THE GREEK FAMILY IN HISTORY AND MYTH

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WHEN I FIRST CONSIDERED THE ROLE of women in Athens I was struck, as so many have been before, by a paradox. On the one hand, one is usually told that the status of women in fifth- and fourth-century Athens achieved some kind of nadir. Women were legal nonentities, excluded from political and intellectual life, uneducated, virtually imprisoned in the home, and appeared to be regarded with disdain by the principal male spokesmen whose comments have survived.[1] On the other hand, as Gomme points out: "There is, in fact, no literature, no art of any country, in which women are more prominent, more important, more carefully studied and with more interest, than in the tragedy, sculpture, and painting of fifth-century Athens."[2] Gomme rejects the traditional view on these grounds and shows how one might arrive at a similar assessment of our own era by the appropriate selection of sources.

Gomme's essay is a healthy antidote to the intoxications that historical inference can induce in the unwary, but the dilemma cannot be laughed away. One may grant the absurdity of using polemical statements (e.g., "a woman's place is in the home") as indices of reality.[3] One may grant that the legal position of women need not reflect their social position.[4] One might accept the inference that at least some women – perhaps only hetairai – attended the theater,[5] and were generally *au courant*.[6] It is also likely, as Ehrenberg argues, that the lower classes never participated very fully in this social pattern.[7] The cultivation of bizarre and inconvenient social patterns is at all times and in all places a luxury which the lower classes often cannot afford, and the poor Athenian woman could not remain secluded in the home if peddling vegetables in the marketplace was her only source of livelihood.[8]

But when all of these qualifications have been made, a core of derogation and sex antagonism still remains. Women were legally powerless – a man could sell his daughter or even his sister into concubinage.[9] Women of the upper classes could not maintain this status and go out unattended, and their social life outside the home was largely restricted to religious festivals and funerals.[10] Among

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the well-to-do, men and women usually ate, and in some cases, slept apart,[11] and a wife who dined with her husband's guests was assumed to be a prostitute.[12] This separation obtained even in Macedonia.[13]

Since this is the generally accepted view of the status of women, it is perhaps unnecessary to accumulate further examples. Instead, let us examine the dissenting voices of Gomme and Kitto, who, in addition to stressing the powerful role played by women in tragedy, cite a number of facts which argue the importance of the woman's role in the home.[14]

At once it becomes clear that the entire controversy rests on a false assumption shared by all the combatants. This assumption might be called the "patriarchal delusion": the notion that power follows deference patterns – or that a sizeable power differential between the sexes is possible. Once one has shed this illusion, the combination of derogation of and preoccupation with women ceases to be a paradox and becomes an inevitability.

Rejection and derogation of women mean rejection and derogation of domesticity – of home and family life, and hence of the process of rearing young children. The Athenian adult male fled the home, but this meant that the Athenian male child grew up in a female-dominated environment. As an adult he may have learned that women were of no account, but in the most important years of his psychological development he knew that the reverse was true. Men were at that time trivial to him – all of the most important things in his life were decided, as far as he could see, by women.

Nor was his view simply a function of his ignorance of the outside world. We know from studies of the modern American family that participation and power go hand in hand. A working mother, for example, has more power in economic decision-making than a non-working mother, but *less* power in decisions regarding household activities – the husband not only participates more in domestic activities but exerts more control over them.[15] Conversely, the more the male imprisons the female in the home and takes himself elsewhere, the more overwhelmingly powerful is the female within the home.

The social position of women and the psychological influence of women are thus quite separate matters. The Greek male's contempt for women was not only compatible with, but also indissolubly bound to, an intense fear of them, and to an underlying suspicion of male

inferiority. Why else would such extreme measures be necessary? Customs such as the rule that a woman should not be older than her husband, or of higher social status, or more educated, or paid the same as a male for the same work, or be in a position of authority – betray an assumption that males are incapable of competing with females on an equal basis; the cards must first be stacked, the male given a handicap. Otherwise, it is felt, the male would simply be swallowed up, evaporate, lose his identity altogether.[16]

I shall try to show how the low status of women and the male terror of women were mutually reinforcing in Hellenic society, but before describing this cycle we must establish that women were in fact powerful in the house. The strongest datum comes from Aristophanes. In the *Lysistrata*, the fact that wives control the management of household finances is advanced as an argument for their assuming political control.[17] Xenophon confirms this, saying that while the husband earns the money, the wife dispenses it.[18] Kitto points out that the home was also a factory, and that the woman's position was thus one of great responsibility. The house being divided into men's and women's quarters, her control over her own domain, which included the children, most of the slaves, and the economic heart of the household, was largely unchallenged, and made the male vulnerable indeed.[19] Ischomachus, in attributing the outdoor life of the male and the indoor life of the female to a god-given division of labor, likens the wife's role to that of the queen bee, who supervises not only interior but also outside workers.[20] This is not to say that this division of labor completely eliminated marital power struggles – Ehrenberg points out the frequency of allusions to sexual competition in comedy.[21] But one cannot be a family patriarch at a distance. The role is an active one, involving the acceptance of interpersonal responsibility. The alcoholic who returns home only at midnight to beat his wife and children is not the most important figure in the daily life of the home.

Gomme points to the great freedom of action that women have in drama, and argues that women like Jocasta and Antigone must have been modeled on contemporary women.[22] Kitto makes the same point, observing that the women are usually more enterprising than the men – that the tragic heroines are striking in their vigor, intelligence, vindictiveness, and uncontrollability.[23] But while one may agree that

these women had contemporary models, one need not assume that such modeling extended beyond the narrow range of the household. All that a playwright requires for drama is a vivid memory for his own childhood and family – especially Greek drama, which is most intensely concerned with intrafamilial conflict.

Attempts to homogenize Greek attitudes toward women are thus thoroughly misguided. In Herodotus' description of the Battle of Salamis we find the Athenians so resenting the fact that a woman, Artemisia, commanded a ship against them, that they offered a large reward for her capture alive.[24] Yet, of the same battle there was a popular legend that the phantom of a woman appeared in the midst of the fighting and asked contemptuously, "in a voice which could be heard by every man in the fleet... if they proposed to go astern all all day...."[25] The belief that an Athenian woman's place is in the home does not in the least prevent them from imagining her in virago form.

This same contradiction appears on Olympus. Despite the patriarchal superstructure we find there, the goddesses are more intimately involved in the lives of men than are the gods. In particular, the enduring wrath of Hera is far more often the mainspring of mythological action than are the brief tantrums of Zeus, and has more far-reaching consequences. Like the Greek husband, Zeus wanders and philanders, but, as the Greek wife was almost forced to be, Hera is faithful. Hera works out her jealous feelings primarily through the vindictive pursuit of her stepchildren, and there are several instances (e.g., Medea, Procne) in Greek mythology in which a mother kills her own children to spite her husband for his infidelity. Is it not possible that this phenomenon, too, reflects (in style if not in intensity) a situation obtaining in the Greek home? Is it not usual to expect the frustrated mother to work out some of her feelings upon her children? It seems likely that some such tendency is responsible for the menacing aspect of women in so much of Greek myth.

Much has been written about homosexuality among the Greeks. We may perhaps pass over the anticipated efforts to idealize this feature of Greek life as "platonic," since as usual the argument appears to be based not on evidence but on some imagined incongruence between homosexuality and various Greek virtues. Actually, there is no source, from comedy to philosophy to litigation to history, which

does not indicate with compelling clarity that physical homosexuality was widespread and generally accepted; and that among the upper classes it competed successfully with heterosexuality.[26] Furthermore, far from being incongruent, we shall see that the tendency toward homosexuality is an essential part of a total pattern of response – that, indeed, one would even predict its existence knowing the rest of the pattern.

Modern studies of the family patterns of male homosexuals indicate that most often the household is "mother-dominant and father-avoidant," with the mother-son relationship "of the close-binding, intimate type, where often it seemed that the mother might select the son as a kind of surrogate husband." The homosexuality is then seen as "a defense against hidden but incapacitating fears of the opposite sex."[27] This description fits the Greek case rather well, although obviously one cannot equate a cultural pattern with a clinical one without some qualification.

Greek fear of women, however, was more particularized than this. Mature, maternal women were those most feared, and regarded as most dangerous. In the tragedies young women and virginal goddesses are helpful and benign, while the mature ones tend to be jealous, vindictive, and destructive. In Greek religion we find two goddesses, Athene and Artemis, being transformed, over the centuries, from mother-goddesses to youthful virgins. And in the daily life of Athens, we find a tendency for males to marry barely pubescent girls, and to encourage their women to practice depilation of all body hair.[28]

At the clinical level, one would tend to regard the desire for pubic depilation as phobic. Bettelheim mentions, for example, the frequency with which disturbed boys are concerned about the "hairy vagina," and suggests that it is "related to fear of the vagina dentata."[29] We may also recall that during the persecutions which periodically convulsed Europe between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, witches were shaved to uncover the mark of the Devil.

The preference for immature women did not end with the Greeks. Benjamin Karpman[30] analyzed a convicted pedophile in prison some years ago whose preoccupations throw considerable light on our search. The prisoner, "Kenneth Elton" after a long and valiant effort to demonstrate that his sexual life had been for the most part a normal one, revealed that his "normal" heterosexual relationships were

made possible largely through the fulfillment of certain conditions: "...if my second wife had allowed me to shave her, I don't think I would have ever bothered any little girl."[31] He says, however, with masterful understatement, that "generally, I don't care to look at woman's genitalia,"[32] and he employs a variety of devices – darkness, clothing, shaving the pubic area, and the pedophilia itself – to transcend this discomfort:

> "My first wife was a brunette – she had a pretty good sized backside ... seeing that would give me a peculiar feeling. She had a large amount of hair on her genitals – it worried me.... I was bothered so much by the sight of this hair that I never had intercourse with my wife during the daytime, as I simply couldn't bear to see her naked.... I wonder whether the fact that the little girls didn't have any hair was the reason for my liking them. I had with them a peaceful feeling – girls up to fourteen, fifteen..."[33]

In one of Elton's dreams he finds himself sailing a boat up a small stream full of sea grass which continually becomes fouled in his propellor. When he looks down, however, he finds that: "instead of it being full of sea grass it was full of long, black hair which seemed to have been plaited around the blades of the propeller, as well as its shaft. And as I gazed down towards the bottom I could see it was covered with this long, black hair, the sight of which, as the movement of the water made it wave (as it were) to and fro, absolutely made me feel 'creepy': in fact, it looked to me like so many thousand snakes straining to get at me."[34]

The boat made powerless by the hair strangling its propeller dramatizes Elton's sexual difficulties. The uncanny feeling that he reports, together with the comparison of the hair to snakes and the inability to move, brings to mind the Medusa myth, about which psychoanalytic theorists have had a good deal to say. Ferenczi, for example, reports, "in the analysis of dreams and fancies, I have come repeatedly upon the circumstance that the head of Medusa is the terrible symbol of the female genital region, the details of which are displaced 'from below upwards.' "[35]

Freud elaborates on this somewhat, suggesting that "to decapitate = to castrate. The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration

that is linked to the sight of something ... the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother."[36] But why, one might ask, should an adult female seem more "castrated" than an immature one? There seems to be something incomplete about this formulation. Freud and Ferenczi both stress the defensive nature of the fantasy, "castration" being denied by the "multiplication of penis symbols" (snakes), and Freud argues that, "however frightening (the snakes) may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror."[37]

But if this interpretation is correct, and snakes may be equated with hair, one would expect that a prepubescent girl would be more terrifying than a mature one to a male with castration anxiety. One wonders if there may not be a less oblique interpretation of this fantasy. Elsewhere, Freud associates the ideas of staring and immobility with the primal scene,[38] and one might ask whether it is the idea of castration which is primary, or whether it is the child's being confronted with the sexuality of the mother.

Freud continues his discussion of the Medusa's head by pointing to its reappearance on the aegis of Athene: "thus she becomes a woman who is unapproachable and repels all sexual desires – since she displays the terrifying genitals of the Mother. Since the Greeks were in the main strongly homosexual, it was inevitable that we should find among them a representation of woman as a being who frightens and repels because she is castrated."[39] But it is somewhat misleading to talk of Athene as someone who "frightens and repels," inasmuch as she emerges as the most personal, most helpful, and least punitive of all the major Olympian females. In fact, the only "repellent" aspect of Athene *is* the aegis, suggesting that from the Greek viewpoint kindness could be anticipated from a woman only so long as she remained a virgin. Perhaps the inhibitory value of the aegis lies in the fact that it is a reminder that the alternative to a helpful Athene is a vindictive Hera.

A more compelling interpretation is suggested by Karen Horney's paper, "The Dread of Woman," in which the fear of female genitalia is derived from a fear of maternal envelopment.[40] She describes typical dreams of male homosexuals: falling into a pit, sailing a boat in a narrow channel and being sucked into a whirlpool, being in a cellar

full of "uncanny, blood-stained plants and animals"; and she comments upon the widespread myth of the pool maiden (there are several in Greek mythology) who lures the male to his death.

Missing from Horney's analysis is any clear indication of the conditions under which this fear is likely to become prominent, for although she implies that it is universal, it is obviously trivial for many individuals and cultures, and utterly incapacitating for others. One would assume, however, that it would be related in some way to the mother-son relationship. We might find a clue in the mythology of the Trobriand Islanders, who also practice pubic depilation.[41] The Trobrianders believe in a mythical island inhabited only by women who do not depilate, and whose pubic hair grows long enough to form a kind of grass apron. They are very fierce, and sexually insatiable. "When they cannot have intercourse, they use the man's nose, his ears, his fingers, his toes – the man dies." Boys born on the island are treated in the same way, become tired and sick, and die before growing up.[42] For the Trobrianders, then, pubic hair is associated with being overpowered by a mature and lustful female, a theme we will encounter again in the case of Kenneth Elton.

First, however, let me summarize. I have suggested that both the practice of pubic depilation and the preference for immature females might derive from a phobic attitude toward the maternal genitalia. I have accepted the view of Freud and Ferenczi that the head of the Medusa is a representation of this fear, but rejected the notion that the fear itself is based on the absence of the penis, or that the many snakes necessarily represent phallic symbols. Despite Freud's ingenuity in dealing with the problem, it seems more likely that the snakes of the Medusa head are not compensatory, but are a *source* of fear, and represent an aspect of the vagina itself.[43]

I would suggest that the horror associated with these symbols of the maternal genitalia, if they be such, is attributable not to the notion that the mother is "castrated" but rather to her being experienced as "castrating," by virtue either of her hostility or her seductiveness toward the male child. This interpretation has the advantage of accounting for *variability* in "Medusa-dread," in terms of maternal behavior and its correlates.

To explore this possibility, let us return once more to the case of Kenneth Elton. While there is too little information to infer that

Elton's mother was "castrating" in either of the ways suggested, one does find almost a caricature of the castrating female in the neighbor who seduces Elton when he is six years old.

Elton describes the woman as powerful, aggressive, and quick-tempered. He recalls her chopping wood, and recounts incidents in which she caught him and teased him. Despite his fear, however, she later tempts him into her house, and he gives a graphic account of his frightened reaction to her powerful limbs and hairy body: "And as she advanced toward me a feeling of horror pervaded me, and if the floor could have opened up and swallowed me I should have been glad .... some two or three months previously I was wading in the water of a small pond when I stepped into a small bed of quicksand or extremely sticky mud which held me for several minutes before I could extricate myself. During the time that I was held in this mud... I thought I was a 'goner.' Of course, I was greatly frightened *then*, but my fright on this occasion was as nothing compared to the feeling that swept over me while lying on top of the Howard woman. It just seemed to me that I was going to be swallowed up within this mass of hideous hair, and I was so frightened I was unable to talk or move."[44]

Elton's association to the quicksand reflects the common equation of earth and mother – a symbolism particularly frequent in Greek myths. His inability to talk or move mirrors the notion that all who gazed on the Medusa head were turned to stone.

It seems likely that the mother's body becomes menacing to the child only as a function of what she does. A cross-cultural study by Stephens,[45] for example, found a positive correlation between variables suggesting sexual arousal of the child by the mother and a number of sexual anxieties and taboos (e.g., menstrual taboos, sexual prohibitions, desexualization of breasts, kin-avoidance); and a study by Baruch[46] provides an excellent illustration of this relation in a child unable to cope with the mother's sexual needs. Thus we may say that wherever one finds a mother unfulfilled in her sexual life, one may expect also to find a mother whose aspect is menacing to her child. But Stephens also finds a relationship between indices of "castration anxiety" and the severity of menstrual taboos, and one may infer not only that menstrual taboos presuppose high castration anxiety among males, but also that in a society with severe menstrual

taboos, penis envy and resentment of males by females is likely to be strong. Hence, one might also hypothesize that wherever one finds a mother who, by virtue of being a woman, is deprived in some way of self-expression or forced to endure narcissistic wounds of various kinds, one may expect also to find a mother whose aspect is menacing to her male children.

Marital Strains and Maternal Scapegoating

If sexual deprivation and humiliation by males both lead to anxiety-provoking maternal behavior toward sons, we would expect Greek males to be doubly fearful, since these phenomena seem to have been combined in the Greek household.

However much she may have looked forward to it in fantasy, as young girls do everywhere, marriage for a Greek maiden was somewhat traumatic. She moved abruptly from the life of childhood and the security of her family into the seclusion of a stranger's house. Her husband was chosen by her father and was probably never seen by her before the marriage, since deception in marriage contracts seems to have been common.[47] Marriage also involved a religious change – the relinquishing of the household gods of her youth: "She must abandon her religion, practice other rites, and pronounce other prayers. She must give up the god of her infancy, and put herself under the protection of a god whom she knows not."[48] These sudden changes took place, furthermore, when she was still very young. The bride of Ischomachus in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* is only fourteen, and he points out that she could not be other than ignorant, since she was well brought up, under strict surveillance, and taught neither to see nor hear nor to ask questions.[49] Hesiod recommends that the girl *wait* four years after *menarche,* which in Mediterranean countries would make the age of marriage seldom later than sixteen.[50] Blümner notes that "it was not uncommon, since Greek girls married very early, for them to play with their dolls up to the time of their marriage, and just before their wedding to take these discarded favourites, with their whole wardrobe, to some temple of the maiden Artemis, and there dedicate them as a pious offering."[51]

The bride, then, is an ignorant and immature teen-ager, totally dependent upon a somewhat indifferent stranger for all her needs – a

stranger who regards marriage at best as a necessary evil, but certainly a tiresome, if only partial, interruption of a pleasant and well-established pattern of daily living, in which his social and sexual needs are already being satisfied, the latter through hetairai and young boys. Semonides of Amorgos concludes a long tirade, in which women are compared to sows, vixen, bitches, donkeys, weasels, and monkeys, by saying: "No one day goes by from end to end enjoyable, when you have spent it with your wife." The husband has normally had little say in choosing his bride, marriage being defined as having a purely procreative function.[52]

Licht makes much of the oft-verbalized reluctance of Greek males to marry,[53] but such material is open to the objection that these dour jokes about exchanging freedom for slavery or equating marriage with death may be found in our own society, as well as in many others. They receive greater force, however, when we see the structural realities associated with them. Many Greek cities, for example, punished celibacy as a crime, and at one time Sparta denied the rights of citizenship to the man who did not marry. While Athens had no such law custom forbade bachelorhood, and it was everywhere viewed as impious. Athens did have a law, moreover, which made it a duty of the city's magistrate to prevent any family from becoming extinct. Only a man who had an elder brother with children could avoid the general rule without incurring disapprobation.[54]

These laws and customs betray the strength of the reluctance so vigorously assailed. Licht argues, furthermore, that even despite this pressure the proportion of old bachelors and old maids in Greece was high.[55] At any rate, the age at which the male married was probably around thirty – more than a dozen years later than that of his bride.[56] In the case of some, it was apparently a great deal more; when Socrates, for example, was over seventy, Xanthippe was still at or near childbearing age.[57]

This age difference was viewed as desirable since the beauty of the female was of briefer life than the strength of the male.[58] Since for some Greek males, as for Humbert Humbert, beauty and maturity could not coexist, this period of desirability was brief indeed.

On her side, the bride was equally unprepared for a mature heterosexual relationship. Her relationship with her father had prob-

ably been rather tenuous, partly because of his emotional distance from familial life, but also because of his overriding concern with preserving his daughter's chastity by means of strict control and seclusion. The pervasive segregation of, and antagonism between, the sexes prevented her ever transferring her major cathexis from mother to father, and she understood of men only that they had the best of things. In the Greek wedding ceremony it was the mother and not the father who performed the ritual analogue of giving the bride away.[59]

Even if an unmarried girl led a "retired and . . . joyless existence," however, and even though marriage often may have brought "somewhat greater freedom," it was nevertheless a disappointment: "When we are young, in our father's house, I think we live the sweetest life of all; for ignorance ever brings us up delightfully. But when we have reached a mature age and know more, we are driven out of doors and sold, away from the gods of our fathers and our parents, some to foreigners, some to barbarians, some to strange houses, others to such as deserve reproach. And in such a lot, after a single night has united us, we have to acquiesce and think that it is well."[60] However restricted her childhood years, maternal protection and affection were hers, as well as the companionship of siblings and playmates. The marital relationship provided little compensation for the loss of these advantages. Socrates can ask Critobulus, "are there any men to whom you entrust more matters of importance, or with whom you have less conversation, than with your wife?" and feel secure in the answer.[61]

This shallowness of the marital bond is not new with the classical period – Finley points out that in Homer there is no marital relationship, even that between Odysseus and Penelope, which contains the emotional intensity found in the attachment between father and son or between male friends.[62] But in most societies or subcultures in which the marital bond is weak, the partners are deeply invested in other relationships which are strong and enduring and supported by a stable and permanent environment.[63] When this external stability breaks down the marital bond becomes more important, and if marital roles are still structured along the older principle, substantial misery can result. This seems to have happened in fifth-century Athens, particularly for the wife; the husband still had many,

if shallow, external ties.[64] Whereas in Victorian England one could talk of a *wife's* "marital duties," in Athens it was more likely to be the male who would view marital sexuality in this light – not, of course, for prudish reasons. While Plutarch may be unduly generalizing from a law which seems fundamentally to be the same one violated by Onan, he nevertheless captures something of the spirit of the Greek male's attitude toward marriage in his discussion of a law of Solon: "that a man should consort with his wife not less than three times a month – not for pleasure surely, but as cities renew their agreements from time to time...."[65] When marital love occurred, even between newlyweds, it excited special comment.[66]

The marital relationship thus came to resemble that of an older brother and younger sister, when the brother has been entrusted with his sister's care against his will, and she is longing for her mother and resents his coldness, irritability, and contempt. But in the case of brother and sister, the mother will eventually return and the sister can even complain of her brother's ill-treatment. The wife is alone among strangers and will remain so. As a child she could perhaps vent her feelings in doll-play. As a wife she vents them on her children.

This is particularly likely to affect the male child. If the wife resents her husband's superiority, she can punish arrogance (or even masculinity) in her son.[67] Such vengeance is especially appropriate, inasmuch as the son is the sole means of perpetuating the father's lineage and property. Furthermore, lack of a son meant not only lack of an heir but also the disappearance of the family religion and rites, and condemnation of the father to eternal unhappiness beyond the grave.[68] Since the direct expression of hostility toward the husband would be inhibited by the wife's dependence upon him, her youth, and her social inferiority, destructive unconscious impulses toward male children must have been strong. Both the impulses and the need to repress them would be increased, furthermore, by the greater value assigned to male children. A woman who failed to produce an heir for her husband was viewed as not having performed her most elemental function, and women could be divorced for barrenness.

The male child was thus of vital importance to the wife – her principal source of prestige and validation. Yet how much she must secretly have resented the callous and disparaging male attitude

toward female children, who were an economic liability, a social burden, and of no redeeming religious significance to the household, of which they were, in any case, only a temporary member. The mother-daughter bond seems nonetheless to have been the closest, most affectionate, and least conflicted of all familial dyadic relationships, as is true in most sex-segregated societies. One sees it in the Demeter-Kore myth, which is unique in having parental affection as its primary motivational theme. Yet it was considered perfectly acceptable, even in Athens, for a healthy female infant to be exposed, even if the family were rich, if the father willed it.[69] When the dramatists based Clytemnestra's hatred of Agamemnon on his having casually murdered Iphigenia to further his military adventures, they were tapping a contemporary emotion. To be a woman was to be "nothing," and if women consciously and automatically shared this social assumption, this did not prevent them from resenting it. The male child aroused both feelings, and the casualness with which female children were denied found its negative counterpart in the mother's ambivalent overinvolvement with the son. His life, in other words, was given preference at a measurable cost. Sex antagonism is a two-edged sword, and if men could only feel secure in a heterosexual relationship in which they were unambiguously superior, the same was true of the woman. The male child was hers – under her control and subject to her whims, and it was here that her feelings could be given full expression. He was at one and the same time a scapegoat for and an antidote to the penis envy of the mother.

In myth the use of the son as a scapegoat for the father is both well-known and baldly expressed. Medea kills her sons in jealous rage against Jason, while Procne, for identical motives, kills her son and serves him up to his father in a stew.[70] Ovid captures the feelings when he has Procne express the desire to burn, blind, and castrate her husband, and then remark pitilessly, upon seeing her son walk by, "how like your father you are!"[71]

But the positive side of the ambivalence was no less difficult for a child to handle. Imprisoned and isolated by her indifferent and largely absented husband, some of the mother's sexual longing was turned upon her son. Along with, and in direct contradiction to, her need to belittle and discourage his masculine striving, she attempted

to build up into an idealized replacement of her husband, fantasying that "her little man" would grow up to be the perfect hero and take care of his mother all of her days.[72] Such fantasies would also gratify her own masculine strivings – though *she* might be confined and restricted, her son, an extension of herself, was free and mobile, and she could live her life through him. This may be an additional reason why Greek men married at such an advanced age, and also why the mother of the groom played such an important part in the marriage ceremony.

This maternal ambition for the son is reflected in myths such as those of Danaë and Perseus, and Thetis and Achilles. In both cases the mother has been slighted or injured in some way by a male (Danaë by Acrisius and Polydectes, Thetis by Peleus) and the exploits of the son serve directly or indirectly to compensate for this. An analogous relationship is that between Hera and Jason, the goddess using the hero to revenge herself on Pelias.

The ambivalence of the Greek mother toward her son was, in other words, not a normal reactive ambivalence, involving an object-oriented affection and an object-oriented irritation, but a deeply narcissistic ambivalence in which the mother does not respond to the child as a separate person, but as both an expression of and a cure for her narcissistic wounds. Her need for self-expansion and vindication requires her both to exalt and to belittle her son, to feed on and to destroy him.

Greek Narcissism

Present knowledge of psychopathology permits us to anticipate two consequences of the ambivalent attitude of the Greek mother. The first is a generally narcissistic personality structure in the child. This springs in part from the mother's own narcissism – the child has no model for the development of simple object-love. As Grace Stuart says: "We love out of our leisure from self-concern, and we are always self-concerned unless we know that someone other than ourself is prepared to maintain the significance of our being."[73] But it also follows from the pressure of the mother's ambivalence. Since she alternately accepts him as an idealized hero and rejects his

masculine pretensions, one would expect him to develop an abnormal concern about how others view him, and to have an extremely unstable self-concept. He will feel that if he is not a great hero he is nothing, and pride and prestige become more important than love. This is perhaps the basis of the Greek idealization of and preoccupation with the body; and we may also assume that the homosexuality of the Greeks rests on a firm narcissistic foundation: an unknown poet says, "Seeing a kindred shape I swooned away."[74] It is, after all, his physical maleness on which his mother's ambivalence is focused, and it is his childish pride in it that she is unable to tolerate with the relaxed indulgence of an unenvious mother, and yet which she continually stimulates and encourages. Consequently, his physical maleness becomes of enormous importance to him. The male body dominates his art and his sexual life.

Bieber suggests that the more precocious and more frequent sexual activity of homosexuals may be oriented toward release rather than pleasure – an attempt "to discharge in homosexual behavior the anxiety-laden sexual excitation evoked by the mother. The continued obsessive preoccupation with sexuality is evident in the concentration on sexual anatomy seen in the exhibitionistic and narcissistic presentation of genitals and buttocks by some homosexuals and the voyeuristic interest shown by others."[75] This emphasis on male exhibitionism was striking in Greek culture, and expressed itself through athletics as well as art. Homosexual love in Greece centered very much on the gymnasium, and many pederastic love affairs began with the admiration of bodily grace. The Greek word *gymnos*, in fact, means "naked," for naked athletes were a Greek innovation, dating apparently from "not long" before the Peloponnesian War, and looked upon askance by non-Greeks.[76] But women, except in Sparta, were excluded from this world of male bodily display. They were forbidden to watch athletic performances, and were themselves rather fully covered.[77] The nude forms that one sees in Greek art are, until rather late, almost entirely male forms.

But Greek vanity was not only physical. It expressed itself in the preoccupation with honor and glory, in boastfulness, and even perhaps in the willingness of Athenians to spend the better part of their daily lives in myriad and tedious official positions. It appears early: in Achilles' desire to trade a long uneventful life for a brief

one filled with honor and glory, and in Agamemnon's willingness to trade several months of his life for an honorable death on the battlefields of Troy.[78] Perhaps the most dramatic demonstration of Homeric narcissism is Achilles' readiness to sacrifice his comrades to his own glory. When Patroclus goes out to do battle, Achilles cautions him not to diminish his honor by winning the entire war without him. And he concludes his instructions by praying to the gods that not one of the Trojans *or the Greeks* would survive the war save Patroclus and himself.[79]

What was merely an exaggeration of a trait one would expect to find in any aristocratic warrior culture did not, however, diminish as the Greeks became more civilized; instead it was generalized to embrace all of life. "Nothing defines the quality of Greek culture more neatly than the way in which the idea of competition was extended from physical prowess to the realm of the intellect, to feats of poetry and dramatic composition."[80] Indeed, as Huizinga remarks, "The Greeks used to stage contests in anything that offered the bare possibility of a fight" – beauty (male of course), singing, riddle-solving, drinking, staying awake.[81] Nothing seemed to have meaning to the Greek unless it included the defeat of another. So absorbed were the Greeks in the quest for the unwilling admiration of their peers, so universal were vanity, boastfulness, ambition, competitiveness, and invidiousness, that there was neither a need nor an attempt to hide the feelings of envy and vindictiveness which the success of another aroused. To achieve revenge and arouse envy were the twin delicacies of everyday life.[82]

Aristotle observes that men pursue honor in order to assure themselves of their own worth.[83] This need derives in large part from a mother-son relationship in which the most grandiose self-definitions are at once fomented and punctured. Gouldner shows how the incessant Greek striving after honor and glory is closely linked to a deep pessimism, and notes that the self is conceived "as a precarious entity which is difficult but vital to maintain . . . an entity that might perish with only one discrepant, unfitting act," such as one of the many seizures of madness with which Greek mythology is dotted.[84] Feelings of weakness, dependence, passive surrender, desires to be protected, must all be hidden from consciousness, forming, as Gouldner notes, the hidden "underside" of the Greek self-image, achieving expression

in the weak, dependent, anxious, fearful, and submissive tone so often taken by Greek choruses.[85] These feelings are also expressed, as we shall see, in the anomalous fact that the misogynistic heroes of Greek myth can rarely achieve any of their goals without extensive feminine assistance. The rejection of and dependence upon women mirror the mother's own ambivalence.

This phenomenon is familiar to the psychoanalyst: "unsublimated, erotized, manic self-inflation easily shifts to a feeling of utter dejection, of worthlessness, and to hypochondriacal anxieties. *'Narcissists' of this type thus suffer regularly from repetitive, violent oscillations of self-esteem.'*"[86] Such a patient tends to be preoccupied with, and over-valuate, the phallus, while regarding the female organs as dirty, injured, and repellent. His attitude toward a female analyst varies inversely with his self-esteem, ranging from contempt to abject dependence, the latter being set off by any minor setback: "The tiniest disappointment, the slightest physical indisposition, the most trifling experience of failure can throw the patient into extreme despair. ... The grandiose body-phallus fantasy ... turns *suddenly* into one of total castration. ..."[87]

This syndrome, at a cultural level, both generates and is generated by penis envy in the mother. A society which derogates women produces envious mothers who produce narcissistic males who are prone to derogate women. The anxiety that success aroused in Greek males had its origins in the nursery. For was not *hubris* fundamentally masculine pride and phallic self-satisfaction, even exhibitionism? And was not the divine *phthonos* at bottom the mother's resentful envy? It is significant that the name of one of the avenging Erinyes, who were primarily, if not exclusively, agents of *maternal* revenge, connotes not merely anger but also envy.

Greek Madness

A second consequence one might anticipate from the ambivalence of the Greek mother is a schizoid reaction. Such an expectation derives from the theory of Bateson and his associates[88] that schizophrenia originates in what they call the "double bind." A "double bind" is said to obtain when a mother deals with ambivalent feelings by ex-

plicitly or covertly directing the child to respond to two contradictory ideas, and punishing him for failure to do either. The situational factors operating in the Greek family accord well with the contributory conditions discussed by Bateson, and the maternal injunctions he outlines might be expressed somewhat as follows:

(1) You must be a strong and adult male, treat me as a woman and by your conspicuous male achievements express my own aspirations.

(2) You must not aspire to maleness nor flaunt your masculinity before me nor remind me that I am a woman.

(3) You must not desert me nor find any contradition in my demands.

While we cannot assess the reality of Greek psychopathology, our expectation receives a shadowy confirmation from Greek fantasy. No other mythology with which I am familiar contains so many explicitly designated instances of madness. All of these, of course, involve a superhuman agent, but the agents are thereby few in number, and certain characteristics easily identified.

The most striking fact is that of all the clear instances of madness deliberately produced in one being by another, none can be said to be caused by a truly masculine or paternal agent. Most are inflicted by goddesses, and the remainder by the effeminate Dionysus, himself a previous victim at the hands of Hera.[89] Nor is the relationship between the sex of the agent and the sex of the victim a random one: in all but a handful of cases madness is induced in persons of the opposite sex.

That children are so often the victims of parental attacks of madness expresses the tendency for narcissistic disorders to be emotionally contagious, particularly between parents and children. Hera's injured narcissism leads her to persecute her stepson, Dionysus, whose injured narcissism in turn leads him to persecute Lycurgus, Agave, and the women of Argos, who express their madness in the destruction of their children.[90] This cycle has its milder counterpart in the dynamics of the Greek family. The jealous, neglected mother injures the narcissism of the young boy. He, upon reaching adulthood, selects, because of doubts about his adequacy with mature women,

an immature, inadequate wife, whom he treats with contempt and neglect, thus ensuring a malignant disturbance in the mothering of his own sons, and so on. His precarious self-respect compels him to disparage women and to choose "a feminine type which is infantile, non-maternal and hysterical, and by so doing ... expose each new generation to the influence of such women."[91]

Maternal Bogies

While paternal figures tend to be idealized in Greek fantasy, the exact reverse is true of the mother. Blümner points out that "naughty children were brought to obedience or quiet by threats of bogies, but, curiously enough, these Greek bogies were all female creatures."[92] Similarly, there were witches but no sorcerers in Greek folklore, and the statue of Fear was a woman.[93] Thalia Feldman also comments upon this feminine near-monopoly of the realm of fear, and contrasts it with the situation in the West today, which is almost exactly the opposite, with male bogies prevailing.[94] In rural Greece, however, the ancient pattern remains, with malevolent female deities omnipresent.[95]

These female bogies – Lamia, Gorgo, Empusa, Mormo, and so forth – are fundamentally nothing more than that; they are often named plurally, and have little attached myth. When they are assigned characteristics, however, their connection with fear of the mother's sexuality becomes apparent. That they should prey on children is intrinsic, but what is important is the sense of deprivation that often attaches itself to them. They have lost their own children, they are devouring and cannibalistic, and, above all, they are sexually ravenous and insatiable.[96] Whatever the origin of these bogies, it seems apparent that at some point they were infused with meanings derived from the child's fear of the emotional needs of the mother, needs often directed toward himself, and in relation to which he felt helpless, inadequate, and frightened. This is one reason why intense feelings which are difficult to control tend to be viewed as having a feminine origin. Socrates refers to passions and vices as "despoinae" and sees them as more malevolent and less straightforward than a severe master.[97] Indeed, even when he is trying to talk a young man out of his hatred

for his mother, Socrates automatically compares the latter to a wild beast.[98]

Thus we find that what Licht calls the first Greek love-tragedy – Sophocles' lost *Phaedra* – consists of a chaste and prudish boy being pursued by his passionate stepmother, who responds to his refusals with vindictive and lethal rage.[99] Aristophanes treats the same interpersonal constellation farcically in the *Ecclesiazusae*, in which a law is passed requiring any man who wishes to copulate with a young girl first to satisfy some old hag, and as a result, a young man is almost torn to pieces by two old harlots.[100]

Mature and conspicuous female sexuality was in itself sufficient to call bogies to mind. Courtesans were frequently called names like Lamia and Charybdis, Sphinx, or Phryne ("toad") – names which expressed depth of avarice as well as sexuality.[101] Indeed, even married women were frequently called *lamiae* or *empusae* if they showed any spirit.[102] It was only young girls who escaped these epithets. The feminine ideal in art was correspondingly youthful – even boyish,[103] and benevolence among goddesses was highly correlated with virginity. As Kitto points out,[104] the two oldest cities in Greece worshiped mother-goddesses: One of these goddesses, Athene, was "dematrified," and became not only virginal and boyish, but also the most helpful female deity in the Greek pantheon; the other, Hera, retained her maternal form, and became the most vindictive and persecutory. Finley describes her, with magnificent understatement, as "the complete female ... whom the Greeks feared a little and did not like at all."[105] It is in fact fair to say that Greek males, as a group, were terrified of any female who was a whole woman.

Origins of the Cycle

I have described thus far what is essentially a self-repeating cycle of sex antagonism and narcissism. It now seems important to raise the question as to what might have set this cycle in motion, or, to put it more precisely, what might have caused the substitution of this cycle for some previous one.

Such a question requires subtler distinctions than the data for the most part allow. We can see the presence of half a dozen charac-

teristics, and how they fit together into a pattern. It is more difficult to say what difference it would make if we ripped out one component and substituted another. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that each single component overlaps many other cultures, and its temporal boundaries are virtually impossible to establish. While the Homeric epics contain all the narcissism one would expect to find in a warrior culture, for example, the sexual constellation seems to be lacking. Despite Licht's efforts to establish the contrary, homosexuality is trivial in the epics, although certainly present.[106] Fear of the mature woman is also lacking or any outstanding preoccupation with the nuclear family. All of these phenomena seem to have coalesced and hypertrophied somewhat prior to the fifth century.

There are several possible factors to which any such change might be attributed. My first hypothesis was that the constellation derived its impetus from the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy. There seem to have been several invasions at various periods by patriarchal warriors, who, one can imagine, killed the indigenous males and took the females to wife. Since in all cases the women probably not only enjoyed a higher status in the older society, but also partook of a more advanced and sophisticated culture, one might expect to find here the ideal conditions for a brittle patriarchy, an anxious and hostile relationship between the sexes, and a transferring of libido by the wife from husband to child. The repetition of this experience several times over a millennium would gradually evolve the kind of cycle I have described.

While this hypothesis is not contradicted by any data, it receives little confirmation either. The last major invasion occurred some three hundred years before the major social changes seem to have taken place, and while the feminine experience of being captured by male-slaughtering invaders never altogether disappeared from Greek life, it never again involved the entire Greek world. Although these ancient events may have lent something to the uneasy Greek marital relationship – the myths of the Lemnian women, of Zeus and Hera, and of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra certainly suggest it – they are insufficient in themselves to account for the apparent changes.

My second hypothesis centers around urbanization. As people gathered more into towns the role of the husband in the family changed – he absented himself more, his economic role became less visible

(changes similar to those accompanying modern urbanization), and the wife became less mobile, more imprisoned within the household, thus upsetting some previous balance. It seems unlikely that this state of affairs applied to any large number of persons, however. More important perhaps was the breakdown of the extended family system and the increase in mobility mentioned earlier – both of these changes throwing an emotional burden on the nuclear family, which was unusually poorly equipped to carry it. Sex segregation is a manageable system only under conditions of strong kinship ties and residential stability. When ties of blood weakened, there was no strengthening of the marital bond to fill the gap, as often occurs in modern society with social mobility.[107]

However the cycle began, Greek myths, as refurbished in the classical age, express its forms in every conceivable elaboration. Not only are most of the major myths clothed with themes of mother-son ambivalence, but the male gods and heroes exhibit a variety of possible defenses against the maternal threat. These range from such alloplastic approaches as matricide, sexual athleticism, and maternal desexualization, to autoplastic devices such as masculine antisepsis (that is, the attempt to extirpate from oneself all traces of femininity or maternity), self-emasculation, and identification with the aggressor.

Most of the major male figures in Greek mythology display one or more of these "defenses" – indeed, the most famous hero of all, Heracles, exhibits all of them.[108] Space limitations forbid any but the most cursory exploration of these, however, and hopefully the following brief sampling will suffice to provide an idea of the approach. I should perhaps emphasize that I am not attempting to "explain" or "reduce" the myths in question to some purely psychological process. Rather I am trying to show that myths of varied and complex origins tended to become clothed with ideas and symbols expressive of the familial tensions of the classical period. There is nothing inherently useful about equating "goddess" with "mother," for example, but the *personalizing* of the divine wrath of Hera in the myths of Heracles and Dionysus (as they later developed) becomes comprehensible in these terms.

Orestes

The earliest versions of the Orestes myth seem to concern little

more than a battle over succession to the Argive throne, with women playing a secondary role. Electra is not even mentioned in the Homeric version, and it is Aegisthus rather than Clytemnestra who initiates the murder of Agamemnon. Orestes is not the infant son and matricide of later versions, but simply the exiled pretender who comes unaided to claim his throne. It is, as Gomme points out, "a very masculine tragedy."[109] Homer is rather coy about the matricide, never saying that Orestes slew Clytemnestra, but nonetheless producing her corpse as soon as he has killed Aegisthus.[110]

But this simple tale of war and politics was later transformed into one in which the matricidal revenge was the central theme. That it was the gynophobic Athenians who filled the story with women and made it a tale of family conflict is not really surprising. A people reared in such a culture would obviously be more impressed by the idea of a woman plotting against her husband than by anything else in the story. It would tap their fear of women and lead them to occupy themselves with the process of filial revenge. But given this fundamental concern, why was Electra introduced?

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Athenians could not conceive of the possibility that a man could get the better of a woman without the assistance of another woman. Somehow the man must only be an instrument: the motive force must come from a woman. Furthermore, once having given Orestes a feminine "mover," it was inevitable that their relationship should begin to incorporate mother-son characteristics. One of these is the fear of envelopment and fusion, which is expressed particularly in Euripides' *Orestes*. When Orestes cries out that the Erinyes are pursuing him, Electra puts her arms around him to comfort him; but Orestes is little soothed by this protection and accuses her of being an Erinys herself.[111] It is particularly interesting that Orestes identifies Electra with his mother's Erinyes at the moment when she offers encircling comfort and protection. Such an association is inappropriate as regards Clytemnestra, who rejected and abandoned him, but Euripides is more interested in portraying the psychological and interpersonal realities of his time than in clinging to the unique probabilities of the myth. It is also significant that the attack of madness itself occurs when Orestes is telling Electra not to be like Clytemnestra.[112] The very thought is enough to unhinge him – to start him talking to his dead mother and

accusing Electra of being an Erinys – for the Greek male's defensive structure was highly dependent upon maintaining some sort of benign (i.e., sexless, virginal, boyish, youthful) feminine model in contrast to the more prevalent and malign maternal one.

In any case, the Orestes myth, in its fifth-century form, became a story of sex antagonism and mother-son conflict. This conflict is "solved" by the killing of Clytemnestra. And yet the story continues – the solution is ineffective, the feelings remain. When Menelaus asks him if the matricide did not slake his thirst for blood, Orestes replies: "I can never have my fill of killing whores,"[113] a sentiment frequently expressed by sex-killers.

To understand this quenchlessness one must recognize the peculiar significance of matricide as opposed to the slaying of she-monsters. In the latter case it is merely a representation of the Bad Mother that is being destroyed. But Orestes destroys the actual mother, the totality – extinguishing all her passions simultaneously. He attempts to deal with his ambivalence toward her by abolishing the relationship altogether. This solution fails to provide a means of satisfying the positive, dependent feelings the hero has toward his mother. Hence, the matricide, unlike the monster-slayer, is afterwards troubled with longing and guilt. In Orestes' case these feelings are betrayed by his chronic dependence on feminine assistance (despite the misogynistic attitudes which he and Pylades affect), and by the Erinyes' persecution.

There are three extant plays which deal in a major way with Orestes' life after the matricide. In *Iphigenia in Tauris* he is saved from death and enabled to accomplish his mission by Iphigenia. In *Orestes*, he is protected and nursed by Electra, and it is her bold stratagem which rescues him from death at the hands of the Argives.[114] In *The Eumenides*, it is Athene who saves him from the Erinyes by casting her deciding vote in the trial and by pacifying them when they threaten revenge. Apollo, his sponsor, instigator, and much-touted protector, is in fact utterly unable to rescue his protégé.

In other words, the mother-rejecting solution blindly ignores the intense, frustrated craving for maternal love and protection. How to placate the maternal rage and bring back maternal love is the theme of his psychosis, while how to find nurturant substitutes is the theme of his overt interpersonal responses.

Unfortunately, there is no simple solution to ambivalence. A craving so intense leads to fears of being utterly swallowed, and cannot, therefore, be permitted free expression. Thus far from selecting motherly figures to satisfy his dependent longings, Orestes chooses three notorious virgins: Electra, Iphigenia (priestess of Artemis), and Athene herself. Since virgins are unconsciously experienced by men as less feminine, more neuter,[115] they are less threatening to masculine narcissism than are sexually mature women. In *The Eumenides*, Apollo even goes so far as to say that Agamemnon would not have been dishonored had he been killed by an Amazon in battle, since the slayer would have been less feminine.[116] A "real woman" required of a man a more secure masculinity than Greeks of the classical period felt able to muster.

But there is still another twist to the Orestean nightmare. Nurturant virgins may be found but can they make him proof against the fears which this very nurturance arouses? Iphigenia threatens his life, and Electra seems to turn into Clytemnestra. And does not Athene herself wear the snake-festooned Medusa head upon her aegis? And what of the Erinyes themselves, the "Gorgon shapes" with snaky hair? Are they not also virgins? The Orestean dilemma is never really resolved, any more than the Athenians resolved it in real life.

The Greeks, nevertheless, were proud of Orestes. Indeed, if dramatic preoccupation be an index, he was their greatest hero. This pride shows most clearly when he is contrasted with a foreigner, as in the *Orestes*, when he is given a comic dialogue with a Phrygian eunuch;[117] or in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, when Iphigenia tells Thoas of Orestes' matricide, and Thoas exclaims: "O Phoebus! This hath no barbarian dared."[118] The nature of his achievement is made clear in his speech to the Argives in *Orestes*, when he argues that: "I helped you no less than my father when I slew my mother; for if the murder of men by women is to be sanctioned, then the sooner you die, the better for you; otherwise you must needs become the slaves of women."[119] Perhaps the reason that the Greeks held him in such affection and esteem was that the solution be adopted – total rejection of the mother and devotion to the father – was most peculiarly their own.

Dionysus

There is a substantial tradition regarding Dionysus, to the effect that "when he grew to manhood Hera recognized him as Zeus' son, despite the effeminacy to which his education had reduced him, and drove him mad...."[120] To this madness are generally attributed his wanderings, in latter-day attempts to synthesize the many and disparate aspects of the god. Greeks of the classical period, having inherited this "crazed god," associated for centuries with orgiastic rituals originating in long-forgotten conditions, sought to rationalize what seemed to them his bizarre characteristics and behavior. The solution they found was quite naturally based upon their own cultural surroundings – if a man was effeminate and berserk his mother must have made him that way, and if a god was in similar straits a jealous mother-goddess must be responsible. Dionysus having become detached from the mother-goddess with whom he was originally worshipped, it was necessary to imagine him as having "caught" his psychotogenic tendencies from Hera.

This parallelism reveals Dionysus' characteristic "mechanism" for coping with maternal malevolence – what psychoanalytic theory calls "identification with the aggressor." It is epitomized in two traditions – that of Dionysus' effeminacy and that of his capacity for inducing madness.

Dionysus' incorporation of feminine attributes begins with his sire, who competed successfully with Hera in producing offspring unaided.[121] Zeus, however, is in no way feminized by these incidents – there even seems to be some underlying feeling that his manhood is incomplete until feminine abilities are also acquired. This is the burden of Bettelheim's interpretation of puberty initiation practices such as subincision, which gives men a "male womb" or "penis womb."[122] Dionysus' birth from the thigh of Zeus[123] reflects another idea behind such rites, namely, that to become a real man one must be reborn from a man. Bettelheim gives examples in which rebirth is directly pantomimed, even to anal imitation of post-partum purificatory procedures.[124]

In Dionysus, however, what began as the same kind of simple hermaphroditism in the god – expressive of his completeness and fertility – was gradually translated into a psychopathological defense.

Dionysus no longer *includes* femininity but merely takes refuge in it. Nor is the effeminacy any longer a mechanism for escaping from the feminine world into a masculine one, as in the intermediate case of Achilles. Dionysus is eternally frozen in his defensive posture by the shared fears of the classical period. He neither escapes from his infant dependence on woman, nor becomes manly, nor wards off maternal malignance, nor relinquishes his absorption with it. The original vigorous hermaphrodite dwindles into a simple homosexual god of the most anthropomorphic type. This is expressed in some of the secondary names assigned to Dionysus, such as "Pseudanor," "gynnis," and "arsenothelys," and in the Prosymnus episode.[125]

Dionysus' unique solution, however, is less his defensive femininity than his psychotogenic powers. Just as he is driven mad by a woman, so he himself has the power to madden other women, a power which he seems to exercise on every possible occasion. This mythical madness, is, of course, an unsympathetic rendering of Dionysian ecstasy, but the fact that the most typical act of the deranged women is to murder their sons betrays other motivational sources.

Euripides' *Bacchae*, for example, is saturated with the theme of sex antagonism and narcissism. Agave's wild boasting, when she imagines she has killed a lion with her bare hands, is directed against men. She taunts them with her achievement and asks her father to admire her bravery – to glory in her kill as if she were his son. Pentheus' most profound insult to Dionysus is to cut off his feminine curls. He rails continually against the women of Thebes for abandoning their traditional role of domesticity, and feels humiliated by their participation in Bacchic rites.[126] When the Bacchae are disturbed in their revels by male voyeurs there is a literal battle of the sexes,[127] upon hearing of which Pentheus is so angered he vows to bathe the woods of Cithaeron in the blood of women. Almost immediately, however, Dionysus takes advantage of Pentheus' own voyeurism to seduce him into spying on the Maenads himself. Pentheus' sneers at the god's effeminacy are now requited as Dionysus dresses him in women's clothes for the event, despite Pentheus' repeated protestations that this seeming relinquishment of manhood would humiliate him beyond endurance. As soon as he is garbed Pentheus

becomes totally absorbed in the performance, mincing about coquettishly and asking if he does not, thus attired, resemble his mother or his aunt. Paradoxically, he feels himself at this moment imbued with superhuman strength.[128]

Ambivalence, however, is inherent in sex antagonism. Hostility toward the other sex, wishing to do without that sex, fearing its contamination, yet imitating it, are all part of the same syndrome. The Bacchae, in their isolated haunts, become hunters – cross-culturally the most exclusively masculine of all subsistence activities.[129] The women of Lemnos dress in their slain husbands' armor. And men, in the secret rites of their fraternal associations, dress as women. Conjoined with hatred and fear is fascination and curiosity – as with any form of group segregation.

To some extent this is simply a response to the artificiality of the separation. A man apart from women is not altogether a man, and must continually "prove" his identity negatively – by stressing what he is not. When Pentheus finally abandons this elaborate defensive structure and expresses all at once the feminine side of his nature, he experiences an enormous surge of energy – suddenly released from its neurotic tasks – and imagines he can move mountains.

The Bacchae expresses the folly of exaggerated repressions. Dionysus represents not so much irrationality as the liberation of natural emotions from the tyrannies of ideology and culture. Dionysian ecstasy fused together what the rest of Greek culture strove so obsessively and superstitiously to keep separate. Narcissism and sex segregation both express a fear of boundary-loss, aroused by the mother's psychological invasion of the child when she attempts to maintain her own internal stability by discharging unmanageable affects into her relationships with her children.

Perseus

The legend of Perseus is concerned with the child's sense of uncanniness when confronted with maternal sexuality and fecundity. The themes of feminine awesomeness, of frozen staring, of confinement, of impotence, of flight, suggest a peculiarly Greek primal-scene fantasy – one which focuses almost exclusively on the *mother's*

sexuality. As usual, the mother is malevolently defined, but the malevolence is not personalized as in the more literary examples. It seems to be inherent in the sexuality itself. The myth is thus one of confrontation rather than relationship – of moment rather than pattern.

Perseus' response is commensurately impersonal. Like other heroes he attacks and kills the representative of the Evil Mother, but in this case the emphasis is placed on what we might call, with only partial inappropriateness, castration (the name 'Perseus' means 'The Cutter').[130] Castration is used here in the more general sense of "unsexing": the mother and her sexual aspects are separated.This separation appears in several forms in the Perseus myth. In the Cronus myth the child separates mother and father by castrating the latter. But the legend of Perseus scarcely contains any father at all – each paternal candidate is kept at bay, save for the ubiquitous Zeus, and even his liaison is a brief and rather ethereal one. The mother's sexuality is detached from her involvement with the father, and confronts the child as a direct and immediate force. The emotional goal of both acts of "castration" is the same: to restore the mother to the son as a nurturing, nonsexual being who gives all and asks nothing. The myth thus reveals a psychological dilemma: on the one hand the boy wishes to possess his mother exclusively, but on the other he is terrified of the intensity of her sexual needs and his inability to gratify them. He wishes her only as a nurturing, undemanding mother, but recognizes that the price of possession is that he be adult and potent. In real life the only way this can be achieved is by identifying with the father and learning how to be a man, at the same time relinquishing childish dependence upon the mother. The irony of this solution is, of course, that in so doing the primary motive for the entire enterprise is lost as well: sexual maturity and adult mastery become ends in themselves, new sexual objects are sought, and the oedipal wish is relegated to a diffuse romantic nostalgia which tinges fantasy life and erotic experiences.

Of greatest importance is the role of the father; if he is absent or inadequate the boy has no leverage for becoming a mature male. Yet it is under just these conditions that his oedipal wishes will be most intense, fanned by his mother's frustration and need. Hence the more he needs a father the less he can tolerate one, and the more he desires his mother the more he will be terrified of being sexually

overwhelmed and devoured by her. This is why fathers tend to be absent or peripheral in the histories of monster-killers.

The myth of Perseus shows a trend toward the elimination of sexual partners for Danaë. From a woman who had at least two royal lovers, one of them incestuous, and outwitted her harem guards, Danaë is systematically divested of all eroticism, and becomes a passive, colorless, and more or less virginal figure who contributes little to the story besides her son, and who is left at the end without a mate, alone with her son and his spouse.

Indeed, guarding Danaë's chastity becomes the focal point of the entire myth, leading, in the final version, to both her divine impregnation and the slaying of the Gorgon. The anxious desire of the son to purify his mother of sexuality is also seen in the fact that even Zeus is not allowed actually to touch her, but must impregnate from a distance.

Separating sex from motherhood by separating mother and father is logically sound but psychologically unsound, since this sexuality thereby confronts the child all the more directly. Thus it is a hostile impulse toward a father figure (the predicted slaying of Acrisius by Perseus) which sets the story in motion; and although otherwise they play a relatively passive role in the drama, it is the father figures who unleash the terrible feminine forces: Polydectes who forces Perseus to confront the Medusa, Poseidon who sends the sea-monster.[131]

To combat these forces Perseus utilizes various magical powers, the most dramatic of which is the ability to fly. In psychoanalytic thinking, flight is seen as having phallic connotations, and the bird is a penis symbol – partly because the slang word for copulate in German is *vögeln*, but more importantly, because of the functional association between flight and erection. Freud suggests that the latter seems impressive because it involves "an apparent suspension of the laws of gravity," and notes the frequency of the winged phallus in the Mediterranean civilizations.[132]

One might suspect from these considerations that for the male, at least, flight does not represent sexuality as such, but sexuality warped by narcissism. The goal is not pleasure, but accomplishment: copulation is defined as conquest, erection as achievement, woman

as the enemy, lack of desire as failure. The winged phallus probably found its greatest use, for example, as a magical cure for impotence. But one need not go so far afield to appreciate the meaning of Perseus' flight. If the sight of the maternal genitalia produces immobility and impotence, then the hero who succeeds in countervailing this threat must be mobile and potent. Instead of being frozen into stone with terror, he becomes winged, like the phallic amulet. The ability to fly also contrasts sharply with Perseus' own initial immobility, when he was imprisoned with his mother underground, or confined with her in the tiny ark on the ocean.

Neumann observes[133] that despite all the help and gifts Perseus receives, he is "barely man enough" to kill the Medusa, with two gods aiding him, a superfluity of magic implements, a sleeping enemy at whom he cannot even look, and a goddess guiding his hand to actually commit the act. This rather excessive buttressing reflects the brittleness of masculine self-confidence in classical Greece. Ultimately nothing could provide sufficient reassurance, and the Greek spirit exhausted itself in futile efforts at phallic self-assertion.

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Notes

[1] H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Baltimore, 1960), pp. 219-222; Blümner, H. *The Home Life of the Ancient Greeks* (New York, n.d.), *passim*.

[2] A. W. Gomme, *Essays on Greek History and Literature* (Oxford, 1937), p. 92.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 97-102.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

[5] H. Licht, *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* (New York, 1963), p. 153; V. Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes* (Oxford, 1951), p. 27; Gomme, *op. cit.*, p. 233; but cf. Aristoph., *Thesm.* 395-397.

[6] Gomme, *op. cit.*, p. 102; Kitto, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-227.

[7] Ehrenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 97, 100-102, 112, 180, 193; cf. also G. H. Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens* (London, 1950), p. 366.

[8] Ehrenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 198.

[10] Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes;* Licht, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32; Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 366; Kitto, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-220; Blümner, *op. cit.*, p. 133; Ehrenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-202.

[11] Lysias, *op. cit.;* Ehrenberg, *loc. cit.;* Licht, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
[12] Kitto, *op. cit.*, p. 219.
[13] Herod. 5. 17 ff.
[14] Kitto, *op. cit.*, pp. 227 ff.
[15] F. I. Nye and Lois W. Hoffman, *The Employed Mother in America* (Chicago, 1963), pp. 215-230; 251-262; 282-305. Cf. also D. R. and Vera Mace, *The Soviet Family* (Garden City, 1964), pp. 92-116; R. Briffault, *The Mothers* (New York, 1931), pp. 188-189, 248-249.
[16] Plut. 752e-f, 753c-d.
[17] See 493-494.
[18] *Oecon.* 3. 15.
[19] Kitto, *op. cit.*, p. 230. Cf. Xenophon, *Oecon.* 9. 5; Lysias, *Eratosth.*
[20] Xen. *Oecon.* 7. 22-42.
[21] *Op. cit.*, p. 207.
[22] *Op. cit.*, pp. 93, 96, 107.
[23] *Op. cit.*, pp. 228-229.
[24] 8. 93.
[25] 8. 84.
[26] Cf., e.g., Licht, *op. cit.*, pp. 133 ff., 411-498.
[27] R. H. Gundlach and B. F. Riess, "Self and Sexual Identity in Men and Women in Relationship to Homosexuality," in L. Aronson and J. Rosenblatt (eds.) *Development and Evolution of Behavior* (New York, 1966).
[28] Aristophanes, *Lys.* 85 ff., 148 ff. and 828; *Eccles.* 60-67; *Thesm.* 215-267, 532-539; cf. also Ehrenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 34, 179; Licht, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 506. Both practices, like many other items in the Greek family constellation, are characteristic of other Mediterranean cultures. It is only the totality that is unique to classical Greece.
[29] B. Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds* (London, 1955), pp. 232-233.
[30] *Case Studies in the Psychopathology of Crime*, Vol. II (Washington, 1944).
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 605.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 595.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 599, 630-631.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 598.
[35] S. Ferenczi, *Selected Papers,* Vol. II (New York, 1952), p. 360.
[36] S. Freud, "Medusa's Head," in *Collected Papers,* Vol. V (London, 1953) pp. 105-106.
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] S. Freud, *Collected Papers,* Vol. III (London, 1956), pp. 498 ff.
[39] S. Freud, "Medusa's Head," p. 106.
[40] *Int. J. Psychoanal.*, XIII, (1932), pp. 349-353.
[41] B. Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages* (New York, 1929), pp. 299-300.
[42] *Ibid.*, pp. 422-423.
[43] For an extended discussion of the symbolism of the serpent in myth, see *The Glory of Hera*, pp. 80-122.
[44] Karpman, *op. cit.*, pp. 615-616, 624-626.

[45] W. N. Stephens, *The Oedipus Complex* (New York, 1962), pp. 80 ff., 124 ff.
[46] Dorothy Baruch, *One Little Boy* (New York, 1952).
[47] Ehrenberg., *op. cit.*, p. 193; Licht, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
[48] N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (Garden City, N. Y., 1956), p. 43.
[49] Xen. *Oecon.* 7. 5-6; cf. also 3. 13; Ehrenberg, *loc. cit.*
[50] *Erg.* 697-699.
[51] Blümner, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
[52] Cf. Xen. *Mem.* 2. 2, 4-5.
[53] *Op. cit.*, pp. 33-39, 71-73.
[54] Plut. *Lyc.* 15. 1-3; Sol. 1. 1-3 and 20. 2-3; Fustel de Coulanges, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50; R. Flacelière, *L'Amour en Grèce* (Paris, 1960), p. 106; Licht, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35, 69.
[55] Licht, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-37; but cf. Ehrenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
[56] Hes. *Erg.* 695-699; Blümner *op. cit.*, p. 136.
[57] Plat. *Crit.* 45, 52; *Phaed.* 60, 116.
[58] Licht, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
[59] Blümner, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
[60] Licht, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29; Soph. *Fr.* 524 (Nauck).
[61] Xen. *Oecon.*, 3. 12.
[62] M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York, 1959), pp. 137-138.
[63] Elizabeth Bott, *Family and Social Network* (London, 1957), pp. 52-113.
[64] A. W. Gouldner, *Enter Plato* (New York, 1965), pp. 26, 60-64, 68-70.
[65] Plut. *Sol.* 20. 3; *Genesis* 38:8; Plut. 769.
[66] Xen. *Symp.* 8. 3.
[67] E. F. Vogel and N. W. Bell, "The Emotionally Disturbed Child as the Family Scapegoat." In Bell and Vogel (eds.) *A Modern Introduction to the Family* (Glencoe, Ill., 1960), p. 387.
[68] Fustel de Coulanges, *op. cit.*, pp. 48 ff.
[69] Ehrenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
[70] Eur. *Med.* 803 ff., 1021-1080, 1236-1414; *Apollod.* 3. 14. 8.
[71] Ovid., *Met.* 6. 613-622.
[72] Cf. Baruch, *op. cit.*, pp. 202 ff.
[73] *Narcissus* (New York, 1955), p. 45.
[74] Plut. 769b.
[75] I. Bieber, "Clinical Aspects of Male Homosexuality." In J. Marmor (ed.) *Sexual Inversion* (New York, 1965), pp. 254-255.
[76] Plat. *Rep.* 5. 452; Thuc. 1. 6; Herod. 1.10.; cf. Licht, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-91, 411-498.
[77] *Ibid.*, pp. 83-93.
[78] *Od.* 24. 18 ff.
[79] *Il.* 16. 80-100.
[80] Finley, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129.
[81] J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston, 1955), p. 73.
[82] Thuc. 2. 43; Kitto, *op. cit.*, pp. 244 ff.; Gouldner, *op. cit.*, pp. 43, 53-58.

[83] *Eth. Nic.* 1. 5.
[84] Gouldner, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44, 58, 98.
[85] *Ibid.*, pp. 108-111.
[86] Annie Reich, "Pathologic Forms of Self-esteem Regulation." *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 15 (New York, 1960), p. 224.
[87] *Ibid.*, pp. 222-227.
[88] "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia," *Behavioral Science* 1 (1956) 251-264.
[89] Eur. *Cyc.* 1-4; Apollod. 3. 5. 1. For a more detailed analysis of madness in Greek myth see *The Glory of Hera*, pp. 50-53, 403-406.
[90] Apollod. 3. 5. 1-2.
[91] Horney, *op. cit.*, p. 360.
[92] Blümner, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
[93] M. P. Nilsson, *Greek Folk Religion* (New York, 1961), p. 97; H. J. Rose, *Primitive Culture in Greece* (London, 1925), p. 95.
[94] "Gorgo and the Origins of Fear," *Arion*, 4, 1965, pp. 490-494.
[95] J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion* (New Hyde Park, N. Y., 1964), pp. 130-190.
[96] K. Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks* (New York, 1960), pp. 39-40; Lawson, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-176.
[97] Xen. *Oecon.* 1. 20; 2.1.
[98] Xen. *Mem.* 2.2, 7-10.
[99] *Op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.
[100] 1015 ff.
[101] Licht, *op. cit.*, pp. 345, 348; J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley, 1959), p. 309; Aristoph., *Eccles.*, 1101.
[102] Licht, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
[103] *Ibid.*, p. 427.
[104] *Op. cit.*, p. 18.
[105] *Op. cit.*, p. 140.
[106] *Op. cit.*, pp. 136, 256, 449 ff.
[107] Cf. M. Young and P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Baltimore, 1964).
[108] See *The Glory of Hera*, pp. 337-396.
[109] Gomme, *op. cit.*, p. 93; cf. also Thomson, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-248.
[110] *Od.* 3. 303 ff., 4. 524 ff., 11. 405 ff.
[111] 262-265.
[112] *Ibid.*, 251-252.
[113] *Ibid.*, 1590.
[114] *Ibid.*, 1177 ff.
[115] See *The Glory of Hera*, pp. 68-70, 106 ff.
[116] *Eum.*, 625 ff.
[117] *Orestes*, 1506 ff.
[118] *Iph. in T.*, 1174.
[119] *Orestes*, 932-937.

[120] R. Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Baltimore, 1955), p. 104; Apollod. 3. 5. 1; Eur. *Cyc*. 3.

[121] Apollod. 1. 3. 5-6 and 3. 4. 3; *Hymn to Apollo*, 305-355; Hes. *Theog*. 924-929.

[122] Bettelheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-114, 177-178.

[123] Eur. *Bacch*. 524 ff.

[124] *Op. cit.*, pp. 109-114, 214-223.

[125] Kerényi, *op. cit.*, pp. 259, 273.

[126] *Op. cit.*, 215 ff., 493, 778-786, 1202-1211, 1233-1243.

[127] *Ibid.*, 758-764.

[128] *Ibid.*, 796-950.

[129] Cf. W. N. Stephens, *The Family in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York, 1963), pp. 282-283.

[130] Feldman, *op. cit.*, p. 492.

[131] Apollod. 2. 4. 3.

[132] S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York, 1955), pp. 395, 583n. For winged phalli see R. P. Knight, "A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus," pp. 13, 35, 63; and T. Wright, "The Worship of the Generative Powers," pp. 11, 15, 75 — both works in *Sexual Symbolism* (New York, 1957).

[133] E. Neumann, *The Great Mother* (New York, 1955), p. 215.