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Trojan Women and Devil Baby Tales

Addams on Domestic Violence

Marilyn Fischer

The knowledge of the existence of the Devil Baby burst upon the residents of Hull-House one day when three Italian women, with an excited rush through the door, demanded that he be shown to them. No amount of denial convinced them that he was not there, for they knew exactly what he was like, with his cloven hoofs, his pointed ears and diminutive tail; moreover, the Devil Baby had been able to speak as soon as he was born, and was most shockingly profane.

With this description Addams captivated her audiences with devil baby tales, folkloric stories believed by many Chicago immigrants. She published an account of these tales in the October 1916 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, with a revised version included as the first two chapters of *Long Road of Woman's Memory*.¹ In these accounts Addams set Greek tragedy and the violence of war alongside the violence her immigrant neighbor women experienced at home as a way of elevating the significance of

Materials marked as JAPM are in the microfilm collection of the Jane Addams Papers. The first number is the reel; the number following the colon is the frame number. In *The Jane Addams Papers, 1860-1960*, ed. Mary Lynn McCree Bryan (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984).

domestic violence and the dignity of those who suffer. She used the scientific theory of race memory to present these women, not as passive victims, but as creative agents, and to help her audiences form a sense of connection with them. These claims may sound somewhat jarring to contemporary readers, as Addams does not explicitly name either Greek tragedy or race memory in her accounts.² However, Addams was acutely aware of the conceptual frames her audiences brought to their reading. Because many among her audiences were well acquainted with Greek literature and then-current scientific theories, Addams could make fleeting, implicit references to these bodies of knowledge and rely on her audiences to fill in the rest. In this discussion I will show how Addams used these bodies of knowledge in shaping a pragmatist-feminist analysis of the devil baby tales and of domestic violence. Pragmatists begin with people's concrete experience within specific, lived contexts and then return to experience to test their theories and concepts. Feminist pragmatists such as Addams give women's experiences central place.³ In her analysis of the devil baby tales and domestic violence, Addams presents the most marginalized women, not merely as victims, but as agents and artists in their own right.

Writing About the Devil Baby

The devil baby incident took place in the fall of 1913. Addams reported that Hull House was overrun with inquiries for a period of six weeks, probably triggered by the birth of a baby with disabilities in the neighborhood. The *Chicago Tribune* labeled the phenomenon a case of "outcropping medievalism" and worried that if people's intelligence matched their curiosity, "Chicago and civilization would shake hands and say 'good night.'"⁴

Addams gave brief, public accounts of the devil baby incident in 1914. In the July 1914 issue of the *American Journal of Sociology*, she gave a basic description of the devil baby incident, which she repeated in all subsequent accounts. For a period of six weeks, thousands of people appeared at Hull House to see the rumored child, with descriptions already in hand. The Italian version involved an atheist husband who tells his pregnant wife that he would rather have the devil in the house than her religious pictures on the wall. His wish is granted when their baby turns

out to be the devil himself. In the Jewish version, the devil appears as the seventh child of a husband who had threatened his wife not to add another daughter to the six they already had. Addams explained that the stories originated as fairy tales authored by women to soften their husbands' treatment of themselves and their children. Many of Chicago's immigrants, former European peasants, still believed and used these tales for family discipline.⁵

In June 1914 the General Federation of Women's Clubs held its biennial convention in Chicago. Attendance was estimated to be up to 150,000, representing the one million women's clubs' members in the United States.⁶ At the convention, in a speech titled "Immigrant Woman as She Adjusts Herself to American Life," Addams used the story of the devil baby incident for the same purpose seen in so much of her speaking and writing: to "interpret," for prosperous, middle-class Americans, the immigrant as sensible and fully human and to seek from her audience some form of reciprocity toward immigrants.⁷ In this speech Addams interpreted the devil baby tales, not as evidence of superstitions held by ignorant, backward folks, but as a form of moral instruction that had evolved and been refined through a long historical development. The tales, along with their art and music, were gifts the immigrants could offer to her audiences. She suggested that as immigrant women became more economically secure and did not need to work long hours, audience members could reciprocate by inviting immigrants to participate in women's clubs.⁸

Addams's 1914 presentations did not include the features that gave her accounts of 1916 so much power. Her earlier renditions say nothing about woman's memory, nor do they recount how domestic abuse was a staple feature of immigrant women's lives. What happened between the summer of 1914 and 1916 to lead Addams to change and deepen her interpretation so dramatically?

In August 1914 World War I broke out in Europe; in January 1915 Addams assumed the presidency of the Woman's Peace Party. That organization sponsored a national tour by the internationally acclaimed Chicago Little Theater Company of Euripides' *The Trojan Women*. Addams negotiated a five-thousand-dollar grant from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to help fund the tour and corresponded with British classicist and translator Gilbert Murray about his accepting reduced royalties; she had lunch with Murray while in Europe during the summer of 1915. The play was performed forty-two times in thirty-one cities on

the fifteen-week tour; extended excerpts from Murray's book *Euripides and His Age* were included in the playbill.⁹

In publicity for the tour *The Trojan Women* was billed as "The World's Greatest Peace Play" and as "still the most vivid, the most poignant and the most beautiful illustration of war's utter futility and unmitigated evil, particularly as war affects women and children. The Woman's Peace Party sends it, not as an archaic curiosity, but as a direct message, inspiration and appeal, here and now to the men and women of America."¹⁰ Audiences had the background to appreciate the play, as knowledge of the classics was pervasive among the elite and middle classes. Before the 1880s knowledge of both Greek and Latin were required for college admission in the United States. As those requirements were dropped, the humanities courses that replaced them contained heavy doses of classical literature, philosophy, and art. Classical subjects and texts figured prominently in Chautauqua movement lectures and on women's clubs reading lists, where ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman history was favored over more modern fare. Murray's translations of Euripides were widely known and enthusiastically received by audiences and readers on both sides of the Atlantic. His book *Euripides and His Age* was part of the Home University Library, a series of low-priced books written expressly for a popular audience that sold widely and well.¹¹

In her 1916 analyses of the devil baby tales, Addams does not mention the Trojan War, Euripides' play, or the suffering of women then in the midst of ongoing slaughter in Europe. In 1915 Addams had met with these women and had spoken eloquently about war's devastation for women and children.¹² As she wrote the devil baby account of the brutality her neighbor women suffered at home, the suffering of war's victims lay heavy on her mind. Katherine Joslin, in *Jane Addams, a Writer's Life*, suggests that with the devil baby analysis, Addams may have been trying to "deflect public criticism of her pacifism."¹³ Perhaps. But given the associations Addams makes between Greek tragedy and domestic violence, it is more likely she was asking her readers to appreciate her pacifism more fully and viscerally.

Greek Tragedy and Domestic Violence

"While I may receive valuable suggestions from classic literature," Addams notes in her introduction to *Long Road*, "when I really want to

learn about life, I must depend upon my neighbors."¹⁴ Addams's statement, though truthful, disguises the extent to which she draws from Murray's picture of Euripides depicted in *Euripides and His Age* and from Murray's translations of Euripides' plays to probe the significance of the devil baby tales. Citation practices in the early twentieth century were loose; many of Addams's unattributed quotations are from these sources, and many of her own sentences contain close paraphrases of Murray's material.

Addams was particularly drawn to the old women immigrants who came to see the devil baby. Living in silence, ignored by their Americanizing families, and unable to adjust to urban Chicago, the women felt their memories stirred by the possibility of such a creature, and they poured out the stories of their lives. In recounting these women's stories, Addams sometimes cast these women in the role of Euripides, for whom Murray invoked the authority of Goethe and Aristotle, calling Euripides "the most tragic of poets."¹⁵ She also makes parallels between the old women and Euripides' tragic heroines, among them Medea and Hecuba. By borrowing in this way Addams places her neighbor women's suffering from domestic abuse alongside the sufferings that the women of ancient Greece experienced through war and betrayal. In the following section I will italicize passages from Addams and Murray to reveal where Addams quotes or closely paraphrases Murray's writings or translations.

In her introduction to *Long Road*, Addams names Gilbert Murray and thanks him for telling how Euripides

could transmute into song traditional tales of sorrow and wrongdoing because, being long past, they had already *become part mystery and part music*. "Memory, that Memory who is the Mother of the Muses, having done her work upon them."

In this passage Addams borrows from Murray's description of how Euripides presents the cries of long-dead children, who

are now at peace and whose ancient pain has *become part mystery and part music*. Memory—that Memory who was mother of the Muses—has done her work upon it.¹⁶

Throughout the analysis, Addams credits the figure of Memory with shifting elderly people's attention from the future to the past and then

transmuting the past by softening bitterness and resentment and enhancing what is beautiful. Memory gathers the fruits of this process into "legendary wisdom."¹⁷ She concludes her analysis with these lines:

In the midst of the most tragic reminiscences, there remained that something in the memories of these mothers which has been called *the great revelation of tragedy, or sometimes the great illusion of tragedy; that which has power in its own right to make life palatable and at rare moments even beautiful.*

Note how heavily Addams draws from the penultimate paragraph of *Euripides and His Age*, where Murray gives a succinct statement of his conception of tragedy in Greek literature:

The powers of evil and horror must be granted their full scope; it is only thus that we can triumph over them. Only when they have worked their uttermost will do we realize that there remains something in man's soul which is forever beyond their grasp and *has power in its own right to make life beautiful. That is the great revelation, or the great illusion, of tragedy.*¹⁸

In passages from *Euripides and His Age* excerpted in *The Trojan Women* playbill, Murray explains how the play is the story of the Greeks' great triumph over Troy, told from the perspective of its greatest victims, the women of Troy. The war is over; their city is destroyed; their loved ones are dead. The remaining women, including Hecuba, the Trojan queen; her daughter Cassandra; and her daughter-in-law Andromache, will become slaves and concubines to Greek chieftains. Murray describes Hecuba, holding her murdered grandson: "No friend among the dead, no help in God, no illusion anywhere, Hecuba faces That Which Is and finds somewhere, in the very intensity of Troy's affliction, a splendour which cannot die." Euripides' tragedy reveals "the crying of one of the great wrongs of the world wrought into music, as it were, and made beautiful."¹⁹

Addams adapts Euripides' pattern in her presentation of her old neighbor women. When we isolate her descriptions of their lives, the starkness shocks. These women "had been forced to face tragic experiences, the powers of brutality and horror had had full scope in their lives." Their faces were "worn and scarred by harsh living." Some lived "under the

iron tyranny of that poverty which threatens starvation and under the dread of a brutality which may any dark night bring them or their children to extinction."²⁰ Yet Addams surrounds these brutal truths with an aura of sympathy and gives the women in full measure the humanity and dignity of Euripides' Trojan women.

In some passages Addams uses Murray's language to cast the old women in the role of Euripides himself. She likens the women's quiet endurance to

the age-worn minstrel who turned into song a Memory which was more that of history and tradition than his own.

Here she is giving a close paraphrase to Murray's description of Euripides, when he officially became one of the "old men" upon completing his forty years of military service. Murray notes,

*Even yet the age-worn minstrel can turn Memory into song . . . the saga of history and tradition, more than his own.*²¹

Addams further identifies the old women with Euripides through the way they told their stories. They spoke without anger or regret, yet they did not hide from the violence that had filled their years. Addams writes,

Such old women do not shirk life's misery by feeble idealism. . . . They relate without flinching the most hideous experiences.

Murray had written,

The weak artist shirks the truth by a feeble idealism,

while the great tragic poet

can touch without flinching any horror of tragic life

and transform this material into poetry.²²

Addams also draws from the choruses in Euripides' plays, both by quoting them and by paraphrasing Murray's account of the chorus's function to describe the women's stories. Murray calls the chorus "the very heart of Greek tragedy." In the chorus, "verisimilitude is simply thrown to the

winds." By its "power of transfiguration" the chorus gives expression to "ultimate emotion," "the essence" of "something universal and eternal." Throughout her analysis, Addams uses similar language. She describes stories such as that of the devil baby as "careless of verisimilitude," as "expressing the very essence of human emotion," as dealing "with fundamental experiences."²³

Addams quotes several passages from the chorus in Murray's translation of *Medea*, a play that Murray claimed was often cited in suffrage circles.²⁴ *Medea*, daughter of a king and mother of Jason's children, sacrificed much for Jason, including committing murder on his behalf. Jason then betrayed her to marry another woman. Addams borrows from *Medea* to describe the women and the conditions under which they raised children. Her succinctness makes the old women's pain palpable:

Some of these old women had struggled for weary years with poverty and much childbearing, had known what it was to be bullied and beaten by their husbands, neglected and ignored by their prosperous children, and burdened by the support of the imbecile and the shiftless ones. They had literally gone "*Deep written all their days with care.*"

This phrase is taken from *Medea*, where the chorus sings,

But they within whose garden fair
That gentle plant hath blown, they go
Deep-written all their days with care—
To rear the children.²⁵

Here the chorus sings *Medea*'s lament about the enormous pain of bearing, rearing, and loving children and how the children then grow to be good or evil and to die. To Addams's ears, her neighbors' stories of children who died prematurely from lack of medical care or from unavoidable neglect while their mothers were at work echoed the following quotation, also from the chorus in *Medea*:

*That God should send this one thing more
Of hunger and of dread, a door
Set wide to every wind of pain?*²⁶

To capture the joy tangled with intense pain with which women in her own neighborhood brought forth and nurtured young lives, Addams uses the phrase

the precious vintage stored from their own agony.

The poignancy of the phrase deepens when we note its source. As Medea prepares to kill her own children, the women of the chorus, desperately trying to beat down the barred door between them and Medea, cry out,

Thou stone, thou thing of iron? Wilt verily
Spill with thine hand that life, *the vintage stored*
*Of thine own agony?*²⁷

Addams was a very careful, intentional, and highly skilled writer. She reworked her material extensively; the four presentations of the devil baby story discussed above are one illustration of that.²⁸ I do not think that Addams relied on Murray to the extent that she did as a way to avoid crafting her own descriptions. My hypothesis is that the borrowing was intentional and done to help her communicate with an educated audience, who would, to varying degrees of precision, recognize the sources of Addams's borrowing. They would know the conceptions of Greek tragedy that Murray worked with; some would identify specific passages from Murray's translations of Euripides' plays. Addams's analysis is feminist in that she names women's oppression vividly, and she signals its significance to her readers by setting it alongside a form of literature they valued most highly.²⁹

As I write this chapter, the layered parallels swirl in my mind. Euripides wrote *The Trojan Women* during the Peloponnesian War, immediately after the Greeks expressed their imperial hubris by slaughtering the Milesians and just as they set off toward their final debacle in Sicily. Murray translated Euripides during the height of the British Empire, just before two world wars led to the demise of European imperial hegemony. I sit here now, on the soil of the greatest military power on earth, a nation entangled in its own imperial debacles, in Iraq and Afghanistan. I read Murray quoting Thucydides, who said that "a democracy cannot govern an empire," and remember Addams's rhetorical query "Was not war in the interest of democracy for the salvation of civilization a contradiction of terms?"³⁰ I think of the explicit, tight connection between war and

violence against women, with rape as a perennial weapon of war, and then turn to the implicit connection, that maintaining structures of patriarchy fuels both violence in war and violence against women in the home. I imagine that in 1916 some of these layered images swirled in Addams's mind, and in the minds of her readers, as well.

Evolutionary Theory, Race Memory, and "A Literature of Their Own"

In this section I will explain theories accepted as scientific in the early twentieth century regarding human social evolution, race memory, and folklore and demonstrate how Addams used these theories in her analysis of the devil baby. Addams placed these theories within a pragmatist-feminist perspective to form connections with and thus decrease distance between her "primitive" neighbors and her "civilized" audiences. As with Greek tragedy, Addams did not need to be explicit in using these theories. Just a few terms and phrases would give her audiences sufficient clues.

To late nineteenth-century anthropologists, *savagery*, *barbarism*, and *civilization* were technical terms. American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan used them to name three stages in human social and cultural evolution, roughly corresponding to, respectively, the period of hunter-gatherer bands, the stage of settlement and agriculture, and the stage in which writing developed and governance was based on territorial control rather than kinship.³¹ Morgan and many of his colleagues believed that the various human "races" followed roughly the same developmental path, with different races being at different points along that path at any given time. *Race* was loosely defined and, in most accounts, contained a mix of physical and cultural characteristics. Traits that we today would call "cultural" were assumed to be heritable in a Lamarckian sort of way.³² These scientists thought that many Native Americans, Africans, Pacific Islanders, and others living at that time were in the stages of savagery and barbarism, and that by studying them, "civilized" peoples could learn about their own deep past.³³

British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor regarded folklore as a particularly fruitful resource for investigating human evolution, claiming that the popular narratives of European peasants gave evidence connecting "savage" and "civilized" peoples.³⁴ J. A. MacCulloch followed this

approach in *The Childhood of Fiction: A Study of Folk Tales and Primitive Thought* (1905), calling folktales "the literature of early man and of primitive people." He studied these stories much as a geologist or archeologist would dig into the earth. A single story could carry elements from many generations and thus give evidence for the movements and mingling of many peoples and the development of custom over vast stretches of time. McCulloch noted that the practice of studying folklore as "the fossil survivals of the thoughts and customs of the past" was then well established among scientists.³⁵

Many theorists at the time thought that more than oral transmission was at work as these tales passed from one generation to the next. In "The Gods as Embodiments of the Race-Memory," Edward Carpenter explains race memory as the evolutionary equivalent of Plato's theory of recollection. Over long stretches of time, people's experiences and emotions accumulate and are shifted and refined into images analogous to Platonic forms. These reside in the subconscious, in the "nerve-plexus or brain-centre of the human body" and are heritable. Jung called them archetypes of the collective unconscious; Carpenter and others associated them with basic instincts, such as pugnacity and sympathy. These images are not perceived in ordinary consciousness, but are manifest in myths, legends, and rituals, seen, for example, in the deep awe and devotion a people show toward even an unworthy monarch. Artists and poets can give these images form; in responding to art, a perceiver's race memory is touched by the artistic artifact. Unlike Plato's forms, the images of race memory are not fixed, but continue to evolve. Carpenter concludes that this evolutionary process "gives to each individual the power . . . to add a chisel-touch to their outlines."³⁶

Although Addams does not use the term *race memory* in *Long Road of Woman's Memory*, her reviewers made the association. A review in the *Los Angeles Times* quoted text from the book's slipcover: "The underlying purpose of the book is to show wherein modern civilization goes back to old tribal customs, to explain, in other words, the scientific theory of race memory." Another commented that "modern psychology is virtually founded" on the theory of race memory. A third thought Addams was presenting her own version of Jung's collective unconscious.³⁷

If we use the theory of race memory as an interpretive frame, many of the phrases in Addams's analysis lose the character of rhetorical hyperbole and become more straightforward. She identifies the devil baby tales "as subconscious memories" that "still cast vague shadows upon the vast

spaces of life, shadows that are dim and distorted because of their distant origin." The theory of race memory offers a process for explaining how "the story seemed to condense that mystical wisdom which becomes deposited in the heart of man by unnoticed innumerable experiences" and how "the strivings and sufferings of men and women long since dead . . . are thus transmuted into legendary wisdom."³⁸

Pairing Addams's devil baby analysis in *Long Road* with Murray's *Euripides and His Age* provides additional evidence that both Murray and Addams drew on the theory of race memory. This theory gives a different feel to Murray's claim and Addams's paraphrase, quoted in the previous section, where Murray writes, "Memory, according to Greek legend, was the mother of the Muses; and the 'memory' of which Euripides is thinking is that of the race, the saga of history and tradition, more than his own."³⁹ Tylor's anthropological investigations of primitive religion and marriage practices⁴⁰ gave scientific backing to Murray's claim about Euripides' morally austere tone in *Cretan Women*, where Murray comments,

But next to religion itself, the sphere of sexual conduct has always been the great field for irrational taboos and savage punishments.

Addams gives a close paraphrase, in describing how the devil baby story still acted

as a restraining influence in the sphere of marital conduct which, next to primitive religion, has always afforded the most fertile field for irrational taboos and savage punishments.⁴¹

In the devil baby chapters, Addams describes her neighbors as "primitive" and as "simple women, representing an earlier development." Murray uses similar vocabulary, referring to the Macedonians as "barbaric" and noting, "We seem in ancient Greece to be moving in a region that is next door to savagery."⁴² Although this language was ubiquitous among intellectuals and in public discourse, scholars today often brush past it. For example, in her introduction to the reprint edition of *Long Road*, Charlene Haddock Seigfried writes, "It is true some aspects of her writings are dated," and "Addams was not completely immune to the new anthropological paradigm," but does not pursue the point. A few scholars, such as Sullivan and Jackson, interpret Addams's use of this language as reinforcing then prevalent hierarchical, racist stereotypes.⁴³

We rightly criticize such language and its conceptual frames as inherently and morally repugnant. It was used to justify slavery, imperialism, exclusionary immigration policies, unjust labor practices, and forced sterilization. A focused, extended study of Addams's use of this language and its conceptual apparatus would be valuable, particularly to ascertain the extent to which it worked at cross-purposes to her commitments to reciprocity, inclusion, and social democracy. However, for this chapter, I would like to pose the question this way: given that this vocabulary functioned as the air that educated people breathed, how might someone within that air, communicating to others who shared the same air, bridge the distance it implies between "primitive" and "civilized" people? Biographer Louise W. Knight notes how Addams, in much of her writing, would "skillfully embed controversial ideas in a soft cushion of conventionality."⁴⁴ I think this aptly describes what Addams does in her devil baby analysis. Here, "conventionality" would be the conventional vocabulary of the day's anthropological theories, with their elaborate differentiations of "primitive" and "civilized" peoples, with theories of "race memory," and with the "science of folklore" as then understood. Addams draws on all these, to stunning effect. My intent is not to justify her use of these theories and vocabulary, but to clarify how she used them to do pragmatist-feminist work, creating a sense of connection rather than distance between her immigrant neighbors and her middle-class audiences.

Feminism, Pluralism, and Making Connections

Seeking connections through responsibility and care and ending oppressions that hinder human flourishing have been central projects for feminist ethics.⁴⁵ These projects also describe Addams's activism and theorizing. She founded Hull House to bring together the privileged classes and the immigrant poor. In *Democracy and Social Ethics*, written for members of privileged classes, Addams argues that sympathetic understanding and reciprocity are essential practices for enacting social democracy. The knowledge required to heal fractured relationships and bring needed industrial and social reform could only be obtained through sympathy and shared, concrete experience. Addams understands democratic equality in terms of reciprocity, that is, that all people can simultaneously learn from

and teach one another. As sympathetic understanding and reciprocity are internalized in attitude and expressed in action, the attitudes and beliefs that maintain power structures of privilege will be undermined.⁴⁶

A worry for feminists is that when members of a dominant group seek connections with groups of lesser power and social standing, their efforts may be paternalistic or smothering. Even with good intentions, members of the dominant group may not recognize or adequately respect the perspectives of the other.⁴⁷ The task is to seek connection while respecting pluralism. This is not easy to do. There is no neutral stance; invariably, one cannot “understand” another’s perspective, without using constructs and terms that make sense within one’s own perspective. One way to read Addams’s devil baby analysis is as an attempt to work through this difficulty, to seek connection while simultaneously respecting the immigrant women’s perspectives. Addams’s task in her written accounts was to move her audience from believing that the devil baby story was merely a manifestation of “primitive” people mired in superstition, toward appreciating these people’s perspectives and being able to learn from them. Addams does not romanticize her neighbors or endow them with a feminist consciousness. For example, her statement that her neighbors believed that a man “needs a woman to keep him straight” is discordant to modern ears.⁴⁸ Yet the overall pattern of Addams’s analysis is feminist. First, she constructs the perspective of immigrant women by presenting them as knowledge makers and artists. That is, she searches for the patterns of meaning they constructed out of their experience with which to understand and respond to the circumstances of their lives. Second, she does not judge these responses per se. Instead, she attends to how these patterns of meaning are responses to universally shared circumstances—dealing with family life, suffering from injustice and violence, needing companionship, facing death—and sets her neighbor women’s responses alongside those of her own and her readers. Finally, in reciprocity, she uses her neighbors’ stories to widen, deepen, and reconstruct her own knowledge and that of her readers.

The Old Women as Artists and Knowledge Makers

Pragmatists and feminists describe how knowledge is constructed and how reflection on concrete experience is central to that process. In *Pragmatism and Feminism*, Seigfried describes commonalities that pragmatist

and feminist orientations share. She stresses how concrete experience serves as the starting point for reflection and subsequently as the testing ground for beliefs and theories. Values and purposes are integral to and guide the process of inquiry. Knowledge is a fabric of beliefs and attitudes, with old threads pulled out, new threads inserted or reinforced, and the shape stretched in response to new experiences.⁴⁹ In her analysis of the devil baby tales, Addams presents the most marginalized of persons—old, unassimilated, uneducated women, whose sanity was often on the edge—as knowledge makers for whom folklore served as functional threads.

Throughout her analysis, Addams makes repeated references to how women used these tales “as a valuable instrument in the business of living.” Women first designed the tales to soften male brutality against them; Addams saw the devil baby story’s taming effect in the faces of men who came to inquire. Women had used such tales for centuries to instruct; to establish family discipline; to give them social standing; to feed their imaginations; and, for peasants not able to acclimate to the modern, industrial city, to keep them sane.⁵⁰

For Addams to refer to folklore as “a literature of their own” was not, in itself, unusual. Yeats and other collectors of folklore made similar points. However, many such collections reveal the patriarchal biases of their collectors. The images in Carpenter’s account of race memory are primarily of male heroes—kings, warriors, and athletes.⁵¹ By contrast, Addams claims that women themselves authored folklore and used the tales to assert their own power. Addams writes that these women artists, who “had nothing to oppose against unthinkable brutality,” used the one tool available to them: “the charm of words.” To twenty-first-century ears, *charm* has a diminutive ring, but for Addams’s reading public, it had a far stronger emotional valence. Murray, in *Euripides and His Age*, quotes Thucydides’ account of Cleon’s warning that an empire must stand firm over those it rules. “Do not be misled by the three most deadly enemies of empire, pity and charm of words and the generosity of strength.” Here Murray presents the “charm of words” as a potent tool of the oppressed, against which oppressors must guard.⁵²

Placing the “charm of words” within the theory of race memory, Addams claims that women, with access to subconscious memories, had the skill to craft their words into literary form, and that their art had potency. Subsequent generations of women, including her neighbors, contributed their artistry to these heritable images, or, in Carpenter’s words, added

their own "chisel-touches." Noting that "new knowledge derived from concrete experience is continually being made available for the guidance of human life," Addams interprets her neighbors' custom of insisting that their husbands give them their unopened paychecks as another example of the still-evolving practices of women creating domestic morality. These practices, Addams writes, "are put into aphorisms which, in time, when Memory has done her work upon them, may become legendary wisdom."⁵³ Understood in this light, the title of the book takes on new resonance. "The long road of woman's memory" was long indeed, and one on which women were active and creative travelers.

Patterns of Meaning

In addition to their practical use, these folkloric stories had a place in the larger patterns of meaning with which the women made sense of their lives. Philosophers, theologians, and poets have long sought ways to reconcile humans' desire for universal justice, where evil is punished and good rewarded, with the suffering that blind fate and calculated injustice bring to the innocent. The devil baby stories helped these old women make this reconciliation. Addams hypothesized that the stories appealed in part because their frank, demonic quality matched the women's experiences with abject poverty and brutal violence.⁵⁴ The devil babies appeared as just retribution for the fathers' brutality. The stories gave the women a way to understand ungrateful children who beat them, or children born with mental and physical disabilities. Today, we refer to chemical imbalances and neural deficits to help us understand and feel some sympathy toward perpetrators of untoward behavior. The devil baby performed an equivalent role; the women could see how the father's "ugliness was born in the boy" and how "the Devil himself gets them."⁵⁵

But how could the women come to terms with the fact that the devil's ugliness was inside the children themselves, causing the innocent to suffer? Addams saw her neighbor women take comfort in their shared stories, realizing that those who walk with the "the piteous multitudes who bear the undeserved wrongs of the world . . . walk henceforth with a sense of companionship." In this passage, Addams's readers may have heard echoes of the chorus from *The Trojan Women*. In the playbill, Murray called the parting of Andromache and her son "the most absolutely heart-rending in all the tragic literature of the world." As the child is dragged away

to be killed, members of the chorus tell how they also lost loved ones. As Hecuba prepares her grandson's body for burial, the chorus again provides companionship.⁵⁶

By stressing companionship here, Addams takes seriously the claim from folklorists that such tales functioned as literature. Devil baby tales and Greek tragedy performed the same literary service by bringing companionship and comfort to those who suffered. She begins the last paragraph of the *Atlantic Monthly* version by paraphrasing Murray, who wrote that the chorus

will translate the particular act into something universal. It will make a change in all that it touches, increasing the elements of beauty and significance and leaving out or reducing the element of crude pain.

Addams adds women as artists to her paraphrase:

*It has always been the mission of literature to translate the particular act into something of the universal, to reduce the element of crude pain in the isolated experience by bringing to the sufferer a realization that his is but the common lot, this mission may have been performed through such stories as this for simple hard-working women, who, after all, at any given moment compose the bulk of the women of the world.*⁵⁷

Addams identifies another literary text to set alongside her neighbors' experiences. She writes that in talking with some of the old women who were very close to death,

one realized that old age has its own expression for the mystic renunciation of the world. The impatience with all non-essentials, the craving to be free from hampering bonds and soft conditions, was perhaps typified in our own generation by Tolstoi's last impetuous journey, the light of his genius for a moment making comprehensible to us that unintelligible impulse of the aged.⁵⁸

Tolstoy was one of her favorites; she referred to him and to his writings frequently. Addams does not specify what she meant by Tolstoy's "last impetuous journey." She may have been referring to his literal last jour-

ney; he died in 1910 while traveling. However, given the context, I suspect that Addams had in mind Tolstoy's short story "Master and Man," a text she used to close *Democracy and Social Ethics*. Lost in the snow and close to freezing, the master covers his servant's body with his own. As he slips into his final sleep, his own lifetime strivings seem trivial; he feels at one with his servant and at peace with himself.⁵⁹ Addams's old neighbor women had revealed through their literature what Addams had learned from Tolstoy, that at the end of life, companionship brings healing and mystic unity, and that is the only thing that matters.

Demonstrating Reciprocity

Addams's devil baby analysis is in one sense a departure from previous writings. In *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907), *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910), and *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil* (1912), Addams names patterns of social injustice and then responds by advocating social democracy to end that oppression. By contrast, in the devil baby analysis, Addams catalogs her neighbors' lifelong suffering from injustice, but then responds by dwelling on their "mystic renunciation" and "emotional serenity." She found that many of her old women neighbors, in spite of their lives of hardship, were not bitter or resentful; Memory had softened their pain. Again, she borrows from Murray. "Apparently," she notes,

the petty and transitory had fallen away from their austere old age.

Murray likewise describes Memory's power, and he quotes Bertrand Russell, who wrote,

The Past does not change or strive. . . . What was eager and grasping, *what was petty and transitory, had faded away.*⁶⁰

In describing these old women's sense of renunciation, Addams writes,

I gradually lost the impression that the old people *were longing for a second chance at life, to live it all over gain and to live more fully and wisely.*

Here Addams uses Murray's words to counter his interpretation. Murray paraphrases what some Theban elders said in the chorus of Euripides's *Heracles*,

*A second life is what one longs for. To have it all again and live it fully.*⁶¹

Addams also finds materials in Murray with which to characterize the old women's attitude toward death and to reassess her own response. Commenting on Euripides' presentations of death in his plays, Murray suggests that at places, Euripides conveys that

death may be the state that we unconsciously long for, and that really fulfills our inmost desires.

He goes on to quote from his translation of *Hippolytus*, where Hippolytus says,

We cling to this strange thing that shines in the sunlight, and are sick with love for it, because we have not seen beyond the veil.

Addams comments that one of her old neighbors expressed

*a longing for death, as if it were a natural fulfillment of an inmost desire, with a sincerity and anticipation so genuine that I would feel abashed in her presence, ashamed to "cling to this strange thing that shines in the sunlight and to be sick with love for it."*⁶²

Why does Addams mull over mystic renunciation rather than call for social democracy in response to domestic violence? One possible explanation is that death was on Addams's mind when she wrote her 1916 versions of the devil baby tale. She worried about the injustices of war then raging in Europe and worried about the well-being of the many people she knew and cared about there. She was not well herself; newspapers reported she was undergoing a lengthy recuperation from tuberculosis of the kidney, complicated by diabetes.⁶³ While Addams does not explicitly call for social democracy in response to domestic violence, I do think that she was enacting the essential practices of social democracy—sympathetic understanding and reciprocity, or the willingness and open-

ness to learn from others. Her neighbor women's stories set alongside Euripides' presentation of old age and Tolstoy's last impetuous journey gave her an occasion for furthering her own construction of knowledge. The old women's attainment of renunciation and serenity added density to truths about death and injustice that Addams had been constructing for some time.

Shortly before the devil baby reputedly put in an appearance at Hull House, Addams had used a trip to Egypt as an occasion to ruminate about death, an account published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in February 1914 and reproduced virtually unaltered as the last chapter of *Long Road*. In that essay, perhaps framed by the theory of race memory, she sets her own experiences of the deaths of loved ones, a constant in her life from an early age, next to those of ancient Egypt.⁶⁴ The characters and the narrative line in the devil baby analysis are different, but I see Addams making a parallel exploration. Euripides and the women in his tragedies replace the ancient Egyptians; her old neighbors stand in for herself. There are times to protest social injustice, but there also comes a time to respond to impending death under conditions of injustice and violence that one can do little to change. The theory of race memory enabled Addams to connect the ancient Egyptians, the women of Troy, and her immigrant neighbors to herself. In 1915 and 1916, her status as the most famous and admired woman in the United States was beginning to slide, as press reports mocked and ridiculed her stance against war. Perhaps she was gathering from her old immigrant neighbors the strength and serenity she would so soon need to face rejection by friends and colleagues and unmeasured hostility from the public.

While Addams does not *argue* for social democracy in her devil baby analysis, she *enacts* it through approaching her neighbors with sympathetic understanding and reciprocity. It is true that readers today can often identify Addams's feminism straight off the page. But it is also true that Addams was very much a woman of her time. Reading her works through the conceptual frameworks widely embraced in her time can reveal her feminism in surprising and powerful ways.

Notes

1. The quotation that opens this chapter is taken from "The Devil Baby at Hull-House," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1916, 441. Nearly identical passages are in "A Modern Devil-Baby," 117; "Immi-

grant Woman as She Adjusts Herself to American Life"; and *Long Road of Woman's Memory*, 7-8. Addams included a version of the devil baby analysis in *The Second Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1930), abridged but otherwise unaltered, from *Long Road of Woman's Memory*.

2. Other scholars discussing Addams's devil baby analysis have not made these connections. See Charlene Haddock Seigfried's introduction to the University of Illinois reprint edition of *Long Road of Woman's Memory*, xx-xxii; Joslin, *Jane Addams, a Writer's Life*, 171-76; and Elshaint, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy*, 176-80.

3. For discussions of feminist pragmatism, see the Introduction in this volume; Sullivan, "Feminism"; and Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism*.

4. *Chicago American*, June 16, 1914, JAPM 62:184; *Chicago Tribune*, November 1, 1913, JAPM 60:1072.

5. "A Modern Devil-Baby," 117-18.

6. *Advertiser* (Boston), June 9, 1914, JAPM 62:141.

7. For Addams's discussion on interpretation as a function of the settlement house, see *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 134.

8. "Immigrant Woman as She Adjusts Herself to American Life," JAPM 47:906. See also the news account of the speech in *Chicago American*, June 16, 1914, JAPM 62:184.

9. Woman's Peace Party microfilm, reel 3, box 3, folder 7; on Addams and the Carnegie Endowment, see letter dated March 13, 1915, JAPM 8:460, and extensive correspondence in WPP microfilm, reel 3, box 3, folder 7. On Addams and Murray regarding discounted royalties, see letters of March 28, 1915, JAPM 8:548 and March 29, 1915, JAPM 8:556. In a letter dated August 27, 1915, Murray mentioned the lunch and congratulated and thanked Addams for the successful tour of *The Trojan Women*, JAPM 8:1446. For data on the theater tour, see Albert, "Gilbert Murray," 65.

10. JAPM 42:1633.

11. Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism*, 1, 119, 145-47. Albert writes that Murray's writings and translations "effectively revitalized Greek drama both on the stage and the printed page, bringing it to unprecedented popularity throughout the English-speaking world." "Gilbert Murray," 62. Murray was one of the editors of the Home University Library series. See West, *Gilbert Murray*, 139-41.

12. See Addams's Presidential Address at the first Woman's Peace Party convention, "What War Is Destroying" (January 10, 1915); her Presidential Address at the International Congress of Women at The Hague, "Women and War" (May 1, 1915); and her address at Carnegie Hall, "The Revolt Against War" (July 9, 1915). At the International Congress of Women at The Hague, Lida Heymann spoke explicitly and eloquently on the connection between rape and war. See Heymann, "Leiden der Frauen im Krieg."

13. Joslin, *Jane Addams*, 173.

14. Addams, *Long Road*, 4.

15. *Ibid.*, 10; Murray, *Euripides*, 243.

16. Addams, *Long Road*, 3; Murray, *Euripides*, 240.

17. Addams, *Long Road*, 7, 11, 16, 19.

18. *Ibid.*, 28; Murray, *Euripides*, 242.

19. Woman's Peace Party microfilm, reel 3, box 3, folder 7.

20. Addams, *Long Road*, 10, 16, 23.

21. *Ibid.*, 11; Murray, *Euripides*, 103.

22. Addams, *Long Road*, 10-11; Murray, *Euripides*, 242, 240.

23. Murray, *Euripides*, 226, 226, 241, 228, 230-31; Addams, *Long Road*, 18.

24. Murray, *Euripides*, 32.

25. Addams, *Long Road*, 12; Euripedes, *Medea*, 484.

26. Euripides, *Medea*, 484-85; Addams, *Long Road*, 21.

27. Addams, *Long Road*, 19; Murray, *Euripides*, 240.

28. For a detailed presentation of Addams as a writer, see Joslin, *Jane Addams*.

29. W. E. B. Du Bois uses a similar technique in *The Souls of Black Folk*, where he begins each chapter by pairing European or Euro-American poetry with an African American spiritual.
30. Murray, *Euripides*, 107; Addams, *Peace and Bread*, 82.
31. See Morgan, *Ancient Society*, chap. 1, "Ethnic Periods."
32. See Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 138, 141, 235. For the construction of "race," see Stocking, *Delimiting Anthropology*, chap. 1, "The Turn-of-the-Century Concept of Race."
33. Morgan, *Ancient Society*, 22–23.
34. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 163.
35. MacCulloch, *The Childhood of Fiction*, vii, 13–14.
36. Carpenter, "Gods as Embodiments," 269, 273, 270–72, 279. My favorite of Carpenter's examples is his attributing a chicken's instinct to hide, when a shadow moves overhead, to "the memory of a thousand and a hundred thousand occasions in the history of the chick's ancestors, when the dreaded claws and beak came from the sky and snatched or nearly snatched the cowering prey" (264).
37. *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 1917, JAPM 82:1108; *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), November 11, 1916, JAPM 82:1071; *Chicago Post*, February 2, 1917, JAPM 82:1115. Not everyone endowed the devil baby analysis with such serious academic credentials. In reviews of a collection of *Atlantic Monthly* essays that included Addams's 1916 account, one called it "amusing"; another said it was "absurd" and "belongs in a book of fiction." *Republican* (Springfield, Mass.), March 17, 1918, JAPM 82:1138; *America* (New York), March 28, 1918, JAPM 82:1140.
38. Addams, *Long Road*, 18, 10, 15.
39. Murray, *Euripides*, 103; Addams, *Long Road*, 11.
40. For Tylor's anthropological investigations, see Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 188. Tylor and Murray overlapped at Oxford. On Tylor's influence on Murray, see West, *Gilbert Murray*, 132.
41. Murray, *Euripides*, 77; Addams, *Long Road*, 18.
42. Addams, *Long Road*, 8, 27; Murray, *Euripides*, 169, 198.
43. Seigfried, introduction to Addams, *Long Road*, x, xxxi; Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness*, 168–80; Jackson, *Lines of Activity*, 51, 224–28.
44. Knight, *Citizen*, 98.
45. The literature on feminist ethics is vast. See, for example, Held, *The Ethics of Care*, chaps. 1, 10; Walker, *Moral Understandings*, chaps. 3–4. Essays on ethics in Jaggard and Young, eds., *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* contain extensive bibliographic references.
46. See Addams's introduction to *Democracy and Social Ethics*.
47. See Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 170; Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 165; and Jaggard, "Global Responsibility and Western Feminism," 185–86.
48. Addams, *Long Road*, 19.
49. See Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism*, chaps. 1–2. See also Code, *What Can She Know?* and Alcoff and Potter, eds., *Feminist Epistemologies*. Entries on feminist epistemology in Jaggard and Young, eds., *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* include many bibliographic references.
50. Addams, *Long Road*, 17, 10, 12, 14, 20.
51. Yeats, *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales*, xxvii. See Stewart's analysis of the ballads collected by Francis James Child, Bottigheimer's extensive analysis of gendered images in the Grimms' fairy tales, and Lundell's discussion of patriarchal biases in Aarne and Thompson's collections of folktale types and motifs. Carpenter, "Gods as Embodiments," 268.
52. Addams, *Long Road*, 18. Murray, *Euripides*, 107. See Frye's discussion of charm in literature in *Spiritus Mundi*, 123–47.
53. Addams, *Long Road*, 19.
54. *Ibid.*, 25, 23.
55. *Ibid.*, 11, 22.
56. *Ibid.*, 27; Woman's Peace Party microfilm, reel 3, box 3, folder 7; Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, 70–73.

57. Murray, *Euripides*, 230; Addams, "The Devil Baby at Hull-House," 451. Never one to waste good material, Addams placed this paragraph at the beginning of chap. 4 in *Long Road*.
58. Addams, "The Devil Baby at Hull-House," 445. The equivalent passage in *Long Road* is identical except for a few key words; see 16.
59. Tolstoy, "Master and Man," 577.
60. Addams, *Long Road*, 11; Murray, *Euripides*, 241.
61. Addams, *Long Road*, 15; Murray, *Euripides*, 102.
62. Murray, *Euripides*, 190, 191; Addams, *Long Road*, 16.
63. *Chicago Evening Post*, April 6, 1916 (JAPM 64:139).
64. Addams, "The Unexpected Reactions of a Traveler in Egypt."

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