to his: "πατρὸς θανόντος ἐνθάδ' ὠρφανεύετο" (535) in response to Heracles' question about how she came to die in Admetus' house. Her choice to die and which resulted in her absence from the house is erased in favour of the transfer between men which brought her into his household. This identification of Alcestis in terms of exchange between men emphasizes even further the erasure of her identity and the significance of her choice to die.

⁸⁷ "After her father died, she spent her orphan years here." Hartigan observes: "Thus by clever wordplay Admetos has denied the fact of Alkestis' death, revealing the truth of her prophecy (381). By his action he is also denying the validity of that surprising on-stage death, the event which we all shared. There will be few more blatant deceits or denials in Greek tragedy." (Hartigan, 27)

When the Chorus questions Admetus' deception of Heracles and his decision to act as a host in his time of grief, he justifies his actions in terms of *xenia*.

<p>ἀλλ' εἰ δόμων σφε καὶ πόλεως ἀπήλασα ξένον μολόντα, μᾶλλον ἄν μ' ἐπήνεσας; οὐ δῆτ', ἐπεὶ μοι συμφορὰ μὲν οὐδὲν ἄν μείων ἐγίγνετ', ἀξενώτερος δ' ἐγώ. καὶ πρὸς κακοῖσιν ἄλλο τοῦτ' ἄν ἦν κακόν, δόμους καλεῖσθαι τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἐχθροξένους. αὐτὸς δ' ἀρίστου τοῦδε τυγχάνω ξένου, ὅταν ποτ' Ἄργους διψίαν ἔλθω χθόνα. (553-560)</p>	<p>Yet if I had driven from my house and city a friend who had just arrived, would you have praised me more? No, indeed, since my misfortune would have been in no way lessened, and I would have been less hospitable. And in addition to my ills we would have the further ill that my house would be called a spurner of guests. I myself find in this man the best of hosts whenever I go to thirsty Argos.</p>
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Alcestis doesn't enter into Admetus' justification of his behaviour; he doesn't mention her name, or even allude to her. Her death is now defined entirely in terms of its effect on him (μοι συμφορὰ). When considering his own circumstances, Admetus decides that it is best to follow the demands of *xenia* and protect his relationship with Heracles. He justifies himself to the chorus, not in terms of what Alcestis would have wanted or what is appropriate for her, but in terms of his relationship with Heracles.

Admetus responds to the Chorus' continued questioning and focus on his present state of grief by reiterating his overriding commitment to the principles of *xenia* and maintaining his relationship with Heracles.

<p>οὐκ ἄν ποτ' ἠθέλησεν εἰσελθεῖν δόμους, εἰ τῶν ἐμῶν τι πημάτων ἐγνώρισεν. καὶ τῷ μὲν, οἴμαι, δρῶν τάδ' οὐ φρονεῖν δοκῶ οὐδ' αἰνέσει με: τὰμὰ δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται μέλαθρ' ἀπωθεῖν οὐδ' ἀτιμάζειν ξένους. (563-7)</p>	<p>He would never have consented to enter the house if he had known anything of my sorrow. And no doubt someone will think that in doing this I am being foolish and will not approve of me. But my house does not know how to reject or dishonor guests.</p>
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He mentions his pain only as something that, if known, would be an impediment to acting as Heracles' host. He rejects the public acknowledgment of Alcestis' death, and his indebtedness to her, which was a critical feature of Alcestis' negotiating position and the ongoing enforcement of the terms of their deal. Public acknowledgement of her death, her decision to die, their negotiation, and Admetus' death is entirely incompatible with the deceptive anonymity that Admetus needs to impose on Alcestis in order to act as a good host to Heracles.

Despite their initial scepticism, after Admetus' explanations the chorus approves of Admetus' deceptive hospitality: his reframing of the situation to erase his deal with Alcestis has been successful, and is reflected in the Chorus' description:

<p>καὶ νῦν δόμον ἀμπετάσας δέξατο ξεῖνον νοτερῷ βλεφάρῳ,</p>	<p>And now, throwing open the gates of his house, he has received a guest though</p>
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<p>τᾶς φίλας κλαίων ἀλόχου νέκυν ἐν δῶμασιν ἀρτιθανῆ: τὸ γὰρ εὐγενὲς ἐκφέρεται πρὸς αἰδῶ. ἐν τοῖς ἀγαθοῖσι δὲ πάντ' ἔνε- στιν: σοφίας ἄγαμαι. πρὸς δ' ἐμᾶ ψυχᾶ θράσος ἦσται θεοσεβῆ φῶτα κεδνὰ πράξειν. (597-605)</p>	<p>his own eyes were wet, weeping for the loss of his dear wife so recently perished in his house. For his noble nature runs unbridled towards pity and respect. All that is good lives in the hearts of those who are nobly born. I marvel at his wisdom. And sure confidence sits in my heart that the god-fearing man will prosper.</p>
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That Admetus is hosting Heracles while grieving for the unnamed Alcestis (ἀλόχου) is now a sign of his exceptional nobility, rather than an inappropriate inconsistency with custom or with his deal with Alcestis. His receiving Heracles is a sign that he is noble 'εὐγενὲς' and acting with appropriate shame/respect (αἰδῶ). That they now heap this praise on Admetus shows the Chorus endorses Admetus' concern for his relationship with Heracles at the expense of his promises and obligations to Alcestis, to the extent that they either forget or are willing to ignore those obligations completely.

Admetus' deception of Heracles is presented to him as a lavish act of *xenia*. When Heracles asks whether Admetus has deceived him about Alcestis' death, the servant replies that yes, 'ἄγαν ἐκεῖνός ἐστ' ἄγαν φιλόξενος'(809) ⁸⁸ his master is extremely hospitable (lit. loving of those with whom he shares a bond of *xenia*).

⁸⁸ "My master is too, too hospitable."

Heracles does not immediately accept that Admetus' act was proper, but is quickly brought from a position of scepticism about Admetus' deception to an attitude of admiration and indebtedness. Halfway through the stichomythia, just as Heracles is being made to appreciate the fact of Alcestis' death and Admetus' deception, he asks whether Admetus has done something terrible to him, 'ἀλλ' ἢ πέπονθα δεῖν' ὑπὸ ξένων ἐμῶν;' (816)⁸⁹ Even at this point of greatest doubt, he still refers to Admetus as his *xenos*.

The answer to Heracles' question, whether Admetus has done something bad to him, will in the end prove to be "no." Only a few lines after asking his question, Heracles explains to the servant that it was because of Admetus' deception, which he now accepts was a favour to him, that he feels obligated to bring Alcestis back (826-829). Admetus' deception was not a bad thing, but a *xenia* gift, which requires a similarly extravagant and deceptive gift in exchange -- the return of Alcestis.

When Admetus justifies his deception to Heracles, he also appeals to the principles of *xenia*:

<p>οὔτοι σ' ἀτίζων οὐδ' ἐν ἐχθροῖσιν τιθεῖς ἔκρυψ' ἐμῆς γυναικὸς ἀθλίου τύχας. ἀλλ' ἄλγος ἄλγει τοῦτ' ἂν ἦν προσκεείμενον, εἷ του πρὸς ἄλλου δώμαθ' ὠρμήθης ξένου:</p>	<p>I was not slighting you or regarding you as an enemy when I concealed from you my wife's unhappy fate. Rather, it would have been pain added to pain if you had departed for some other friend's house; and it was already enough for me to</p>
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⁸⁹ "But has my host done a terrible thing to me?"

ἄλις δὲ κλαίειν τοῦμόν ἦν ἐμοὶ κακόν. lament my loss.

(1037-1041)

Admetus' justification answers any objection that Heracles may still be entertaining to the deception, by making the deception into an act of friendship and hospitality, not one that treats Heracles as an enemy or dishonours him (1037). Admetus frames his hospitable gesture to Heracles in such a way as to affirm their equality in inviting a reciprocal gesture of deceptive gift-giving.⁹⁰

Heracles' Deal

Heracles repays Admetus' deception with a mirroring deception of his own. Where Admetus used the memory of Alcestis to enable his deception of Heracles, erasing her ability to negotiate by ignoring his deal with her, and erasing her identity by making her into an anonymous and generic woman,⁹¹ Heracles makes her silent and passive anonymity into a physical reality, by retrieving her in physical

⁹⁰ Dellner argues that Admetus' exchange with Heracles is equivalent to Admetus' exchange with Alcestis, in that both incur debts that Admetus can never hope to repay (Dellner 2000, 10). In my view the two exchanges are crucially different: Heracles and Admetus have a mutual exchange and engage in mutual deception, and both use Alcestis as their medium of deceptive exchange. Heracles and Admetus give gifts, Alcestis makes demands; that is, Heracles and Admetus benefit each other through their exchange (gifts), and Alcestis offers a sacrifice in return for a sacrifice (demand).

⁹¹ O'Higgins comments on the Admetus' process replacing Alcestis with an idealized substitute: "In the course of the play Admetus plans to replace his living wife with a lifeless (but glamorous) substitute: before her death he promises to array her corpse in splendid clothing; and later (but still during Alcestis' life) he vows to console himself with a crafted replica of his wife. At the play's end, the "heroine" returns as a speechless and veiled prize, won by Heracles. The audience may well suppose that, far from being a triumphant return from the underworld, a classic heroic feat in Greek and many other traditions, this "return" is in fact a regression to the suspect automaton which instituted and defined the race of women." (O'Higgins, 78)

form from the underworld. He returns her veiled and physically indistinguishable from any other woman, silent so that she is unable either to assert her identity or to negotiate her to improve her position.⁹² Heracles hands her over to Admetus as his property, whom he chooses to give and whom Admetus chooses to accept, in an exchange in which her actual identity is demonstrably incidental: Heracles is deceiving Admetus as to Alcestis' identity the whole time the exchange is taking place. Alcestis' ability to negotiate, which stemmed from her ability to choose to die publicly and openly, is completely removed when her life is restored and she is returned to Admetus as both the physical sign of the relationship between the men and the locus of the mutual deception which defines that relationship.⁹³

When Heracles returns to Admetus' house after retrieving Alcestis from Hades, he tells Admetus that he objects to Admetus' deception about Alcestis' death, and presents the deception as something that could threaten their friendship:

φίλον πρὸς ἄνδρα χρὴ λέγειν ἐλευθέρως,	One should speak frankly to a friend,
Ἄδμητε, μομφὰς δ' οὐχ ὑπὸ σπλάγχνοις	Admetus, and not silently store up
ἔχειν	reproaches in the heart. I thought it
σιγῶντ'. ἐγὼ δὲ σοῖς κακοῖσιν ἠξίουν	right that I should stand by you in your

⁹² Both Rabinowitz and Foley comment on the resemblance of this scene to a marriage or betrothal ceremony, in which Heracles is giving Alcestis away to Admetus. (Foley 2001, 324-5, Rabinowitz 1993, 90)

⁹³ Segal argues that over the course of the play Admetus undergoes a transformative grieving process, which is arrested by Alcestis' return. From that he argues that Admetus makes the wrong choice in accepting Alcestis from Heracles and prioritizing his relationship with Heracles over his promises to Alcestis. (Segal 1992, 144) I disagree, and argue that Admetus makes the right choice, and in accepting Alcestis from Heracles is engaging in the sort of deal that Apollo's model suggests he should.

<p>ἐγγὺς παρεστὼς ἐξετάζεσθαι φίλος: σὺ δ' οὐκ ἔφραζες σῆς προκείμενον νέκυν γυναικός, ἀλλὰ μ' ἐξένιζες ἐν δόμοις, ὡς δὴ θυραίου πῆματος σπουδὴν ἔχων. κᾶστεψα κρᾶτα καὶ θεοῖς ἐλειψάμην σπονδὰς ἐν οἴκοις δυστυχοῦσι τοῖσι σοῖς. καὶ μέμφομαι μὲν, μέμφομαι, παθῶν τάδε: οὐ μὴν σε λυπεῖν <γ'> ἐν κακοῖσι βούλομαι. (1007-1019)</p>	<p>misfortune and give proof that I was your friend. Yet you did not tell me your wife was laid out for burial but feasted me in the house, saying that you were busy with a grief not your own. So I garlanded my head and poured libations to the gods in your house in its hour of misfortune. I do object to this treatment, indeed I do. Yet I do not want to cause you pain in the midst of your trouble.</p>
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Heracles' objection to Admetus' deception is disingenuous. As Heracles explained to the Therapon before he left to retrieve Alcestis, it was Admetus' gesture of deceptive hospitality that caused him to set out to retrieve Alcestis in order to repay Admetus' gesture. In the course of that conversation, Heracles had already come around to the view that Admetus' deception was a noble gesture of excessive hospitality to which his response was not offence, but reciprocation.

Heracles' expression of disapproval of Admetus' deception is a prelude to Heracles' own deception of Admetus. Heracles presents an anonymous Alcestis to her husband, persuading Admetus to accept her into his household as a servant by telling him that he won her as a prize in athletic competition(1020-1036). By deceiving Admetus into unknowingly accepting the gift of his wife, Heracles simultaneously repays both Admetus' hospitality and his deception.

The exchange of Alcestis completes the deal between Admetus and Heracles, confirming their capacity to engage in legitimate deals, and completely negates Alcestis' capacity to engage in deals, placing her firmly in the role of exchanged object.⁹⁴

The story that Heracles invents about Alcestis reinforces her passivity and her lack of agency. Heracles' story equates Alcestis with animals that are exchanged between men. He asks Admetus to keep Alcestis for him while he retrieves the Thracian mares. The real errand that he uses as a pretext for depositing an anonymous woman with Admetus is a reference to his obligation to Eurystheus and the series of deals between men associated with that mythic tradition. Alcestis is then associated with the objects and animals that are shuffled between men as part of Heracles' labours. In the invented athletic competition in which he claims to have won Alcestis, Heracles says horses, cattle, and women were all awarded as prizes:

τὰ μὲν γὰρ κοῦφα τοῖς νικῶσιν ἦν Those victorious in the light events won

⁹⁴ Rabinowitz comments on the way that the interaction between Heracles and Admetus turns Alcestis from subject to generic object following her potentially threatening return from the underworld: "The residual power nonetheless immanent in such a figure is controlled by making Alcestis the "subject" of a joke and turning her into an object in an exchange of gifts between men. In this way, we will see, the play deprives her of her potential strength and renders her a cipher -- meaning zero, and thus empty but nonetheless crucial as a placeholder. Having been glorified (or, as I claim, fetishized) for her self-abnegation in sacrifice, she is turned into a simulacrum, the imitation of her own rival." (Rabinowitz 1993, 72) While I agree with her assertion that Alcestis is made into a meaningless placeholder, I disagree that the exchange interaction between Heracles and Admetus which accomplishes this transformation is best understood as a "joke" (as Rabinowitz does throughout her argument). By analyzing it instead as a deception, and part of system of deceptive exchanges in the rest of the play, the scene is better integrated into the rest of the play, and its importance is much easier to appreciate.

<p>ἵππους ἄγεσθαι, τοῖσι δ' αὖ τὰ μείζονα νικῶσι, πυγμαῖν καὶ πάλην, βουφόρβια: γυνὴ δ' ἐπ' αὐτοῖς εἶπετ': ἐντυχόντι δὲ αἰσχρὸν παρεῖναι κέρδος ἦν τόδ' εὐκλεές. ἀλλ', ὥσπερ εἶπον, σοὶ μέλειν γυναῖκα χρή: οὐ γὰρ κλοπαίαν ἀλλὰ σὺν πόνῳ λαβῶν ἤκω: χρόνῳ δὲ καὶ σύ μ' αἰνέσεις ἴσως (1029-1036).</p>	<p>horses as a prize, while those in the greater events, boxing and wrestling, won cattle, with a woman in addition. Since I happened to be there, it seemed a shame to let slip this chance for profit combined with glory. But as I said, you must care for the woman. For I did not steal her but won her with labor. Perhaps in time you will praise me for this.</p>
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In Heracles' fiction, Alcestis has come into his possession just as a cow or a horse might; her agency is as irrelevant as theirs.

Alcestis' reality is reflected by the fictional association with the exchanged animals. Like the imagined animals, Alcestis is silent.⁹⁵ Like an animal, Alcestis is being used not as an individual but as an example of her type: a cow may be of better or worse quality, but one is not normally overly concerned with its specific identity or individuality, other than for the purposes of establishing who owns it. Alcestis, while veiled, is not Alcestis, but someone whose characteristics are pleasingly or distressingly similar to the real Alcestis (who conforms most closely to the ideal specifications of her breed as woman and wife). Admetus compares the veiled

⁹⁵ For an alternative explanation of Alcestis' silence based on its ritual necessity, see Betts 1965.

woman to Alcestis' body, making clear that she is important not for herself, but for her resemblance to Alcestis:

<p>σὺ δ', ὦ γύναι, ἥτις ποτ' εἶ σύ, ταῦτ' ἔχουσ' Ἀλκήστιδι μορφῆς μέτρ' ἴσθι, καὶ προσήϊξαι δέμας. οἴμοι. κόμιζε πρὸς θεῶν ἐξ ὀμμάτων γυναῖκα τήνδε, μή μ' ἔλης ἠρημένον. δοκῶ γὰρ αὐτὴν εἰσορῶν γυναῖχ' ὄρᾶν ἐμήν: θολοῖ δὲ καρδίαν, ἐκ δ' ὀμμάτων πηγαὶ κατερρώγασιν: ὦ τλήμων ἐγώ, ὥς ἄρτι πένθους τοῦδε γεύομαι πικροῦ.</p> <p>(1061-9)</p>	<p>Woman, whoever you are, know that in shape you are like Alcestis and resemble her in appearance. What agony! Take this woman out of my sight, by the gods, do not slay again one who is dead! For when I see her I think I see my wife. She makes my heart pound, and tears stream from my eyes. Oh luckless me! It is but now that I taste the full bitterness of this grief!</p>
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That the veiled woman is in fact Alcestis does give her a greater claim to an individual identity than if she were, as Admetus is led to assume, a woman who strongly resembles Alcestis.⁹⁶ That the resemblance is in this case perfect simply means that Alcestis conforms as closely as possible to the ideal woman envisaged by Admetus, and so will be able to fill the empty slot reserved for a woman in Admetus' household.⁹⁷ Another woman might have filled this slot almost as well; the

⁹⁶ Luschnig comments on Alcestis in disguise and the “ambiguity of her resurrection”: “Only by appearing to be somebody else can she make herself not only appreciated but even *known*.” (Luschnig 1995, 10) I am arguing the opposite point: that by appearing to be herself, Alcestis demonstrates the relative unimportance of her identity and the loss of the recognition she had enjoyed before her death.

⁹⁷ Stieber addresses this theme in an article on the statue motif in Alcestis. She argues that the audience is set up throughout the play to see statue-like qualities in

recognition of her individuality that Alcestis gained with her death has been lost, once she is no longer dead.

Conclusion

In *Alcestis*, Admetus' deal with Heracles competes with his deal with Alcestis. These deals are modelled after Admetus' deal with Apollo, and Apollo's deal with the Fates, respectively. Apollo's two models show that a deal between men is constructive and desirable, and a deal between a man and a woman is not. A deal between men is of mutual benefit to the participants, both of whom have a legitimate claim on subjectivity. In a deal between a man and a woman, the more the woman's illegitimate subjectivity, the less the man's. Admetus' deal with Alcestis saps his subjectivity and capacity to make deals in support of Alcestis.

By the play's conclusion, Apollo's model of negotiations has been successfully implemented. Admetus correctly prioritizes his deal with Heracles, and rejects his deal with Alcestis. Through his deal with Heracles, Admetus regains the subjectivity that he surrendered as a result of his deal with Alcestis.

Heracles and Admetus have succeeded in transforming Alcestis into a passive object, whose exchange validates their deal and erases her capacity to negotiate. Alcestis has regained her life, at the expense of her subjectivity and individuality, the qualities she negotiated for when she surrendered her life in her deal with

Alcestis at the end of the play, so that they will recognize Alcestis' silence at the end of the play as statue-like. (Stieber 69) The audience is then primed to recognize comments on how life-like she is, and how much she resembles Alcestis, as the sort of praise one might give a high-quality portrait-statue (or funeral monument). (Stieber 83-84)

Admetus. She has become a good woman not because of her noble death, but because of the passive and anonymous life that replaces it.

Medea

Every deal in *Medea* is negotiated with the title character, and each one is destructive. In *Alcestis*, men make deals with each other which contain Alcestis' destructive subjectivity. In *Medea*, the men do not even interact with each other during the action of the play.

Medea participates in three deals in the play -- with Creon, with Jason, and with Aegeus. These deals form a cycle, and *Medea* shows their intersection. Jason's deal with Medea is in the past, and the audience sees only the end; Creon's deal with Medea is begun and completed during the course of the play; Aegeus' deal is in the future, and the audience only sees the beginning. Through references and allusions to the past and future, all three deals are shown to be close analogues; each man's deal with Medea is characterized by interruption of the homosocial bonds formed through marriage, and by harm to his children. Medea's subjectivity is an unchanging and destructive force because, unlike Alcestis, she is never made the object of any deal.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Many readers interpret *Medea*, and Medea herself, as a warning against the destructive power of women's agency. Segal: "One can regard the play as the exploration of a bold hypothesis. Suppose the suppressed woman of this patriarchal society had the will and the power not only to express her resentment openly but also to act on that resentment. What would such a woman look like, and what would the world that contains such a woman look like? The play suggests answers to these questions that must have been terrifying to many in the audience. It shows an ever-widening rift between Medea's helplessness as a woman in a male-controlled society and her power as a granddaughter of Helios who possesses powerful instruments of death." (Segal 1996, 17). McDermott "[I]f, as Medea asserts at lines 214ff., she is like all women, then perhaps all women (despite their disclaimers) are capable of the same abominations as Medea. Such a reaction would result in a heightened sense

Medea's Deal with Creon

Medea's deal with Creon takes place entirely within the space of the play. In his only interaction with Medea, Creon is drawn into a deal with her against his better judgment. Making a deal with Medea requires an implied endorsement of her subjectivity. Creon's willingness to treat Medea as a subject leaves him vulnerable to her destructive influence. After the terms of their deal are negotiated, Medea exploits Creon's vulnerability. She uses his daughter as a means of exacting revenge against him and against Jason, making the princess into a deadly and animated corpse; a horrific physical manifestation of inappropriate female agency.

When Creon approaches Medea, his position is absolute: he is ordering Medea's immediate departure from the city with her children 'μή τι μέλλειν'⁹⁹(274). He does not at first offer any justification or support for his position. He is communicating a decision that has already been made, not giving an opening position in a negotiation, which he may be willing to compromise over the course of a discussion.

But when Medea asks him directly for an explanation for his actions, appealing to his sympathy for her self-described state of helplessness (277-281), Creon offers her the explanation she demands:

that heavy societal restrictions laid upon women may potentially backfire, that the subsurface smoldering that they generate may burst out into the open in destructive flashes. We know that Euripides was aware of such repercussions of repression, especially as regards women, from his great play on that theme, the *Bacchae*."(McDermott 1989, 50). See also Rabinowitz 1993 , 150. What has not been explored is Medea's destructive subjectivity as it is expressed by making deals, and the extent to which her destruction is the result of men's failure to control her through deals, rather than an inevitable consequence of her uniquely overwhelming subjectivity.

⁹⁹ "Instantly"

δέδοικά σ' (οὐδὲν δεῖ παραμπίσχειν
 λόγους)
 μή μοί τι δράσης παῖδ' ἀνήκεστον κακόν.
 συμβάλλεται δὲ πολλὰ τοῦδε δείγματα:
 σοφὴ πέφυκας καὶ κακῶν πολλῶν ἴδρις,
 λυπῆ δὲ λέκτρων ἀνδρὸς ἔστερημένη.
 κλύω δ' ἀπειλεῖν σ', ὡς ἀπαγγέλλουσί
 μοι,
 τὸν δόντα καὶ γήμαντα καὶ γαμουμένην
 δράσειν τι. ταῦτ' οὖν πρὶν παθεῖν
 φυλάξομαι.
 κρεῖσσον δέ μοι νῦν πρὸς σ' ἀπεχθέσθαι,
 γύναι,
 ἢ μαλθακισθένθ' ὕστερον μεταστένειν.

(282-291)

By showing himself willing to provide her with an explanation, Creon shows that he is open to negotiation. When Creon gives the specific grounds for his fears, he is offering arguments that Medea can counter. When he admits that he fears Medea, he is admitting that she has power over him. When he admits that he will incur Medea's hatred, he is admitting that he has considered her perspective and her emotional state, and that these considerations have some bearing on his action. When he suggests that he may later regret his decision, he signals that he is vulnerable to persuasion. While Creon may seem to be offering a strong defence of

I am afraid (no need to dissemble)
 that you will do some deadly harm to my
 daughter. Many indications of this
 combine: you are a clever woman and
 skilled in many evil arts, and you are
 smarting with the loss of your husband's
 love. And I hear that you are
 threatening—such is the report people
 bring—to harm the bride, her father, and
 her husband. So I shall take precautions
 before the event. It is better for me to
 incur your hatred now, woman, than to
 be soft now and regret it later.

his position, the fact that he offers a defence at all signals his willingness to negotiate. He is no longer making a decree; he proposing his terms and inviting a counter-offer.

Medea responds to Creon by addressing his principal argument in favour of her exile: that she will prove dangerous to him if allowed to stay. She argues that since he has done nothing wrong to her (a premise it would be extremely awkward for him to refute), she has no grievance with him (307-312). Medea then proposes her own terms: that she be allowed to stay and in exchange she will concede his authority and not act against him: “ἔατέ μ’ οἰκεῖν. καὶ γὰρ ἠδίκημένοι/σιγησόμεσθα, κρεισσόνων νικώμενοι”¹⁰⁰ (314-15). Creon rejects her terms and her argument, but does not end the conversation. He is unwilling to accept these particular terms, but not unwilling to deal. He does not leave, or have Medea expelled by force. His continued engagement with her allows Medea to establish a greater claim on a reciprocal relationship with him. She begs him as a suppliant, and appeals to their love of their respective homelands (324-30). Creon’s confession that his concern for his daughter is of overriding importance to him, second only to his love of his homeland (328), opens more common ground. The continued conversation gives Medea an opportunity to propose another set of terms from the physically close and morally compelling position of a suppliant (338-9):

μίαν με μεῖναι τήνδ’ ἕασον ἡμέραν	Allow me to remain this one day and to
καὶ ξυπερᾶναι φροντίδ’ ἧ φευξούμεθα,	complete my plans for exile and to

¹⁰⁰ “But let me stay in this land. For although I have been wronged I will hold my peace, yielding to my superiors.”

παισίν τ' ἀφορμήν τοῖς ἑμοῖς, ἐπεὶ πατήρ	ensure some provision for my children,
οὐδὲν προτιμᾷ, μηχανήσασθαί τινα.	since their father does not care to do so.
οἴκτιρε δ' αὐτούς: καὶ σύ τοι παίδων	Have pity on them: you too are a parent,
πατήρ	and we might expect you to be well-
πέφυκας: εἰκὸς δέ σφιν εὖνοιάν σ' ἔχειν.	disposed towards them. I do not care if I
τούμοῦ γὰρ οὗ μοι φροντίς, εἰ	myself go into exile. It
φευξοῦμεθα,	is their experience of misfortune I weep
κείνους δὲ κλαίω συμφορᾷ κεχρημένους.	for.

(340-7)

Medea's terms, that she will accept exile provided that she be allowed a day to prepare, are strongly based in an appeal to her children's welfare. Creon, against his better judgement, accepts Medea's terms, and allows her to stay in the city for one day, even as he admits that he is probably making a mistake: καὶ νῦν ὀρῶ μὲν ἔξαμαρτάνων¹⁰¹(350). He enters into a deal with Medea in which he has nothing to gain by negotiating, and which he knows can have only unhappy consequences for him.

After Creon leaves, Medea takes great satisfaction in explaining to the Chorus that she was negotiating in bad faith, and that her protestations of goodwill and harmlessness and her appeals as a suppliant were all a deliberate deception to extract the time she needed from Creon. She boasts:

δοκεῖς γὰρ ἄν με τόνδε θωπεῦσαί ποτε	Do you think I would ever have fawned
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¹⁰¹ "And now, though I see that I am making a serious mistake"

<p>εἰ μή τι κερδαίνουσιν ἢ τεχνωμένην; οὐδ' ἂν προσεῖπον οὐδ' ἂν ἠψάμην χεροῖν. ὁ δ' ἐς τοσοῦτον μωρίας ἀφίκετο, ὥστ', ἐξὸν αὐτῷ τᾶμ' ἐλεῖν βουλευμάτα γῆς ἐκβαλόντι, τήνδ' ἐφῆκεν ἡμέραν μειναί μ', ἐν ἧ̃ τρεῖς τῶν ἐμῶν ἐχθρῶν νεκροῦς θήσω, πατέρα τε καὶ κόρην πόσιν τ' ἐμόν. (368-75)</p>	<p>on this man unless I stood to gain, unless I were plotting? I would not even have spoken to him or touched him with my hands. But he has reached such a pitch of folly that, while it lay in his power to check my plans by banishing me, he has permitted me to stay for this day, a day on which I shall make corpses of three of my enemies, the father, his daughter, and my husband.</p>
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In this speech, Medea makes explicit the direct connection between Creon's susceptibility to her deception, her deal with him, and the destruction of Creon, Jason and the Princess as a result of that deal. She is clear that the deal is not based on mutual gain and that the deception is not intended to coax Creon into a deal which would ultimately be to his benefit, as were the deceptive deals between men in *Alcestis*. By her own admission, Medea's deal and her deception are intended to benefit only her, and to harm the man who enters into a deal with her.

Though Medea's deception of Creon certainly contributes to her successful negotiation for time to carry out her revenge, it would be wrong to attribute Creon's failure to stop Medea's destruction only to her deception. Creon, although aware of the danger that Medea poses (as he repeats several times), nevertheless allows himself to be drawn into a deal with her. It is only once he agrees to deal with

Medea that her intentions become relevant, and he becomes vulnerable to her deception.

Creon and Medea never meet again. Medea uses the day's grace she negotiated to carry out her revenge, part of which is tricking the Princess into accepting poisoned gifts: a crown and a robe coated in a substance which burns her flesh away when she puts them on. A messenger reports to Medea how Creon dies from coming into contact with his daughter's toxic corpse. Upon his discovery of his daughter's body, he bemoans her death and embraces her, but is then unable to disengage himself from her body:

<p>ἐπεὶ δὲ θρήνων καὶ γόνων ἐπαύσατο, χρήζων γεραιὸν ἐξαναστῆσαι δέμας προσείχεθ' ὥστε κισσοῦς ἔρνεσιν δάφνης λεπτοῖσι πέπλοις, δεινὰ δ' ἦν παλαίσματα: ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἤθελ' ἐξαναστῆσαι γόνυ, ἢ δ' ἀντελάζυτ': εἰ δὲ πρὸς βίαν ἄγοι, σάρκας γεραιὰς ἐσπάρασσ' ἀπ' ὀστέων. (1211-7)</p>	<p>But when he had ceased from his wailing and lamenting and wished to raise up his aged body to his feet, he stuck fast to the fine-spun dress, as ivy clings to laurel-shoots, and a terrible wrestling ensued. For he wanted to rise to his knees, but she held him fast and prevented him. And if he used force, he would rip his aged flesh from his bones.</p>
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In throwing himself on his daughter's corpse, Creon repeats the mistake that he made when he was drawn into a deal with Medea. Creon treats his daughter's corpse, an inanimate although person-like object, as a person with whom he could speak and interact. While it is not unusual in Greek tragedy for the deceased to be addressed by a mourner, Creon's physical engagement with his daughter's corpse is

shown to be inappropriate by its disastrous result. Creon's error is not in lamenting a corpse by addressing the deceased as though she were still alive, but in engaging with his daughter's corpse specifically. The Princess is to be objectified because firstly she is female; her death reinforces rather than creates her status as an object.

Others knew better than to touch the corpse after seeing the manner of her death, as the messenger explains: 'πᾶσι δ' ἦν φόβος θιγεῖν/ νεκροῦ: τύχην γὰρ εἴχομεν διδάσκαλον'¹⁰² (1202-3). But Creon does not see the poison at work on his daughter's body, and although he sees the aftermath, he is not scared away from touching her. His contact with her is physically destructive and ultimately fatal.¹⁰³ Once Creon chooses to touch her, the corpse is disturbingly active in its reluctance to let him go; at this point the messenger goes back to using a female pronoun for the corpse, and she is described as actively holding on to her father: "ἡ δ' ἀντελάζυτ'." The Princess' corpse destroys her father in an act of frighteningly inappropriate subjectivity.

Creon's mistake in his interaction with Medea was treating her as an appropriate person to make a deal with, when he should have realized that she, like

¹⁰² "And we were all afraid to touch the corpse, taught well by the event we had seen."

¹⁰³ Mueller sees a connection between Medea's destruction of the Princess through dowry-like gifts, symbolically connected to her own marriage to Jason and the Golden Fleece (the crown and the robe are golden and made of fleece, respectively). "If the weaving of the fleece, then, can be read metaphorically as the union (*sumploke*) of Jason and Medea through marriage, its unraveling is a logically parallel enactment of that marriage's destruction. Thus, when Medea's *peplos* touches the body of the princess, it destroys more than that woman and her father; the disintegration extends to Medea's own marriage, brought to an end symbolically by the same objects with which it was first contracted." (Mueller 2001, 492) See also Mueller 2008, 164-5 for Medea's plot against the Princess as a reenactment of Medea's own marriage to Jason.

his daughter's corpse, should only be treated as an object. Once he chooses to make a deal with Medea, he finds it impossible to extricate himself from her influence. Creon's death is the result of his inappropriate involvement with Medea and with his daughter. His deal with Medea allows her to wrap his daughter in poison, and his emotional attachment to his daughter, which persists even after he has given her away in marriage to Jason (a transaction in which Creon both objectifies and surrenders his daughter), causes him to fall victim to the same poison.

Creon fails to complete his exchange of his daughter with Jason, because Medea's influence makes it impossible for him to separate his body from hers. The pronoun in 'ἡ δ' ἀντελάζυτ' can be interpreted as referring to the Princess' corpse, as above. But it can also refer to Medea. The part of the messenger speech immediately preceding describes the robes that Medea poisoned, not the Princess' flesh itself, holding onto Creon's body and wrestling with him for control. Creon is hopelessly and fatally ensnared in his deal with Medea at the same time that he is fused to his daughter's body. Medea's presence onstage for the messenger speech, and her relish of the details of the deaths¹⁰⁴, can only enhance the impression that it is she who is holding on to Creon, and not (only) the dead Princess.¹⁰⁵ Creon experiences a

¹⁰⁴ Rabinowitz notes how through the messenger's description, the Princess becomes the object of Medea's vicarious pornographic gaze. (Rabinowitz 1992, 49-50)

¹⁰⁵ Hopman argues that in burning the Princess with poison, Medea is re-enacting her meeting with Jason in Colchis and their marriage, and that the Princess serves as a substitute for Medea in this re-enactment. Medea "stages a revised version of her own wedding that emphasizes her autonomy as gift giver and enacts the consequences that, according to her, result from Jason's remarriage. The young, innocent Medea inflamed by love for Jason has been annihilated and transformed into a bride of Hades." (Hopman 2008, 165)

feminizing loss of bodily integrity in the face of Medea's assault, in which she uses his daughter's body as a weapon against him.¹⁰⁶

Creon dies because of his literal inability to let go of his daughter.¹⁰⁷ It is a physical manifestation of his inability, shared with Jason and Aegeus, to engage in appropriate deals with other men of the sort that would contain Medea's subjectivity and render her harmless.

Medea's deal with Aegeus

The audience sees only the beginning of Medea's deal with Aegeus. Medea and Aegeus easily and apparently amicably negotiate the terms of their deal onstage. As the play ends, Medea is about to leave for Athens where she and Aegeus are to carry out the terms of their deal.

It would be easy to see Medea's deal with Aegeus as positive and therefore distinct from Medea's other deals, and to see it as a useful and deliberate contrast to the deal with Jason and Creon.¹⁰⁸ In this view, the other deals have bad outcomes

¹⁰⁶ Rabinowitz notes the masculine and phallic nature of women's violence "In tragedy after tragedy, we see the female defined as sexual, possessed of a desire that destroys. When women are active and assertive like Clytemnestra and Medea, that sexuality is masculine and makes its object in turn a feminized victim; they usurp the phallographic subject's privilege of pornography." (Rabinowitz 1992, 51)

¹⁰⁷ See Seaford 1990, 152 for examples in Euripides of the danger present when the transfer of a woman from her natal to her marital household fails.

¹⁰⁸ Buchan asserts that "Aegeus remains a foreign presence, a haphazard addition and affront to any organic unity of the plot." (Buchan 2008, 3). Boedeker contrasts Jason breaking his oaths with Aegeus keeping his oaths (Boedeker 1991, 98). Mueller argues that "Aegeus functions in several ways as a precise complement to Jason. His marriage is childless, but he has remained loyal to his wife and seeks help from the Delphic oracle." Mueller also argues that Aegeus differs from Jason in that Aegeus is able to see and acknowledge that Jason has treated Medea badly, and in that he

because of Jason's and Creon's poor negotiating tactics and failure to properly appreciate Medea's subjectivity and the depth of her anger. Against this view, I argue that it is the fact that they all enter into any deal at all with Medea, not the particular way in which they negotiate, that is significant.

Aegeus, like Creon and Jason before him, will suffer the disruption of his relationships with other men as a result of his deal with Medea. The fact that Aegeus does not immediately appreciate or experience the repercussions of his deal with Medea makes his deal more ominously similar to Jason's and Creon's, not less. Jason and Creon both experience the worst effects of their deals when the terms are carried out, not during the negotiation phase. Medea's deal with Aegeus could be the hopeful beginning of a deal with Medea that will have unprecedented success, but it is more plausibly interpreted as a suggestion that Medea's destructive cycle of deals will continue.¹⁰⁹

offers Medea help (Mueller 2001, 487). Luschnig argues that Aegeus is different from Jason in that Aegeus is a "good man," and that Aegeus is different from Creon in that he is a "good king", even while acknowledging the implications in the play that Aegeus is already coming under Medea's control in the same way that the others did (Luschnig 2007, 32). Schein, by contrast, interprets Medea's encounter with Aegeus as parallel to the others, in a reading similar to mine: "Throughout the play, in her successive encounters with Creon, Aegeus, and Jason, Medea uses her understanding of *philia*, and her ability to exploit it and other traditional institutions and relationships of reciprocity, to achieve her own ends and defeat her enemies." (Schein 1990, 62)

¹⁰⁹ Nimis argues for the similarity between Aegeus' and Creon's deals with Medea: "When the Athenian male hero Aegeus arrives on stage and Medea proposes to help him with his problem, childlessness, in exchange for being allowed to enter his city and find safety there -- the very devil's bargain that Jason has just lamented earlier in the play -- what was going through the minds of the Athenian men in the audience? Did they, knowing what they did about Medea, begin yelling to Aegeus like a child in a scary movie: "Don't do it, Aegeus! She's a witch!" " (Nimis 2007, 402).

Aegeus makes clear from the friendly greeting at the beginning of his conversation with Medea (663-4) that he is happy to engage with her. Medea is able to gently lead the conversation with Aegeus to achieve the deal she wants.¹¹⁰ Medea learns that Aegeus has been to Delphi to ask what he should do to beget children, and has received an oracle he is unable to interpret. Medea inserts herself into Aegeus' effort to interpret the oracle:

M: τί δῆτα Φοῖβος εἶπέ σοι παίδων πέρι; **M:** What then did Phoebus tell you about

'A: σοφώτερ' ἢ κατ' ἄνδρα συμβαλεῖν ἔπη. children?

M: θέμις μὲν ἡμᾶς χρησμὸν εἰδέναι θεοῦ; **A:** Words too wise for mortal to

'A: μάλιστ', ἐπεὶ τοι καὶ σοφῆς δεῖται interpret.

φρενός.

M: Is it lawful for me to hear the

M: τί δῆτ' ἔχρησε; λέξον, εἰ θέμις κλύειν. response?

'A: ἀσκοῦ με τὸν προύχοντα μὴ λῦσαι **A:** Most certainly: it calls for a wise
πόδα... mind.

M: πρὶν ἂν τί δράσης ἢ τίν' ἐξίκη χθόνα; **M:** What then did the god say? Tell me, if

'A: πρὶν ἂν πατρώαν αὐθις ἐστίαν μόλω. it is lawful to hear.

(674-81)

A: 'Do not the wineskin's salient foot
untie...'

M: Until you do what or come to what
country?

¹¹⁰ Fletcher notes that the "liturgical quality of the stichomythia -- its antiphonal question and response format -- enhances the impression that Medea is controlling Aegeus' speech." (Fletcher 2003, 34). Compare Medea's control of Creon's body, above.

A: '...until you come to hearth and home again.'

Aegeus is describing a relationship with Apollo, where the result of their interchange will be the production of children for Aegeus. In this sense, the relationship between Aegeus and Apollo is analogous to the relationship between father- and son-in-law, but without the exchange of a woman.¹¹¹ Aegeus admits that he is not able to participate in his deal with Apollo, when he says that the oracle is 'σοφώτερ' ἢ κατ' ἄνδρα συμβαλεῖν ἔπη' (675).¹¹² He says that the oracle is incomprehensible to *andres*, 'men', not to *anthropoi*, 'humans', as might be expected. His word choice simultaneously calls attention to the presumption that deals for the production of children should be conducted between men, and to his inability, as a man, to complete this transaction with Apollo.

His word choice also pointedly leaves open the possibility that Medea, a woman, will be able to interpret the prophecy. Medea does not immediately provide Aegeus with an interpretation, but her ability to do so, and the possibility that she will, has been strongly suggested.

After Medea inserts herself in the role of interpreter, she constructs a scenario in which the exchange between Apollo and Aegeus alone is no longer sufficient to enable Aegeus to have children. Medea's help is now also necessary, since she is needed to perform the act of interpretation on the prophecy on Aegeus' behalf. She,

¹¹¹ The formulaic phrase for contracting marriage between a father- and son-in-law in New Comedy is "I give you my daughter to sow for the purpose of producing legitimate children." (Pomeroy 1997, 33) The relationship is between the men, and its purpose is to produce children; the daughter is an instrument to fulfill this purpose.

¹¹² "Words too wise for mortals to interpret"

and not Apollo, would be the one to transmit the prophecy to Aegeus, in a form that she has adapted to allow him to make use of it. As is the case in her other deals, Medea's help is not actually necessary or beneficial. Instead, she seduces Aegeus away from appropriate deals with men for the production of children, and into dangerous reliance on female subjectivity.

Aegeus' unnamed wife has a passive and supportive role which may be contrasted with Medea's active role. She appears only very briefly in the text of the play, when Aegeus informs Medea, when she asks, that he has a wife (672). It may be inferred that Aegeus' wife has already been given to him as the object of an exchange, marriage, to allow him to get children through the use of her body. Aegeus' answers to Medea's questions imply that her body continues to be available to him for this purpose. The only contribution to this project required of Aegeus' wife is to continue in a state of passive availability -- that is, to take no action. Medea, however, has to choose to perform an action for Aegeus to have children. This is an action that she can choose to perform or not, and puts her in an excellent negotiating position in her deal with Aegeus.

When Medea puts forward the terms of her deal to Aegeus, she makes an explicit offer to provide him with children in return for a place in his city and household:¹¹³

λόγω μὲν οὐχί, καρτερεῖν δὲ βούλεται.	But I beg you by your beard and by your
ἀλλ' ἄντομαί σε τῆσδε πρὸς γενειάδος	knees and I make myself your suppliant:

¹¹³ Euripides was likely familiar with the tradition in which Medea herself bore Aegeus a child in Athens. (Segal 1996, 16)

<p>γονάτων τε τῶν σῶν ἰκεσία τε γίγνομαι, οἴκτιρον οἴκτιρόν με τὴν δυσδαίμονα καὶ μή μ' ἔρημον ἐκπεσοῦσαν εἰσίδης, δέξαι δὲ χώρα καὶ δόμοις ἐφέστιον. οὔτως ἔρωσ σοὶ πρὸς θεῶν τελεσφόρος γένοιτο παίδων καὐτὸς ὄλβιος θάνοις. εὐρημα δ' οὐκ οἶσθ' οἶον ἠύρηκας τόδε: παύσω γέ σ' ὄντ' ἄπαιδα καὶ παίδων γονὰς σπεῖραί σε θήσω: τοιάδ' οἶδα φάρμακα. (708-18)</p>	<p>have pity, have pity on an unfortunate woman, and do not allow me to be cast into exile without a friend, but receive me into your land and your house as a suppliant. If you do so, may your longing for children be brought to fulfillment by the gods, and may you yourself die happy! You do not know what a lucky find you have made in me. I will put an end to your childlessness and cause you to beget children, for I know the medicines to do it.</p>
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Medea proposes the terms of her deal to Aegeus after a *stichomythia*, as she did with Creon. As with Creon, she appeals to Aegeus as a suppliant, repeating the phrase 'πρὸς ... γονάτων' (324, 709-10) from that earlier encounter. Aegeus is not hostile as Creon was, so Medea has less need to press every advantage. However, her use of the same tactic, and the structural similarity between the two encounters, emphasize the overall similarity between the two deals, and the likelihood that Medea's relationship with Aegeus may become hostile.

Aegeus accepts Medea's terms, admitting that his decision is influenced in large part by her promise of children (719-21). When Aegeus leaves, they have agreed that Medea will join him shortly in Athens. Aegeus has, at Medea's urging,

sworn oaths that once she arrives he will allow her to stay and defend her from any enemies who may wish her harm.

The similarity between the deal with Aegeus and the other deals in *Medea* is strengthened if Medea's actions in Aegeus household in Athens are taken into account. Medea's attempt to poison Aegeus' son Theseus (conceived with Aethra, daughter of Pittheus, whom Aegeus told Medea he was going to see)¹¹⁴ is the subject of Euripides' fragmentary play *Aegeus*, which predates *Medea*¹¹⁵ The outline of the plot is likely this: Theseus, having come of age, journeys to Athens, according to the instructions that Aegeus left with Aethra. When Theseus arrives, Medea learns that he is Aegeus' son, although Aegeus does not. Medea plots with Aegeus to kill Theseus by administering poison, and almost succeeds. However, Aegeus recognizes his son just in time, and saves him. Medea is exiled.¹¹⁶

There are obvious parallels between this and the outcome of Medea's other deals. She has already left a city after committing violence against the royal family

¹¹⁴ Kovacs advances a theory that first, Theseus' mother will be the wife that Aegeus spoke of in Athens, and second, that this wife may very well be Pittheus' daughter Aethra. Kovacs proposes that after speaking with Medea, Aegeus abandons his plan of going to visit Pittheus in Troezen, but instead returns home to Athens. There, in accordance with the prophecy, he conceives Theseus with Aethra (Kovacs 2008, 298-303) I find Kovacs' argument plausible. If his interpretation is adopted, and we believe that Aegeus is married to Aethra, then his deal with Medea has disrupted the relationship he has with Pittheus, since after making the deal with Medea, Aegeus chooses not to ask Pittheus for help. The interrupted relationship between Aegeus and Pittheus is then comparable to, though much less extreme than, the interrupted relationship between Jason and Creon. They are both father-in-law/son-in-law relationships which Medea interrupts, and part of that interruption consists of Medea's presence as an actual or potential alternative mother for the son-in-law's children.

¹¹⁵ *Aegeus* was produced soon after 450, *Medea* in 431 (Webster, 52)

¹¹⁶ Webster, 77

in Colchis, Iolcus and Corinth. When she left her father's household, and when she left Jason's, she killed their sons. That Medea did not succeed in killing Theseus is unusual, but that she makes the attempt is entirely predictable.

When considered in its totality, Medea's deal with Aegeus proves to be a close parallel to Medea's deals with Creon and Jason. Like Creon and Jason, Aegeus enters into a deal with her that interrupts his homosocial bonds, first by displacing his wife in her reproductive capacity (an interruption of Aegeus' relationship with his father-in-law), and secondly through the near murder of his son. The deals with Creon and Jason both come to their violent conclusion during the action of the play; the Aegeus episode reminds the audience that Medea's cycle of destructive deals will continue after she leaves the stage.

Medea's Deal with Jason

The action of *Medea* shows the end of the initial deal between Jason and Medea. In the backstory, this deal was negotiated at their meeting in Colchis, and Medea and Jason have been living under its terms throughout their association. As the play opens, Jason has announced that he wishes to end his association with Medea in favour of a new marriage to the Princess. The play shows Jason and Medea navigating the end of their deal, Medea's revenge, and Jason's downfall.

Medea and Jason meet three times over the course of the play. In their first encounter, Jason tries and fails to negotiate a new deal with Medea: he asks that she endorse his marriage to the Princess in return for financial support. She refuses. In their second encounter, Medea tricks Jason into believing that she has had a change

of heart, and negotiates a new deal with him. This new deal, like her deals with Creon and Aegeus, is calculated to put her in position to carry out her revenge. Having secured her deals, Medea kills the Princess, Creon, and finally her children. In their third and final encounter, Jason returns and discovers her with the children's corpses. Medea describes how he will live alone until old age and then die isolated and powerless. Medea leaves Jason with nothing, and leaves for Aegeus and Athens.

Medea's revenge against Jason consists of cutting him off from relationships with others through a complete severance of his homosocial bonds. She accomplishes this first by destroying his marriage bond: she kills the Princess, the object which Creon and Jason had exchanged to cement their relationship, and incidentally kills Creon himself. Second, she cuts Jason off from his patriline: she kills Jason's children (who are also her own), ending his relationship with them and isolating him further.

According to the logic of the plot, Medea takes her revenge against Jason out of anger at his betrayal. But I will argue that the manner of Medea's revenge, rather than an abrupt reversal of a heretofore beneficial association, is in fact the logical and predictable culmination of their deal, the effect of which deal was always to interfere with Jason's homosocial bonds through marriage, and to violently interrupt relationships between fathers and their children. The lesson is not that it

is dangerous to *end* a deal with Medea, but that it is destructive to deal with her at all.¹¹⁷

This is a lesson that Jason never learns. I will argue that even as he tries to end his deal with Medea, he is drawn into a further deal with her. This deal, along with the deals with Aegeus and Creon, enables her to take revenge.

Medea's History of Destruction

Medea's history with Jason is summarized twice in the play. The brevity of the summaries belies the importance of the history in understanding Medea's and Jason's relationship, which is demonstrated by the repetition of the history, and by its placement at the very beginning of the play, and again in the *agon* between Jason and Medea.

The Trophos gives her summary of Medea's and Jason's relationship as a causal chain, leading inexorably to the crisis with which the play opens:

Εἴθ' ὄφελ' Ἄργοῦς μὴ διαπτάσθαι σκάφος	Would that the Argo had never winged
Κόλχων ἐς αἴαν κυανέας Συμπληγάδας,	its way to the land of Colchis through the
μηδ' ἐν νάπαισι Πηλίου πεσεῖν ποτε	dark-blue Symplegades! Would that the

¹¹⁷ Rabinowitz shares my conclusion that Medea's violence is a manifestation of destructive female subjectivity: "To the extent that she gets away with murder, the play does represent a form of successful female subjectivity; it nonetheless supports the continued control of actual women because it makes Medea's very freedom terrifying. One lesson to be learned is that the woman who is not exchanged, who is not controlled by a man, who acts on her own sexual desire, will kill her own children to get back at him.[...]The play, then, might well encourage men to control actual women by portraying the disaster that occurs when a woman is out of control." (Rabinowitz 1993, 150) Rabinowitz' analysis differs from mine in that she does not explore how Medea's subjectivity is manifested in making illegitimate (by definition) deals, and how Medea's destruction flows directly and consistently from her deals.

<p> τμηθεῖσα πεύκη, μηδ' ἔρετμῶσαι χέρας ἀνδρῶν ἀριστέων οἳ τὸ πάγχρυσον δέρος Πελία μετῆλθον. οὐ γὰρ ἂν δέσποιν' ἐμὴ Μήδεια πύργους γῆς ἔπλευσ' Ἴωλκίας ἔρωτι θυμὸν ἐκπλαγεῖσ' Ἰάσονος: οὐδ' ἂν κτανεῖν πείσασα Πελιάδας κόρας πατέρα κατῶκει τήνδε γῆν Κορινθίαν ζῦν ἀνδρὶ καὶ τέκνοισιν, ἀνδάνουσα μὲν φυγὰς πολίταις ὧν ἀφίκετο χθόνα αὐτῷ τε πάντα συμφέρουσ' Ἰάσονι: ἥπερ μεγίστη γίγνεται σωτηρία, ὅταν γυνὴ πρὸς ἄνδρα μὴ διχοστατῆ. (1- 15) </p>	<p> pine trees had never been felled in the glens of Mount Pelion and furnished oars for the hands of the heroes who at Pelias' command set forth in quest of the Golden Fleece! For then my lady Medea would not have sailed to the towers of Iolcus, her heart smitten with love for Jason, or persuaded the daughters of Pelias to kill their father and hence now be inhabiting this land of Corinth, with her husband and children, an exile loved by the citizens to whose land she had come, and lending to Jason himself all her support. This it is that most rescues life from trouble, when a woman is not at variance with her husband. </p>
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Later, during her *agon* with Jason, Medea gives Jason an account of their history, as a demonstration of the benefits he has enjoyed as a result of his association with her:

<p> ἐκ τῶν δὲ πρώτων πρῶτον ἄρξομαι λέγειν: ἔσωσά σ', ὡς ἴσασιν Ἑλλήνων ὅσοι </p>	<p> I shall begin my speech from the beginning. I saved your life—as witness all the Greeks who went on board the </p>
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ταῦτόν συνεισέβησαν Ἄργῶν σκάφος,
 πεμφθέντα ταύρων πυρπνόων ἐπιστάτην
 ζεύγλαισι καὶ σπεροῦντα θανάσιμον
 γύην:
 δράκοντά θ', ὃς πάγχρυσον ἀπέχων
 δέρος
 σπείραις ἔσφζε πολυπλόκοις ἄπνος ὦν,
 κτείνας' ἀνέσχον σοὶ φάος σωτήριον.
 αὐτὴ δὲ πατέρα καὶ δόμους προδοῦσ'
 ἐμοῦς
 τὴν Πηλιῶτιν εἰς Ἴωλκὸν ἰκόμην
 σὺν σοί, πρόθυμος μᾶλλον ἢ σοφωτέρα:
 Πελίαν τ' ἀπέκτειν', ὥσπερ ἄλγιστον
 θανεῖν,
 παίδων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, πάντα τ' ἐξεῖλον
 δόμον.
 καὶ ταῦθ' ὑφ' ἡμῶν, ὧ̄ κάκιστ' ἀνδρῶν,
 παθῶν
 προύδωκας ἡμᾶς, καινὰ δ' ἐκτήσω λέχη,
 παίδων γεγῶτων: εἰ γὰρ ἦσθ' ἄπαις ἔτι,
 συγγνώστ' ἂν ἦν σοὶ τοῦδ' ἐρασθῆναι
 λέχους. (475-91)

Argo with you—when you were sent to
 master the fire-breathing bulls with a
 yoke and to sow the field of death. The
 dragon who kept watch over the Golden
 Fleece, sleeplessly guarding it with his
 sinuous coils, I killed, and I raised aloft
 for you the fair light of escape from
 death. Of my own accord I abandoned my
 father and my home and came with you
 to Iolcus under Pelion showing more love
 than sense. I murdered Pelias by the
 most horrible of deaths—at the hand of
 his own daughters—and I destroyed his
 whole house. And after such benefits
 from me, o basest of men, you have
 betrayed me and have taken a new
 marriage, though we had children. For if
 you were still childless, your desire for
 this marriage would be understandable.

Both histories cover the same series of events: Medea's and Jason's meeting during the voyage of the Argo (when their initial deal took place), and Medea's departure from Colchis with Jason; the murder of Pelias by his daughters, under Medea's influence; and finally Medea's anger at Jason as a result of his marriage to the Princess in Corinth.

Both accounts are on the surface sympathetic to Medea. The Trophos is Medea's ally, and presents Medea's predicament as a result of a series of events outside of her control, set in motion with the building of the Argo. Medea gives her history to Jason in order to emphasize the value of the services that she has performed for him, and to establish that he is in her debt.

But while giving an account of Medea's services to Jason throughout their history, Medea and the Trophos simultaneously enumerate the occasions on which Medea has interfered with Jason's forming of homosocial bonds with men, and on which she has used children to hurt their fathers, and cut fathers off from their patriline through the destruction of children.

Interruption of Marriage Bonds

The first episode in Jason and Medea's history is also the occasion of Medea's first and most wide-reaching interference with Jason's ability to form homosocial bonds with other men through the exchange of women in marriage. At their meeting in Colchis, she makes a deal with him that in exchange for her help in the retrieval of the Golden Fleece, he will enter into a marriage-like relationship with

her.¹¹⁸ In the Prologue, the Trophos' causal chain identifies the voyage of the Argo as the original cause of the crisis in Corinth. The Trophos' description suggests a continuity in Jason and Medea's relationship, and highlights the importance of the events in Colchis, the genesis of the deal between Jason and Medea, for the interpretation of the end of the deal shown in the action of the play. At the play's conclusion, Medea's description of her revenge and prediction of Jason's death reinforce the connection between Jason's downfall and the entirety of his deal with Medea.

In the final scene of the play, Medea has the children's bodies in her dragon chariot, and refuses to allow Jason to bury them. She has also made absolutely certain that he has no sons, friends or allies to bury him when he dies. She explains to him how he will die:

<p>σὺ δ', ὥσπερ εἰκός, κατθανῆ κακὸς κακῶς, 'Αργοῦς κάρα σὸν λειψάνῳ πεπληγμένος, πικρὰς τελευτὰς τῶν ἐμῶν γάμων ἰδών. (1386-8)</p>	<p>But you, as is fitting, shall die the miserable death of a coward, struck on the head by a piece of the Argo, having seen the bitter result of your marriage to</p>
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¹¹⁸ See Flory 1978, 70-1 for a discussion of why Medea is unable to contract her own marriage. Rabinowitz explores the consequences of Medea's union with Jason as though they were married, while conceding that Medea was not exchanged: "As the text makes explicit, Medea is both like and unlike other mortal women. The fact that she was not exchanged but is yet recognizably feminine underlines the risks in marriage by exchange: she is the extreme case of the outsider woman who marries into the family, the woman located at the hearth who threatens the very *oikos* she comes to stand for. Her loyalty to Hekate, goddess of the underworld, not Hestia, goddess of the hearth, makes the point. Medea's situation may be anomalous, but it nonetheless points out a crux in the problematic relationships of women's desire to the institution of marriage." (Rabinowitz 1993, 139)

me.

Jason will die from being struck on the head with a piece of the Argo, a physical link to what the Trophos identified in her Prologue as the beginning of the crisis: the quest for the Golden Fleece during which he first made a deal with Medea.¹¹⁹ The Trophos bewailed the voyage of the Argo as the ultimate cause of Medea's misfortune, but it is now clear that it is the first cause and finally the instrument of Jason's. Furthermore, Medea tells Jason that he will see that death is the bitter outcome of marriage with her (1388).¹²⁰ Though she argued earlier in their conversation that she took revenge as a result of Jason's recent betrayal, she is now saying that Jason's eventual ignominious death will be the result of their marriage/deal as a whole, and not only of Jason's betrayal and the end of their deal.

In contracting her own marriage, Medea has usurped her father's prerogative to use her as an object of exchange.¹²¹ In a system of the exchange of women, he should be the one to exchange her in marriage and so to use her to form a relationship with another man, a son-in-law, where the arrangement is

¹¹⁹ As a further piece of continuity, Flory points out the connection between the emphasis on the joining of right hands when Medea and Jason first swore oaths to each other, to the right hand that Medea uses to kill her children. (Flory 1978, 70)

¹²⁰ Mueller argues that Medea's "autonomy, which was effectively silenced in the earlier parts of the play, reasserts itself in the end, in the language of revenge." (Mueller 2001, 500) Against this view, I hope to have demonstrated in my discussion that Medea's autonomy and subjectivity were never truly suppressed, and Medea's revenge at the end of the play is the logical culmination of its continual expression.

¹²¹ Mueller notes that Medea takes over the father's role in her own marriage, and that she repeats this behaviour even more overtly when she offers dowry gifts to Creon's daughter, and betroths the Princess to Hades (Mueller 2001, 499).

advantageous and agreeable to both men involved. Instead, Medea chooses a marriage partner for herself, based on her own preference.¹²²

Jason's loss through his deal with Medea is less obvious than Aeetes'. By entering into a quasi-marital but exclusive relationship with Medea, Jason is deprived of the opportunity and ability to contract a marriage which connects him to a politically and socially advantageous father-in-law. In the first instance, his deal with Medea directly precludes Aeetes as a father-in-law, since the fact that Medea deals directly with Jason cuts her father out of any negotiation. Medea emphasizes the estrangement with her family she incurred as a result of her marriage with Jason: "αὐτὴ δὲ πατέρα καὶ δόμους προδοῦσ' ἐμοῦς" "¹²³(483) while listing her sacrifices on Jason's behalf, but the same deal that cut Medea off from her father cut Jason off from a valuable potential ally. As a result of her deal with Jason in Colchis, Medea will be in a position to interfere with Jason's potential marriage alliances in Iolcus and in Corinth.

Having established her claim on Jason in Colchis, Medea defends it from possible threat when they establish themselves in Iolcus. At some point after they settle in Iolcus, Medea does away with King Pelias by tricking or persuading his own daughters to kill him. Both the Trophos and Medea include the killing of Pelias by

¹²²Rabinowitz notes that in her decision and ability to contract her own marriage Medea is "clearly an anomaly: she was never given in marriage the way that an Athenian woman would have been; there was no ritual of betrothal, no exchange of gifts between men. Rather, she chose Jason. This action is doubly significant, for if not only raises her to Jason's status as an equal -- no one gives her in marriage; she has no male guardian (*kurios*) -- but also shows her to have sexual desire and to act on it." (Rabinowitz 1993, 138).

¹²³ "Of my own accord I abandoned my father and my home"

his daughters in their summaries of Jason and Medea's history. The Trophos uses it as an example of a tragedy which stems from the events in Colchis and precipitates the couple's move to Corinth. Medea uses it as an example of the benefits she has given to Jason while acting on his behalf (486-88).

An explanation of Medea's actual motive for orchestrating Pelias' death is not given in *Medea*. Whatever the motivation, it is possible to read Medea's murder of Pelias as an example of Medea's interference with Jason's opportunities to form homosocial bonds through marriage.

The daughters of Pelias were strong potential marriage partners for Jason. Had Jason completed his quest for the Golden Fleece independently, and returned to Iolcus without Medea, then the standard fairy-tale trope leads one to expect that the hero's triumphant return to the kingdom upon completion of his quest will be rewarded by the King with his daughter's hand in marriage and a share of the kingdom.¹²⁴ But Jason returns with Medea, and so is not free to contract a new marriage alliance with Pelias. Medea also has some moral claim to control the Fleece, which would make its exchange with Pelias problematic.

Jason's motive to marry a Princess in Iolcus is the same as the one that presents itself in Corinth. If Jason marries any of Pelias' daughters, he would gain a connection with the King, a path to political power, and increased social standing, and eventually become king himself. This is the very rationale that Jason offers Medea as explanation for his marriage to the Princess in Corinth. Although he

¹²⁴ Laurel Bowman, private communication. For other examples of this trope in Greek myth see for example Bellerophon (Il. 6.144-90), Perseus and Andromeda (Apollod. 2.4.2-3), etc.

frames his statement in terms of what will benefit the sons he already has with Medea, the benefits he names clearly apply to him as well:

<p>ἐπεὶ μετέστην δεῦρ' Ἴωλκίας χθονὸς πολλὰς ἐφέλκων συμφορὰς ἀμηχάνους, τί τοῦδ' ἂν εὐρημ' ἠῦρον εὐτυχέστερον ἢ παῖδα γῆμαι βασιλέως φυγὰς γεγώς; οὐχ, ἦ σὺ κνίζη, σὸν μὲν ἐχθαίρων λέχος καινῆς δὲ νύμφης ἱμέρω πεπληγμένος οὐδ' εἰς ἄμιλλαν πολύτεκνον σπουδὴν ἔχων: ἄλις γὰρ οἱ γεγῶτες οὐδὲ μέμφομαι: ἀλλ' ὥς, τὸ μὲν μέγιστον, οἰκοῖμεν καλῶς καὶ μὴ σπανιζοίμεσθα, γιγνώσκων ὅτι πένητα φεύγει πᾶς τις ἐκποδῶν φίλον, παῖδας δὲ θρέψαιμ' ἀξίως δόμων ἐμῶν σπείρας τ' ἀδελφοὺς τοῖσιν ἐκ σέθεν τέκνοις ἔς ταῦτ' ἰθεὶν, καὶ ξυναρτήσας γένος εὐδαιμονοίην. σοὶ τε γὰρ παίδων τί δεῖ; ἐμοί τε λύει τοῖσι μέλλουσιν τέκνοις τὰ ζῶντ' ὀνήσαι. (551-67)</p>	<p>When I first moved here from the land of Iolcus, bringing with me many misfortunes hard to deal with, what luckier find than this could I have made, marriage with the daughter of the king, though I was an exile? It was not—the point that seems to irk you—that I was weary of your bed and smitten with desire for a new bride, nor was I eager to rival others in the number of my children (we have enough already and I make no complaint) but my purpose was that we should live well—which is the main thing— and not be in want, knowing that everyone goes out of his way to avoid a penniless friend. I wanted to raise the children in a manner befitting my house, to beget brothers to the children born from you, and put them on the same footing with them, so</p>
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that by drawing the family into one I might prosper. For your part, what need have you of any more children? For me, it is advantageous to use future children to benefit those already born.

In the last two lines, Jason states explicitly that a marriage to the Princess would improve his way of life. This would be even more true in Iolcus, where marriage to one of Pelias' daughters would reinforce an existing claim to kingship (since he is the king's nephew), and forge a relationship with a hostile ruler. If Jason had the same motive in Iolcus to wish to marry a Princess that he has in Corinth, then Medea also has the same cause to object, and to take action to prevent Jason's marriage in Iolcus which is similar to the action she takes in Corinth.

The effect of Medea's action in Iolcus is to sever a potential alliance for Jason, and not to help him, as she claims. Rather than moving in to fill a vacant kingship, Jason is forced to flee Iolcus 'πολλὰς ἐφέλκων συμφορὰς ἀμηχάνους'¹²⁵(552), without resources to draw on because he is without (male) friends. His deal with Medea, and Medea's actions as a result of that deal, did not result in a kingship for Jason, where a deal with Pelias for the exchange of one of his daughters very well might have. It should also be noted that Medea takes the same action, violent murder of a royal family with marriageable daughters, in Iolcus when she claims to have been helping Jason, as in Corinth when she admits that her goal is to harm him.

¹²⁵ "Bringing with me many misfortunes hard to deal with"

Medea's Use of Children against their Fathers

The second part of Medea's revenge, after she puts an end to Jason's new marriage, is to cut him off from completely from his sons, killing them and denying Jason access to their bodies. Medea's history with Jason shows her tendency to use children to harm their fathers.¹²⁶ Before Medea turned the Princess' body into a weapon which killed Creon, she used the daughters of Pelias as weapons against their father.

Before she kills her own children to have revenge against Jason, Medea kills her brother Apsyrtos in an act of aggression against her own father Aetes. In both cases she acts directly against the children, killing them and severing the father's relationship with their sons and their patriline, and leaving the fathers alive to suffer.

The Daughters of Pelias and Creon's Daughter

Neither the Trophos nor Medea give a detailed account of the death of Pelias.¹²⁷

The Trophos says only that Medea 'persuaded' (πείσασα) (9) the Peliads to kill their

¹²⁶ See Luschnig 2007, 23 for Medea's use of children to destroy their fathers. She points out that Medea uses herself and her brother to destroy her father, Pelias' daughters to kill Pelias, the Princess to kill Creon, and that she destroys Jason by killing his children.

¹²⁷ The details that the Trophos and Medea give seem to conform to the version of the myth from Euripides' lost *Peliades*, a summary of which survives from Moses Chorenensis. 'She (Medeia) allied herself with Jason and sailed from Scythia to Thessaly. There having shown her skill in magic she decided to destroy by treachery the local king. Therefore she spoke long to his daughters about their father's great age and lack of male offspring and offered to help in restoring his youth. After this Euripides proceeds to narrate in detail how her end was accomplished, how Medeia put a slaughtered ram in a cauldron and fired it from below, how by the boiling of

father. In fuller accounts of the myth, Medea persuaded (or deceived) them into believing that if they dismembered their father and allowed Medea to boil him in a magic potion, he would emerge with his youth restored.

There is a close resemblance to the death of King Creon, which I discuss above. In both cases Princesses, whom Jason might marry, kill their fathers after coming under Medea's influence. Both the Peliads and Creon's daughter come under Medea's influence when she tricks them into entering into a deal with her. In both cases, Medea offers gifts to the other women which turn out to be deadly. Medea offers the Peliads restored youth for their father. She offers the Princess a crown and a robe. Both are examples of deals and deception between women where the result is destructive of the relationship itself, and of the relationships and deals between men in which the women are implicated.

In both instances making a deal with Medea, itself a display of inappropriate agency, draws the Princesses into further grotesquely violent displays of agency. As a consequence of her deal with Medea, Creon's daughter kills her father. I have discussed above how Creon's daughter's corpse displays an uncanny degree of agency, and almost seems to be animated by Medea, when it kills Creon.

As a consequence of entering into a deal with Medea, the Peliads kill their father -- they murder him using knives, a particularly masculine and active murder weapon which anticipates Medea's murder of her children, and they butcher him, also a male task. Like Creon's daughter, the Peliads are disturbing because they take

the cauldron she showed the appearance of a living ram and thereby deceiving the daughters managed to get Pelias butchered. And he was, says Euripides, in the cauldron and *he adds nothing else.*" Quoted in Webster 33.

action when they should be passive, but are also disturbing because the action they take is not entirely their own. Just as she animated Creon's daughter's corpse, Medea also has control of the Peliads when they kill their father. When describing the murder of Pelias to Jason, she assigns herself the active role in his death: 'Πελίαν τ' ἀπέκτειν'. She describes it as a murder that *she* carried out, by means of those who physically committed the crime, his daughters, 'παίδων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ'. Medea is the guiding intelligence behind the murders; the Princesses are her tools.

The outcome of both the Peliads' and the Creon's daughters' deals with Medea, and their destructive agency, is the dismemberment of their fathers' bodies. I have already discussed how Creon's death, when his flesh is ripped off his body as a result of contact with his daughter's corpse, is a feminizing loss of his body's integrity. In Pelias death, this effect is even more pronounced. His flesh is not just ripped from his bones, his very bones are disarticulated as his body is cut to pieces. The bodies of both fathers are feminized as a result of their daughters' inappropriate and masculine agency

Apsyrtos and Jason's Children

The Trophos does not mention the murder of Apsyrtos during her summary of Medea's and Jason's history, although it is a part of the events in Colchis, which she does include. Medea makes explicit mention of Apsyrtos during her appeal to Themis and Artemis that she be allowed to destroy Jason and the Princess. The context of Medea's admission is similar to her later summary during her *agon* with

Jason; she includes the murder of her brother among the sacrifices that she has made on Jason's behalf.

<p>ὦ μεγάλα θεμί καὶ πότνι ἼΑρτεμι, λεύσσεθ' ἅ πάσχω, μεγάλοις ὄρκοις ἐνδησαμένα τὸν κατάρατον πόσιν; ὅν ποτ' ἐγὼ νύμφαν τ' ἐσίδοιμ' αὐτοῖς μελάθροισ διακναιομένους, οἷ' ἐμὲ πρόσθεν τολμῶσ' ἀδικεῖν. ὦ πάτερ, ὦ πόλις, ὧν κάσιν αἰσχρῶς τὸν ἐμὸν κτείνας' ἀπενάσθην. (160-167)¹²⁸</p>	<p>O mighty Themis and my lady Artemis, do you see what I suffer, I who have bound my accursed husband with mighty oaths? May I one day see him and his new bride ground to destruction, and their whole house with them, so terrible are the wrongs they are bold to do me unprovoked! O father, O my native city, from you I departed in shame, having killed my brother.</p>
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There are similarities between the two events which show how the murder of Apsyrtos is a precursor to the murder of Medea's children. In both cases, Medea kills the male children of the man whose household and control she is leaving; when she leaves her father, she kills his son, and when she leaves Jason, she kills his sons.

Medea is also killing children she is related to in both instances; her father's son is her brother¹²⁹, and Jason's sons are her sons too. In both instances, Medea expresses shame and grief at the child she has killed, expressed in terms of loss of family. In the passage quoted above, she calls her murder of Apsyrtos "αἰσχρῶς", and

¹²⁸ See Bremmer 1997, 84-6 for a description of variant versions of the Apsyrtos myth, including versions in which Medea does not kill Apsyrtos

¹²⁹ See Bremmer 1997, 88-99 for Medea's murder of Apsyrtos having particular significance as the murder of a brother by a sister, given the closeness of the opposite sex sibling bond and the rarity of brother/sister violence in Greek myth.

mourns his loss along with the loss of her father and city. Medea's famous debate with her heart is an eloquent expression of the pain she feels at the thought of killing her children. Even as she resolves to kill her children, she characterizes the act in terms of grief and shame. Medea calls the murder of her children 'δεινὰ κακά', (1244) and predicts that her life afterwards will be full of grief: 'ἔρπε πρὸς βαλβίδα λυπηρὰν βίου' ¹³⁰(1246) and that she will lament: 'θρήνει' (1250).

In both cases Medea kills the men's only male children, cutting them off from their patriline. ¹³¹ After Jason discovers that Medea has killed Creon and the Princess, he comes to Medea's house to find their sons whom, now that there is no possibility that he will father royal sons, he is eager to protect. When he discovers that Medea has killed the children, he says that she has destroyed him by making him childless: 'ἦτις τέκνοισι σοῖσιν ἐμβαλεῖν ξίφος/ ἔτλης τεκοῦσα κάμ' ἄπαιδ' ἀπώλεσας' ¹³² (1325-6). He is not grieved only or primarily by the loss of these children, but by no longer being in a state of having sons.

When Jason confronts Medea about the death of his children, he connects her murder of her sons with her murder of Apsyrtos:

ἐγὼ δὲ νῦν φρονῶ, τότε οὐ φρονῶν,	Now I am in my right mind, though I was
ὄτ' ἐκ δόμων σε βαρβάρου τ' ἀπὸ χθονὸς	insane before when I brought you from
Ἑλλην' ἐς οἶκον ἠγόμην, κακὸν μέγα,	your home among the barbarians to a

¹³⁰ "Go to your life's miserable goal"

¹³¹ Segal argues that Medea's killing of two sons, rather than one, emphasizes that her revenge consists of wiping out of a whole family by killing all the men, rather than simply causing grief at the loss of a child. (Segal 1996, 16).

¹³² "You brought yourself to take the sword to your own children and destroyed my life with childlessness."

πατρός τε καὶ γῆς προδότιν ἢ σ'
 ἐθρέψατο.
 τὸν σὸν δ' ἀλάστορ' εἰς ἔμ' ἔσκηψαν θεοί:
 κτανούσα γὰρ δὴ σὸν κάσιν παρέστιον
 τὸ καλλίπρωρον εἰσέβης Ἄργουῤ σκάφος.
 ἦρξω μὲν ἐκ τοιῶνδε: νυμφευθεῖσα δὲ
 παρ' ἀνδρὶ τῶδε καὶ τεκοῦσά μοι τέκνα,
 εὐνῆς ἕκατι καὶ λέχους σφ' ἀπώλεσας.
 οὐκ ἔστιν ἥτις τοῦτ' ἂν Ἑλληνὶς γυνή
 ἔτλη ποθ', ὧν γε πρόσθεν ἠξίουσιν ἐγὼ
 γῆμαι σέ, κῆδος ἐχθρὸν ὀλέθριόν τ' ἐμοί,
 λέαιναν, οὐ γυναῖκα, τῆς Τυρσηνίδος
 Σκύλλης ἔχουσαν ἀγριωτέραν φύσιν.
 (1329-1344)

Greek house. A great curse you were
 even then, betrayer of father and of the
 land that nourished you. But the
 avenging spirit meant for you the gods
 have visited on me. For you killed your
 own brother at the hearth and then
 stepped aboard the fair-prowed Argo. It
 was with acts like these that you began.
 But now when you were married to me
 and had borne me children, you killed
 them because of sex and the marriage-
 bed. No Greek woman would have dared
 to do this, yet I married you in
 preference to them, and a hateful and
 destructive match it has proved. You are
 a she-lion, not a woman, with a nature
 more savage than Scylla the Tuscan
 monster.

Jason argues here that the same barbarian nature which caused Medea to murder Apsyrtos in Colchis at the beginning of their association has caused her to murder her children in Corinth. He calls attention to the similarity of the two situations, saying that Medea killed Apsyrtos at the hearth (in her father's home),

before leaving on the Argo. Medea has just killed her children in their home, and is about to leave in a chariot.

But while Jason recognizes the parallel between the violence that marked the beginning of their deal and the violence with which it is concluding, he fails to make the connection between the violence and the deal itself, and so his own role in the deal. He argues that his mistake was in bringing as dangerous a barbarian as Medea home, and denies that a Greek woman would have acted similarly. According to him, the danger lies in the nature of the woman, and not the quality of his interaction with her. He does not recognize that the death of his own children, like the death of Apsyrtos, was caused by his continued willingness to deal with Medea and his failure to contain her subjectivity. In the next section, I will discuss the how Jason enters into a second deal with Medea and enables Medea's revenge.

Negotiation Between Jason and Medea

Like Creon and Aegeus, Jason brings about his own downfall because he enters into a deal with Medea. As I discussed in the last section, Jason's history with Medea is characterized by violence brought about as a result of their original deal in Colchis. In this section, I will explore the ways in which Jason enables Medea's subjectivity by continuing to deal with her during the action of the play.

Jason's First Encounter with Medea

As soon as he approaches her, Jason shows that he is willing to continue to deal with Medea; he immediately offers her terms of a new deal.¹³³ He proposes that Medea accept exile, and leave Corinth with her children, whereupon Jason will be free to conduct his married life with the Princess unmolested. Jason offers to provide financial support while they are in exile, and, somewhat facetiously, allows that Medea may continue to speak abusively about him, while he protests that he will never have hostile feelings towards her (446-58).¹³⁴

Jason is offering Medea less than what she is entitled to under her interpretation of the terms of their original deal. In exchange for his financial support, to which she already has a strong claim as his wife,¹³⁵ she is to accept his new marriage.

¹³³ Foley argues that "Jason's failure to treat Medea as the fully human (rather than in the traditional sense Greek female) and even heroic being that he married with a clasp of right hands and supplicated in time of trouble propels her to even greater daring." (Foley 1989, 80-1) I argue exactly the opposite, that it is Jason's failure to treat Medea as female, rather than fully human, which enables her destruction.

¹³⁴ Rabinowitz observes "Jason seems to believe that his relationship to the princess and to Medea could have coexisted but for Medea's passion. In his scenario, she desires him, while he merely desires heirs and is trying to do what is best for them. In other words, heterosexual desire is ascribed to women; men are motivated by a homosocial drive for sons." (Rabinowitz 1993, 140).

¹³⁵ See Mueller 2001 for an excellent discussion of the connection between *philia*, gift-giving and obligation in *Medea*. She identifies in Jason and Medea's conflict two competing versions of *philia*. The first is familial *philia*, which obliges the head of a household to provide for his dependents. The goal in providing for them is not equality, but continuity of the relationship. The second type of *philia* is appropriate for relationships between *philoï* who are not family, and between *xenoi*. With this type of *philia*, gifts are exchanged on both sides to maintain the relationship and to reinforce equality. She argues that Jason is trying to use both systems, but fulfills the obligations of neither. If he is behaving as a husband, the proper context in which to support Medea is within marriage, and he should not be offering her

In response to Jason's offer, Medea gives the summary of their history which I discussed in the last section. As I argued above, the same events that Medea advances as benefits that she has provided to Jason are, in fact, incidents in which she harmed him by interrupting his homosocial bonds.

Medea describes the deals in terms which emphasize her agency and Jason's passivity, which establishes her subjectivity and her claim on Jason.¹³⁶ The first words she uses in her account of her participation in the voyage of the Argo are "ἔσωσά σ'"¹³⁷ (475). In her version, she did not just help Jason to accomplish his goals; she is solely responsible for their accomplishment. She, in the first person singular, killed the dragon 'κτείνας', and offered Jason salvation 'ἀνέσχον σοὶ φάος σωτήριον'¹³⁸ (482). He owes his success in his quest, and the fact of his survival, to her.

Unable to recognize the harm that he has suffered already through his first deal with Medea, Jason persists in trying to make a new deal with her. In his rebuttal to Medea's history of their relationships Jason accepts the premise that they

money to destroy it. If he is behaving as her friend, then he should be rejecting the language of profit and gain, and aiming for an equal exchange, rather than insisting on his superiority (Mueller 2001, 474-6).

¹³⁶ McClure argues that: "As a drama about discourse, Euripides' *Medea*, like Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* before it, depicts a frightening status reversal brought about by a verbally dominant female who powerfully manipulates discourse in order to destroy her husband." (McClure 1999, 376). Specifically I agree that Medea's manipulation of discourse is important, and argue that it is important as a manifestation of her ability to deal.

¹³⁷ "I saved your life"

¹³⁸ "I raised aloft for you the fair light of escape from death"

have been engaged in a relationship of mutual exchange, but argues that it is he, not Medea, who has offered gifts of greater value over the course of their relationship.

His first tactic is to try to ascribe Medea's helpful actions in the past to Aphrodite, but even then he does concede Medea's point that she has taken helpful action on his behalf in the past:

<p>ἐγὼ δ', ἐπειδὴ καὶ λίαν πυργοῖς χάριν, Κύπριν νομίζω τῆς ἐμῆς ναυκληρίας σώτειραν εἶναι θεῶν τε κἀνθρώπων μόνην. σοὶ δ' ἔστι μὲν νοῦς λεπτός -- ἀλλ' ἐπίφθονος λόγος διελθεῖν, ὡς Ἔρωσ σ' ἠνάγκασεν τόξοις ἀφύκτοις τοῦμόν ἐκσῶσαι δέμας ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀκριβῶς αὐτὸ θήσομαι λίαν: ὄπη γὰρ οὖν ὤνησας οὐ κακῶς ἔχει. (526- 33)</p>	<p>Since you so exaggerate your kindness to me, I for my part think that Aphrodite alone of gods and mortals was the savior of my expedition. As for you, I grant you have a clever mind—but to tell how Eros forced you with his ineluctable arrows to save me would expose me to ill-will. No, I will not make too strict a reckoning on this point. So far as you did help me, you did well.</p>
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As a second tactic, Jason argues that Medea got more out of their exchange than she gave: 'μείζω γε μέντοι τῆς ἐμῆς σωτηρίας/ εἴληφας ἢ δέδωκας, ὡς ἐγὼ φράσω'¹³⁹ (534-5). This language admits Medea's agency in his salvation: if she were not responsible for it, why argue that what he provided in return was of an appropriate value to cancel the debt? In arguing for the greater value of what he

¹³⁹ "So far as you did help me, you did well. But in return for saving me you got more than you gave, as I shall make clear."

provided Medea compared to what she provided, Jason is conceding that they were in fact engaged in a deal.

The benefits that Jason claims to have provided to Medea also depend on her agency, not his.¹⁴⁰ He argues that as a result of her deal with him, she lives in Greece, and enjoys renown among Greeks:

<p>πάντες δέ σ' ἤσθοντ' οὔσαν Ἑλληνες σοφὴν καὶ δόξαν ἔσχεσ: εἰ δὲ γῆς ἐπ' ἑσχάτοις ὄροισιν ὤκεις, οὐκ ἂν ἦν λόγος σέθεν.</p>	<p>All the Greeks have learned that you are clever, and you have won renown. But if you lived at the world's edge, there would be no talk of you.</p>
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(539-41)

Jason takes credit for Medea's presence in Greece, although he has conceded that he himself was not responsible for the success of the expedition which allowed them both to come to Greece. What is more, according to Jason it is not the mere fact of her presence in Greece, but her wisdom and the reputation she has earned her 'σοφὴν καὶ δόξαν' (539-40) that has resulted in her renown. That Jason has provided Medea any benefit at all is doubtful, and his arguments are unconvincing. As the Chorus adjudicates (576-8), Jason is the clear loser in the *agon* with Medea. But even if the Chorus had found him more persuasive, he would still be vulnerable in that he was deeply engaged in negotiation with Medea.

Even after his clear defeat in their debate, and Medea's recitation of past violence that has arisen from their deal, Jason persists in trying to make a deal. At

¹⁴⁰ Luschnig argues that Jason is entirely dependent on Medea for his identity as a hero (Luschnig 2007, 31).

the end of their encounter, he offers Medea the same terms he had proposed at the beginning of their conversation:

<p>ὥς οὐ κρινοῦμαι τῶνδέ σοι τὰ πλείονα. ἀλλ', εἴ τι βούλη παισὶν ἢ σαυτῆ φυγῆς προσωφέλημα χρημάτων ἐμῶν λαβεῖν, λέγ': ὥς ἔτοιμος ἀφθόνω δοῦναι χερσὶ ξένοις τε πέμπειν σύμβολ', οἳ δράσουσί σ' εὖ. καὶ ταῦτα μὴ θέλουσα μωρανεῖς, γύναι: λήξασα δ' ὀργῆς κερδανεῖς ἀμείνονα. (609-15)</p>	<p>I shall not argue any more of this case with you. But if you wish to get some of my money to help the children and yourself in exile, say the word, for I am ready to give with unstinting hand, and also to send tokens to my friends, who will treat you well. You would be a fool not to accept this offer, woman. Forget your anger and it will be the better for you.</p>
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He offers Medea these terms even as he insists that he will not engage further with her. But as before, he is offering her a deal even as he says that he is finished with her. Jason's persistent refusal to recognize *that* he is engaged in a deal with Medea, and the danger that puts him in, is consistent through his every interaction with her, and the source of his eventual downfall.¹⁴¹

In their first encounter of the play, Jason shows unequivocally that he is willing and even eager to make a new deal with Medea to replace the old, and that he can contain the destructive effects of Medea's anger by negotiating this new deal.

¹⁴¹ Lloyd argues that the *agon* between Jason and Medea happens too late to have any practical effect, since Jason is already married. (Lloyd 1992, 41) In my view, the effect of the *agon* is not to prevent or continue Jason's marriage to the Princess, but to reaffirm and intensify Jason's vulnerability to Medea's subjectivity. To the extent that it enables her revenge, the *agon* has a hugely important practical effect.

This mistaken belief leaves him vulnerable to Medea's deception, when in their second encounter Medea pretends to accept the new deal he offers, using Jason's naive cooperation as a means of carrying out her revenge.

Jason's Second Encounter with Medea

Jason immediately expresses his willingness to deal with Medea when meeting with her for a second time, as he did at their first encounter. It is Jason's willingness to deal that makes Medea's deception, and hence her revenge, possible. Jason begins:

ἦκω κελευσθείς: καὶ γὰρ οὖσα δυσμενῆς	I have come at your bidding. For though
οὐ τᾶν ἀμάρτοις τοῦδέ γ', ἀλλ'	you hate me, you will not fail to obtain a
ἀκούσομαι:	hearing from me. What further do you
τί χρῆμα βούλη καινὸν ἐξ ἐμοῦ, γύναι;	wish from me, woman?

(866-8)

He has come when Medea called, and regardless of her feelings towards him and the hostility that she has expressed, he is willing to listen to her demands. Medea has yet to say anything untruthful to him; she did not need to employ deception to get him to enter into this deal with her, only to hide her true intentions and motives during the negotiation.

To set up her murder of the Princess, Medea pretends to accept the deal that Jason offered at their earlier meeting.¹⁴² She has already explained to the Chorus that she is making this deal with Jason in order to carry out her revenge. She says that she is giving up her subjective stance, and she pretends to agree with Jason that she should view her best interest as determined entirely by his:

<p>νῦν οὖν ἐπαινῶ σωφρονεῖν τέ μοι δοκεῖς ἢ χρῆν μετεῖναι τῶνδε τῶν βουλευμάτων καὶ ξυμπεραίνειν καὶ παρεστάναι λέχει νύμφη τε κηδεύουσαν ἦδεσθαι σέθεν. ἀλλ' ἐσμὲν οἷόν ἐσμεν, οὐκ ἐρῶ κακόν, γυναῖκες: οὐκουν χρῆν σ' ὁμοιοῦσθαι φύσιν, οὐδ' ἀντιτείνειν νήπι' ἀντὶ νηπίων. παριέμεσθα, καὶ φαμεν κακῶς φρονεῖν τότ', ἀλλ' ἄμεινον νῦν βεβούλευμαι τάδε. (884-93)</p>	<p>So now I approve and I agree that you are acting with sober sense by contracting this marriage-alliance for us. It is I who am the fool, since I ought to be sharing in your plans, helping you carry them out, standing by the marriage-bed, and taking joy in the match I was making with your bride. But we women are, I will not say bad creatures, but we are what we are. So you ought not to imitate our nature or return our childishness with childishness. I give in: I admit that I was foolish then, but now I have taken a better view of the matter.</p>
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In so far as Medea describes the subordinate position that she should have taken, she is speaking correctly. In a system where only men may act as subjects

¹⁴² Foley comments on Medea's deception of Jason "But this is all playacting on Medea's part: she cleverly mimics Jason's own mode of ethical reasoning and feigns female subservience only in order to deceive her adversary." (Foley 1989, 64)

and only they may make deals, Medea *should* be passive. Her deception is only in telling Jason that she *has* adopted this position. But even as she says that she has become passive, she continues to deal with Jason, and Jason continues to deal with her.¹⁴³ It is not so much Medea's deception of Jason¹⁴⁴, as Jason's persistent inability to recognize that as long as he deals with Medea and engages with her as an equal, she will not be passive and so will continue to be dangerous, and his inability to treat Medea as anything but a partner in a deal, that is most dangerous and harmful.

Medea's acquiescence is clearly not a manifestation of a new-found passivity, in spite of what she says, since she demands and receives further consideration from Jason in return for agreeing to his demands. Under the guise of securing a reprieve from exile for her children, she gets Jason to take the children to the Princess, so that the children can give her gifts from Medea, in an effort to persuade the Princess to prevail upon her father that the children be allowed to stay in Corinth with Jason. Had she truly been adopting a submissive position, she would not be demanding that Jason make concessions in return for hers; Medea is able to send her poisoned gifts to the Princess not because she deceives Jason, but because Jason continues to be willing to deal with her.

As part of their new deal, Medea interposes herself into Jason's relationship with Creon, as a means of delivering the poisoned gifts to the Princess. Medea instructs Jason to make a deal with Creon to lift the children's exile. But under

¹⁴³ Foley comments on this interaction: "Medea also gives up on trying to persuade Jason honestly. Instead, she successfully feigns being the helpless woman, given to tears and irrationality, who will now for the good of her children accept, as a proper woman should, her husband's superiority and guidance." (Foley 1989, 75)

¹⁴⁴ See for example Lawrence 1997, 52 for Medea as "arch-deceiver".

Medea's influence, Jason is no longer sure of his ability to engage in a deal with Creon independently: 'οὐκ οἶδ' ἄν εἰ πείσαιμι, πειρᾶσθαι δὲ χρή' ¹⁴⁵(941). Because of Jason's reluctance to trade on his own on the relationship he has established with his father-in-law, Medea guides him easily into his habitual method of making deals with other men: getting his wife to make the deal on his behalf. First, Jason agrees to have the Princess appeal to her father on his behalf. Second, Jason agrees to let Medea persuade the Princess on his behalf, by having the children bring the Princess gifts from her. He is now conducting his deal with Creon at two removes, with two women, his former quasi-wife and his new bride, as intermediaries.¹⁴⁶

Instead of using the new relationship with Creon established through his marriage to make a break from Medea and deals with women, he allows Medea and the Princess to gain control of his relationship with Creon. By ceding this territory to Medea, he gives her space in which to carry out her revenge, where a refusal to deal with her and an insistence on making his own deal with Creon would have prevented the revenge.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ "I don't know whether I shall win him over, but I must try."

¹⁴⁶ Mueller notes that "While Jason is the ultimate recipient of Medea's gifts, he never actually touches the objects. They destroy him indirectly, by destroying those whom they do touch (the children, Creon, and Creon's daughter)." (Mueller 2001, 496)

¹⁴⁷ Mueller comments on Jason's inability to see the significance of the gifts Medea offers for the Princess, and their potential danger as deal-making objects. "As the speech unfolds, we recognize that what Jason sees when Medea offers (and perhaps displays) the robe and the crown is a certain quantity of material wealth (*chremata*). He does not accept the objects with the intention of either creating a new bond or strengthening a preexisting relationship with their owner, for he still expects that Medea will go into exile, with or without her children. Nor does he question

Conclusion

The destructive consequences of Jason's deal with Medea are evident from its inception. Throughout her association with Jason, Medea has acted to interrupt Jason's homosocial bonds, and demonstrated her propensity to use children to harm their fathers, particularly by severing the father's patriline. Medea's revenge against Jason at the end of their deal is consistent with her actions over the course of their entire relationship, rather than a sudden reversal inspired by jealousy.

Medea is able to successfully execute her revenge against Jason because of his consistent willingness to deal with her. He makes deals with Medea both when she emphatically asserts a hostile subjectivity, as in their first encounter, and when she uses deception to present a falsely benevolent subjectivity, as in their second encounter. He never realizes, as the audience must, that there can be no benevolent female subjectivity.

His willingness to deal with Medea amounts to a failure to contain her destructive subjectivity through relationships with other men, particularly the one formed with Creon through his marriage to the Princess. Whereas in *Alcestis*, Alcestis' subjectivity was contained through Admetus' rejection of his deal with her and investment in a deal with Heracles, Jason never fully rejects his deal with Medea, or invests in his deal with Creon.

Medea's motive in giving a gift to a woman who is clearly not her friend." (Mueller 2001, 497)

Conclusion

Alcestis and *Medea* are plays about deals, and *Alcestis* and *Medea* are both female, and therefore inappropriately destructive, deal-makers. The full effect of *Alcestis*' destructive subjectivity is not realized, as *Medea*'s is, not because one is a good woman and the other bad, or because one makes self-sacrificing and the other self-interested deals, but because *Alcestis*' subjectivity is contained when she is exchanged in a deal between men, where *Medea*'s subjectivity is encouraged by a series of deals with men.

Alcestis makes a deal with Admetus that seems positive and appropriate to a woman; she agrees to sacrifice herself on behalf of her husband, family, and community. But *Alcestis* makes demands in return for her sacrifice. These demands are a dangerous manifestation of her subjectivity, and have the effect of interrupting Admetus' network of relationships with other men based on orthodox deals. Order is restored to Admetus' household and family once the terms of his deal with her are undone. This process of unravelling culminates when Heracles undoes her death, and exchanges her, anonymous and silent, in his deal with Admetus.

Medea makes a series of deals with Jason, Creon, and Aegeus. Her deal with Jason seems to offer him vital support and success as a hero, but in reality, the list of favours that *Medea* has performed for Jason as part of their exchange is a list of occasions on which *Medea* has interfered with Jason's homosocial bonds. *Medea*'s revenge against Jason, the murder of his bride, father-in-law, and sons, is consistent

with, rather than a deviation from, the effects of their deal since its inception. Medea is able to take revenge because Jason, Creon and Aegeus all make deals with her. These deals share a similar structure; they are negotiated with men who ought to have power over Medea, and who surrender that power against their self-interest as part of the deal. Creon experiences a loss of homosocial bonds and children, as Jason does. Aegeus' bonds are threatened.

During the action of the play, unlike *Alcestis*, the men never make deals with each other. Had they done so, they could theoretically have contained Medea as *Alcestis* was contained.

Both plays show the danger of female subjectivity, expressed through the power to make deals. It is a constant. The danger that women pose is always present, and will lead to disaster, regardless of the intention of the woman who makes a deal. The variable in the equation is men's subjectivity. They control the outcome, by succeeding or failing to make deals with each other that neutralize the danger. Though *Alcestis* and *Medea* show the danger of women's action, men's actions are ultimately the ones that matter.

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