Motherhood and Representation in Modern Adaptations of Greek Tragedy

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CONTENTS

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

The following chapters will examine how the mother is being represented in modern adaptations of Greek tragedy. Although the productions discussed all afford different conceptualisations of the mother from different angles and in different time periods, it is my argument that the fact that the discourses surrounding motherhood are multiple rather than unified points to a certain level of anxiety surrounding the role. This can be seen to be representative of a wider cultural anxiety regarding the maternal function, as well as women and feminism more generally.

In order to examine the issues delineated below, the following chapters will each look at an aspect of how the mother is used in terms of rethinking female subjectivity. The first chapter will examine how Hélène Cixous' play *Le Nom D'Oedipe: Chant du Corps Interdit* can be seen to attempt to reformulate Freudian and Lacanian notions of female subjectivity via the linguistic and theatrical potentiality of the maternal body. The second chapter will look at how, following the gender theory of the 1990s, any sense of gendered – including maternal -identity is questioned. The final chapter will look at the reasons as to why Euripides' *Medea* is the most popularly performed Greek tragedy in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with particular reference to her infanticide.[1] These different strategies do, however, have many themes and objectives in common. These include: issues of female subjectivity, the representation of women on-stage and the choice of Greek tragedy as a vehicle for exploring these concerns. These shall be discussed below as a guide to the overarching issues of the thesis.

<u>Subjectivity</u>
Firstly, these productions can be seen to be seeking a way of understanding subjectivity as plural (as opposed to the finished and unified male subject of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis). This is achieved through a reconfiguration of the maternal. The Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic tradition has become an important point of departure for much feminist criticism, particularly that of Hélène

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1 The *Medea* is the focus of two chapters as it is the most widely performed Greek tragedy of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Therefore, the amount of emphasis placed on adaptations of this play is proportionate to its cultural status.

Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. The psychoanalytic texts of Freudian psychoanalysis gave the mother the central role in the family as well as a central role in terms of the subjectivity of male children. For Sigmund Freud, in his formulation of the Oedipus complex, the male child enters into subjecthood via his interactions with his parents (specifically his mother). According to Freud, the Oedipus complex occurs in the third - or phallic – of the five stages in a child's psychosexual development. This stage, according to Freud, normally manifests itself between the ages of three and six. It is during this stage that the child in question begins to develop a gendered sense of sexual identity as being either male or female based on an awareness of the genital differences between the sexes.[2] Due to the resultant changes in the dynamic of parent/child relationship, the male child directs his sexual energy (or libido) towards his mother. He thus develops a sense of rivalry with the father, the sexual partner of the mother. Freud claims that the male child wishes to kill his paternal sexual rival (this can be seen at work in the plot of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the play from which the term 'Oedipus complex' stems). However, the child is aware that the father is the stronger of the two rivals and may seek to punish the desires of the male child. This fear is made manifest in a subconscious castration anxiety. The child therefore decides to transfer his incestuous desire for his mother onto desire for other women. [3]

The female Oedipus complex is defined by penis envy. This is to say that within the context of Freudian psychoanalysis, women – in lacking the male penis – feel that they are lacking the necessary part for obtaining narcissistic value. This inculcates a feeling of gender inequality.[4] Furthermore, lacking a penis, the female child cannot engage sexually with the mother. Freud therefore hypothesises that she transfers her desire for her mother onto a desire for her father (with child-bearing acting as a replacement for the missing penis).[5] Following the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex, both male and female children can be seen to enter into heteronormative male/female gendered identifications. Failure to successfully resolve the Oedipus complex, Freud claims, can result in psychoses and deviant sexual behaviour (such as homosexual or incestuous desire).

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2 Freud 1905: 113-114.
3 Freud 1905: 145-152.
4 Freud 1905: 113-114.
5 Freud 1931: 386-388.

These psychosexual theories are expanded upon by Jacques Lacan who reappropriates the Oedipus complex in terms of language and culture. Lacan writes that following the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex the male child enters into the Symbolic order. Here, Freud's penis is replaced with the Symbolic phallus which represents patriarchal power. Lacan's Symbolic order is an order of culture mediated through language. This is to say that Lacan's concept of the Symbolic order is reliant on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure who argued in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) that language can be demonstrated to have arisen from a given society's needs rather than in order to name a pre-linguistic set of ideas. The main focus of de Saussure's work is the sign which is made up of the signifier (the sound image, or, a psychological concept belonging to the given linguistic system) and the signified (that to which the signifier is referring). These components are mutually reliant. Furthermore, the relationship between objects and the words used to name them is, in fact, dependent on the wider linguistic system: it is only through a sign's relationship with other signs that the communication of the concept which the sign signifies can be achieved. Lacan sees this linguistic system as pre-existing the subject. Therefore, the subject is necessarily subjected to the order language imposes on culture: 'Man speaks, then, but it is because the symbol has made him man.'[6] Thus, Lacan argues, the Symbolic order is only thinkable in terms of language.

In order to enter into subjecthood the male child must enter into this Symbolic order. In the pre-Oedipal phase the male child experiences an unindividuated identification with his mother. At the point of the Oedipus complex, Lacan introduces the concept of the *nom du père.* This Symbolic father is a position in the Symbolic order, drawn from Freud's concept of the mythical father in *Totem and Taboo* (1918). Lacan placed a greater than previous emphasis on 'the place that she [the mother] reserves for the Name-of-the Father in the promulgation of the law.'[7] The *nom du père* functions to impose social law and regulate the incestuous desire for the mother which characterises the Oedipus complex: 'It is in the *name of the Father* that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has

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6 Lacan 1977: 65.
7 Lacan 1977: 218.

identified his person with the figure of the law'.[8] The phrase is homophonic with the 'non du père' – a prohibitive utterance which represses the libidinal desires proscribed by society. Again, fearing castration by the Father, the child rejects the mother and the Imaginary (the pre-Symbolic realm) and enters into subjecthood. Entrance into the Symbolic order occurs through the child's acquisition of language and in tandem with what is referred to the as 'mirror stage' of psychosexual development where the child differentiates himself as separate from the mother rather than as part of the mother.[9] However, the child in becoming a subject is, in turn, subjected to the laws and the language of the Symbolic order. This forces the individual into a heternormative gendered or sexual identity. Therefore, the realisation of the gendered subject is connected to the linguistic dimension of the Symbolic. Thus, the self engendered is a cultural ideal rather than any true or essential self.

The Symbolic order necessarily excludes women from subject positions, designating them as being defined by lack or as Other to the male norm. As has been discussed, in the Symbolic order the symbol of the phallus represents patriarchal power and authority. For Lacan, the female child is unable to identify with this Symbolic phallus. This precludes her from entering into the Symbolic order and attaining subjecthood. Following on from Freud, Lacan's work on the Oedipus complex posits the mother as the first Other for the male child.[10] Neither the works of Freud nor Lacan discussed the subjectivity of the mother, rather explored the ways in which the male child came into subjecthood through his interactions with the mother figure.

Some of the first criticisms of patriarchal Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis came from a group of feminist scholars, namely: Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva. They formed a branch of feminism referred to by Jill Dolan as cultural feminism. Dolan writes that although cultural feminists argue that gender is a concept which can 'only take place within a cultural space,'[11] for them sex is empirical. This can be best encapsulated by Simone de Beauvoir's 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'[12] where the 'one' presupposes an innate female subjectivity to be realized.

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8 Lacan 1977: 67 (emphasis in original).
9 Lacan 1977: 1-7.
10 Lacan 1977: 281-91.
11 Dolan 1988: 6.
12 de Beauvoir 1953: 301.

This is to say that: 'women's biological difference from men – primarily focused on their reproductive capacities – gives rise to a formulation of femininity as innate and inherently superior to masculinity.'[13]

Following Lacan's linguistic formulations of the Symbolic order, the concept of language as mediating culture and selfhood in patriarchy is of central importance to Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray. They hold that the patriarchal language and the formulation of subjectivity which constitute Lacan's Symbolic should be rejected as they do not allow for a female subject position. They accuse Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis of accepting male superiority (as opposed to recognizing it as a fabrication of patriarchal society) and defining the feminine as constituting lack and Otherness. Therefore, this school of thought is invested in criticizing the notion that woman is necessarily defined through a reconfiguration of the linguistic process by which the Lacanian subject enters into the Symbolic order. Although it would be reductive to claim that they are all homogeneous in thought with regards to psychoanalytic and semiotic issues, they were all heavily invested in deconstructing traditional patriarchal psychoanalysis and in exploring the role of language in creating patriarchal society.

An important aspect of this is theorising how a reconceptualisation of language could give women room to escape their Othered role in the Symbolic order. This preoccupation with language follows on from Jacques Derrida's work on *phallogocentricism* in his essay 'Plato's Pharmacy' (1972). The term is used to describe Derrida's theory that Western culture (i.e. the patriarchal Symbolic order as defined by Lacan) is controlled by the two concepts of *logocentrism* and *phallocentrism*. The former is, in Derrida's argument, the mistaken belief of and desire for a set of truths which pre-exist and are independent of the signs which are used to identify them within the linguistic system. Derrida employs the latter term to communicate the way in which *logocentrism* has become primarily patriarchal. This is to say that the concept of *phallogocentricism* prioritises the phallus and patriarchal discourse. As a result, women must necessarily participate within this masculine economy which characterizes them as lack and Other. However, there is a possibility

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13 Dolan 1988: 6.

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of escape from patriarchal discourse through embracing the arbitrary nature of the sign. If this arbitrariness is acknowledged, it can be demonstrated that there is no possibility for the 'completed' subject in the Symbolic order. This is due to the fact that Lacan's subject is constructed through language, and Derrida argues that language does not necessarily guarantee meaning. Central to Derrida's theories is the concept of *différance*,[14] a word which includes ideas of both deferment and difference. As has been discussed, words and signs are not meaningful in themselves but are solely definable, and thus meaningful, through relationships between other signs. Derrida therefore concludes that meaning is constantly deferred and there can be no point at which meaning is complete. If language is thus unstable and incomplete, then there can be no sense of a completed subject in the linguistic Symbolic order. It is therefore argued that the subject is always necessarily in process, the completed self – like the meaning of the sign – constantly deferred. Lacanian notions of the Symbolic are incompatible with this notion of the subject-in-process. This is because Freudian and Lacanian notions of the Oedipus complex necessarily evoke the sense of a teleological process at the end of which the male child enters into subjectivity in the Symbolic order.

Following this vein, terms such as 'woman' can similarly be seen as subject to process, plurality and deferment. Therefore, the *phallogocentric* formulations of language which constitute the Symbolic order and necessitate an objective reality to the relationship between the signifier and the signified are inadequate for expressing a female subjectivity autonomous of the masculine. For these cultural feminists, it necessarily ensues that traditional patriarchal forms of writing are inadequate for the task of expressing female subjective experience: 'the female writer is seen as suffering the handicap of having to use a medium (prose writing) which is essentially a male instrument fashioned for male purposes'.[15] Although the ways in which these theorists reconceptualise language differ, their goal is to challenge the Lacanian assumption that female subjectivity is defined by lack and as Other to the male norm by reconfiguring patriarchal discourse. This is to be achieved primarily through the female body. For Irigaray, any theory of a specifically female language must be grounded in and articulated through the sexualised female body. She argues against

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14 See Derrida 1971.
15 Barry 2002: 126.

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the ways in which the female body is understood in patriarchal society writing that 'female sexuality has always been conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters.' Irigaray thus seeks to reconfigure female sexuality. She writes that 'Woman "touches" herself all the time . . . for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact.'[16] Furthermore, for Irigaray, female desire defined without recourse to the masculine can be conceptualised as 'an extremely ancient civilisation [that] would undoubtedly have a different alphabet, a different language.'[17] Here, Irigaray can be seen to be arguing that female sexuality is located in touch rather than the 'scopic economy' privileged by the Symbolic order. For Lacan, touch is associated with the Imaginary and the mother. In this configuration, children's first erotic sensations result from physical contact with the maternal body. This incestuous erotic touch is renounced when the male child enters into the Symbolic order and the child's principal method of perception becomes sight. In this scopic economy, the female genitals, as has been discussed, are defined as lack.[18] Whereas the phallus represents 'one', the female genitals are counted as 'not one' or 'none', 'the reverse of the only visible and morphologically designatable organ . . . . the penis.'[19] Yet, Irigaray sees the potential in the female genitals to disrupt the patriarchal binary structures. She writes that although there are terms which name the constituent parts of the female genitalia, these terms do not refer to the female genitals as a single organ, or as the opposite of the penis. The title of the essay 'This Sex Which Is Not One' can be seen as a pun on the concept of the female organ as lack. Instead of 'not one', the female genitals are multiple, 'at least two.'[20]

The concept of the sexualised maternal body is also important to Kristeva's concept of the semiotic and Cixous's notions of *écriture féminine*. Kristeva's theories on the semiotic places the it in the Imaginary and as the precursor to the acquisition of language which marks a subject's entrance into the Symbolic order. It focuses signification on the prosodic elements of language rather than the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Kristeva argues that the semiotic can disrupt Symbolic language and the patriarchal cultural hegemony with which it is complicit.

16 Irigaray 1985:24.
17 Irigaray 1985: 25.
18 Irigaray 1985: 25-26.
19 Irigaray 1985: 26.
20 Irigaray 1985: 26.

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It is heavily associated with the maternal body (which is regarded as the primary source for the semiotic).[21] Cixous formulates a concept of a specifically female mode of discourse – identified as *écriture féminine* – which will allow female subjective experience to be expressed, as well as shattering the false notion of the completed or unified self in the Symbolic order. Again, the physical female body – particularly the maternal body – is important in terms of this concept of a female mode of writing and is the space in which Cixous locates women's voices. In this way, Cixous uses the mother as a way of reconfiguring 'woman' outside of patriarchy. Thus, it could be conceived that in reconceptualising the traditional paradigm of the mother, women can begin to break down the structures which position them as lack in society. A more detailed discussion of Cixous and *écriture féminine* will follow in the first chapter.

However, following on the feminism of the late 1960s and the 1970s the institution of motherhood was systematically challenged. The technological and industrial changes of the 1980s and 1990s – particularly the entry of women into the workplace en masse – have affected the traditional gender roles of the nuclear family. Whereas formerly it was presupposed that women's main function was reproductive, this notion was irretrievably challenged. [22] Scientific and legal developments (such as contraception and the legalization of abortion) afforded women unprecedented opportunities to control their own bodies and fertility. Within the feminist movement which characterized Britain and America in the late 1960s/1970s there was a general trend that motherhood was 'a difficult (and perhaps undesirable)' position or identity for a woman to strive for.[23] Furthermore, the emergence of queer theory has since precluded any notion of an independent subjectivity at all, arguing that all gendered identities (including that of the mother) are necessarily performative.

Queer theory emerged from post-structuralism in the 1970s when theorists brought post-structural, and particularly deconstructive, methods into discussions regarding gender and sexual identity. In doing so they sought to challenge the legitimacy, authority and stability of heteronormative discourse. Queer theory seeks to contest

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21 See Kristeva 1974.
22 Kaplan 1992: 14-18.
23 See Kaplan 1991.

those ideologies which define heterosexuality and male dominance as normative and natural, citing that both are socially-constructed, artificial categories set up to maintain heteronormative, patriarchal power structures. Social construction theory argues that all meaning is created solely through and within discourse. This position holds that gender and sexuality are not innate nor are they stable facets of the self but rather repeated processes of performance. The individual cannot be taken as an independent, individual subject but instead must be comprehended within his/her socio-historical and ideological context. Social constructionism defies what it sees as limiting, socially constructed categories, such as those of race and nationality, as well as gender and sexual orientation. They argue that any facet of individual identity is not so easily fixable and discourage labels such as 'gay' or 'feminist' or 'black' as these are products of discourse and not incontestable facts. Those who identify with this position seek to establish the difference between the role in which a subject places him or herself and the nature of the subject's true self outside of discourse and regulative forces. In terms of gender theory specifically, such a position argues that heteronormative sexual identities, rather than being innate to the subject, are imposed on the subject by the ideologies within society.

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) argues that gender is something which individuals perform on a daily basis and is not an innate facet of identity. Thus, gendered social roles, such as motherhood, can similarly be seen to be equally as constructed and a way of maintaining the patriarchal social order. She writes that gender is not contingent on biological sex. Rather, it is performative. This is to say that an individual's behaviour, mannerisms and dress are prescribed by what is deemed socially acceptable for his/her gender. Any behavior which is seen as outside of this acceptable norm is deemed deviant and subject to correction. Studies in performativity centre on the way in which the performative act bridges the distance between performance (e.g. acting like a heterosexual mother) and the realisation of the identity toward which that performance is directed (I *am* a heterosexual mother). This is, again, most clearly expressed in Simone de Beauvoir's oft-quoted phrase 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'. This phrase argues for the existence of a pre-given subject – the 'one' who is nonetheless conditioned from birth into becoming the passive, heterosexual woman required by patriarchy. de Beauvoir refers to that which denotes female in society as 'the eternal feminine'. By this she means that 'the

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eternal feminine' is a myth which constitutes what is considered proper feminine behavior. The sanctity of the mother is one of the forms which this myth takes and, de Beauvoir argues, serves to trap women within patriarchal ideals. Unlike Butler's *Gender Trouble,* which questions the possibility of a unified gendered subjectivity entirely, *The Second Sex* retains as its central assumption the idea that within the individual there is an innate identity and subjectivity which requires realisation. This is to say that there is an actual female identity behind 'the eternal feminine' which can be realized. Nonetheless, some of Butler's theorizing on gender can be helpful when considering the production of 'the eternal feminine' in society even if we do not take them to Butler's more extreme conclusions (i.e. that gender can be seen to be enacted rather than acted, a position which precludes any notion of gendered identity whatsoever). Butler argues that 'natural' feelings of gendered identity or sexual orientation are in fact culturally constructed through repeated stylised acts. These are inscribed in everyday practices and behavior (e.g. women taking on a nurturing or maternal role): 'Gender is not something that one is, it is something one does, an act . . . a 'doing' rather than a 'being.'[24] Adherence to these expected norms give the effect of a stable, 'normal' gender. However, these performances are not conscious choices made by the experiencing subjects. This argument borrows heavily from Foucauldian theories on 'regulative discourses' which determine those aspects of gender and sexuality which are socially permissible, denoting them as natural or innate. This is to say that widespread belief and acceptance in certain ideologies naturalises them within the experiencing subject community.[25] Furthermore, the performance is so fully interiorised by the performing subject that they fail to realise themselves outside of these prescriptive regulative discourses. In this case, it is the male/female heteronormative binary. Thus, it is argued that the categories of male and female, masculine and feminine should be open to reinterpretation alongside ideas of the self, subjectivity and objectivity. Butler suggests that one must trouble heteronormativity and make the performative nature of gendered identity evident.

Representation

The second issue which will be considered in the following chapter regards the use and representation of women on-stage. Sue-Ellen Case argues that the repression of

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24 Butler 1990: 33.
25 Butler 1990: 133, 179; Lorber 2010: 9.

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the patricidal and incestuous anxieties which characterize the Oedipus complex have been transposed onto the stage, creating a specifically male-gendered subject position and a theatrical tradition which is permeated by male characters dealing with specifically male psychosexual anxieties:

> the creation of the theatre itself springs from the condition of unfulfilled desire in the male subject. He has been denied any real satisfaction and establishes the stage as a site for his alienated, symbolic yearning for satisfaction.[26]

Thus, Case concludes, 'the traditional [theatrical] subject has been the male subject with whom everyone must identify.'[27] Furthermore, Case argues that Laura Mulvey's discussion of the male gaze in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) can be directly transposed on to the theatre. Mulvey discusses how women on screen (and arguably on stage also) are unconsciously eroticised, and therefore objectified, when they are viewed by men. Through a psychoanalytic lens, Mulvey examines how the unconscious mind of the male spectator experiences erotic visual pleasure through a series of cinematic techniques. She writes that '[i]n their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.'[28] Mulvey centres her argument on the idea of *scopophilia*, a Freudian term used to connote the feelings of sexual pleasure aroused when looking at objects of erotic interest, which Mulvey defines as 'pleasure in looking.' This is to say that the male spectator takes pleasure in making the woman on-screen the object of the gaze. Mulvey examines how this act of voyeurism 'satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking.'[29] This objectification of women is achieved through the combination of three 'looks':

> The first look which objectifies the women on screen is that of her male co-star; the second of the male spectator; the third is an amalgamation of the two. The spectator allows himself to relate to the male character causing him to regard the woman being portrayed as his own personal object of erotic interest. [30]

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26 Case 1988: 120.
27 Case 1988 121.
28 Mulvey 1975: 2184 (emphasis in original).
29 Mulvey 1975: 2184.
30 Mulvey 1975: 2184-87.

Mulvey's conceptualisation of the male gaze creates the heterosexual male subject to the detriment of female as object through audience identification with the male on-screen. The illusion of reality is achieved by de-emphasising the role of the camera and the audience, instead focusing on creating an uncritical identification between spectator and protagonist. Previously, de Beauvoir suggested that inviting men to view women on screen/stage as objects encourages conformity to patriarchal ideas of femininity, such as fulfilling the patriarchal maternal function.

For the theatrical gaze, Case similarly argues:

> When the *ingénue* makes her entrance, the audience sees her as the male protagonist sees her. The blocking of her entrance, her costume and the lighting are designed to reveal that she is the object of his desire. In this way, the audience also perceives her as an object of desire, by identifying with his male gaze.[31]

Thus, although the theatre cannot control the spectator's gaze as rigidly as that of the cinema, it is possible to control how female characters are interpreted on-stage via a range of dramaturgical devices. I will argue that it is against this traditional marginalization of the female subject on-stage that modern productions of Greek drama can be seen to be writing.

Techniques for the disruption of this male gaze can be derived from Bertolt Brecht's theories on theatre, although, as shall be demonstrated in chapters one and two, this can be to very different ends. For Mulvey it is alienation, for Cixous detheatricalisation. The Brechtian concept of 'epic' or 'dialectic theatre' proposes a new kind of theatrical practice which can prevent a play's audience from fully engaging with the actions on-stage. Rather, the audience will be made aware throughout the production that they are watching a play and are not unseen spectators to some real-life action. Whereas realist theatre can be seen to normalise patriarchal ideologies, epic theatre seeks to rouse the audience's reflective and critical faculties by interrupting the spectator's identification with the characters or the action occurring on-stage through a process of alienation or defamiliarisation. Brecht writes: '[i]t is most important that one of the main features of the ordinary theatre should be

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31 Case 1988: 119.

excluded from [epic theatre]: the engendering of illusion."[32] The techniques used to achieve this end include: the fragmentation of the text and the mixing up of tenses and grammatical persons so as to disrupt linear narrative, breaking the fourth wall, issues of staging and lighting (which Case, above, notes as being central to the issue of female representation), the use of song and announcing stage directions to the audience.[33] These techniques serve to prevent the audience from adopting the spectator position described by Mulvey. By emphasising the fact that a play is a performance, Brecht sought to demonstrate that real-life can be perceived as being similarly performative or constructed by dominant ideologies. By emphasising the constructed rather than innate nature of reality, Brecht sought to demonstrate that social change was possible.

These techniques are used by feminist theatrical practitioners to highlight the socially constructed nature of heteronormative gender identities and to open them up for re-interpretation.[34] Jill Dolan writes that in Brechtian feminist theatre:

> Rather than being seduced by the narrative that offers a comfortable gender position, the spectator is asked to pay critical attention to the gender ideology the representational process historically produces and the repressive social relations it legitimises.[35]

In watching a theatrical performance, the spectator is made heavily aware of gender as performance. Theatre has been called 'the art of imitations that reveals imitation'[36] due to the fact that by drawing attention to its own performativity, it can question the ideological positionings of its particular socio-historical moment. In watching a performance, the audience is made aware that they are simultaneously embracing both fiction and reality.[37] In making this dichotomy apparent, theatre simultaneously mirrors and warps the dominant culture in which it exists, deconstructing both itself and, by extension, society's ideological positionings.[38] It could be argued that this relationship between theatrical performance and real-life performance is most

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32 Brecht 1964: 122.
33 Brecht 1964: 138.
34 Dolan 1988: 111.
35 Dolan 1988: 14.
36 Wilshire 1981: x.
37 Solomon 1997: 16.
38 Solomon 1997: 2-3.

apparent regarding the performance of gender. Transsexual lesbian actor Kate Bornstein writes:

> I see the theatre as the performance of identity, which is acknowledged as a performance. We're always performing identities, but when we *consciously* perform one, and people consciously acknowledge our performance, it's theatre.[39]

Herbert Blau writes that theatre 'implies no *first time*, no origin, but only recurrence and reproduction.'[40] This can be seen to echo Butler's notion of gender performance as being a repeated series of stylised acts. This holds within it to make the audience aware of the possibility of performance outside of the theatrical context in the everyday. In becoming thus aware of the liminal moment, it is possible to reconceptualise the heteronormative gender binary into something which embraces a greater plurality of gendered and sexual identities.[41]

This is not to say that theatre has not often supported the status quo nor actively participated in the construction of gender. In 'The Technologies of Gender', Teresa de Lauretis writes that gender is a product of 'various social technologies', such as the cinema, theatre, ideology and discourse, as well as being inscribed into everyday life.[42] Thus, to say that theatre always and necessarily deliberately deconstructs these ideologies is false. Indeed, looking at Greek drama in its original performance context there is evidence to suggest that much of the deviant gendered behaviour represented is done so in order to ultimately repress it.[43] Nonetheless, theatrical performance can be seen to be one of the best ways to highlight the performative nature of gender and to act as strategy to deconstruct female representation and objectification both on-stage and, by extension, more widely.[44] By highlighting the constructed and performative nature of gender, the objective reality of the relationship between the sign and the signifier 'woman' is troubled. Thus, it becomes possible to re-appraise the term 'woman' outside of patriarchal discourse.

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39 Bornstein 1994: 147 (emphasis in original).
40 Blau 1983: 148.
41 Ferris 1993: 9.
42 Lauretis 1987: 2.
43 This is particularly apparent with regards to deviant female behaviour such as in the *Medea* or in the *Oresteia*; Foley 2001: 7.
44 Ibid : 11-13.

<u>Why Greek Tragedy?</u>

Another of Brecht's alienation techniques is to adapt familiar narrative tales so as to prevent the sensation of dramatic suspense and to create a sense of estrangement from well-known narratives. This is a reason as to why Greek dramatic plots are so popular with playwrights who seek to use similar techniques in their work. Sue-Ellen Case argues that ancient Greek drama in its original performance context can be seen to impact negatively on the representation of women and reifies the binary hierarchical division of the sexes.[45] Yet, the numbers of worldwide performances of Greek tragedy have been the most prolific in the past fifteen years.[46] It is also apparent that many modern productions of Greek drama in the latter half of the twentieth/twenty-first century seem very focused on issues of gender. The question is: what is it about these plays that makes them so amenable to these interpretations? It could be argued that the characters which most populate the stage today tend to occupy a liminal space between genders. Characters such as Medea or Clytemnestra are often described in decidedly masculine terms in the original texts. Previously, following the advent of psychoanalysis, the Freudian Everyman Oedipus dominated the stage from the early to the mid- 1900s.[47] The post-Freudian shift towards issues of female subjectivity can be seen in a 'decidedly feminist' reading[48] of Martha Graham's Oedipal *Night Journey* (1947) where the focus shifts from Oedipus and his act of parricide onto Jocasta's experiences of incest. This can be seen as representative of the sort of change that Edith Hall records in other productions of Greek tragic drama. She writes that from the late 1960s, Greek tragedy has been adapted to make it more amenable to concerns such as female subjectivity and its related issues:

> These modern versions of Greek tragedy can be seen to be taking their themes from the unconscious contradictions within the narrative of the original. The narrational voice can be seen to inadvertently reveal repressed resentments about woman's oppressive place within the nuclear family, particularly her unmet needs for power and self-fulfilment that may originally have caused the transgressions. [49]

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45 Case 1988: 15.
46 Altena 2005: 472.
47 Macintosh 2008: 253.
48 Macintosh 2008: 256.
49Hall 2004: 14.

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It is therefore apparent that modern productions and adaptations of Greek tragedy, as Hélène Foley suggests, have 'responded explicitly and self-consciously to the prominent gender politics of Greek tragedy' throughout the ages and that, most recently, 'the increased interest in these aspects of Greek tragedy in the late 1960s has reflected or engaged with developments in both feminism and gay and lesbian movements.'[50] Hall argues that the resurgence of interest in Greek tragedy from the late 1960s to the present day was facilitated by the fact that the women of this period 'found in Greek tragedy a prefigurative articulation of the unfairness of women's lot.'[51]

Modern interpretations can be seen to be influenced by themes present within the original texts themselves. Although Greek tragic texts can be regarded as master narratives which reify patriarchal culture, Alice Jardine proposes that it is possible to re-interpret these texts by focusing on the experiences which were marginalised in the original productions. Jardine argues that feminist critics should examine the aspects of these master narratives which have been emphasised, de-emphasised, added or removed. She argues that these 'spaces' within the text indicate an area which the narrative considers unidentifiable, indefinite, aberrant or uncontrollable. These spaces are gendered feminine within these texts and can be seen as loci over which the master text has lost control.[52] Identifying these spaces allows for reformulations of female representation in ancient drama. This practice can perhaps be seen at work in modern interpretations of ancient texts. Barbara Gold argues that in 'these master narratives from antiquity, the authors have naturalised and normalised all of our most fundamental concepts . . . according to a particular masculine and aristocratic ideology.' Yet, in certain authors:

> we can see a 'space' in the fabric, where there is an uneasiness in the representation of gender for both the author and the reader, where the language seems to have more potentiality to be interpreted from many different perspectives, where the marginalised character seem to be trying to 'speak' and where there are border challenges.[53]

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50 Foley 2004: 77.
51 Hall 2004: 13.
52 Jardine 1985: 25.
53 Gold 1993: 84.

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It could therefore be argued that these playwrights in their reformulations of characters from ancient drama are articulating the spaces where the previously marginalised are trying to 'push through the fabric of the text.'[54] We can see playwrights and directors taking themes from these margins and re-presenting them in ways so as to challenge master narratives, gender constructions and the representation of women on-stage. Lorraine Helms writes in relation to Shakespearean theatre (although this can arguably be used in relation to ancient Greek theatre as well) that:

> To create new meanings and subversive tensions in Shakespearean roles demands specific strategies for intervention. This feminist critique may explore alternative to the performance choices, tasks and motivations by which masculinist productions have trivialised or demonised female characters; it may investigate more radical revisions through alienation effects. Through such explorations and affirmations, feminist Shakespeareans may begin to create a theatre where patriarchal definitions of femininity can be transformed into roles for living women.[55]

It is through such acts of re-appropriation and adaptation that feminism and ancient Greek drama can be reconciled. It is therefore apparent that the lure of Greek tragedy for feminist enterprises can be seen to be located in a desire to destabilize the Western master narratives with which Greek tragedy in its original performance context can be seen to be complicit.[56] By working against and within the parameters of these master narratives, such performances can challenge patriarchal discourses of gender.

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54 Gold 1993: 84.
55 Helms 1990: 206.
56 Foley 2005: 99.

SONG OF THE FORBIDDEN BODY: ÉCRITURE FÉMININE AND HÉLÈNE CIXOUS'S *LE NOM D'OEDIPE*

The following will look at how Hélène Cixous' *Le Nom d'Oedipe: Chant du Corps Interdit* relates to her theories on a maternal pre-Symbolic against a male psychoanalytic tradition. *Le Nom D'Oedipe* was an operatic stage-play, the text of which Cixous wrote as the lyrics to a musical score by André Bouchourechliev. It was originally performed between 26-30 July 1978 at the Palais des Papes at the Avignon Festival in Avignon, France. Each character in the play is performed intermittently by both an actor and a singer throughout. The play is an adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and does not follow a linear plot structure. It is therefore necessary to briefly summarise the action of the play. The play can be seen as a re-reading of Freud's interpretation of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. It initially plays out the Freudian/Lacanian formulation of the male child's rejection of the mother in favour of entrance into the Symbolic (i.e. the resolution of the Oedipus Complex). However, throughout the play Cixous uses the figure of Jocasta to offer an alternative to the male Symbolic order, with reference to a female pre-Symbolic which can be accessed via a relationship with the mother. Although Oedipus initially chooses to enter the Symbolic order, at the end of the play, following the death of Jocasta, he chooses to reject it and enters into a re-identification with the pre-Symbolic mother.

The following will look at the relationship between semiotics, psychoanalysis and the physical body in the theatre in order to argue that Cixous uses her re-writing of the Oedipus myth in order to realign the mother-figure with a pre-Oedipal subjectivity so as to undo the 'oedipal limitations'[57] theatre and psychoanalysis place on women. In *Le Nom d'Oedipe*, focus is deflected away from Oedipus and on to the wife-mother figure of Jocasta – the first Oedipal mother - through whom Cixous attempts to realise a pre-Oedipal, pre-Symbolic female subject position outside of patriarchal discourse and through whom women can re-establish a lost feminine identification. It will also look at how Cixous's theoretical work on *écriture féminine* can be seen in the play not only thematically but as framing every aspect of the plot, narrative structure, staging, characterisation and casting. It will examine Jocasta and the maternal body as

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57 Fertier 1997: 105.

embodying this concept of women's language in order to create the subject position for women denied them by the Lacanian Symbolic order.

In traditional theatre, as has been argued in the Introduction, only male representations of women are present and that woman as sign is ideologically and culturally encoded. It is Cixous' aim in *Le Nom D'Oedipe* to seek out a new sense of subjectivity by breaking down the relationship between language and the Symbolic order. Cixous explicitly positions the theatre as a space which can be used to question traditional representations of women and the relationship between women and their physical bodies. Thus, *Le Nom d'Oedipe* will be seen to be an attempt to move away from the necessarily male formulation of selfhood in traditional theatre through a reformulation of the relationship between language and the subject in the Symbolic order. Through the use of these devices, Cixous promotes a multiplicity of selves within one individual, creating an autonomous female subject through subverting Lacanian theories of libidinal development and the traditional dramaturgical devices which necessarily create the male dramatic subject in the theatre. In doing so, she fulfills what Teresa de Lauretis has asked: that 'feminist theory refrain any more from disrupting man-centred vision by representing its blind spots, but move on to creating another – feminine or feminist – vision.'[58]

The title of Cixous' adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* indicates that she is writing explicitly in relation to a Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic tradition. This intellectual context is important to give a background to the issues explored in *Le Nom d'Oedipe*; particularly female subjectivity and its representation. The play can, in its title, be seen to be referring to the Freudian Oedipus complex which, as has been discussed, tracks the development of the male child into subjecthood through the rejection of his incestuous desires for his mother, whilst designating females as being defined by lack. The Oedipus complex is realised at the level of the Symbolic by Lacan. Following the Oedipus complex, the male child enters into the Symbolic order so as to come into subjectivity. This is brought about through the intervention of the prohibitive *nom du père*, or the Law of the Father, in the incestuous mother-child relationship. The *nom* of the play's title can be seen to be an oblique reference to this

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58 Kaplan 1992: 69.

concept of how social law and taboo are regulated. The experience of the subject in Lacan's Symbolic order is restricted by the order language imposes on culture. [59] Thus, the Symbolic subject is controlled by the laws and language of this culture. This compels the subject into a unified sense of heteronormative gendered identity in line with patriarchal law. Therefore, the heterosexual male subject of the Symbolic order is heavily dependent on a linguistic formulation. [60] Thus, the subject created is a cultural ideal rather than any true or essential self. However, women are excluded from subject positions in their role as lack or Other.

Following Lacan's linguistic formulations of the Symbolic order, Cixous accuses Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis of accepting male superiority - as opposed to recognizing it as a fabrication of patriarchal society - and defining the feminine as constituting lack and Otherness. Cixous was part of a group of feminist scholars (which included Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray among others) who sought to deconstruct Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic formulations of subjecthood and to study the role language plays in creating patriarchal society, or Lacan's Symbolic order. Cixous was invested in criticizing the notion that woman is necessarily defined as Other and by lack through a reconfiguration of the linguistic process by which the Lacanian subject enters into the Symbolic order. This criticism was centred on the articulation of a specifically female mode of writing which would create a space for a female subjective experience outside of the patriarchal Symbolic.

Following on from Derrida, Cixous argued that the language of the Symbolic order was *phallogocentric* and therefore ill-equipped to articulate the subjective experiences of women. This is to say that *phallogocentric* language can be seen to prioritise the phallus and patriarchal discourse. These theories of language also include the notion that meaning is constantly deferred and incomplete due to the fact that words and signs are only meaningful in relation to other words and signs. If language can be conceived as being so unstable and incomplete, then any notion of a subject created through language, as is the case in Lacan's Symbolic order, must be similarly unstable and incomplete. Selfhood is therefore conceptualized as a process. This is opposed to Freudian and Lacanian notions of selfhood as being unified and complete. Similarly,

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59 Lacan 2007: 65-6.
60 Lacan 2007: 65-6.

terms such as 'woman' can be conceptualised as being potentially subject to process, plurality and deferment. A *phallogocentric* language which requires an objective reality to the relationship between the signifier and the signified is unable to express this notion of the subject-in-process or an autonomous female subjectivity. Cixous therefore theorized a specifically female mode of discourse: *écriture féminine*. As has been discussed, the Freudian concept of subjectivity necessarily implies a process which is completed at the point of the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex. The concept of *écriture féminine* would, according to Cixous, allow the expression of female subjectivity by shattering this false notion of the completed or unified self in the Symbolic order. Furthermore, the physical female body – particularly the maternal body – is important in terms of this concept of a female mode of writing and is the space in which Cixous locates women's voices. This is an important departure from Freudian and Lacanian theory where the mother is central to the male child's entrance into a subjectivity which she herself is denied.

The binary system of gender and the discourses which construct woman as sign heavily preoccupy Cixous in both her theatrical and theoretical work. For Cixous, in traditional theatre the mother on-stage is a normalising tool, complicit in reifying heteronormative patriarchal systems of gender. Furthermore, the sign 'woman' is ideologically and culturally encoded with a set of values contingent on the audience's particular socio-historical situation. She claims that a woman on-stage is merely a sign for the patriarchal feminine, which Teresa de Lauretis calls 'a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures.'[61] This is due to the fact that, in the theatre, the signifier is an amalgamation of the dramatic text, the actors, the physical performance space and the audience, whereas the signified in theatre is that which is derived from the signifier and from the audience's collective consciousness.

As has been discussed, for Sue-Ellen Case the anxieties which surround the Oedipus complex have been transferred onto the stage, creating a universally male-gendered subject/spectator position.[62] This follows on from Freud's formulations that the process of the Oedipus complex is experienced universally and that individuals can

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61 de Lauretis 1984: 5.
62 Case 1988: 120.

identify with the Sophoclean Oedipus in that he is acting out their repressed patricidal and incestuous desires:

> His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours — because the Oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that this is so.[63]

Yet, this formulation of selfhood, rather than being universal, is specifically masculine. Thus, any formulation of the self on-stage is similarly necessarily male. Furthermore, this can be seen to be to the detriment of a female designated as object. In its original performance context, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz argues that Jocasta's death in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is used to engender subjectivity in the male spectator.[64] Rabinowitz writes:

> The specularisation of Jocasta is overt: like the victim in pornography, she is displayed to viewers. Through her suicide, she becomes a silent body for their perusal; by the play's verbal depiction of her hanging while they look, she has become an object of their and our gaze.[65]

Thus, as Case concludes, audiences are forced into an identification with a male subject and into accepting a male formulation of unified selfhood.[66] Furthermore, women can be seen to be regarded as relegated to roles which, in the context of the theatre, facilitate the action of the male protagonist[67] or, in the Freudian Oedipus complex, assist the entrance of the male child into subjectivity. It is against this traditional marginalization of the female subject on-stage that Cixous can be seen to be writing. In reinterpreting the figure of Jocasta in terms of female subjectivity, Cixous can perhaps point to the possibility of change outside of the theatre. This is done by re-writing the Oedipus myth so as to address the issue of female subjectivity, whereas previously it had only dealt with male subjecthood.

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63 Freud 1913: 296.
64 Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus:* 1223-1285.
65 Rabinowitz 1992: 42-3.
66 Case 1988: 121.
67 Dolan 1988: 2.

It has been previously discussed how women on screen (and arguably on stage also) are unconsciously eroticised, and therefore objectified, when they are viewed by men. Furthermore, the process of the representation of women on-stage involves a powerful male subject and a powerless female object. Thus, Cixous writes:

> As women, how can we go to the theatre? Except to find ourselves complicit with the sadism with which women are subjected there. To see ourselves invited to take the place of the victim in the patriarchal family structure which the theatre produces ad infinitum.[68]

Thus, in traditional theatre 'woman' is merely a representation of male fantasy and is necessarily bound to a masculinist point of view, consequently distorting the true female subject. Laura Mulvey therefore argues for a theatrical practice founded in the alienation techniques of Bertolt Brecht. She writes that feminist theatre should alienate the audience from the action of the play in a metatheatrical manner, i.e. make the audience aware that they are watching a performance. The audience is thus encouraged to reflect on the nature of representation, not only on-stage but also in culture more widely.[69] In highlighting the representational structures of the theatre, feminists can open possibilities for change and deconstruct the depiction of women in traditional realist theatre.

Cixous reformulates Brecht in 'Aller à la mer,' pointing to the potential of the female body on-stage to reconceptualise a female, rather than a patriarchal feminine, experience:

> If the stage is to become a woman, it should do so in order to *detheatricalise* this space. She will still want to be a bodily presence: it is a matter therefore of working to undermine everything that creates a 'spectacle'. To overrun the footlights, to undo the dominance of the visual and to insist upon the aural; learning to prick up all of our ears, especially those which know how to capture the fluttering of the unconscious, to hear silences and beyond. No 'alienation', on the contrary, this staged body will not hesitate to approach, to approach the danger, but the danger of life'[70]

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68 Cixous 1977: 19.
69 Mulvey 1975: 2191-92.
70 Cixous 1977: 19 (emphasis in original).

Thus, for Cixous the theatre 'necessarily articulates the relationship between body, voice and text: revealing the potential of expressing corporeality of a text and the textuality of the body.' The stage 'offers the female speaking, desiring subject a stage on which to defy reified representations of gender, and to undermine the masculine scopic economy.'[71]

Cixous suggests that the presence of the female body and voice on-stage is able to subvert the male gaze. She argues that when female subjectivity is presented on-stage as plural and subject-in-process it cannot be Othered.[72] Thus, *Le Nom d'Oedipe* will be seen to be an attempt to move away from the necessarily male formulation of selfhood, which Case identifies in traditional theatre, through a reformulation of the relationship between language and the subject in the Symbolic order. The title of the work on theatre discussed is 'Aller à la mer' which is homonymically identical to 'Aller à la mère'. Thus, the female body on-stage can be seen as a way of expressing Cixous' theoretical formulations on the importance of the interplay between women's language and the physical maternal body. By highlighting the constructed nature of the sign 'woman', Cixous can point out its subliminal ideological positioning and begin to re-present woman on-stage as expressing the genuine female experience. This is realized through the practice of *écriture féminine*, which shall be discussed in more depth below.

For Cixous, the relationship between the mother, whom she sees as pre-Symbolic, and language offer a radical alternative to the Symbolic order. The importance of the symbol of the mother in terms of this repressed feminine self is a recurring theme in much of Cixous's theoretical work. In 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' Cixous writes that women and their bodies are circumscribed by patriarchal discourse and directly correlates 'true' female subjectivity with the mother, more specifically the maternal body:

> In women, there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation: a force that

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71 Dobson 2002: 22.
72 Cixous 1977: 20.

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will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of the codes. We will rethink womankind beginning with every form and every period of her body.[73]

She further argues that women's bodies have been repressed by patriarchy and, as a result, women's voices have been silenced: 'Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies.'[74] M. Shiach writes that Cixous' work can be seen as a way of 'unsettling the illusion of subjective autonomy and conscious control.'[75] Cixous disrupts the notion of the unified patriarchal self by exposing that such intellectual control is achieved through the censorship of the body. Cixous argues that once women are re-attuned to their bodies, they will be able to express themselves in a discourse which is pre-Symbolic:

> By writing, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write your self. Your body must be heard.'[76]

Therefore, Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* is the expression of the female subjective experience, as realized through her physical body, in language and text. It places the experiences of the given individual before the linguistic. This is opposed to the linguistic system of the Symbolic order which regulates the subject's experience. *Écriture féminine* is characterized by polysemy, non-linearity, wordplay, fragmentation, sound and rhythm and can be seen to evade 'the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system.'[77] Mary Klages in her lecture on Cixous argues that 'feminine writing will serve as a rupture, or as a site of transformation or change', a place where the totality of the system breaks down and one can see a system as a system or a structure, rather than simply as truth.'[78] *Écriture féminine* can thus be seen as directly opposed to, and a way of breaking free from, *phallogocentric* discourse. It is through this process of *écriture féminine* that Cixous seeks to

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73 Cixous 1975: 2045.
74 Cixous 1975: 2039.
75 Shiach 1991: 70.
76 Cixous: 1975: 2043.
77 Cixous 1975: 2046.
78 Klages 2001 http://www.Colorado.EDU/English/engl2010mk/cixous.lec.html; Cavallaro 2003: 123.

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destabilise patriarchal language, which is the basis of the inherently sexist Symbolic order, by allowing women to eschew the binary and hierarchical organising principles of a discourse which excludes women.

As has been discussed, within the psychoanalytic feminism of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, the mother is an important locus for movement outside of the Symbolic trajectory imposed by the Oedipus complex. This is opposed to the mother of Freudian psychoanalytic discourse who is only important in terms of the psychosexual Oedipal development of the male child. However, it has been argued that the mother is a problematic place in which to locate subjectivity. Indeed, it could be argued that it remains true to the Freudian paradigm that women displace the desire for the phallus onto a desire for a child. Nonetheless, Irigaray writes that although the female voice is not necessarily exclusively bound to woman's reproductive faculties, this is not to say that it has any less value in being achieved in this way. Therefore, the accessing of *écriture féminine* via the mother should share equal amounts of social power as other ways of accessing female self-expression.[79] For both Irigaray and Cixous, the physical female body – particularly the maternal body - is necessarily beyond the phallus and thus the ideal place from which to explore female subjectivity outside of the Symbolic.

Other critics have argued that this emphasis on the relationship between women's language and women's physical bodies can be seen as biologistic and essentialising. Thus, the use of the female body on-stage has been deemed problematic. Cixous argues that the physical female body articulates a common significance for women which: is outside of patriarchal representation, is pre-Symbolic and is not conscribed by patriarchal constructs. Nonetheless, it is apparent that 'in the genderised terms of the performance space, [women's bodies become] accountable to male-defined standards for acceptable display.'[80] This is to say that 'the female body is not reducible to a sign free of connotation. Women always bear the mark and meaning of their sex, which inscribes them within a cultural hierarchy.'[81] Furthermore, 'reducing woman to an exterior leaves her only with her sex; and her sex is an irreducible sign.

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79 Irigaray 1985: 59.
80 Dolan 1988: 62.
81 Dolan 1988: 63.

A naked female body is laden with connotation, the most prevalent of which is sex object.'[82] Therefore, Jill Dolan argues, '[t]he female body is impossible to translate theatrically without getting caught in the contradictions of women's place in representation.'[83] It could therefore be argued that Cixous's dramatic practice fails to wholly release representations of women from the repressive representational apparatus and the patriarchal ideologies which the theatre facilitates.

Dani Cavallaro suggests that these criticisms can be met by recognizing that the body of which Irigaray and Cixous speak is 'not so much a flesh-and-blood organism as a *text*: that is, both the fictional version of femininity constructed by patriarchy in order to legitimize its oppressive practices and as an alternative construct ushered in by the practice of *écriture féminine*.'[84] What is more, Diana Fuss writes that it is possible to see this position as 'a politically strategic gesture of displacement' which can reveal how in patriarchal society woman has been identified as a 'site of contradiction'[85] and limited by essentialist characteristics. Therefore, rather than reducing woman to essence and biology, *écriture féminine* could be argued to burst out of the essentialist myth of what Simone de Beauvoir termed 'the eternal feminine' by claiming that all identity is textual and that all identities, like all texts, 'are inevitably riddled by internal tensions and paradoxes.' This is to say that the nature of the feminine text can be used to 'shatter masculine institutions and values'[86] through a reformulation of the linguistic system which supports the Symbolic order.

Building on this, the following discussion of *Le Nom d'Oedipe* will look at how Cixous uses the techniques of *écriture féminine* to reformulate the self outside of the Symbolic. Such a re-formulation of the self outside of a recourse to the masculine is the central theme of the play, throughout which the fluid and plural nature of subjecthood is emphasised. This can be seen as being directly opposed to the unified subject conceptualised by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. This is achieved through various means which will be discussed below. The first is the casting of an actor and a singer in the roles of each of the main characters and the overlapping of

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82 Dolan 1988: 52.
83 Dolan 1988: 97.
84 Cavallaro 2003: 119-120 (emphasis in original).
85 Fuss 1989: 72.
86 Nead 1992: 30.

multiple voices throughout the play so as to emphasise the multiplicity of selfhood. Secondly, Cixous rejects traditional notions of plot structure, instead juxtaposing scenes which are taking place in the play's present with memory scenes and dream sequences. Similarly, Cixous plays around with verb tenses so as to confuse any sense of a temporal framework. This rejection of a traditional narrative dramatic structure can be seen as an attempt to prevent the formulation of the traditional Oedipal dramatic subject. Thirdly, by freely interchanging verb tenses, nouns and pronouns, words can be seen to lose some of their meaning and therefore much of their power in the Symbolic order. Finally, Jocasta's death at the end of the play will be read as an escape from the patriarchal Symbolic for both genders through an identification with the maternal pre-Symbolic. Through the use of such strategies, the play can be seen to undermine the unified Freudian/Lacanian self, universally conceptualised as Oedipus.

As has been indicated, each character is played by both an actor and a singer.[87] For Cixous, the doubling of the principal roles can be seen to refute any notion of a unified (i.e. patriarchal) subject position as the splitting of the characters between two performers can be seen as a way for Cixous to highlight the theme of the plurality of subjecthood. This acts as a reassessment of a fundamental Freudian construct, i.e. the Symbolic/ Oedipal sense of self both dramatically and in psychoanalysis.[88] Furthermore, the play begins with indistinguishable overlapping chants originating from both the characters and the chorus. The dialogue here, and throughout the play, rejects logical patterns of speech and mixes up verb tenses within sections of dialogue:

(Jocasta)	(Oedipus)	(Tiresias)	(Chorus)
Mère pleure	Le corps	Mourir!	
L'enfant	L'en	Je ne veux pas	Du sang
L'en	Se	Je ne pas	
Tend	Velir		Le sang
Mère	Peur		
Mère!	S'il meurt	Mourir	Sens
Ne vois-tu	Seul	Sans	
Pas	Tombé		l'encens

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87 Dobson 2002: 34.
88 Fortier 1997: 107.

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Que je meurs          Va mourir
Mère!                                                    l'enfant[89]
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This intricate overlaying and overlapping of voices and vocal styles can be seen to portray the intricate interplay between discourses, both conscious and unconscious. This lends into the idea of the plurality of subjectivity. This style of dialogue – which is the epitome of *écriture féminine* as defined above - is at odds with *phallogocentric* language. Furthermore, much word play is apparent, for example 'mère,' 'meurs' and 'meurt.' Such puns on sound and sense can be seen to be indicating the arbitrary nature of the sign which constitutes the supposedly unified subject within the Symbolic order.

This style of dialogue also aids to eschew any sense of a logical temporal framework for the plot. Scenes taken from Jocasta's memory are juxtaposed with those of the plot of *Oedipus Tyrannus* without any sort of temporal or spatial differentiation or narrative dramatic structure. This can be seen to be rejecting the structure of a tragic plot as defined by Aristotle. For Aristotle, plot was the foremost important element of tragedy.[90] The plot of a tragedy should be:

> the representation of a complete i.e. whole action . . . which has a beginning, a middle and a conclusion. A beginning is that which itself does not of necessity follow itself, but after which there naturally is, or comes into being, something else. A conclusion, conversely, is that which itself naturally follows something else, either of necessity or for the most part, but has nothing else after it. A middle is that which itself naturally follows something else, and has something else after it. Well-constructed plots, then, should neither begin from a random point nor conclude at a random point, but should use the elements we have mentioned.[91]

Furthermore, he writes that the best plots are 'complex'. This is to say that the transformation of the main characters' fortunes (for the better or for the worse) should occur as a result of reversal and/or recognition which arise 'either by necessity or by probability as a result of the preceding events.'[92] A reversal is 'change of actions to

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89 Cixous 1978: 13.
90 Aristotle *Poetics:* 95.
91 Aristotle *Poetics:* 96.
92 Aristotle *Poetics:* 99.

their opposite,' whereas a recognition is 'a change from ignorance to knowledge.'[93] Aristotle's model for his definition of tragedy is Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Reversal and recognition occur simultaneously in the play when Oedipus discovers his true identity and his fortunes change from good to bad.[94] Following this formulation, tragic plots can be seen to engender complication (the city is seized by plague), crisis (Oedipus discovers that he has killed his father, Laius, and married his mother Jocasta) and resolution (Oedipus experiences exile and the city is saved). This can be seen to be analogous to the male sexual experience. Cixous instead envisages a specifically female dramatic form which might embody a female sexual mode with no dramatic focus or necessity to build to a single climax. In this soliloquy, Oedipus recounts his discovery of the truth about his parenthood:

> La nouvelle m'arrivait, j'étais debout dans ma chambre,
> Une voix m'annonçait: <<il est l'amant
> De sa mère>> Je ne l'entendais pas.
> <<Il est le fils de sa femme>>, mais j'écoutais pas.
> J'étais devenu un autre; la nouvelle me stupéfiait..
> Je ne savias pas qui j'étais. Celui que j'avais été
> N'est pas moi.[95]

Here, the traditional climax of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* - wherein Oedipus realises his true identity as patricide and participant in an incestuous relationship[96] – occurs in the middle of the play and is almost anticlimactic.[97] Through such rejection of the Aristotelian structure of the dramatic plot, Cixous seeks to prevent the creation of the patriarchal male dramatic subject. Traditionally, the male dramatic subject enters into subjecthood through undergoing the resolution of the crisis posed in the play. These crises are characterized in psychoanalysis as a conflict between the libido and the *nom du père*. For Cixous, such traditional theatre is unable to represent the female subject, defined by Cixous as in-process as opposed to complete.[98] Through her narrative structure, Cixous attempts to reformulate patriarchal notions of a fixed self as being realised via complication, crisis and resolution, both dramatically and psychologically, by abandoning linear narrative entirely. By rejecting the organising

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93 Aristotle *Poetics:* 99.
94 Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus:* 1305-1310.
95 Cixous 1978: 41.
96 Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus:* 1305-1310.
97 Miller 1994: 250.
98 Dobson 2002: 143.

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principals of patriarchal discourse, the Cixousian self is engendered as multiple and outside of binary male/female oppositions.

It is this troubling of a linear narrative structure – a structure which traditionally pursues Oedipus' quest for origins – that repositions audience response to a well-known tale. Subsequently, the dramatic tension is focused on how Oedipus responds to his identity as patricide and his discovery that his relationship with Jocasta is incestuous. His acceptance or rejection of the 'name of Oedipus' and the mythology which surrounds the name is defined wholly in relation to the Symbolic order, symbolized in the play by the city of Thebes.[99] At the beginning of the play, Oedipus is bound by the limitations of his mythology. Following the Freudian formulation, he rejects his mother and enters into the Symbolic as the king of the city. Jocasta on the other hand refuses to allow her body's desires to be repressed by the Symbolic restrictions placed on incest and the mythological tradition in which she exists. This is expressed in the following passage:

> Une heure, mais sans limite, sans nom,
> Si tu savais qui tu es! Reste et je te dirai qui tu seras
> O mon fils amant, mon amant
> Mon fils époux, mon amant
> Ma mère, ma vie, toi.
> Ensuite.
> Sois. Celui que tu voudras
> Celui qu'il te faudra.[100]

Here, Jocasta attempts to attribute to Oedipus a multitude of fluid subject positions as her husband, son, lover and mother as well as being the Oedipus of the myth. Julia Dobson argues that '[t]he apparent interchangeability of these terms of address empties them of their cultural significance, allowing them to become freely interchangeable.'[101] This can be seen as an example of Cixous defying the Symbolic through a reformulated notion of language. Yet, Oedipus remains trapped within, and pathologically obsessed with, his own mythology. At the beginning of the play, he rejects Jocasta, or the mother, and enters into the Symbolic. This has been seen to be analogous to the formation of the Freudian/Lacanian subject discussed above. It

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99 Dobson 2002:36.
100 Cixous 1978: 14.
101 Dobson 2002: 36-37.

seems, initially at least, that Cixous' Oedipus is bent on following the traditional Oedipal trajectory, both dramatically and psychologically.

Whereas Oedipus initially finds himself constrained by his mythological positioning, despite failed attempts to cast off the more distasteful aspects, Jocasta's more fluid conceptualisation of the world allows her to move in and out of that which seeks to bind her. As has been discussed above, the realization of female subjectivity in language is a major theme in both Cixous' dramatic and theoretical work. This is a theory formed within the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis, with particular reference to the importance of language in the creation of the subject in the Symbolic order. This is clearly evoked in *Le Nom D'Oedipe*. In the figure of Jocasta, Cixous attempts to reject Symbolic language, instead locating subjectivity within the physical body and pre-Symbolic utterances. The importance of language with regards to the rejection of or assimilation into the Symbolic is explicitly referred to:

> J'aurais voulu le deliverer des noms.
> Tous les noms qui se font prendre pour des dieux;
> Par feinte, par fraude, se font adorer.
> Obéir. Passer pour des êtres purs:
> Père, mere, vérité, vivre, tuer, faute, dette, épouse, vérité
> Mari, roi, origine, quel homme peut dire lequel il est?
> Ce sont les noms qui gouvernent.
> Je voulais le libérer.[102]

Here, Jocasta can be seen to refute the patriarchal discourse which creates the unified self of the Symbolic in favour of maintaining the pre-Symbolic relationship between mother and son. Thus, the central struggle of the play can be seen as being between the Symbolic and the pre-Symbolic, as exemplified by the developments in the relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta. However, whereas in the Freudian/Sophoclean formulation Oedipus' entrance into the Symbolic order is inevitable, for Cixous, Oedipus experiences a re-identification with Jocasta following her death at the end of the play.

How the final scenes of the play – i.e. Jocasta's death and its aftermath – are read is crucial to how the play is read as a whole. Dobson suggests reading Jocasta's death as

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102 Cixous 1978: 56.

an escape from being excluded from the Symbolic order. Following the trajectory of the Oedipus complex, Oedipus has now separated from sole identification with Jocasta and has entered into the Symbolic order, leaving her in the pre-Symbolic, or the Imaginary. This interpretation is supported by the associations made in the scene between the mother, the pre-Symbolic and music, an important concept in Cixous' theory.[103] Thus, the scene could perhaps signify an avowal of the maternal. However, Dobson adds, incorrectly as I will argue, that it is not easy to read Jocasta's death scene as a triumphant, uncomplicated return to the maternal pre-Symbolic. This is due to the fact that, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, to return to the pre-Symbolic, or the Imaginary, amounts to a regression of the subject. Cixous seems to be identifying the pre-Symbolic, or the Imaginary, with the feminine, as does Lacan; yet, Jocasta's 'position as exiled from desire, from dominant discourse, from language, from the city and from Oedipus can be interpreted as symbolic of the further exile of the woman writer.'[104] As Nina Baym writes, such theories of the pre-Oedipal mother limit 'maternity to a global, non-verbal or pre-verbal endlessly supportive, passively nurturing presence;' and 'confine mothers and hence women within the field of the irrational.'[105] As a result, the play could be read in a negative light. Although, as has been demonstrated, much of Cixous' work engages with seeking out a linguistic system which allows for the expression of a different perception of self outside of the binary unified categorizations of the patriarchal Symbolic system, *Le Nom D'Oedipe* can be seen to highlight the plight of the female writer in patriarchy, as opposed to suggesting a means for the female writer to escape the confines of *phallogocentric* discourse. Thus, Dobson concludes, although Jocasta in *Le Nom D'Oedipe* asserts herself against patriarchal discourse, she succeeds only in expressing her sense of exclusion from the Symbolic order and the silencing of her voice by the Symbolic via her death: '[t]he play ends with Jocasta leaving the scene of patriarchal discourse in order to explore unspecified and unrepresented "elsewheres"'[106] Ultimately, Dobson writes, Cixous' 'utopian evocation of writing as the means to creation of a female Imaginary, and the reconciliation of the female subject with her body through language, is not present in the play.'[107]

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103 Cixous 1978: 80.
104 Dobson 2002: 117-8.
105 Baym 1984: 55.
106 Dobson 2002: 118.
107 Dobson 2002: 45.

Nonetheless, I would argue that Jocasta's death need not be read negatively. Although she wills death upon herself following her abandonment by Oedipus, there is much to suggest in this scene that it is an escape from the denial of subjectivity forced upon her by the patriarchal Symbolic. Although the Lacanian pre-Symbolic, as has been discussed, tends to be portrayed in a negative light, it could be argued that Jocasta's escape into the Imaginary is not a regression into the non-linguistic Imaginary; rather the pre-Symbolic utterances of *écriture féminine* can be seen as a mode of signification which questions or disrupts the Symbolic order:

> Things are starting to be written, things that will constitute a feminine Imaginary, the site, that is, of identifications, of an ego no longer given over to an image defined by the masculine but rather inventing forms for women on the march, or as I prefer to fantasise, 'in flight', so that instead of lying down, women will go forward in leaps of themselves.[108]

Thus, Cixous' female pre-Symbolic can be seen as an alternative to the patriarchal Symbolic. Rather than being non-linguistic, it is defined by *écriture féminine*, which for Cixous necessarily involves a space defined by the plurality, non-linearity and fluidity of identity. This is antithetical to the unity, teleology and linearity and *phallogocentricism* which defines the Symbolic order and which enforces the rigid binary categories which serve to define woman as solely Other to the male norm. The pre-Symbolic, as conceptualised by Cixous, is a space where the binary hierarchical organizational categories of the Symbolic are not present. It is from this space that female representation can be re-formulated.

The wide number of subject positions now laid open can be seen in the final scenes of *Le Nom D'Oedipe*. At the end of the play, it is apparent that it is only through identification with the mother in the pre-Symbolic that Oedipus is able to formulate a true sense of self, as opposed to the falsely unified sense of self imposed on him by the Symbolic order. In the scene where Oedipus returns to re-identify with Jocasta, the pre-Symbolic mother, he claims that he has freed himself 'D'entre les mots./ D'entre les morts'[109] and has left the Symbolic order and returned to the pre-

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108 Cixous 1981: 52.
109 Cixous 1978: 81.

Symbolic. Despite initially feeling lost following the death of Jocasta, he is able to incorporate the mother, and *écriture féminine*, at the end of the play:

> Je la sense encore, je ne la sens pas
> Entre mes jambs
> Se glisser,
> Ses seins se posaient sur mon ventre
> Sur me peau est-ce ce que je sens
> Je ne sens plus
> Ses doights courir, ses seins
> Oiseaux se poser ses
> Langues appeler un flot immense
> De jouir, un torrent,
> Depuis ma tête jusqu'aux genoux
> Jusqu'aux chevilles et me voici
> Rempli, le voici qui roule.[110]

In this passage, Oedipus metaphorically absorbs the mother and, in doing so, is able to enter into a 'writing of the body,' uninscribed by Symbolic discourse. In his final monologue, he uses a singular verb with a neutral plural pronoun. This use of the plural pronoun is incongruous with his identity as a singular male-gendered subject: 'Nous continue' ('We continue/s') expresses an embracement of the mother and a mode of discourse which is not bound by patriarchal discourse or linguistic formulations. The use of this verb is also significant as it rejects the 'I' which marks the subject position in the Symbolic order. In doing so, Oedipus adopts the more complex subject position offered to him by the pre-Symbolic, rejecting his unified subject position within the Symbolic order. It is also a demonstration of how the concept of *écriture féminine* is not limited to women. Cixous writes that men are also capable of it, although women are naturally more open to it:

> The fact that a piece of writing is signed with a man's name does not in itself exclude femininity. It's rare but you can sometimes find femininity in writings signed by men: it does happen.[111]

In this way, Oedipus disrupts the notion of self formulated by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as being entrenched in notions of a binary system of gender. Thus, *Le Nom d'Oedipe* can be seen as an attempt to deconstruct the patriarchal mother and the

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110 Cixous 1978: 85.
111 Cixous 2000: 286.

mother-child relationship in relation to traditional psychoanalysis in order to re-think women's position in the Symbolic order. Oedipus' ultimate acquisition of language is made possible through identification with the mother as opposed to the Lacanian Symbolic father. This creates an Oedipus who is not a complete, unified subject but, rather, a subject in process.[112]

Cixous' handling of the incestuous relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta is also of interest here. At the beginning of the play, the interactions between Oedipus and Jocasta make it apparent that Oedipus will ultimately forsake his mother and the pre-Symbolic and enter in to the Symbolic order. His eventual entrance into the Symbolic - symbolized by his relationship with the city - is described by the Chorus who describe it as an abandonment of Jocasta, representing the city as an alternative lover to the mother:

> Il était en ville avec la foule,
> Avec les inconnus,
> En fusion, avec elle,
> La ville toute entire
> J'entendais les mots
> S'échapper de sa gorge
> Il parlait, il répondait,
> Le corps droit,
> Elle le courtisait,
> J'ai entendu sa voix
> Il riait.[113]

The relationship between Oedipus, Jocasta and the city clearly invokes the progression into subjecthood delineated by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. This, importantly for Cixous, necessarily involves a rejection of the mother. Such an entrance in to the Symbolic requires the relinquishment of the incestuous relationship between mother and son in accordance with the *nom du père*. Without doing so, one is not able to construct a unified sense of self in the Symbolic order. Whereas for Lacanians, when the *nom du père* is foreclosed the result is exclusion from the Symbolic order and manifestations of psychosis; for Cixous, such repression of the libido is endemic of the repression of the self, particularly the female self, in its total

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112 Miller 1994: 250.
113 Cixous 1978: 76.

submission to patriarchal discourse and the Symbolic order. In *Le Nom d'Oedipe,* the Oedipus figure experiences mental disequilibrium only when he is attempting to separate himself from the mother in accordance with the *nom du père*:

> Je voulais devenir fou. Rêver,
> Que je tuais ma mere, de mes mains,
> L'étrangler, enfouir sa voix dans la silence,
> La recouvrir avec mes cris.[114]

It is only at the end of the play, when he incorporates Jocasta, that Oedipus is able to reject the Symbolic. Here, Jocasta can be seen to be Cixous' 'mother who exults in orgasm'. For Cixous, Jocasta is not bound by the *nom du père* and its proscriptions. She expresses that which is forbidden - the 'song of the forbidden body' of the title - by communicating her culturally proscribed desires for her son. It is through Jocasta that Cixous' *écriture féminine* finds its voice. It is dependent on the embracing of the sexual, physical maternal body – the 'forbidden body' of the title – and is antithetical to the sexless mother of Freudian psychoanalysis. By eventually accepting his relationship with his mother, Oedipus also subverts the unified Oedipus of the Freudian and Lacanian Symbolic, creating new subject positions for both male and female subjects outwith the patriarchal formulation.

To conclude, *Le Nom d'Oedipe* posits Jocasta (or more specifically Jocasta's body) as the central voice of the performance. Furthermore, it is through embracing what Lacan's Symbolic order seeks to repress (in this case an incestuous relationship with her son) that she has found her voice. Her dialogue, as seen above, is almost incantatory in tone, eschewing grammatical accuracy or any sustained sense of temporal linearity in her narrative. Through this reformulation of language, Jocasta can create a pre-Symbolic world which is not characterised by libidinal repression. Jocasta can thus be seen as the on-stage embodiment of Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine*, a specifically female form of self-expression which is located in the physical female, specifically maternal, body and which is necessarily pre-Symbolic. In doing so, she allows herself the subject position denied her by the Symbolic order. What is more, this sense of self is characterised as being plural and in-process, eschewing the falsely unified self of the Freudian/Lacanian Oedipal formulation.

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114 Cixous 1978: 41.

This is particularly apparent in the representation of her death at the end of the play, following which Oedipus achieves selfhood and language in relation to the mother, not the father. He only speaks on-stage following the death of Jocasta. In doing so he says 'Nous continue', attributing a singular verb to a plural pronoun, demonstrating his assimilation of the mother into himself and his escape from the patriarchal into the pre-Symbolic. The resultant figure can be described as neither masculine nor feminine but outwith binary categorisations. The play has transformed the Lacanian and Freudian Oedipus from embodying the end-point of selfhood to embodying a sense of self in constant process.

This chapter will look at the representation of the mother on-stage with particular reference to Yukio Ninagawa's *Medea*. It will examine to what extent cross-dressed performances can be seen either to subvert or reify heteronormative gendered binaries and the perpetuation of Simone de Beauvoir's 'eternal feminine.' This production is particularly useful as it has been subjected to both positive and negative criticisms with regards to its use of an all-male cast. This means that I can examine both the positive and negative issues with regards to the use of cross-dressing in a modern performance of Greek drama. Ninagawa's *Medea* was first performed in February 1978 by the Toho Company at the Nissei Theatre in Tokyo, Japan. It followed a Japanese translation by Mutsuo Takahashi and has been performed world-wide. It was last performed in May 2005 at the Bunkamura Theatre Cocoon. The eponymous character was played by Tokusaburo Arashi.

In its original performance context, it seems likely that ancient Greek drama was a cultural institution which sustained a society of male citizens.[115] What is more, Sue-Ellen Case writes that:

> As a result of the suppression of real women, the culture represented its own representation of gender, and it was this fictional 'Woman' who appeared on-stage, in the myths and in the plastic arts, representing the patriarchal values attached to the gender while suppressing the experiences, stories, feelings and fantasies of actual women . . . 'Woman' was played by male actors in drag, while real women were banned from the stage . . . . Classical plays and theatrical conventions can now be regarded as allies in the project of suppressing real women and replacing them with masks of patriarchal production.[116]

This is to say that although female characters were often at the centre of Greek tragic plots, what was portrayed on-stage was a male idea of femininity. This is due to the fact that the actors, playwrights and audience were all perceived as male. In the case of the audience, this is to say that the audience was positioned as male through the theatrical apparatus which creates and controls the male gaze, regardless of whether or not women were actually present. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz writes:

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115 Rabinowitz 1993: 2.
116 Case 1988: 7.

> The audience [whether in actuality or not] is made masculine, asked to identify with the male protagonist, and in this way is put in relation to the author and the text. Through this experience masculine subjectivity is established . . . accomplishing the solidification of the male subject at the expense of and through the construction of the female as object.[117].

Thus, Rabinowitz further argues: 'the theatre, like the agora and the assembly, was a male space.'[118] Greek tragedy was written by men for men and supported patriarchal values of male subjectivity. According to Judith Fetterley, women reading literature written by men (or in this case watching a play written by a man) are forced to identify with the masculine ideology being purported. Fetterley further writes that such texts do not convey or justify feminine experience but force them to 'think as men, identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny.'[119] Rabinowitz goes on to argue that Greek tragedy can be seen as a 'technology of gender,' as conceptualised by feminist film critic Teresa de Lauretis. This is to say that, following on from Louis Althusser's work on ideology, Greek tragedy in its ancient performance context invested the audience with gendered subjectivities in line with socially approved gender norms, crediting the masculine with subjectivity and the feminine with objectivity. In doing so, Greek tragedy presented paradigms of normalising gendered behaviour with which individual audience members were expected to comply.[120] This can be seen in Euripides' *Medea*. In the *Medea* what we see is the eponymous female character highly masculinised through her actions and dialogue:

<div style="text-align:center">Let no one think of me</div>

As humble or weak or passive; let them understand
I am of a different kind: dangerous to my enemies,
Loyal to my friends. To such a life glory belongs.[121]

Medea's rejection of the feminine attributes of humility and passivity and her pretensions to the masculine sphere of glory (usually achieved by men in war, in this

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117 Rabinowitz 1992: 49.
118 Rabinowitz 1993: 2.
119 Fetterley 1977: xx.
120 Rabinowitz 1993: 12.
121 Euripides *Medea*: 805-8.

case through a domestic battle) creates a character which would have been perceived as a perversion of all that Greek society perceived as feminine. Although it could be argued that this gender reversal connotes subjectivity as opposed to objectivity, Rabinowitz argues that Greek tragedy shaped male sexuality and ideas of femininity[122] as opposed to subverting them. In the *Medea,* we see a character transgressing the feminine boundaries. This may be read as a justification for the controlling of female sexuality in light of its possible consequences (i.e. the feminisation of men[123]). In this case, it appears that masculine-characterised female strength is designed to induce an uneasy male reaction.

I would argue that in its original performance context, Greek tragedy can be seen to have worked as an Althusserian apparatus of state ideology in order to force women to comply with gender norms which, in turn, shaped modern gender constructions.[124] This is particularly apparent in Greek tragedy's use of cross-dressed performance in which '[i]t is not a woman who speaks or acts for herself on stage, it is always a man who impersonates her.'[125] However, I will argue that in most recent productions and adaptations Greek tragedy and cross-dressed performance can be seen to subvert and question as opposed to solidify heteronormative gendered ideologies.

Whereas the reversal of expected gender roles would have been seen in an ancient performance context as a deficiency in the feminine nature, now it challenges ideas of what constructs masculinity and femininity and points to the performative (as opposed to innate) condition of gender. This is due to the fact that a text's interpretation is not static or innate but directly reflects the culture in which it is being read (or in this case viewed).[126] Whereas in the realm of the historical, Greek tragedy encouraged men to view women, and women to view themselves, as objects and denied them subjectivity, it will be argued that in a modern context this can be seen to no longer be the case. This is due to the fact that in a modern performance context, cross-dressed performance can '*prohibit* the cinematic male gaze through self-conscious

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122 Rabinowitz 1992: 49.
123 Zeitlin 2002: 106
124 Rabinowitz 1992: 49
125 Zeitlin 2002: 105.
126 Kolodny 1980: 2148-49.

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theatricality' and thus 'undermine the rigidity and stability of gender.'[127] This is because 'the cross-dressed actress is less a confirmation than a challenge to modern assumptions about the gendering of the spectacle.'[128] Although this could also be applied to drama in its ancient performance context, I would argue that in that instance, cross-dressing posed less of a challenge to dominant ideology as it was expected, whereas today such performances are more unusual.

It is apparent that there have been many productions of Greek drama over the years which claim to rethink female subjectivity. Of his *Medea,* Ninagawa argued that he was attempting to show Japanese women that they could be as empowered as Medea in a society where feminine demureness is considered a desirable quality.[129] It is my argument that the nature of theatrical cross-dressing in this play can be seen as a way of, if not capturing the female subjectivity which Ninagawa seeks, troubling the male-centered view of women on-stage. For Rabinowitz, a key part of the prescriptive gendered ideology present in ancient Greek drama is the fact that 'the audience is constructed by the experience of participating in the drama.'[130] Therefore, the following will argue that cross-dressing in modern performances of Greek drama can be used as an alienation technique following the Brechtian tradition. As has been discussed, whereas ancient audiences expected female characters to be played by male actors, today the portrayal of a character by an actor of another gender is more unusual. The fact that modern and ancient spectators have different expectations in terms of how they interpret cross-dressed performance is an important differentiation. Although the use of cross-dressing has been seen as problematic, as shall be discussed below, it is my argument that it can be used to highlight both the constructed nature of gender in society and to subvert the male gaze and heteronormative gender identification. By demonstrating the incongruity between the sign and the signifier 'woman,' historical women can be liberated from traditional notions of motherhood and femininity.

In order to do so, the following will look at how both Judith Butler's and Simone de Beauvoir's theories on the performative nature of gender can be used to study modern

127 Solomon 1997: 13-14.
128 Straub 1991: 143-144.
129 Smethurst 2002: 1.
130 Rabinowitz 1993: 12.

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cross-dressed adaptations of Greek drama, as well as how Laura Mulvey's reformulations of mainstream cinema can be applied to the theatre in order to create an alienating effect. Although much of the theory which I will be looking at post-dates the first production of Ninagawa's *Medea,* I am using the tools of postmodern theorists of gender in order to look at earlier works so as to examine their possible impact on the audience.

As has been discussed, in *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler argues that gender – a social and cultural construct - is to be considered separate from biological sex. Rather, gender is to be regarded as something which individuals perform on a daily basis. This is to say that the semblance of a stable gendered identity is achieved through repeated stylized acts. An individual's everyday behaviour, mannerisms and dress are socially conditioned according to what is considered acceptable for his/her biological gender. This in turn constructs them in society as being either male or female. Gender is not an innate facet of individual identity. Instead, patriarchal regulative discourses can be seen to denote heteronormative gendered or sexual behavior as natural or innate. This is to say that gendered behavior and heteronormative ideologies can be seen to be naturalized within an experiencing subject community.[131] Butler argues that these artificial categories, which rigidly define men and women, male and female, have been set up so as to establish and maintain heteronormative patriarchal power structures. These power structures ensure masculine superiority in society. The role of the mother can be similarly interpreted as a socially-constructed role which maintains the patriarchal gendered social order.[132] Any behavior considered to be outside of heteronormative standards are deemed deviant and may be subjected to correction. Therefore, an individual subject must be understood within the context of his/her social, historical and ideological background (as opposed to being autonomous of these factors). Gender performance should not be considered a conscious choice, rather something which the experiencing subject has interiorized.

Again, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, the theories of cultural feminists such as Hélène Cixous and de Beauvoir can be seen to argue for the existence of a pre-given subject behind these performances of patriarchal femininity. This is

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131 Butler 1990: 133, 179; Lorber 2010: 9.
132 Butler 1990: 33.

conceptualized in de Beauvoir's claim that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman.'[133] This 'one,' she argues, has been conditioned from birth into embodying a patriarchal ideal of femininity, referred to by de Beauvoir as 'the eternal feminine.' Within this 'one' there is a repressed female identity and subjectivity which requires realization. On the other hand, Butler's work troubles the notion of a unified gendered subjectivity entirely. She argues that the categories of male and female, masculine and feminine should be open to reinterpretation alongside ideas of the self, subjectivity and objectivity. In doing so, Butler seeks to contest the legitimacy, authority and stability of patriarchal discourses which have normalized heteronormativity. She argues that heteronormativity must be challenged by making the performativity of gender and gendered identity apparent. This includes notions of the mother as a gendered construct.

Much of Butler's work on gendered identity is useful when thinking of ways to reconceptualise female subjectivity. I will argue that modern performances of Greek drama can be seen to be amenable to these interpretations in their conscious choice of casting one gender in the role of the other, as well as the fact that the theatre more generally can be seen to be an appropriate medium for highlighting the performativity of gender in everyday life. It will, however, stop short of Butler's claim that there is no essential gendered identity behind the performance to be discovered, as most feminist theatre is invested in discovering the true female self, albeit outside of the patriarchal feminine. This is to say: it is my position that there is in fact a presumptive 'I,' or self, behind the performance of identity.

In the final section of *Gender Trouble,* Butler delineates the ways in which an awareness of the performative nature of gender could lead to its subversion. She argues that such sedition relies on the understanding that performative acts need to be continually repeated in order to maintain their citational legitimacy. This is to say that 'the appearance of substance' which is attached to the gender performance is dependent on the repetition of stylised acts which are simultaneously 'a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established.'[134] The process of repetition naturalises these acts to the extent that they are taken as innate to the

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133 De Beauvoir 1953: 301.
134 Butler 1990: 140.

subject. Butler argues that by highlighting the performative nature of these acts, the reality that gender is a regulative social discourse, as opposed to an innate facet of identity, can be revealed. This will allow society greater freedom in its understanding of gender and sexuality outside of the heteronormative binary:

> The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a deformity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction.[135]

She suggests that cross-dressed performance is one of the ways which might serve to achieve this. Cross-dressing troubles the relationship between imitation (cross-dressed man/woman) and original (biological man/woman). Cross-dressing, in parodying the daily gendered performances of the other sex, could potentially reveal the illusion that is gendered identity.[136] Drag performance in particular is subversive in its disproportionate acquiescence to normative gendered behaviour.[137] The fact that drag is widely understood as a deliberate misperformance of gender highlights the performativity of any notion of a gendered identity. It also demonstrates how gender in the heteronormative hegemony is falsely seen as intrinsically linked to biological sex.[138] Cross-dressed performance can therefore be seen to highlight the discrepancies between the sign 'woman' and its signifier:

> As much as drag creates a unified picture of 'woman' . . . it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalised as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency.*[139]

A conspicuously cross-dressed performance (due to its patently performative nature) highlights the daily stylised acts through which someone is identified as female. This includes physical appearance, dress and mannerisms. Furthermore, cross-dressed performances highlight:

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135 Butler 1990: 141.
136 Butler 1990: 137-8.
137 Brady et al. 2011: 73.
138 Brady et al. 2011: 56-57.
139 Butler 1990: 137 (emphasis in original).

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what we take for granted elsewhere, precisely because the dramatic and transgressive character of drag tells us that elsewhere is normality. We should be prepared to accept the inherent instability of our own gestures because, in themselves, they cannot be distinguished all that clearly from [drag's] hyperbolic ones.[140]

The body is therefore no longer seen as 'prior to signification;'[141] instead it becomes 'disputed territory.' Thus, the body is no longer marked by hegemonic cultural signifiers of gender but is instead the locus for a 'denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself.'[142] Thus, it becomes evident that the sexing of a body is not based on nature or biology but is contingent upon discourse.

A way of looking at how this gender performativity can be read on-stage is by looking at Lesley Ferris's application of Roland Barthes's concept of readerly and writerly texts to cross-dressed performance. In *S/Z*, Barthes writes that unlike readerly texts, which are passively absorbed by a reader, the notion of writerly texts follows the same vein as his work on 'the death of the author.' This is to say that the final product of a text is no longer singular or unified but that the reader, in actively engaging with the text through the process of re-reading, gives the text a plurality of meanings and interpretations.[143] Ferris argues that cross-dressed theatrical productions can be seen as writerly texts in this vein. This is to say that through cross-dressed performance the spectator is encouraged to re-read the signs through which an individual is identified as either male or female. Moreover, the role of the physical human body in theatrical performance adds a further dimension to this notion of the writerly text. Ferris writes that:

> One of the first readings we are taught in our lives is gender. Is it a man? Is it a woman? We are taught these as bedrock definitions, with no possibility for multiple meanings, no playful ambiguity. As spectators of transvestite theatre we are the Barthesian 'products' of text extraordinaire.[144]

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140 Butler 1993: 230-3; Chambers et al. 2008: 23-24.
141 Butler 1990: 130.
142 Butler 1990: 146.
143 Barthes 1974: 15-16.
144 Ferris 1993: 8.

This is to say that through the watching of a man performing woman or vice versa, the spectator is forced to re-read the signs which identify either gender (such as movement, gesture, physical appearance or dress). As with the reader of the writerly text, the spectator of the writerly play must accept the possibility of multiple readings and ambiguity in meaning and reject categorisation and any conceptualisation of gender as a closed or finished, as opposed to mutable, product.

In watching a cross-dressed performance, the spectator is made heavily aware of gender as performance. Theatre can be seen to draw attention to its own performativity, thus demonstrating an ability to question the ideologies of its particular socio-historical moment. While watching a performance, the spectator is made aware that he/she is simultaneously giving in to both fiction and reality.[145] In creating this awareness, theatre can be seen to both deconstruct itself and the ideologies of the society in which it exists.[146] It is my argument that this analogy between theatrical performance and performativity in real-life is most pertinent regarding the performance of gender. Herbert Blau's claims that the theatre 'implies no *first time*, no origin, but only recurrence and reproduction'[147] can be seen to echo Butler's notion of gendered performance as being a series of repeated acts. When the signs of one gender are performed by another (as occurs in cross-dressed performance), the resulting incongruity draws attention to normally conventional aspects of gendered behaviour.[148] Thus, theatrical cross-dressed performances hold within themselves the potential to make writerly spectators aware of the possibility of performativity outside of the theatre in everyday life. In doing so, it becomes possible to reformulate patriarchal constructions of gender and to reconceptualise gender in a way which embraces a wider spectrum of gendered and sexual identities.[149]

This is not to say that theatre always and inevitably consciously deconstructs gender ideologies. It is apparent that traditional theatre has actively participated in the continued naturalization of heteronormative gendered identities. This is particularly apparent with regards to Case's and Mulvey's discussions of the male gaze and the

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145 Solomon 1997: 16
146 Solomon 1997: 2-3.
147 Blau 1983: 148.
148 Senelick 1992: x.
149 Ferris 1993: 9.

resultant objectification of women on-stage and on-screen respectively. Case and Mulvey, as has been discussed, argue that traditional theatre and cinema create a necessarily male-gendered subject/spectator position. It is also suggested that by encouraging men to objectify women on-stage or on-screen, conformity to patriarchal ideals (such as fulfilling the maternal function) is perpetuated.[150] What is more, it is argued that cross-dressed performances are not necessarily successful in terms of rethinking the representation of women. The problems inherent in Butler's call for the parodying of gender via the use of cross-dressed performance is an issue which she addresses in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) where she asks 'whether the denaturalisation of gender norms is the same as their subversion.'[151] This is to say that whereas the act of cross-dressing may call attention to the signs and signifiers of appropriate gendered behaviour, it may not directly call those behaviours into question. This is of particular interest if we look at the reliance of parody on the cultural stability of the parodied. In this case, it could be argued that the parodies of gender which characterize cross-dressed performances rely on the fact that the heteronormative binary system of gender is heavily culturally ingrained. Heteronormative ideologies have been so fully naturalised by society's subjects that they are more than capable of withstanding the attack which cross-dressing represents.[152] As David Halperin writes, queer - and this includes cross-dressing as a 'queer' art-form - is 'a positionality vis-à-vis the normative.'[153] Although for Halperin the concept of queer can be seen as a position of resistance against socially-enforced heteronormativity, in his formulation queer is defined solely in terms of that which it seeks to destabilise: its deviance from the norm. In identifying as queer, an individual merely reifies his/her position in relation to heteronormativity.[154] Thus, the power of patriarchy with respect to practices of gender is precisely that it makes it possible to reinterpret even the most dramatic deviations from gender norms as mere marginalisations of sexuality. This can be seen to attest to the power of the heterosexual norm.[155] Thus Butler tempers her original claims that all gender parody can be used as tools for subversion. In its failure to revolutionise heteronormative

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150 Mulvey 1975: 2184; Case 1988: 119.
151 Butler 1993: 283.
152 Butler 1990: 139.
153 Halperin 1997*:* 62.
154 See Green 2010.
155 Chambers et al. 2008: 153.

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conceptualisations of gender, cross-dressing can be seen to emphasise the ultimate power of the patriarchal social order.

In its use of a cross-dressed cast, Ninagawa's *Medea* could be interpreted as being complicit in reifying patriarchal heteronormative ideology, as well as perpetuating male ideas of women (with the playwright, the director and the cast all being male) rather than allowing women to represent themselves. As has been discussed above, ancient Greek tragedy, with its highly stylised male-female transvestism, can be seen to have perpetuated negative female stereotypes, a binary sense of gender and suppressed the subjective experience of women. It has also been suggested that male-female cross-dressed performances, with their selective focus on and exaggeration of certain aspects of female subjectivity (primarily physical appearance) to the detriment of others (e.g. issues of reproduction), can be seen to effect a heavily sexualised interpretation of women. Case thus recommends that feminists should read against these texts where the female characters 'are properly played by drag roles.'[156] In valorising cross-dressed performance the material effects of women's experience is trivialised.[157] Thus, the following analysis will look at how the stylization of Ninagawa's Medea can perhaps be seen to be playing into some of these issues.

In Ninagawa's adaptation, Medea's elaborate costume consisted of an outer robe made up of fifty brocade obis, a red inner robe attached with large artificial breasts and an elaborate headdress with hair ornaments. The actor playing Medea, Tokusaburo Arashi, is heavily made up in female kabuki style with black teeth and white face make-up. However, the blue make-up around the eye area is more in keeping with the stylisation of a supernatural or evil male character.[158] This can be seen to point to Medea's androgynous nature, as well as hinting towards her supernatural powers. It could also be argued that this elaborate and sexual (the breasts are prominent in the performance) male-rendering of a female character can be seen as an attempt to 'play out through outrageous female characters writ-large aspects of the self otherwise denied to men'[159] rather than an attempt to express female subjectivity. Theatre, in this context, can be seen as a socially-sanctioned way for men to express feminine

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156 Case 1988: 15.
157 Brady et al. 2011: 77.
158 Smethurst 2002: 9-10.
159 Foley 2005: 90.

emotions as well as creating a feminine Other against which to define themselves as male.[160] With reference to Greek tragedy specifically, Froma Zeitlin argues that the 'theatre uses the feminine for the purposes of imagining a fuller model for the masculine self, and "playing the other" opens that self to those often banned emotions of fear and pity.'[161] This can be seen to ultimately valorise patirarchal ideology and privilege.

In the performance, Ninagawa utilised the conventions of traditional Japanese theatre, such as *noh* and *kabuki*, in order to portray Medea's androgynous gendered positioning between abandoned wife and mother and vengeful hero. This is achieved through the use of costuming and the Japanese theatrical tradition of *onnagata*, a practice wherein male actors take on female roles. The most apparent example of Medea's androgyny is when Medea makes the decision to kill her children. Following Medea's meeting with Aegeus, Arashi, simultaneously removes the outer garments and fake breasts which denote him as female to reveal his (male) body underneath, all the while still retaining the female mask.[162] This gives the act of killing the children by their mother a powerful gendered dimension by playing off the signs of one gender against those of the other. For Smethurst, the 'male, self-assertive' side of Medea's character only comes in to play when she removes her female costume to reveal the man underneath.[163] Whereas, on the one hand, the killing of the children can be seen as an act of female empowerment and the casting-off of societal definitions of femininity, on the other hand, it could be argued that, in this production, that which is considered 'feminine' is constantly devalued and degraded, as shall be discussed below.

The exchanges between Medea and Creon, Aegeus and Jason can be seen to privilege the masculine. Arashi was able to modulate his voice and actions accordingly between that denoting female (i.e. Medea the mother who refuses to kill the children that she has borne and nurtured) and that denoting male (i.e. the male-gendered avenger of honour who repudiates the maternal weakness which stalls her) in the *kabuki* tradition. This, as well as the costuming, hints at Medea's liminal gendering.

160 Dolan 1992: 5.
161 Zeitlin 1985: 80.
162 Euripides *Medea:* 766-808 [in the original text].
163 Smethurst 2002: 22.

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When Arashi speaks in a masculine voice, it is at moments when Medea is to be depicted as strong, resolute and in control. For example, when she and Jason first meet, her tone is masculine and she is challenging and sarcastic throughout their exchange.[164] When she speaks in her feminine voice, this is when she is being deceptive, duplicitous or seductive. The three most important scenes where she uses her more feminine persona are during her meetings with Creon and Aegeus and her second meeting with Jason. In the first instance, Medea pleads with Creon for mercy and is polite and deferent. This can be juxtaposed against the resolute words of the king.[165] In the following scene, Medea behaves in a slightly different manner towards Aegeus when asking him for his help. Again, she is polite and deferent but her gestures imply another, more seductive, element to their exchange.[166] Perhaps the most interesting instance of Medea's masculine/feminine persona is to be found in contrasting her second meeting with Jason to her first.[167] Whereas previously she had been difficult and challenging, now she again employs her seductivity. Furthermore, by taking on the role of the female, Jason is now able to take on the role of the male and thus sounds more masculine than in the previous scene.[168] The gendered stereotypes at play here are obvious, with the masculine being portrayed as strong, confident and resolute; the feminine as weak, seductive and duplicitous. In these exchanges, it is apparent that the masculine is privileged.

Moreover, the decision to kill the children in Ninagawa's play is couched in heroic terms, as it is in the original Greek.[169] Medea's dialogue and mode of speech is reminiscent of the *kabuki* hero.[170] Thus, these values and her sense of empowerment are of the traditionally masculine sphere rather than the feminine. Through this, value is attributed only to that which is defined as 'male'. Furthermore, in the final exchange between Medea and Jason, Medea is portrayed as victorious whereas Jason is stooped beneath her, weeping helplessly and beating his breast in a manner not dissimilar to other female mourners in Greek drama.[171] This privileging of the

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164 Euripides *Medea:* 449-625[in the original text].
165 Euripides *Medea:* 237-356[in the original text].
166 Euripides *Medea:* 661-729[in the original text].
167 Euripides *Medea:* 835-975[in the original text].
168 Smethurst 2002: 17-18.
169 See Knox 1979; Euripides *Medea:* 766-808[in the original text].
170 Smethurst 2002: 21.
171 Smethurst 2002: 28-30; Euripides *Medea:* 1294-1419[in the original text].

masculine is done at the expense of a feminised Other, in this case Jason. Femininity is subsequently degraded and devalued.[172] Hélène Foley argues that when the mask of Medea slips, we actually see an archaic hero behind it.[173] In other words, what appears to be a female character on the all-male stage is, in essence, a representation of an earlier form of masculine heroism. Following Foley, we can see Medea's heroism as being constructed from the epics and heroic traditions of men. The womanly character merely provides the dramatic potential for representing a disruptive – and therefore, seemingly base – civic act while fulfilling a heroic role.[174]

However, it has been argued that in the final scene, Medea transcends all human boundaries, including those of gender and appropriate gendered behaviour.[175] This is an idea which Ninagawa pursues in his production. Here, Medea is portrayed as wearing a white costume and is made-up in white, which traditionally denotes the supernatural in *kabuki*, as does her dragon-drawn chariot which is suspended above the stage by a crane. However, for Case, Medea remains a hero in the very human – and masculine – sense of the word. She asks: 'does the actor portray the gestural system of an embodied woman who transcends? . . . Was it not . . . heroic?'[176] In the case of Ninagawa's Medea, I would agree that Medea exemplifies the latter rather than the former, with Mae Smethurst writing that '[l]ike a Japanese hero, Medea now is superior to all other human beings,'[177] although I would add that there is still an element of female characterization about the scene. In the *noh* and *kabuki* traditions, the avenging spirit of a wronged female is often represented by a snake or a dragon, like those which transport Medea's chariot in the final scene.[178] Thus, Medea remains a strongly androgynous figure in the final scene, although I would agree that the heroic (i.e. masculine) elements are held in precedence over her more feminine attributes.

A way of looking at this devaluation of the feminine is in relation to patriarchal power and phallic privilege. Whereas female-male cross-dressing can be seen as a way of

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172 Durham 1992: 54-59.
173 Foley 2001: 261.
174 Case 2009: 114-5.
175 Smethurst 2002: 26.
176 Case 2009: 115.
177 Smethurst 2002: 26.
178 Smethurst 2002: 28.

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laying hold of phallic privilege (and can thus be seen as a threat to the hegemonic status quo), male-female transvestitism can be seen as a sort of symbolic castration of male privilege in patriarchal society. As bell hooks writes, '[t]o appear as "female" when one is male is always constructed…as a loss, as a choice worthy only of ridicule.'[179] Again, the masculine is valorised over the feminine regardless of the biological gendering of the individual performing the act. In the *kabuki* tradition the *onnagata* actor is only free to explore the liminality of gender on-stage. However, this liminal behaviour is not possible off-stage.[180] The performative context allows the male cross-dressed actor to explore these emotions whilst retaining the safety-net of the fact that, outside of the theatre, he steps back into a world which privileges the masculine.[181]

Furthermore, how a cross-dressed performance might be received by its wider audience is incalculable. Returning to Barthes' notion of the writerly text, the spectator can be seen to give the play his or her own meaning, leading to multiple rather than hegemonic interpretations. The fact that the cross-dressed performance includes various factors outside of individual control (such as performative space and context, the importance of others who may be involved with the performance (such as sexual partners) and others' interpretations of the performance) is something which Butler initially overlooked.[182] Furthermore, the fact that theatrical cross-dressing is performed in an explicitly performative context means that the spectator could be seen to understand the performance as just that – merely performance.[183] Thus, it is possible for the spectator to not look beyond the performance to see the possibility of the performative in everyday gendered behaviour.[184] It is possible that the spectator of a cross-dressed performance is unlikely to be inclined to identify with the cross-dressed figure, rather consider it as a source of amusement. Brady and Schirato take this idea further and write that 'the body or the performance of the body that looks wrong may thus serve only to re-establish that the body *is* wrong, rather than to provoke critique of the forcible performance of coherent gender identities.'[185] Thus,

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179 hooks 1992: 145.
180 Senelick 1992: xi.
181 Ferris 1993: 13; Dolan 1985: 8.
182 Lloyd 1999: 195-213.
183 Chambers et al. 2008: 42.
184 Chambers et al. 2008: 49.
185 Brady et al. 2011: 76.

the viewer re-identifies with his/her heteronormative gendered identity, an identification which is made stronger through the challenge posed by the cross-dressed figure.

However, although it has been demonstrated that it is possible to envisage how these seemingly subversive acts ultimately reify rather than subvert heteronormative patriarchal ideology, it could be argued that the theatre has a license to challenge and suggest alternatives to existing ideologies in ways which are not possible outside of this space.[186] Theatre must necessarily, unlike most cinema, reveal its performativity. Therefore, it is always open to having its own and society's self-representations questioned.

For Mulvey, the prevention of the objectification of women on-screen, and I would argue on-stage also, is achievable through post-Brechtian alienation techniques. As has been previously argued, the mimetic nature of theatre on which the male gaze depends is reliant on the down-playing of those aspects which remind the audience that what they are watching is a performance. It is through the disruption of this illusion that the male gaze can be dislocated. Mulvey writes that 'foregrounding the process itself, privileging the signifier, necessarily disrupts aesthetic unity and forces the spectator's attention on the means of production of meaning.'[187] Through alienation techniques and metatheatricality, the audience can no longer be complicit in perpetuating the gendered ideologies which dominate patriarchal society. The critical distance between spectator and stage created by Ninagawa's cross-dressed performance therefore breaks the collective illusion with regards to theatrical realism. More widely, this awareness of performance at play may serve to highlight the performativity apparent in everyday life by making the spectator aware of his complicity in maintaining the illusion of gender. Such metatheatrical plays 'allow us to see ourselves seeing the theatrical construction of a social construction.'[188]

However, Mulvey's position has been criticized. B. Ruby Rich argues that Mulvey focuses too much on dislocating female objectivity in male representations of women

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186 Senelick 1992: xi.
187 Mulvey 1979: 7.
188 Solomon 1997: 10.

as opposed to attempting to envisage the possibility of a female subjectivity that is not reached via masculinity.[189] Teresa de Lauretis also writes:

> According to Mulvey, the woman is not visible in the audience which is perceived as male; according to Johnston, the woman is not visible on the screen . . . How does one formulate an understanding of a structure that insists on our absence even in the face of our presence? What is there in a film with which a woman viewer identifies? How can the contradictions be used as a critique?[190]

Such critics of Mulvey argue that in positioning masculinity as necessarily equating subjectivity and femininity as objectivity, there is no place for 'alternative subjects and objects of vision,' which is what de Lauretis argues that feminist representations of women should try to achieve.[191] Furthermore, de Lauretis also argues that Mulvey's methods, which stem from the male Modernist avant-garde and the work of Brecht in particular, offer little in the way of a preferable alternative to mainstream narrative cinema. She writes that Mulvey's methods hail an established male tradition as opposed to a feminist reformulation.[192]

Nonetheless, I would argue that alienation techniques, rather than attempting to realise a genuine female subjectivity, instead seek to destabilise the notion of woman on-screen and on-stage as fetishised object and to reveal the incongruity between the sign and the signifier 'woman'. Alisa Solomon argues that the theatrical conventions listed by Case as being detrimental to female subjectivity on-stage (staging, costuming, lighting etc.[193]) can in fact be used to subvert the gaze. This is due to the fact that the theatrical spectator's gaze is 'far freer than the movie-goer's.'[194] Solomon writes that plays can disrupt the male gaze via cross-dressed performance and a highly presentational theatrical style.[195]

Ninagawa's *Medea* can be seen to use both of these theatrical conventions in its cross-dressed performance and, in doing so, can be seen to disrupt the male gaze and create

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189 Rich 1978: 87.
190 de Lauretis 1985:157.
191 de Lauretis 1985: 163.
192 de Lauretis 1985: 155-156.
193 Case 1988: 119.
194 Solomon 1997: 13.
195 Solomon 1997: 13.

new subjectivities outside of the binary heteronormative code. The lack of realism in Arashi's costuming and make-up is of vital importance. Such self-consciously performative theatre disrupts the naturalisation of gendered attributes. This troubling of the heteronormative binary does not allow for the creation of a male subject to the detriment of a female or feminised object.[196] Thus, Ninagawa's production can be seen as an example of the sort of theatre which Solomon argues can help to reformulate the heteronormative gender binary and disrupt the male gaze. Although, above, it was suggested that the use of male-female theatrical cross-dressing is problematic in terms of female subjectivity, it is my argument that this does not necessarily preclude it from challenging social gender norms in light of Mulvey's and Solomon's suggested uses of alienation techniques and metatheatricality.

With reference to productions of Shakespearean drama – which also involved an all-male cast in its original performance context – Kathleen McLuskie argues that Shakepeare's representation of women on-stage resists 'feminist manipulation by denying an automomous position for the female viewer of the action.' Even in a modern performance context where the female characters can now be played by women as opposed to men, the texts are a continuation of a historical tradition which constructs gender from a wholly male perspective. Yet, this does not necessarily preclude these texts from other possible interpretations. McLuskie acknowledges that: 'the gap between textual meaning and social meaning can never be completely filled for meaning is constructed every time the text is reproduced in the changing ideological dynamic between text and audience.'[197] Such possibilities for the potential re-interpretation of patriarchal texts are important to bear in mind. Indeed, even different kinds of cross-dressed performances may involve different responses dependent on the positionality of the cross-dresser and the audience. Although the ancient Greeks expected male actors to play women, the reverse is the same today. While it has been argued above that the cross-dressed performance of Ninagawa's *Medea* could be considered one of the more accepted avenues for cross-dressing in modern society in that it poses no real threat to patriarchal masculinity, it is my argument that cross-dressed performances can be seen, in semiotic terms, to draw attention to the gap between the signifier and the signified. The artificiality and

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196 Solomon 1997: 13-14; Straub 1991: 143-144.
197 McLuskie 1985: 88-108.

incongruity presented by cross-dressed performances break the illusion that spectators are being shown what is natural. Thus, it is important to remember that, despite its androcentric roots, Greek tragedy can still be seen to challenge gender norms.

To conclude, it is apparent that the use of cross-dressing in modern theatrical performances of Greek tragedy are not widely accepted as being an effective way of troubling the heteronormative gendered binary or the subjugation of women to the role of 'the eternal feminine' by the power of the male gaze and the process of identification. Nonetheless, although in some ways such performances may reify certain gendered stereotypes and preclude the self-presentation of women on-stage, I have argued that the alienation of the audience from the action on-stage through cross-dressed performance allows the audience to reconceptualise gender in ways which would not otherwise be possible. The very nature of a theatrical performance – in that it makes explicit its own performativity in ways which narrative cinema cannot – makes this suggestion even more powerful. By demonstrating the gap between the sign and the signifier 'woman,' women can be liberated from rigid gender categorization and this can include the maternal function. The visual spectacle of the cross-dressed performer thus serves to reiterate the fractured nature of a selfhood reliant on gender identification. By no longer identifying with the figure on-stage, the spectator is no longer subjected to the rigorous gendered ideology which characterized the ancient performance context. Although Ninagawa may not have succeeded in capturing an autonomous female subjectivity outside of gendered norms, his play can be seen to trouble gendered identity at least to the extent that the performativity of gender can be revealed.

'"THE DARK SECRET SIDE OF MOTEHRHOOD:" SOME ISSUES REGARDING THE INFANTICIDE OF MEDEA

The following chapter will look at how different interpretations of the infanticide of Euripides' *Medea* can be seen to reflect the plethora of discourses surrounding the mother in modern society. The themes explored in modern adaptations can be seen to have been present in the original play, namely sexual freedom, economic and political equality and, most controversially, reproductive rights and issues of maternity. By drawing out these themes and elements, adaptations of ancient drama can make known the oppression of women in the ancient world and in the modern nuclear family. Particularly important themes in the context of the infanticide, as shall be discussed below, are the exploration of women's subordination to men and the creation of the socially-constructed idea of the feminine. These issues shall be explored so as to understand why a play in which a mother kills her children is the most widely performed extant Greek drama of the past thirty years.

The first section of this chapter will look at how the mother is ideologically constructed by society. There are three perspectives which I would like to set up in terms of examining the social phenomena of the mother and Medea as infanticide. The first is that which can exemplified by D. L. Page's comments in his 1938 Oxford commentary on Euripides' *Medea*. He writes: 'the murder of the children . . . is mere brutality: if it moves us at all, it does so towards incredulity and horror. Such an act is outside of our experience, we . . . know nothing of it.'[198] The second position will be psychoanalytic. It will examine those paradigms which differentiate between those designated good mothers and those designated bad mothers. It will also examine the concept of infanticide as being taboo in the Freudian sense. The third position will look at the current socio-historical moment where motherhood discourses have become problematised following the social and technological changes of the 1960s onwards. It will then examine the cultural issues surrounding the act of infanticide more generally, looking as to the reasons for infanticide and comparing society's responses to male and female infanticides or filicides. This first section will examine

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198 Page 1938: xi.

to what extent Medea's act of infanticide can be seen as either a normalising tool or as a way for women to move out of the socially-constructed maternal role.

The second section will argue that a gendered response is apparent with reference to the infanticide of *Medea* in modern productions of the play. It will examine the reasons why male responses to productions and adaptations of Euripides' *Medea* are engendered with an anxiety regarding the traditional role of the mother in society. I will ultimately conclude that the wide range of directorial and spectatorial responses to adaptations of the *Medea* is endemic of the general anxiety regarding the wide range of contradictory discourses surrounding the mother.

These issues will be looked at in four adaptations of the *Medea*. Although these productions do not overtly follow a particular theoretical line, as Cixous's play does, it is apparent that the discourses surrounding the mother is an important concern of these plays. John Fisher's *Medea, the Musical* was performed first of all at UC Berkeley in 1994 before running for fifteen months at the Stage Door Theatre in San Francisco. It has since been revived by Theater Rhinoceros in 2005. In this production, the characters Paul and Elsa decide to write a feminist version of Euripides' *Medea* which omits the infanticide entirely. Looking at this production, it will be suggested that Fisher's treatment of the infanticide is rooted in his commitment to maintaining traditional notions of the mother. Tony Harrison's *Medea: A Sex War Opera* was never performed (although the text is available). This production asks why society is preoccupied with female infanticide while male infanticide is, relatively-speaking, less well publicised in the media. Finally, the reception of Brendan Kennelly's *Euripides' Medea: A New Version* (first performed at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1988, then at the Gate, London, 1989) and Liz Lochhead's *Medea* (first performed at The Old Fruitmarket, Glasgow, followed by the Edinburgh Fringe, 2000) will give us an insight to the potential gendered responses to critics of these productions with a mind to arguing that there is a tendency amongst male critics towards uneasiness with regards to the play's subject matter, particularly when it is portrayed in a contentious manner (such as in Kennelly's production). This could be seen to be indicative of a trend in male viewers as being particularly invested in maintaining traditional notions of the mother as all-nurturing.

In the first instance, Page's comments, although written more than seventy years ago, can be seen to reflect the opinions of many today, as shall be seen below. Yet this opinion seems at odds with the fact that the numbers of performances of the *Medea* outnumber any other extant Greek drama.[199] Therefore, the question is: what has made actors, directors and audiences want to engage with an ancient mythological character whose defining act is something which Page deems unthinkable? It is, therefore, necessary to look at the discourses surrounding the mother in the present time. The two perspectives from which I intend to examine the mother is the psychoanalytic and the socio-historical. This is due to the fact that it is apparent that these perspectives have dramatically influenced how the figure of the mother is perceived in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Traditionally, notions of the mother are antithetical to the notion of mother as infanticide. Freudian psychoanalysis can be seen to have been both a result of, and ultimately perpetuated by, the discourses which gave the mother the central role in the family, responsible for both the physical and psychological well-being of the children.[200] As a result, the role of motherhood was described using increasingly medicalised terminology.[201] Following on from Freud, Hélène Deutsche articulated that the good mother, or, as she put it, the 'feminine woman,' had a physiological maternal instinct and that the mother's love for her child is 'normally greater than her self-love.'[202] A 'good mother' is solely defined through the needs of her children: '[w]hile the mother has needs and desires of her own, these are not explicitly attended to in the discourses that construct her maternal role.'[203] This is to say that any needs that the mother herself expresses which are separate from those of her children are seen as self-centred and liable to be met with censure.[204] Whereas Freudian psychoanalysis argued that penis envy in women is ultimately mitigated through childbirth, Deutsche argues that when penis envy is not resolved a woman is an inadequate mother. This is because the experience of penis envy leaves a woman no space in her life to devote herself to the maternal function as she should, i.e. being

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199 APGRD [accessed: 28/06/2012]
200 Badinter 1981: 260.
201 Badinter 1981: 261.
202 Deutsche 1945: 47
203 Wallbank 2001: 8.
204 Wallbank 2001: 133.

wholly invested in the needs of her children to the neglect of her own.[205] These 'unfeminine' women are said to lack the innate physiological maternal instinct which Deutsche claimed to be able to locate in women. Those aberrations from this nurturing maternal paradigm were designated pathological deviations from the norm.[206]

Late twentieth and twenty-first century social discourses surrounding the mother can be seen to be somewhat indebted to this psychoanalytic paradigm. Such representations which denote motherhood as physiologically innate to women following childbirth remain prevalent today. Ann Dally stresses that motherhood is inherently self-fulfilling and that childbirth was an event which signified a maturation into adulthood;[207] for Carol Gilligan, again, motherhood is seen as the most fulfilling role a woman can engage in and that women who choose not to have children are selfish, failed women;[208] Sheila Kitzinger assumes that all women should want to fulfil a nurturing maternal role at some point in their lives.[209] Such 'maternal revivalism,' Lynne Segal argues, has 'emerged as part of a process of withdrawal from public struggles where women did not achieve sufficient satisfaction.'[210] Within these discourses there is a strong sense that the maternal drive or instinct is a physiological and biologistic phenomenon uniquely universal to the female gender. There is also an implication that women who have not physically given birth make inadequate mothers. This can perhaps be seen in the example of Glauke in Euripides' *Medea*. Therefore, for birth-mothers to behave in a way incongruous with such social expectations is often coded as difficult to comprehend, as has been seen in the examples above.

However, bell hooks argued that the motherist movement, as she called it, tended to romanticise the maternal function and emphasised that the role almost always positions women as subordinate to men in patriarchy. This is to say that mothers are often socially isolated and both emotionally and economically dependent on others

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205 Badinter 1981: 274.
206 Badinter 1981: 277.
207 See Dally 1982.
208 See Gilligan 1982.
209 Kitzinger 1978: 145.
210 Segal 1987: 2.

(usually men).[211] It is therefore apparent that traditional notions of the mother can be seen as constructions created in order to maintain the hierarchies which characterise the patriarchal order. Thus, it could be conceived that in subverting the traditional paradigm of the mother women can begin to break down the structures which position them as lack in society. This could, as will be discussed below, theoretically include infanticide.

This continued notion of the mother as innately nurturing can be seen to be set against the discourses which developed out of the Anglo-American feminist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. The shift in motherhood discourses at this time can be attributed to developments in reproductive technology as well as the socio-political circumstances brought about by the women's movement. The development of the contraceptive pill and the legalization of selective abortion have challenged traditional notions of the mother in unprecedented ways. The issue of the sexual liberation of women and their rights to control their fertility through readily available contraceptives and access to abortion came into the spotlight through the campaigns of women such as Carol Downer in the late 1960s/early 1970s. Women's new-found control of their own bodies meant that they were no longer necessarily limited to the patriarchal function of mother. Nonetheless there were, and remain, issues surrounding the unfair division of labour when women choose to have children. Furthermore, as was discussed in greater detail in the second chapter, following the gender theory of the 1990s the very notion of a natural or essential gendered function was also challenged. This includes the notion of woman as innately maternal. As a result of these discourses, E. Ann Kaplan writes:

> In the 1980s we find a plethora of discourses in which the mother now figures as subject (where as previous to this she was unseen, a non-subject). But her subjectivity causes her dislocations, problems, that cultural productions and articulations now address.[212]

It is therefore apparent that the discourses surrounding motherhood are often uncertain. We are in a socio-historical moment where mother hood can be seen as a 'failing institution' due to the fact that 'as women have made non-domestic goals the

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211 Hooks 1985: 134-6
212 Kaplan 1992: 26.

main goals in their life, it has become more difficult (and perhaps undesirable) for the female historical subject to develop and retain an identity as "mother."'[213]

Most recently, however, there seems to be a return to traditional notions of femininity and maternity. Maureen Freely argued that mothers were Othered from feminism, just like feminists consider women to be Othered by the patriarchal order.[214] Although Melissa Benn argued that another understanding of past feminism – one which does not involve a total denunciation of the maternal – can be achieved,[215] it is apparent that the feminism which characterised the late 1960s and 1970s can be seen to alienate those who wish to retain an identity within the maternal role. Again, it is apparent that debates surrounding the traditional construction of the mother in light of feminism remain problematic and unresolved. It is therefore difficult to pinpoint exactly where society currently stands with regards to the institution of motherhood.

Yet, this could be the key as to why the heavily problematic figure of Medea is of such interest to audiences and theatrical practitioners in the twenty-first century. It is my argument that these contradictions as to the function of the mother in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries are addressed in modern productions of Euripides' *Medea.* This is due to the fact the *Medea* can be seen to articulate the anxieties inherent both in the maternal role and the identity of the mother. Playwrights can be seen to be teasing out some of the issues at stake, namely the psychological, social, political and economic issues which surround the mother. It will be demonstrated that the ways in which the original material is handled, with particular reference to the issue of infanticide, highlights current concerns regarding the status of the mother in recent times.

Contrary to Page's claims, infanticide is not something which is outside of the modern experience. Lillian Conti writes that there is an 'emotional intensity surrounding even the word "infanticide."' [216] This ideological position can be seen as an example of a trend which Alice Miller identifies, namely that 'the victimisation of children is

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213 See Kaplan 1991.
214 Freely 1995: 13.
215 Benn 1998: 191.
216 Conti 1998: xiv.

nowhere forbidden; what is forbidden is to write about it.'[217] This acknowledges a general social awareness that child abuse occurs but, due to the fact that most child abuse occurs within the family unit, it is mostly hidden from public discourse. In the United States whereas overall rates of homicide are decreasing, the rates at which parents are murdering their children are increasing.[218] Furthermore, in some non-Western cultures (such as in China and India) infanticide is used as a method of birth control (presumably due to the lack of available alternative family-planning methods). Therefore, it is apparent that infanticide is not the aberrant phenomenon which Page, Freud or Deutsche would have us believe. Yet, it is also apparent that society seeks to understand the phenomenon of maternal infanticide in such a way as to explain this overwhelming social trend without necessarily re-evaluating traditional motherhood discourses. This includes branding maternal infanticides as deviant to the social norm of the nurturing maternal presence.

Therefore, people seek specific factors which could explain why maternal infanticide occurs. This can include economic, psychological, social and political factors. Psychopathologically, the reasons behind maternal infanticide in modern Western culture include 'a severe personality disorder and an additional depressive episode in the context of the offence.'[219] The above are all criteria which could certainly be applied to Medea's act of infanticide: mental illness is attributed to Medea by the Nurse[220] and she is socially handicapped in that she is a foreigner and has fewer rights than Greek women, thus she has no political recourse for Jason's actions.[221] It is also apparent that the act of infanticide in Greek mythology can also be seen to be committed in response to the perceived crimes of the child's father. [222] According to Toni Badnall, a similar psychopathology can also be seen in the case of Procne in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and that of the Lemnian women.[223] Moreover, perhaps Medea can be seen to negotiate the reasons as to why women might be induced to kill their children whilst still considering that behaviour as marginal and the result of

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217 Miller 1984: 190.
218 Friedman et al. 2005: 1580.
219 Marleau et al.: 1995: 147.
220 Euripides *Medea*: 19-32.
221 Euripides *Medea*: 250-56.
222 See Badnall 2012.
223 See Badnall 2012.

outside mitigating factors. Thus, notions of the traditional mother can remain largely untroubled, despite the fact that one can begin to understand, or even sympathise with, the act of infanticide.

Therefore, if society has created laws which proscribe the murder of children then the societal discourse surrounding the all-nurturing female can be seen to be ideologically constructed. Thus, the murder of children could suggest a deconstructive move against this notion of the mother as constructed by discourse. This means that the killing of the children, the casting off of the role of mother, can be seen as an act of self-definition. Margaret Reynolds writes that Medea's dismissal of her 'natural' maternal feelings is a dismissal of her socially-constructed femininity.[224] It can be seen as a sort of obverse 'writing of the body.' Yet, rather than Cixous' reversion back to the essential mother within all women, we see a destruction of it. The killing of the children can be seen as deconstructing the binary structures which maintain what is perverse and what is normal; what is natural and what is deemed unnatural.[225]

The focus on female infanticide is in line with a general trend in both Greek drama and real life to give more attention to maternal rather than paternal infanticide. Although Kathleen Riley argues that there has been an increase in the numbers of productions of the *Heracles* following on from a spate of infanticides committed by veterans of the current war in Iraq, it is apparent that, generally speaking, society is much more heavily invested in maternal infanticides and that the numbers of productions of the *Medea* – which deals specifically with female infanticide – outstrips the numbers of productions dealing with male infanticide.[226] This is despite the fact that men are statistically more likely to commit filicide than women.[227] E. Ann Kaplan argues that this is due to the fact that the role of the mother in the social imaginary is to be nurturing and self-sacrificing. Women's behaviour which can be positioned outside of this norm is therefore met with much more culpability.[228] Men and fathers experience less social expectation to fulfill a nurturing role. Indeed, as has

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224 Reynolds 2000: 122.
225 Conti 1998: 189.
226 APGRD [accessed 28/06/2012].
227 Greenfield et al. 1999
http://web.archive.org/web/20100603113816/http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/wo.pdf [accessed 29/06/2012].
228 Kaplan 1992: 193.

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been discussed above, in traditional psychoanalysis the good mother was only good insofar as she had abandoned all masculine desires. Therefore, it seems that masculinity is, in fact, totally incongruous with, or perhaps even antithetical to, maternity. Hence, male abuse of children is met with less outcry. It is interesting to note in relation to this that the pathology of what has become known as the Medea complex (a psychiatric diagnosis for women who seek to harm their children) was articulated years before the corresponding Laius complex.

This discrepancy between the treatment of male and female filicides in society, as well as in Greek drama, is articulated by Tony Harrison in *Medea: A Sex-War Opera:*

> He killed his children. So where
> is Hercules's electric chair?
> A children slayer. Or is Medea
> The one child-murderer you fear?[229]

At the end of the play, media reports of maternal infanticide are projected onto a screen. After a while, Harrison projects a headline taken from *The Sun* newspaper which reads: 'A Father Kills His 4 Kids,'[230] with the word 'Father' underlined in red by Harrison. At this point, the music and the chorus fall silent. In doing so, Harrison emphasises the fact that it is rare for men to be publicly decried for an act of child abuse as opposed to women. In emphasising this discrepancy between the treatment of male and female filicides, it is apparent that society is much more heavily invested in maintaining the traditional discourse of the mother. A potential reason for this could be to ensure that the patriarchal binary system of gender and male subjectivity is maintained. If masculinity is antithetical to the nurturing role required for the bringing-up of children, then the weight of child-rearing must be borne by the mother. This maintains a social hierarchy in which men are the social superiors of women. This male/female dichotomy can be seen in the original text where Medea's actions are coded as heroic (and therefore masculine). It is only through rejecting those maternal feelings which society codes as natural that Medea is able to realign herself with a more masculine view-point and kill her children.

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229 Harrison 1986: 370.
230 Harrison 1986: 448.

Although it is apparent that many of the concerns which influence the choice of the *Medea* as the vehicle through which to explore issues of motherhood can be explained by the social and political context with which the plays are engaging, it is also important to look at the communal-psychological reasons as to why these productions might be so prevalent. Barbara Johnson writes that 'when a woman speaks about the death of children in any other sense other than that of pure loss, a powerful taboo is being violated.'[231] It is this sense of infanticide as taboo which is vital to an understanding of modern audiences' fascination with the character of Medea. Freud writes that a taboo is a 'primeval prohibition forcibly imposed (by some authority) from outside, and directed against the most powerful longings to which human beings are subject.'[232] His most famous example of this was the incest taboo which characterised the Oedipus complex. Freud wrote, with reference to the *Oedipus Tyrannus,* that the power of ancient drama to move later audiences lay in its ability to demonstrate the realisation of our unconscious desires; in this case, the patricidal and incestuous desires which drive the universally-conceived Freudian Oedipus complex.[233] As has been previously discussed with reference to Hélène Cixous' *Le Nom D'Oedipe*, it could be argued that an individual can only experience a true sense of subjectivity by breaking the artificial, socially regulated taboos which trap individuals in a heteronormative, patriarchally-authorised sense of self. Therefore, Medea's act of infanticide could be read as a way of defining herself outside of a socially-prescribed maternal role. Yet, Freud maintained that no one is able to identify with the Medea myth. This is patently not the case as Tina Shepherd, director of *Bad Women,* is quoted to have said, 'I don't know if I have known a woman that is completely Medean in what she does, but I certainly have known a lot who feel what she has felt.'[234] Therefore, it is apparent that on some level there is identification with the figure of Medea in contemporary society. If infanticide is a taboo in the Freudian sense (i.e. an innate, universal desire which is proscribed by society) then a neo-Freudian reading might be inclined to indicate that our commitment to the Medea myth in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries might be reflective of culturally repressed desires which are denied official discourse in our society.[235] Furthermore,

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231 Johnson 1986: 38.
232 Freud 1918: 40.
233 Freud 1913: 296.
234 Quoted in Foley 2004: 77
235 Conti 1998: xi.

we can see the comments of male critics such as Freud and Page as being indicative of ideological positions which involve a commitment to the idealisation of the mother as traditionally conceived. It could therefore be surmised that the act of infanticide can be seen as a casting off of the culturally repressive maternal role and an experiencing of subjectivity outside of that designated by the patriarchal order.

Therefore, the *Medea* could - as well as being socially and historically pertinent - be interpreted as the realisation of a latent potentiality. This is similar to the experiences which Freud attributes to audiences of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The very fact that so many find the *Medea* both disconcerting and identifiable can be located in the fact that the play communicates latent desires which have been prohibited by society at large but are in actual fact not outwith the realm of experience. [236] Indeed, Germaine Greer refers to infanticide as 'the dark, secret side of motherhood.'[237] For Greer, infanticide is powerfully taboo; therefore, the popularity of the *Medea* may relate to the fact that it represents an admittedly painful and self-destructive, yet necessary, resistance to cultural constructions of gender.[238]

Thus, there are two possible interpretations of the actions of Euripides' Medea. The first reflecting an ideological construction of maternal infanticide which posits the mother who kills her children as being an aberration to the norm; the second arguing that her act of infanticide can be read as a casting off of socially constraining roles. This can be seen as endemic of the wide range of motherhood discourses in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Although Kaplan argues that 'all of these discourses, either implicitly or explicitly, reify the traditional mother and condemn all other forms of womanhood,'[239] it has been demonstrated that some discourses could perhaps challenge the traditional function of the mother by allowing her a space in which to define herself outside of this role. In this guise, we can see many oppositional strategies with regards to the portrayal of the mother as defined by patriarchy. Even if this reappraisal of the maternal function is not wholly successful in challenging gender roles and the traditional representation of the mother, it is

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236 Conti 1998: xi.
237 Greer 1984: 228.
238 Foley 2004: 110.
239 Kaplan 1992: 183

apparent that the challenge posed by such revisions could give an audience an increased awareness that there is space for a different conceptualisation of the maternal outside of patriarchal discourses.

The following will therefore look at to what extent these issues can be seen in directors' handling of the original material, as well as spectators' responses to different productions. It is apparent that the issues and contradictions outlined above can be seen in modern adaptations of the *Medea*. It is my argument that the reason for this can be seen in the complex interplay between the two different kinds of spectator offered by the theatre. The way in which an individual interprets a performance is dependent on the complex relationship between authorial/directorial control and reader response. The first spectator position offered by drama is the hypothetical spectator - the spectator-position which the play offers to the audience (although the historical spectator can choose to what extent he/she accepts or rejects this offered position). The second is the socio-historical and ideological position which each individual spectator brings to his/her reception of the play (this includes his/her gender). It is argued that the spectator-subject is thus constructed both by dramatic strategies (i.e. those which create the hypothetical spectator), as well as his/her specific socio-historical circumstances. This means that there is a complex relationship between the hypothetical spectator position and the viewer's own interpretations of what he/she is watching. Kaplan writes that '[d]epending on the social practices through which this viewer is constructed, he/she will be more or less receptive to the hypothetical spectator-position of the play.'[240] It is my argument that the gendered position of the audience can serve to influence how performances of the *Medea* are performed and received.

The choice of the *Medea* as a touchstone for female empowerment is problematic. John Fisher, author of *Medea, the Musical,* is quoted as having said, 'People love this woman killing kids . . . It's weird, killing kids is not okay! Killing kids is never okay – but for some reason it's okay for Medea. It's an interesting audience phenomenon.'[241] Fisher explores this 'phenomenon' further in his play, *Medea, the Musical.* For Fisher, the choice of Medea as a protofeminist icon of female

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240 Kaplan 1992 11.
241 Fisher 2002: 24.

empowerment and subjectivity is difficult. In the play, the characters Paul and Elsa are planning on putting on a production of the *Medea*. The question of how to direct the infanticide on-stage culminates in this exchange between Elsa and the play's director, played by Fisher himself:

> JOHN: Killing your children is a feminist act. It's the ultimate act of self-empowerment. It's like burning your bra.
> ELSA: No . . . It's a man's idea of a feminist act.[242]

Here, Fisher may be suggesting that rather than being an act of self-definition or empowerment, this 'man's idea of a feminist act' is merely a patriarchal construction, albeit a darker one, of female sexuality. Whereas Reynolds argues, as has been discussed above, that the act of infanticide symbolises the point at which Medea rediscovers her essential self beneath the socially-constructed ideas of femininity, for Fisher, the act is more problematic, perhaps a destruction of the self entirely; or, as Tony Harrison's chorus sings, the Euripidean infanticide is merely 'Another male plot to demean/ Women's fertility.'[243] Hence Medea's most famous act of self-definition is contested. It is argued that through the rejection of her maternal function, rather than casting off a patriarchal construction of femininity, she is merely subscribing to another facet of the patriarchal feminine. Foley writes that the infanticide in Euripides' *Medea* represents 'the death and betrayal of [Medea's] maternal self': 'Medea's inability to trust her maternal voice . . . destroys our hopes for a more enlightened form of human ethics, the authoritative female identity that could contest masculine ethics, whether archaic or contemporary.'[244] For Foley, the destruction of the maternal self entails a destruction of women's only hope for 'an authoritative female identity.' Like Cixous, Foley locates female identity within the maternal body. Therefore, at the end of *Medea, the Musical,* 'infanticide' is performed not on two children but on two adult actors by both Jason and Medea. The scene is absurd and the act of infanticide is ridiculed and parodied so as to question its significance in terms of female identity and sexuality. However, much of the discourse surrounding maternal infanticide does not necessarily entail that infanticide and motherhood are antithetical, rather they are two sides of the same coin. Indeed, throughout Euripides'

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242 As quoted in Foley 2004: 109.
243 Harrison 1986: 431.
244 Foley 2004: 82-83.

Medea both Medea's destructive and nurturing sides are apparent.[245] This is perhaps one of the reasons as to why it has proved so popular a vehicle for exploring the many different facets of motherhood discourses.

The following will now look at spectators' responses to Brendan Kennelly's *Euripides Medea: A New Version* and Liz Lochhead's *Medea*. It is my argument that there is a gendered divide in the responses to Euripides' *Medea* or, rather, a divide between patriarchally-informed interpretations of the *Medea* and feminist interpretations of the *Medea*. Much of the criticism and incredulity of Medea's actions stem from male critics. In the particular case of Freud, it is heavily demonstrable that he had an invested interest in maintaining the illusion of the all-caring, all-nurturing maternal female following on from his work on psychoanalysis. Although it is reductive to claim - as has been seen above - that all women, or indeed all those who align themselves with feminism, necessarily think positively, or at least in a non-wholly-negative light, with regards to the infanticide of Medea, it is my argument that there is an apparent distinction between those who are more uncomfortable with Medea's transgressions against her maternal self and those who embrace it as a way of troubling traditional notions of motherhood and femininity. It is my argument that, generally, male critics are more uneasy about Medea's act of infanticide than women. It is also my argument that this is due to the fact that the act of infanticide can be interpreted as a challenge against women's position of subordination in society. By challenging dominant discourses surrounding motherhood, women can be seen to be seeking an autonomous identity outside of patriarchal standards. This can be seen as representing a challenge to patriarchal power.

Thus, the following will look at two possible interpretations of Brendan Kennelly's 'Women of Corinth' speech. Simon Goldhill writes that this adaptation constitutes an even heavier body politics than normal:[246]

> Men, the horny despots of our bodies,
> sucking, fucking, licking, chewing, farting into our skin,

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245 Euripides *Medea*: 1233-1246.
246 Goldhill 2007: 166.

> sitting on our faces, fingering our arses,
> exploring our cunts, widening our thighs,
> drawing the milk that gave the bastards life[247]

He further argues that that the violence of Kennelly's expression may serve to alienate audiences from identifying with the character.[248] Medea objects to being made subjected to patriarchal rule and has a very definite sense of her subjectivity, which is often couched in sexual terms. Women in the audience are asked to identify with, and are incensed into action by, Medea's repeated use of the possessive adjective 'our' against issues which include, but are not restricted to, sexual, political and economic double standards. Similarly, Valerie Solanas's 'SCUM Manifesto' (which is recited during Harrison's *Medea: A Sex-War Opera*) can be seen to be equally visceral and political in its dialogue. Solanas refers to man as variously being 'a biological accident,' 'a walking abortion,' 'unfit even for stud service,' 'a walking dildo' and that women should begin to reproduce without them.[249] According to Solanas, man is responsible for war, capitalism, marriage, prostitution, mental illness, government, religion, racism, culture, disease and death. All these criticisms of men are expressed in heavily sexualised and bodily terms.

Although female spectators are encouraged to identify with Kennelly's Medea as a woman wronged by a man at the start of the play, this affinity does not last long as Medea's plots are revealed. Identification and sympathy can now be reserved for Jason, Creon, Glauke and the children as victims of her revenge. In exceeding the standards of expected behaviour, Medea's actions are marginalised and perceived as if in need of modification by society at large. This can, in turn, ultimately reify societal expectations of acceptable female behavior; i.e. that the good mother is defined through a discourse of her children's needs,[250] a paradigm of maternal sacrifice which can be seen to uncritically embody the patriarchal unconscious, positioning women into the roles of lack and passivity.[251] Indeed, one could argue that the figure of Medea can, in fact, be used as a tool for normalisation. In this context, Wallbank writes that:

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247 Kennelly 1991: 25.
248 Goldhill 2007: 166.
249 Solanas 1967: http://www.womynkind.org/scum.htm [accessed 13/03/2012]
250 Wallbank 2001: 131-145.
251 Kaplan 1992: 77.

> normalisation operates by setting up a norm to which individuals must conform. Individuals are measured according to how closely they conform to the desired norm. The effect of the normalising judgment is to establish a standard to behaviour towards which everyone is encouraged. Any individual behaviour that falls outside what has been defined and valued as normal is marginalised and is perceived as in need of modification.[252]

In expressing herself in sexual terms, Medea is miles away from the asexual Freudian mother. Indeed, such characterisation could be considered masculinising. Returning to the psychoanalytic theories of Deutsch, it is argued that if women retain those desires which are considered masculine (i.e. desire for the phallus and the power which it represents), then this irreconcilable with the fulfilment of the maternal function. Therefore, it could be argued that Medea is abandoning her femininity in favour of more masculine values. This makes her a more problematic standpoint for a reformulation of the female self through a reappraisal of the maternal.

However, this reappraisal of the mother can be seen to criticise the positioning of women as lack in patriarchy. Whereas the image of the self-sacrificing mother is usually recounted from an inherently masculine point of view, this paradigm of motherhood arises from castration anxiety. Kaplan writes that the 'mother sacrifice pattern uncritically embodies the patriarchal unconscious and represents women's positioning as lack, absence, signifier of passivity: she has ceased to be a threat to the male unconscious.'[253] On the other hand, the mother which crushes this paradigm by harming her children can be seen to be antithetical to the patriarchal mother who exists only in order to bring the male child into subjectivity. Women who refuse to be defined by the patriarchal standards of lack and passivity can be seen as a threat to male subjectivity and a patriarchal order which can only exist through the creation of male subjects at the expense of women (who are designated objects). This is also expressed by Solanas who writes that women 'don't have penis envy; men have pussy envy.'[254] Thus, patriarchal values are troubled by the actions of Medea. Hence, the challenge to patriarchy remains and can be seen, even if in a small way, to question the status quo and go some way to defying traditional renderings of the mother. The

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252 Wallbank 2001: 6-7.
253 Kaplan 1992: 124.
254 Solanas 1967: http://www.womynkind.org/scum.htm [accessed 13/03/2012].

way in which this can be seen to come about is best described using Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of carnival. For Bakhtin, an individual could be seen to live two lives. One which was characterised by an adherence to the socio-political hierarchy and another which was characterised by the carnivalesque: liberated, unrestricted, obscene, debased, profane, excessive, subversive and ambivalent. During a period of carnival, there is no respect for norms or hierarchies. Bakhtin writes that although both of these lives were legitimate, they were separated by the temporal restrictions placed on carnival activity. However, when carnival became realised in literature, it could be ideologically realised. The official worldview could perhaps be destabilised through the image-borne strategies which characterise the carnivalesque.[255]

The literary application of the 'carnivalesque' describes insurrection against the status-quo through humour and chaos. This is to say that the solemnity of social hierarchies and their 'truths' are overturned by traditionally suppressed voices. The result is a world turned upside-down, ideas and truths being continuously tested and contested, and all crying out for equal dialogic status. The result of this confusion between high and low culture is the recognition of the relativity of 'truth' and the de-privileging of hegemony's previously authoritative voice. This can be seen at work in Kennelly's reworking of the *Medea* in bringing high literature (i.e. Greek tragedy) down to the status of the obscene; in bringing the heroic character of Medea down to the level of the common.

However, an objection to this idea of carnival as an anti-authoritarian force that can be mobilised against official culture is that carnival, paradoxically, is a part of the very culture that it seeks to destabilise. Instead, this temporary suspension of cultural authority could be seen to eventually reify and reinforce that authority. The important regenerative laughter of carnival, the mockery which holds within it the potential for political change, can be seen to have been institutionalised in order to curb its potentially revolutionary force. In this case, carnivalesque behaviour is restricted to the theatre. By allowing individuals to experience carnival in a controlled setting, there may be less of a desire to experience subversive behaviour in non-sanctioned

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255 Bakhtin 1965: 1-58.

situations. By giving women a voice within this context, it is possible that such a group may not seek to speak thus outside of it.

Nonetheless, Natalie Zemon Davis, argues that 'comic and festive inversion could *undermine* as well as reinforce.'[256] For subordinated groups such as women, carnival could be used to highlight the presence of cultural hierarchies - such as gender - and potentially provide a space in which they might be overturned. It is my argument that this is the case; that although carnival behaviour is generally restricted, it is possible for it to, in some way, affect the status quo.

For Goldhill, the violence of Kennelly's expression may serve to alienate audiences from identifying with the character and her articulate hatred of men. Yet, for others, it may serve as a cry against the regulation of female sexuality, against its ownership by 'despotic' men who curb women's rights to explore their sexual identities outwith that which they experience in a heteronormative, monogamous relationship.[257] This may be particularly poignant in terms of the original performance context (Ireland) where abortion remains illegal.

On the other hand, one could interpret alienation as the point of Kennelly's characterisation. For Mulvey, as has been discussed, the use of Brechtian alienation techniques offers an alternative to the male gaze. Thus Kennelly's visceral dialogue could perhaps be seen as a solution to the problem of the objectification of female characters on-stage. Furthermore, his Medea could be interpreted as grotesque (a notion related to carnival) in the Bakhtinian sense. The 'grotesque' is an anarchic aesthetic which utilises the grotesque physical body as a weapon of mockery against official culture. It is an awareness of the physicality of the body which identifies the body as a site of resistance to the socio-political status quo. This causes the body to become a potential site of cultural and political change. It is my argument that Kennelly's *Medea* can be seen to embody this in its heavy focus on the sexualised female body in the play. Such a celebration of the body's more base processes in a highly exaggerated and grotesque way degrades the abstract, the spiritual, the noble, and the ideal to a physical level. This degradation is not necessarily a negative

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256 Davis 1975: 131(emphasis in original).
257 Goldhill 2007: 166.

process, rather the grotesque body becomes a site of opposition against hegemony. The grotesque is therefore as much regenerative as it is degrading. For Bakhtin, the use of the 'grotesque' to degrade the socio-political system was to demonstrate a power which was potentially strong enough to regenerate that same system.[258] Kennelly's characterisation of Medea, in resisting imagining her as a self-sacrifing mother, rather portraying her in terms of her grotesque and base sexuality and physicality, may allow room for a critical re-evaluation of the ways in which women are constructed and positioned in patriarchal society. The play can be seen to challenge the categorisation of women as either passive victims or as evil and manipulative. Such an approach can be seen to reveal spaces in the original text for re-evaluation and re-interpretation.[259]

I now suggest that a gendered response to the portrayal of motherhood in adaptations of the *Medea* is apparent. This is particularly evident with regards to less-traditional adaptations, such as Kennelly's. Whereas both Goldhill (above) and Oliver Taplin[260] write against the tone of Kennelly's dialogue, *Independent* reviewer Kathryn Mead writes that Kennelly's Medea is 'electrifying.'[261] On the other hand, although Liz Lochhead's *Medea* did not receive the same level of mixed reviews which characterized Kennelly's reception, I would argue that a gendered response is also apparent in this instance.

It could be argued that Lochhead's more traditional rendering of the Medea myth poses much less of a threat to the sensibilities of the audience. In Kennelly's production, Medea objects to being made subject to patriarchal rule and has a very definite sense of her subjectivity which, as has been discussed, is often couched in sexual terms. This in particular seems to make the male reviewers uneasy.[262] With regards to Lochhead's *Medea,* Michael Billington noted that the play endowed 'an unusual degree of complicity in the audience.'[263] Perhaps this is due to the fact that her Medea more readily embodies both Medea the mother and Medea the infanticide and is not characterized by the rage which distinguishes Kennelly's rendering.

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258 Bakhtin 1965: 303-367.
259 Kaplan 1992: 125.
260 Taplin:1988.
261 Mead 1989.
262 Kingston 1989; Thormber 1989.
263 Billington 2000.

Nonetheless, Billington further writes that Lochhead's *Medea* has the 'men in the audience shifting uneasily in their seats.' Another review, this time in *The Scotsman*, notes a potential discrepancy between gendered responses of Lochhead's work, writing that, '[w]hat Lochhead does is to recast Medea as an episode - ancient but new, cosmic yet agonisingly familiar - in a sex war which is recognisable to every woman, and most of the men, in the theatre.'[264] The fact that there seems to be a tendency for male critics to react uneasily to productions of the *Medea,* particularly those which serve to totally alienate the character from any idea of the traditional nurturing mother, goes some way to demonstrate the idea that the notion of the traditional mother is one in which society is particularly invested in. It therefore seems that patriarchal society is heavily concerned with the mother, perceived attacks on whom are met with resistance from male critics. On the other hand, female viewers seem to be more likely to identify with the character, even in less-traditional productions.

To conclude, it has been demonstrated that there are many reasons, both psychological and socio-historical, as to why the *Medea* has proven to be the most popular Greek tragedy of the past thirty years. It is apparent that the treatment of the infanticide of the play can be seen to reflect the anxieties and multiple discourses surrounding the mother in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It has shown that the infanticide can be treated as either an escape from the patriarchal feminine, engendering a sense of a new female subjectivity via the taboo of infanticide, or merely falling into the trap of another patriarchal construction of femininity. It has also argued that the treatment of infanticide can be seen to be socially engineered due to the discrepancies in the treatment between male and female infanticides. The second section demonstrated that the gendered responses apparent with regards to different productions of the *Medea* can be seen to reflect an ideological investment in maintaining traditional female roles and a patriarchal binary system of gender.

It is apparent that these differing formulations of the mother and her representation demonstrate the fact that contemporary conceptualisations of women on-stage are complex. This is indicative of a more general postmodern trend of conceiving of

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264 Anon 2000.

selfhood as being constantly in process and redefined. Although Kaplan argues that most dominant motherhood discourses, whether implicitly or explicitly, 'reify the traditional mother and condemn all other forms of womanhood,' productions of the *Medea* can be seen to be in discussion with the various motherhood discourses, in some ways affirming traditional notions, challenging them in others. The appeal of the *Medea,* by way of its high cultural and ideological position in society, is that it allows the discussion of the ordinarily undiscussable, in this case the taboo of unrepentant child-murder. It is also apparent that this particular fascination with Medea the infanticide came at a time when the essential nature of the maternal was being criticised through the writings of those such as Judith Butler and Germaine Greer. For Butler, motherhood is no more than another culturally-signifying act, a performance, as opposed to having any ontological status prior to the patriarchal structure, as such feminists, like Cixous, may purport.[265] The play's popularity also demonstrates that the discourses surrounding the mother can be seen to be socially and historically situated and therefore subject to change.

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265 Butler 1990: 90-115.

CONCLUSION

The previous three chapters have examined the different ways in which the mother has been reconceptualised in terms of female subjectivity and representation. Whereas the first chapter looked at how a multiple subject position outside of patriarchy and a reinterpretation of the sign 'woman' is made possible through a recourse to the mother, the second chapter looked at how motherhood can be seen to be another patriarchal construct. Therefore, female subjectivity – indeed any sense of gendered subjectivity – was questioned in order to reformulate a self outside of restrictive patriarchal binaries. The final chapter looked at the reasons why the *Medea* has proven to be the most popular drama of the past thirty years, with a mind to arguing that different responses to her infanticide can be seen to be in line with the fact that motherhood discourses are ambiguous and full of anxieties.

E. Ann Kaplan writes that: 'mothering was the last female role, historically, to be questioned.'[266] It is therefore apparent that debates surrounding the traditional construction of the mother in light of feminism remain problematic and unresolved. The discourses surrounding motherhood remain wide and often contradictory. It is thus difficult to locate exactly where society currently stands with regards to the maternal. Following on from the Freudian/Lacanian formulations which debarred the mother from an autonomous selfhood, the mother in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries is now articulated as a subject. Returning to Kaplan:

> we find a plethora of discourses in which the mother now figures as subject (where as previous to this she was unseen, a non-subject). But her subjectivity causes her dislocations, problems that cultural productions and articulations now address. [267]

It is this new sense of subjectivity that can be seen at work in the plays discussed in the previous chapters. It is also apparent that the use of the mother in order to rethink the representation of women has resulted in many different viewpoints on how this is to be achieved. Although all stances share the goal of re-appraising the traditional

266 Kaplan 1992: 139.
267 Kaplan 1992: 26.

representations of women, it is apparent that this does not necessarily lead to a homogeneous course of action. It is my argument that the fact that these discourses are so different reflects the anxiety and ambiguity surrounding how the mother is perceived in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Despite the fact that all three positions can be seen to differ, what they share is an emphasis on the multiplicity of the female self as defined against a unified patriarchal self. In line with this notion of the multiplicity and instability of identity and subjectivity is the idea that women are freed from subordination, fetishisation and Otherness. This emphasis on multiplicity can be seen to be reflective of the fractured, multiple and ambivalent nature of what Jean-Francois Lyotard referred to as the 'postmodern condition.'[268] Postmodernism can be seen as being characterised as embodying fracture, multiplicity and challenging authority. This is in direct opposition to Modernism which was heavily invested in maintaining those ideologies and master narratives which postmodernism seeks to deconstruct.

I argue that the ambiguous ways in which postmodern productions of Greek tragedy engage with gender reflects the state of the society in which they were produced, one where the very notion of 'identity' is problematised. It is apparent that the plays are engaging with a wide range of issues of which there is no neat expression and often their solutions are ambiguous, contradictory or problematic. This can be seen to reflect contemporary society's incredulity regarding the grand narratives which justify the patriarchal social structure. If Classics can be seen as one of these 'grand' or 'master' narratives for Western culture then there is much significance in using ancient plays as a means of destabilising such notions. Greek tragedy can be seen to be one of the roots from which current patriarchal representations of women in theatre, and in real-life, take their cue. By returning and re-evaluating these bedrock ideologies, the act of re-thinking the representation of women can be seen to have greater social, cultural and political resonances. However, the solution of multiplicity of identities which this mode proposes is nonetheless problematic. Hélène Foley writes that :

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268 See Lyotard 1985.

> Revisions [of Greek tragedy] endow both male and female characters with new subjectivities, voices and cultural resistances, but the inexorable plot structures of the originals remain to remind the audience of the complexities of this task and the fragilities of their resolutions. Characters no longer achieve recognitions of their 'true' identity but confirm the instability of a self struggling with powerful internal and external forces in a world where gendered identities are actively changing.[269]

What is more, Jill Dolan writes:

> The 'playful pluralism of early feminist criticism was accepted because it symbolised intellectual, ideological and methodological freedom. But feminist theorists have since recognised the dangers implicit in trumpeting a strictly non-sectarian approach to method and ideology. Feminism loses some of its polemical force if it is not linked to a coherent ideological structure.[270]

This is to say that such an individualistic sense of self precludes the possibility for social or political action on behalf of the oppressed. Although I would argue that the use of theatrical performance can be seen to trouble traditional notions of gender, it is nonetheless important to note that much recent feminist scholarship has argued that the near total deconstruction of the postmodern subject and the subjugation of feminism into postmodernism are moves which aim at the obliteration of the specificity of feminist critique and the silencing of women's voices. It is argued that feminist attempts at creating a universalising female perspective is a tactical political necessity. Thus, most recent feminism seeks to mediate a way between holding on to the category of 'woman' whilst simultaneously recognising the differences between women of different backgrounds. [271]

Nonetheless, I would argue that although a total recourse to the idea that any sense of a gendered identity is undesirable, it remains important that feminism does not, in its search for a political standpoint between women, return to a monolithic interpretation

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269 Foley 2005: 111
270 Dolan 1988: 3
271 See Tasker et al. 2007

of women or their representation. The performances discussed can be seen to trouble patriarchal notions of femininity. This does not necessarily entail a loss of any sense of female gendered subjectivity altogether and the multiplicity which these positions characterise is important in terms of not returning to a notion of woman as defined by patriarchy.

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