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Introduction

"Remember we are women, we're not born to contend with men."

— Sophocles, *Antigone*

Film and television have become essential parts of our daily lives and can be immensely influential with regard to our self-image and our social relationships. Because film and television never show us all of reality, but only a consciously chosen part of it, the intent of the filmmaker determines what the viewer perceives as being 'real'. The camera creates a limited viewpoint that determines our field of vision when watching a film, creating a confined, but very powerful, impression of reality (Solomon p. 1). Consequently, films are able to influence and shape our culture's view on gender relationships and the definition of femininity. One cinematic genre that shapes and reflects notions of gender and female sexuality are motion pictures using ancient Greek material as a their primary source. This thesis will focus on the presentation of female gender and sexuality, and the notion of femininity, in films drawing on classical antiquity. Even if one is not particularly familiar with literature from classical antiquity, Helen of Troy or Medea are names that may still be recognizable to most people. However, they are not the only ancient Greek women that may be of interest in exploring current issues of gender. This thesis will compare three women from ancient Greek literature - Antigone, Electra, and Phaedra - with their representations in six films from the 1960s to the 2010s. I will examine how the ancient Greek material is adapted in modern films, with a focus on how the representation of the three women differ in the original Greek texts and modern films. In addition, I will explore what the differences are in the representation of Antigone, Electra, and Phaedra between films from different time periods.

My research will be based on the comparative method as used by Konstantinos Nikoloutsos in his essay "Between Family and the Nation: Gorgo in the Cinema", where he explores how a woman from ancient Greek literature and history, Gorgo, is represented in a film from the 1960s and in one from the 2000s. First, I will investigate the extent to which the representations of Antigone, Electra, and Phaedra are faithful to or depart from ancient literary sources. This includes looking at what, in modern cinematic representations, has been left out or has been added to the ancient Greek source material, and for what reason. Then I will identify the cinematic mechanisms that are used to create the differences or similarities between ancient Greek literary sources and cinematic representations of these ancient Greek women. I will look at mechanisms such as costume, dialogue, music, and setting. Lastly, building on the assumption that modern films set in ancient times often reflect contemporary concerns, I will explore what these films reveal about contemporary concerns in relation to gender and femininity (Solomon p. 2). For each of the ancient Greek women I will be discussing I have chosen two films from two different time-periods. These periods will be compared to see how contemporary views on gender and femininity have influenced the use of the ancient Greek material in these films.

As of yet, Antigone, Electra, and Phaedra have received hardly any scholarly attention in classical reception studies, in which women in general are an underrepresented area of research (*Ancient Greek Women* p. 3), even though this is a highly interesting subject. Looking at the classical past can shed light on and force us to think about present issues, one of which is gender. Film is still a predominantly male terrain, with directors, producers, and screenwriters being mostly male. Therefore films often display the patriarchal value systems of their time and "employ women as conduits to propagate male ideologies" (*Ancient Greek Women* p. 13). Although examining the reception of ancient Greek material in modern cinema may not reveal anything new about the classical works, it might shed some light on gender

and sexuality in recent decades and how film can be used - or abused - to influence women's self-image.

Chapter one will be a discussion of Antigone. I will compare Sophocles' play *Antigone* with the films "Antigone" (1961), directed by Giorgos Tzavellar, and "Antigóne" (2011), directed by Gábor Dettre. Chapter two will be a discussion of Electra in Euripides' play *Electra* and in the films "Electra" (1962), directed by Michael Cacoyannis, and "Electra" (1974), directed by Miklós Jancsó. The third chapter will be a discussion of Phaedra in Euripides' *Hippolytos,* and "Phaedra" (1962), directed by Jules Dassin, and "Immortals" (2011), directed by Tarsem Singh.

Chapter 1

Gender in Ancient Greek Society

Before turning my attention to Antigone, it is useful to briefly look at the ancient Greek viewpoint on women and gender roles. In ancient Greek society there were three main rules a woman had to adhere to. First of all, a woman's place was invisibility. Women were excluded from public life such as the courts of law, the city council, assemblies, and political gatherings. It was seen as honourable for a woman to stay inside and out of public view (Lauriola 28). A woman could only safely venture outside if she was old enough for people to wonder "whose mother is she?" instead of "whose daughter is she?" (Lauriola 28). The ideal Greek wife stays in the domestic sphere, the *oikos*, and devotes her time to weaving, raising children, and managing the servants. As Dorothy Willner sums up: "Women were seen as naturally inferior… limited to the production of offspring…and household duties." (Willner 67).

Secondly, women were dependent on and had to be obedient to men, whether a brother, a father, a husband, or a grown son. A woman would always be under the tutelage of a male. This notion also comes to the fore in ancient Greek literature, where women are always seen in relation to or through the eyes of male relatives (Lauriola 29). Furthermore, being dependent on men meant that women were not able to act, only obey. Women who did act were breaking the established gender rules. An overview of Greek mythology shows that women who perform actions are not left unpunished for exceeding gender boundaries: they either cannot become wives or mothers, or, if they already are wives and mothers, the only possible outcome is for them to die (Willner 72). A virtuous Greek wife submits to her husband and lives under his lordship.

That brings me to the third main virtue of the ancient Greek woman: silence. A woman should never express her own opinion, especially if that opinion goes against a man's view. All women could do was to accept men's decisions without protest. And even if a woman should use her voice, her words cannot be trusted; they will either be nonsensical or lies and deceit for her own benefit (Lauriola 30).

Antigone in Ancient Greek Literature

As a basis for my discussion of Antigone I, of course, will use Sophocles' play *Antigone*, but I will also briefly touch upon other accounts of her in ancient Greek literature and mythology. Similar to other female characters, Antigone is defined in relation to men. In *Oedipus Rex* she is no more than a ghost in the background of her father's story. In *Oedipus at Colonus* she travels abroad as an aid to her aging father. In this latter play she seemingly breaks the rule of the female domain that women should not venture outside. However, this is only allowed because she is under the guardianship of her father, a man, and thus it is not a breach of her gender role (Lauriola 31). In addition, during their travels she is a help to her father and we see her performing actions. Women were not allowed to act independently from men; Antigone is only able to perform actions because they are in the service of her father (Lauriola 31).

Sophocles' play *Antigone* takes place in the aftermath of the war between her brothers Eteocles and Polyneices. After Oedipus' death, both brothers would each in turn rule the city of Thebes for a year. However, after his first year, Eteocles refused to hand rulership over to Polyneices. In anger, Polyneices marched with his army on Thebes, and in the subsequent fight the brothers were killed by each other. Creon, the uncle of Oedipus, is next in line as ruler of the city. He declares Polyneices a traitor to the city for marching against her, and decrees that he should not receive the proper burial rites. This is in line with what is known

about ancient Greek society, where traitors were often denied burial rites (Lauriola 32). Being properly lain to rest was of the utmost importance. Burial rites were decreed by the gods, and the ancient Greeks believed that if a body was maimed or disfigured, the soul would not be able to cross over to the underworld. As a result, one of the most dishonourable things a person could suffer was for his (or her) body to be disfigured by birds or dogs after death (Lauriola 32). Furthermore, it would bring dishonour to the name of a fallen hero. In a shame-culture like ancient Greece, where your name and reputation are everything, not receiving burial rites would be detrimental to the family honour and the fame of the fallen fighter.

The action of the play begins when Antigone, being a very pious woman, feels that it is her religious and moral duty to bury her fallen brother Polyneices in defiance of Creon's decree. Antigone and Creon become interlocked in a power battle between the right of the individual to bury family members with due honour versus the right of the state to carry out appropriate punishment on traitors (Lauriola 33). Antigone believes burying Polyneices is sanctioned by the gods: the law of a human being, Creon, should not overrule the law of the immortal gods, therefore the dead must receive proper burial. In her view, her actions are not rebellious, but rather an expression of piety to the gods, as she tells Creon: "(…) for it was Zeus who proclaimed that edict to me (…) and I did not suppose that your decrees had such power that you, a mortal, could outrun the god's unwritten and unfailing rules." (*Antigone* ll. 450-456). Moreover, in ancient Greek society it was a woman's duty to perform burial rites for deceased family members (Lauriola 33). On the other hand, Creon sees Antigone's actions as disregard for his power as a ruler, and is of the opinion that it is appropriate to deny a traitor his burial rites.

However, the antipathy that Creon feels towards Antigone is not only caused by political matters, but also by the fact that she is a woman (Lauriola 34). Antigone's womanhood makes her opposition to his mandate that much worse: Creon, as a man, should wield power and

have others do his bidding, while Antigone, being a woman, should silently obey his orders. For example, in a dispute with his son Haemon, Creon insists vigorously on the fact that he does not want a *woman* to dispute his power: "Thus the appointed rules must be upheld, and we must on no account be beaten by a woman. Better to fall from power, if fall we must, before a man: and we at least would not be called *women's* inferiors." (*Antigone* ll. 678-680). The fact that she refuses to adhere to her gender role enrages Creon to an almost sadistic vindictiveness towards her.

By burying Polyneices against Creon's command, Antigone disregards all three pillars of female identity in ancient Greece: invisibility, obedience, and silence (Lauriola 33). There are several examples in Sophocles' play of Antigone's refusal to be invisible and physically stay inside the domestic sphere designated for women. For one, she ventures outside the palace to perform burial rites on her brother's corpse, not once but twice. Also, in the prologue she takes Ismene outside of the palace to speak to her. As a woman, Antigone should have been obedient to Creon's decree no matter what her own opinion might be. By acting on her own beliefs, she breaks away from the prevailing notion in ancient Greek society that women ought to be obedient to men at all times. Antigone's unwillingness to stay silent is exemplified by the proud declaration of her actions to the face of Creon: "And if I now seem to you to have acted foolishly, perhaps it is a fool who charges me with folly. (…) No; there is nothing shameful in loyalty to my own mother's sons." (*Antigone* ll. 468-511). That it was not viewed as appropriate for a woman to speak in this way is exhibited when Creon replies: "here was further insolence, to boast of these things and exult at having done them. Now I swear that she is a man and I am not, if she is to prevail in this and go unpunished. (…) While I am alive no woman shall rule me." (*Antigone* ll. 485-526).

In this last quotation, another reason for Creon's extreme antagonism towards Antigone comes to the fore: a woman who can hold power is no woman, and a man who lets this

happen is not a man. Therefore, Antigone's action of burying her brother is a direct attack on Creon's identity as a man (Lauriola 34). In Creon's view, a woman who has power, and is therefore able to act, is unthinkable. Indeed, his first reaction when hearing that someone has unlawfully poured libations on Polyneices' body is: "What *man* has dared to do this?" (*Antigone* l. 249). The action of burying Polyneices makes Antigone step into the role of a man; for this destabilization of the male ego she will pay the ultimate price (Lauriola 34).

Creon arguably has the biggest role in Sophocles' play, but the tragic hero of the play is Antigone (Willner 62). As Willner puts it: "A victim also suffers, but his suffering is not the outcome of his actions or choice. A victim suffers, not acts. But on the tragic hero, suffering is never merely imposed; he incurs it by his own decision." (Willner 62). Antigone's suffering is brought about by her own actions; when given the chance she neither denies her disobedience nor does she attempt to evade punishment. Despite knowing the consequence full well, she makes the decision to continue her attempts at burying her brother. In this sense, Antigone dies a hero, not a victim.

Yorgos Tzavellas' Antigone

Antigone (1961) is a Greek film directed by Yorgos Tzavellas. On the surface, its main goal is to give a thoughtful, accurate representation of Sophocles' play on screen. Accordingly, the décor of the film is modest and not distracting, so that the themes of Sophocles' play receive full attention. Also, the costumes of the actors aim at historical accuracy; the women are modestly dressed in a *peplos* (a draped garment typically worn by women) and a *himaiton* (a piece of cloth worn over the peplos), and the men who are not in military costume are wearing a *chiton* (a simple tunic garment). Despite this veneer of historical accuracy, when one analyses the film more carefully, it becomes apparent that the director and screenwriter have

subtly, but decidedly, adjusted some of the play's themes and motives to fit a contemporary audience.

In Sophoclean drama the hero is not always an admirable character who is self-evidently right (Brown 3). This is also the case in Sophocles' play *Antigone*, where Antigone is not a "likeable" character. This comes to the fore in her interactions with her sister Ismene because she is often needlessly cruel and dismissive towards her:

> ANTIGONE: (…) I do not care for a friend who shows her friendship in words.
>
> (…)
>
> ISMENE: And what life can I desire, deprived of you?
>
> ANTIGONE: As Creon. He is the one you care for.
>
> ISMENE: Why do you hurt me like this, when it does you no good? (*Antigone* ll. 442-550)

From the interactions between the sisters it becomes clear that Ismene serves as a foil to Antigone: where Antigone is cold and self-righteous, Ismene always responds with reason and empathy for her sister. Consequently, an audience will not necessarily feel sympathetic towards Antigone throughout the play, and is probably not meant to (Brown 3). Though her ending may inspire an audience to take pity on her, Antigone's behaviour towards her sister makes her words "It is not my nature to join in hatred, but in love." (*Antigone* l. 524) seem rather ironic.

In Tzavellas' film, however, Antigone's relationship with Ismene is subtly but significantly altered to make Antigone a more "likeable" character. Although the lines that are spoken are not substantially modified, in the film it is suggested that Antigone is strict towards Ismene because she loves her; she wants to keep her safe by excluding her from burying Polyneices. For example, the line "I do not care for a friend who shows her friendship in words." (*Antigone* l. 542) is left out of the film script. Instead, we see Antigone tenderly

embracing Ismene and telling her: “Your death would serve no purpose… Mine is enough!” (*Antigone* 35:41). In addition, lines 550-560, in which Antigone wounds Ismene by accusing her of siding with Creon, are completely left out of the scene. Furthermore, just when Antigone speaks her iconic words “It is not my nature to join in hatred, but in love.” (*Antigone* l. 524), the camera switches to a full shot of Ismene walking into the hall. This implies that with “love” Antigone has in mind her love for Ismene, while in the play the context makes it clear that Antigone means the love she bears for her deceased family members. Thus the viewer of the film is left with the impression that Antigone is heroically taking all the blame to save her sister from undergoing the same cruel fate as herself. This sentiment is a stark contrast to Sophocles’ play, where Antigone does not allow Ismene to take a portion of the blame out of anger and pride; she begrudges her sister a part in her pious deed.

Antigone exemplifies the notion that, as mentioned before, a Sophoclean hero is not self-evidently right. Andrew Brown argues that the Greek audience of Sophocles’ time would likely not have approved of Antigone burying Polyneices. Though, as mentioned before, in ancient Greek society an honourable burial was of great importance, family members would perhaps not have felt they had to bury a dead relative “whatever the cost” (Brown 8). An ordinary Greek person would not have felt that it was appropriate for a person to give up their life in order to bury the dead, nor that the gods expected this from their worshippers: “Indeed, since the Greek gods offered no certain assurance of reward or compensation in an after-life, they were not in a good position to demand death of their votaries.” (Brown 8). Moreover, the ancient Greeks would certainly not agree with a woman defying the decree of a male ruler (Brown 8). As Ismene points out: “We are women, not meant to fight against men. (…) There is no sense in acting beyond our limits.” (*Antigone* ll. 61-67).

Another way to determine the views of "the ordinary Greek" is by looking at the chorus. In ancient Greek plays, the chorus often reflects the general opinion of the Greek public (Brown 8). In Sophocles' play, the chorus is very dismissive of Antigone's actions: "Advancing to the limit of daring, you stumbled with your foot, child, against the high pedestal of Right. (…) Piety is piety, perhaps; but breach of authority cannot be tolerated by one in whom authority resides. Your self-willed temper has destroyed you." (*Antigone* ll. 855-876). From these lines it becomes clear that the chorus does not feel that Antigone is in the right, but that she has wrongfully transgressed the law set by Creon.

In fact, no one in the play voices approval of what Antigone has done – not even the gods in whose name she buries Polyneices (Brown 9). Through Tiresias, the gods make clear that Creon should not have buried a living person, or have kept a dead body from the tomb, but they do not mention whether they approve of Antigone's attempted burial. Nor do the gods help her in any way, or save her from her gruesome fate. Indeed, when Antigone goes to her "hollowed dwelling-place of eternal prison", she feels completely abandoned by the gods: "What divine law have I transgressed? Why should I look to the gods any more in my misery - what ally should I invoke – when for my piety I stand convicted as impious?" (*Antigone* ll. 921-925).

In this regard, Tzavellas' film has artfully adapted its source material to paint a very different picture: Antigone is unquestionably right in everything she does, and her actions are wholly justifiable. One way in which the film achieves this is by having other characters indicate their approval of Antigone's deeds. For example, instead of telling Antigone "you go in folly" (*Antigone* l. 97), the film gives Ismene the following line: "Be a true sister to your brother." (*Antigone* 07:42), implying that Ismene approves of Antigone's plan to bury Polyneices. This is a divergence from the original play, where Ismene consistently voices her disapproval of her sister's deeds.

Furthermore, the chorus is much less critical of Antigone. For example, line 855 of the play, in which the chorus condemns Antigone for reaching beyond her limits, is left out, and so are lines 874-876, in which the chorus berates Antigone for not bowing to authority. Effectively all chorus lines that display a negative attitude towards Antigone are left out or transformed. Indeed, whereas in the play the chorus mocks Antigone when she goes to her tomb, in the film the lines are fashioned into an effort of consolation. In Sophocles' play, after Antigone compares herself to Niobe, daughter of Tantalus, the chorus responds:

> CHORUS: But she was a goddess and of the race of gods, while we are human and of mortal race. And yet it is a great thing for a dead woman even to have it said that she shared the fate of demigods <…> in life and afterwards in death.
>
> ANTIGONE: Oh, this is mockery! Why, by the gods of our fathers, do you insult me not when I am dead, but to my face? (*Antigone* ll. 835-841)

Clearly the chorus mocks Antigone's pride in comparing herself to a divine being, which is quite an unkind thing to do to a person facing imminent death. In contrast, in Tzavellas' film these lines are left out, and the old man speaking the chorus lines says to Antigone, while gently laying a hand on her shoulder: "Yet there is glory in your way to death…unwasted by disease…nor struck down by the sword…you go to the world below as no one went before!" (*Antigone* 49:07). Instead of mocking her for her presumption, the chorus comforts Antigone with the notion that her death is exceptional. In addition, at 34:16 of the film, the wise men of the city nod in approval to Antigone's claim that "These men would all say that this was pleasing to them if fear did not seal up their mouths." (*Antigone* ll. 505-506). In the play, this claim is unlikely to be true in view of the many critical remarks given by the chorus on Antigone's behaviour (Brown 9).

Thus it seems that Tzavellas chose, contrary to Sophocles, to portray Antigone as a noble character whose deeds are pure and ethical. One reason for this change might be that,

according to Nikoloutsos, Greek history "is revived and reinterpreted according to the moral standards of the present" (Nikoloutsos 260). A modern audience wants the hero of a story to be a likeable character who behaves in accordance with accepted standards of conduct (Nikoloutsos 260). It would be much more difficult for a modern audience to identify with an Antigone who is proud, bad-tempered, and possibly wrong in her beliefs. Furthermore, a modern audience expects good and evil in films to be presented in stark contrast with each other; the hero (Antigone) must represent all that is good, and the villain (Creon) must be purely evil. So, to cater to a modern audience's expectations, any doubt about whether Antigone is justified in her actions is glossed over in the film.

Changing Antigone in this way also has implications for how Tzavellas' film relates to gender. The film reflects a different attitude towards proper female behaviour than in Sophocles's play. In the play, Ismene is not criticised because she represents the perfect Greek wife; submissive, silent, and invisible (Brown 7). Ismene is the voice of reason, and expresses all three important characteristics of femininity in ancient Greece. For example, she tries to persuade Antigone to abandon her plan of burying Polyneices by reminding her that women ought to submit to male authority: "We must rather bear in mind, first that we are women, not meant to fight against men" (*Antigone* ll. 60-62). Also, Ismene urges her sister to keep silent about her plan: "Then at least disclose this deed to no one. Keep it a secret, and I shall do the same." (*Antigone* ll. 85-86). Antigone's response to this offer underscores the difference between the sisters: "Oh, proclaim it aloud! I shall hate you much more for you silence if you do not announce these things to all." (*Antigone* ll. 87-88). Antigone refuses to be silent and submissive, and, as has been discussed in previous paragraphs, is criticised for it in the play. She represents the "ill-behaved" Greek wife.

This balance between the sisters is reversed in the film. Antigone is still a strong, fearless character, but, in contrast to the play, in Tzavellas' film this is worthy of praise, not scorn. In

the film Antigone is presented as the "true sister to [her] brother". This line, wistfully uttered by Ismene, implies that she holds back from assisting Antigone out of fear, not out of a sense of propriety. Ismene knows burying Polyneices is the only respectable choice, but her frailty prevents her from joining Antigone in this undertaking. Ismene's more naïve and obliging attitude is further exemplified by her appearance; as opposed to Antigone's jet-black hair, Ismene has soft blond curls. According to Bella Vivante, "since the 1930s 'bottle blonde' female stars functioned as projection of 'virtue, honesty and acceptability". This acceptability is based on passivity and compliance, whereas dark-haired and dark-skinned actresses have been cast as stronger, and therefore dangerous, female characters (Vivante 37). Where in the play Ismene's softness and virtue are preferred, Tzavellas' film is a celebration of Antigone's courage. Therefore, it could be argued that the film has changed certain aspects of Sophocles's play to fit the different attitude towards women in the 1960s. In this period it was no longer unseemly for a woman to defy male authority, or to assert her own opinion in view of the public.

In spite of this, it cannot be said that Tzavellas' film is interested in exploring the gender issues described by Sophocles. In the film, as opposed to the ancient Greek play, the dispute between Creon and Antigone is mainly caused by political matters, not by the fact that she is a woman. Some of the lines from Sophocles' play that discuss gender and the role of women are changed or left out of the film entirely. For example, when Creon orders Antigone and Ismene to be imprisoned, he tells the guards: "From now on they must be women, and not let loose." (*Antigone* l. 580). This line is simply left out of the film. Also, in the play, Creon is angry at Haemon for siding with Antigone, while a woman's opinion should not be listened to: "You vile character, giving way to a woman! (…) All your words, at least, are spoken for her sake. (…) You woman's slave, do not cajole me!" (*Antigone* ll. 747-756). In the film, however, these sentences are boiled down to Creon shouting "Womanish!" at his son

(*Antigone* 43:48). It seems that Tzavellas seeks to depict the opposition between Creon and Antigone as caused by politics, not gender issues. Creon punishes Antigone because he considers her deeds to be an act of rebellion against his authority, not because she refuses to stay within the limits of her gender.

Gabriel Dettre's Antigone

The film *Antigone* (2011) by Gabriel Dettre follows the original text of the play word for word, adding or subtracting nothing. However, through visual mechanisms Dettre does change certain aspects of the play. Dettre seeks to make *Antigone* relevant for a modern audience by not using any classical décor, either in setting or clothing. All characters are completely unclothed, and scenes have different abstractions of colour, shape, and organic motifs such as stones or leaves as a background. The film contains no ornaments or costumes that could place its characters in a specific time-period. In this way, the themes of the film become generally applicable. It is no longer a story of one woman's tragic ending, but a universal story about human emotion and suffering.

That the film has a wider scope than the play is established in the first scene of the film. Dettre has switched lines 1-98 and 100-161 around so that the film begins with the first speech of the chorus instead of the discussion between Antigone and Ismene. The chorus is portrayed as a divine, though anthropomorphic group of goddesses. They know the past, they have a precise overview of the present and they can see the future. By having them commence the film, Dettre wants to establish a world in which the human characters do whatever they do within what they think of as their free will. The goddesses moving them as puppets will soon show them how wrong they are. For example, at 34:37 in the film, while Creon is raging about his right to deny Polyneices' corpse proper burial rites, a shot of a few seconds is

inserted of one of the goddesses smiling disdainfully at Creon's words. She knows that in the end all of his deeds will come to utter ruin, and that Creon's words are impotent.

What is also noteworthy about this change of the chorus is that it establishes commentary on gender roles in society. According to Dettre, he has changed the chorus into goddesses because: "Men "create, develop, progress" and we all know what result that has given us. Women would preserve, sustain if we let them..... if we had not changed the harmony. I am talking about the different natures.....not suggesting that women "should not have come out of the kitchen", but stating that men crushed and practically annihilated the femininity as equal part of the universe and replaced it with something that was and is more convenient even for them." (Dettre interview). Thus the film is also made more contemporary because it adheres to our current view of the equality of the sexes, instead of the ancient Greek perspective of male superiority. From the above quotation it becomes apparent that Dettre's film has a much more explicit feminist agenda than Tzavellas' film, which is more concerned with presenting a historically accurate *Antigone* that would please its audience than giving social commentary.

Another way in which Dettre aims to make his film more universal is by adding several scenes of an old woman wailing gibberish. Dettre states that "The older woman is 'all of us'..... the suffering human kind, who represents and suffers from the results in general of what in concreto has been happening in the world." (Dettre interview). The scenes containing the older woman are placed before or after references to Antigone's suffering, thus turning the ordeal of an individual character into a symbol for all human beings who suffer. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Dettre chose a female figure to portray the universal condition of human suffering. This could be viewed as another reference to his statement that "men crushed and practically annihilated the femininity as equal part of the universe"; it is men who cause the most pain in the world, and in that sense we are all like a woman suffering from the actions of men.

A further difference between Sophocles' play and Dettre's film is the way in which female sexuality is depicted. In Sophocles's play, there is no evidence of Antigone and Haemon having any sort of sexual relationship, or even spending time in each other's presence. This is due to the fact that in ancient Greek society a woman was supposed to be chaste until marriage, when her body became the property of her husband (Willner 67). In contrast, in Dettre's film Antigone's sexuality is openly displayed. Dettre has included a scene in his film in which Antigone and Haemon are reclining in suggestive positions, gently touching each other's faces, while she is stroking his inner thigh. This is in line with post-sexual revolution views on sexuality and gender: we have come to realise that male and female sexuality may not be as dissimilar as we have typically assumed. This is a long way from past notions on the subject, which "ran the gamut of women being insatiable, sex-hungry nymphomaniacs to having no desire at all" (Nuwer 1).

On the other hand, Tzavellas' film never shows Antigone and Haemon having any sort of physical contact; indeed, in the one scene that features them together they do not come within two feet of each other (*Antigone* 38:10). This erasure of any sexual relationship between Antigone and Haemon is in agreement with the proscriptions of the Hays Code, which was enforced between 1934 and 1968 (Nikoloutsos 260). Acknowledging the influence that motion pictures could have on their viewers, especially young ones, the Code placed upon the industry the obligation of safeguarding and promoting the moral values of American society. One of the Code's 'particular applications' was concerned with sex and declared with religious zeal: 'the sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld'. To this end, the Code banned representations of erotic perversion and restricted physical expressions of desire, stipulating that scenes of passion should be included only if they were essential to the plot. Furthermore, the amount of passion projected on the big screen was

curtailed. For, as the Code specified, prolonged kissing and lustful embraces were prohibited (Nikoloutsos 260).

Conclusion

Both films have changed the original Greek text, but for different reasons. On the surface, Tzavellas' *Antigone* is a faithful rendering on screen of Sophocles' play. However, subtle alterations to the text make the films more conform the expectations of a 1960s audience. Tzavellas' Antigone is changed from a morally ambiguous tragic hero into a self-sacrificial warrior of justice. In addition, unlike Sophocles, Tzavellas does not explicitly comment on gender issues. He downplays the fact that Creon's antagonism towards Antigone largely stems from her stepping outside of the designated female gender boundaries. In contrast, Dettre's *Antigone* is not an attempt at historical accuracy, nor does it aim to please the general public. His film is provocative, and concerned with more general themes of human life, including commentary on gender and society. Dettre's Antigone is much more like Sophocles' version – at times disagreeable, but captivating until the end.

Chapter 2

Electra in Ancient Greek Literature

The Electra plays are based on myths about the house of Atreus and its curse by the gods. The last consequence of the curse is that queen Clytemnestra is killed by her own children. This episode of the house's tragic history is told in three ancient Greek tragedies: Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Euripides' *Electra*. The three playwrights were free to highlight or omit certain parts of the story. For example, Sophocles added a sister, Chrysothemis, to act as a foil to Electra. Which of the two *Electras* was written earlier is still a matter of debate, but it is generally assumed that the *Oresteia* is the oldest play. For my analysis I will use Euripides' *Electra*, since both Cacoyannis' film *Electra* and Shyamaprasad's film *Elektra* are based on Euripides' version of the myth.

Of the three tragedians, Euripides was the most interested in female characters (Roisman 15). In all but two of his plays the choruses consist of females; these add a feminine point of view to the events of the play. Furthermore, Euripides was much more sympathetic to the plight of women and of people at the margins of society, as exemplified by the positive characterization of the Farmer in *Electra* (Roisman 15).

Euripides' treatment of Electra is different from that of Aeschylus. In Aeschylus' play Orestes is the central character, and Electra is placed at the margins. She does not have any individual characteristics, does not join the action of the play, and has very limited stage time. On the other hand, in Euripides' *Electra* she takes the central stage. Excepting a few short exits, Electra is present on stage for the entirety of the play. Furthermore, Aeschylus' Electra is not as vindictive towards her mother as in the other two plays. She even pours libations on Agamemnon's grave in order to stop Clytemnestra's bad dreams.

While Sophocles and Euripides are more alike in terms of putting Electra at the centre of the play, they have produced completely different Electras. For one, where Sophocles' Electra

is a grand, tragic figure, Euripides brings her down to earth: “Where Sophocles created a character of enormous stature, Euripides created a reduced character driven by a very personal, almost petty vindictiveness.” (Roisman 248). Sophocles’ Electra is the truly heroic figure, fighting for justice and ideals. This somewhat excuses the rigidness and destructiveness of her actions. In contrast, Euripides’s Electra has no excuse. She is full of resentment at having been rejected by her mother, turned out of her father’s palace, and being wedded beneath her station. She never rises above or beyond her own concerns (Roisman 31). Euripides makes Electra more human, and arguably more effective as a tragic character (Roisman 248).

So why does Euripides make Electra less ‘heroic’? Usually, when a minor character from mythology is elevated to a major role, they will be portrayed as heroic and tragic. This is what Sophocles did with Aeschylus’ Electra. He probably felt that Aeschylus did not do her justice, and she deserved a more grand and heroic treatment in his play. Perhaps Euripides in turn responded to his rival Sophocles: “He gave her too much credit, there are no heroes and heroines in this world. I’ll show what she was really like.” (Roisman 31). This is in line with the more pessimistic world-view that is often shown in Euripides’ plays (Roisman 30).

Next to making her less heroic, Euripides also makes Electra a very unlikeable character. For one, the Euripidean Electra’s miseries seem to a large extent self-imposed. For instance, Electra laments the loss of her status as daughter of Agamemnon, and that others look on her with pity: “I was born the daughter of Agamemnon, (…) ‘Electra the Wretched’ is the name my countrymen call me.” (*Electra* ll. 115-119). Yet the chorus of Argive women does not see her as merely a poor wretch, but calls her “Daughter of Agamemnon, Electra” and treat her with great respect (*Electra* l. 168). Moreover, Electra refuses the kindness of the Farmer. While her husband wants to make her life as comfortable as possible: “(…) why do you give yourself this trouble, toiling away on my behalf (…)” (*Electra* ll. 64-65), Electra keeps

labouring to underscore just how unfairly she has been treated: "(…) carrying this pot that rests on my head (…) uttering my groans to the wide heavens. It is not a question of being reduced by need to this action, but rather that I want the gods to see how brutally Aegisthus treats me." (*Electra* ll. 55-59). Electra seems to do her utmost to make her situation that much more miserable. When the chorus of women or the Farmer offer her solace, "she refuses them in a manner that is so indignant that it alienates both the chorus and the audience" (Chong-Gossard 72). It is almost as if Electra feels that she is obliged to be miserable with the Farmer because he is poor and of such low social status. Therefore, it is very difficult to sympathise with her.

Another way in which Euripides portrays Electra as unpleasant is through her conduct towards the gentle Farmer. While she occasionally expresses gratitude for his kindness towards her, she often looks down upon him and his poverty: "(…) my spirit pines away as I live under a common labourer's roof (…)" (*Electra* ll. 203-204). Indeed, she berates him for inviting guests into their humble cottage: "Why have you invited these strangers into your home when you know it is so poor and you are so beneath them? (…) there's nothing grand about your surroundings and you've made a fool of yourself!" (*Electra* ll. 404-408). She feels ashamed to be associated with her husband.

In relation to this, Electra's characterization is less positive because of the motivations she exhibits for killing Aegisthus and her mother. She is not solely motivated in her revenge by a feeling of duty to avenge her father, but also by resentfulness for her degradation in social status. Her comments on Clytemnestra's luxurious dress show that Electra's hatred towards her mother arises partly from her own poverty and lack of such rich attire. Also, while Electra is still a virgin because her marriage to the Farmer is a sham, she laments her mother's marriage and sexual relations with her new husband: " (…) while my mother has taken another man as her husband and shares with him a bed whose sheets are stained with the

blood of murder." (*Electra* ll. 210-212). From these lines another motive for killing her mother can be deduced: it is her mother's marriage and her own lack of sexual fulfilment that trouble her, not her inability to avenge her father. As Chong-Gossard states, Electra's matricide "seems to be merely an expression of her resentful nostalgia." (Chong-Gossard 72).

Despite the fact that Euripides's Electra is far from likeable, I would argue that she is a strong female character. In the play, Electra participates in the action as fully as her gender allows. Alone of the three Electras, she is present at the scene of the matricide, urging Orestes on and even touching the murder weapon itself (Roisman 248). Indeed, Electra shows an extreme eagerness to participate in the murder of her mother. When Orestes and the Old Man are discussing the murders, she interjects with the blood-curdling line: "Mother's death shall be *my* responsibility!" (*Electra* l. 648). Euripides' Electra is much more immersed in the action of the play than Sophocles' Electra, who stands outside the palace screaming at Orestes, "Strike her again, if you have the strength!" (Roisman 249).

Additionally, although Electra is unable to revenge her father with the aid of her brother, a man, Euripides does give Electra a 'manly' spirit. While Orestes wavers at the thought of killing his mother, Electra's determination never fails her. Electra's determination is a masculine characteristic, aligning her with heroic warrior figures such as Sophocles' Ajax. In this she re-enacts her mother's career: Aeschylus had made much of Clytemnestra's 'man-minded heart' (Roisman 239). For example, some of the lines spoken by Electra are reminiscent of a warrior's battle-cry: "I myself shall keep watch with sword ready in hand. Never shall I yield the victory, never give my enemies the satisfaction of trampling me in the dust!" (*Electra* 694-697).

Cacoyannis' Electra

Cacoyannis' film *Electra* (1962) is not so much a rendering of the play on screen, but more of an interpretation of Euripides' play. The film has left out much of the text of the play and has reworked the narrative in order to simplify both the plot and the characters. His goal was to make the film accessible to a 1960s audience, and to convey his anti-war message to them (Roisman 263).

In order to simplify Euripides' text, Cacoyannis created a more straightforward and highly linear narrative (Roisman 263). The plot of the film roughly follows Euripides and includes all the major events. However, while in Euripides's play the reader can slowly piece together the background of the story – Agamemnon's return and subsequent murder – through flashbacks and allusions, Cacoyannis begins his film by showing these events on screen. We see Agamemnon's return and brutal murder, Orestes' flight into exile with his tutor, and Electra being given to the Farmer as a wife. At 14:45 in the film, we see Electra riding away on the Farmer's cart, her back to him and her face towards her former home, her face set in a mask of determination. Every now and then the camera switches to peasants singing a song of hope and return. These scenes establish clearly for the audience the motives that will drive the revenger later in the film (Roisman 263).

Another way in which Cacoyannis' film has simplified the play is by showing all the significant occurrences explicitly on screen (Roisman 263). For example, whereas in the play the killing of Clytemnestra takes place off stage, in the film this is shown in a very dramatized way. We see how Clytemnestra attempts to flee the hut, but is barred by her daughter, and her running around screaming frantically while her son stabs her (*Electra* 1:39:59). This scene is interspersed with shots of the peasant women stumbling around in a blind panic because of what is happening inside the hut. In this way, by showing rather than narrating events, Cacoyannis uses the special abilities of the camera to his advantage. It gives the events

immediacy and makes them much easier to follow for an audience, while enhancing the emotional impact of the story.

This leads me to another difference between Cacoyannis' film and Euripides' play. In Greek tragedy, the verbal aspect of a story or myth was central to the play, while the visual impact of the play was of secondary importance. Cacoyannis' reverses this hierarchy and places much more emphasis on the visual aspect of his film and the resulting emotional response, and less on the verbal aspect. Indeed, Cacoyannis has stated about *Electra* that his desire was "to move the audience, to shock them, and to lead them to a cathartic experience." (Roisman 263). Cacoyannis strives for this emotional power by using camera techniques to increase the emotional pitch of scenes. His film is rife with wordless scenes that show wide-angle expanses of bleak landscapes or ruined structures, conveying a sense of oppression and an aura of grandeur.

In addition, Cacoyannis makes use of close-ups to increase the film's emotional impact on the audience (Roisman 264). When the camera is not moving over some stony landscape, it gives us full-screen close-ups of the character's faces contorted into some type of emotion. While there are close-ups of many of the character's faces, Electra's face is the one the camera turns to most often. We see her face distorted into rage, mockery, despair, and vengefulness, presenting her as the tormented heroine of the story. A salient example of this is when the camera zooms in on her face while Electra addresses the dead body of Aegisthus, her face a mask of contempt and her mouth twisted into a snarl (*Electra* 1:22:24). Through these close-ups Cacoyannis amplifies the character's emotions and shows the audience their inner torment, thus encouraging the viewer to become emotionally invested in the film.

One of the most striking differences between the film and the play is that Cacoyannis practically obliterates the ambiguities of Euripides' characters (Roisman 264). In Euripides' play the characters all contain a mixture of good and bad, but Cacoyannis casts his characters

as either a hero or a villain. The stark contrast between good and evil already comes to the fore in the opening scenes of the film where the camera moves back and forth between images of Agamemnon's brutal murder, and his distressed children standing outside. Once again we get an ample view of a young Electra's distraught facial expression. Perhaps Cacoyannis thought that one-dimensional characters would appeal more to a 1960s film audience, or increase the emotional impact of his film (Roisman 264).

What can be said for certain is that Irene Papas was probably right when she ventured that "Euripides might be angry with us" for systematically ironing out all the faults that he gave to Electra (Roisman 265). As previously mentioned, Euripides' Electra is making herself more miserable by going to fetch water against the Farmer's remonstrance and refusing to borrow clothes from the Chorus to go the festival of Hera. But Cacoyannis portrays these actions not as stubborn attempts at making herself more miserable, but as "refreshing virtues in contrast with Clytemnestra's bejewelled licentiousness" (Roisman 265). For one, Cacoyannis leaves out lines 55-58 in which Electra laments that she works hard to show the gods how horribly Aegisthus is treating her. By doing so he avoids the viewer's suspicion that Electra may be acting more out of wilfulness than a desire to help the Farmer. Furthermore, in the film, Electra's gentle tone of voice and facial expression show that she truly means it when she says that "It's a great pleasure to help you in everything." (*Electra* 31:39). Electra wishes to help the Farmer out of gratitude for his kindness. In contrast, Euripides' Electra uses phrases such as "I must help you" (*Electra* l. 71) and "it is my job" (*Electra* l. 74) in answer to the Farmer's question. This shows that Electra's readiness to do the hard work of a farmer's wife does not stem from a genuine kindness, but from an obligation to be miserable because she is living with a poor farmer.

In addition, what Roisman fails to note are the subtle ways in which Cacoyannis makes Electra more sympathetic. While Euripides' Electra speaks haughtily to the Farmer and looks

down upon him because of his poverty, Cacoyannis' Electra speaks to him in a grateful and gentle manner. In the film, Electra does ask why the Farmer has invited rich strangers when he is so poor, but all the venom has been taken out of her words. For one, Cacoyannis' Electra asks her question in a mild and concerned tone, instead of in a berating manner. Also, lines 407-409, in which Electra mocks the Farmer's answer to her question, have been left out. She does not answer him in a biting tone, calling him a fool and laying emphasis on his poverty and humble dwelling. In the film, Electra accepts the Farmer's answer as reasonable and moves on to making preparations for the guests. This change in attitude ties in with Cacoyannis' aim to make his film more palatable for his audience. In modern society it is not socially acceptable to think of people in terms of social class, and it is therefore easier for a modern audience to sympathise with an Electra who does not act as if she is superior to the Farmer.

Another way in which Cacoyannis makes Electra more sympathetic is by changing her attitude towards her mother. In Euripides' play, Electra, without hesitation, lures her mother to her death with a ruse that plays on Clytemnestra's motherly feelings. In the film the same ruse is used, but now Electra wavers at the thought of killing her own mother (Roisman 265). For instance, when Clytemnestra tells her daughter: "I forgive you. Don't think I am proud of my past actions, whatever I say. (…) my poor daughter." (1:35:45), we are shown a close-up of Electra's face looking uncertain, taken in by the words of her mother, and then startled at the thought of what she is about to do. Then, when her mother is about to enter the hut, Electra stops her from going inside, seemingly unable to go forth with the plan of killing her (1:37:48). When Clytemnestra insists that she will go inside for the sacrifice, we see Electra leading her inside with tears welling up in her eyes, screaming "Mother!" one last time (1:38:47). Moreover, in Euripides' play, Electra's words to her mother before Clytemnestra enters the cottage come across as sarcastic and bitter: "(…) do please take care that your

clothing isn't stained by all the smoke inside the cottage when you offer up the kind of sacrifice you must to the gods." (*Electra* ll. 138-141). In contrast, in the film Electra speaks these lines with a touching softness in her voice and not a hint of mockery (Roisman 265).

To make Electra seem even more sympathetic, and less reprehensible for the murders, Cacoyannis ignores any credit Euripides gave to Clytemnestra (Roisman 265). Euripides' Clytemnestra is a vain, libidinous, and jealous woman, but not a vicious one (Roisman 265). She is caught in a dilemma between duty towards her offspring and fear for their revenge, resulting in her bad behaviour towards her children. In the play, Clytemnestra expresses her feelings of remorse for her past actions: "Oh pity me! I am sorry for what I devised! I let my anger against my husband drive me too far!" (*Electra* ll. 1109-1110). Cacoyannis expunges these expressions of remorse from his film. Indeed, he emphasizes Clytemnestra's hardness. While Euripides gives her credit for genuinely wanting to help her daughter after supposedly giving birth, Cacoyannis has her accuse Electra of being the source of her troubles and shows her as eager to get the ritual over with so she can meet up with Aegisthus: "Why are you wasting your time? I have to go for my husband. I don't want to make him angry because of *you*." (1:38:01).

Roisman does not address gender issues in *Electra*, yet it is an important aspect of Cacoyannis' appropriation of the Greek material in his film. A consequence of changing the play to make Electra more likeable is that Cacoyannis' film implies that for a woman to be a successful protagonist, at least in the 1960s, she had to adhere to certain gender stereotypes. For one, she could not be extremely hateful and vindictive like Euripides' Electra. For Electra to be a heroine in Cacoyannis' film, she had to be made more feminine, more gentle and sensitive, as shown in her conduct towards the Farmer and her mother.

Indeed, while Euripides' Electra looks down upon the Farmer and berates him, Cacoyannis' Electra is surprisingly submissive and obedient to her 'husband'. In Euripides'

play, when Electra asks the Farmer why he invited rich strangers, his timid question "will they not be as much at home in humble as in grand surroundings?" is met with biting sarcasm and insults from her. In contrast, in the film the Farmer's response is transformed from a question into a statement, spoken in a decisive tone: "If they are as noble as they seem, they will be content with as much as I can offer them." (51:36). Instead of refuting his argument, Cacoyannis' Electra immediately accedes to his opinion and starts making preparations for their guests.

In addition to making Electra more sympathetic and obedient, Cacoyannis also had to make her less 'masculine'. For instance, instead of the heroic lines: " Never shall I yield the victory, never give my enemies the satisfaction of trampling me in the dust!" (*Electra* ll. 695-697), Cacoyannis' Electra cries out that if Orestes is killed, she will "plunge a knife into [her] heart" (1:07:45). This proclamation conveys a much more 'feminine' stance; while fighting was neither an appropriate nor a possible action for a woman, committing suicide was not necessarily frowned upon. Often, the only way in which women could control their lives in Greek myths was to kill themselves (Garrison 26). Moreover, instead of keeping watch with her sword ready in hand, we see Electra anxiously pacing outside of her cottage while she awaits the return of her brother (1:12:10). Also, Cacoyannis leaves out lines 277-282 in which Electra expresses her desire to take part in the murders: "ORESTES: Would you dare to join him in killing your mother? ELECTRA: I would, and in my hands I'd have the self-same axe that killed my father! (…) I would be prepared to die if only I could slit my mother's throat!". In this way, it seems that Cacoyannis felt he had to 'tone down' Electra's lust for action to keep the audience's sympathy.

However, Cacoyannis' main purpose with his film was not to convey ideas about gender but to criticise revenge and violence (Roisman 266). He was "attracted" to the works of Euripides because he considered them to contain an anti-war message (Roisman 266). This

message was important to Cacoyannis because of recent events in modern Greece's history. Between 1946 and 1949 Greece was disrupted by a civil war between the Greek government army, backed by the US and the UK, and the army of the Greek Communist Party. The civil war left Greece in ruins and divided the Greek people for decades to come. With these tragic consequences of war in mind, Cacoyannis already opens his film on an anti-military note, with Agamemnon returning from the war exuding "might and arrogance" while his army radiates menace.

Then, instead of following the traditions of Greek tragedy in which murders take place off stage, he shows both Agamemnon's murder and the matricide on screen. He does this to emphasize the horror of these violent murders for the audience (Roisman 266). Indeed, Cacoyannis uses clever camera-work to link the two murders. In both scenes the camera moves between the inside of the building where the murder is taking place, and what is happening outside, where black birds fly ominously across the sky and the chorus is wailing in distress.

To emphasize his anti-violence and revenge message, Cacoyannis changes the ending of his film. Like many movies referring to Greek myth, he removes the gods from his film. The play ends with the divine Castor and Pollux judging Orestes and Electra, but Cacoyannis ends his film without any sense of a divine influence (Roisman 267). He did not only do this because he thought it would be alienating to a 1960s audience, but also to strip the matricide from any sense of being right. In Euripides' play Electra is convinced that the gods sanction Clytemnestra's murder. Indeed, Apollo even commands Orestes to avenge his father by killing his mother and her new lover. By removing the gods from the play, Cacoyannis not only undermines the rightness of the matricide, but takes from the siblings their entire claim to moral understanding and raises questions about the ability of human beings to know what is right and what not (Roisman 267).

Jancsó's Electra

Miklós Jancsó's film *Electra, My Love* (1974) is a Hungarian film that reinterprets the Electra myth to serve its political agenda. The film is set in an archaic and mythical world in which a tyrant, Aegisthus, faces an uprising from his oppressed subjects. The film is restricted to twelve long takes. As a consequence, the film is not completely chronological or set in a definitive place or time. The setting is not specifically Greek, nor Hungarian, but more a general nomadic-agricultural one. The plot is mainly based on Euripides' version of the Electra myth, but Jancsó makes a lot of changes to the major events of the play.

Electra is oppressed by Aegisthus, the tyrant who murdered her father some fifteen years ago. Electra longs for revenge, which can only happen once Orestes returns. So far the plotline follows Euripides' play. However, Clytemnestra has no role in the film at all, and from the only allusion made to her we gather that she was at some point married to Aegisthus but died ten years ago. Also, instead of marrying Electra off to a farmer, Aegisthus forces her to marry a dwarf to humiliate her. Furthermore, when Orestes does return, Electra does not recognise him and kills him for bringing the message of Orestes' supposed death. Luckily, Orestes miraculously comes back to life and together they capture and murder Aegisthus. The film does not end with the divine intervention of Castor and Pollux after which the siblings go their separate ways, but by the arrival of a scarlet helicopter and Electra and Orestes flying off into the distance.

In the words of the director, the film is "a fairy-tale and a parable for the idea that revolutions must continually renew themselves." (Barns 57). Jancsó's *Electra, My Love* is a plea for violent revolution as a way to liberate and oppressed society. Because he made his film while still under the yoke of the Soviet Union, he had to give his critique on society very subtly. Therefore, he used the myth of Electra to embed "his ideas in a form that was

acceptable to the authorities." (Brody 1). He made his film so full of mystical and vague allusions that his plea for an uprising of the people was not discernible for the people in power. This plea for violent action is the complete opposite of what Cacoyannis wanted to achieve with his *Electra*, which was an emotional entreaty against the use of violence.

While Euripides was mainly interested in the inner turmoil of his characters, Jancsó is more interested in what the characters in his film represent. Euripides' *Electra* was a very personal tale of familial revenge. For Jancsó, this theme of personal revenge is a symbol for revolution against authority. In his film, even the desperately personal desire of seeking revenge for Agamemnon's murder becomes an act of public will. This is exemplified in the film by the constant presence of the down-trodden people in the background. During the confrontations between Aegisthus and Electra we see the commoners acting out what the protagonists are saying. For example, at 35:36 in the film Electra gives a speech against Aegisthus: "You've kissed the feet of the oppressor. You've lied the stars from the sky. Where has it got you? You bought happiness and got terror.", but around her we see dozens of people falling to the ground with their hands over their ears, refusing to listen to the truth about their tyrant.

To make his plea for violent action convincing for his audience, Jancsó felt he had to make changes to Euripides' portrayal of Electra. For one, just like Cacoyannis, Jancsó erased all the flaws that Euripides gave to Electra. Where in the play she is condescending to commoners and labourers, Jancsó portrays her as a defender of the common people. In the first few minutes of the film Electra says about herself: "I keep the sun in the sky. I watch over the people so they don't go on all fours. I bear every innocent baby. I , Electra, who doesn't forget." (*Electra* 03:26). Judging from her clothing and her surroundings, Electra lives the life of a simple farmer. But in contrast to Euripides' play she never complains about the meanness of her dwelling or the low status of the people she has to associate with.

Furthermore, instead of making Electra's thirst for revenge seem rather petty and resentful, Jancsó depicts her vengefulness as noble and heroic. He portrays Electra as a personification of the law, and her eventual murder of Aegisthus as a brave and noble act. To Electra, her father's murder is not only a personal tragedy, but an attack on justice in general: "If crime is not punished, law ceases to be. And without law there is no world, and man is not man. (…) You have no power over me because I am justice." (*Electra* 06:29). So by killing the tyrant Aegisthus, Electra restores justice to the world and her people can once again be fully human.

Another way in which Jancsó gives Electra a more positive characterization is by deleting Clytemnestra from the film altogether. By doing so he avoids the jealousy and resentfulness that Euripides' Electra displays towards her mother, and the horror of the matricide. Consequently, there is no question about the integrity of Electra's actions and Jancsó can use her as an example of the principle of behaviour he wanted to convey to his viewers. That is, to join together in a violent revolution against the ruthless soviet regime.

With regard to gender, Jancsó does not portray Electra in an overtly feminine way, in contrast to Cacoyannis, who makes Electra more feminine to make her more likeable for his audience. Jancsó uses the character of Electra as a symbol of revolution, as the embodiment of a collective political unconscious. His Electra is not gentle and subservient, like Cacoyannis' Electra, but clearheaded, sharp, and commanding. Indeed, Electra speaks of herself as if she were a man: "*Aegisthus' companion*: Ever seen a man who'd trade a peaceful life for mortal danger? *Electra*: I look in my mirror to see one. (…) I'm Agamemnon's daughter, Orestes his son. Same father, same task." (*Electra* 08:55). Electra sees herself as equal to her brother in the task of avenging their father; her gender does not hinder her from taking up this bloody task.

Also, Jancsó's Electra seems to be more independent compared to Euripides' and Cacoyannis' version. Although she has been forced to marry a dwarf, he hardly figures in the

film at all, and we never see them interact with each other. Electra seems to live completely separate from her husband. As opposed to Euripides' and Cacoyannis' Electra, she does not do any chores for him, receive guests for him, or even refer to him at all. Indeed, whereas Cacoyannis makes Electra more obedient and subservient to her husband than in the original play, Jancsó portrays her as completely independent from him.

In ancient Greece, a woman taking action was severely frowned upon. In his play, Euripides' goes as far as he dares to subvert this policy by allowing Electra to touch the murder-weapon. Jancsó takes it a step further. Although his Electra also has to wait for her brother to slay Aegisthus, she does take matters into her own hands. This is strongly exemplified in her killing the supposed messenger of her brother's demise. After asking him if it was him who brought the hateful news, she stabs him without hesitation (*Electra* 31:11). Also, Electra is the one who tortures and humiliates Aegisthus and his companion. She orders them to perform humiliating tasks while stripped of any clothing: "Dance! (…) Feed the doves." (*Electra* 46:42), all the while smiling disdainfully.

Another difference with Euripides' play is that Jancsó's Electra is able to voice her opinion. She alone speaks out against Aegisthus, telling her people the truth about their oppressed state: "I've been silent fifteen years, today I will speak. (…) You prefer a life of lies to speaking the truth once. To rot, trembling in the filth, rather than face death once. Where did it get you? You got only fear." (*Electra* 36:19). Indeed, from the very beginning of the movie Electra confidently asserts her views to Aegisthus. Whenever they try to coerce her into forgetting the injustice of Agamemnon's murder, she does not back down: "You have no power over me. (…) I was born to disturb men's peace. (…) Kill me and my corpse will haunt you." (*Electra* 08:40).

Conclusion

Cacoyannis and Jancsó have used the *Electra* myth for similar purposes. Both filmmakers used it to convey certain political and ideological ideas to their viewers. Furthermore, both directors adapted the character of Electra to fit their respective cinematographic objectives. For his anti-war and violence message to come across Cacoyannis erased all of Electra's flaws and made her more in line with what a 1960s Greek audience would see as "appropriate feminine behaviour". Contrastingly, in his film, Jancsó kept to the more "masculine" portrayal of Electra in Euripides' play; he even enhanced it further to drive home his call for violent revolution.

Chapter 3

Phaedra in Ancient Greek Literature

The myth of Phaedra has been depicted in multiple versions in classical antiquity, the most acclaimed works being the two *Hippolytus* plays written by Euripides, and Seneca the Younger's Latin play *Phaedra*. For this chapter I will look at Euripides' second version of the play *Hippolytus* concerning the myth of Phaedra and her stepson. The first version of Euripides' play, which is now lost to us, was strongly rejected by the Athenian crowds. Normally Euripides did not rewrite a play to please his audience, yet with *Hippolytus* he felt compelled to do so. This second version was so favoured by the Athenians that he was chosen as the winning playwright of the year 428 BC.

While we do not have the first version of the play itself, from plays that have been derived from it we can still glean some information of what it contained, and possibly why it failed to please the crowds (Roisman *Veiled* 397). Roisman argues that the play failed to please because the character of Phaedra exhibited behaviour that was not in line with how the ideal Greek woman was supposed to act. In Euripides' first version Phaedra was brazen, forward and openly made sexual advances towards her husband's son (Roisman *Veiled* 397). The Athenians were not so much shocked that a woman would fall in love with her stepson, but that a woman would openly disclose her feelings of desire to a man. In ancient Greek culture a woman's silence and invisibility were her most laudable attributes, so Phaedra's shameless breach of both of these traits was especially shocking and distasteful.

To remove the blame of the tragedy from the lovesick Phaedra, in the second version Euripides has the Nurse approach Hippolytus on behalf of Phaedra. Moreover, Phaedra is unaware of the Nurse's proposition, which makes Phaedra seem even more blameless in the matter (Roisman 397). In addition, from the start the play makes clear that the ensuing occurrences are all devised by her to punish Hippolytus. Phaedra is no more than a helpless

puppet under influence of the most powerful of all divinities. Thus, in the second version Euripides cleverly removes the blame for the tragic events from Phaedra, and puts it on the Nurse and on the goddess Aphrodite. A consequence of transferring the blame for Phaedra's passion to Aphrodite and the Nurse is that it undermines Phaedra's independence. In order to paint her in a favourable light, Euripides had to diminish Phaedra's responsibility for her own actions because 'good' women in ancient Greece could not be autonomous.

In choosing to depict Phaedra as a woman who is not necessarily 'bad', Euripides set himself the problem of providing a motive for her murderous anger against Hippolytus (Parker 47). Parker suggests that Phaedra does not murder Hippolytus out of mere vengeance for his rejection of her advances, but that she destroys him to save herself, her children, and family from disgrace. In a shame culture like that of the Ancient Greeks, Phaedra's children would never be able to live an honourable life if it was known their mother was an adulteress. Her transgression, when made public, would stain the name of her entire family: "In my thinking a man becomes a slave, even if he's well born and free, when he's obsessed by a parent's disgrace." (*Hippolytus* ll. 645-647). After Hippolytus' denunciation of all women, and of Phaedra in particular, she fears that he will not keep his promise to remain silent. Therefore, Phaedra feels that the only way to preserve her reputation, and thus save all that she holds dear, is to silence Hippolytus definitively. Causing the death of a young man who is an enemy to her good name would, in 500 BC, not have been regarded as moral failure.

Another way in which Phaedra seeks to avoid public shame is by committing suicide (Kovacs 300). In this way, she hopes to save not only her family but also the reputation of all of Crete: "I see my way to securing – despite this catastrophe – an honourable future for my children, salvaging from my wrecked condition as much as I can. I will never humiliate my native Krete." (*Hippolytus* ll. 1081-1086). To a modern audience, committing suicide to avoid losing your public honour seems like too drastic a measure. However, in ancient Greek

culture your life and that of your family essentially depended on your reputation. Indeed, because Phaedra is a queen, she is an example to all of her people, and therefore her improper behaviour would shame all of Crete. Euripides' audience would not have thought of this issue in a more complicated way than Phaedra; he invites his audience to enter fully into her aristocratic values and the struggle to realise them (Kovacs 300).

Further evidence for the theory that Euripides meant his audience to view Phaedra in a positive way is that no other character in the play judges her (Kovacs 301). For example, she is praised by the Chorus and her Nurse, which is only natural since they are her friends and companions. However, neither Hippolytus nor Artemis have any reason to be overly generous towards Phaedra, yet Hippolytus says of her: "There was honour in her death" (*Hippolytus* l. 1586), and Artemis says: "(…) what she did, seen in its own strange light, burns with her soul's nobility." (*Hippolytus* ll. 1960-1961). Euripides gives us no reason to look behind the shame-culture values of the play; "Phaedra has lived and died by the standards appropriate to a noble-born woman." (Kovacs 301).

Although Euripides depicts Phaedra in a surprisingly positive way, she does not always behave like the perfect Greek wife. For instance, Phaedra 'plots' her message outside: she tells the Nurse of her affliction while being out of doors, which is a transgression of gender roles. The masculine realm seems to be that of the exterior and public speech; the female realm is that of the interior, of silence and invisibility (Goff 1).

In her speech, Phaedra praises those women who conform to the female ideal of silence and invisibility. Yet while she is in a delirium because of her illness, she imagines herself in the role of a man of the hunt: "I will go to the pine forest, follow our killer hounds stalking the mottled deer, closing in—gods, let it happen! I want to cry on the dogs and flash a keen Thessalian spear past my flying yellow braids—I want my hands grazing the steel and hefting

the spear shaft." (*Hippolytus* ll. 312-320). It seems as if her unconscious mind wants to escape from the oppressive confinement of the female realm.

Furthermore, a major theme in Euripides' play is female silence and speech. As Goff puts it: "The play is a struggle between male and female speech." (Goff 2). The ideal ancient Greek woman was a creature of silence, but Phaedra does not live up to this ideal. At first, she does all she can to silence herself about her feelings of passion, even to the point of losing her health: "My first attempt was absolute silence – camouflage for my sick spirit." (*Hippolytus* ll. 604-605). Yet, when her secret has come out, Phaedra changes tactics and uses her voice to influence events. For example, Phaedra uses her eloquence to silence Hippolytus even after she has died: " (…) and in death I will touch with this venom someone else — he'll not be able to smile with complacent hauteur when news of my misfortune comes because he will then share with me this sexual sickness unto death." (*Hippolytus* ll. 1099-1104). She uses a wax tablet to make her husband Theseus believe Hippolytus raped Phaedra, causing him to kill his son in a rage. In the end, Phaedra's words will prove more eloquent than Hippolytus' words, reversing the usual relations of power between the sexes (Goff 24).

To sum up, Euripides persuades his audience so sympathise with Phaedra more than their prejudices would normally allow – all women, especially passionate and outspoken ones, were suspicious in Greek popular morality.

Dassin's Phaedra

Jules Dassin's film *Phaedra* (1962) is set in contemporary Greece and instead of a queen, Phaedra is now the wife of a wealthy shipowner called Thanos. The film does not aim to give a faithful representation of the original play on screen. Rather, Dassin's *Phaedra* is an interpretation of the myth with all its previous readings taken into account (Lauriola 492). The story of the film resembles the core of the original tragedy, but Dassin also incorporates

elements introduced by both Seneca and Racine. For instance, the ending of Dassin's film appears to be indebted to Racine. In his play, there is no final reconciliation between Theseus and Hippolytus, making the ending much more bleak than in Euripides' version. Inspired by Racine, Dassin's film ends with the ruin of a family and no hope for the future.

One way in which Dassin alters Euripides' play is that he adds the theme of class conflict to his film. This juxtaposition of upper and lower class revolves around the ship 'Phaedra'. The film opens with the luxurious and festive launch of the ship, where the main characters, who are all part of the elite of Greek society, have gathered together to eat and drink the night away. This upper class festivity is contrasted with the group of sad black-garbed women, representing the tragic chorus, who are looking at the fireworks and comment: "They are powerful. They speak many languages and they celebrate with fire in the sky." (*Phaedra* 08:31). These women appear again at the end of the film after the sinking of the cruise ship. They are the ones suffering from the loss of their sons and husbands, the employees on the 'Phaedra'. Yet Thanos does not seem concerned with their plight at all and leaves them standing in the hallway without any information about their loved ones (*Phaedra* 1:39:49). Next we see Phaedra elbowing her way through the grieving women with a disdainful look on her face, seeing them as no more than a nuisance. In Dassin's film the upper class are seen as responsible for lower class sufferings – a sentiment which Euripides, known for his criticism on the aristocracy, would have approved of.

One of the most notable changes that Dassin makes is that he made Phaedra less innocent than she is depicted in the play. Phaedra is a slave of her own passion, the passion that motivates her as, in the original, does the character of Aphrodite; she seduces Alexis, though he is quite willing. In Dassin's film, Phaedra has become a middle-aged woman who is a sophisticated seducer of men (Baldwin 74). Phaedra is passionate towards Alexis, but when he asks her to go with him she refuses. She does not reject him out of consideration for

morality; on the contrary, it was usual in her social class for older women to seduce younger men. In the tragedy Phaedra wishes to discredit Hippolytus in order to save her dignity and thus her family; in the film she just wants to have Alexis for herself and to prevent his marriage to another woman. Even when Alexis pleads her to let him go, she tells him "I can't" (*Phaedra* 01:17:35). The only excuse for her behaviour is that Thanos, her husband, seems to neglect her in favour of his business.

Another change that Dassin makes is that he leaves out the Greek gods and religion and transforms them into more symbolic cinematic images. During the film, Dassin gives different representations for the two rival gods of Aphrodite and Artemis. One opposing pair is fire and water. Fire is present in, for example, the fireworks for the celebration of the ship, and water is seen in the shot where Phaedra throws her ring into the Thames. But the most notable instance of this opposition is during the love scene between Phaedra and Alexis, which is a series of shots from the fireplace, interspersed with shots from the rain on the window – fire to water.

One consequence of the erasure of Aphrodite and Artemis is that Dassin has to find a reason for Phaedra's infidelity other than Aphrodite's revenge on Hippolytus. In the film Thanos constantly neglects his wife, and this neglect is used as an excuse for Phaedra's subsequent affair with her stepson Alexis. When he is called away again Phaedra pleads with him: "Don't go tonight… say you are ill. Please." (*Phaedra* 34:47), but Thanos brushes aside all her arguments and swiftly takes his leave.

Another consequence is that the character of Alexis behaves in a different way than Euripides' Hippolytus. Now that he is no longer a disciple of the virgin goddess Artemis, and celibate for religious motivations, Dassin is free to have Alexis return Phaedra's desirous pursuit of him. Thus Dassin also makes Alexis, as Hippolytus, a less innocent character than Euripides – he actually did do the immoral deed that his father accuses him of.

When it comes to gender, in Dassin's film, Phaedra is neither invisible nor silent like she was in Euripides' play. Instead of being confined to the interior of her house, in the film she enjoys the glamorous jet-set life of the Greek upper class, and enjoys being admired by all who see her. It is no accident that Dassin chose to call his film *Phaedra* instead of *Alexis,* as she is the dominant figure in the film and drives the plot from beginning to end. This is in contrast to Euripides' play, where Phaedra dies halfway through and the focus lies ultimately on the tragic death of Hippolytus.

Also, she is able to influence her life and the world around her with her actions. For one, she actively pursues her passion for her stepson and does everything she can to seduce Alexis. Where Euripides' Phaedra was confined to the grounds of her palace, Dassin's Phaedra flies all the way to London to meet Alexis. When she sees Alexis' hesitation to come with her to Paris, she uses her skilful way with words to persuade him. She takes off the expensive ring her husband gave her and throws it into the Thames while speaking these seductive lines: "In ancient Greece when they wished something very hard they would make a sacrifice. (…) I could sacrifice this ring. Touch it. Look at it. It's beautiful is it not? (…) I wish that you come to Greece." (*Phaedra* 31:49). Furthermore, she takes initiative to stop her affair with Alexis and fly back to Greece to be with her husband. Alexis pleads her to stay with him but she calmly rejects him: "ALEXIS: You're coming to London with me. PHAEDRA: It's impossible. ALEXIS: Everything else is impossible! PHAEDRA: Don't come to Greece. *Don't* come to Greece." (*Phaedra* 49:08). In this type of behaviour she resembles more the Phaedra of Euripides' first version of his play, where she was brazen, forward and solely motivated by her own desire. Another possibility is that Dassin was influenced in this respect by Seneca, who based his play *Phaedra* on Euripides' first version of his *Hippolytus* play.

Moreover, in the film, Phaedra is much more outspoken and does not refrain from voicing her opinions and feelings. For example, she openly tells Alexis of her feelings for him: "I love

you. When I say I love you, that means I'm in love with you." (*Phaedra* 38:14). Also, when she hears of Thanos' plan to marry Alexis to his step-cousin, Phaedra expresses the depths of her obsession with Alexis when she tells him: "Your father is planning for you to marry Herse. I warn you, I will not allow it. (…) I don't care if the whole world burns down. I love you." (*Phaedra* 01:23:39). Furthermore, near the end of the film Phaedra blatantly tells Thanos what is going on between her and Alexis: "I love Alexis. Alexis is my lover. Since Paris.", then she calmly walks out the door (*Phaedra* 1:42:06). Euripides' Phaedra would never have been able to express her feelings for Hippolytus in such an explicit way, or admit them to her husband Theseus.

Singh's Phaedra

The film *Immortals* (2011) by Tarsem Singh is a Hollywood blockbuster that is loosely based on Greek mythology interspersed with Christian motifs. Singh uses bits and pieces from all available ancient Greek material, but the main myths that he relies on for inspiration are those of Theseus and the Minotaur, and the Titanomachy.

His use of the Theseus myth can be seen in the major battle between Theseus and a huge man with a headpiece in the shape of a bull. By some inventive contraption the headpiece even grunts like a real bull and has smoke come out of its nostrils. Thus, just like the Minotaur, Theseus' opponent is half man and half beast. There many other references to bulls in the film, the most notable being when the three fake oracles are being cooked alive in a huge iron pot in the shape of a bull. Furthermore, the fight takes place in a 'maze' – the catacombs beneath Theseus' hometown. Instead of using Ariadne's thread, Theseus cuts his calf so that he leaves bloody footprints for him to follow back to the entrance.

Singh also weaves in elements from the Titanomachy in his film, which describes a ten-year series of battles between the Titans (the old gods) and the Olympians (the new gods). In

the end, the Olympians are victorious and make their home on mount Olympus. In Singh's film, the Titans are evil beings who have been contained beneath a mountain by the Olympians. After Hyperion has set the Titans free, the Olympians must wage war on them to keep the Titans from destroying all life on earth.

One of the figures from Greek mythology Singh uses in his mythological 'soup' is Phaedra. In his film, she is neither a queen nor a mother, but a virgin oracle kept as a prisoner by the evil king Hyperion. She does play a significant role in the film, following Theseus on all his adventures.

One may wonder if there is still some resemblance to Euripides' original play *Hippolytus*. I would argue that there are still traces of Euripides' Phaedra to be found in Singh's film. The most obvious resemblance is that even though the circumstances are wildly different from Euripides' play, Singh brings Phaedra and Theseus together in the film. But that is not the only link to Euripides' play.

In addition, at the core of the film the same thing happens as in Euripides' play; Phaedra's loyalty shifts from father to son. Singh's Phaedra leaves the service of her master Hyperion, the older man, to be of service to the younger man Theseus. They are not related by bonds of bloodline, but Hyperion sees kinship between him and Theseus: "He knows, like him, you were cast aside by your very own people. (…) Embrace me, Theseus. They will never give you a seat at their table, but you could sit at the head of mine." (*Immortals* 01:14:35). Because they share a similar backstory, Hyperion wants Theseus to become his protégé, thus the relationship between Theseus and Hyperion can be compared to the relationship between Hippolytus and his father Theseus.

Furthermore, Singh's Phaedra is also overcome by her passion for a man leading to a negative result. Early on in the movie it is made clear that Phaedra's gift of prophesy is tied to her virginity. Her ability to see the future is a vital tool in Theseus' quest to keep the Epirus

Bow from Hyperion's control, which would lead to the release of the Titans and the destruction of the world. However, the importance of her gift for the fate of humanity is not enough to quench Phaedra's desire for Theseus. Without saying a word, she slips off her dress and gets into bed with Theseus: "I want to see the world with my own eyes, feel with my own heart, touch with my own flesh." (*Immortals* 57:17). Similar to Euripides' play, in *Immortals* the strength of Phaedra's passion dwarfs any negative consequence her deed might have. Where Euripides' Phaedra at least tries everything in her power to avoid giving in to her desire, Singh's Phaedra is more like Dassin's Phaedra who chooses the satisfaction of her own cravings over the rest of the world: "I don't care if the whole world burns down. I love you." (*Phaedra* 01:23:39).

Yet in many ways Singh's Phaedra is completely different from Euripides' version, or any other version of Phaedra in Greek mythology. For one, instead of being a mother and wife, Singh cast her as a virgin. In this way she takes on some of Hippolytus' character. Phaedra's virginity is a prerequisite for her divine visions, like Hippolytus' virginity was a prerequisite for the blessing of the goddess Artemis.

Her virginity and her visions also evoke a comparison with the mythical oracle of Delphi, the Pythia. The oracle used to be a young virgin who remained chaste for her bridegroom Apollo, until the rape of one of the virgin oracles, after which the chosen Pythia had to be a woman of over fifty. During the seventh century BC until the fourth century AD the Pythia was the most prestigious and authoritative oracle among the Greeks, and the most powerful woman of the classical world. Connecting Phaedra with this female figure gives Phaedra an aura of prestige and authority that Euripides' Phaedra did not have. In this way, Singh made an attempt at incorporating a strong female lead in his film.

Another example of Phaedra's strength is that, instead of gaining honour by remaining silent, as in Euripides' play, Singh's Phaedra gains honour by using her voice for her

prophecies. Her significance lies in her voice and her ability to speak with divine authority. For example, at 31:56 in the film Phaedra has a vision of Theseus, and therefore knows she must help him escape Hyperion's prison: "The slave by the water, he is touched by the gods. If he embraces Hyperion, all of Greece will be destroyed." (*Immortals* 31:56). In addition, Phaedra also has a vision of Hyperion's evil plan: "Titans…unleashed. King Hyperion. He seeks the Epirus bow to rule over mankind." (*Immortals* 02:45). The male protagonist, Theseus, then has to act according to what Phaedra saw in her vison and follow her lead. Without her visions Theseus would never have known of Hyperion's plans. Thus, Singh gives her power through her voice, as opposed to Euripides who emphasized the dangers of female speech.

In addition, Singh's Phaedra can take care of herself and is not always dependent on a male character to save her. For instance, she and her three companions devise a plan of escape from imprisonment by performing 'masculine' actions, such as stabbing the guards and fighting their way out. They lure the guards to them by singing and moving seductively, then stabbing them in the neck when they get close. Also, Phaedra's companions show a type of courage that is usually reserved for male heroes in Greek myth. Similar to male warriors refusing to leave their commander, they offer to stay and fight, knowing it will be their death, so that Phaedra can escape and continue the war against evil: "Go my oracle, we still and take care of the guards. Go!" (*Immortals* 33:15).

Phaedra plays a key role in the film, not only because of her visions but also because she keeps Theseus alive long enough to save the world. First, when he's a slave in Hyperion's salt mines, she saves him from dying of thirst by dripping water from her own mouth into his (31:04). Second, as has been discussed in the previous paragraph, she and her companions break Theseus of the bonds of slavery. Phaedra saves his life a third time when she prevents the poison from the pseudo-minotaur's scratch from spreading through Theseus' body.

Indeed, when another man congratulates Theseus on slaying his enemy he tells him: “She saved my life.” (*Immortals* 58:01), giving Phaedra credit for his survival. Without her the male ‘hero’ would have died a slave in the mines of Hyperion, instead of dying while saving the world.

Despite all this, in some ways Singh fails in creating a strong female character who’s more in line with modern feminist ideas. For instance, during the final battle Phaedra is put in the role of the standard scared female who needs the protection of a warrior. She has no place in the battle, and in the only screen time she gets we see her hiding and praying to the gods for help. Theseus even calls to her: “Phaedra! Phaedra! Stay in the shrine!” (*Immortals* 01:25:13).

Moreover, at the end of the film we are shown frescos of Theseus’ deeds, and in one of them Phaedra is depicted on her knees in front of Theseus, looking up at him in reverent supplication (*Immortals* 01:39:00). This image suggests that Phaedra, as a woman, is subordinate to Theseus. It seems that without her visionary powers, which she lost after sleeping with Theseus half-way through the film, Phaedra becomes more like the stereotypical silent and invisible female from ancient Greek literature.

Conclusion

Dassin and Singh used Euripides’ material in very different ways. Dassin made an attempt at recreating the Phaedra myth in a contemporary setting, adding themes of social inequality and the elite lifestyle. On the other hand, Singh devised a completely different plot, using many bits and pieces of Greek mythology as inspiration. Dassin’s Phaedra is more independent and outspoken, but less innocent than her classical Greek counterpart, actively seducing her stepson to satisfy her own feelings of passion. Singh’s Phaedra has a dual characterization: on the one hand she is very self-relying, but on the other hand she plays the role of the ‘damsel in

distress'. While Dassin is not particularly interested in the aspect of gender in his film, Singh seems to purposely change Phaedra to conform to current views on gender equality.

Conclusion

All six films that have been discussed in this thesis have adapted the original Greek material in their own way and for a range of different reasons. For example, in Cacoyannis' film *Electra*, the Greek material has been altered to convey a message of anti-violence. Tzavellas' film *Antigone* was also made with a political agenda in mind: to encourage individuals who are being treated unfairly to stand up to authority. Other reasons that have come to the fore are social commentary, a call for revolution, and empowering women.

When it comes to the ancient Greek women that have been discussed, Antigone, Electra, and Phaedra, there is a great difference in how they have been altered in the films discussed. In Cacoyannis' film, Antigone is changed from a stubborn woman, held up as an example for misguided behaviour, into a self-sacrificial warrior of justice. Thus, the central theme is changed from a conflict between the genders into a conflict between the individual and the state. This theme is already present in the original, but in Cacoyannis' film it is promoted to serve as the main theme. Dettre's film on the other hand places emphasis on gender conflict, and aims to convey a feminist message.

Euripides portrays his Electra rather negatively, making her unlikeable and giving her masculine and warrior traits. Cacoyannis' Electra is given more traditionally feminine characteristics, such as being kind and gentle to those around her instead of showing a pugnacious spirit. He does this to secure the audience's sympathy for Electra, which he needs to drive home his anti-war and revenge theme. Conversely, Jancsó enhanced Electra's feisty and 'masculine' personality to underscore his call for violent revolution against Soviet rule.

The Phaedra we meet in Dassin's film is much less innocent than in Euripides' play. She is much more outspoken and able to influence her situation, and as such does not adhere to the ancient Greek ideal of a woman being silent and invisible. Yet Phaedra's strength is not a

positive trait in Dassin's film. One of the film's goals is to satirise the Greek upper-class, and to this end he made Phaedra's portrayal a lot more negative. Where Dassin felt his 1960s audience would view Phaedra's brazen behaviour as not befitting the female sex, Singh enhanced this feature. He tried to please his audience by constructing a positive, strong female lead character that would fill the void of substantial female roles on screen.

Taking all this into consideration, I would argue that there is a correlation between how these three ancient Greek women are portrayed on screen and contemporary ideas about gender. Even when the focus does not lie on gender issues, many changes are made to their character. To illustrate, with his film *Electra*, Cacoyannis' main goal is to convey to the viewer a message of anti-violence, yet to achieve this he must make Electra more sympathetic. To do that, he has to make her more conform to what a 1960s audience would consider proper female behaviour. Another example is the Phaedra in Singh's movie *Immortals*. He tries to accommodate his audience's need for more strong female characters in his depiction of Phaedra, and has her not only save herself but also the male hero.

From this follows that films from different time-periods adapt Antigone, Electra, and Phaedra in different ways under the influence of political climate, current morality, or social stirrings. Films from the 1960s seemed to have a tendency to make their female leads more 'feminine' than their ancient Greek counterparts, less vengeful and truculent and more gentle and sympathetic. The exception is Dassin, who makes the character of Phaedra more aggressive and forward than in Euripides' play. The more recent films from the 2000s make their female characters more independent, outspoken, and able to influence the world around them – in a word, more 'masculine'.

It may seem counterintuitive to try and shed light on current issues by looking at texts written a few thousand years ago, yet the themes and issues that were touched upon by the ancient masters are as relevant today as they were in 440 BC. As the examples in this thesis

have demonstrated, looking at ancient Greek women in modern film can indeed provide insight into contemporary issues and the changing view on gender roles. Therefore, it would be useful to do further research into this area and perhaps combine literary – and film criticism with the fields of psychology, sociology, and politics to better understand the social and political climate of the periods in which these, or other, film adaptation of ancient Greek literature were made. Instead of labelling the ancient playwrights as irrelevant the gender dialogue because of their out-of-date views on women, we should analyse them, together with the contemporary works they inspired, with a fresh view. The way we modern humans present classical antiquity says as much about us, as it says about the ancient Greeks.

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